

# Siren

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Women Members [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

Inside this issue

... Conference: NWC motions backed

... Law: families get a boost



Summer 2007

## EDUCATING, ENTHUSIASING AND EMPOWERING

### FBU Women's School 2007 a hit





FBU Women's School  
Pages 5 to 7

# Work and Families Act 2006

# New law extends family friendly policies

## 4 Campaign news

Overwhelming conference support for National Women's Committee motions

Women debate pensions and nuclear power

## 5 FBU Women's School

Educating, enthusing and empowering ...

## 8 I'm a rep

Meet Pauline Layhe, South West FBU Women's Rep

Cover picture: Jess Hurd

**Published by** the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE . Tel: 020 8541 1765, fax: 020 8546 5187

**Design by** Edition Periodicals, 241-251 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BJ www.editionperiodicals.co.uk

**Printed by** Lookers, 24 Factory Road, Upton, Poole, Dorset BH16 5SL

**T**he Work and Families Act 2006, which came into force in April this year, is the first step towards delivery of some of the measures set out in the Government response to the consultation document *Work and Families: Choice and Flexibility* published in October 2005.

It aims to establish a package of rights and responsibilities for both employers and employees. The Work and Families legislation will:

- Extend maternity and adoption pay from six to nine months from April 2007, towards the goal of a year's paid leave by the end of this Parliament.
- Extend the right to request flexible working to carers of adults from April 2007.

- Give employed fathers a new right to up to 26 weeks additional paternity leave, some of which could be paid, if the mother returns to work. This will be introduced alongside the extension of maternity pay to 12 months.
- Introduce measures to help employers manage the administration of leave and pay and plan ahead with

greater certainty from April 2007;

- Help employers and employees benefit from improved communication during maternity leave.

It also:

- Provides an enabling power to extend the entitlement to four weeks leave, making it additional to time equivalent to bank (and public) holidays. The Government is currently consulting on these changes.
- Provides a one-off power to increase the maximum amount of a week's pay affecting compensation

The Act offers more rights than ever to employees with caring responsibilities

payments in connection with, in particular, redundancy, unfair dismissal and insolvency.

The Act offers more rights than ever to employees

with caring responsibilities.

A recent survey of human resources (HR) professionals by *Personnel Today* magazine found that 74% believed the Work and Families Act will have at least some impact on employees' work-life balance.

Over 90% believed that offering flexible working hours to staff



PAUL BOY/REPORTORIGINAL.CO.UK

# Editors' letter



Welcome to our summer 2007 edition of *Siren*. The women's school is over and we are already starting to plan next year's school. It was a fantastic event this year with 56 students and 36 children attending. There were also six women from the United Firefighters Union of Australia. It was a real pleasure to have them attend and for all the women to share their experiences together.

The TUC women's conference is also over and the FBU motion on childcare was carried overwhelmingly. We were delighted that the women went on to pick our motion on childcare as their number one motion to send to the main TUC conference in September. Our second motion on Zimbabwe was carried unanimously by the conference and our delegates did the FBU proud with their wonderful contributions.

In the past few months we have seen some fundamental changes to legislation that may be helpful to our members in the shape of 'The

**The National Women's Committee are redrafting the FBU model maternity policy, so watch this space**

**Work and Families Act'. This edition of *Siren* gives you some brief details with regard to the changes and how they may impact on you. The National Women's Committee are currently redrafting the FBU model maternity policy, so watch this space.**

**After that lot you'd think we'd be taking five minutes out, but no – we've still got a bit to do! We will continue to support women up and down the country, keeping up the pressure on fire authorities for decent facilities, uniform, PPE and family-friendly policies, fighting against the regionalisation of Emergency Fire Controls, pensionability of CPD, advising CLG on recruitment, selection processes, targets, shift patterns, equality, and continuing to build and maintain a strong, well organised Women's Committee ... and that's just on our reps' days off!**

**Well done sisters and hope you enjoy the read.**

**Vicky Knight**

**Executive Council member, Women**

**Kerry Baigent**

**Secretary, National Women's Committee**

improves their job satisfaction. The survey also asked HR professionals what would improve work-life balance in their organisation. Most respondents (52%) said allowing staff to spend more time with their families. It would be interesting to hear whether this encouraging majority view is also reflected in the fire service.

The National Women's Committee

(NWC) will be working to ensure all members – women and men – are able to take advantage of these new rights.

As part of this process – and having learnt from the experience of women working in the fire and rescue service since the new maternity rights came in under the 2003 pay agreement – the NWC is redrafting the FBU model maternity policy.

## Overwhelming conference support for National Women's Committee motions

### ANNUAL CONFERENCE

All three of the National Womens Committee's resolutions were passed overwhelmingly at the FBU annual conference in May. They related to retention of women firefighters (Resolution 5), PFI and women's facilities (Resolution 37), and a call to extend the rights of the NWC at Annual Conference (Resolution 4).

In a powerful speech Sam Rye, NWC rep for the north east of England (region 3), argued that the finances required to provide adequate facilities for women at workplaces in the fire service are being sacrificed in order to maximise profit for private companies that have gained PFI contracts.



JESS HURD

Sam Rye: powerful speech

Conference agreed that the Executive Council would produce an up-to-date record of all PFI buildings within the service that lists the facilities provided for women at each and that this record to be produced in time for the 2007 Women's AGM.

### Action on retention

Conference also backed the NWC in its call for fire and rescue services to take action on retaining women and demanded that the Executive Council negotiate within the NJC an effective strategy for brigades to create workplaces which women are "happy to work and remain in".

Presenting the motion, Jenny Impey, women's rep for the South East (Region 11), told conference

how very little work is done to ensure that women remain in their chosen profession and that women are leaving "rather than put up with an isolating and unfriendly environment". The motion was seconded by Denise Christie, on behalf of Lothian and Borders.

Conference also supported the NWC's demand to build on changes made at Annual Conference 2002 that enabled the NWC to submit resolutions to Annual Conference, so that the NWC can amend its own conference resolutions – and any other conference resolutions or policy statements – as well as submit emergency resolutions and submit rule changes or proposed amendments to conference standing orders.

## Women debate pensions and nuclear power

### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN

The National Assembly of Women (NAW) was founded in 1952 to bring about full social, economic, legal, political and cultural independence and equality for women irrespective of age, race, philosophical belief, sexual orientation or nationality.

At this year's annual general meeting, held in May at Wortley Hall near Sheffield, nuclear power and women's pensions were debated.

Lydia Meryll, an expert on nuclear waste issues and a member of the Labour environment campaign SERA that promotes sustainable environmental policies within government and the party, moved the motion on nuclear power. She gave a fascinating insight into the state of the nuclear industry in Great Britain and the risks involved in moving forward with a second generation of nuclear power stations.

A motion on women's pensions highlighted how the Pensions Bill

falls far short of the needs of women.

There was also an emergency motion on recent "honour" killings. All three were carried.

At the international session, Kate Begley, who lived in Zimbabwe and has continued contact with her many friends there, talked of the atrocities in the country.

Gemma Tumelty, the president of the National Union of Students, spoke to us about the involvement of the student's union in campaigns at home and abroad, including the Women's International Democratic Federation Congress in April in Venezuela, attended by the NUS as part of a delegation from the NAW.

Sam Rye, North East women's rep, who attended the event, said: "The National Assembly of Women is truly inspirational. This group of women make you realise that the fight is always worth it, that you can make a difference, however small, for the greater good."

→ NAW website: [www.sisters.org.uk](http://www.sisters.org.uk)



ROB BREMNER/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Pensions Bill falls far short of the needs of women

# FBU WOMEN'S SCHOOL



'It gets better every year. The people were fantastic and friendly, the talks and workshops were interesting'

## Educating, enthusing and empowering

**F**BU Women's School was once again a hit with women members, providing them with a unique opportunity to network, learn about their rights at work and, more generally, hear from inspirational women in the trade union and women's movement here and abroad and to exchange ideas and information on campaigning and how to advance both their personal and collective interests.

There were a range of workshops, covering workplace bullying, campaigning, workplace problems and concerns, and tips and information on how women in the fire service can speak out and participate fully. FBU solicitors Thompsons provided workshops on pensions and on recent legislation affecting women and families.

### Guest speakers

All three guest speakers, Megan Dobney, Terry Marsland and Lucia Matibenga from Zimbabwe, made inspirational contributions on being a woman and a trade unionist in

very different – and as far as Lucia is concerned, extremely difficult – environments. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack also spoke to the school.

As always, students were allowed to take a break from the hectic schedule on the Saturday night.

FBU women members were very positive about the school, which exceeded the expectations of the vast majority of those attending. In a questionnaire filled in at the end of the school, most appreciated the mix of events and activities, supporting materials and facilities. The creche was particularly valued and most favoured the new timing of the School in school holidays. The high number of new women members attending was also welcomed.

One student commented: "It was very well organised and I was made to feel very welcome. The accommodation was all clean and comfortable. It was well structured and organised, the resources were excellent and there was a very warm atmosphere that allowed me to contribute without fear."

Another said: "It gets better every



'It was very well organised and I was made to feel very welcome'

More details overleaf

year. The people were fantastic and friendly, the talks and workshops were interesting and I had the chance to see old friends and meet new friends and tutors. My children always love coming here."

One student was particularly touched: "I feel valued and supported more than ever before. I no longer feel alone and as if the issues on my station are my fault."

### Thirst to learn

For many students, it was an experience that gave them a thirst to learn more. "I have learnt a lot although I would like to have access to education and women's rights, history of women in the workplace and where and what are the best sources of education." The FBU National Women's Committee values students' feedback – positive and negative – as it helps to ensure the women's school is the best possible experience for FBU women members.

The theme of the school was "Educating, enthusing and empowering" – most students would probably agree it has achieved these aims.

# FBU WOMEN'S SCHOOL

## 'We need to learn by setbacks and build on achievements'

**TERRY MARSLAND**

**T**erry Marsland, a lifelong trade unionist and campaigner for women's rights, was a guest speaker at the first FBU National Women's School held at Wortley Hall, Sheffield in 1992.

Then, she chose as her subject the history of women in the trade union movement. And there is a lot to tell.

So when she was invited to speak at the 2007 School, she decided to return to the same subject, highlighting the long history of women and men combining for the defence of their rights and to advance their economic interests, and reminding students that women are no strangers to solidarity action.

### Taken the lead

In many cases, Terry pointed out, they have taken the lead, such as in the Bryant and May strike by women match workers in 1889 that set off the demand for change in the whole British trade union movement.

In a letter to the NWC following the school Terry said she felt "privileged" to have been part of the 2007

School, and added: "We need to remind ourselves and others from time to time of the vital role and contribution women have made to the trade union and labour movement, not just in our own country but worldwide.

"Knowledge of past struggles is essential. We need to learn by setbacks and build on achievements and move forward.

### Concern to all

"It gave me great pleasure to listen to your discussions, debates and visions for the future of your union and your determination to continue to be an integral part of that future.

"Each issue we raise, whether it relates to our place of work or trade activity, must be of concern to all. Success for one group be it male or female is a triumph for the Union.

"At the first FBU Women's School the then General Secretary Ken Cameron sent out a clear message to women workers within the fire service.

"It was a commitment that the Union would promote and support the principle of full equality of oppor-



tunity at the place of work and within the Union.

"Great progress has been made since that first school and the FBU women's organisation is precious, it is also a vital part of the women's movement."

## What shaped the women we are today?

**MEGAN DOBNEY**

**M**egan Dobney is the Secretary of the two-million member Southern and Eastern Region of the TUC (SERTUC), the first woman to hold such a senior position in the TUC's regional structure.

Megan, formerly a printworker and trade union activist, sought to make us all think what experiences we have encountered that have moulded and shaped us into the women we are today: women who are actively fighting for equality rights for all.

She spoke about her experiences growing up as a child with a father who was black and a mother who was white. It was here, Megan said, that her moulding began. She challenged racist behaviour as a child and has continually fought for equality rights for all.

### Gradual increase

In the trade union movement Megan has tirelessly worked to improve conditions for women and through this work she has seen a gradual increase in the involvement of women.

Denise Christie, women's rep for Scotland, chaired the session at what was just her second school. She said: "I could see from the other women at the session she certainly inspired them. Her contribution to the school will help motivate us to keep up the fight for equality.

"Megan spoke about who has inspired and shaped her, I can say that she has certainly contributed in the shaping of me.

"Her contribution to the school was educational, motivational and inspirational as I am sure all who attended would agree."





PICTURES: JESS HURD

# Dignity! Period

## LUCIA MATIBENGA

**W**omen in Zimbabwe are facing unbelievable hardship and suffering and need our help, Lucia Matibenga, vice president of the Zimbabwe Trade Union Congress (ZTUC), told the school.

She explained how the current political climate in Zimbabwe and life under the Mugabe regime was causing the hardships.

Average life expectancy of women in Zimbabwe is just 34 years old, the lowest in the world, said Lucia. Wages have been driven to all-time lows and inflation is at a jaw-dropping 1,700%,



driving basic provisions out of the reach of most women.

A box of sanitary protection costs almost a month's wage (£2) and women are being forced to resort to using rags or newspaper in place of sanitary wear.

This is causing infection – and due to a lack of available medication – disease and death. As a result, domestic violence is also at an all-time high due to infections wrongly being attributed to sexually transmitted diseases.

What are we doing about this? The FBU national women's committee motion to this year's TUC Women's conference was on the subject of "Women in Zimbabwe". And former FBU national officer Geoff Ellis recently completed a bike ride between Lands End and John o'Groats and through sponsorship from FBU members and officials raised nearly £2,500 for ACTSA's Dignity! Period campaign.

→ For more information, visit [www.actsa.org](http://www.actsa.org)

## Challenging inappropriate behaviour in the workplace

### HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

**A** workshop on harassment and bullying has become a regular choice at the school, reports Helen Harrison, women's rep for West Midlands (region 7). It remains a common feature of advice and representation that NWC reps deal with.

The NWC makes sure this session is not just about sharing horror stories, although sharing can help to lessen the isolation that many women feel. The structured workshop aims to provide women with the skills and confidence to identify and importantly challenge inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.

We know that the earlier a challenge is made, the more likelihood there is of a successful

resolution for all parties. If the matter is resolved informally it is easier to "put behind us"

The students start by making a list of the inappropriate behaviour that they have seen or heard of in their workplace. We compare the lists and have some interesting debates on what is OK and what isn't! We look at the effects on the individual subjected to bullying.

We try to end the session on a positive note and do this by exploring the options for help and support if you are being bullied. We look at how to challenge and the best way to get the result we need – get the bully to stop.

Students are asked to think of one thing, however insignificant it might seem, to take back and challenge in the workplace.

### YOUR RIGHTS

## Workshop on law for families and working parents a hit

Jo White from the FBU's solicitors, Thompsons, discussed current family friendly legislation and the rights provided to working parents.

The workshop included a discussion of the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations 1999 (as amended), including the recent legislative change, the Flexible Working Regulations 2002, the Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Work and Families Act 2006.

Jo facilitated a questions and answers session for students. Both sessions were well attended and there was plenty of interaction from students.

Sam Rye, FBU women's rep for the north east of England, who attended the workshop, said: "During the course of the session it was clear that unfortunately some of our members are still suffering from terrible treatment at work.

Jo offered help and advice to those students. Everyone certainly got something from the session. Whether it was just a better understanding of the above legislation covered or actual information to be used by the individual students, yet again the Women's School delivers to its members."



Pauline Layhe and family

## PAULINE LAYHE SOUTH WEST FBU WOMEN'S REP

**'I don't mind living in a man's world as long as I can be a woman in it'**  
Marilyn Monroe

When I was a single mother I used to commute from my Devon home to Buckinghamshire Fire Control for five years. I loved the Devon lifestyle and I loved my job. I met John, a firefighter, and we travelled together. We both left the fire service and Daniel joined his sister Annie in 2005. No more travelling and plenty to look forward to. Why then rejoin Devon Fire Control 12 months later? I was missing my job.

In 1999 and two weeks before the birth of my daughter I went along to the first National Women's Committee AGM for a bit of a noseay really. Helen Harrison from Staffordshire control was my temporary birthing partner and went on to become the current women's rep for the West Midlands (Region 7).

Shortly afterwards I joined her and became the Southern region women's rep. My real learning in man's world began. I had experience of being a control branch rep but I realised I was fortunate to be cocooned by the support of control staff. I began to meet women from both control and fire stations and started to take an interest in issues that were repeatedly coming up for women in the fire service – sexual harassment and discrimination, bullying, problems with maternity and the uniform, and no women's toilets. I realised that emergency fire control had similar issues.

I have had my own experiences, of course. I won a grievance when all my annual leave and bank holidays were treated as sickness whilst on

maternity leave. Women in control had theirs paid back from many years ago. I have seen many controls with no decent toilets and no showers. Trousers bunched up around the crotch and white shirts made of rice paper. I refused to wear the Home Office maternity frock as I looked like a ship in sail.

Have we moved on in this man's world? I found out in June this year at the FBU office in Bristol, where I was elected SW women's rep. Fourteen women from controls and fire stations across the region attended. What was the common denominator? Not wishing to sound like a broken record it was toilet and shower facilities, maternity provisions, and uniform, not just at fire stations but at controls too. What can we do about it?

The facilities issue can be taken up and with your support taken to annual conference next year as a resolution around dignity for women and men. We also had great feedback at the Bristol meeting concerning problems encountered by women before, during and after maternity leave. This has been fed back to the National Women's Committee, who are updating the current FBU maternity document with your ideas and new legislation.

If we organise ourselves and meet, we can find the way forward together. We can raise issues collectively with management and take resolutions to the NWC AGM in November and make our union listen.

Meetings should be taking place across the country soon. Go to them. I will be holding a regional meeting in August to discuss the three resolutions women members in the South West want me to take forward and make positive changes for all.

And finally, I don't want to be like Marilyn. I want to stay in this man's world and make it perfect. Do you?

## Contacts

### NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OFFICIALS

#### EC Member

Vicky Knight  
07710 741 460 • vickyk@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Secretary

Kerry Baigent  
07736 818 036 • kerry.baigent@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Chair

Dona Feltham  
07802 583622 • nwchair@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 1 (Scotland)

Denise Christie  
0780 104 7620 • denise.christie@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 2 (Northern Ireland)

Lynda Rowan  
07764 186 268 • o2nwc@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 3 (North East)

Sam Rye  
07977 297 563 • samantha.rye@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 4 (Yorkshire)

Contact Kerry Baigent

#### NWC Region 5 (North West)

Contact Vicky Knight

#### NWC Region 6 (East Midlands)

Staci Leach  
07766 348 834 • o6nwc@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 7 (West Midlands)

Helen Harrison  
07767 886 189 • helen.harrison@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 8 (Wales)

Contact Kerry Baigent

#### NWC Region 9 (East Anglia)

Emma Carr  
07917 170 110 • emma.carr@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 10 (London)

Sally Harper  
07870 267 246 • sally.harper@london-fire.gov.uk

#### NWC Region 11 (South East)

Jenny Impey  
07946146615 • jenny.impey@fbu.org.uk

#### NWC Region 12 (Southern)

Contact Dona Feltham

#### NWC Region 13 (South West)

Pauline Layhe  
07968724348 • pauline.layhe@fbu.org.uk

**Ring the FBU free confidential stress and support hotline 0800 783 4778**

### FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

**0808 100 6061**

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues**. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.



THOMPSONS SOLICITORS