

# SIREN



SUMMER 2005



## **FIRE WON'T WAIT. WHY SHOULD YOU?**

**Support the campaign against  
regional fire control**

*INSIDE*

**Defending our controls!**

**Your maternity rights**

# National Women's Committee Secretary Kerry Baigent on the union's model maternity policy

**I**N THE last issue of this magazine Sam Rye wrote a moving account of the awful treatment she received when she reported her pregnancy to her brigade. Sam gave an honest and heartfelt account of how this treatment made her feel at what should have been one of the most happy periods of her life. Probably one of the most appalling features of the treatment suffered by Sam is that it is not unique, a fact brought to light by the many women who contacted FBU Women's reps as a result of the article.

It is a sad reflection on the UK fire service that even after many years of pressure many brigades still don't know what to do with women firefighters who are pregnant and delay putting in place appropriate maternity policies until forced to by circumstances. This lack of foresight has only one result: women who are pregnant have to suffer added pressure, stress and worry.

Recent experiences have shown that most brigades still view pregnant women as either aliens from outer space or people who have an illness.

There is no excuse for this disgraceful situation and the FBU is committed to ensuring that all fire services in the UK face up to their responsibilities and put in place effective and appropriate maternity policies as a matter of the utmost urgency.

All the necessary work and information to do this is available and has been for some time. The FBU National Women's Committee (NWC) some years ago drafted a Model Maternity Policy for the FBU to use during negotiations both locally and nationally. It was born out of many resolutions that had been brought to various women's forums, including the national Women's School.

Driving women members' concerns was the fact that they were suffering during pregnancy while working for the UK fire and rescue service. Many brigades didn't have policies and most that did still had no real understanding of how to implement them.

The FBU Model Maternity Policy was used during the negotiations for the Grey Book Scheme of Conditions, Sixth edition 2004 and as a result Section D entitled Maternity, Childcare and Dependency was greatly improved. But there is an important feature of the Grey



**We're not from  
another planet  
nor are we ill.  
We're pregnant.**

Book that many brigades are refusing to acknowledge: the Grey Book is a set of minimum standards which should be used as a basis for implementing improved policies on a local basis.

There are some brigades who have grasped this opportunity and, by working in partnership with the FBU, brigades such as Gloucestershire, Northern Ireland and London now have good policies in place. The common feature in all these brigades is that the management was prepared to work together with the FBU on the basis that the FBU Model Maternity Policy (available on [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk)) was a set of procedures written by women in the fire and rescue service for women in the fire and rescue service.

These brigades should be praised for their forward

# Questions and answers

## **What if I'm not sure about my dates?**

If you are not sure whether or not you were pregnant when you started your present job, or, whether you will have worked for your employer for long enough to qualify for some rights, you should obtain advice about your situation. What you get will depend on what date your midwife puts on your MAT B1 certificate when you are about 20 weeks pregnant, so you should discuss this with her before she fills it in.

## **Am I entitled to maternity leave?**

You are entitled to maternity leave if you are an employee. There are two lengths of maternity leave depending on how long you have been working for your employer: Ordinary Maternity Leave and Additional Maternity Leave.

## **How much maternity leave can I take?**

**Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML)** lasts for 26 weeks. It doesn't matter how many hours you work or how long you have worked for your employer, all employees are entitled to ordinary maternity leave from day one.

**Additional Maternity Leave (AML)** lasts for 26 weeks and starts at the end of ordinary maternity leave. You are entitled to take additional maternity leave if you have worked for your employer for 26 weeks by the 15th week before your baby is due.

## **When can I start maternity leave?**

You can start your leave up to 11 weeks before your baby is due or you can work right up to your due date if you wish. Your employer can only 'trigger' your leave if you are off sick with a pregnancy-related illness in the last four weeks of your pregnancy.

## **Do I have to give notice to take maternity leave?**

Yes, to take maternity leave you must give notice to your employer in or before the 15th week before your baby is due and tell them:

- That you are pregnant
- The expected week of childbirth
- The date on which you intend to start your ordinary maternity leave.

If this is not possible then give notice to them as soon as you can. If you are entitled to additional maternity leave your employer should assume that you will be taking it. Therefore if you do not wish to take additional maternity leave or you want to return to work before the end of it you should give 28 days notice that you are returning to work early.

## **What happens when I go back?**

When you go back to work after OML, you have the right to return to exactly the same job.

When you go back to work after AML, you also have the right to return to exactly the same job. But, if your employer can show that it is not reasonably practicable for you to return to the same job, for example, because the job no longer exists, you have the right to be offered a suitable



**Ultrasound scan on a mother-to-be. It is a sad reflection on the UK fire service that even after many years of pressure, many brigades still don't know what to do with women firefighters who are pregnant and delay putting in place appropriate maternity policies until forced to by circumstances.**

**Left, the Siren article by Sam Rye that prompted many women to contact their union women's rep.**

thinking and progressiveness. But the experiences of many women in the fire and rescue shows that there is much work yet to be done. The NWC is determined that this is a subject which must remain at the top of the agenda until all women are treated fairly and equally.

Listed on the right are some questions and answers on maternity rights sourced from the website of Maternity Alliance, a national charity working to end inequality and promote the well being of all pregnant women, new parents and their babies. These are your legal rights at work, but in some instances, the Grey Book (which is your Conditions of Service) improves upon these rights. If you have any questions, contact a member of the NWC or your local FBU rep for advice.

alternative job on very similar terms and conditions.

## **Do I have to give notice of my return from maternity leave?**

You do not need to give any notice of return if you are going back to work at the end of maternity leave. You simply go to work on the day that you are due back:

- If you are entitled to OML you will be due back to the work on the day after the end of the 26 week period.
- If you are entitled to AML you will be due back to work on the day after the 52 week period.

If you want to return to work before the end of your maternity leave, you must give your employer at least 28 days' notice of the date you will be returning. If you do not give this notice and just turn up at work before the end of your maternity leave, your employer can send you away for up to 28 days or until the end of your leave, whichever is earlier.

**Note:** if you are entitled to AML but only wish to take OML you must give 28 days notice of your return as you are in fact returning early.

The law does not allow you to work for two weeks after childbirth and this period is known as Compulsory Maternity Leave. You will not be allowed to return to work during this time.

## **Am I entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay?**

Statutory Maternity Pay 'SMP' is maternity pay lasting 26 weeks. For the first six weeks you receive 90% of your average pay. After that you receive a 'basic rate' for 20 weeks which is £106.00 per week (or 90% of your average earnings if that is less).

You will be entitled to SMP if:

- you have been employed by your present employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of your 'qualifying week' (the 15th week before your baby is due)
- you are still employed in the 15th week before your baby is due – even if you are off sick or only work part of the week, and
- you actually receive at least £79 per week before tax on average in the eight weeks (if you are paid weekly) or two months (if you are paid monthly) before the end of your qualifying week.

To claim SMP you must give your employer 28 days notice and give them your MATB1 maternity certificate which your midwife will give you when you are about 20 weeks pregnant.

## **How do I work out the 'qualifying week'?**

The qualifying week for SMP is the 15th week before your baby is due. Find the Sunday before your baby is due and count back 15 weeks. That is the start of your qualifying week.

## **I am on a temporary contract. Can I still get SMP if my contract ends?**

Before the start of your maternity leave: To get SMP you must be employed in all or part of your qualifying week – even for one day. It doesn't matter if you are on holiday or off sick in that week. If your job ends in or after your qualifying week but before the start of your maternity leave you are still entitled to SMP. SMP will start on the Sunday after your employment ends or the Sunday of the 11th week before your baby is due (if that is later). After the start of your maternity leave: If your contract ends after

you have already started your maternity leave your SMP will continue to be paid. Once you have qualified for SMP it is payable for the full 26 weeks even if your contract ends during the SMP period. If your contract ends before your qualifying week and you do not qualify for SMP you may be able to get Maternity Allowance instead.

## **Do I have to repay my maternity pay if I decide not to return to work?**

No, all of the Statutory Maternity Pay (paid for 6 weeks at 90% of your salary and 20 weeks at £106.00 per week) is yours to keep whether you go back or not. Your employer gets most of it back from the government anyway. If your employer pays contractual maternity pay, such as full pay, any additional maternity pay over and above the Statutory Maternity Pay would only have to be repaid if that was agreed in advance or was stated in your contract. You NEVER have to repay the Statutory Maternity Pay.

## **I do not qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay. Can I get any other maternity pay?**

You may be entitled to Maternity Allowance. This is a benefit for women who have changed jobs during pregnancy and/or are self employed or have had periods of low earnings or unemployment during their pregnancy. Maternity Allowance lasts for 26 weeks. It is £102.80 a week for 26 weeks or 90% of your average earnings if that is less.

You can get Maternity Allowance if:

- you have worked for 26 weeks during the 66 weeks before your baby is due, and
- you can find 13 weeks in which you earned over £30 a week.

To claim Maternity Allowance, ask your local Jobcentre Plus for form MA1.

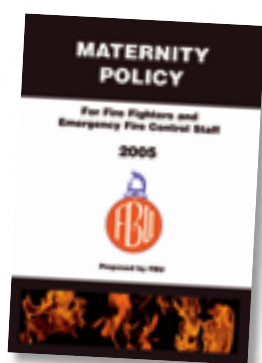
## **Do I have to tell my employer that I am pregnant?**

It is up to you to decide when you want to tell your employer that you are pregnant. Legally you do not have to tell your employer until you give notice for maternity leave and pay in the 15th week before your baby is due but you will need to tell them in order to benefit from the rights below such as paid time off for antenatal care and health and safety protection.

If you go for a job interview you do not have to tell the employer that you are pregnant and it would be sex discrimination to refuse to employ a woman because of pregnancy. Note that you will not receive SMP if you change jobs during pregnancy but you may get Maternity Allowance instead.

## **Can I take sick leave during pregnancy?**

Yes, you should follow your employer's normal sickness reporting policy. You are entitled to any sick pay that your employer normally gives. Your employer should record any pregnancy-related sick leave separately from other sick leave and it should not count towards your total sickness absence for disciplinary or redundancy purposes. It is against the law for your employer to dismiss you or treat you less favourably because of your pregnancy or for having taken sick leave during your pregnancy. Your employer can only 'trigger' your maternity leave if you are off sick for a pregnancy-related reason in the four weeks before your baby is due.



Note that if you only receive Statutory Sick Pay and you are off sick in the middle of your pregnancy it may affect your maternity pay.

### **Can I take paid time off for Antenatal Care and what does 'Antenatal Care' cover?**

Yes, if you are an employee you have the right to reasonable time off work for antenatal care and you have the right to be paid for this time off. The term 'Antenatal Care' can include time off for parent craft or relaxation classes as long as they are taken on the advice of your midwife or doctor.

### **Do I have extra health and safety protection when I am pregnant or when I am breastfeeding?**

If you are pregnant, have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, your employer must make sure that the kind of work you do and your working conditions will not put your health or your baby's health at risk. To get the full benefit of this protection you must notify your employer in writing that you are pregnant or have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

Your employer should carry out a risk assessment of your working conditions and if any working conditions are found to be a risk to your health or your baby your employer must remove or reduce that risk. If the risks remain they must temporarily alter your working conditions or hours of work to remove the risk. If this is not possible your employer must offer you a suitable alternative job. If they can't offer you a suitable alternative job, your employer should suspend you on full pay for as long as is necessary to avoid the risks.

### **Do I have any rights if I am treated badly at work because of my pregnancy or my maternity leave?**

Yes. It is against the law for your employer to treat you unfairly, dismiss you or select you for redundancy for any reason connected with your pregnancy, childbirth or maternity leave. If you are dismissed while you are pregnant or during your maternity leave, your employer must give you a written statement of the reasons for the dismissal. If you are dismissed or treated unfairly you can bring a claim in an Employment Tribunal for detrimental treatment, unfair dismissal and sex discrimination.

### **What can I do if there is a dispute at work about my maternity rights?**

Most employers and their advisers are not familiar with the law on maternity rights, so if you have a problem it may help you achieve a solution if you show them a Maternity Alliance factsheet explaining the law. Rights such as returning to work part time are not very well known at all and your employer may not know that they are in danger of breaking the law.

You could write a letter to your employer explaining your views and send them one of the Maternity Alliance factsheets explaining your legal rights. Try to sort the problem out amicably. It may be that your employer is just mistaken or confused, rather than deliberately trying to treat you badly. You could ask for a meeting to discuss the problem. You can take someone into the meeting with you such as a friend, colleague, relative or union representative. If you are not happy with how your employer

has handled the situation you could make a formal complaint using the complaints or grievance procedure at your work. If you cannot negotiate a solution you will have to decide whether to take things further by making a claim to an Employment Tribunal. The time limit for making a tribunal claim is three months.

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### **What happens to my holidays during maternity leave?**

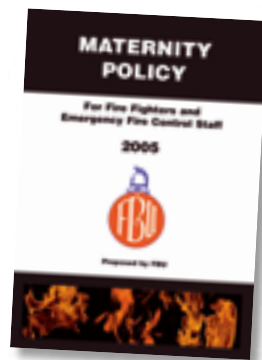
You continue to accrue your contractual holiday during your first 26 weeks of ordinary maternity leave. During additional maternity leave you will continue to accrue statutory paid holiday of 20 days per year. Working out your holiday entitlement during maternity leave and when to take your holiday is complicated.

### **What happens if there is a fixed holiday or Bank Holiday during my maternity leave?**

In a recent case, the European Court of Justice said that where a fixed period of annual leave or annual shutdown falls during maternity leave, a woman must be allowed to take her annual leave at another time. It is not clear what happens to Bank Holidays that fall during maternity leave but as they are fixed holidays you could argue that following this case you should be entitled to Bank Holidays as well.

### **My employer has told me my job is redundant. What are my rights?**

It is unfair dismissal and sex discrimination to select a woman for redundancy because she is pregnant or on maternity leave. If the redundancy is not connected to your pregnancy or the fact that you are on maternity leave you may be entitled to redundancy and notice pay. If you are made redundant whilst on maternity leave, your employer must offer you any suitable alternative work that is available. If there is none, they must pay you any notice and redundancy pay that you are entitled to.



This year's annual FBU Women's School was held at Wortley Hall on the 8th to the 10th April. It was attended by approximately 50 women from all around the country and from all parts and sections of the union. One of the reasons for the success of the school was the childcare provided by the union. The crèche was once again excellent and provided care and supervision for about 35 children, a major contributor to why we can get so many women to attend. There is no doubt that that is positive for the union! FBU President Ruth Winters reports



### Who attended and why?

There was a mix of firefighters who work the wholetime and retained duty systems as well as firefighter (control) staff who all had varying reasons for attending.

Also we were privileged to have two women officials from ASLEF, Sharon Allen and Pauline Cawood, as well as a women official from the RMT, Janine Booth, who came along to see how we work and also so we could learn from them. I know they enjoyed the experience, as we did having them there.

We started with a session that discussed what women's expectations of the school would be.

This ranged from wanting to find out more about the union as well as women in the union; gaining more knowledge about the union and other brigades and regions; wanting more information about campaigning issues such as pensions and regionalisation of controls; getting confidence and learning from shared experiences; to learn how to get a positive change for women within the fire service; learning how to apply their knowledge; support and help for problems ongoing at the present time; and, last but by no means least, women wishing to make their own minds up about the school and section and what it does.

So, as you can see, not everyone came along with the same expectations but hopefully we managed to meet them all. Again no doubt that if we do, it is positive for the union!

# Why is the School su

### Who runs the school?

It is devised and run by the National Women's Committee and women officials of the union supported by head office and the executive council. The National Women's Committee work and plan the school months in advance and, where possible, we utilise women officials to run the sessions and workshops, as well as leading them. This is not done to keep men out, rather it is done to use the obvious talent and commitment that exists amongst our FBU women. We also utilised outside experts: Gayle Hayes and Maggie Williams from WHISC, Ivan Walker from Thompsons and trade union tutors Loren Fabian and Julie Weekes. We must thank them all for their time and skills.



# e FBU Women's uch a success?\*

Once again no doubt that this is positive for the union!

## What did we do all weekend?

We did what all good union schools do: we covered key issues in terms of the union as a whole as well as women specific workshops and some international input. We aspired to give as much choice as we possibly could in offering a range of workshops on day two of the school which were allocated by self-selection of the women themselves.

The workshops available were as follows:

**Stage 1 – FBU Structures** – This was a basic “How does our union work?” session, not just on the equality struc-

tures, but the whole union.

**Stage 2 – “Be active in the FBU”** – This dealt with developing and practising the skills needed to take part in FBU meetings, running meetings and gaining a better understanding of how the equality structures work.

**“Find your voice”** – this session dealt with building confidence and/or skills when speaking in public, developing research skills as well as getting your message across.

**“Harassment and bullying in the workplace”** – this included skills needed to identify and deal with bullying and harassment in the workplace. This included dealing with it and hopefully resolving it.

**“Pensions – LGPS and FPS”** – Public pension schemes are currently under attack and this workshop was designed to assist members to understand our current pensions arrangements and to fully understand any consequences of any changes being proposed. This session was run by Ivan Walker from Thompson’s Solicitors, who apparently made a pensions session fun!

**“Women’s Health”** – This dealt with health issues that affect women such as menopause, self examination, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, identifying and dealing with stress and its causes.

All of these issues need to be dealt with, as a good trade union; therefore all must be positive for the union!

**Did anyone from head office turn up to tell us what’s going on?**

Yes, I did! I was there for the whole school, not just because I’m the President of the union but I am a woman member and official.

If you think it is easier for a woman official in a male-dominated union then think again!

Where prejudice exists it always finds a way to rear its ugly head. You only have to listen to the absolutely ridiculous rumours that have gone around about the Long Service Increment in the dispute.

Apparently I personally negotiated that increment away to forward “my equalities agenda”!

True? NO! Then why do they say it? Because it’s easy to link it to me because I’m a woman and if you want to discredit a woman in a male dominated arena, it is often this twisted anti-equality tactic that is utilised.

In my session on the “state of the union” I tried to give a realistic and honest overview as to where we were post dispute and what we had to do to progress this union and its aims and campaigns. There is no doubt that the control campaign is at the top of the union’s agenda and I once again gave the commitment of head office and the Executive Council to support and participate in opposing the closure of our fire controls and any job losses being proposed.

Let’s be very clear that our reasons for doing so are not just because of the jobs, although that is extremely important, but because the reasons for the regionalisation are wrong in their essence and will not improve the service our firefighters (control) already provide to a spectacular standard.

So I gave an update on the political work done both by head office and the regions. But you out there have to involve yourselves in this campaign – our members in control deserve no less. This is not a new fight – it has just been brought to the fore once again and once again we must fight it.

I also talked about the attacks not just on our pensions but on all pensions and particularly in the public sector. We have worked closely with other unions and totally support a united fight on this issue. But we also must listen to our members and inform our members of the effect of any positive changes as well as the detrimental changes.

In doing this, we can best produce effective strategies for fighting these proposals, for fight them we must. Never forget pensions are not just something in the far off future they are your pay, they have always been your pay and they will always be part of your pay. This is not a new fight – it’s just been brought to the fore once again



and once again we must fight it.

And let’s not forget fire cover, an issue that we hear about on a daily basis. I also dealt with that in explaining the union’s national strategy to regain a national framework for fire cover.

We sometimes have to remind ourselves of the policies we actually have. We do have a policy that supports risk based fire cover and have done for some years, but that is not what brigades are giving us with local Integrated Risk Management Plans. They are not, in our view, assessing the risk properly or safely.

We discussed the new research on the physiological effect of firefighting on firefighters and the startling results, specifically how this could affect attendance to incidents – who we send and when we send them.

Obviously there are the attacks on jobs and posts at fire stations: this is without doubt an issue that cannot be ignored. However, jobs and posts have always been an issue and to say anything different is like burying our heads in the sand.

If we look at what happened under the section 19 arrangements that very, very rarely saved jobs. The only way to do that is the tried and tested way and that is to do something about it which, yes, ultimately may include industrial action.

It was sadly the only way before and may still – while authorities are not using risk assessment properly – be the only way.

In covering these three main issues the union is facing at the moment, I hope that the position of the national union was made clear for everyone there, and that can only be a positive thing for the union!

**What did you talk about when you were all together?**

We discussed many things, firstly we had a speaker from the Western Sahara, Fatimetou Mahfud Sidi Alla, who explained her people’s long fight for their own state.

After years of war, negotiation and struggle for their right to self determination she explained how, in particular, the women of the Western Sahara have built the refugee camps in very difficult terrain and circumstances and how they have survived and developed in an environment that no human being should have to endure.

Danielle van Brunt Smith informed us of the Sandblast project, to which the FBU is signed up, and how they plan to heighten our awareness of the situation through an arts and culture festival next year. They are truly amazing women and an amazing people.

Brian Amos from B&EMM gave a presentation and showed the B&EMM film. If anyone in this union ever wants to be reminded or know why this section started and what our members faced then and, yes, now, then get a copy of this film, show it at brigade committees and branch meetings.

Stewart Brown from the Gay and Lesbian section gave us a very informative and educational session on the subject of HIV, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) regulations that came into effect in October last year and what they may mean for us.

He also discussed the pandemic around the world in terms of the disease and reinforced what we can actually do to help as well as reiterating why we should.

For any further information please contact the FBU G&L website ([www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/sections/gnl/](http://www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/sections/gnl/)).



## What was the main FBU campaign discussed at the school?

Without doubt it was the proposed regionalisation of fire controls. I'm sure it may have warranted more time but we had debate and workshops to discuss, not the rights and wrongs, but what we could actually do as members of a trade union.

The session was led by Val Salmon and Sue Offland from the CSNC. They gave an update on where we were with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and with Regional Management Boards. There is no doubt we have had more success with the second group than the first. We discussed why this was not just a control issue but a regional fire service issue and how that affected us all.

Within the workshops it became clear that, once again, some firefighters do not know enough about what control staff do and that we have to change that.

Where they do know, they have to be motivated as do our firefighter (control) staff. There are, of course, many that are and do participate, but we have to keep building on that.

We also discussed the need for head office and the Executive Council to be more prominent and visible in this campaign. A message we will not let fall on deaf ears. Please visit the FBU website and the link to the ControlCare website for information and lobbying materials. In featuring this issue we are defending our members' jobs and conditions, and that can only be a positive thing for the union!



## So did you just talk all weekend or did anything constructive come out of it?

Well, yes we did talk all weekend but that's how you communicate! We also devised action plans and practical ones that were arranged in regions. We wanted to ensure that each region could tailor their plan to their needs and were full of achievable aims. Those plans were developed and have all been taken back into the union to be acted upon.

We also got the women to fill in a monitoring form to find out what worked and what didn't so we can build for the future. We assessed that if the school had met the expectations of the women drawn up at the beginning of the school – and I have to say that almost all of them were met – that is the key to a successful school: to achieve the aims of the people who organised it and who attended it.

Thanks to the National Women's Committee and all the speakers and tutors who assisted them, you did a brilliant job.

I make a plea to all FBU women out there who have never been to a women's school before: apply next year, come along, find out for yourselves. I really don't think you'll be disappointed. I know I have never been. I also make a plea to all the men in the FBU out there: encourage women in your workplace to attend the women's school next year. You and they have nothing to fear or worry about. As I've said all through this article, it can only be a positive thing for the union!

**\* Answer: because it is relevant, and it can only be a positive thing for this trade union!**



# Unions work for women

**T**HE 2004 STUC women's conference was held on 16-17 November at the Albert Halls in Stirling. The conference was a roaring success and the FBU delegation, observers and visitors had a fantastic time debating, networking and exposing global injustice against women.

This conference had an order paper as wide and diverse as any I have attended, if not more than most, and was chaired by Veronica Rankin (Educational Institute of Scotland).

The conference debated issues from asylum to the gender pay gap, emergency fire controls to paternity leave and had guest speakers from trades councils, MSP Malcolm Chisholm, the Cathkin High School "debating society" and the South African high commissioner Lindiwe Mabuza, to name but a few.

The FBU motions being debated by the 90 strong conference were:

- Emergency Fire Control Rooms
- Abortion Rights
- Western Sahara

All were carried unanimously.

The delegates were Ruth Winters (FBU President) Linda Shanahan (STUC Women's committee) and Janette Ferguson (Region 1 Women's Rep) Sally Harper (Region 10 women's rep). Observers were Joanne Winrow-Jones (Region 9 Womens rep) and Vicky Knight (EC member for women) and our visitor was Philippa Clarke (Ex research department and FBU sister.)

Resolutions on the BNP and Paternity Rights were also seconded by the FBU and we received resounding support in the debate created by the FBU's 'Emergency Fire Controls' motion.

Unison, in seconding this motion pledged

full support for our campaign and shared in our concerns of the proposed 500 job losses, reduction in public service and the future for regional fire services, regional government and the impact on trade unions and the workforce of the future.

The contribution of our South African sister moved and humbled the conference, each and every one of us.

She told delegates a brief history of apartheid and how the reinforced and reiterated beliefs of the South African people were: "only with the full and equal contribution of women, could a better life for all be achieved".

She talked about the oppression of South African sisters in so many different ways and for so many reasons, the chief one being to divide the strength of Black South Africa through racism, class and gender segregation.

She paid tribute to strong women worldwide – celebrating feminism and women like Sylvia Pankhurst for fighting the British struggle against racism, fascism and sexism. A truly uplifting and moving contribution.

There was an afternoon session solely on the issue of equal pay, which after a 50 year struggle attempting to achieve it was still a burning issue and high on the agenda of so many women workers. The session was enjoyed by all participants and was followed by four motions on this subject. All were passed by the conference.

The 2004 Women's STUC was a fantastic event, I would like to congratulate the women in Region 1 for their amazing input. They are a credit to the FBU. Thanks for a great two days. I hope to be invited again soon!

*Vicky Knight, EC Member for Women*

THE TUC Women's  
Conference

was held in

Scarborough in

March 2005. The

FBU was well

represented. Below

are two emergency

resolutions

presented by the

union and carried

by the conference

**The campaign against Regionalisation of  
Emergency Fire Control Rooms is one of  
the most prolific campaigns this union  
has ever run and  
quite rightly so. In  
order to maintain  
its profile and  
ensure the maximum  
support for this**

**issue, the NWC took the following  
motion to the 2005 WTUC conference  
in Scarborough, which again passed it  
unanimously and reiterated the TUC  
and all its affiliates' support for our  
campaign.**

## **REGIONALISATION OF CONTROLS**

**This conference is aware of the  
government's proposals to reduce the  
number of control rooms in England  
and Wales from 49 to 9 and in Scotland  
from 8 to 1. Conference firmly believes  
that these proposals form part of  
New Labour's political agenda on  
regionalisation and is in no way based  
on improving the service. Conference  
notes that this political policy on**

**TUC**



*FBU delegation to the TUC Women's Conference with Fatimetou Mahfud Sidi Alla, representative of the Polisario Front movement which is campaigning to end Moroccan rule of Western Sahara*

# women's conference

regionalisation was overwhelmingly rejected by the public in the North East referendum held in November 2004.

Should these proposals be implemented there will be job losses of 47% within emergency fire control rooms where women are the majority workforce.

This conference believes that these proposals will have a negative impact on the highly efficient service provided by the fire and rescue service throughout the UK and would result in an increased risk to both firefighters and the public.

Therefore this conference calls on the TUC and all affiliates to oppose the government's proposals on the regionalisation of emergency fire controls by:

- Supporting the FBU's national

campaign.

- Publicising the FBU campaign entitled 'Campaign against regionalisation'
- Lobbying government, MPs and local councillors to oppose this initiative.

## WESTERN SAHARA

2006 is the 30 year anniversary of the illegal Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, which this Conference has and will continue to condemn.

On the 16th January the Spanish newspaper El Pais reported that the King of Morocco stated in an interview that "The Territory was recovered in 1975 in a legal and peaceful way, neither myself nor the Moroccan people will ever agree to give up our sovereignty". This reinforced the fact that UN resolution

1514 (xv) calling for the self determination of Saharawi people has been selectively ignored for the financial gains of some, at the cost of the liberty and self determination of a nation of Saharawi people.

This conference calls upon the TUC Women's Committee and all affiliates to:

- Lobby the UK Government to put Western Sahara on its agenda as head of G8 and take active steps to help revive the referendum process.
- Re-agenda the issue of Western Sahara by highlighting and raising awareness of the plight of the Saharawi people.
- To become involved and financially support the Sandblast project taking place in 2006.

WELCOME to the summer issue of *Siren*. It's been a busy few months since our last edition.

We have some new women's regional representatives to welcome to our national committee. Heather Laurie, Region 1 (Scotland), Emma Carr, Region 9 (East Anglia), Julie Barton, Region 12 (Southern) and Gail Banks, Region 13 (South West) are all now working hard representing the women in their regions and their contact details can be found on the next page or on the NWC website [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk).

An important recent new initiative of the NWC was the circulation earlier this year of the FBU model maternity policy. This document, which is now with the NJC for negotiation at national level, was born out of a demand from women members and brigades requiring a consistent, fair and all-encompassing document that could be negotiated into brigades to ensure that women can enjoy their pregnancy, brigades treat them fairly and officials are armed to facilitate this.

While focusing on assisting women members, the NWC has continued to do what it can to help sisters elsewhere in the world facing incredible problems, such as the Saharawi women in Western Sahara, who will next year have suffered 30 years of the illegal Moroccan occupation. We urge you to get involved in the Sandblast campaign (see enclosed leaflet).

Also, your active involvement is absolutely essential in the union's



**Janette Ferguson, Editor**

campaign against the regionalisation of emergency fire control rooms, which the NWC has been highlighting within the union and fire service and in the wider trade union movement where we presented motions to the women's conferences of the TUC and STUC.

As a emergency fire control staff operator, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the brigades and regions for mounting such a successful campaign.

Emergency fire control staff don't know whether they are going to have a job or not at the end of it all. But what we are sure of is that we don't want a job in regional emergency control centres, with all the higher stress levels, sickness levels and inferior service to the public they will bring.

So send off a postcard to your MP or MSP. Send a letter to your fire board/fire authority (a postcard and standard letter can be obtained from your local FBU rep and you can also send and email direct from the FBU website - [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)). Visit your local emergency fire control centre. Find out what the job is all about, why it's worth saving and at the same time help to raise morale in your control. After all, emergency fire control staff have been involved in every FBU dispute, whether it affected them or not.

Let's not forget our conference policy! We are talking about 900 job losses - 900 FBU members' jobs. We must be clear also that if any of our emergency fire control staff are made redundant then you can be assured it won't be long before they come for firefighters' jobs as well. This is an FBU dispute involving FBU members, so let's fight this together.

■ For further information about what the NWC do, how we fit into the FBU structures, who we are and why we get involved with issues and campaigns, see our website at [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk). Contact us if there are any issues we can help raise or problems we can assist with.

## NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OFFICIALS

EC MEMBER	Vicky Knight	<a href="mailto:Vickyk@fbu.org.uk">Vickyk@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC SECRETARY	Kerry Baigent	<a href="mailto:KBaigent@fbu.org.uk">KBaigent@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC CHAIR	Dona Feltham	<a href="mailto:nwchair@fbu.org.uk">nwchair@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 1	Heather Lawrie	<a href="mailto:heather.lawrie@fbu.org.uk">heather.lawrie@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 2	Lynda Rowan	<a href="mailto:02nwc@fbu.org.uk">02nwc@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 3	Sam Rye	<a href="mailto:theryes2003@yahoo.co.uk">theryes2003@yahoo.co.uk</a>
NWC REGION 4	Contact NWC SECRETARY	<a href="mailto:KBaigent@fbu.org.uk">KBaigent@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 5 and VICE CHAIR	Joanne Winrow-Jones	<a href="mailto:joanne@fbu.org.uk">joanne@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 6	Staci Leech	<a href="mailto:06nwc@fbu.org.uk">06nwc@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 7	Helen Harrison	<a href="mailto:rwcr_07@fbu.org.uk">rwcr_07@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 8	Contact NWC SECRETARY	<a href="mailto:KerryBaigent@fbu.org.uk">Kerry Baigent</a> <a href="mailto:KBaigent@fbu.org.uk">KBaigent@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 9	Emma Carr	<a href="mailto:Emma.Carr@fbu.org.uk">Emma.Carr@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 10	Sally Harper	<a href="mailto:sally.harper@london-fire.gov.uk">sally.harper@london-fire.gov.uk</a>
NWC REGION 11	Contact NWC SECRETARY	<a href="mailto:KBaigent@fbu.org.uk">KBaigent@fbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 12	Julie Barton	<a href="mailto:women.chair@hantsfbu.org.uk">women.chair@hantsfbu.org.uk</a>
NWC REGION 13	Gayle Banks	<a href="mailto:gayle.banks@fbu.org.uk">gayle.banks@fbu.org.uk</a>

**FBU: Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE**

**Tel: 020 8541 5744 • Fax: 020 8546 5187**