

GRASSROOTS FBU

FOR A DEMOCRATIC AND FIGHTING UNION

www.grassrootsfbu.co.uk

"I have not yet begun to fight" John Paul Jones (1747-1792)

Bulletin 14: July 2004

National Officer Suspended As Witch-Hunt Gathers Pace

DEFEND PAUL WOOLSTENHOLMES! DEFEND UNION DEMOCRACY!

Readers of this bulletin will know that the FBU leadership recently embarked on an authoritarian crusade designed to undermine democracy and free speech in our union by silencing those who stand in opposition to their handling of the pay dispute and its aftermath. It has, in recent weeks, become increasingly clear that the main target of the leadership's assault is Grassroots FBU.

There was hope among some that, following the bold decisions taken at the Southport conference, the need for unity in the run-up to a national strike ballot would persuade the leadership to drop the witch-hunt and instead concentrate their energies on leading a proper fight to secure our long-overdue pay rises. Sadly, it would appear that this optimism was misplaced. For news reaches us that recently-elected national officer Paul Woolstenholmes has been suspended from office.

Paul won overwhelming support from rank and file FBU members in his election six months ago, when he stood on a platform of opposition to the leadership's repeated sell-outs, as well as a commitment to fight for greater democracy and openness within the FBU. Paul said openly that he wanted FBU members to "reclaim their union" – something that obviously did not sit comfortably with other officials at FBU head office.

It is alleged that Paul released details of the voting pattern of an executive

council meeting – a charge that he strenuously denies.



Woolstenholmes...suspended

Aside from the not insignificant fact that, in a supposedly democratic organisation, FBU members are surely **entitled** to know how each EC member votes, and that any attempt to suppress this information undermines the principles of accountability and transparency, Paul's suspension appears to be a politically-motivated attack, and a further example of the FBU leadership's cynical attempts to crush anyone who opposes them. It seems that rather than engaging in an open and honest debate about the future direction of our union, the leadership is all too keen to reach for the rule book and invoke internal union discipline to eliminate dissent. This is clearly a sign of their own weak position, and their acknowledgement of the fact that the tide is turning against them.

Of course, the FBU rule book is there for a reason, and must be used when appropriate. However, it should not be used as a tool to prevent proper democratic debate or to justify the suspension of officials on the basis of spurious and unfounded allegations.

Indeed, it could be argued that Paul's suspension was itself 'not within the rules' given that the official who suspended him, Bro Dave Whatton, has assumed the role of vice-president without ever having to face an election for the position – contrary to FBU rules. Further doubts were cast on Bro Whatton's legitimacy when it also emerged that he has been a serving member of the executive council for nearly **six years** without facing re-election – almost two years in excess of the time set-down in the FBU rule book and a year beyond the permitted time laid-out in legislation governing trade union elections.

Quite simply, it's time for the leadership to stop their bureaucratic manoeuvres and to start focusing on the critical battles that lie ahead. We face a major onslaught from the national employers, and the efforts of every official will be crucial in ensuring that a mandate for industrial action is achieved. The leadership must stop reaching for the rule book - and start reaching out to the disgruntled and disaffected members whose faith in the FBU rapidly needs restoring. Branches and brigades should pass resolutions defending Paul Woolstenholmes and demanding that the witch-hunt is brought to a halt. And to the leadership, we say: **STOP ATTACKING THE MEMBERS, AND START FIGHTING THE EMPLOYERS!**