



Postal workers will not accept defeat

Breaking the pattern of defeat

Editorial

FOR over a decade now the trade union movement has been shaped by the consequences of the defeat of the great miners' strike of 1984-5. The miners fought bravely but went down to an avoidable defeat courtesy of the timidity and cowardice of the short-sighted bureaucrats who sit at the top of the labour movement but fear its strength.

But now, at long last, it looks like the dark shadow cast by the outcome of that titanic battle may be fading. After a decade in which the cumulative effects of defeat and demoralisation, bureaucratic strangulation, savage anti-union laws and a hostile labour leadership have held back the industrial struggle, there are clear signs of a turn in the situation.

First, there is the postal dispute. Victory for our side will break the pattern of defeats and set the tone for a new industrial offensive. It looks set to develop into a full blown confrontation, between on one side a management determined to impose speed-up and undermine union shop floor power, and, on the other, postal workers who have not experienced defeat in the '80s and '90s. A section of this workforce has just emerged victorious from the largest unofficial, and illegal, strike since 1945 — the Scottish strike of '95, in which to defend just four full-time jobs tens of thousands walked out and spread the action with flying pickets.

Against solidarity like that, Royal Mail management have few weapons. They have no network of potential scabs to act as a fifth column in the way that the Nottingham miners scabbed on the other miners during their strike.

The biggest asset Royal Mail has is, paradoxically, the top leadership of the Communication Workers' Union, and in the first place Joint General Secretary Alan Johnson.

Johnson has opposed strike action all along. He has downplayed the key issue — "teamworking" — and done his best to demobilise the workers. Nonetheless, despite Johnson, the potential is there, if only the rank and file can seize control of the dispute, to inflict

a very serious defeat on Royal Mail, win a shorter working week and inspire other workers to fight back.

The other key dispute that may herald a new period of working-class revival is that on the London Underground. The drivers' union ASLEF is conducting a series of one day strikes to secure for its members the one hour off the working week which its leaders claimed they had won last year.

The other rail union, the RMT, is balloting on the same issue. Most encouraging has been the massive display of solidarity shown by RMT members who proudly refuse to cross ASLEF picket lines. This is doubly encouraging because for over fifteen years the unions on London Underground have been held back by the idiocies of inter-

union rivalry and the poison of sectionalism. Different unions have routinely crossed each other's picket lines.

Now, and not before time, the RMT rank and file train crews have taken matters into their own hands, refusing to cross ASLEF picket lines. Already this has brought immense strength to the action, increasing the pressure on ASLEF leader Lew Adams not to go for another dirty deal.

Only sectarian RMT chauvinists — who are, surprisingly, influenced by Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party: aren't you paying attention Arthur? — have argued against

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respecting the ASLEF pickets.

With empty sorting offices, sealed post boxes, grid-locked roads and most of the capital's Underground network intermittently shut down, we are once again getting a glimpse of the power of our class when it fights back and refuses to accept ill-treatment or defeat.

The key to making sure that this isn't just another isolated episode of militancy in a general period of retreat, is for the rank and file on the Underground, in the post and in rail — where strike ballots are soon to start — to seize control of their disputes.

If the official leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must.

If they try to sell workers out then the workers must push them aside. The pattern of defeat can be broken! ❗

Blair's Daleks are a weak base

THE outbreak of controversy surrounding Welsh Labour MP Paul Flynn's perfectly accurate description of Tony Blair's leadership style as "autocratic" is highly significant not just because of the light shed on the extent of opposition to Blair, even inside the Parliamentary Labour Party, but mainly as a portent for the future.

What Flynn says is perfectly factual, accurate and reasonable. Blair has moved Labour to the right of the Liberal Democrats in formal policy terms. The "modernisers" project is about seeking to remodel the Labour Party in order to replace the Tory Party and occupy its traditional ground.

It is "hypocritical and opportunist" for Labour's frontbenchers to attack Tory policies on welfare, health and education if they insist on portraying Labour as the party of low taxation and are definitely not going to spend any money to undo the damage done by systematic underfunding. And it is "soundbite politics" to go on and on about fat cats and corporate greed while preparing to do absolutely nothing about the £10 billion of tax cuts per year that the Tories have given to their super-rich friends.

All these changes are self-evidently true. What is remarkable behaviour is the outbreak of political honesty that seems to be developing inside the Parliamentary Labour Party. The hard left is being joined by all kinds of unlikely people.

As well as Flynn other MPs from the mainstream are sticking the boot in. Former Deputy Leader and right wing hatchet man Roy Hattersley now finds himself on the left of the PLP. Not because his politics have changed one iota — they have not — but because Blair *et al* are determined to move Labour away from even the most minimal pallid, but at least pro-working class, social democratic reformism.

Hattersley still believes in those old reformist goals. This is how he commented on the furore surrounding Flynn's remarks: "In the Labour Party autocracy is acceptable in a good cause. If Tony Blair were to announce that, whatever the policy forums may decide, he was going to increase the basic pension and insist on genuine non-selective secondary education throughout the country, there would be no problem of party morale."

Hattersley then went on to warn of the opposition Blair was building up in the party as a result of his "ideological provocations."

"Large scale revolt has been avoided up to now because the Labour Party wants to win. A party leader is like a bank robber who stands in front of the safe displaying the sticks of dynamite that are strapped to his chest. 'Shoot, even in my direction, and you may cause an explosion that destroys us all.' That tactic can work for a time. But — instead of stretching loyalty to breaking point — how much better to take the party with the leadership step by step. It is a slow and tedious process but it will give the next government the security that four years of ideological provocation cannot provide."

Not even Bill Jordan, that most stupid and right wing of union bureaucrats, has leapt to Blair's defence.

Only the Daleks have defended Blair.

The Daleks are that group of student politicians and pay roll MPs for whom the epithet "Blair's Babes" is too kind. Inexperienced, naive and juvenile they may be, but Labour's Daleks are deadly serious. They have been programmed to exterminate the Labour Party by their creator Davros Mandelson.

Unfortunately for Blair their base is another planet and not in the labour movement. To ordinary party activists their voices sound strange and alien.

Blair — for all his self-promotion and vain boasting — isn't really doing very well at winning the hearts and minds of Labour's rank and file. Blair is going to free massive opposition when he actually tries to carry out his reactionary policies in government.

And with millions of working-class people demanding some real material change not even all the Daleks in Islington will save him. ☐



Daily Mirror comes to Blairs defence — but he protesteth too much...

"Everything holy is profaned"

THE Archbishop of Canterbury calling for a "new morality" amidst the landscape of Tory-blighted Britain is like someone calling for clean air in the vicinity of a nuclear disaster of Chernobyl dimensions!

The cynical old joke about "the 11th commandment" — "do unto others as they would do to you, only do it first" — sums up the governing moral principle of the Britain Mrs Thatcher and John Major and those they represent have created. The successful spiv, and bandits wearing corporate masks — these are its heroes. These are the 'role-models' for those who want to get on, who don't want to be mugs and victims, and who are taught by everything around them in society to believe that they must choose to be either one of the mugs or one of the clever, successful predators. Albert Einstein memorably said it long ago:

"[The] crippling of individuals I consider the worst evil of capitalism. Our whole educational system suffers from this evil. An exaggerated competitive attitude is inculcated in the student, who is trained to worship acquisitive success as a preparation for his future career."

More than that. Legalised robbery and cheating is lodged inextricably in the DNA of capitalism. Only the degree of rampancy varies, according to the presence or absence of shame-making social disapproval, and according to whether they need — for themselves as well as others — to dress it up hypocritically, or feel free to flaunt it.

In Thatcher-Major Britain it has reached a rampancy previously unknown.

Ours is a society with little public decency or shame. The fat cats — the water boards for example — pay themselves vast amounts of money and

rip off the public with glee as well as with impunity: after all, the ripping off operation is set up for them by the government — the Central Committee of all the spivs, robbers and rip-off merchants who batten on the British people. The moral decay built into capitalism has now advanced so far that it seriously threatens social cohesion.

A society that will not care for its young, that provides for them neither decent education nor proper jobs, nor even fall-back social security; that lets so many of its young people sleep in the streets; which consigns its orphans to a care system known to be riddled with abusive practices — that society is already far gone in rot and disintegration. By any human standards it is a moral abomination.

The idea that the Haves can cordon themselves off indefinitely from the affects of creeping social decay is fond delusion. Some of them know that and fear it.

A very rich society like that of the USA that creates Third World slums in the most advanced cities on earth — and Britain is following not too far behind the USA — is not only immoral but radically sick.

Faced with the moral decay around us, the question is begged of those who talk of moral regeneration: whose moral regeneration? Moral decay comes from the bourgeoisie, and from the working out to the extremes of absurd individualism and social anatomisation of the basic principles of a market-worshipping and market-regulated society, where the primary rule is “the war of all against all”.

Moral regeneration can only come from the working class and the labour movement.

Our movement is rooted in the idea of solidarity — class solidarity of the exploited and oppressed as the basis on which a general human solidarity can be reconstructed. Trade unionism is class solidarity organised on a day-to-day basis, counterposed to and at war with its opposite, dog-eat-dog capitalism. Its highest goal and destination is socialism. But that can be won only by the victory of the working class.

One of the elements in the decline of morality and moral solidarity in modern Britain is the weakening of the labour movement by Tory blows and Tory laws: the same government that has vastly increased the scope of social robbery and superior class spivery, has also legally tied the labour movement hand and foot, outlawing most of the things that make trade unionism effective.

It is symbolic and symptomatic that they have outlawed solidarity strike action, thus attempting to still the heart of the working-class alternative to what they represent — of the antidote to the moral gangrene rotting their own system.

One measure of the creeping spread of moral decay is the refusal of the Labour Party to commit itself to unblocking the well-springs of working class solidarity and morality: Tony Blair goes to Mass and takes Communion, but he also sips from the poisoned Tory trough. Blair too bemoans the moral decay in Britain!

Nevertheless, despite the Blairs, the labour movement is showing signs of reviving. If the Labour Party wins the next election we will be in a better position, despite the Labour leaders, to secure our own unshackling, and continue the fight for a solidarist society.

The socialists and our central principle of solidarity are the real answer, and in the long-term the only antidote, to the social decay and moral corruption that is endemic to a capitalist system that degrades human beings and elevates wealth. The labour movement is the potential seed and source of a positive human-centred morality, of a moral revival, of a rational morality free of the old religiosity. Socialism, the reorganisation of the world according to the principles of reason and solidarity is the proper name for the moral revival the Archbishops, the Tories and the Blairs vainly call for.

When the politicians of the other side go on about moral decline and moral revival they thereby, though they do not know it, tell the labour movement to step up its fight against them. ■

Postal workers can win

By a Manchester postal worker

AFTER two weeks of standing still it looks like the postal dispute is once more gathering pace after the CWU Postal Executive finally agreed to call more strike days.

The decision of the Postal Executive last month not to name any further days of strike action for the time being was a mistake. The decision was no doubt taken for the best of motives — the need to consult the Branches and to take stock of the progress of the negotiations.

Nevertheless, the effect was to give the impression to the members that the industrial action had been put on the back burner and that some deal was in the offing. Much of the momentum that had been built leading to the first 24 hour strike was lost and many branches are going to have build it up again.

What made things worse was that an explanation of the Executive's decision and the reasons for it didn't reach the members for two days. This allowed the media and management to peddle their propaganda. In many offices management circulated leaflets urging staff not to take further strike action as “the dispute is virtually over”. It's probably just as well that no-one believes anything from management these days.

We call ourselves a Communications Union. No Executive meeting about the dispute should be allowed to finish without an agreed statement being drawn up and immediately faxed to Branches. That way our members will be the first to know what's going on instead of the last.

This stop/go strategy on strikes probably appeals to some of our negotiators. It also makes it a bit easier to persuade our more reluctant members to come out. But it's no way to win the dispute.

One day strikes virtually run themselves. Longer ones don't. Picket rotas, regular bulletins to members, mass meetings, speakers to other unions and Labour Parties — these don't happen on their own.

There is a huge amount of support for our stand among our members, the wider labour movement and the public. They are sick and tired of seeing working people pushed around by arrogant and bullying bosses who think they can do what they like. They want to see our side win for a change. With their help we will. ■

Thirty years of fighting for workers' liberty

OUR tendency will celebrate its 30th anniversary in October 1996. And to mark this milestone in our history we will be holding a conference in London on Saturday 26 October.

We have also republished *What We Are And What We Must Become*, the founding document of our tendency.

● *What We Are And What We Must Become* is available for £2.50 plus 36p postage from AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA (cheques payable to “WL Publications”).