

Scotrail drivers: Just say no!

By a Scotrail driver

SCOTRAIL drivers rejected a second restructuring deal on 6 August by 428 votes to 320 (57% to 43%). It was rejected in spite of its recommendation by the Scotrail divisional council and ASLEF executive committee, causing ASLEF officials much consternation and the local Edinburgh press to howl about greedy drivers "derailing the train's golden age".

This abortive deal followed one earlier in the year which was rejected by 89% of Scotrail drivers.

Petitions have been circulated, and branch motions of no confidence passed in all the officials concerned to no effect. Divisional council reps have not resigned. By the look of things, they have not, even now, started to listen to the activists.

The logical thing to do at various points would have been to ballot in order to get authority for action to force management to drop the worst features of the Driver Restructuring Initiative. But that would have upset

those in charge of the golden handshake. It would also have meant an end to trade union time off from driving every weekday, an end to having every weekend off, and to the daily early afternoon appointment with Denhom's bar next to Central Station (all on average earnings). Hence, there was no pressure from here on the executive to ballot.

The problem is, of course, that those irritating, awkward Scotrail drivers keep on messing up the cosy management/ASLEF officials' plans.

After all, what's so bad about 11-hour shifts (nine hours driving a train)? With contract turns (meaning you must come out to work at 24 hours' notice)? With 100 surplus drivers performing other grades' duties? With having only an allotment of 20 measly hours for report-writing per year at the end of a shift (included in basic pay)?

The reason for the refusal of the ASLEF 'leadership' to ballot is slightly different. After the two-day strike for a shorter working week in 1995, management threatened the abolition of

the automatic check-off of union dues. Adams, seeing the effect this had had on the RMT, was made more determined than ever to prevent any industrial action by ASLEF. He feared that cash collections would be devastating. He knows very well that many members feel they have been misrepresented for years and might not pay their dues.

The result has been restructuring deals which have devastated the driving grade. Conditions of service have been taken away. So have national and local agreements. There has been a lengthening of the working day, and a dramatic increase in "flexibility" — all on ASLEF recommendations. This in turn has had a snowball effect on workers covered by the more militant RMT. That is what management intended in the first place.

But where now on Scotrail? As ever there is a yawning gap between 'what the ASLEF leadership should do and what they will do'. A ballot over the management offer of 5% from September, back-dated only to 1 April, could force management to drop the worst features of the last deal. Talking has not achieved an acceptable deal and plainly talk alone will not. Management will almost certainly offer some small concession in an effort to win 51% before the winter timetable at the end of September, and before they face different divisional council reps after the December elections. Another recommendation for acceptance will follow the slight modification. They will try to grind us down by the usual double-act. ASLEF may have to pay a heavy price for what they have done and are doing.



A living monument to Sacco and Vanzetti

70 YEARS ago Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were burned to death in the electric chair for a murder they didn't commit. On 23 August this year in Boston the Mayor, Thomas Menino, formally accepted that they were innocent and dedicated a memorial.

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were arrested and tried at the height of the Red Scare in 1920. Thousands of foreign-born Communists, socialists and anarchists were arrested and deported by Attorney General Palmer. Sacco and Vanzetti were sentenced to die in the electric chair. Their only crime was that they had rebelled against capitalism. At the beginning of the case Sacco and Vanzetti were unknown, obscure working-class fighters. Their names now will forever be linked with the fight to overthrow capitalism.

In court, they refused to beg for mercy or renounce their cause. If they had, they would have had a better chance of survival and, eventually, of being freed. They remained in prison for 7 years with the threat of death hanging over them. For 7 years the bourgeoisie was too scared to kill them because an international labour movement campaign agitated, organised, petitioned and

demonstrated for their release.

Mass meetings were held in all major cities in the US. In New York 18,000 workers attended one meeting in Madison Square Gardens. Hundreds of resolutions were sent to the Governor of Massachusetts. Posters, articles for the press, and every means of publicity and agitation were used. In Europe support came from Germany, Italy and England. Demonstrations took place outside American Embassies in Paris, Lisbon, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Montevideo and Mexico. This level of support pushed back the hands of the executioner.

Eventually however American capitalists showed the protesting workers of the world that they were prepared to go to any length to beat down the labour movement and that legal murder was a weapon they dared use and relished using.

We must remember, honour and celebrate Sacco and Vanzetti. But our memorial to them must be more than a sepulchre. As the American Trotskyist James P Cannon said we must commemorate them by building "a movement which will incorporate in its work and achievements the spirit of Sacco and Vanzetti and thus become a living monument to their memory."

Elaine Jones

The referendum and the working class

ON 11 September voters in Scotland will vote for or against the creation of a Scottish parliament. They will also vote on whether or not such a parliament should have tax-levying powers.

Doing it by referendum marks a retreat from Labour's earlier commitment to set up a parliament simply on the basis of the mandate given to them by a general election victory. Yet the powers proposed for a Scottish parliament are wider than had been expected. It will have responsibility for education, health, local government, the legal system, economic development, transport and the protection of the environment.

The Westminster parliament will retain control over foreign policy, "defence and national security", border controls, employment legislation and social security.

The White Paper published on 24 July stresses that sovereignty remains with the Westminster parliament. In reality substantial areas of sovereignty will be transferred from Westminster to Edinburgh. Moreover nothing in the White Paper prevents the Scottish parliament from calling a referendum on independence.

Opposition to Scots Home Rule is headed by the "Think Twice" campaign, which is largely a front campaign for mainstream Scottish Toryism. (A substantial minority of Scottish Tories support the creation of a Scottish parliament.)



Support for a double "yes" vote in the referendum is being mobilised by the "Scotland Forward" (SFOR) campaign. This, and it prides itself on it, is "cross-party and non-party". It refrains from discussing the contents of Labour's White Paper.

SFOR likewise prides itself on the breadth of its celebrity supporters. These range from Educational Institute of Scotland President Ian McCalman, a one-time Trotskyist, to the Director of Magnum Power plc and the Earl of Mar and Kellie.

The tenor of SFOR's campaign is essentially technocratic: a Scottish parliament will be more modern and more

efficient than the Westminster parliament, it will be "a new parliament for a new millennium", replacing "confrontational Westminster politics with a more consensual, considered approach to government".

However, the different currents within SFOR are campaigning for a double "yes" vote for diametrically opposed reasons.

The Scottish National Party argues that the creation of a Scottish parliament will be a step towards independence; the Scottish Labour Party argues that creating a Scottish parliament will preserve the Union. In terms of its political outlook and class composition, the leadership and activist base of SFOR is essentially petty-bourgeois.

More specifically, it is a stratum of the petty bourgeoisie with a developed Scottish identity, drawn mainly from: Scottish media and culture, the Scottish churches, Scottish local government and the voluntary sector, the Scottish legal system, and the Scottish education system.

The petty-bourgeois class composition of SFOR does much to explain its hostility to sharp political debate, its apolitical and anodyne approach to campaigning, and aversion to the concept of class politics.

Nowhere in its campaigning material does SFOR even attempt to argue that the creation of a Scottish parliament would be a step forward for the working class in Scotland. For SFOR there is only "the Scottish people", rather than mutually antagonistic class forces.

SFOR is backed by the trade unions in Scotland. But even the publicity material produced by the unions themselves takes up the question of a Scottish parliament only in terms of Scottish populism, not in class terms. According to a TGWU leaflet, for example:

"Scotland wants change... important decisions affecting Scotland should be made by a Scottish parliament elected by the Scottish people, rather than hundreds of miles away in London... So make your mark for Scotland. Vote YES YES in the referendum."

The working class can benefit from a Scottish parliament only if it rejects SFOR's pious pleas for "a consensual, considered approach to government", and mobilises instead on the basis of "confrontational politics".

Dale Street

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The crisis of the Labour Party

Will the union leaders fight?

TONY Blair's post-election political honeymoon may be about to end. He has expected to be able to use the euphoria and loyalty generated by Labour's May Day landslide to push through the most far-reaching set of internal Labour Party counter-reforms so far contemplated by Labour's right. He wants to gut Labour Party Conference, kick the left off the NEC and reduce trade union representation in the new party structures from 50% to 25%.

His purpose is, first, to insulate the New Labour government from criticism when its policies fail to deliver real change for the people who elected it, and, then, to create an entirely new centre-party out of the old Labour shell. He aims to end New Labour's financial dependence on the trade unions by way of attracting political contributions from capitalists, and instituting state funding for political parties.

Yet Blair finds himself facing a level of opposition he did not expect. A record number of Constituency Labour Parties have criticised his "Partnership in Power" (PiP) proposals in resolutions to annual conference. The great bulk of the trade unions in principle also oppose PiP.

Judging by the scale of opposition so far, and the lack of any tide of support for PiP, Blair should be heading for defeat at this year's Brighton Party conference. The CLPs are running 9-1 against him, while in the unions over 60% of the vote should be cast in support of the old federal labour movement-based party structure.

Blair's unlikely saviours

THAT'S how things should go, except for one key factor in the situation: the trade union leaders. John Edmonds of the GMB, Bill Morris of the TGWU, Rodney Bickerstaffe of UNISON and Roger Lyons of MSF have no intention of seeing Blair defeated.

First they work fervently to pull their own unions into line with Blair.

The TGWU officials on Labour's NEC have voted for PiP despite TGWU conference opposition to it. GMB congress opposed key parts of PiP, but Edmonds hints that that is just a "negotiating position". GMB officials on the Labour NEC also vote with Blair. MSF conference opposed the principles behind PiP, but union leader Lyons is working on the job of nobbling the union's Labour conference delegation. In UNISON the pathetic Bickerstaffe allows a totally unrepresentative structure, the Affiliated Political Fund, to

take a decision in support of PiP that the bulk of the union would never have gone along with.

But Blair's main asset is the *political* weakness of his opponents. The union leaders know that the ridiculously mis-named "modernisers" seek to destroy the Party as a vehicle for trade unionist pro-working-class reform, but they do absolutely nothing to alert their members or the broader class movement to this threat. They are doing everything they can to disarm the opposition. In recent months only the AEEU engineering union — normally on the hard right of the trade union movement — has started to pose these issues.

The AEEU's increasingly aggressive stance reflects the greater independence enjoyed by a union with real industrial muscle. This is a union which has won the only offensive strike of recent times: the 1989-90 shorter working week fight. They also possess a genuine desire to secure trade union parliamentary representation and resent the new routine imposition of yuppie Parliamentary candidates, in defiance of the wishes of local union activists.

In contrast Morris, who won re-election on a trade union independence and anti-moderniser ticket, has gone all quiet. John Edmonds has reportedly reconciled himself to a complete break between New Labour and the unions. He argues that maybe such a new dispensation would make it easier for the unions to win legislation in their interests because the Blairites would no longer feel electorally compelled to show how tough they are on the unions. Dream on John...

Those of us who are loyal to the idea of working-class representation in politics must work urgently to build up a powerful current of rank-and-file opposition in both the unions and CLPs. We must attempt to force the union leaders to fight. There is still enough spirit left in the ranks of the unions to make this a real possibility.

But it is not just the job of Marxists to be the most militant fighters, we also have to help the working class and its movement reach adequate self-understanding. A political collapse on this scale, in which the trade union leaders go along with their own political self-liquidation — and in return for virtually nothing from the new government — requires explanation.

Mis-leadership born of defeat

TODAY'S trade union bureaucrats aren't

just the old set of double-dealing, sly and contemptible apparatchiks long known, described, despised and denounced by Marxists. They are something far worse, lacking even the raddled virtues of the old-time trade union leaders. They lack the spirit and drive of their predecessors who were in their own short-sighted way loyal to the labour movement. They had to fight to build up and protect their organisations. Someone like the TGWU's Ernest Bevin, the right-winger warrior who sustained the Labour Party during the 1930's when the group around Ramsey MacDonald, Blairites of the day, had tried to destroy the Labour Party and then gone over to the Tory-led National Government, would weep if he saw the abject surrender of Morris to the MacDonald of today.

Bevin saw the Labour Government of 1945 as a government to serve the working class and could rightly claim its accomplishments — limited as they were — as in part his own. What will today's leaders be remembered for? Lord Morris of Casual Labour? Viscount Edmonds of Workfare? Baron Bickerstaffe of NHS privatisation?

Today's union officials still live out all the contradictions that union officials have always lived out, balancing between the demands of their members and the needs of the ruling class. But their starting point is different. They have been thoroughly demoralised and intellectually self-defeated by the entire experience of Thatcherite Toryism and the Labour Party's headlong gallop to the right in response to Tory electoral success. Morris, Edmonds, Bickerstaffe and Lyons are products of defeat. They have been selected by our recent history to play the role future historians of the labour movement will justly brand as *the least capable, least talented, least loyal and least effective* representatives of the labour movement in this century.

None of them has an industrial record of any significance whatsoever. Only Morris has ever worked on the shopfloor. The other big three are in their muscles and bone, in their small minds and little hearts "professional" trade union functionaries. At every stage of the long ruling-class offensive they have sought to avoid conflict. They have run away from the Tories down two long and for the labour movement terrible and debilitating decades. By default they were the Tories' accomplices in the marginalisation and defeat of the labour movement after 1977 and now they are the



Blair at TUC conference: the unions are unlikely to get much more than a big smile

active accomplices of Blair and his Tory-hatched and Tory-programmed New Labour gang in attempting to drive the unions out of politics. Yet, despite their mis-leadership, we have a potentially very powerful trade union movement.

The main trade union leaders never saw the Thatcherisation of the Labour Party under Kinnock as what it really was — the political counterpart to the industrial defeats of the 1980s. They thought it would serve them by promoting a Labour electoral victory that would also be a victory for the unions. A benevolent Labour government, acting with the help of EC institutions, would usher in a new era of workplace reform. Union leaders would once again have a key role to play.

This was perhaps 70% fantasy in 1987 and '92. Today it is pure utopia. Plain nonsense. They are now having to sober up to the realisation that the orgy of rampant bourgeois prejudice that is Blairism is not some clever electoral stunt aimed at duping a hostile media, but the deep and all-defining ethos guiding the gang who hold the levers of control in the Labour Party and who now pose a mortal threat to the survival of the trade unions in politics. They now have to face the fact that what they for so long regarded as progress — the political eclipse of labour's left and the reduced level of industrial struggle that followed the miners' defeat — is not progress at all, but reaction and regression.

That is not easy for them. The trade union leaders have been telling themselves

for too many years already that Labour's drift to the right was politically necessary.

Bickerstaffe or Morris may not have liked such things as dumping unilateralism and keeping the anti-union laws, but they were prepared to trade them in in return for the possibility of a Labour election victory followed by a decent minimum wage, more jobs and increased public spending. Even Edmonds and Lyons who were enthusiastic for "modernisation" had a bottom line in terms of demands on a future Labour Government. They too expected more than Blair will willingly give them.

It is worth charting how this trade union agenda collapsed into out-and-out support for Blair.

From Smith to Blair

ALL the main union leaders were delighted when, to face down opposition to his plans for internal party change, John Smith's 1993 "Charter of worker's rights", promised full-time rights for part-time workers, automatic recognition of trade unions, a minimum wage of half male median earnings and the removal of some of the anti-union laws. He defined full employment as the touchstone of a civilised society.

When Smith died the union leaders continued to measure Labour politicians against their own set agenda. During the 1994 leadership contest Edmonds sketched out a series of key issues for candidates for Labour leadership to address — rights at work, the level of the minimum wage and policies for full employment.

But once Blair was crowned King of the Labour Party the "Edmonds strategy" started to look more and more unrealistic. The union leaders, by not vigorously campaigning against him, had handed control of the Labour Party to someone dedicated to its abolition.

First Blair went for Clause Four. Edmonds backed him publicly, while privately briefing journalists that Blair's initial conference defeat on the issue was a good thing: "It might teach young Icarus not to

fly too close to the sun". Edmonds didn't want to fight Blair over Clause Four, for the simple reason that he, as a thoroughly modern trade union leader, had no use for it. The test for the GMB, according to Edmonds, was going to be whether or not full employment was included in Labour's new statement of aims. It was not. The Blairites openly polemicised against full-employment on the grounds that it did not fit in well with the dynamics of market capitalism. Edmonds still backed the new statement of aims!

Tribunes of the people? Union leaders dump the low paid and pensioners

THEN came Blair's attack on the minimum wage. The level at which the minimum wage is set is absolutely crucial in determining whether or not the minimum wage is an instrument for driving up working class living standards or one for maintaining poverty wages. The half male median earnings formula (about £4.42 per hour, in today's terms) would do the former. So Blair dropped it. Edmonds did not protest. More, he did his best to keep the issue off the 1995 Labour Conference agenda.

Morris went one step better. He used a minor drafting error in the minimum wage motion to announce that the TGWU wouldn't be supporting its own policy in the Labour Party.

And so at the 1995 Labour Conference the union leaders paved the way for the abandonment of a policy which had been held up as the reason for going along with Labour's drift to the right! The eventual level of the minimum wage will probably be lower than the £3.60 per hour that Kinnock promised in 1992!

Blair's next target was the old. He was to find some strange accomplices. Bill Morris and Rodney Bickerstaffe may be weak in the face of opposition from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, or spiv contractors like Pall Mall, but they found reserves of boundless energy, nerve, strength and determination when it came to taking on the pensioners.

The 1996 Labour conference was marked by the most revolting political episode so far in the degeneration of what was once a robust — if fundamentally flawed — reformist tradition. Labour's commitment to restore the link between pensions and earnings, a reform of the 1974-9 Labour government, was one of the few progressive policies that had survived the great Kinnockite reaction. Previous Labour leaders had believed it politically impossible to dump this commitment and expected resistance from the unions.

What did they do when Blair dared to test them? Morris, speaking in direct opposition to his union's policy, described

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Barbara Castle's defence of the earnings link as "a quick fix solution". He then cast the TGWU's vote for Blair. To their shame the TGWU delegation let him.

Bickerstaffe didn't just vote against UNISON's policy, he allowed the submission of a motion to Labour Conference in the name of UNISON that bore no resemblance whatsoever to UNISON's policy! This motion was never voted on by any elected committee of the union and opposed UNISON's policy for the restoration of the earnings link!

To his credit only Edmonds opposed this abandonment by the Labour Party of the older generation of "non-productive" "economically costly" workers for the sake of protecting the lifestyle of the middle class in Blair's "New Britain".

Backing Blair's plebiscite, the commitments that never were

BLAIR'S election Manifesto also won uncritical support from the union leaders and Morris yet again distinguished himself as the least inhibited groveller. The manifesto was completely in conflict with recent TGWU's policies, making no mention of key TGWU demands like trade union rights or full employment. It was positively recommended by Fearless Bill. Morris then went on to describe the laughable cross between a loyalty test and an election in a one party state — "the Road to the Manifesto consultation" — as the greatest exercise in democratic participation in the history of the Labour Party!

The private, behind-the-scenes justification for all this sycophancy was that the Manifesto did contain key trade union demands — such as union recognition. According to the great strategists who lead our movement, the key union concern had to be to ensure this policy was enacted as soon as possible by a Labour government.

As if urinating on them from a great height, Blair let it be known during the election period that union recognition would not be in the Queen's speech, because of other priorities. The millennium Dome or Royal Yacht? The union leaders did nothing apart from collaring the odd ex-soft left Minister-in-waiting.

David Blunkett has now announced that there will be legislation of some sort in the autumn. What will it contain? With his characteristic intolerance for anything that

involves the working class challenging the prerogatives of capital Blair has "let it be known" through "the usual sources" that there is not now to be "interventionist" legislation on union workplace recognition, and that his preferred approach is for the TUC and CBI to reach an agreed joint formula. The unions can have whatever they like from the government so long as the CBI agrees.

Where does this leave us today?

THE serious working class socialist left must do everything it can to force the union leaders to oppose Blair's destruction of the Labour Party. Immediately, that means a drive to put the leadership on the spot in front of as wide a working class audience as possible.

Union branches and shop stewards' committees should send in protests and demand that the union leaders defend their union's policy.

Every effort must be expended to build the Unite for Labour Democracy conference on 13 September amongst the affiliated unions, as well as in the Constituency Parties and the Labour left. Our immediate target is clear. We must ensure that the unions stick to union policy and oppose Partnership in Power at Brighton.

Beyond Labour conference, and irrespective of the outcome, we must galvanise the working-class base of the unions to fight for union policies, and for working-class candidates — inside the Labour Party where possible, but against it if necessary.

It is a big part of the job of Marxists today to intervene actively into the contradictory processes involved in the decomposition of Labourism, *by countering the working class mass organisations (the unions) to the Blairite machine along the axis of working class representation.* Our starting point should be the idea of electing working class MPs to fight for working class policies.

A battle along these lines would open up the possibility of a serious political realignment of the trade union and of the working class movement. It will be difficult, but the alternative is to accept as inevitable the death of mass trade union politics. That might be what the union leaders — and foolish socialist sectarians — have already reconciled themselves to. But for socialists who base themselves on the working-class movement acceptance of defeat while battle is still possible would be treason and apostasy.

The working-class needs mass labour movement politics. The greater we rouse up against the Blairites now, the easier will it be, in the worst eventuality, to rebuild — on better political foundations — what the neo-Thatcherites of New Labour destroy.

A Labour Government of a special type

ALL Labour Governments have been bosses' governments in the sense that, even when they bring in reforms, fundamentally they have administered capitalism in the interests of the ruling class. What is new about the Blair Government is not that it is a bosses' government. What is new about this "Labour" government is the fact that it has so many bosses in it!

These are the facts:

● **Lord Simon:** the former union-busting boss of BP, is Minister for Competitiveness in Europe. Translated into English, that means he is responsible for ensuring that the better terms, conditions, pensions and other welfare rights enjoyed by the majority of the European working class are not imported to Britain.

● **Martin Taylor:** chief executive of Barclay's Bank, where he sacked thousands of staff and shut hundreds of branches, is part-time head of a special taskforce charged with examining the tax and benefit system. We doubt that he will be working to end corporate tax evasion.

● **Former chief executive of Jaguar, Peter Robinson:** Paymaster General and Gordon Brown's main man in liaising with big capital.

● **Alan Sugar:** boss of Amstrad, is an unpaid "Ambassador for Business"; he is going to lecture inner-city youth on the importance of the enterprise culture.

● **Peter Davidson:** boss of Prudential Insurance, is the key business figure in the Welfare to Work team charged with introducing slave labour for the unemployed.

Put these developments in the context of Labour's plans for business agencies to perform the functions of local government — in the "New London" for instance under the Mayor — and New Labour's intention that all new hospital and school buildings will be privately financed and what do we get? We have a glimpse of a new kind of corporatism.

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