

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”).

# New Labour is nothing new

THERE is absolutely nothing new in *New Labour, New Life for Britain*. Tony Blair's pre-manifesto election programme is a handful of concrete commitments and a mountain of waffle.

*New Labour, New Life for Britain* positively bristles with the banal. In 10,000 words we get a compendium of all the orthodoxies of mainstream capitalist economic thinking — save and invest not tax and spend, low inflation and interest rates, financial prudence, Ministers to save before they spend, etc. etc., all of these mantras reinforced by the desire to be "internationally competitive."

Now, apart from the Keynesian interreg-

num of World War Two and the post-war boom, these goals have underpinned the financial policies of British governments since the discovery of the Americas if not before. Nothing new here.

Nor is there anything new in *New Labour, New Life for Britain's* dream of an end to class conflict and struggle. The document opens with a set of pious wishes for social peace that belongs right at the ideological heart of "Old Labour."

"We should not be forced to choose between state control of the economy and letting the market do it all; between higher levels of tax and spend and dismantling the

welfare state; between a society that denies enterprise and one in which we step over bodies sleeping in the doorways..."

It's the kind of empty rhetoric trying to be all things to all people that Ramsay MacDonald would have loved.

The second aspect of *New Labour, New Life for Britain* is the programme for government. It will put Blair on a collision course with the labour movement.

The key policies are to be set out on a little postcard to be sent to every home that people are asked to keep and refer to in order to check the progress of the government.

"Keep this card and see we keep our promises. New Labour's first pledges are to:

- cut class size to 30 or under for 5, 6 and 7 year olds by using money from the Assisted Places Scheme;
- fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders by halving the time from arrest to sentencing;
- cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step by releasing £100 million saved from NHS red tape;
- get 250,000 under 25 year olds off benefit and into work by using money from a windfall levy on privatised utilities;
- set tough rules for government spending and borrowing; ensure low inflation; strengthen the economy so that interest rates are as low as possible."

This is extremely limited and some of it is deeply reactionary.

It is surely utopian to believe that real inroads can be made into the NHS waiting lists without increased investment, or that £100 million can be saved from NHS bureaucracy if the next Labour government keeps the purchaser/provider split which is the lynchpin of the new health market bureaucracy.

The proposals on youth unemployment are deeply reactionary. No real jobs are to be created. Instead, youth will be forced onto either a revamped version of the old Community Programme, or sent to work in sweatshops and McJobs for very little money.

New Labour simply means tighter policing of the labour movement by the state regulating the reserve army of labour. The aim is to keep down everyone else's wages but boost profits and help achieve the much vaunted "international competitiveness."

This anti-working class drive of *New Labour, New Life for Britain* is further strengthened by Blair's proposals on the trade union laws: "The key elements of the trade union legislation of the 1980s — on ballots, picketing and industrial action — will stay." This is all perfectly logical. Thatcherite economics required a Thatcherite framework of union law to hold down its victims and stop them resisting.

And resist they will. The overarching commitment to keep public spending down means that Blair simply will not be able to meet any of the basic aspirations for homes, schools, hospitals and jobs which will bring him to office. Conflict with trade unions and public service users is inevitable. As it is with students who are going to face the imposition of a fully-blown loans system and the end of the last vestige of free higher education. ■

## London Underground

# Solidarity reborn

AT the end of June a very important discussion took place among RMT activists on the Underground. Faced with the prospect of the first one-day strike by the drivers' union ASLEF, militants in the RMT had to work out how to respond. Should they uphold working-class principles and respect the ASLEF picket lines, or should they go in to work and wait for the RMT strike ballot to finish (another three weeks)?

A minority in and around the Socialist Labour Party argued for crossing the picket lines, but the majority were for rank and file unity.

On the morning of the first strike the majority were proved right when hundreds of RMT train crew voted with their feet and refused to go into work.

An RMT activist and Hammersmith and City Line driver looks at the tube strikes.

SINCE the last edition of *Workers' Liberty* the situation on London Underground has changed dramatically — and for the better. We've seen the first days of strike action. This has shown two things: the depth of anger and resentment at the way we've been treated over last year's hour, and the willingness of tubeworkers to stand together and fight back together, irrespective of which union we belong to.

This first taste of unity on the picket line is fantastic. But it is just a start. There is a long way to go from where we are now to turn this unity into victory. We have to face up to some difficult questions. How do we make sure that the action we've had so far isn't shunted off to a dead end as has happened so many times in the past — strike called off, crappy deal, tubeworkers divided, and management laughing?

The first part of the answer to this is to look at the balance of forces.

Management are worried — the pay offer (for everyone except train staff!) has gone up to 3.2%. After pleading poverty they've found more money again — surprise, surprise! And there's plenty more where that came from! Management have made millions in profits off our backs and we deserve a share — they're not slow to vote *themselves* huge increases.

There's no question of productivity, no strings are acceptable to us. We've given productivity year after year. Management have only got away with what they have because we've been divided.

Who stands behind management? The Tories — they put all the senior management in their jobs. 55 Broadway is full of Tory puppets.

But whose hand is it manipulating them now? It's not Thatcher at the height of her power, sweeping all before her — its Major, barely holding on to the leadership of a divided and directionless party.

Their weakness is our strength. If we can act together we can win our hour from last year and a whole lot more.

That will require a determination to maintain the unity that has been created on the picket lines. For nearly two decades management has thrived on playing ASLEF off against RMT and vice-versa. On 27 June we started to put a stop to that with large numbers of RMT drivers and guards refusing to cross ASLEF picket lines. But what we need now is some proper co-ordination across the unions. We need to hammer out a strategy to win the 35 hour week — not in the next millennium, but now!

Next week, and till we've won, it doesn't matter what initials are on our union cards — we are all trade unionists. RMT, ASLEF — we have all got the same interests. When we fight together, we can win together. We've had a taste of how powerful we are, let's use that power!

RMT, ASLEF, respect all picket lines!

# A "peace process" without the IRA?

Portrait

## Billy Hutchinson

By Jack Cleary

SINN Fein got its best-ever vote (15.5%, 116,000 votes) in the recent Northern Ireland elections to select the negotiators for the "all-party talks" that began on 10 June. But Sinn Fein is not represented at the talks.

This is unfortunate, but it is not all that surprising: the Provisional IRA's refused to call a new cease-fire and thus — before the mid-June Manchester bomb upped the ante — gain admission to the talks. Provisional Sinn Fein/Provisional IRA campaigned incessantly for all-party talks during the cease-fire (August 1994-February 1996) and explained its breakdown in part by frustration at not getting "all-party talks".

In fact the PIRA has not resumed full-scale military action, yet when the talks were due to begin, it would not make the gesture of a new cease-fire to secure admission to the talks. How is this to be explained?

You have to understand what the PIRA/PSF meant by "all-party" talks. They meant that the British government should steamroller ahead with talks that would for certain be boycotted by most or all Unionists if Sinn Fein took part in them without prior PIRA "decommissioning" of some or all of its armoury — something that was unthinkable for the PIRA. The real demand was for Britain to proceed without the Unionists, and at the stage after that, coerce them.

The Unionists probably would — even after the elections — not be in these "all-party" talks if Sinn Fein was. Blowing Sinn Fein out of the "peace process" the PIRA's bombs were perhaps a prerequisite for the talks that are now going on. That they go on *with* the Unionists present means for Sinn Fein that they are a move in the wrong direction.

The cease-fire was for PIRA/Sinn Fein always based on the gross misunderstanding that the "pan-nationalist alliance" of all Irish-based nationalist parties, from Sinn Fein to Fine Gael, with Irish America could compel the British government to coerce the Unionists into accepting some variant of the United Ireland that the PIRA regards as its bottom line.

This was a fantasy. As long ago as February 1995 the London and Dublin governments publicly knocked it on the head by publishing proposals for progress in Northern Ireland based on a Council of Ireland, resting on the twin pillars of

Dublin and (Catholic-Protestant power-sharing) Belfast governments.

With their tokenistic resumption of military action in London's Dockland last February, the PIRA moved out from under this fantasy.

They have made no effort to get in on the current talks because they know that they cannot conceivably get even the minimum they want there. They know that they will split if some of them negotiate and settle for anything less.

They may split anyway, though it is impossible to know how much the Adams "peace faction" is really at odds with hard-line militarists, and how much of the ostensible division between "peace process" people and "militarists" is a mere charade, a theatrical division of labour, with Adams playing "soft cop" to the PIRA's "hard cop".

The whole recent practice of PSF/PIRA fits perfectly into the strategy of combining the "Armalite and the Ballot Box", which they have followed for a decade and a half now.

Their appeal for a Sinn Fein vote as a vote for peace paid off handsomely in the election: a percentage of those who voted for them for that reason must now feel betrayed. So do many of the mainstream bourgeois nationalists in the south, those who in the last two years have tried to seduce Sinn Fein away from militarism.

But outside the "peace process", where can PSF/PIRA go? The answer depends on what happens in the negotiations now going on. If enough of the representatives of both communities can agree on a basis for Catholic-Protestant power sharing, and proceed to set it up, then the political poles of both communities can be isolated.

Despite their big recent vote there is a great deal of Northern Irish Catholic hostility to the PIRA. Progress towards institutionalised power-sharing may be possible.

And the Protestants? When in 1973 the 'centre' of Northern Ireland proceeded to do what Britain wanted and set up a power-sharing executive, there was massive Protestant opposition and it fell before the Orange general strike of May 1974. Opposition is likely to be a great deal less now; Orange fear of a Council of Ireland is probably less.

Therefore there may be a chance of progress towards a power-sharing executive. Despite all the criticism socialists would have to make of it, that would indeed be progress. ■

A THIN working-class man of medium height with a sharp nose and face, Billy Hutchinson is only 40, but he has already served a life sentence in a Northern Irish jail for a sectarian murder.

He recently stood for election to the Northern Irish Assembly under the banner of the Progressive Unionist Party, but he was not elected. WZ interviewed him when he came to Islington to debate with us at Workers' Liberty '96, where his presence provoked a peaceful picket of protest by a coalition of "Trotskyist" groups.

He was 13 years old when "The Troubles" came to Northern Ireland in 1969, and eighteen months later the Provisional IRA launched their military campaign.

After 1972, when the Protestant-Unionist majority-rule Stormont Parliament in Belfast was abolished by Britain, there was a rash of protest strikes. It was then that Billy Hutchinson and many others like him got drawn into para-military activities, with the Ulster Volunteer Force.

In the three years after the abolition of Stormont there was a holocaust of over 300 killings of Catholics picked at random.

Hutchinson had a labour movement background, his father having been in the Northern Ireland Labour Party. But all such questions were pushed into the background by the eruption of the IRA's war, which was seen as an attempt to force the Northern Ireland Unionists to abandon their own identity and submerge in a Catholic-controlled all-Irish state.

Billy Hutchinson illustrated for us how wide the gap between Protestant and Catholic workers in Northern Ireland was, even for people with his labour movement background: as a child he went with his father on a visit to a Catholic home and was frightened at the sight of the numerous pictures of saints and gods on the walls, something typical of Irish Catholic homes. All he'd ever seen in Protestant homes were pictures of the Queen!

Ten years ago, he said, he might have considered himself a Marxist, influenced by "the Workers' Party". Now he's "Old Labour", in a Northern Irish context. The PUP has the now-jettisoned British Labour Party's socialist Clause Four in its constitution.

What was the sense in indiscriminate assassinations of Catholics? To generate pressure on the Catholic community to get them to extricate the IRA he replied. In fact it had the opposite effect as such things always do: it made Catholics feel dependent on the IRA, as the IRA campaign drove Protestants into reliance on groups like the UVF. He thinks that the Protestants/Unionists had a right to defend themselves in the best way they could and still have; however the violence of the '70s was too "unfocused" and indiscriminate. He said he hopes it will not come to violence again.