

WORKERS'



LIBERTY

RMT CONFERENCE

PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. 6 February 2004

LABOUR SHOULD PUT BLAIR ON TRIAL, NOT THE RMT

The Labour Party has written to us warning the union that unless we revoke the Executive's decision to allow Scottish RMT branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), we will be outside the rules of the Labour Party. That essentially means our union's expulsion.

This clash arises from our Annual General Meeting (AGM) decision in 2003 to allow branches to affiliate to organisations outside the Labour Party. This Special General Meeting (SGM) has been called to decide what we do about it.

Few of us will want to back down to the ultimatum from the New Labour clique.

They are a group of middle-class careerists, spin-doctors, advisers, and political fixers, most with no roots at all in the labour movement, who have hijacked the party which the trade unions founded. We have done no more than stay loyal to the principles that motivated our union's predecessor, the ASRS, when it initiated the founding of the Labour Party back in 1900.

The SSP has a working-class base in Glasgow. It backs renationalisation of the railways and repeal of the Tory anti-union laws. This Labour government has part-privatised the Tube and keeps the anti-union laws. The SSP campaigned against the Iraq war. The New Labour clique successfully blocked our union's attempts to get even a serious debate on the war at Labour conference 2003.

The New Labour clique cannot expel the RMT from genuine labour movement politics. All it can do is prove yet again how alien it is to the working-class roots of the Labour Party.

This is not about the New Labour clique being sticklers for the rules. They were happy to let Ken Livingstone back in to the Labour Party, because they have seen him, for example, supporting the Tube bosses over the sacking of driver Chris Barrett and saying that he "doesn't know how he [Barrett] has got away with it for so long". The difference is that the RMT has stood up for its members.

What will this mean? Our panel of Labour Party MPs has already stated that they will continue to support us and our aims, so our political voice is not weakened as such.

A major debate will open up in the TUC and Labour Party about the fact that one of the founding unions of the Labour Party has been expelled. Already the Communication Workers' Union has condemned the expulsion.

Depending on how this is played, the result could be either the RMT taking the lead in the restoration of accountable working-class political representation, or the sidelining of the union on the political front, its reduction to a funding agency for Plaid Cymru and minor middle-class politicians.

Activists need to get out in the workplace and explain the issues.

A bold front — citing Blair as the enemy — could turn the tables. The RMT should campaign to rally other Labour-affiliated unions to oppose the expulsion and demand that Labour dumps not the railworkers, but the Blairite leadership.

We also need to get Constituency Labour Parties to pass resolutions calling for RMT's reinstatement.

We should reject the Labour Party's ultimatum. But this SGM has a great deal more to do. It has to start mapping out a whole new political direction for the union, in hitherto uncharted territory.

We don't want our union's political activity to fragment, with different branches supporting different parties haphazard, and no clear overall direction.

We need a reasoned debate, not just a decision to to brush off the Blairites.

The SGM should not limit itself to voting yes or no to a motion from the Executive. It should debate all the motions submitted to it from branches. Not to do so would be a gift to the Blairites, who will then try to line up other unions against us; and will make it difficult to secure a purposeful, well-understood, coherent overall direction for our union's future political activity.

To sum up:

- Reaffirm the 2003 AGM decision and branches' right to back the SSP
- Don't let Labour kick us out without a fight
- Vote on all the motions from branches
- Workers need our own representatives
- Don't go out of the door facing backwards; look where we are going.

We believe the two motions below deserve support.

MOTION FROM FINSBURY PARK RMT BRANCH

This SGM resolves to defend the decisions of last year's AGM against the threat by the Labour Party to expel the union. We also defend the right of the

WHO WE ARE

THIS bulletin is produced by members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. We fight in the unions, in the Socialist Alliance, in the Labour Party, and in cooperation with the *Solidarity* platform of the Scottish Socialist Party, for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy. We want one democratic, fighting union for all railworkers. We reject artificial division between workers of different grades. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all prejudice that divides us. Only our bosses benefit from a divided workforce.

Contact us: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Web: <http://www.workersliberty.org>. For our regular Tubeworker bulletin, by and for London Underground workers, see: <http://www.workersliberty.org/tubeworker>.

For our fortnightly paper, *Solidarity*: <http://www.solidarity-online.org>

Scottish branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party within our new rules, and endorse the Council of Executives' decision to allow them to do so. This union will not give in to the threats from the Labour Party bureaucracy either by rescinding our decisions or by allowing Labour to disaffiliate us without a fight.

We reaffirm the principle that led this union's predecessors to initiate the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 — that the working class needs its own distinctive and socialist voice in politics, independent of all parties of the wealthy classes. We believe that the current Labour leadership has no right to put the RMT on trial, after it has privatised the Tube, refused to renationalise the railways, and betrayed and attacked the working class. Instead, the labour movement should put Tony Blair and his cronies on trial — it is they who should be removed from their place in the labour movement, not the RMT.

This SGM therefore instructs the Council of Executives to immediately launch a campaign within the labour movement to defend the RMT's affiliation to the Labour Party against the Party's threat to expel us. In particular:

1. All our representatives on Labour Party bodies should raise this issue as a matter of urgency.
2. We call on other Labour-affiliated unions to demand the Labour Party withdraw its threat.
3. We call on other unions to take an RMT

POLITICAL FUND BALLOT

This year we are due to ballot our members on the continuation of the political fund. Obviously, all the activists will favour a yes vote, but we must not underestimate the room for confusion if the membership continues to receive as little information as it has done so far on the political fund and New Labour's threats. It is urgent that this issue be taken out into the workplaces, with a positive message that we do need politics, but working-class politics.

It is the Blairites who are defining themselves out of labour movement politics, not the RMT. The union should argue to convince our members of the need to continue to work with our group of loyal Labour MPs and with the Scottish Socialist MSP, and to sponsor and promote Labour and socialist candidates true to the working-class cause in elections.

And when we decide to sponsor such candidates, the decision should be taken to workplace meetings or ballots, so all our members are involved.

COMMUNICATION WORKERS CONDEMN EXPULSION

The Communication Workers' Union National Executive on 29 January 2004 passed the following motion on the RMT's expulsion from the Labour Party.

"This Executive deplores, condemns and regrets the backward step for the labour movement of the decision of the Labour Party to expel the RMT without giving them an opportunity to put their case against expulsion to the NEC of the Labour Party and notes that this will not become effective until after the RMT Conference on 6th February.

"We therefore call on the Labour Party to instigate urgent talks with the RMT, with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution.

"The Executive further instructs the General Secretary to write to the Labour Party General Secretary and Chair outlining the terms of this motion and circulating the terms of his letter as a LTB" [letter to branches].

This conflict is not just about the RMT versus the Blairites. It is about the whole future of the labour movement in politics.

Not all unions will move at the same pace. When the Labour Representation Committee was set up in 1900, it has an affiliated membership of only 300,000 through unions and Trades Councils (that is, with some double counting), when the trade union movement numbered two million. If the pioneers had waited until the slowest were ready to come with them, they would never have moved forward.

But they mapped out a path which could draw in other unions, fought for it, and succeeded, drawing in most of the big unions by 1909.

Other unions' representatives on the Labour Party NEC voted with Blair on the expulsion. Those unions should call them to account. The RMT should work for the strongest possible trade-union and socialist united front against the New Labour clique — maybe a new Labour Representation Committee, a 21st century version of the one our predecessors helped launch in 1900.

speaker at their conference this year.

4. We call on other Labour-affiliated unions to ensure that this issue is debated at Labour Party conference this year, with an RMT speaker there.

5. We call on Constituency and Regional Labour Parties to continue to recognise RMT delegates even if the expulsion goes ahead.

6. An initial meeting to organise this campaign should be held within one month of this SGM.

MOTION FROM EAST MIDLANDS RMT BRANCH

We note the historic decision of the 2003 RMT AGM to open its political fund to candidates and organisations outside of the Labour Party. While applauding this decision on its merits, we believe that the union needs to take the issue further and establish principles as to who we should and should not back.

A century ago, the pioneers of our union took the historic decision that trade unions should form our own political party, so that working people could be directly represented in Parliament, rather than relying on other parties who served the employers not the workers. Despite the betrayals of the Labour Party since then, we believe that this is still the right policy: workers need our own party.

With this in mind, we believe the Council of Executives should not authorise support or payments for nationalist, religious or liberal organisations or personalities, or support coalitions with any of these.

We have seen these groups at work around

the world and when in power they attack the working classes as much or more than the Tories.

Further, we would like to see the union taking the initiative to stand our own candidates, along with other unions and socialists, rather than tagging along with non-socialist, non-working-class parties or personalities.

"RESPECT" COALITION IS NO ALTERNATIVE

Some people are proposing George Galloway's new "Respect" coalition as an alternative political focus. We believe the RMT would be much better advised to work to build a solid trade-union and socialist united front, rather than dally with this improvised coalition.

The whole stunt, run by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), is centred on getting Galloway elected to the European Parliament. How will that help workers? Galloway has said publicly that he has no time for the idea of "workers' representatives on a worker's wage", that he could not live on three workers' wages, and that he "needs" £150,000 a year "to function". He says that the aim of his coalition is to "unite socialists, liberals and conservatives".

Galloway was for nine years the nearest thing in Britain to an ambassador for Saddam Hussein. He admits to taking money from Saudi Arabia and the Emirates for his political activities. His coalition is not socialist or working-class. Its platform is a bland collection of sops for various constituencies (peace, green, Muslim, trade-union).