

# T&G election

# Trade unionists reject Blair's stooge

BILL MORRIS'S decisive victory in the T&G leadership election is a re-affirmation of the basic principles of strong, independent trade unionism — and a slap in the face for the Blairites who so arrogantly presume to speak always for the "ordinary members" of the labour movement.

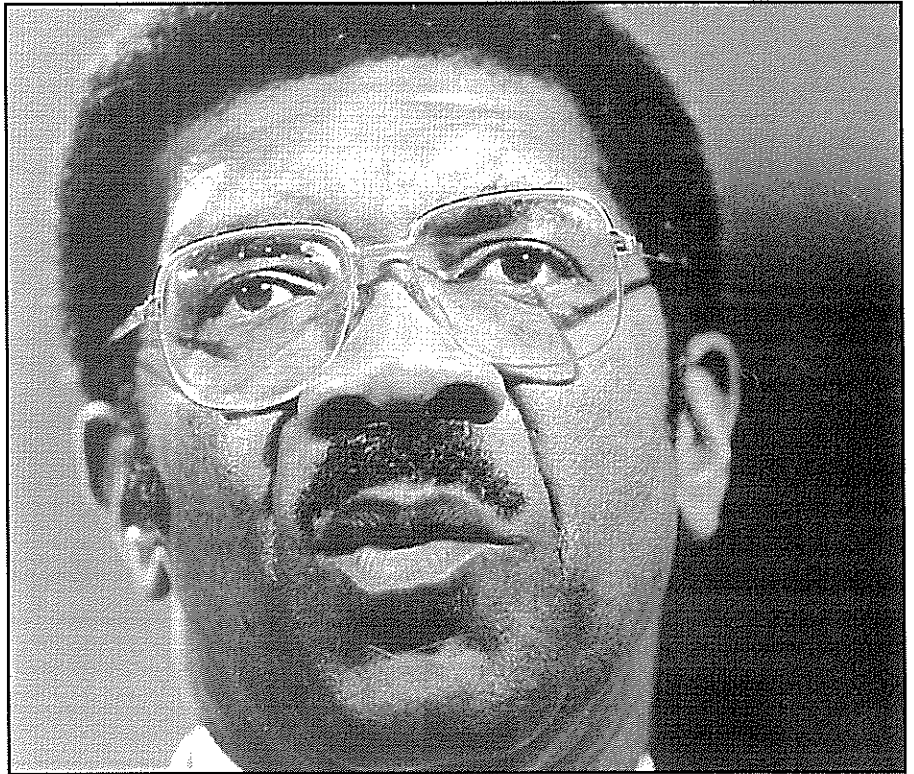
Had Blair's creature Jack Dromey succeeded in his bid to oust Morris, the New Labour "modernisers" could have claimed to be masters of all they surveyed, able to crush all opposition at will. A Blair government would have the leadership of the second-largest union in its pocket and official opposition over issues like the minimum wage and trade union legislation would crumble.

As it is, the rank and file of the T&G have begun to set the parameters of Blair's authority. The 33 per cent turnout was double the average for such postal ballot elections and Morris's vote (158,909 against 100,056 for Dromey) represents a bigger percentage of the T&G membership than the percentage of Labour Party members who voted to back Blair over Clause Four.

The relatively good turnout reflects the high level of media coverage which was, in turn, largely the result of the Dromey camp's tactics. Dromey and his advisors (including Peter Mandelson and the rest of the New Labour media slime-balls) reckoned that driving up the campaign's media profile was the way to appeal to the "ordinary members" (who, naturally, would back Blair's man) over the heads of the much despised "activists."

In the event, the tactic back-fired. Trade unionists proved less amenable to moral blackmail to do what the right wing said was necessary for a Labour victory than constituency Labour Party members in the Clause Four vote had been. And Dromey's dirty, disloyal attacks on Morris personally and the union in general almost certainly alienated a lot of rank and file members who otherwise wouldn't have bothered voting.

It is important to understand that the Morris victory is *not* a victory for a radical left-wing agenda. Morris is, personally, a decent and principled man (if somewhat



aloof) but he has never been particularly left-wing. What Morris represents is a style of leadership that bases itself upon the union's internal policy-making machinery, rather than a demagogic pretence to speak for the "ordinary members" regardless of union policy. Thus Morris abided by the lay executive's pro-Clause Four line despite opposing it within the union. And he continues to champion a minimum wage of at least £4 per hour, while the Blairites try to wriggle out of any commitment to a precise figure.

The ex-Stalinist Dromey, for all his "modernising" talk, would have run the union in the manner of an old-style union boss like Arthur Deakin, ignoring the lay executive and the Biennial Delegate Conference, surrounding himself with cronies and doing Blair's bidding in the name of the "ordinary members" (who, of course, he would never need to actually be consulted on anything).

Morris's victory does not in itself solve any of the problems facing the T&G: the continuing loss of members, the relative failure of the "Link Up" campaign (aimed at women, youth and part-timers), the inability to spread important disputes like the current Badger Line/Eastern National

lock-out and the outmoded, regionally-based structure of the union. But it does represent a victory for basic trade unionism over class collaboration.

The next step for socialists in the union is to build a united, open and democratic Broad Left: the forthcoming Biennial Delegate Conference gives us the opportunity to begin that task.

POSTSCRIPT. The one dirty trick that the Dromey camp *didn't* play during their disreputable campaign was the race card: New Labour is nothing if not Politically Correct. Bill Morris is still the only black union leader in Britain and a defeat for him would have been a bitter blow to many black union activists who (with some justice) regard the British union hierarchy as a white domain. Morris's victory is an encouraging sign that racism is on the retreat within the organised working class: in 1991, Morris's opponents used the unofficial slogan "don't let the coon call the tune." Nevertheless, Morris's colour was not a decisive consideration for socialists in his election. Morris himself was right to reject the advice of professional "anti-racists" who wanted to turn the election into a race issue. ■

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