

# Amicus Unity Gazette

For a democratic union controlled by the members

April 2006

## TIME TO RING SOME CHANGES!

By John Boardman

*The last 25 years have brought traumatic changes in economic policy moving from Keynesianism to Neoliberalism and New Labour's Third Way. The outcome is that mainstream political and economic debate is stagnant, out of balance and driven by the needs of the few and not the many.*

The main political parties in the UK all advocate similar economic policies and by contesting the centre-right ground on what they promote to be populist agendas, they deny many working people, whose politics are to the left of centre, the right to vote for core working class values.

UK mainstream politics is no longer about political policies based on morality, instead policy is driven solely by what they perceive will give them the best chance of being elected. Being in government becomes the objective rather than governing in the best interests of the many.

Part way through the third term of a new Labour Government, UK citizens are still denied fundamental employment and trade union rights enjoyed by other workers in Europe.

The Government uses tax revenue to fuel an aggressive foreign policy, in preference to the adequate funding of the NHS, Welfare and Education and investment into infrastructure and the manufacturing base. Is it any wonder that they are unpopular both at home and abroad?

Politicians dismiss any attempt to assert political morality with acceptance of the inevitability of 'the rigours of market forces' and in doing so condition us to believe that there is nothing we can do to change our lives. They promote choice for the individual

(usually 'Hobson's Choice') because they know that the concept of the individual is divisive and it mitigates the likelihood of a popular alternative point of view forming.

If we continue to accept this sorry state of affairs, we are condemning ourselves, our children and our grandchildren to a soulless future.

The campaign against the war in Iraq and the Make Poverty History campaign brought decent people on to the streets; because those people instinctively recognised the immorality of what was and still is happening.

We believe that the time is absolutely right for a change of direction, it's obvious that many Labour backbenchers feel the same, having already shown their dissatisfaction on several occasions.

Replacing Labour with the Tories or the Liberals will only mean more of the same or even worse, instead we need to change the direction of the Labour Party and reclaim it for the benefit of all workers, their families and the less fortunate not just in our nation, but throughout the world.

In 2005 the Amicus National Policy Conference agreed policies that if implemented could change our lives for the better.

Whilst we readily acknowledge that the NEC and the General Secretary will use their best endeavours to implement those policies, they cannot do it alone. We all have an obligation to lobby and campaign for change.

Amicus UG is not the only pressure group active within the union. "MSF for Labour" and "AEEU United" also organise their supporters. As Amicus has taken shape and progressed it has developed new traditions and this has had a marked effect on all groups. For Gazette supporters it has been the challenge of having the lead role in the leadership of the union. The Gazette has abandoned the last remnants of

'oppositionalism' (opposing for opposing sake) as a political method and now faces the future with a greater certainty than it has had in the past. The other groups have abandoned their previous policies and political methods as they reconcile themselves to the new situation. Whilst we must never forget the treatment meted out to Gazette supporters in the past a real opportunity is here for us to engage all activists on our democratic and progressive agenda.

The 'new kid on the block' is the ATU Network. In their launch leaflet it stated, "The ATU Network will be based on a Full Time Officer (FTO) and Staff structure linked to a network of lay activists building support across all sections of Amicus." They are still a new organisation and have yet to declare their policies and objectives other than support for the direction that the union is going in.

Whilst we support the right of all members and officers and staff to play a full role in the political life of the union we would point out that many of the Senior Staff are the executors of policy determined by the lay membership and should always act professionally in their posts. We would ask ATU supporters to also consider the role that officer led organisations have played in our history and why such an organisation is unacceptable to the Gazette and we believe to the other groups. Many that have been attracted to the ATU Network have indicated that they would support the Gazette if our politics were both progressive and in tune with the aspirations of the mass membership. This edition of the Gazette makes it absolutely clear where we stand on the big issues affecting the union.

- For the most democratic union possible
- For a Labour Government committed to socialist policies
- For the creation of a 'New Union' to arrest the decline in union power

**INSIDE: Creating the new union ♦ Shipbuilding ♦ Trade Union Freedom Bill ♦ Why Blair must go**

and face the challenges of Globalisation

- For a level playing field of employment rights to allow unions to take action to support their members including the right to take supportive solidarity action

We call upon all activists in Amicus to discuss these policies with us. Invite a speaker to your meeting or come along to the Gazette meetings planned for the future.

If you agree with our objectives and you want to campaign for a better future get active with the most progressive force within Amicus.

For more information visit:

[www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk](http://www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk)

Please note the new web address

## THE GAZETTE ARGUES FOR AN EXPANSION OF UK SHIPBUILDING

By Jim Barnes

Recently John Reid, the minister of defence urged the defence industry to concentrate their efforts on producing 'high tech' weapons and to leave 'low tech' aspect to others abroad. The example he used was building warships. He suggested that the hulls could be produced abroad while the 'high tech' weaponry and control systems should be built here. If Britain is ever to have a balanced economy, where what we consume matches what we produce then we need a manufacturing base with heavy engineering occupying an important sector. Heavy engineering implies a shipbuilding industry. Britain imports a huge amount of goods leaving us heavily dependent the shipping industry; because the bulk of this is now owned by foreign companies the cost is in effect exported abroad, which affects our balance of trade. It makes sense therefore, that legislation should be framed to encourage British registered shipping and it makes sense that we should build the ships we depend upon here.

The Thatcher policies, tragically so enthusiastically carried on by the

labour government mean that there is very little investment in our economy. The UK stock market demands something like 20% return on capital investment yet its unlikely that you can get more than 7% return on the capital used to build a ship. Japan and a number of other successful manufacturing nations offer interest free loans to shipping companies, if they have the ships built in Japanese yard (they also have tax breaks and concessions on buying machine tools etc). This means that in a Japanese yard the bulk of cutting and welding will be done by computer controlled machines. Japanese universities house large scale computer equipment to design hull shapes. It is simply nonsense to think of building ships hulls as a 'low tech' process.

The other major flaw here is that Britain is not in a position to compete in the production of 'high tech' products. China for instance is training in the region of ½ million engineering graduates a year, while we would be lucky if there are 5,000 emerging from our universities.

To function in a high tech production will require a huge shift in government attitudes towards support for industry and education.

The weapons industry in Britain is the only area where government support is available to industries at a level which allows them to compete abroad, which has meant that while the bulk of our manufacturing base has been depleted the arms industry has survived. It is the only area where we are able to function in modern materials and which has the technical base to apply modern manufacturing techniques. It is, therefore a vitally important area of our economy.

*It is an unpleasant and economically unhealthy position to be in to be dependent upon sales to ugly and repressive regimes.*

In the past the trade union movement has campaigned for a move away from a dependency on weapons and for support for our civilian manufacturing base. However if we are to achieve the rebuilding of that manufacturing base then we need the resources currently held in the defence manufacturing industries.

In other words use the defence production as a springboard to rebuild the civilian manufacturing.

For instance the success of Landrover is based on the design and economies of scale which comes from building vehicles for the army.

Yet when the trade union movement has raised the demand for support for civilian manufacturing the government has used jobs in defence as a threat and a bribe to keep the demands at bay. In 1997 the incoming labour government faced a crisis in the civilian shipping industry, because there simply were no merchant ships to support the military in times of crisis. For instance of the 12 ships the government hired in the 91 gulf war, only one was British. Nine of them were Roll on Roll off ferries, none of which matched the safety standards introduced after the Zeebrugge disaster.

The government decided to have 12 such ships built. They could have used this requirement to create the design and production facility for a successful industry in Britain, capable of exporting cost effective and safe, vessels. Instead the government organised a PFI scheme where the ships were leased from a Danish company who had them built in Italy.

*The Gazette group recently agreed a motion which argued there should be an expansion of the civilian shipbuilding industry, as a part of a balanced and sustainable economy. In order to do this, the existing production of warships should be used to aid the development of high tech production capacity in Britain and the development of both the skill base and the design facilities for the heavy engineering industry.*

Please support the Gazette by sending donations to the treasurer:

Bill Young  
22 Swale Road, Rochester,  
Kent ME2 2TT

Cheques to be made payable to;  
'Engineering Gazette'

Standing Order forms can be downloaded from the web site.

[www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk](http://www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk)

## CREATING THE NEW UNION

By Steve Davison

### Declaration

*"The New Union will be at the forefront of supporting workers in struggle nationally and internationally, through its programme of campaigning and organising."*

We are living through one of the most changing periods in history, politically, socially and economically. The mass use of the information and communication technologies has revolutionised the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services. This period has been termed as 'Globalisation' and the domination of the free market internationally has spawned the ideology that this is both the natural way and is untouchable. Workers have to accept these conditions, change or die and the Politician's job is to get the best deal possible for their citizens in the determined boundaries of global capitalism. The Americans have a term for it. 'The race to the Bottom.'

The Gazette rejects this ideology and takes as its starting point that men and women make history even if it's not in the circumstances that they find favourable. We have choices and we must take them. Every union in Britain (and now globally) has been faced with the question of how to halt the decline in membership and how best to effectively represent their members. Amicus has been unique in the British labour movement in its recognition that the only way to achieve this is by developing initially strong mass based trade unions nationally as the first step to developing International trade unionism that can meet the employers head to head on the same playing field.

Having achieved the largely successful mergers of the AEEU, MSF, Unifi and the GPMU, Amicus has developed into one of the most progressive forces in British politics. The 2005 Conference lay the basis for taking the 'merger strategy' forward and we are now engaged with the TGWU and the GMB as well as laying the basis for International trade union mergers through the various accords and agreements between European, Asian, Australian and American trade unions.

The successful creation of a 'super union' of 2.5 million members will act as a pole of attraction to other British

unions where the removal of competition will begin to create some industrial logic to trade unionism in Britain and Ireland. It will also play a profound role in transforming and reclaiming the Labour Party for the workers of Britain who have now been without effective political representation for decades.

### Lay Democracy

The 'New Union Sub Group', (the negotiating bodies from the three unions that include General Secretaries, key Senior Officers and an equal number of lay Executive members,) have reached agreement on a number of key issues and Amicus and the TGWU are now in the process of consulting their members. The timetable for the GMB is slightly different as they have some pressing internal issues to resolve first. Central to this is the unanimous agreement on the principles of Lay Democracy. These are:

- The Executive of the New Union must be solely a lay member body
- New structures should facilitate inclusion and not act as a barrier to members' participation
- Equalities must be at the heart of the New Union
- Members should have industrial autonomy on their wages and conditions

Democracy cannot be an add-on for any union that wishes to represent its members effectively. This is even more so for a 'super union'. Without a powerful lay democracy that keeps its leadership, both full time and lay, accountable to the membership is the road to failure. The Gazette and its supporters have been at the forefront of the struggle for enhanced democracy in Amicus. Our aspirations are well known and the recent rule changes have implemented many of the policies supporters have demanded. The 'vision' for the New Union and the agreements on lay democracy is consistent with the long - standing views held by Gazette supporters.

Gazette supporters are in a unique position to be able to determine the rule book and the structures and policies of the New Union. This power demands responsibility and political maturity. Each of the three unions' activists generally hold the view that their system is the best. That's because it's the one that they are used to. Gazette supporters should advance our policies and aspirations and argue their merits

both inside Amicus and with colleagues from the TGWU and GMB. But if we raise these in a dogmatic way and disregard the long histories of the other unions it will be both disrespectful and will be counter productive and damaging. Discussions in the New Union Sub Group have cautiously and carefully worked through misconception and different terminology to discover that there is a large degree of commonality. Engagement on fact not fiction and being big enough politically to put vested interest to one side has been the basis for progress. This should also be the strategy for Gazette supporters as we engage the members of all three unions on how best to achieve the democratic, lay member led union that all active workers have striven for in over 150 years of struggle.

We are approaching what promises to be a key milestone in the development of national and international trade unionism.

Our legacy to future generations should be one that delivers the working conditions and life style that workers across the world so richly deserve. Supporters are encouraged to participate in the consultations around the vision for the 'new union' contained in the latest edition of the Activist (and also at the Amicus web site) and feed back the views of the members into the union structures.

(Editors Note)

*Gazette policy sets out the following objectives for the merger:*

- *Any Instrument of Amalgamation shall require the agreement of a recall Conference before being submitted to a ballot of the membership.*
- *The NEC of any merged Union shall be composed exclusively of lay members.*
- *The Union should be based on Regions and Industrial Sectors with the Sectors having autonomy subject to overall Union policy.*
- *The NEC should be based on 75% Industrial Sector representation, 25% Regional representation (with additional provision for representation from Women) with all NEC members elected by and from their constituencies.*
- *Full time officers should be elected.*
- *All full time officers should be responsible to the relevant lay committee.*
- *The Rules Commission to draw up a new rule book should be elected by Conference.*

## BRING BACK OUR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

By Neil Sheehan

*Labour MPs and leading Trade Unionists are calling for mass support in the fight for a new Trade Union Freedom Bill in Parliament.*

The Bill which to date has the support of 116 MP's who have signed an early day motion (EDM 1170) marks the first step to restoring Trade Union rights. These rights were snatched away by the Tories and have not been restored by New Labour.

The TUC are making the Bill a central demand of this years May Day's celebrations and in particular the London Rally on 1 May.

It will be a fitting celebration of the Trade Dispute Act 1906 which, one hundred years ago, gave for the first time legal protection for the Trade Unions organising industrial action. Since then the obligation to guarantee the right to strike has become a fundamental feature of International Law, in the creation of which, Britain was Instrumental.

UK Law as been in breach of this obligation since the introduction of the hated Tory anti trade union laws.

Workers and Trade Unions in the UK now have fewer rights in relation to industrial action than they had 100 years ago and fewer rights than workers elsewhere in Europe.

Tony Blair has boasted that British Law is "the most restrictive on Trade Unions in the Western World".

The Trade Union Freedom Bill is in reality an essential first step to allow workers to support each other and to be able to strike without being sacked or seeing their Union bankrupted.

The Campaign for the Bill arose out of calls from both the TUC Congress and the Labour Party Conference for Legislation to restore the secondary picketing rights which were denied to the Gate Gourmet workers during their bitter dispute at Heathrow Airport.

MP John Cruddas, who is one of the leading signatories of the Early Day Motion has urged all trade unionists to

lobby their MP's to ensure that they support "this vital campaign to restore our Trade Union Rights".

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow says "The Tories 1980s Anti-Union Laws were designed to disarm working people and take industrial relations back to Victorian times".

"Two decades on, it is shameful that in 21st century Britain working people have to jump through hoops to take industrial action, are barred from taking solidarity action and remain prey to employers seeking damages from Unions that dare to stand up to them".

Amicus is taking a leading part in the campaign and is sponsoring transport to the London May Day Rally.

Speakers at the London May Day Rally include:

Ken Livingstone - London Mayor

Gloria Mills - TUC President

Brendan Barber - TUC General Secretary

Derek Simpson - AMICUS General Secretary

Tony Woodley - TGWU General Secretary

Maria Helena Andre - European TUC

Randall Howard - South African Transport and AWU General Secretary

Greg Combet - Australian Council of Trade Unions

Dave Prentis - UNISON

Paul Kenny - GMB

Tony Benn

**Give your active support to the new Trade Union Freedom Bill by:**

- Joining the London May Day March for Union Rights
- or Support your Local May Day Rally
- Ask your MP to support Early Day Motion (EDM1170) Re Campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill

Details of the proposals for a Trade Union Freedom Bill can be found on the TUC Web site:

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/law/tuc-11539-f0.cfm?theme=mayday>

The text of EDM 1170 is shown below:

**CAMPAIGN FOR A TRADE UNION FREEDOM BILL 30.11.2005**

Lloyd, Tony

*That this House recognises that free and independent trade unions are a force for good in UK society and around the world, and are vital to democracy; welcomes the positive role modern unions play in providing protection for working people and winning fairness at work; notes the 1906 Trades Disputes Act granted unions the legal freedom to take industrial action; regrets that successive anti-union legislation has meant that trade union rights are now weaker than those introduced by the Trades Disputes Act; notes the overwhelming support at both the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party Conference for the Gate Gourmet workers and for improvements in union rights, including measures to simplify ballot procedures and to allow limited supportive action, following a ballot, in specific circumstances; further notes that these conferences called for legislation which conformed to International Labour Organisation Conventions ratified by the UK; and therefore welcomes the decision of the 2005 Trades Union Congress to campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1906 Trades Disputes Act.*

Check to see if your MP has signed the EDM by visiting the following web page:

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=29530&SESSION=875>

**Maximising support for this rally is a must!**

# WHY BLAIR MUST GO!

By Chris Weldon

*Two of the main three political parties have recently elected new leaders and are now setting out their vision for the future.*

*Unfortunately the Labour Party under the control of Tony Blair seem to want to keep the worst kept secret (Blair's departure) on ice.*

No one individual is bigger than the organisation yet Blair seems to want to continue to lead Labour into one catastrophe after another.

War in Iraq, The Education White Paper, Attacks on Pensions and Identity Cards just to name a few.

It is clear to everyone that his judgement and leadership qualities are exhausted and in the interest of the party he should stand aside to allow his successor a sufficient time to lay out to the electorate a new vision with

a new leader but not necessarily New Labour ideology.

The ideal time would be for Blair to announce to this years Party Conference his retirement which would allow the party to look for a replacement immediately.

Amicus along with other T.U affiliates to the Labour Party influenced the final Labour Party Policy Forum before the General Election to create a workplace agenda within Labour's 2005 election manifesto this has been called the Warwick Agreement.

56 points to advance workplace issues were part of the agreement and the agreement was contained in the Labour Party manifesto.

A committee of senior Trade Union reps and ministers has been set up to ensure the delivery of the 56 points agreed.

***The Gazette believes that the role of Blair's successor is to deliver the Warwick agenda in full and then face the next General Elections with a new vision: "Warwick 2" which should address further issues in the workplace.***

***By doing this the new leader will repay the faith and support of not just Amicus members but also of all Trade Union members throughout the country.***

**Have you got something to say?**

If the answer is yes please submit your article via the web site.

Advice on submitting articles is available on the web site:

[www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk](http://www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk)

## ACTIVISTS MEETINGS

### Your opportunity to have an input!

By John Boardman

*The 2005 Amicus Rules Conference backed a Gazette initiative to introduce Area Activists' Quarterly meetings and Area Committees to co-ordinate the activities of the Area Activists' Quarterlies.*

We recognise that this is a new situation for the majority of members of Amicus, but many 'old hands' from the former AEU are absolutely convinced of the value through their previous experience of AEU District Committees and Shop Stewards Quarterly Meetings.

Whilst the Gazette is committed to the sector based structure of Amicus, we believe that providing a local forum which brings together the different sectors will re-invigorate local activities. The building of links between local

activists to enable us to share experiences and directly evolve best practice which takes account of local conditions will prove invaluable.

Building visible local networks of activists is essential for a member lead trade union which is not reliant on Full Time Officers for the communication of information and ideas.

We are aware that some officials remain sceptical of the value of these meetings, however we believe that good officials will act responsibly and ensure that these committees work effectively.

Every work place representative and every lay branch officer will be entitled to attend the Area Activist Quarterly in which their branch or workplace is located. This offers an exciting opportunity of bringing together every activist in the area and not just 'the

same old faces' attending on a delegated basis.

Whilst we ourselves are a left of centre pressure group we welcome the opportunity for activists to meet on equal and independent terms, free of patronage from any political pressure group or official within the union.

We believe the activists quarterlies will kick start the process of allowing all activists to listen and contribute to arguments and reach their own conclusions based on what they genuinely believe is in the best interest of the union and the members that they represent.

This important step to restoring local democracy also offers a springboard to rekindle interest and lay involvement in the CSEU District Committees, Local Trades Union Councils and to promote change within the Labour Party.

# Amicus Unity Gazette

We urge all Amicus members to join the campaign for

## Free Unions! Fair Rights!

JOIN THE MAY DAY

# MARCH FOR WORKPLACE JUSTICE



FOR A TRADE UNION FREEDOM BILL • FOR WORKPLACE SOLIDARITY

MONDAY

MAY 1

Assemble 12 Noon Clerkenwell Green  
Nearest Tube Farringdon Move off 1pm  
Rally 2.30pm Trafalgar Square

MORE INFO AND TRANSPORT DETAILS AT [www.tuc.org.uk/mayday](http://www.tuc.org.uk/mayday)

JOIN LONDON'S MAY DAY MARCH TO SAY 'YES' TO WORKERS' RIGHTS

The mass sackings at Gate Gourmet shows the law still fails minimum international standards. [Join the campaign for fair rights and for a Trade Union Freedom Bill.](#)

*Speakers include:*

[Ken Livingstone](#) London Mayor • [Gloria Mills](#) TUC President  
[Brendan Barber](#) TUC General Secretary • [Derek Simpson](#) Amicus General Secretary  
[Tony Woodley](#) TGWU General Secretary • [Paul Kenny](#) GMB • [Maria Helena Andre](#) European TUC  
[Dave Prentis](#) UNISON • [Randall Howard](#) South African Transport and AWU General Secretary  
[Greg Combet](#) Australian Council of Trade Unions • [Tony Benn](#)

Plus representatives from the international communities, pensioner organisations, Gate Gourmet, and union leaders from RMT and many more.

Organised jointly by the TUC and the London May Day Organising Committee [www.londonmayday.org](http://www.londonmayday.org)