

# Floods, droughts and capitalism

BY STUART JORDAN

**F**REAK weather conditions have emerged with increasing frequency over the last few years. This summer has seen two million people on the Indian sub-continent have their villages submerged by flood water, an extended heat wave in continental Europe and the worst floods in centuries in the UK.

So has the recent weather convinced everyone that global warming is happening and we better be prepared? Well some parts of big business have stopped denying the reality of climate change, but are now saying that it is not caused by human activity, that it is a natural phenomenon. That it has nothing to do with 200 years of fossil fuel burning and the destruction of the rain forest. The scientists on the payroll of big business are now coming up with a whole lot of new "proofs" that climate change is 'natural'.

But whether or not July's floods were a direct result of increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or not is largely by-the-by. The question is what is society going to do about the massive ecological problems the planet faces — crop failure, mass migration, resource scarcity and freak weather. The UK's establishment's failure to deal with the relatively minor problem of flood water raises some scary questions.

One of the main problems with climate

change as a phenomena is that it leaves people feeling completely helpless. We wake up in the morning, the weather is weird, some people have lost their homes, a couple of people have drowned, what to do? Probably the most pathetic scene in July was the group of Oxford residents demonstrating with placards saying "Enough" in the face of the approaching disaster.

We need real, concrete solutions. The starting point for developing those solutions is to develop a critical response to capitalist solutions.

Do the people who rule the world have any interest in stopping climate change or putting in place adequate provision to deal with the fallout? Yes, but only if it helps to maintain their profit margins. The main conclusion of the government-sponsored Stern Report on climate change, published in January this year, was that if we don't act soon then it will be bad for business. But to some capitalists climate change may be an opportunity to expand and grow — Russia for instance has taken advantage of the melting of the North Pole in order to do some underwater exploration for new oil and mineral deposits. And because capitalist profit making relies on the commodification of everything — including healthcare, education, social housing — the world ends up cluttered with stuff. Only

people with money can afford to live ecologically sustainable lifestyles! Capitalism is a waste of energy and its insatiable demand for ever more growth is surely at the root of our present ecological crisis.

Even if you do not buy into all or some of this it is now starkly clear that capitalism cannot, will not deal with the consequences of global warming.

In the UK 100,000 homes have been lost in a flood that could have been predicted years ago.

The cost of the flood is predicted to be £1.3 billion. Government aid to the affected communities stands at a puny £3 million.

With already over two million properties in Britain standing on flood plains, the government's solution to the housing crisis is build on more flood plains!

These houses will not be publicly-owned democratically-controlled social housing but houses built by property developers and multi-million pound housing associations. These companies will be doing all they can to shirk their responsibility to provide adequate flood defences in the pursuit of a quick buck.

The Environment Agency, involved in managing the disaster, were less interested in saving the people from the rising tide, but more interested in stuffing their pockets with public money. The executives of the EA have just awarded themselves a bonus as part of a performance review. Baroness Young the CEO decided that she had done such a good job that she deserved a £24,000 bonus on top of her £163,000. The other seven executives all agreed with Young's analysis and followed suit. This is after the National Audit Office

criticised the EA for failing to maintain the flood defences in 50% of the most high risk areas.

Dealing with the terrible affects of climate change will require all resources — material, scientific, technological — aimed at serving the public good. This will not be achieved by overpaid bureaucrats being paid vast amounts of money to set targets, cost-savings and building infrastructure on the cheap.

In the long-run we need to take stop relying on insurance companies, bourgeois politicians and their hired hands, but take collective, democratic control of the world's resources.

This project is not a present reality. We need to build a movement that can fight for that project. Socialist ideas can help us do that. Socialists see human labour as the key to making, creating and changing the world for the better. From Pentium processors, the bricks and mortar that make our houses, to the clothes on our backs, human labour rearranged the raw matter of the earth to transform the world.

Capitalism has been able to organise labour very effectively but on the principle of short-term, individual gain for the capitalists and the wealthy. It is fundamentally incapable of serving a collective good, serving the majority and will do the bare minimum to preserve its labour force. Ultimately the majority can learn to live collectively and will in those circumstance be able to summon up the means, ideas, technology and whatever it takes for humanity and the planet to survive the worst flooding, hurricanes and droughts.

## Challenge the BNP everywhere

BY PETE RADCLIFF

**T**HE BNP finished its Red, White and Blue Festival in Codnor, Derbyshire, on 5 August. Once again they were able to organise this mass fascist rally without facing national mobilisation from either of the two anti-fascist groupings, Searchlight or Unite against Fascism (UAF). Nor did they face any obstruction from local Labour councils or the police or fire services they are in charge of.

Is this because the BNP are a dwindling threat and there are more important priorities? Hardly! The BNP have never done as well as they have in the 2005 and 2006 local elections.

Is it because the cause of anti-fascism has been marginalised in the labour movement and to mobilise against it would meet with no support? Well perhaps, but if so why do both Searchlight and UAF speak, in the triumphalist terms they have, about the 2006 BNP results and the strength of the alliances they have built against it?

The truth is that the BNP are increasing in strength and the anti-fascist left are both politically and organisationally seriously in disarray.

At the time of going to press, it is not possible to say how many attended the BNP festival. The BNP claimed they would have 2-3,000.

What we do know is that:

- There was a hearing of Amber Valley council that considered a drinks and alcohol license on 18th July. At that panel, made up of mainly Labour members, the police made no objection to the BNP event as they expected no serious anti-fascist presence at it.

- Many more racists, particularly from nearby Notts and Derbyshire areas, attended their first fascist event and undoubtedly have been closer integrated into BNP structures.

- Whilst Searchlight provided useful information to the local Labour MP, Judy Mallaber, objecting to the event, nothing was done to consider organising the affiliates of either Searchlight's Hope not Hate campaign nor UAF to stop the event happening.

The UAF did send out an email through its union affiliates asking union members to vote in an online poll of the *Derby Evening*

*Telegraph* about whether the event should go ahead. Ironically the futile nature of that method of protest was revealed by the fact that the BNP internationally mobilised far more votes, by a margin of 4 to 1, in defense of their rights to hold this fascist rally.

14 years ago the BNP were far less of a threat than they are now. But in response to the victory of one BNP councillor, Derek Beackon in Tower Hamlets, in the order of 20-30,000 marched in Welling against the BNP having an office there.

What should labour movement activists alarmed by the growth of the BNP do?

Firstly, organise on the ground in the localities near to where the BNP organise. Indeed there are many local groups doing precisely that.

Secondly, recognise that the BNP feeds off not only off ignorance and racism but also genuine working class grievances about housing, low pay, jobs and war in Iraq and so an anti-fascist campaign has to encourage genuine trade union and community campaigns of working class protest as a real alternative to the BNP racist poison.

Thirdly, demand that a real national anti-fascist campaign must be built on the same principles. National and local working class organisations must go beyond the tokenistic responses of simply approving an affiliation to this or that inadequate national anti-fascist organisation.

Unions, Labour Party organisations and other campaigns in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and elsewhere are responding to these threats. Activists in many of the areas subjected to intensive BNP activity are starting to organise local meetings and campaigns. Notts anti-fascist activists are holding stalls in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and elsewhere in Notts. Derby Race Equality Council has called a meeting to discuss the formation of a Far Right Monitoring Council in the area.

But to turn out the numbers that could have stopped the BNP festival only a few miles from both Nottingham and Derby, requires a national mobilisation and a genuinely militant and working-class national campaign.

Before the BNP organise their next festival — and they have already announced that it will be in the same place in Derbyshire — we have to recreate such a national campaign.



### Mick Cashman, 1959-2007

**O**N 18 July Mick Cashman died, aged just 48. For over a decade until the early 1990s, he was a member of the AWL's predecessor organisations and a supporter of *Solidarity's* forerunners *Workers' Action* and *Socialist Organiser*.

During the same period he was a prominent activist in the Wallasey Labour Party (both the Labour Party Young Socialists and the constituency party), and played a leading role in transforming the organisations into bodies fighting for working class socialism.

The high point of this struggle took place 20 years ago, when Wallasey CLP selected Lol Duffy as its candidate for the 1987 general election. Lol was Mick's comrade and, with others, were open Marxists and supporters of *Socialist Organiser*. Mick was the CLP election agent.

It was a model socialist election campaign, bringing together the industrial and political struggle, rousing and involving working class and labour movement activists of all ages. It came within a whisker (279 votes) of kicking out the sitting Tory MP and government overseas development minister, Lynda Chalker, and achieved the biggest increase of any

Labour vote in Britain (39%) during the general election.

Offering no support to the CLP in 1987, the Labour leadership moved against Wallasey before the 1992 general election, suspending Lol Duffy and other key activists and imposing a tame Labour candidate. Mick left the Labour Party during this period in disgust. He rejoined recently when he believed he saw the possibility of the trade unions asserting themselves within the New Labour structures.

Mick was also a trade union organiser. As a militant on the then Tory government's cheap labour schemes, he played a prominent role in organising fellow young workers on the Wirral schemes in the 1980s, and subsequently continued this work as a lay organiser for the TGWU, including during the Wallasey election campaign. Drawing on this experience he worked in different roles for the TGWU, and remained committed to building an organising, fighting union.

At the time of his death, Mick was a full time TGWU (now Unite) official, in charge of the union's organising campaign in the North West. In that capacity, and as part of the organising team, he contributed to the recent victory of the Salford city council bin workers, in dispute over conditions and the employment of agency workers. Mick collapsed and died in negotiations with the employers during the strike.

Fittingly, a sizeable contingent of strikers travelled to Mick's funeral on 27 July in Wallasey. And Mick's family requested that no flowers be sent for the funeral, and that instead donations be made to the strike fund.

Peter Cashman spoke movingly at the funeral, describing his older brother as a lifelong international socialist, whose dedication to the struggle for workers' liberty was an inspiration to everybody.

Mick's death is a tragedy and serious loss to all those who knew and worked with him. To Mick's wife and comrade, Janet, his children, and all his close family and comrades, we extend our condolences and solidarity.

John Bloxam

(A more detailed appreciation of Mick's life will appear in the next issue.)