

# Blair becomes unhinged as economy crumbles

by Mark Burdman

The 20th century has seen two world wars and horrific acts of genocide, as well as, positively, such events as a human being landing on the Moon. It is now coming to a close, amidst the worst financial crisis yet. But for “New Age” British Prime Minister Tony Blair, all of this is irrelevant. There is one object that most sums up the century: the electric guitar.

Blair was recently asked to donate an object for an exhibit at the newly opened Museum of Scotland. His choice was the Fender Stratocaster electric guitar, the model used by the late, drug-besotted rock star Jimi Hendrix. As the London *Observer* noted on Oct. 11, the Fender Stratocaster achieved “iconic status,” when Hendrix “set his on fire at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1967.”

In a statement motivating his choice, Blair said the Stratocaster best sums up the 20th century, as it reminds him “of a time when everyone wanted nothing more than to be in a rock band.” Blair also stated that his greatest disappointment, was when his student rock band, Ugly Rumours, failed to make it into the Top 30 in Britain.

## Back to the mid-19th century

Nobody expects profound thinking from New Ager Blair, who has said that his greatest living hero is the Rolling Stones’ Mick Jagger, and that his role model is Pontius Pilate. But to spew out such lunacy now, would suggest that Blair is beginning to lose touch with reality. Indeed, Blair may soon be in store for much greater disappointments than his failed rock band, as his government begins to unravel, under the impact of the global economic crisis on the United Kingdom.

Exhibiting the same flight from reality as the Prime Minister, but from a different standpoint, British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, on Oct. 11, described the British economy as “a rock of stability in these troubled times.”

On the same day, the *Observer* reported that employment in manufacturing in Britain is steadily falling to the lowest level since the mid-19th century! The article reported that there are expected to be “record job losses” in the manufacturing sector in 1999. Based on current projections, i.e., not taking into account the coming phases of disintegration of the overall system, there will be almost 400,000 layoffs in manufacturing next year.

Perhaps Britain will soon be unable to produce electric guitars.

Surveys taken in early October by the U.K. Institute of Directors and by the British Chambers of Commerce, have revealed a sharp drop in business confidence in Britain, the which is most marked among manufacturing companies.

These institutions, as well as trade unions whose workers are in the manufacturing/industrial sector, are pressuring the Bank of England to further lower interest rates, below the 0.25% that was decided on Oct. 8. That lowering was widely greeted with a thumbs-down, and the reaction, “Too little, too late.” But, the problems in the British economy go far beyond what manipulation of interest rates will accomplish.

There is pressure from the parliamentary opposition in Britain for Chancellor of the Exchequer Brown to make an emergency statement on the subject, when the House of Commons returns to session this month.

At the same time, the latest news reveals a catastrophe in the British farming sector. On Oct. 9, the press reported that farm incomes in the U.K. are having their worst fall since the 1930s, and that things are expected to get worse. The bottom 25% of the country’s 170,000 full-time farmers—a number down by 30,000 compared to 10 years ago—are suffering 10 times the losses they suffered in 1996, and are being advised to quit farming. According to the Oct. 9 *Daily Telegraph*, the drop in incomes is being blamed on the high valuation of the pound sterling, low crop and livestock prices, “the world recession,” and poor weather. The controversy over “Mad Cow” disease is only making matters worse.

On Oct. 14, the *Daily Telegraph* reported in a front-page story that 25,000 British farmers are now “facing ruin,” and will be forced out of farming. It reported a finding from the National Farmers Union of England and Wales, that net farm incomes this year will be less than one-fourth of what they were as recently as 1996. A union statement declared, “Never mind a graph, the income figures are going over the cliff.”

Certainly, the devastation is rooted in policies that began before Blair came to power, in the Thatcher-Major years of 1979-92, when whatever there was of the real economy was sacrificed on the altar of radical “free market” policies, which prioritized short-term profits, “privatization,” and the like. The problem is that Blair has made it clear repeatedly, that he admires the Thatcher legacy, and that his much-vaunted “Third Way” is an attempt to preserve the essence of Thatcherism, albeit with a somewhat more “Fabian,” softer face.

And it is Blair and his team who will now have to face the music. On Oct. 11, the London *Sunday Times* forecast dire troubles for the government, in the coming months. In an editorial entitled “The Economy, Stupid,” the paper wrote: “As ever, ‘the economy, stupid’ is the answer to the question of what makes or breaks governments. The worse the economic situation, the less important every other issue becomes. . . . Labour [Party] control freaks at No. 10 [Downing Street] have panicked before when the going got rough. They may do so again.”