

Britain's Guardian and Observer sound a warning to the political elite

Chris Marsden
1 February 2012

In 1987 UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared, “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.”

In 1990, her successor John Major proclaimed his intention to produce “a genuinely classless society so people can rise to whatever level from whatever level they started.”

His successor, Tony Blair, told the 1999 Labour Party conference, “The class war is over,” before advocating, “Not power to the people but power to each person.”

In no other country has such a systematic propaganda offensive been required to deny even the existence of the working class. In America, the term “middle class” has for decades been used to define a broad swathe of the working class that is then differentiated from the equally ill-defined “poor.” However, in Britain, class has for so long (and so nakedly) been the basis on which society and political life are organised that the campaign to expunge the term was forced to assume major proportions.

There is significant portent, therefore, to the recent discussions within British ruling circles to the effect that the massive and growing inequalities produced by capitalism are fuelling discontent, raising with it the danger that the working class will again make itself felt as a social and political force.

On January 18, Prime Minister David Cameron proclaimed his intention to inaugurate yet another era of “popular”, “moral” capitalism. He spoke as Goldman Sachs disclosed that its staff pay and bonuses for 2011 totaled almost £8 billion, fully 42 percent of its revenues, and amid rumors that chief executive of the nationalised RBS, Stephen Hester, was in line for a bonus of £1

million on top of his £1.2 million salary.

Cameron pushed the usual buttons, praising “open markets and free enterprise” as a means to “promote morality”, but also acknowledged that “many people today are disenchanted with markets—even angry” and complained that “the bonus culture... has got out of control.”

As testament to the rotten record of the last Labour government, he was able to blame it for turning “a blind eye to corporate excess” and allowing “a debt-fuelled boom to get out of control.” This had led to “a series of lethal imbalances in our economy... The truth is that the last government made a Faustian pact with the City.”

All of which is true. But everyone knows that the Faustian pact continues and that the Tories are imposing over £100 billion in cuts that are devastating the lives of millions.

Step forward the *Guardian* and its sister paper, the *Observer*.

There is a dawning recognition in what now passes for a liberal press that most people realise that the invocations of a “moral,” “popular”, or “responsible” capitalism, made by either Cameron or Labour leader Ed Miliband, change nothing. The social order remains capitalism. And they will continue to suffer its ill effects. Thus we see a return to more critical comments on the state of Britain and the world.

In a fairly scathing attack on the refusal of the government to actually curb bonuses, Marina Hyde warned in the *Guardian* that the political elite’s claim that nothing can be done was a “suicide strategy... as

demonstrated by the reaction to Hester's bonus, the public unfortunately still believe it doesn't have to be this way."

She closed by asking of politicians, "[A]fter a 2011 in which all manner of hierarchies were shaken, and in some cases destroyed, can they really be intensely relaxed about the uncharted places it could lead?"

The same theme of rising opposition to capitalism was taken up more broadly by the *Observer* in a January 29 editorial on "the true cost of globalisation."

"The worldwide public realises there is something deeply wrong with today's world economic system," it commented. Beginning by noting the call by Karl Marx "for the workers of the world to unite," it cited numerous examples of how "the public is no longer willing to ignore the dark underbelly of world capitalism."

More than four years on from the crash of 2008, the *Observer* went on, "millions of people still wait for economic recovery to take hold" and "there has been a growing chorus of discontent from far beyond the corridors of power."

"The demands of these inchoate groups may not be fully formed," the editorial continues. "[b]ut they have noisily identified the fact that there is something deeply wrong with today's world economic system, which puts unfathomable riches in the hands of an unaccountable elite, while millions are trapped in unemployment and poverty."

"The truth is that the neo-liberal consensus, with its promise of economic 'freedom', has failed to deliver," the *Observer* writes, citing the "shameful" levels of poverty in China, India and "other developing countries," while "average workers in most of the major rich economies, including the UK, have seen the real value of their wages shrivel away."

The *Observer* offers as a palliative to assuage public anger the "heavier taxes on properties, pension contributions and mortgage interest payments for the rich" suggested by the OECD, concluding with the appeal, "as we sift through the wreckage of the Great Recession, perhaps it's finally time to heed Marx's words, and stand up for workers everywhere."

The Guardian Media Group's editorial staff many years ago placed the liberal ideological baggage of their youth into storage, while they benefited from the speculative boom and the soaring living standards of the upper middle-class layer for which they speak. They stood in the front ranks of supporters of the New Labour project, as Blair and then Gordon Brown presided over a transfer of social wealth from workers to the rich, the very rich and the unimaginably rich, before holding out a hand of friendship to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition and its austerity measures.

It is only now that things look set to explode that they take a trip up to the attic, dust off their old "friends of the workers" persona and urge the rest of the political elite to do the same. Their citation of Marx points to the reason why—a fear that social discontent will and must inevitably find political forms that threaten the system which they hold so dear. For the most part, however, their appeals will fall on deaf ears.

There is presently no vehicle through which the ruling class can strike even a pose of sympathy for the plight of working people. The Labour Party and the trade unions, on which all past strategies to ameliorate social antagonisms and contain the class struggle have relied, are discredited and moribund husks—steeped in betrayals that no one is likely to forgive and motivated solely by the dictates of the financial oligarchy.

To encroach seriously on today's grotesque levels of personal and corporate wealth, to "stand up for workers everywhere," is in fact a revolutionary act. It requires the building of a new party of a type that is anathema to the *Guardian/Observer* crowd, one whose relationship to Marx's historic struggle for world socialism is not confined to cynical rhetorical flourishes, but is its *raison d'être*.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact