

Letters from our readers

22 February 2014

On “Years of government cuts worsen UK flooding”

Dear Comrade Paul,

Your article reveals the legacy of repeated cuts in the Environment Agency budget. This is only partially true and of course other agencies have responsibility for water management and the environment.

The last few weeks have also exposed the class and state interests at stake.

Firstly, following the devastating flooding in Hull, Doncaster and Gloucestershire, the then-Labour government increased environment agency spending up to and including 2010/2011. With the election of the Tory/Liberal government, cuts were implemented each year as you highlight. If Labour had been re-elected, being slaves to the needs of the City, it would most probably have followed a similar program of “efficiency” measures.

The privatized water companies, whose first priority is to the shareholders and are driven by their share price on the world markets, are also responsible for water course management. Here too there has been a systematic failure. Massive and persistent cuts to local government funding have degraded surface water run-off control in urban areas. Likewise, wholesale destruction of public transport and the inexorable rise in car use and “concreting” over of grass land has played its part.

The last sixty years of high intensity agriculture farming, much of which is in the hands of transnational companies and a quick buck policy, has in many areas created soil quality so degraded that it is almost dead. Very low organic matter, low earthworm density—essential for drainage, filling in of ditches and ponds, grubbing of hedge rows and small copses all contribute to flash flooding. Soil microbial and fungi life are almost eliminated.

In 2007, GCHQ’s operations were threatened with the flash floods that hit Gloucestershire. Electrical

supply from the nearby substation was maintained by the rapid intervention of the military building a wall of sand bags around it. A parliamentary report in 2008 stated that “business continuity arrangement” at MI5, MI6 and GCHQ will be reviewed. No doubt that was not subjected to further cuts by Labour or the present administration. State interests, i.e., spying on most of the worlds population, have number one priority.

The class values of capitalism manifest themselves in the EA funding policy. For flood defence work to go ahead, the criteria is that for every one pound spent roughly eight times that is expected in “savings”. Hence, when Hull and Doncaster were extensively flooded in 2007—being relatively poor areas with low property prices—the money allocated for flood protection spending was “modest”. (On December 5th of last year, Hull’s flood defences were almost breached.) The Somerset Levels are low on spending too, hence they have been left with “each home taking it’s own measures against flooding”. However, along the Thames valley the price of a house will frequently be ten or more times greater than in parts of Yorkshire. So, flood defences are not assessed according to safeguarding homes but of protecting markets. Perhaps Lord Howell of Guildford also had this in mind when he spoke in favour of fracking going ahead in the North East where there are large “desolate areas”. Failure to protect all homes, whether multi-million mansions, or small terraced ones, can only lead to a ghettoisation of large areas. Small, relatively cheap homes on flood plains will become uninsurable, worthless and uninhabitable. The extremes of property prices will consequently expand enormously. Abandonment of the poor was central to the response in New York and New Orleans.

This morning Lord Lawson, in a BBC Radio 4 interview, stated that he doubted the weather extremes were a consequence of man made global climate change. What cannot be doubted, however, is that

weather extremes are playing havoc on all continents. Also, the issue is to some extent not whether this is man made or not—it could be variability of solar emissions, but unlikely. Global temperatures are rising, oceans are also warming and expanding—raising sea levels—atmospheric potential and kinetic energy levels are elevated giving rise to high winds. All the evidence suggests that changes are largely man made and hence must be tackled with urgency.

He concluded that Britain should not embark on a program of de-carbonisation of energy production, as this country only contributed around two percent of greenhouse gases. Here he unintentionally put his finger on the fault: the continued division of earth into nation states, each pursuing its own selfish interest: someone else can pay, but definitely not “our” country. This has bedeviled global climate change talks from the start. The only way to ensure our small planet remains habitable for humans is with the overthrow of the capitalist system and the ending of nation states.

John U

13 February 2014

On global cancer rates and capitalism

Why is WSWs not writing articles that capitalism bears the greatest responsibility for cancer worldwide? The passionate supporters of capitalism are also victims of their own capitalist system, losing their own family members; their wives, their husbands, their sons or daughters or other parts of their families, or losing good friends.

This shows how ridiculous capitalism operates and how their supporters have been trapped in a vicious circle.

Alphons

17 February 2014



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