

Austerity Exacerbates Flooding Risks

The flooding this Christmas has been some of the worst in recent memory. Significant parts of the North of England have suffered severe flooding, including Manchester, Cumbria, Leeds, Calderdale and York. Bridges have been washed away with some communities totally cut off.

Fingers are rightly being pointed to the cuts the Tory government has made to flood defence spending, as well as the emergency services. Spending was cut by 8%, around £540m since 2011, including planned defences around Leeds and York. Yet back in 2009 the Environment Agency were asking for an extra £500m over 25 years to deal with the effects of climate change, a request rejected by the then Labour government.

Added to this is the savage cuts made in the last few years to fire services across the country. In West Yorkshire numerous fire stations have been closed and merged, with the loss of fire engines and staff. North Yorkshire Fire Authority has just passed similar reductions in fire engines and staff.

Yet flooding itself is also a crisis being intensified by the logic of capitalism. Between 2001 and 2011 around 200,000 new homes were built on flood plain land. Such land being generally cheap, as well as being flat, means that large housing construction firms can build cheaply with less chances of complications on such land.

The privatised water companies have been hiking prices to boost

profits, whilst failing to invest in maintaining sewerage & waterways.

Another linked issue is that of agricultural policy. Clearing of uplands to allow sheep to graze, has reduced its capacity to absorb water. A study cited by George Monbiot in the Guardian (8th December) suggests that the infiltration rate of rainwater is 67 times higher under trees than sheep pasture! Yet the EU Common Agricultural Policy means gives farmers subsidies for doing just that!

The same is the case with owners of Grouse moors, who are draining and burning blanket bogs and burning moorland heather. Again, such land owners do so to maximise the profitable of grouse hunting, but also receive subsidies from the government to do so.

That mismanagement of UK peat bogs is also contributing 3.7m tonnes of CO² emissions per year, adding to global warming and thereby increasing the risk of extreme weather events such as flooding, shows how interconnected our

environment is.

According to the IPCC, global warming means the atmosphere was around 0.75 degrees warmer in 2012 than it was in 2000, meaning that it holds 5-6% more moisture which will lead to heavier rainfalls. 30cm of rain fell in 24 hours on Cumbria earlier in December, the third such incident since 2005, yet such extreme events used to be once a century!

Whilst further flood defences will undoubtedly be welcomed by those who have had their Christmas ruined by flooding, if our environment is continually degraded they will only offer a temporary relief.

Capitalism's logic means it will continue to degrade our environment in pursuit of bigger profit. Only by taking the key sectors of our economy, including construction, energy and food, into public ownership, as well as expropriating the major land owners, can we democratically plan a sustainable plan to reverse climate change whilst minimising its effects.

We demand:

- Austerity must go! No cuts to the emergency services. Restore spending on flood defences
- Stop building on flood plains. For a sustainable mass council house building programme. Bring the construction companies into democratic public ownership
- Properly maintain sewerage & waterways. Renationalise the utilities companies under democratic control & management
- Invest in renewal energy & public transport to tackle climate change
- End subsidies that degrade our environment. Expropriate the major landowners and manage the uplands in an environmentally sustainable manner.