

## Southwark Left Unity

### Tackling floods and climate chaos.

Despite the devastating floods, storms, and tidal surges, that have been battering Britain in recent weeks the government continues to deny the basic cause of the problem: human induced climate change.

Nicholas Stern, the author of the 2006 report on the economics of climate change, was clear about this in the Guardian pointing out that a warmer atmosphere holds more water and will result in more rain and that four of the five wettest years recorded in Britain have occurred since the year 2000. He warns that if emissions are not cut there will be even more devastating consequences as the global average temperature is set to rise to by at least 4C by the end of the century.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report published last September also pointed to an increasing pattern of extreme weather since 1950 with more heatwaves, droughts, high winds, hurricanes and rainfall resulting from global warming.

Nor is it just Britain that is seeing climate chaos. Since 1997 the world has experienced the 13 warmest years on record. June 2012 marked the 328th consecutive month with a global temperature above the 20th century average. The Arctic sea ice is retreating.

In the US California is facing its worst drought in 100 years, while the East Coast has seen massive snowstorms and freezing temperatures. Australia has faced intense summer heat and droughts, and major bush fires. There has been extreme cold and snow in Japan. Typhoon Haiyan that devastated the Philippines last year was the strongest ever recorded. Argentina had one of its worst heatwaves in December and Brazil saw record rainfall resulting in floods and landslides.

Entire islands and some low-lying regions of the world—most of Bangladesh for example—are disappearing beneath rising seas. Millions of people have already been displaced.

Since the coalition came to office they have been cutting back every aspect of environmental spending. They slashed spending on flood defences as soon as they came to office. They have disregarded the Climate Change Act of 2008 that requires the government to ensure that Britain's carbon emissions are cut to 80% below the 1990 baseline by 2015.

Even the environmental agency responsible for flood protection has been the subject of cuts and redundancies. Both Osborne as Chancellor and Patterson as Minister for the Environment are leading deniers, and the Tory back benches are stacked out with them.

The coalition are cutting back on renewables whilst introducing a whole new generation of fossil fuel in the form of shale gas from fracking. Left Unity members and branches are rightly involved in campaigning against this.

The government are also introducing a new generation of nuclear power stations when we have seen disasters like those at Fukushima, the full implications of which will not be known for some considerable time, there is (still) no safe way of disposing with the waste they will generate and despite the military implications. Left Unity does not support the use of nuclear power –nor do we believe that climate change makes it necessary.

Miliband is right to warn that Britain is sleepwalking towards disaster on this. And he is right to warn that climate change has the ability not only to drive the economy into deeper crisis but to generate conflict between different regions of the world as its impact unfolds. We have to ask, however, where has he been on this since he became Labour leader, and what is he going to do about it. At the moment his proposals are limited to investment in flood defenses rather than tackling the cause of the problem—which is climate change.

The sight of well-heeled Tory voters along the Thames demanding more help from a state that they have long denounced as too big demonstrates the gulf between Tory ideology and political reality. It also demonstrates that free market economics has no answer to climate change and that we need a socialist solution.

Protection against extreme weather events requires action to strengthen the infrastructure. It also means, however, a completely new approach to planning and a curb on building on flood plains and in vulnerable areas. It means a whole new approach to water management with storage in the upland which could involve returning some farmed areas to woodland.

It means the construction of a completely new publicly owned energy infrastructure based on renewables that will protect the planet from global warming as well as providing the energy necessary. It means a serious approach to energy conservation.

We therefore propose the following 10 practical steps:

- 1) Make good the damage that has been done. Full compensation, where necessary, for the victims of these events, and those who have been refused insurance cover, particularly in the poorest areas.
- 2) Reverse staff cuts at the Environment Agency, increase its budget, and drop the requirement to consider economic growth in its spending plans.
- 3) Bring water back into public ownership.
- 4) For a nationalised integrated transport system.
- 5) For a sustainable, publicly owned, energy infrastructure based on wind, wave, and solar power to create millions of new green jobs in manufacture, construction and engineering. Bring the energy companies back into public ownership.

- 6) The insulation of housing and public buildings to conserve energy.
- 7) End all fracking for shale gas and other extreme energy initiatives.
- 8) No to nuclear power.
- 9) Improve flood protection and management in the vulnerable areas. Strengthen planning rules to prevent further development, and begin to roll back existing unsustainable development on flood plains. Ensure that developers prioritise and guarantee flood protection.
- 10) Rethink land management policy to encourage water storage in hinterland areas and increase the holding capacity on flood plains in both rural and urban areas.

This will involve:

- a) Directing landowners towards re-wetting some currently over-drained flood plains.
- b) The restoration and creation of hedgerows and woods in vulnerable farmed land.
- c) Reduction of grazing on vulnerable hinterland habitats.
- d) The planned reduction of all water-repelling hard urban surfaces including roads, car parks, gardens and shared open spaces.
- e) Making water conservation (and therefore flood protection) a condition of all farm subsidies.