

01924 218737

info@cpgb-ml.org

**Communist Party
of Great Britain
(Marxist-Leninist)**



**Fight fuel
poverty!**

**Fight
capitalism!**

www.cpgb-ml.org

More info: PO Box 110, Normanton, WF6 1XZ

As capitalist Britain spirals deeper into crisis, the curse of poverty spreads wider and deeper, taking ever nastier forms.

One kind of poverty has in recent years been sanitised with a fancy new name in social-work circles: 'fuel poverty'. If a family has to spend more than 10 percent of its income on heating, it is said to be 'fuel poor'; if the slice is more than 20 percent, then the family then officially enters 'extreme fuel poverty'. How much better is capitalism at cataloguing problems than at solving them!

For the 5 million plus families in Britain finding it impossible to heat their homes, the matter is more succinctly expressed: 'Heat or Eat'. Across the UK, one in six families is fuel poor. The figure in Scotland is yet worse, one in three, with 770,000 households affected in 2009, up from 618,000 in 2008 and 293,000 in 2002.

The number of households in 'extreme' fuel poverty rose from 3 percent in 2002 to 10 percent last year. In Glasgow alone, some 105,000 families are trapped in fuel poverty. For more and more families, the 'lifestyle choice' faced daily is whether to keep warm or keep fed.

Fuel poverty is a killer

Every winter the death rate in Britain surges by around 18 percent as a result of cold-related deaths. Many of these deaths could be avoided, were capitalism not more worried about profits than workers' lives.

Whilst a very severe winter is right now turning distress into desperation for so many, it is not the weather but capitalism that is to blame for the combination of unemployment, low income, substandard housing and sky-high energy bills that keeps so many families shivering.

It is capitalism that plants poverty in the midst of plenty, making the working class pay to go on bailing out the handful of parasites for whose benefit the failing capitalist system is run.

Even though the Scottish government accepts that rising fuel costs are to blame, with prices having already rocketed by 19.5 percent between July 2008 and July 2009, the privatised energy companies suffer no more than the occasional token slap on the wrist from the regulators.

Glasgow: help is at hand?

Meanwhile shivering Glaswegians are being told to contact something called the Home Energy Advice Team (G.HEAT), which hands out advice on the "most cost-effective use of heating", "energy saving measures for the home", and "understanding fuel bills".

Whilst schemes to squirt some insulating foam into cavity walls and bung a few rolls of fibreglass under the roof space may appeal to councils that want to be seen to be 'doing something' about the scandal of fuel poverty, any economic benefit to household budgets is rapidly set to nought by the relentless rise of fuel bills.

And most families have little difficulty in 'understanding' the bills piling up on the doormat, even without the assistance of G.HEAT: Pay up or freeze. By 'offering' coin-operated meters to those unable to cope with bills, matters are so arranged that the poor cut themselves off, allowing the energy companies to preserve both their 'social conscience' and their fat profits.

All G.HEAT's advice puts the onus on families to somehow manage their poverty better, leaving the energy companies free to prosper on the back of other folks' misery. This is less

surprising when we note that this body, initiated by Glasgow City Council and partnered with various social enterprises, also includes amongst its bedfellows no less than the 'Scottish Power Energy People Trust'.

What a boon it must be when G.HEAT offers "an advocacy service for householders dealing with utility companies" for it to be able to draw on the experience of Scottish Power!

Scottish Power: parasites and crooks

This company, one of the Big Six that monopolise energy supply in Britain, certainly has plenty of experience – of fleecing the public. It had the highest proportion of complaints per 100,000 customers made to advice line Consumer Direct this year.

Back in 2007 it refused to cut prices in line with the rest of the industry. In 2008 it was accused of rigging the power market, manipulating its supply to the National Grid in such a way as to draw deeper from the public fund designed to balance overall supply and demand. The energy regulator Ofgem quietly dropped its investigation when it became obvious that all the suppliers were at it.

Meanwhile, the latest report reveals that net profit across the industry has increased from an average of £65 per retail customer to a new high of £90.

Given the billions that Scottish Power is extorting from its customers and draining unimpeded from the public purse, it is understandable that the Scottish Power Energy People Trust should declare it is "delighted to support this unique project and has awarded £100,000 to provide much needed assistance to fuel poor households across Glasgow." Good public relations flannel has never come so cheap.

Overproduction crisis

Britain's energy resources are enormous and capable of further great expansion. What brings the curse of fuel poverty is not the scarcity of resources or commodities. Rather, it is the overproduction of commodities that triggers capitalist crisis; the manufacture of more commodities than can all be sold at a profit on the market.

This does not mean that the supply of commodities outgrows social need. On the contrary, children go to bed hungry whilst unsold food rots in warehouses and food crops are used for bio-fuels.

The problem is that, in his efforts to out-compete his rivals in a glutted marketplace, each capitalist further impoverishes the workers whose labour he exploits, thereby further reducing effective demand and increasing market glut in a vicious downward spiral.

Monopoly capitalists like the owners of Scottish Power cannot be 'regulated' or tamed by a state that exists to defend the rights of private property in the means of production. If the capitalists of a wealthy country like Britain declare themselves unwilling or unable to end the scourge of poverty, then they need to be overthrown by the working class.

Scottish Power and the rest of the Big Six need to be taken out of private hands, along with the rest of industry and the banks, so that a planned economy can be run on the basis of social need, not private profit.

End fuel poverty – nationalise the energy companies!

End capitalism – forward to socialism!