What the election means
Media & democracy
Spanish elections
Greek appeal
Argentine Piqueteros
Sports Direct
Mental Health
The AGS is a political alliance seeking to build a future based on the twin principles of socialism and environmental sustainability - we see these two things as being inextricably linked, each being impossible without the other.

If you share our concerns and our principles, if you care about the survival of our civilization on this planet and about social justice for all who live on it, then why not join us? Membership details are on page 11.

This issue naturally covers the general election campaign and outcome. The result was a staggering blow to Labour. They should have won easily. How have the Tories won, albeit with a slim parliamentary majority and only 25% of electors? Why did the environment barely figure in campaigns?

AGS Parliamentary candidate, Juliet Boddington reflects on the role of the media during the election campaign.

The other theme of this issue is international affairs. In Spain, by contrast to the UK, with the new leftist force of Podemos, there is something to cheer about. Greece’s left government of Syriza needs solidarity. We print an appeal for support of the Greek commission on public debt.

Yemen, one of the poorest countries on the planet, and yet some of the most expensive military hardware ever is deployed in this new middle eastern war.

In South America commodity exports have fallen in volume and price as a result of China’s slowdown. We print a statement from one group of a new movement of grass roots political self help organisations in the Piqueteros tradition.

The next issue will look at the reality of climate change effects so far, resisting the cuts through five more Tory years; and more news from around the world.
Five more hard years.

The UK general election on May 7th was a disaster for ordinary people, perpetrated by those people. They voted in a Tory government. Yet the Tories clearly represent the multi-millionaires and clearly act against the interests of ordinary people.

Five years of Cameron had also shown clearly that the Tories had no interest in the environment. The contest between stopping climate change and capitalist profit was no contest at all under the Tories. Yet this issue hardly figured in the election campaign.

The Tory vote was barely up. Only 25% of the total electorate voted for them. Millions were not even on the register to vote.

At their first cabinet meeting the Tories promised plenty of work for "hard working families". Of course, this will be low paid, insecure and part-time - delivering a struggle for existence for the poor but super profits for the wealthy.

Of course, people were let down by a Labour Party, limited by its own past actions and present policies: embracing capitalism under Blair; illegal wars; bailing out a bankrupt financial system in 2008; and supporting the Tory con-trick of austerity for the poor.

For this Labour Party the election was a complete and utter disaster of its own making. Scared of their own shadow, Labour totally failed to convince their natural supporters that they would offer them something different to cuts and austerity. Because, indeed, they were not offering anything different to the Tories.

Swathes of working class votes went to UKIP as a misguided protest, for lack of anything on offer from Labour. When Labour did mention freezing fuel bills, taxing the rich and nationalising the railways their poll ratings went up! But overall they had no viable strategy for government.

Also, the Tories were lucky. The economic cycle and Labour’s inability to strike home on the economy meant that those few thousand voters in a small number of midlands and southern seats plumbed for the devil they knew.

The first past the post electoral system favoured them enormously. In addition, changes to the way voters became registered meant several millions were disenfranchised, most likely the transient poor and young people who should be the left’s natural supporters.

In Scotland, an SNP presenting itself as anti-austerity swept the board.

The Lib Dems got their just reward for selling out to support the Tories. Down from 56 MP’s to just 8 now.

Electorally, the radical left did badly, but they were always going to be squeezed as left voters short-sightedly looked for the most likely candidate “to beat the Tory”. A better guide to the Left’s influence may be the local election results where significant city/conurbation totals could be found.

The so-called Greens will take comfort in a five-fold increase in their vote over 2010. The surge didn’t materialise in parliamentary seats but large numbers joined them as party members.

The Tories are now out to destroy the Trade Unions or make them entirely ineffective. They have long recognised that organised labour is the best defender of all that makes life civilised: a free well-funded public health service, a democratic education system, decent homes, good wages and conditions and public services to meet need.

The Tories want to hand all this over to their rich friends for them to plunder as much wealth from it as they can.

This election was billed as the most important for a generation. Resistance to the Tories’ wicked and cruel plans will no doubt intensify. Will the Trade Union leaders be up to the job? On past evidence, it seems unlikely.

Some ordinary people will join together to fight their own battles or provide their own services if necessary, like the New Era Estate London tenants fighting evictions, anti fracking protesters, those fighting hospital closures, living wage campaigners, and Claimants’ Unions.

We hope that new layers of activists will find a political response. Such new layers may offer our best hope of rolling back the neoliberal attack and of saving our environment.
The most fundamental question posed by the election result is why so many people (nearly a quarter of the electorate) voted for a Tory party that is explicitly committed to acting against their interests. At least Labour still pretends to be on the side of ordinary people. Tory policies disadvantage everyone who is not super rich. Most of those who voted Tory are not super rich. (Of course, one could ask the same question of most elections since the introduction of universal suffrage.)

The media, almost universally in the pockets of the Tories or worse, played a huge role. They ran down Miliband, talked up the ludicrous idea of an SNP threat, and presented Labour as economically incompetent. The Labour Party itself continued a disastrous New Labour approach, while the media pretended Labour had moved to the left. In fact Labour did not present itself as anything at all. Policies like £6,000 fees instead of £9,000 fees, or opening rail franchise tendering to a state competitor, were neither one thing nor the other. Certainly none of this represented a shift to the left. Labour failed to present itself as anything coherent or credible.

The massive swing to SNP illustrates how Labour lost. While there was certainly a core of nationalist voters, the SNP surge came from ex-Labour voters who saw the SNP present itself as to the left of Labour. Far from losing because of a supposed shift to the left, in Scotland Labour clearly lost because they had shifted too far to the right. While the real nature of the SNP is highly debatable, they succeeded at this election in attracting the left vote deserted by Labour.

When the LibDems went into coalition with the Tories in 2010, we correctly predicted they would be wiped out for a generation. But it also seemed logical that their right wing would be happy and their left go elsewhere. In fact, the results suggest much of their right wing went to the Tories. Two-thirds of 2010 LibDem voters defected; they actually split between Tories, Labour, Greens and even UKIP. Typical incoherent LibDems!

The Green Party surge did produce over a million votes, but only one seat. Why did people vote GP? Some for environmental reasons; some because (a la SNP) the GP presented itself as on the left; and some as a protest against the major parties. GP instructions to their candidates were to avoid anything contentious; they traded on their brand name rather than their policies. Similarly GP publicity put little emphasis on the environmental issue and attempted to be generalist and “fluffy” rather than hard-hitting.

Most GP voters were middle class, not working class, probably more women than men.

UKIP got nearly four million votes. Views on their leader varied. Who voted for UKIP and why? UKIP votes seemed to come equally from Tories and Labour. Many wanted to leave the EU – although that issue was rather downplayed during the campaign. Some were anti-immigrant or plain racist. Many must have been simply protesting against the big parties; that would be consistent with UKIP doing well in by-elections but less well in the general. Many UKIP voters seemed to be simply nostalgic for a (non-existent) golden age an unspecified time ago.

Other left or green groups got comparable votes to the AGS, For example, TUSC did a little better than the AGS in the general and significantly worse in the locals. The National Health Action Party stood out, getting votes around 1,500. The CPB got poor results, under 150 everywhere.

Demographically, young people moved to the left, but were less likely to turn out to vote; pensioners moved to the right, and were likely to vote.

There were remarkable absences from most of the campaigning. The environment, including global warming, was largely invisible – which is odd given the success of the Green Party. Middle East policy, NATO and Trident hardly figured. Privatisation of the NHS – as opposed to funding pledges – was hardly raised by the main parties.

The results showed people much readier to vote AGS in local elections than in the parliamentary election. “Must keep the Tories out” was evidently a strong factor.

The next question for us in the Alliance for Green Socialism is how we should respond. What should we do differently in the light of this election? Suggestions to the Editor or any national committee member.
The main reason for Labour’s defeat and the election of a Tory majority government was the SNP surge in Scotland. The loss of 40 Scottish seats made it very unlikely that Labour would obtain an overall majority or even become the largest single party. Scaremongering by the Tories and their press about the SNP imposing its will on England seems to have led to traditional English Tory voters of a Europhobic persuasion abandoning Farage and returning home to the Conservatives. This meant that UKIP did far less damage to the Tories than many, including Labour strategists, had anticipated. Mark Reckless lost Rochester and Stroud, Farage himself failed to gain a seat and Douglas Carswell alone represents the party in parliament. Paradoxically, it seems likely that the largest component in the substantial UKIP vote of over 4 million came from former working class Labour voters and rather than from former petit bourgeois Tory voters.

The Labour vote in Britain as a whole actually increased slightly compared with 2010, despite the party’s dramatic collapse in Scotland. This trend was more marked in London and some of the other major cities. But the first past the post system meant that votes stacked up in safe seats, whilst marginals often failed to swing to Labour or even in some cases swung the wrong way. Personal factors sometimes played a role – Ed Balls’ thoroughly obnoxious personality was evident to his constituents as to his parliamentary colleagues. This marginal increase in the Labour vote shows the completely misleading nature of the narrative constructed by the Blairites and the mainstream media since 7 May.

In so far as the Labour vote increased in England, it increased because of Miliband’s very belated and very half-hearted move to the left – talk of taxing the rich and curbing zero hours contracts mobilised some remnant of Old Labour’s traditional electorate, which is why most far left candidates whether from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Left Unity, AGS or other smaller groups did poorly - with even Dave Nellist (Coventry) and Jenny Sutton (Tottenham) losing their deposits.

The dominant Blairite narrative that Labour must swing back to the right if it is to recover electorally is exposed as complete nonsense by the Institute of Fiscal Studies to be more deflationary than those of the Tories, Labour or the Lib Dems. The SNP gets massive funding from the union-busting homophobe Brian Souter and the SNP is second only to the Tories in donations from those on the Sunday Times Rich List. Note the enthusiasm of Murdoch’s Scottish Sun for a party whose former leader Alex Salmond remained a sycophantic courtier of the Australian/American media magnate, even after the Dirty Digger’s humiliation by a Commons committee. This was in very sharp contrast to Ed Miliband who was duly monstered by the English Sun – with its barely concealed anti-Semitism centred around the bacon sandwich episode - on the eve of the election for standing up to the phone hackers.

By no means all the 50% vote share garnered by the SNP is a left vote. Scotland, like Wales, has generally been
The Spanish municipal and regional elections of 24 May were a disaster for the Partido Popular (PP) of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. The PP’s vote share went down from 37% in 2011 to 27% in 2015. The PP’s origins lie in recycled remnants of the Franco regime but it is now in most respects a party of the modern mainstream centre-right – even if its hard line anti-abortion and anti-Basque stances are transparently vestiges of the Caudillo’s politics. The PP had hoped to benefit from Spain’s very recent and partial economic recovery from the depths of the depression into which the main parties’ enthusiastic pursuit of deflationary austerity policies of the kind advocated by Angela Merkel had led it. In the event, most Spanish voters were unconvinced by these marginal improvements, which have made little difference to the unemployment rate, and have toppled a large number of PP administrations.

However, there has been no surge of support for the other main party of the post-Franco era, the social democratic PSOE (down to 25% of the vote from 27% in 2011), even if the outcome probably means the PSOE is now in a position to lead coalition administrations in many regions and municipalities. These elections have been marked by the appearance at the local and regional levels of two new contenders, Podemos and Ciudadanos, putting an end to what had in large measure been a two party system (with the obvious exceptions of regionalist or nationalist parties in Catalonia and the Basque country).

Podemos, which had made its first electoral breakthrough in the European elections of May 2014, is a product of the Indignados, the predominantly young anti-austerity and anti-establishment movement that occupied the squares of Spain’s major cities in May 2011. However, whilst Podemos arose out of specifically Spanish social movement, albeit one influenced by the Arab Spring, its own politics are rather more eclectic and owe little to the traditions of the Spanish socialist or communist left. Its leader Pablo Iglesias, a young and charismatic university lecturer who became a TV star, has, like many of his closes associates in the new force, been influenced by Latin American populism of the leftist kind associated in practice with Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales and theorised by the Argentinian academic Ernesto Laclau. The party’s name on the other hand is a Spanish translation of Barack Obama’s rather vacuous Presidential 2008 election slogan: ‘Yes, we can’.

A further complication is that Iglesias’s initial allies in creating the framework of a nationwide organisation were the members of Izquierda Anticapitalista ( Anticapitalist Left, the Spanish sister organisation of Britain’s Socialist Resistance), even if he quickly marginalised them once Podemos had started to make an electoral breakthrough. After Podemos gained some MEPs, Iglesias was keen to tone down the radical left image and programme of the organisation, stressing its opposition to the political class (la casta) and the corruption that is such a feature of Spanish political life rather than foregrounding an anti-austerity agenda. This bid for the centre ground soon boomeranged. The Spanish economic establishment were fearful that both their favourite party – the PP- and their fall back team – the PSOE- were being undermined by Podemos. They helped create, finance and publicise Ciudadanos (Citizens), another new party with another young leader (Albert Rivera) and a plausible line in attacks on la casta and corruption without any inconvenient anti-austerity baggage of the kind that links Podemos to the Greek Syriza. Ciudadanos has a rigorous neo-liberal line but none of the embarrassing associations with corruption or the Francoist legacy that plague the PP. Ciudadanos has therefore mopped up the centrist voters that Iglesias had hoped to appeal to by claiming that Podemos was beyond the “antiquated” notions of left and right.

Podemos lacks a solid organisational structure, relying to a large degree on the Internet to recruit members and attract funding and was therefore in no position to contest all of Spain’s more than 8,000 municipalities. However its average score of 10% in the regional elections held on the same day gives an indication of its potential support. Podemos’s organisational weakness meant both that it concentrated its efforts on the largest urban centres and that it usually joined electoral cartels with leftist civil society organisations rather contesting towns and cities under its own name. For example in Barcelona, it is part of Barcelona en Comu (Barcelona in Common) and in Madrid it is part of Ahora Madrid.
The nationwide performance of Podemos, although very respectable - the mainstream media seem to acknowledge it as the third force in Spanish politics – has thus been rather uneven. However, it has made one very spectacular gain, taking control, via its electoral cartel, of Barcelona, Spain’s second city and the one with the most leftwing tradition. The woman leader of Barcelona’s anti-eviction movement, Ada Colau, has become the new mayor of Barcelona, ousting Xavier Trias of the CiU, the rightwing Catalan nationalists, who had previously run the capital of Catalonia.

In Madrid, a city with a more rightwing tradition that had been run by the PP for 24 years, there was a much more closely fought contest between the PP’s Esperanza Aguirre (an ex-minister and ex-President of the Senate, as well as being a countess by marriage) and Ahora Madrid’s Manuela Carmena, a 71 year old former labour lawyer and erstwhile Communist Party member, whose record enabled Ahora Madrid to win large numbers of voters in the very poor quarters in the south of the city as well as amongst the more solidly working class ones. Although the PP has won one more seat on the council than Ahora Madrid, Manuela Carmena should be able to forge a coalition with other anti-PP forces anxious to humiliate the Prime Minister in the capital and that she too will become a radical left mayor.

Whatever reservations one may have about Iglesias’s leadership of Podemos, these triumphs in Barcelona and in all probability Madrid, increase the chances of a radical left breakthrough in the Spanish general election (widely assumed to be due in November) and will raise the spirits of all genuine fighters against austerity in all the countries being slowly strangled by the Troika.

Nowhere will the news from Barcelona have been as welcome as in Athens where the Syriza government desperately needs the opening of a second front. Otherwise the Germans will force Greece to choose between total capitulation to the most extreme set of neo-liberal demands ever imposed on a European country on the one hand and default, return to the drachma and a chaotic exit from the EU on the other.

Continued from page 5  UK Election analysis

somewhat to the left of England, but not to that extent. The unpopularity of the Tories in Scotland has meant that in the post-Thatcher era, centre right voters have frequently voted for the Tartan Tories rather than the Conservatives.

The protest vote in England has taken different forms. We would be foolish to ignore the rise of the Green Party who polled over a million votes (4%) This must be seen as in large measure a left vote, for a party that presented itself as against austerity and for social justice. On certain specific issues like rail renationalisation, the SNP clearly placed itself to Labour’s left. However, the Green Party is petty bourgeois in terms of ideology, with their utopian dreams of a more socially just and environmentally sustainable society without a rupture with capitalism. Their electorate is largely made up of people who would define themselves as middle class. They attracted a larger share of the more leftish former Lib Dem vote than Labour did, whilst also attracting a substantial number of students and university graduates who either had voted Labour in the past or, in the case of first time voters, might well have done so in another historical conjuncture.

One of the most worrying trends from a socialist perspective is the size and nature of the UKIP vote (over four million, 13%). Whilst there is obviously a sizeable chunk of that vote that resembles its leadership group, coming from the Europhobic and often racist Tory right in political terms and the petty bourgeoisie in class terms, UKIP has made substantial inroads into working class former Labour voters, in the North and Midlands particularly. These people rightly feel that Labour has turned its back on the working class and, resentful about low wages, unemployment, the lack of social housing and other related issues, want to hit out at the political establishment. The explanation for their plight that UKIP offers them in terms of blaming foreigners (whether the European Union or immigrants or both) is a lot simpler than any anti-capitalist analysis. In many ways it is only a more extreme version of the explanations already offered by the major parties and the tabloid press.

I remain slightly sceptical about the theory that the massive media publicity given to UKIP is a conscious ruling class ploy to turn the working class protest vote in a direction that does not threaten the system as a whole. But nobody can doubt that the constant TV and radio appearances on programmes like Question Time and Any Questions has brought them into the mainstream of public debate. If the left cannot win over some of the former Labour voters in UKIP’s following, there is a danger of a force roughly equivalent to the French Front National or the Italian Lega Nord becoming a permanent feature of the British political landscape.
Greek Appeal

At the time of writing the economic situation in Greece is reaching a critical phase. The Troika are exerting tremendous force on the Syriza led administration to capitulate to austerity by withholding agreed loans that would allow the government to pay its bills. Exposing where the debt comes from and who gains from the interest payments won't in itself cause the onerous debt to be written off, but it may illuminate to the masses all over Europe the corruption and power of a small number of very wealthy people. Syriza have held firm so far but the Greek working class will require practical solidarity if they have to take to the streets again.

**APPEAL TO SUPPORT THE RESISTING GREEK PEOPLE and its TRUTH COMMISSION ON PUBLIC DEBT. FOR THE PEOPLES' RIGHT TO AUDIT PUBLIC DEBT**

To the people of Europe and the whole world!

To all the men and women who reject the politics of austerity and are not willing to pay a public debt which is strangling us and which was agreed to behind our backs and against our interests.

We signatories to this appeal stand by the Greek people who, through their vote at the election of 25th January 2015, became the first population in Europe and in the Northern hemisphere to have rejected the politics of austerity imposed to pay an alleged public debt which was negotiated by those on top without the people and against the people. At the same time we consider that the setting up of the Greek Public Debt Truth Commission at the initiative of the president of the Greek Parliament constitutes a historic event, of crucial importance not only for the Greek people but also for the people of Europe and the whole world!

Indeed, the Truth Commission of the Greek Parliament, composed of volunteer citizens from across the globe, is destined to be emulated in other countries. First, because the debt problem is a scourge that plagues most of Europe and the world, and secondly because there are millions and millions of citizens who are rightly posing basic and fundamental questions about this debt:

"What happened to the money that made up this loan? What were the conditions attached to it? How much interest has been paid, at what rate? How much capital has been repaid? How was the debt allowed to accumulate without benefiting the people? Where did the capital go? What was it used for? How much was diverted, by whom, and how was this done?"

All these questions will be subjected to rigorous analysis by the commission, which has an official mandate to "gather all information relevant to the emergence and disproportionate increase in public debt, and to subject the data to scientific scrutiny in order to determine what part of that debt can be identified as illegitimate and illegal, odious or unsustainable, during the period of the Memoranda, from May 2010 to January 2015 as well as in the preceding years.

It must also publish precise information – which must be accessible to all citizens, provide the evidence to back up public declarations, raise awareness among the Greek population, the international community and international public opinion, and finally draw up arguments and demands calling for cancellation of the debt.

We consider that it is the most basic democratic right of every citizen to demand clear and precise answers to these questions. We also consider that refusal to reply constitutes a denial of democracy and transparency on the part of those at the top who invented and use the "debt-system" to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. And even worse: we consider that by jealously keeping for themselves the monopoly right to decide the fate of society, those at the top deprive the overwhelming majority of citizens not only of their right to make decisions but above all of the right to take their destiny and the fate of humanity into their hands!
This is why we are launching the following urgent appeal to all citizens, social movements, ecological and feminist networks and movements, trade unions and political organizations that reject this ever less democratic and humane neo-liberal Europe:

- Show your solidarity with the Greek resistance by supporting in action the Greek Public Debt Truth Commission and its work in identifying that part of the Greek public debt which is illegal, illegitimate, odious and/or unsustainable.

- Defend it against the outrageous attacks it has been subjected to from all those forces in Greece and the rest of the world who have an interest in keeping the truth about the "debt-system" hidden from view.

- Actively take part in the citizen debt audits that are being developed throughout Europe and elsewhere.

- Share your support and solidarity on your social networks, since this support and international solidarity is the only way to thwart the ruling powers' plan to suffocate Greece and the people who are fighting against our common enemy: the politics of austerity and the debt that is strangling us!

We are confronted by an experienced adversary, united, well-coordinated, armed with extraordinary powers and absolutely determined to pursue its offensive against every one of us to the bitter end: we who constitute the overwhelming majority of our societies. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of resisting separately, each in his own corner. So let us unite our forces in a vast movement of solidarity with the Greek resistance and support for the Truth Commission of the Greek Parliament, multiplying such debt audit commissions everywhere where that is possible. Because the struggle of the Greek people is our struggle and their victory will be our victory.

**Our unity is our only strength.**

1. Immanuel Wallerstein, sociologist and world analyst, USA
2. Noam Chomsky, MIT, USA
3. Ken Loach, film and television director, UK
4. Hugo Blanco Galdos, movimiento campesino indigeno, Peru
5. Etienne Balibar, philosophe, France
6. Frei Betto, writer, activist, liberation theologian, Brazil.
7. Leonardo Boff, Professor Emeritus of Ethics, Philosophy of Religion, and Ecology, Rio de Janeiro State University, Brazil.
8. Gaillot Jacques, France, Évêque
10. Padre Alex Zanotelli- missionatio comboniano (Napoli)
11. Ada Colau, mayoral candidate, Barcelona en Comú
12. Susan George, honorary president of Attac-France, and many hundreds more.

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**The Yemen - Late April 2015**

'They' murder with impunity
And drop their bombs with accuracy,
Guided by the latest tech,
Their targets to be burnt and wrecked.
Ordered: destroy their infrastructure,
Another failing state for sure!
Another Libya, another Afghanistan,
Another Serbia, another former sovereign land.
Add Syria, Somalia to the list
Plus war in Iraq which still persists.
Why, oh why, is all this so?
To furnish profits for the foe -
The global rich who want their spoil.
All sovereign states they must despoil.
Divide and conquer, their cardinal rule,
They act decisively and so cruel.
Mass murder is only 'collateral damage'
As the bombs rain down, producing carnage.

Now we are told that a new Bentley
Will be gifted to each pilot free,
Suitable prizes for cowardly acts,
But they're 'brave' scribe the media hacks.
So, when will we have a Revolution,
A time for Peace, End Persecution?
Crony capitalism would then be banned
And 'Jerusalems built in every land'.
On, 'to Dream perchance to Dream'.
I watch TV and want to scream.
Is the human race Armageddon bound?
My youthful dreams cast like
blood stained rain in desert sand.

*Pete Relph*
ARGENTINA
PIQUETEROS & STRUGGLE

This is a bulletin from the Agrupacion Villera Piquetera (AVP), an Argentinian political organisation who sent a delegate to address the AGS National Committee last year

ORGANISING WORKERS TO STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALIST DECOMPOSITION, AGAINST BOURGEOIS GOVERNMENT AND FOR WORKERS REVOLUTION

AVP was founded in 2010 after the occupation of Indioamericano Park in Buenos Aires, Argentina (more than 13,000 people occupied a park in the most important struggle for popular housing in the last decade), with the aim of grouping employed and unemployed workers to struggle for their claims. We oppose sociological views about unemployed workers as ‘outside the working class’. What defines a ‘piquetero’ is to be part of a class that struggles against capitalist oppression and fight against attempts of the bourgeoisie to destroy workplaces and neighbourhoods. Organizing and fighting, uniting employed and unemployed workers, we re-unite what the capitalists try to separate in order to defeat.

AVP is founded in the tradition of the piquetero movement and the Argentinazo (2001 uprising), which organize assemblies in the neighbourhoods in order to struggle for jobs for those who are unemployed, houses for those who cannot afford rent anymore, improve conditions in the neighbourhood (schools, hospitals, sewer and drinking water supply services, etc). Piquetero movement is highly politicized and linked with left parties as it has a direct confrontation with political power and has carried out the most important struggles in the last decades.

On 2010, the Indioamericano struggle was opposed to Macri’s (mayor of Buenos Aires, leader of PRO and probable next Argentine president) and Cristina Kirchner governments, whom unite to send police and Gendarmerie to clear the Park. This fight was part of a national trend of land occupation in claim of popular housing all around the country.

This is the expression of a very clear situation: the dollars earned by exports (mainly soybeans), were invested in real estate, boosting prices of houses in every city and turning almost impossible to a worker family to rent a house. In the last 10 years, population in slums (villas) rise more than 50% in Argentina, but in Buenos Aires the augmentation was 156% and nowadays 1 in 10 inhabitants lives in a slum.

As part of the Indioamericano struggle, the widow of one the victims of police and para-police repression (three people were killed: Emilio Canaviri Álvarez, Rosemary Churapuña and Bernardo Salgueiro) organized in AVP and after more demonstrations and a camp in 9 de Julio (a main avenue in Buenos Aires), she got a house to be paid for in small instalments.

Since 2012, we built also political collaboration with comrades of Movimiento Clasista y Combativo and Movimiento 20 de Diciembre, the two most important piquetero organizations in Chaco (northern province in Argentina), which were expelled from Polo Obrero (piquetero movement leaded by Partido Obrero) in 2011.

In 2014, we relaunched the AVP based in common work since former year with one assembly of Polo Obrero, which was also expelled as part of it anti-piquetero turn, and comrades who participated in Indioamericano occupation and were founders of AVP. This was not by chance, but it was related to the social and political situation.

Inflation has accelerated (it is 40% yearly, hitting working class families income) and layoffs spread all around the industry and even more in informal sector. In 2013, fighting against the right-wing government of PRO, we stopped the closing of a popular kitchen in Buenos Aires (which is organized by the assembly with state supply) and in 2014 we achieved the opening of 2 more: today almost 300 people have a daily meal in one of the AVP popular kitchens.

During 2014, with other organizations we struggle demanding jobs for unemployed people and we stopped outsourcing of as state workers in Buenos Aires. In December, we organized our first Congreso Villero Piquetero with a hundred comrades from seven different neighbourhoods and voted on several initiatives. Today we have regular political intervention in three neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires while we also develop political activity in the factories and schools nearby, and organize cultural and social activities.

We believe that this is not a political situation particular to Argentina but an experience that should be applied in other countries. It is rooted in the global capitalist tendency to bankruptcy, dissolution of social relations, unemployment and decomposition, which has to be confronted with conscious political organization and workers struggle.

We expect that piquetero movement in Argentina will help workers in Turkey, in Europe, in USA and every country to organize and rebuild power of working class against bourgeois attacks.

Lionel Zivals, Tendencia Piquetera Revolucionaria
The media has a huge impact on what the public focus on and how they react to an issue. This is catastrophic during an election. It isn’t surprising because where else can we gain topical information? It is written or spoken so it must be true, surely? Not everyone knows that the only thing to be believed in a newspaper is the date - and even that needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.

The media want to sell newspapers and stories. They are happy to contradict themselves and will mostly use anything deemed newsworthy – just think how many times Madeleine McCann or Diana Spencer are dragged onto a front page after all these years. Editorial integrity is compromised time and time again because of the ‘old boys’ public school network bringing pressure to bear, nepotism and sheer greed. For example, HSBC advertise in the Telegraph – a very lucrative deal bringing in the newspaper millions of pounds. Strangely the Telegraph didn’t report on the HSBC tax evasion scandal for days.

There is a Press Complaints Commission – now called IPSO – but it takes weeks and weeks to deal with a complaint and then apologies get published in an insignificant part of the paper, or not at all.

So how did the media influence the public during this election? It seemed to me to be all about making people afraid: afraid of immigration, of economic failure, of Scotland controlling the UK, of the Europe Union making ‘our’ decisions, …

The media barons have their own agenda so they make sure their stories support the party of their choice. It was reported that the chairman of the Telegraph group assured David Cameron that he would do whatever it took to help the Tories’ election campaign.

You may have noticed that Nigel Farage got a huge amount of media coverage. He had massive donations from the owner of the Express and the son-in-law of Rupert Murdoch.

Alex Salmond is a good friend of Rupert Murdoch. The SNP’s Nicola Sturgeon scorned this connection, but kept quiet when she was promoted by the Scottish edition of the Sun. She didn’t want to turn down good publicity and Murdoch wanted Labour to fail.

Then there are the opinion polls – I have never met anyone who has taken part in one – but they are listened to and are thought to sway the tactical voter.

What this all boils down to is that the media barons are unprincipled and greedy, just like the majority of politicians. If any individual reporter sticks to their guns, heaven help their careers, because they will be victimised, bullied and often simply fired.

Arguable our bent media are one of Britain’s biggest political problems.

MEDIA & DEMOCRACY
by Juliet Boddington
Climate Pointers
Bryn Glover

First a welcome change to an earlier report. A couple of years ago we highlighted the existence of vast amounts of methane locked up in the permafrost of the Arctic tundra. The fear was that as the globe warms, this methane would be released, and as a far more significant green-house gas than carbon dioxide, this would accelerate warming out of control. After a number of further scientific studies, a new growing consensus is that the release will take place, but over a rather longer timescale than first thought. Also, methane has a much shorter life in the atmosphere than CO₂ and so smaller releases can be better tolerated.

The problem with such changes to earlier statements is that opponents – particularly those with no real awareness of scientific method – will seize upon the change and gleefully exclaim that, “They can’t make their minds up”. Or that “Scientists cannot agree”. But this is how real science works. It gathers all the facts it can, and then it infers the best explanation for those facts. It then devises ways of confirming such inferences, and if in the process it unearths new facts then the only valid, honest thing to do is to find new explanations that fit the new facts. True science does not start with a stated belief, and then highlight only observations which support it.

The Western United States are currently going through unprecedented extremes of weather. California, Texas and Oklahoma have just come through some of the longest droughts they have known with California actually contemplating legislation to ration water usage. The droughts of the latter two States have just been broken with what the Governor of Texas describes as the biggest floods they have ever seen. The simple cause of these wild aberrations is the South Pacific ocean phenomenon known as El Niño, as reported in this column a few issues ago. El Niño is a naturally recurring event (it happens about once a decade or so) but in recent times it has happened not only more frequently, but with much greater severity. Put simply, it is an unusually large flow of warm water across the central Pacific which hits the Americas and then splits North and South. Its other consequences are the droughts and floods in Australia and drastic changes to the Asian monsoon rains. The simple reason for the change is that the oceans of the world are now significantly warmer than they were 50 years ago. It frankly beggars belief that the climate-change deniers of the world still fail to accept that.

The recently elected right wing government of Australia abolished the department concerned with looking at policies to ameliorate climate-change. Being principally concerned with costs, perhaps they will pay some heed to a report from the Charles Darwin University which has placed costings on the losses to the Australian economy due to heat stress in workers. The report authors investigated nearly 2000 workers and found an average of nearly one week a year of absenteeism for that reason. On top of that, many of those investigated reported reduced productivity due to the same cause. Cutting through to the last line of the numbers in the report, the conclusion is that heat stress costs that country at least 0.4% of its GDP. That may sound quite small, but the cost of limiting net carbon emissions to zero by 2050 is put at 0.1-0.2% of GDP. Heat stress is only going to get worse as the world continues to warm. Surely that should make sense to those cost-cutting Australian Tories.

Forget about 2°C of global warming. For years scientists have warned that 2°C was a rough guide to the sort of rise within which we might stand some chance of adapting our ways of life to cope. Of course, as they feared, politicians and others immediately began to regard this not as a limit but as a target. Science has never said that 2°C was a safe level – science has consistently said that it must not on any account be exceeded. However, the message has changed after years of political dithering and avoidance of reality. The general consensus amongst those who know what they are talking about is that 2°C is now no more than a forlorn hope and that by the end of this century, we must develop strategies for dealing with rises of maybe twice that level. But tell that to politicians and they simply breathe with relief. “Oh well”, they say, “We have 85 years to worry about that.” Tell them that one of the necessities may be the relocation of London because rising sea levels will inundate the entire Thames basin, and they will dismiss you as a crank. How do we get through to them?
Letters and E-mails

The Elections 2015 issue was, as always, informative, lively and worth reading. However I have to take issue with a couple of the articles.

The first, I'm sorry to say, was Mike Davies's editorial, in which he writes that, 'The so-called Green Party concentrates on the environment while largely ignoring capitalism'. If he really believes that he cannot have been giving much attention to what the Green Party, of which I'm a member and (as far as age and infirmity permit) an activist, has been saying and doing. Can he really accuse Caroline Lucas of being indifferent to war, poverty, and the Tory campaign against the NHS and other social values?

Agreed, the Green Party does not have an analysis of capitalism such as the AGS does, but it is intensely alive to its detrimental impact across the social universe, and campaigns vigorously against its malignity for what it does to people as well to the environment. The last two issues of our publication Green World, have highlighted the campaign against TTIP, housing, planning, Palestinian rights, the NHS, human rights. Here in the North East our members have been involved, as party members, in various campaigns against marketisation and social blight, and been among citizens confronting on the streets the racists of the BNP and EDL. In the election statement of one of our Sunderland general election candidates, nearly all her bullet points relate to social issues. There were some signs recently of bridges being built between the Green Party and the AGS in the North West, it would be better if that were to continue.

I'm afraid my other criticism is directed against an aspect of Mike's other article, 'Sham democracy', though generally, that was enlightening and helpful. He argues that the ruling power is well aware of the impending climatic disaster, but is pursuing a strategy not of averting it but merely planning to survive it as the ruling class. This is an innovative idea but is well worth taking seriously. My criticism however is that the article tends to treat the capitalist ruling class as a unified entity with a single will, whereas in reality it too is riven with hostilities and contradictions; and therefore the article is too easy to parody as an example of conspiracy theory.

Willie Thompson, Sunderland

Mike Davies replies

I welcome Willie Thompson’s thoughtful criticism of my contributions in the “Election Special” issue.

On the Green Party, may I point out that nowhere did I write or imply that “Caroline Lucas (is) indifferent to war, poverty, and the Tory campaign against the NHS and other social values”. Nor do I believe she is.

However I would certainly defend the statement I did make, that the Green Party “concentrates on the environment while largely ignoring capitalism”. Indeed, when I asked Caroline Lucas in person why she said little about capitalism, her response was “We must solve the environmental crisis first and then worry about capitalism”.

By contrast, the AGS view is that the environmental crisis cannot be solved under capitalism: both problems must be addressed together.

I agree with Willie's second paragraph. He says “the Green Party does not have an analysis of capitalism”. Quite. He goes on to say, quite correctly, that the GP does address “its detrimental impact” and its “malignity”, and gives examples. To sum up that paragraph, the GP does address some of the effects of capitalism (as do all parties, even the Tories, to a limited extent) but not the issue of capitalism itself as a system.

As important as the theory is the practice. I was cheered by Willie’s reference to the North West.

The AGS has cooperated with elements of the GP, and others, in organising the Ecosocialism event. Also the GP has worked there with other organisations, backing a GP candidate. AGS members will also be aware that in Epping Forest, the AGS refrained from running a candidate itself and chose instead to campaign for a good, left GP candidate. However, I fear these are exceptions that prove the rule.

Nationally the GP has consistently taken an arrogant and ultra-sectarian line, refusing even to respond to AGS approaches on avoiding electoral clashes. The same is true locally in my own area, Leeds. The AGS been writing to the GP for a dozen years with the same response, or lack of it. I hope I am wrong and that the North West heralds a new GP attitude.

Willie’s second point was on “treating the ruling class as a unified entity”. I agree that could be misleading, but I think the criticism a little harsh. Of course the “ruling class” is a conglomerate of varying interests, views, loyalties and policies. How could it be otherwise? However, as the very use of the term “ruling class” implies, it - or its majority - also acts to a significant degree in concert.

Mike Davies
TV REVIEW

The Secrets of Sports Direct

Dispatches, Channel 4 (27/4/15)

Review by Jim Smith

It has been well documented how the Capitalists rob workers as a class using the money trick of wages to hide the full extent of the exploitation of labour.

This programme concentrates on how an individual capitalist can rip off customers as well as exploiting its workforce in ways that civilised society would think were left behind in the Victorian age. (Capitalists do of course rob one another too. This is called business, but it is not included in this particular programme.)

What we see is various tricks employed to lure customers into shops and convince them they are getting a bargain. Plastering the shop front with “Closing Down Sale” notices appears to do the trick - except often the shop is not really closing down, or it is just moving a few doors to another premises.

Then give a recommended retail price on an items label crossed out with a lower price inserted. Except that the higher price is a total fabrication. It was shown that the goods were imported with both prices on the tag! Brands bought by Sports Direct were used to exaggerate discounts as the items can be of any quality and the brand name completely gives a false impression of quality.

The most shocking part of the programme was when a reporter went undercover to work in the distribution depot. These are not well paid jobs but they are needed by the workers as there is little else about. Bullying is rife. Most likely the supervisors are bullied by managers and the managers bullied by the senior managers. The pace of the work is relentless and the monitoring is frightening in its intensity. There is constant pressure to do more and more and if it’s not done you are shown the door. Failure to meet non-negotiated targets means a reprimand. So does being sick, spending too long going to the loo, talking to your colleagues etc. Six strikes, as reprimands are called and you are out.

This is a huge workplace employing five thousand people. The vast majority work for one of two employment agencies. Clearly the employment of two agencies means the company can play one against the other.

There are no unions to defend workers - and this in an area once rich in mining and heavy industry where Trade Unions stood tall.

Green Socialist Journal is always pleased to receive Letters, E-mails, Articles, and Book, Film, Play or TV reviews. Let us have your comment, criticism or praise on material we carry. Drop us a line, short or long (although too long may be cut)!
On March 24\textsuperscript{th} 2015 an aeroplane carrying 150 people crashed into a mountainside in the French Alps with the co-pilot at the controls. It seems that the co-pilot had mental health issues that he had hidden from his employer and colleagues. Investigations are continuing and it's always unwise to assume without the full facts. Nevertheless the crash has prompted a lot of articles in the media about stress in modern society and I was in the process of writing something on this theme when the disaster happened.

I was prompted to write when I read that one in four young teenage girls suffer from stress and one in three people will suffer from a mental illness during their lifetime. Clearly there is a huge range of mental disorders. Some are about coping with the demands of modern life and others are severe personality disorders. Buy why should these type of illnesses appear to be far more prevalent today compared to past generations?

I'm not going to go into detail of all the types of mental health disorders. Those suffering from such a condition have been found throughout all societies in history and have been treated sometimes with care and other times cruelly.

What I want to ask is this: could today's western lifestyle of diffusion of class (relatively, and only on the surface), of no longer one generation working at the same workplace as the previous generation, of mass world transport, of less time spent at work (either by choice or enforced), of mass cheap(ish) leisure industries, the internet, modern advertising, fashion, reality TV shows etc play a part. Could these provoke at times feelings in many people that perhaps in their lives they are missing out on what others have, or that their lives are not as perfect as the magazines suggest they should be. You know, articles like “For your perfect Christmas” or “For your perfect wedding” etc. Or simply that they are not meeting the expectations of those around them.

Women, it appears, suffer most, but it may be that men do not seek help. I ask too if a huge part is the lack of control in somebody's life. This may apply to those who do not have the choices that those with a good education have and find themselves in workplaces where the pressure is crushing but with little job satisfaction, such as maybe call centre work or production line work. In earlier eras society was far more rigid and the choices we have today did not exist. Now when things do not appear to fulfil our hopes then we blame ourselves rather than society. In the past too, Trade Unions would campaign to improve workplace conditions and this would mean negotiation and representation. Today, management rule so tightly and many workers cower with fear over losing their job if they take up a grievance. Low pay traps people in poor housing. The campaigning zeal of an earlier Labour Party to improve things is long gone. People get depressed about their situation and are told by the establishment and wealthy that it's all their own fault and they need to work harder.

Then there are the demands made of those in decent jobs by career progression. It seems time spent in the office is so important - to be seen to be spending extra time in the office by one's superiors even if output is unaffected. Student debt, mortgage debt, car loans etc all pile on the pressure of keeping a job, and there is no safety net today if things go wrong. These debt's act like fetters in shackling somebody to a treadmill. The collective cohesion of large workplaces, tight-knit communities and social gatherings has been largely lost.

The speed of life for many is tremendous compared to previous generations. Cars mean long distance commuting, adding so much to the working day. Instant communication means usually an instant response is expected. Special trips need to be made by car to the supermarket, now no longer in the centre of town, to the gym, to the doctors, to the dentist, to the school - on roads made dangerous by fast moving traffic. And the stress of sitting in a traffic jam when there is so much to do!

The AGS says personal wellbeing should have top priority for any government. This means that much work we do in order to make the very rich even wealthier can be phased out and work in general can be spread around. Safety nets for when things go wrong should be reinstated so nobody should fear losing their home and financial penury. Democratic planning should aim to provide amenities, work and homes in a local area. The profit motive should be replaced by the planning-for-need motive.

I welcome other reader's thoughts and expertise in this field.

\textbf{Is Capitalism ruining our Mental Health?} by John Sillett