



Anti-Fracking: a conservative protest for austerity

by Mark Iddon

Anti fracking protestors are determined to stop drilling equipment from getting to a fracking site in Preston Road near Blackpool that was awarded planning permission in October 2016. According to the '**Frack Off**' anti fracking campaign group's website, protestors see fracking as the greatest threat to their way of life and have called on the public to block roads and join their protests.

Fracking or 'Hydraulic Fracturing' is the process of drilling wells deep, 1- 1.5 km, into the ground and pumping water, with lubrication chemicals, to release the shale gas deposits. The government sees the potential to create energy, jobs and economic growth and is supportive of the process. Environmentalists use the words toxic and pollutants to emphasise the potential hazards.

Caudrilla, the company intending to extract the shale gas are aware of the environmental issues and have tried to reassure their critics by elaborate videos on their website. The videos show the care and attention they take to avoid spillage on site, with non-porous ground membrane that can collect any spillage, a 4m high acoustic fence around the site and they have set up an e-portal so that the monitoring of environmental issues are accessible to the general public. Environmentalists are not convinced by Caudrilla's efforts as in their eyes this is big business extracting energy and resources from the earth for financial gain with a complicit Tory Government giving its backing.

There is no doubt that Caudrilla want to make a profit through the provision of energy, however, there is a potential problem storing up of a shortfall in energy production as the coal fired power stations reach the end of their life and no viable alternative plants being in place. Whilst there has been significant investment in wind turbines, and solar panels are increasingly used on housing developments, the so called renewable energy methods may not meet the demand that we will surely need in the not too distant future.

Traditionally, those on the left of the political spectrum were opposed to the exploitative aspects of capitalism and organised themselves through trade unions to fight for better pay and conditions. Antagonism between the working class and the owners of the means of production may well have been more explicit, but understood, that the products of labour along with the housing and cities, that were built to enable industrialisation, also benefit the working classes in providing employment and then schools, hospitals and transport networks etc. It was understood to be quite natural to make use of the earth's resources for the benefit of humankind.

It is only in recent years that pessimism towards human endeavour has come to be the predominant sentiment. Instead of wanting to improve the material conditions and prosperity of all, we have been bombarded with the message that we should consume less and reduce,

reuse and recycle. This is austerity politics of the most conservative kind but is dressed up and presented as if it is some kind of radical fightback against capitalism. That is why we are seeing strange alliances of farmers, landowners and the countryside middle classes alongside, alleged, anti capitalist protestors. Even senior policemen and the clergy have expressed sympathy for the anti fracking lobby.

It may well be that if Caudrilla were not challenged to the degree of scrutiny that they have recently faced that they may not have been so conscientious in taking precautions against environmental damage. The real issue though, is the pessimism towards human endeavour that is really the obstacle preventing economic growth and progress for improved living conditions for all.