The Plebs News

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Austerity is killing us and destroying the future for our children

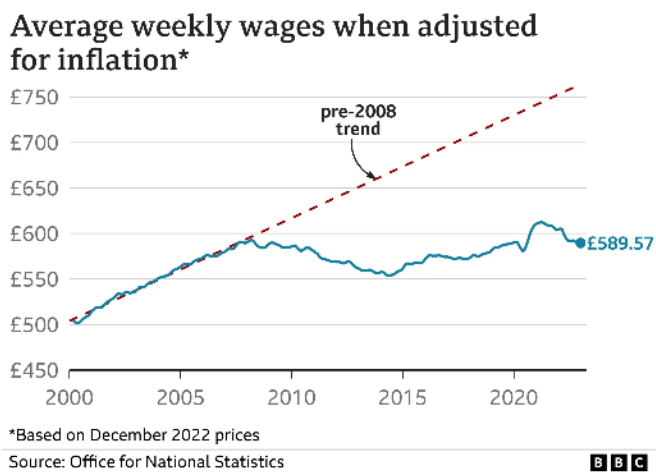
It is easy to think of the everyday damage caused by "austerity" inflicted over the last 13 years. The coalition Government's brag of ridding the country of the National Debt seems like a long distant memory. Money printing through Quantative Easing saved the banks after the financial crash and more money printing got employers through the pandemic. But the idea of raising wages and living standards is condemned as inflationary despite the evidence that wages had nothing to do with it.

For working class people of the UK the pain has been long standing and immediate and for the country its infrastructure meant to protect our children's future is falling apart. The share of GDP devoted to wages has fallen as a percentage of GDP since 1975 with the TUC estimating the average worker has lost £10k. Almost 11,000 people in England were hospitalised with malnutrition last year, as doctors warned that the cost of living crisis has also led to a rise in "Victorian" illnesses such as scurvy and rickets. Provisional data newly obtained by The Times Health Commission under freedom of information laws reveal that cases of malnutrition have more than doubled in a decade and have quadrupled since 2007/8. Poor health exacerbated by poor housing and a lack of affordable shelter. The Uk now has more foodbanks than McDonalds and they operate more as an arm of the State than as charities.

As well as this day to day poverty the country and itself are slowly falling apart undermined by lack of investment, privatisation and corruption. Ask anyone working in the public services about their day they will tell you of crumbling hospitals and schools, creaking railways and airports and utilities more spectacular for there profits than service. Alongside this services we used to expect like Legal Aid, Special Educational Needs education and Adult Education have disappeared or limp along with little funding and no vision for the future.

Even vanity projects are doomed to failure with HS2 now 15 years behind schedule and paused and projects like Crossrail billions over budget.

Plebs News has highlighted some of the failures and scandals over the recent months: Grenfell, Covid and pointless wars, economic and military. The question is can we find a better way and we feature articles by people who offer radical solutions. The 1945 situation was similar and Labour won the election on a programme of **Building a New Jerusalem. As socialists can we do the same in the 21st century.**



Bank of England must 'create recession' to fight high inflation, Hunt advisor says, as mortgage rates rise again – as it happened

Graeme Wearden- The Guardian

Hunt economic advisor: Bank of England must create recession to curb inflation.

The Bank of England must "create a recession" to curb inflation, according to Karen Ward, chief market strategist EMEA at JP Morgan Asset Management.

Ward, who is also a member of chancellor Jeremy Hunt's economic advisory council, told Radio 4's Today programme there are "certainly signs" that a price-wage spiral is emerging, which the central bank "has to nip in the bud".

Speaking after inflation remained stubbornly high at 8.7% in May, Ward explained:

"The difficulty for the Bank of England – I mean, no-one envies them their job at the moment – is they have to therefore create a recession.

"They have to create uncertainty and frailty, because it's only when companies feel nervous about the future that they will think 'Well, maybe I won't put through that price rise', or workers, when they're a little bit less confident about their job, think 'Oh, I won't push my boss for that higher pay'.

"It's that weakness in activity which eventually gets rid of inflation."

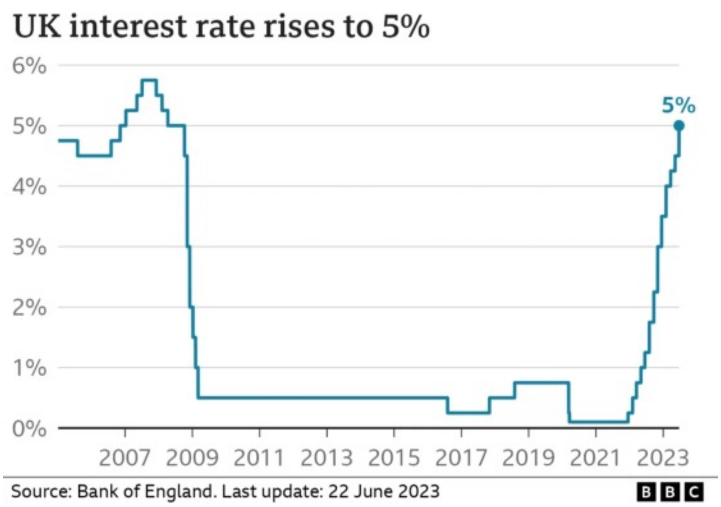
Ward is also a member of The Times's shadow monetary policy committee, a group of experts who are today calling for the actual MPC to raise interest rates by half a point tomorrow, to 5%.

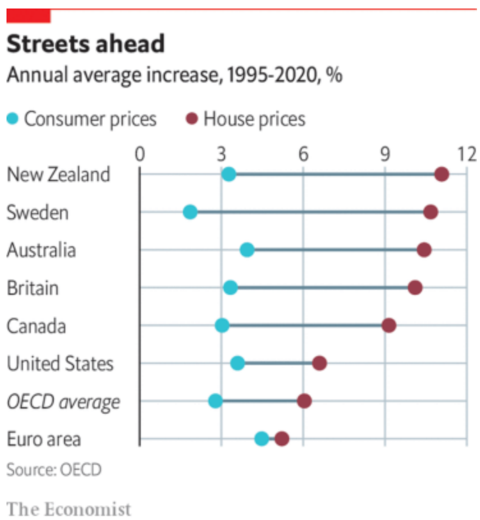
Ward argued that the Bank of England's "earlier hesitancy" has put it in an uncomfortable spot.

With her shadow MPC hat on, Ward told The Times:

"It hoped for too long that inflation would go away on its own accord and underestimated the second-round effects now evident in accelerating wage growth."

"It did not adhere to the "stitch in time saves nine" principle and now will have to raise rates by more and cause a deeper downturn to bring inflation back to target."





Why don't rising house prices count towards inflation?

Property values have increased much faster than other costs of living but dont count in CPI

The Economist

The way to cure inflation is to cut the Bank of England base interest rate

Richard Murphy-

We face a cost of living crisis created by events outside the UK triggering rates of inflation that many in this country have never witnessed before. In the face of these rising prices the Bank of England has, inexplicably, increased the price of money itself. This is bizarre. A thread……

For reasons that are very hard to explain, the Bank of England, which is wholly owned and controlled by the UK government, is claimed to be independent of it. That is not true.

The law that supposedly established this independent status (The Bank of England Act, 1998) did not do so. It contained a clause that always permitted the government to overrule the Bank. As a result the Bank always does what the government wants.

What the Bank has, in that case, done for the government over the last eighteen months or so is massively increase the cost of money in the UK. They did this by increasing the base interest rate set by the Bank from 0.1% to 4.5%.

This rate is expected to rise further this week. A rate of 4.75% is most likely come Thursday. It is thought the rate will now reach 5%, or more.

The interest rate increases that the Bank has put in place are intended to achieve one purpose. That is to reduce the spending power of people in the UK. That is because the Bank (and government) believe that people in this country have too much money to spend.

This belief is based on theories on the cause of inflation developed in the 1970s. It was presumed then that inflation was caused by wages rising faster than prices. The excess spending power that this created then dragged prices in its wake, resulting in inflation.

Whether this actually happened in the 1970s is open to debate. What is clear is that, excepting the case of a minority of quite wealthy and high-earning people in this country, this situation does not exist today.

Evidence is very clear that, again excepting the case of a minority of quite wealthy and high-earning people in this country, real pay has for most people in this country been stagnant for a long time, whilst for public sector workers it has been in free fall.

So, again excepting the wealthy and high earners, pay in this country has not and as a matter of fact could not have driven inflation, and nor can it do so for a long time to come because most wage earners have neither the income or savings to force prices up.

So why have we got inflation? The answer is that we reopened after Covid too quickly, resulting in those with wealth seeking to spend on high-ticket items when supply chains to the UK and within it were disrupted.

That pushed prices for some goods and services up for a while. Cars were impacted heavily. So was the cost of new kitchens and building work in general. That situation is, however, now long gone.

In the place of this short-term, and entirely self-correcting inflation, there has come inflation from another source. That is the inflation that has come as a result of war in Ukraine.

But, again, and quite remarkably, most of that inflation has now gone. Wholesale food and shipping prices have now returned to pre-war levels. Gas and petrol prices have fallen drastically from their peak. The underlying causes of price war-based rises have now gone.

But inflation has not. There must be other reasons for that. There are, actually, three.

The first is Brexit. It has created continuing supply chain disruptions and has imposed considerable extra costs that are fuelling continued inflation. This fact cannot be avoided.

Second, there is profiteering. Banks, oil companies and many companies in food supply chains are very clearly increasing their absolute levels of profit, and their profit rates. This is not true for all companies, but it is for many.

The third reason for inflation is that the Bank of England has pushed up the cost of money, and is clearly intent on continuing to do so. This is seriously inflationary, in itself. That needs explanation.

The Bank of England pushes up the interest rate in an attempt to reduce the demand for goods and services. Its logic is that if borrowers pay more in interest cost they will have less to spend. That means demand in the economy should fall, and so, it thinks, should prices.

There are some massive assumptions in that logic. The first is that most people are borrowers. In other words, sufficient people are impacted for demand to fall enough. This is not necessarily true: fewer younger people have mortgages now, for example.

Second, they assume interest costs are not themselves reflected in inflation calculations, but that's wrong. A lot of borrowing costs are now hidden in other price. Take the cost of car rental contracts as an example. 90% of cars are leased, and that cost is in inflation.

Third, rent is a massive cost for many people. In the 1970s it is unlikely that this was insignificant. But now rent is 40% of the cost of living of renters in London. And rent paid is heavily related to interest costs: landlords pass their costs on. Interest is inflationary, then.

Fourth, landlords are not alone in passing on interest costs. Many businesses are financed by debt and pay a lot in interest. The bank seems to assume markets set prices and so businesses can't pass their costs one, but large ones (most especially) can, and do.

In that case, increases in interest are inflationary, yet again.

And let's not pretend that people who have their disposable income pushed down don't try to recover that lost income. We know that they do, even if the Bank of England has been quite clear in their instruction to them not to do so.

And employers then pass on wage rises, even if (as in most cases) the increase in wage costs is less than the inflation rate reflected in business prices. So, interest rate increases reinforce inflation, yet again.

And then we shouldn't forget that some people are made better off by interest rate rises. Many savers see their income go up as a result, and most of them will not be borrowers. So they have more to spend as a result of the Bank's actions.

What is more, because savers also have money in reserve they can dig into those funds to pay increased prices if they still want to spend - and because of their increased income, plus the expectation that prices will only increase if they don't do so now - that's what they do.

I could keep going. My point is that all the assumptions that the Bank makes on the impact of interest rate rises appear to be based on what economics text books say, and the relationship between economics textbooks and reality ceased a long time ago.

It is my suggestion that the Bank of England has not only got their assumptions wrong, they are so blinkered that they cannot see that it is their own interest rate rises that are now stopping inflation falling by creating an upward inflationary cycle.

And we do know the Bank has got their assumptions wrong. They have, for example, already had to abandon their models for forecasting inflation because, as they have admitted, they simply do not work.

Getting your model wrong is one thing. Getting your policy wrong is something else when that policy has real-world implications and they are the opposite of what you intend. That, I suggest is what is happening right now. Interest rate rises are creating inflation.

This would not matter if everyone (businesses, households and international economies) suffered inflation at the same rate. But they don't. Inflation is making most people in the UK poorer right now, and some a lot richer. And it is making us poorer compared to other countries.

The Bank of England is, then, undertaking a massive redistribution of income and wealth right now at cost to those on lower incomes. But also the country as a whole. And this matters as well.

Let me just deal with the income impacts. When those without savings and who borrow see their incomes fall the Bank of England is right: they do eventually spend less. They have no choice. They pay the essentials and hope to survive.

What they cut out are the fun things in life. The trouble is that going out, buying a beer, dressing up and so on all create lots of employment. All of that is under threat. And so even those not feeling the direct impact of borrowing costs see their incomes under threat.

This is a doom loop spiral that in economics is called a multiplier effect. In the macroeconomy if a person saves then someone else does not get as much income as they hoped for, so they too save, and on the process goes. The impact can be big. It creates recessions.

And this downward doom loop multiplier effect amongst those with lower income is not compensated for by those with larger incomes. Although they might have more income as a result of growing interest rates they save some of it. It's because they save that they are wealthy.

What that means is that the wealthy might spend more but they do not spend enough to compensate for the downward spiral those on lower incomes create.

That means that the Bank of England gets its wish: if it keeps increasing interest rates it will eventually get the recession it desires. And let's not pretend there is any surprise in this: the Bank has always wanted a recession to control inflation.

In straightforward terms then, the economic problems that we now face are, at the very least, being partly created by Bank of England policy. I think that they are mainly created by it.

Because the Bank to have never understood that interest rate rises would never address the inflation we got from 2021 but did them anyway, we now have continuing inflation precisely because the Bank has increased the price of money by raising the official interest rate.

If you want to know why inflation is now stubbornly high in the UK, that is the answer. And the response from the Bank of England will be to raise the rate still further. That will mean things cannot get better. It's as straightforward as that.

What, then, should the Bank be doing? I suggest four things. First, it should tomorrow announce no rate increase. It should say that in the face of uncertainty about whether its policy is working it will hold rates for the time being. This will change market expectations.

Second, next month it should say that rates have peaked. This will end the market expectation of rises, for good.

Third, at the same time, the Bank should end its policy of quantitative tightening which is only being done to support high interest rates. This will take £80 billion out of the economy this year which the economy cannot afford. This should start rates falling in financial markets.

Fourth, in two months time the Bank should begin to cut rates. Let them start slowly, and ideally, then speed up. But this policy is essential. Not only will it slow down inflation, which interest rate rises are fuelling, it will also keep people in their homes.

And then the policy is to wait and see. No one in macroeconomics can ever predict anything precisely. But what we do know is that what is happening now is both not working and is causing very real harm.

In that case, what is wrong with trying something that might work and most definitely will do good?

I am very confident that good will flow from this move. Nothing can now reduce the upward pressure on prices more than a cut in the Bank of England's official base interest rate. It's time it happened.

Why interest rate rises are fuelling inflation- Richard Murphy

Posted on June 23 2023

I have been suggesting that interest rate rises are fuelling inflation.

That idea might, it seems, shock the Bank of England. They seem to think that inflation is down to excessive pay increases. However, I have some news for them, which is that employees do not set price increases. It is companies that do that. In that case, let me put forward a model of a company that is largely service-based to explore my suggestion.

The figures have been chosen for purely representational purposes: they are denominated in monetary units (thousands, tens of thousands, or millions: it makes no difference) but also, in effect, indicate the percentage split in the cost base of the company. The proportion of wages suggests it is service orientated, as most companies are.

This is the starting point for this model:

Then I suggest that adjustments for inflation be taken into account, as follows:

	Start point £
Costs	40
Wages	50
Interest	5
Profit	5
Sales price	100

	Start point £	% increase %	Actual increase £	Resulting total
Costs	40	10	4	44
Wages	50	6	3	53
Interest	5	160	8	13
Profit	5	6	0.3	5.3
Sales price	100		15.3	115.3

Bought-in costs have increased by 10% - roughly the rate of inflation in the last year.

Wage increases have been kept to 6% - which will be tough on many staff.

The big increase is, however, in interest costs. The company pays interest at 3% over bank base rate. So, the rate has grown from near enough 3% to 8%, or a growth of about 160%.

In comparison, profits have only been targeted to increase at the same rate as wages.

The resulting overall cost increase is 15.3%, with more than half of that being due to interest, which imposes a bigger cost increase than external costs and the wage settlement combined.

If the company limits the price increase to 10% then profits are wiped out and bankruptcy occurs.

Government 'prepared for range of scenarios' amid Thames Water collapse fears

By Michael Race- BBC 28/06

The government has said it is prepared for a "range of scenarios" following reports that Thames Water could be on the brink of collapse.

Ministers declined to comment on the company's situation, but said regulator Ofwat monitored "the financial position" of all water firms.Thames Water is under pressure over its performance and reportedly struggling under £14bn of debt. It said it is working to raise the funds it needs to improve the firm.

"Ofwat is being kept fully informed on progress of the company's turnaround [plan] and engagement with shareholders," it said.

"Thames Water continues to maintain a strong liquidity position, including £4.4 billion of cash and committed funding."

Whatever happens to Thames Water, which is the UK's biggest water firm, providing water for 15 million people in London and the South East, its water supplies will continue uninterrupted.

According to Sky News and the Financial Times, the company is in talks with ministers and Ofwat about contingency plans for the business. One option would be placing Thames Water in a special administration regime (SAR), which would see it temporarily taken over by the government.

This route was most recently taken with energy supplier Bulb after it ran into financial difficulties.

When asked about the reports, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said it was "a matter for the company and its shareholders".

It added: "We prepare for a range of scenarios across our regulated industries - including water - as any responsible government would.

"The sector as a whole is financially resilient. Ofwat continues to monitor the financial position of all the key water and wastewater companies."

The business is yet to comment on the speculation over its future.

On Tuesday, Thames Water's chief executive Sarah Bentley quit the business after just two years in the job. It came weeks after she was asked to forgo her bonus over the company's handling of sewage spills.

The firm has not given a reason for her departure, but it comes amid questions over the company's financial stability.

It has been under pressure to improve its performance amid criticism of its handling of sewage contamination and leaks. The firm leaks more water than any other water company in UK, losing the equivalent of to 25 Olympic size swimming pools every day from its pipes.

Last year Thames Water's owners - a consortium of institutional investors - pumped £500m into the business and pledged a further £1bn to help it turn things around. But reports suggest the firm is struggling to raise the remaining cash which it needs to pay down debts.In its statement it said: "Thames Water is continuing to work constructively with its shareholders in relation to the further equity funding expected to be required to support Thames Water's turnaround and investment plans."

Debt fears

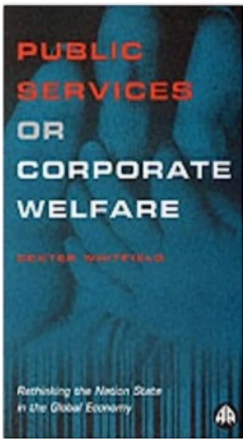
Water companies have taken on large amounts of debt, collectively about £60bn, since they were privatised in 1989, with Thames Water's debt totalling £14bn.

There have been long running concerns at Ofwat, the water company regulator, over Thames Water's ability to service that debt and raise the huge amounts of cash needed to modernise its infrastructure amid rising inflation and higher interest rates.

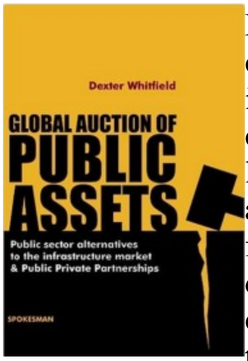
For the last five years, its owners have backed the decision not to pay any dividends to external shareholders.Water bills have been on the rise, with the annual bill for an average household in England and Wales hitting £448 in April.

Bills are set to rise again in 2025 by about £42 per household on average over a "long time frame", former Environment Secretary George Eustice said on Wednesday.It came after the Times reported bills could rise by as much as 40%, a figure Mr Eustice dismissed.

"That figure [40%] is something that the industry has put out and it is probably because they are about to commence their negotiations with Ofwat and I think that the figure will be far lower than that when it comes to it," he told the BBC's Today programme.



Examining the role of the modern nation state, Dexter Whitfield assesses the achievements, failures, costs and benefits of the neo-liberal and 'third way' transformation of the state. He demonstrates that private finance of infrastructure, marketisation of government and privatisation of the welfare state are accelerating the globalisation process and generating ever larger financial, social and environmental crises. Whitfield analyses current trends which are exacerbated by the marketisation and partnership agenda advocated by global bodies such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO. He reveals how these policies further reduce the capacity of the state in the global economy, its ability to provide good quality public services and inevitably create a corporate welfare complex. Within a framework for understanding the extent, scale and impact of the transformation of the state, the author forecasts the implications of the continuation of current policies.



Public infrastructure in the 21st century is confronted with new challenges - adapting to climate change, meeting the economic, energy, water, transportation and social infrastructure needs of megacities in Asia, megaregions in North America and European city regions. Public infrastructure provides basic human needs - homes, water, energy for light, heat and cooking; the transport of people, raw materials and goods by road, rail, sea and air; hospitals, schools, sports and cultural facilities; communications networks; facilities for the criminal justice system; and civic and governmental buildings for democratic governance, social and political activity. Public infrastructure supports economic growth, increases productivity, generates employment, creates opportunities for the production and supply chains in construction and services, and improves community well-being. Wider adoption of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and growth of the global infrastructure market, financed by investment funds and pension funds, could fuel a new era of public asset sales. Already, the refinancing and the sale of equity in PPP projects has led to the buying and selling of public hospitals, schools, prisons and roads, furthering exploitation and profiteering. PPPs are promoted by the World Bank, IMF, development banks and via bilateral agreements in developing countries and the industrialised north.

Book Review by Prof. Hugo Radice- Capital and Class

Covid: The shambles continues.

This week at the Covid inquiry saw two contrasting views. Health professionals describing poor planning and a health service denuded of funding and politicians claiming that austerity had done no harm and had actually helped with dealing with the pandemic.

Covid Inquiry: Former chief medical officer close to tears over pandemic deaths- Kate Whannel- BBC

Prof Dame Sally Davies tells the Covid inquiry that "it wasn't just the deaths, it was the way they died".

England's former chief medical officer Dame Sally Davies was close to tears at the Covid Inquiry as she apologised to families bereaved by the pandemic.

"It wasn't just the deaths, it was the way they died... it was harrowing and it remains horrible," she said.

She also said the UK did not have enough resilience to cope with the pandemic, with fewer doctors, nurses or hospital beds than similar countries.

The inquiry is currently examining the UK's preparedness ahead of Covid.

In her evidence, Dame Sally also expressed concern about the impact of the lockdowns on children and students.

"We have damaged a generation, and it is awful... watching these people struggle," she said.

The former chief medical officer told the inquiry the UK did not have plans in place to cope with a Covid pandemic, but she added "it didn't have resilience either".

Compared with similar countries, the UK was at the bottom of the table for numbers of doctors, nurses, beds, IT units and ventilators per 100,000, she said.

During questions about preparation exercises for pandemics, Dame Sally broke off to say: "Maybe this is the moment to say how sorry I am to the relatives who lost their families."

"I heard a lot about it from my daughter who was on the front line as a doctor in Scotland," she added.

Dame Sally Davies became chief medical officer in 2010 and left in 2019 to be replaced by Sir Chris Whitty. He is due to give evidence on Thursday along with Sir Patrick Vallance, who was the government's chief scientific adviser during the pandemic.

At the same hearing, George Osborne said his spending cuts meant the UK was better able to cope with the pandemic.

The former chancellor argued that without austerity Britain would have been "more exposed" and rejected claims his approach left the health and social care "depleted" ahead of the Covid pandemic.

Last week Sir Michael Marmot, a professor of epidemiology at University College London told the inquiry that the UK had entered the pandemic with "depleted" public services.

Asked by inquiry lawyer Kate Blackwell KC if he agreed with the statement, Mr Osborne said: "Most certainly not, I completely reject that."

He accepted more money could have been spent on the NHS, but said as chancellor he had to balance demands for resources from other public services.

"You can't just say we like public spending to be higher without explaining where you get money from," he told the inquiry.

He said the public had elected the Conservatives to government in 2010 and 2015 knowing the party was planning to cut public spending.

During the period, cuts were introduced in welfare spending, school building programs, local government, police, courts and prisons. There was also an overall squeeze on health spending.

Mr Osborne - who was chancellor from 2010 to 2016 - said: "If we had not done that Britain would have been more exposed, not just to future things like the coronavirus pandemic, but indeed to the fiscal crisis which very rapidly followed in countries across Europe.

"If we had not had a clear plan to put the public finances on a sustainable path then Britain might have experienced a fiscal crisis, we would not have had the fiscal space to deal with the coronavirus pandemic when it hit."

The British Medical Association said Mr Osborne's "denial" of a connection between austerity and the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable was "staggering".

On Monday, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) produced a report which said austerity had led to unsafe staffing in public services leaving the UK "hugely unprepared" for Covid.

During the one hour 20 minute question session, Mr Osborne was also asked about the Treasury's planning for potential national lockdown.

He said the department had plans for an outbreak of influenza but added "given what subsequently happened that was very small scale".

"There was no planning done by Treasury - or any western Treasury - for asking the entire population to stay at home for months and months on end.

"If someone had said to you the UK government should be preparing for a lockdown that might last for months, then I have no doubt the Treasury would have developed schemes it did subsequently develop around the furlough and the Covid loans.

"Planning could have been done for a furlough scheme in advance - I'm not clear that would have made a better furlough scheme than the one we as a country actually saw."

Earlier in the day, Sir Oliver Letwin, a senior minister in David Cameron's government, told the inquiry a rapid turnover of civil service staff hindered the government's ability to plan for pandemics.

He also warned that the UK was "wildly under-resilient" and said there should be a minister "solely devoted" to the subject.

Labour said the admissions were "too little, too late", adding the Conservatives "cannot be trusted to protect the public from the emergencies of tomorrow".

UK has made ‘no progress’ on climate plan, say government’s own advisers

Fiona Harvey- The Guardian 28/06/23

The government’s plans to hit net zero have been comprehensively criticised in a withering report by its own advisers that says targets are being missed on nearly every front.

Fewer homes were insulated last year under the government-backed scheme than the year before, despite soaring energy bills and a cost of living crisis. There is little progress on transport emissions, no coherent programme for behaviour change, and still no decision on hydrogen for home heating.

Meanwhile the installation of new wind and solar farms and the upgrading of the electricity grid are still too slow to meet net zero, according to the Climate Change Committee, which says that the lack of urgency of government and a failure of political leadership means progress has stalled.

Lord Deben, the outgoing chair of the CCC, said the UK had “lost the leadership” on climate action shown at Cop26 in 2021 and done “a number of things” – such as greenlighting a new coal mine and new oil and gasfields in the North Sea – that were “utterly unacceptable”.

He said the committee’s confidence that the government would meet its shorter-term carbon-cutting goals by 2030 was even lower than last year, despite the publication of a new green strategy by ministers. “We’ve slipped behind, and other people have moved ahead,” he said. “This is not a report that suggests satisfactory progress.”

Greenhouse gas emissions have been falling by just under 3% a year, but this will need to double over the next eight years.

The committee warned that the UK could no longer expand any of its airports without closures or shrinking of capacity elsewhere but the government seems not to have accepted this.

Public charging for electric vehicles is more costly than it need be, and the government is expecting transport emissions to be higher than was previously admitted, according to the CCC’s latest annual report, published on Wednesday, entitled Progress in Reducing UK Emissions: 2023 Report to Parliament.

The report also found:

The number of homes receiving energy efficiency improvements under the government’s Energy Company Obligation scheme more than halved, from 383,700 in 2021 to 159,600 in 2022, according to the report. At least 1m to 2m homes should be upgraded each year to meet net zero.

- Homes are still being built that will need to be retrofitted with low-carbon heating and efficiency measures, because the government has not yet brought in its promised future homes standard.
- No decision on whether to use hydrogen for home heating will be made until 2026, leaving households and boiler companies in limbo.
- Emissions from transport have remained stubbornly high as the government has “made a political choice” to allow an increase in road traffic, instead of encouraging people on to public transport.

There is no coherent programme to encourage people to change their high-carbon lifestyles.

There is no clear policy to decarbonise steel production, or emissions from other heavy industries.

Chris Stark, the chief executive of the CCC, said: “What’s missing is the kind of political leadership. You’ve got a series of strings being pushed across government and no one at the top pulling it up to raise it to the political priority that is required. Until that happens, this programme [of reaching net zero] is going to run into the sand.”

Rebecca Newsom, the head of politics for Greenpeace UK, said: “There’s almost no progress in this progress report, just a pitiful catalogue of Rishi Sunak’s climate failures.”

The 438-page annual progress report was the committee’s 15th since the 2008 Climate Change Act, and the last for Deben, a former Conservative environment secretary, who is stepping down after an extended 10-year term as chair. An interim chair, the scientist Prof Piers Forster of Leeds, will take over while a replacement is found.

Deben said ministers could still step up: “What I’m looking for is the leadership which is essential when we are at a moment not just of national emergency, but of global emergency.”

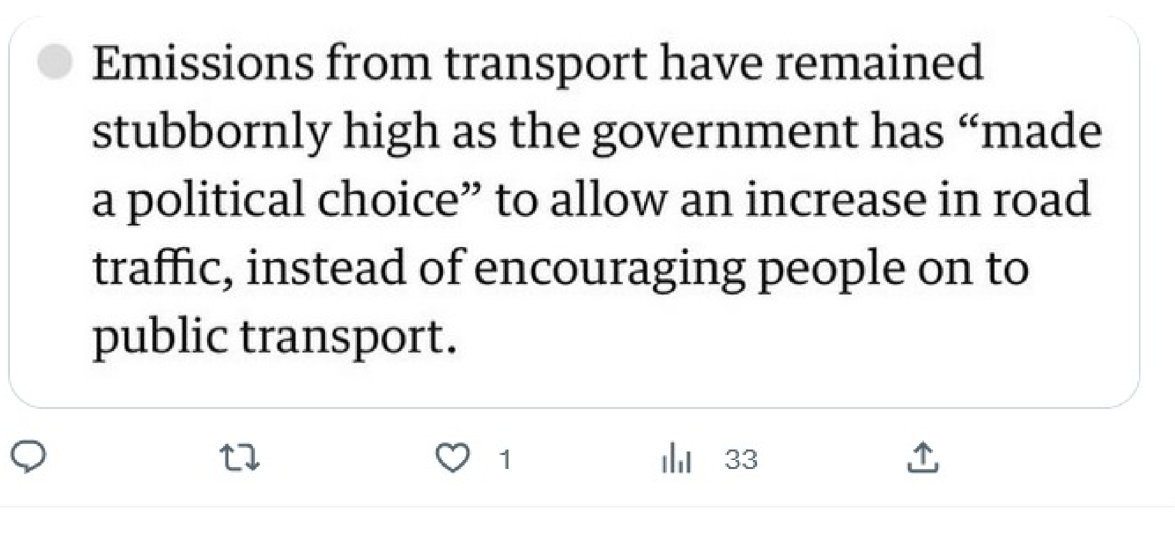
Alok Sharma, the Tory MP who acted as president of Cop26, urged the government to lift the ban on onshore wind, catch up with rival countries on green jobs, and to show leadership internationally, before Cop28, the next UN climate summit, which takes place in November.

“In the global race to attract green investment, jobs and growth the UK risks falling behind without a material response to initiatives from other countries like the US’s Inflation Reduction Act,” he said.

A government spokesperson said: “We can be proud of the UK’s record as a world leader on net zero. We are going far beyond other countries and delivering tangible progress whilst bringing down energy bills, with hundreds of pounds coming off bills from next month.

“The UK is cutting emissions faster than any other G7 country and attracted billions of investment into renewables, which now account for 40% of our electricity. In the last year alone, we have confirmed the first state backing of a nuclear project in over 30 years and invested billions to kickstart new industries like carbon capture and floating offshore wind.

“With a new department dedicated to delivering net zero and energy security, we are driving economic growth, creating jobs, bringing down energy bills, and reducing our dependence on imported fossil fuels.”



Judge tells Just Stop Oil activists they ‘should feel guilty for nothing’

Morning Star-Activists from Just Stop Oil block the route of a tanker as they blockade the ESSO Birmingham Fuel Terminal, Birmingham. Picture date: Friday April 1, 2022.

A JUDGE told Just Stop Oil activists today during their trial for disrupting an Esso oil terminal in Birmingham last year that they “should feel guilty for nothing.”

Seven of the protesters were found guilty and two were acquitted over the action last April, which pressed the demand that the government ends fossil fuel licences.

Harley Brewer, Paul Barnes, Oliver Clegg, Jon Deery, Paul Fawkesley, Naomi Goddard, Diana Hekt, Sylvie More and Alan Woods appeared before District Judge Graham Wilkinson at Wolverhampton magistrates’ court on charges of aggravated trespass.

The judge said: “It’s unarguable that man-made global warming is real and we are facing a climate emergency. Your aims are admirable and … are supported by the science.”

“I say this, and I mean this sadly, I have to convict you. Good people doing the wrong thing cannot make the wrong thing right. You should feel guilty for nothing. You should feel proud that you care, have concern for the future.”

The seven activists were fined between £250 and £500 each, while the Crown Prosecution Service offered no evidence against Ms Goddard and Ms More, who were therefore found not guilty.

In summation the judge stated:

“It's abundantly clear that you are all good people. You are intelligent, articulate and a pleasure to deal with. It's unarguable that man-made global warming is real and we are facing a climate emergency. Your aims are admirable and it is accepted by me and the Crown Prosecution Service that your views are reasonable and genuinely held. Your fears are ably and genuinely articulated and are supported by the science.”

“When the United Nations Secretary General gives a speech saying that the activity of fossil fuel companies is incompatible with human survival, we should all be very aware of the need for change. Millions of people, and I do not dispute that it may be as many as 1 billion people, will be displaced as a result of climate change.”

“No-one can criticise your motivations. You all gave evidence that was deeply moving. I certainly was moved. The tragedy is that good people have felt so much, without hope, that you feel you have to come into conflict with the criminal justice system.”

“Thank you for opening my eyes to certain things. Most, I was acutely and depressingly aware of, but there were certain things.”

“I say this and I mean this sadly, I have to convict you. You are good people and I will not issue a punitive sentence. Your arrests and loss of good character are sufficient. Good people doing the wrong thing cannot make the wrong thing right. I don't say this, ever, but it has been a pleasure dealing with you.”

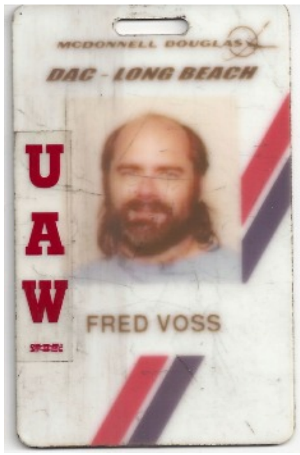
“You should feel guilty for nothing. You should feel proud that you care, have concern for the future. I urge you not to break the law again. Good luck to all of you.”

Interview #29 – Fred Voss

The supervisor has my job application in his hands
I sit
in a little chair facing the superviser's desk and the supervisor
pours
over my application like a dentist
looking for cavities
a detective
looking for crimes
I havent worked in a year
I hear
the machines pounding andsawing and buzzing outside the
        office's big glass windows
but I've almost forgotten
what it's like to stand in front of a machine and grip it's handles
        and pull down
a paycheck
my guts squirm my legs ache I'm in a cold sweat trying to have
        the answers
to the questions before the supervisor asks them and he looks up
and studies me
like a bug
in a jar
an amoeba
on a microscope slide
and I want to yell at him
“Look, I'm a human being
I had a mother and father who loved medon't I have a right to eat
to have a bed and a roof over my head and a mailbox
and a toilet and an oven and a chair
to sit in with dignity and watch the sun go down safe
from rain and madmen's knives in alleys and jail cells
all I want to do is work
all I want to do is give you 10 hours a day and do whatever you
        ask
so I don't have to end up starving on the street”
but the supervisor is calm
he picks a piece of steak from between his teeth and flicks it
        at the floor
and studies me
waiting for me to crack under the bright white light
in fireplace factories
magnet factoriesgumball machine fire hydrant stovepipe
        manhole cover
gasket skateboard chair trashcan flashlight parking meter
        bowling ball factories

across the land it is the same
supervisors
with big bellies and cold beady eyes
leaning back in soft leather chairs behind desks holding our
        applications
and our lives
in their hands

Fred Voss, a machinist for 35 years, has had three collections of poetry published by Bloodaxe Books, and two by Culture Matters: The Earth and the Stars in the Palm of Our Hand, and Robots Have No Bones.



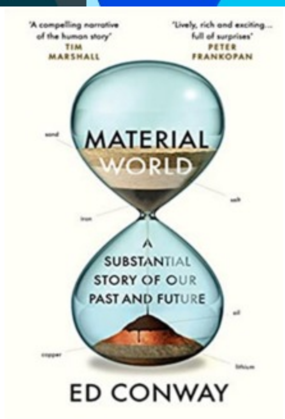
Fred Voss (born Frederick William Voss on July 8, 1952 in Los Angeles CA) is an American poet and novelist who has written about the lives of American machinists working in factories for over forty years.

Critical response to Voss has been generally positive. For example:

"Fred Voss has been called a poet of alienated labor and can be regarded as the foremost verse chronicler of blue-collar working life in America, preeminently in his first full-length collection, Goodstone (1991). This is a multifaceted dramatization of his experiences as a machinist in the factories of the Los Angeles area, where he has worked, and at times been laid off, for more than two decades. He continued a powerful poetry of social witness in Carnegie Hall with Tin Walls (1998) expanding his scope to look outside the workplace, sympathizing with the economically vulnerable. The masculine environment and implicitly political undertones of Voss's writing place it in a line of descent from the proletarian poets of the 1930s as well as Californian novelists such as John Steinbeck and Louis Adamic. It is also characterized by a Walt Whitman-like embracing of the human spirit. His prolific output, humour and hammered-down vernacular recall Charles Bukowski, the contemporary poet he most admires." Jules Smith: The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry (2006).

Voss has been a machinist in various factories, steel mills and machine shops since 1976. Beginning in 1978 he wrote seven novels. In 1986 he turned to poetry. Since then he has written over 3,000 poems. He has done seven poetry reading tours of the U.K. and his poetry has been featured on national BBC Radio 4 in 1998 and 2002 and on WBAI Pacific Radio New York in 2017. In 2016 he received the Port of Los Angeles/ Long Beach Labor Coalition's Joe Hill Labor Poetry Award.

Media and reading



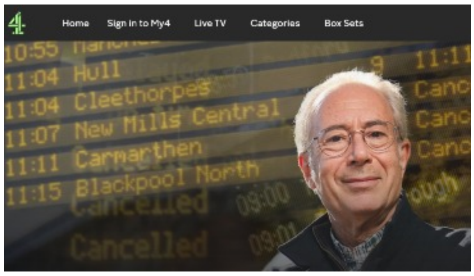
Materials that shape our world-Start the Week

Sand, salt, iron, copper, oil and lithium are the stars of Ed Conway's book, Material World. He tells Tom Sutcliffe how they built our world, from the Dark Ages to the present day. And how much the battle to secure them will shape our geopolitical future.

The science writer Aarathi Prasad focuses on one of the world's strongest biological materials ever known – Silk. In her latest book she explores the ancient origins of silk, its global reach, and how it continues to inspire new technologies – from pharmaceuticals to holograms.

And materials and how different civilisations use them are at the heart of the British Museum's exhibition, Luxury and Power: Persia to Greece (until 13th August). The curator, Jamie Fraser, highlights the perceived excesses of the Persian empire – with its abundance of gold, finely crafted pottery and frankincense – in direct contrast to the plainer tastes of their Greek victors.

Ben Elton: The Great Railway Disaster



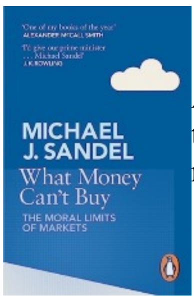
The railways are in crisis, from mass cancellations to soaring prices. Comedian Ben Elton embarks on a northern rail misadventure. Is rail privatisation a failed experiment? By the end of the programme we pretty much know the answer and where all our money is going.

Political economists Radhika Desai, Michael Hudson, and Ann Pettifor discuss the growing debt crisis in the Global South and the need for forgiveness and system change.

Transcript: https://geopoliticaleconomy.com/2023/...

You can watch other episodes of their program Geopolitical Economy Hour here: • Radhika Desai & M...

The NHS is at crisis point. In the 75 years since it was founded on the dream of making healthcare accessible to everyone, its principles have been chipped away at and disregarded by successive political leaders. The result: an underfunded, understaffed, exhausted workforce, a decimation of patient services and the infiltration of privatisation within our public healthcare system. We are now in danger of losing what we have come to depend upon: the NHS is collapsing and a two-tier healthcare system is emerging in its place. We can stop this, but only if we do it together.



What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets

An old favourite from the self styled liberal philosopher Michael Sandel who is shocked by the idea that in a modern economy "we know the price of everything and the value of nothing". He traces how society and the market has lost any morals or conscience.