

A Class War Is Raging in Britain, But Only One Side Is Taking Punches

The Huffington Post - Posted: 09/12/2014

Go into any supermarket in the run up to Christmas and you will likely see a shopping trolley by the door designated for donations to your local foodbank. For many of us the idea of walking past it without donating jars, forcing us to wrestle with a conscience that is particularly sensitive to poverty and need at a time of year when excess and greed is encouraged in advertising campaigns which leave no stone unturned when it comes to manipulation and mawkish sentimentalism.

Foodbanks are an abomination, an insult to the very word progress and nothing if not a symptom of a society that is headed over a cliff. They constitute proof that Tory Britain in the winter of 2014 is the last bastion of cruelty and inhumanity, where to be poor is regarded as a badge of personal and moral collapse rather than an inevitable by-product of an economic system which breeds poverty and its attendant social maladies - crime, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, etc. Those unfortunate enough to fall through the increasingly widening cracks in this race to the bottom are not regarded as victims of blind economic forces, but authors of their own despair and as such undeserving of anything excepting punishment.

The free market isn't free. Its cost is measured in human despair and truncated lives. That we have a situation in one of the richest economies in the world where people, including children, do not have enough to eat, is nothing short of a crime. And only those who have had their humanity surgically removed would seek to justify this crime on the basis of cutting a deficit that has risen rather than fallen under the present government.

Not only our basic humanity but also economic stability and efficiency dictates that the overriding purpose of any economy must be to serve the needs of society. Yet we currently operate on the basis that society must serve the needs of the economy. This by definition means an economy set up to serve the needs of the rich and connected, its success bound up with ever larger and more obscene executive salaries, bonuses, shareholder dividends, and rising property and asset prices.

An economic crash caused by the inherent weaknesses of the current economic system should have resulted in it and the philosophical and ideological foundations upon which it rests being completely discredited and discarded as unfit for purpose. Instead, and by dint of a propaganda campaign unleashed by the right, society's guns have been turned on the poor - the low waged, the unemployed, benefit claimants, and migrants. Walk into any Jobcentre and you could be forgiven for thinking that you'd made a mistake and instead walked into a courtroom, where people are routinely punished by those hiding being the the mantra of just doing their job.

Being sanctioned for such grievous infractions as turning up for an interview 5 minutes late is as easy as pressing a button on a keyboard for the one doing the sanctioning, but for the

human being sitting on the other side of that desk it triggers a downward spiral of mounting despair, not to mention degradation and humiliation.

The Trussell Trust, the largest provider of food banks across the country, has identified the spike in demand for their services as directly linked to an ever-tougher and brutal benefits regime, as has an All Parliamentary Inquiry Into Hunger across the UK. It leaves little doubt that what the victims of this benefits regime are living through is akin to a mass experiment in human despair.

This is bad enough, but with more and more incidents of suicide directly related to that despair, we have surely reached the point where enough is enough.

The economic logic behind austerity remains as flawed now as when first embarked on. Rather than understand the deficit as a consequence of a global recession decimating demand in the economy, with a sharp fall in tax revenues due to a sharp rise in unemployment, the government is intent on deepening the same cycle by introducing drastic cuts in spending in the forlorn hope that the private sector will invest and create new jobs to replace those lost. The jobs that have been created, trumpeted by the Coalition as proof that austerity is working, are largely low waged, part time, and/or temporary. A crap job is a crap job, no matter how you try and dress it up, with the fact that the majority of people claiming benefits in work a damning indictment of the yawning chasm between the haves and have nots in 2014.

As we approach Christmas we live in a country where 4million people are at risk of going hungry, half a million children live in families that cannot afford to feed them, and 3.5million adults can't afford to eat properly. We have been dragged back to the 1930s by a government whose conception of progress is to eradicate the poor rather than poverty and the hungry rather than hunger. If this is not a call to arms then what is?

The Tory response to this mounting despair came recently in the form of a Marie Antoinette-like declaration from Baroness Jenkin that, "Poor people don't know how to cook".

Yes, there is a class war raging in Britain all right. The only problem is that up to now only one side has been taking punches.

<http://lennon.free.fr/prepa-colle/>

(920 words)