

Was Mr Brown alone responsible? Hardly.

Published: January 13, 2026, 8:15 am

[FT.com / Columnists / Martin Wolf - The economic legacy of Mr Brown.](#)

Not my words. They are those of Martin Wolf:

[B]efore the [new] government starts, it is important to ask just why its inheritance is so grim. In a [column](#) on May 9, my friend, Niall Ferguson, referred to Gordon Brown's stewardship as a "disaster". But was Mr Brown alone responsible? Hardly. I would argue his big underlying mistake was to put too much trust in the orthodoxies of contemporary economists and financiers.

As he continues:

Mr Brown trusted such economists, poor man.

And adds:

In retrospect, the government also trusted too readily in the stability of contemporary finance. Would a Tory government have been much more distrustful? If you believe that, I have a bridge to sell you.

And on bank regulation:

Mr Brown also followed the best professional opinion in making the Bank operationally independent in pursuing an inflation target. I agree that this was a wise decision. Yet belief in a tight link between control over inflation and macroeconomic stability turned out to be false. Mr Brown bought this remedy from top economists, who, again, exaggerated the efficacy of their ideas.

As for the recession:

Mr Brown evidently failed to foresee the possibility of a huge recession. Did anybody

else foresee such a disaster? Some had an inkling. But few realised either the size of the global downturn or how vulnerable the UK economy would be to the financial implosion.

And on the budget deficit:

Can we not at least blame Mr Brown for the bloated public spending and grotesque fiscal deficits? Yes, but also only up to a point. Between 1999-2000 and 2007-08, the ratio of total managed spending to GDP did rise from 36.3 per cent to 41.1 per cent. But the latter was still modest, by the standards of the previous four decades. The jump to a ratio of 48.1 per cent, forecast for this year in the 2010 Budget, is due to the recession.

As he concludes:

Yes, Mr Brown made big errors. But more significant is how wrong the conventional wisdom on which he relied turned out to be.

Precisely.

Brown failed because he believed in a flawed economic policy based on a flawed economics built on false assumptions that pursued inappropriate, even false, objectives.

That's why the ConDems will fail too.

That's why the race is on for new ideas. The vacuum is there to be filled.