

The young - reaching tipping point all over the place

Published: January 22, 2026, 4:49 pm

There is something of a coincidence about articles by Paul Mason (of Newsnight) in the Guardian and [Neil Clark in The First Post Daily](#) today.

As [Paul Mason says](#):

'We will fight, we will kiss' says the poster, over a picture of a single rioter leaping over a line of riot shields. "London, Cairo, Rome, Tunis." It may be a bit over-optimistic about Rome, but it sums up the zeitgeist. What's going on is neither a repeat of 1968 or of the "colour revolutions" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nor is it enough to observe that "they're all using Twitter" — this misses the point of what they are using it for.

At the heart of the movement is a new sociological type — the graduate with no future.

Clark makes the same point:

Many commentators have portrayed the revolts against the ruling regimes in Tunisia and Egypt as something peculiar to the Arab world. It's all to do with Islamists trying to take control, or about the 'Arab world's 1989', we're told.

In fact, they're part of a global phenomenon. What is fuelling the anti-government protests in the Middle East, in Serbia, Albania and Turkish Cyprus are economic factors. People are taking to the streets, not because they are Islamists, far-leftists, or far-rightists, but principally because they want a life. They want jobs and a decent standard of living.

I am convinced that that is true. Back to Paul Mason:

Why now? It's a mixture of the unsustainability of regimes based on repression and the sudden uncertainty about the economic future. Modern capitalism demands mass access to higher education. In most of the world this is funded by personal indebtedness — people making a rational judgment to go into debt so they will be better paid later. However, the prospect of 10 years of fiscal retrenchment in some countries means they

now believe they will be poorer than their parents. And the effect has been like throwing a light switch; the prosperity story is replaced with the doom story, even if for individuals reality will be more complex.

This evaporation of a promise is compounded in the emerging markets. First, even where you get rapid economic growth, countries like [Egypt](#) cannot absorb the demographic bulge of young people fast enough to deliver rising living standards for them. Second, you have states and systems based on the suppression of information. In a suddenly information-rich age, they have struggled to adapt and are mostly dying

As Clark says:

The street protests in these countries illustrate a growing discontent, particularly among the young, with the neo-liberal model of globalisation and rising anger against corrupt and out-of-touch political elites who seem not to care about their predicament.

And the bad news for those elites is that the discontent is only going to spread.

Last August, the International Labour Organisation revealed that 81 million young people worldwide were without jobs at the end of 2009 - the highest level of youth unemployment ever. The ILO expects the increase to have continued throughout 2010, and with governments across Europe committed to deficit-slashing austerity programmes, unemployment is only going to get worse in 2011.

And to conclude: Clark again:

And there's nothing to say that large-scale anti-government protests won't spread to Britain, too, with economists warning of a double-dip recession and youth unemployment reaching a record high in January.

It seems that across Europe ruling elites have a choice: either change their economic policies and put [full employment](#) back on the agenda, or face an increasingly angry populace.

I'm not a fan of social unrest.

Nor revolution.

In fact I'm far from a fan of either.

But, how would I feel if 21, piled high with debt, no prospect of a job, or a house, or the well being I'm told I'd enjoy? I don't know. And, how do the parents of these young people feel? They're also being betrayed. And that betrayal is not by chance. It is deliberate. The [ConDems tax policy](#), explored [here over the last few days](#) is clear indication of that.

The stress in our society is enormous, and growing. Threatening tough policing is not the answer. Delivering real reform is the answer.

[And it is possible.](#)