

The Tories impose hardship and chaos by choice

Published: January 13, 2026, 10:49 am

There are days when even the most cynical person must want to think that Conservative economic and social policy is all about cock up and not conspiracy. I do honestly try to see the good in all people. I would like to think these people have a conscience and it is merely incompetence that leads them into pursuing the policies of neoliberalism without realising the potential consequences.

And then we get days like today, when thirty year old cabinet papers are made available in the National Archives and we realise that this is not the case: hardship and chaos are imposed by the Tories by choice. The first example is from the FT and relates to the 'Big Bang' in the City, which did, of course, inexorably lead to the chaos of 2008 from which we are still suffering. [As the FT put it:](#)

David Willetts, who was in the policy unit of 10 Downing Street, told the prime minister in a memo in 1985 that sudden financial deregulation could lead to “unethical behaviour” and ultimately to “boom and bust” as banks became more competitive. “Some things were bound to go wrong,” he said in a memo.

But John Redwood, head of the policy unit – [and a future minister](#) – reassured the prime minister that greater competition would minimise wrongdoing in the City.

Pragmatism failed: dogma ruled and disaster followed.

Much the same is true with regard to the poll tax. [There the Guardian reports:](#)

These files show that cabinet critics confronted Lady Thatcher and her acolytes with well-costed and fully enumerated warnings about the fiscal and political impact of the poll tax. Seven million people would lose out. Evasion would become endemic. The political consequences would be volcanic. But the papers go on to show that these objections were brushed aside by the policy’s advocates in terms that should make all those concerned blush with shame when they look back on the consequences today.

Except I doubt that the survivors do feel any such shame: Oliver Letwin is still advising the current government, after all, despite his central role in this. One has to conclude

they are beyond shame precisely because they do really believe in imposing the suffering and chaos they create.

And one day, no doubt, we will find that the suffering of the bedroom tax was deliberate.

And that the misery caused by cuts was well known.

And that the creation of low paid, zero hours work was consistent with an economic master plan to shift power from labour to capital.

And that the NHS really is subject to a privatisation plan.

All we have to do is learn from the past and realise that the same mentality prevails now. We hardly need to read runes: we just have to be logical in our thinking to understand that what is being said is not what is meant.

I am quite convinced this government knows what it is doing is not necessary. I am equally convinced that what is happening is what it wants.

And that is something that should be widely appreciated as we enter 2015.