

No wonder there is anger

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John Lichfield has a powerful piece on the weekend's Paris riots [in the Guardian this morning](#). I do not apologise for quoting two paragraphs. The rest needs to be read as well:

France is a republic that was founded in popular violence. Politics runs to the street here more rapidly than in any other western democracy. I've lived in France for 22 years and have witnessed street protests by workers, farmers, wine producers, truck drivers, railway employees, university students, sixth-formers, teachers, youths in the multiracial suburbs, chefs, lawyers, doctors and police officers. Yes, even police officers.

I have never seen the kind of wanton destruction that surrounded me on some of the smartest streets of Paris on Saturday — such random, hysterical hatred, directed not just towards the riot police but at shrines to the French republic itself such as the Arc de Triomphe. The 12-hour battle went beyond violent protest, beyond rioting, to the point of insurrection, even civil war.

Civil war is a strong term to use. I suspect John Lichfield knows that. I presume he uses it wisely as a result. And where France goes, who knows who might follow?

I have a concern. As Lichfield notes, France rioted 50 year's ago and rising prosperity deflected the anger. Now no one thinks that will happen. All increases in prosperity go to a tiny handful in society. People are oppressed, and they know it.

We need to be clear about the cause of the oppression. The superficial anger is in tax. I am well aware of it. But the cause is inability to make ends meet.

We cannot do without tax.

And we need green taxes.

So the problem has to be tackled another way.

The problem is excess rents.

And maybe excess interest costs.

And a lack of a living wage.

The problem is not tax.

The problem is the failure of a society where enough is made for all to make sure all can partake.

This is what neoliberalism has delivered. The riots are its consequence. As is Brexit. But the answer is not to blame taxation. Nor is the answer to overthrow government per se. Instead there is a need to oppose a government that will not tackle unfair debt burdens, income and wealth inequality, the absence of affordable property and the failure support those in need.

Those are the core issues, along with the environment, for our times.

And we have too many governments who will not be radical in the face of them.

No wonder there is anger.