

The Tory version of The Forgotten Man

Published: January 12, 2026, 10:17 pm

I did some reading around the issue of The Forgotten man - who is, apparently, to the focus of government attention according to the new Rooseveltian programme that the government proposes.

As a result I got, via an academic article or two, to the nineteenth-century work of William Graham Sumner. This was fascinating, but the easiest explanation I found of it was on [Wikipedia](#), so on this occasion I will use it, simply because it seems to be a good summary:

Sumner's forgotten man

[Yale University](#) professor [William Graham Sumner](#) appears to be the first to use the phrase "the forgotten man", in his 1876 essay. His algebraic definition of the forgotten man was "C", who is coerced into helping the man at the economic bottom "X", by "A" and "B" who demand charity for "X".

As soon as A observes something which seems to him wrong, from which X is suffering, A talks it over with B, and A and B then propose to get a law passed to remedy the evil and help X. Their law always proposes to determine what C shall do for X, or, in better case, what A, B, and C shall do for X... What I want to do is to look up C. I want to show you what manner of man he is. I call him the Forgotten Man. Perhaps the appellation is not strictly correct. He is the man who never is thought of.... I call him the forgotten man... He works, he votes, generally he prays-but he always pays..."

Now contrast this with Roosevelt:

Roosevelt's forgotten man

Roosevelt the phrase in a radio address he gave on April 7, 1932. Roosevelt used the phrase to describe the poor men who needed money and were not getting it, promoting his [New Deal](#). Roosevelt said,

These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the

unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power, for plans like those of 1917 that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

As Wikipedia notes:

The term quickly appeared within popular culture, supplanting Sumner's concept of the forgotten man.

But hang on for a moment: suppose Johnson has not forgotten Sumner, because his formulation seems to work very well for me.

Johnson and Cummings know that they have a massive unemployment problem coming their way. Call the victims X. And call Johnson and his friends A and the Tory party funders B, now who is C? That's all the people who can be persuaded [via the media](#) that they must suffer tax increases or spending cuts because of the cost of X.

So who is the Forgotten Man now? Those who can be persuaded to support the oppression without arguing.

That's my theory of the Tory Forgotten Man.