

We're heading for a winter of discontent like no other ...

Published: January 13, 2026, 4:44 am

I [wrote yesterday about my fears for the UK economy](#), and the apparent lack of awareness there is amongst the UK political class that we are heading for unemployment of between 3.5 million (the wildly optimistic Office for Budget Responsibility estimate) and 6 million (the figure Danny Blanchflower and I both agree on, for slightly differing reasons).

This morning the FT reinforces the messages in two ways: Firstly [it notes](#):

More than half of UK manufacturers expect to make job cuts over the next six months as large employers across automotive, aerospace and other core industries brace themselves for a sustained downturn in demand during the pandemic.

The UK will lose high value skills in what is being called a "jobs bloodbath" by manufacturing trade group Make UK, whose members reported that their redundancy plans were ramping up as the prospects for a return to normal trading faded.

And it adds, [in another article](#), that:

UK universities are cutting the jobs of thousands of academics on short-term contracts as the sector prepares to make sweeping cuts in the wake of coronavirus.

Institutions across the country have dropped hundreds of hourly posts and left temporary contracts to expire, leaving academics facing unemployment and depleting the capacity of departments to run courses and support students.

In this second article 'hundreds' does, I think refer to each institution, and not a total.

What I strongly suspect is about to happen is the "jobs bloodbath" that Make UK predict. And the government appears to be standing aside and is watching it happen. I explored the [resulting issues yesterday](#) and won't repeat them now, except for one thing that is.

This decision to move from furlough to mass unemployment is a choice. It is not

necessary. It can be avoided. As I have long argued it is the consequence of putting the desire for what are thought to be "sound government finances" above any concern for the people of this country. It is economics gone mad.

And I can't see it being accepted. The anger that this will give rise to will be long and sustained. Unless the government acts now - and there's no sign that it thinks it needs to do anything more than offer £10 off at Pizza Express - then we're going to be heading for a winter of discontent like no other we have ever seen.

Just add Brexit, a second wave of coronavirus if it happens, disruption to food and medical supplies and people unable to feed their children with their houses under threat of repossession as they realise that there is no hope of another job that can pay the mortgage and a mix more politically toxic than anything that has even remotely happened in my lifetime will be created. And apparently Dominic Cummings can't see that coming. So much for his super-forecasting.