

# What are we going to do when the water runs out?

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Water is critical to life, but neoliberal economics is threatening water supplies for differing reasons in many parts of the globe, including in London. That type of economic thinking has no answer as to what happens next, and neither have our politicians so far. When will they realise they have to act?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Bz\\_rImKqRU&si=xRCI9CeeCCoy5Efo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Bz_rImKqRU&si=xRCI9CeeCCoy5Efo)

The audio version is here:

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The transcript is:

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What happens when the water runs out? It's an important question because it looks likely that it might.

There are two scenarios where this question is relevant. One is who's going to be supplying water to London very soon if Thames Water fails, as some are now seriously talking about.

New investigations into Thames Water suggest that it is running the company on the basis of software first written in 1989. I wouldn't put too much bet on the fact that that

is in great order. And there's a lot of equipment inside Thames Water, £23 billion worth apparently, which has not been properly physically maintained as well, where there is a backlog of repairs to do, which means that at any point in time, the water supply in parts of London could fail.

This report may be wrong. It may be that Thames Water has, in fact, got totally robust IT systems. But it seems unlikely because clearly somebody's been doing quite a lot of digging to come up with this information. And it is apparent that Thames Water has not, because of its desire to maximise profits at cost to the consumer, been undertaking the sorts of repairs that are necessary to its kit. We, therefore, face the real prospect that Thames Water could financially fail but simultaneously fail to deliver water to our capital city.

How do we manage that? I genuinely have no idea. But maybe the sheer challenge of dealing with that is something that we have to face. We have to come to terms with the fact that a world in which financialisation has been more important than the delivery of goods or services, at least as far as the City of London is concerned, has brought us to the point where something so absolutely critical to human life may not be available in the largest financial services centre in the world. The paradox is almost unbelievable and yet it could happen.

There is another way in which this crisis might become apparent. And that is around the world, many parts of the world are getting hotter. Very much hotter. And we know that water is disappearing.

We know that that is true in many areas in the Middle East, where lakes and whole rivers are just drying up.

We know that there are regions where there was once agriculture where there is no more.

We know that people can't live in those areas for much longer if they are now. We know that the ability to find water underground is disappearing.

Therefore, there are millions and maybe billions of people who, at some time, are going to have to move because of a lack of water in this world.

This may be an immediate crisis for London if it happens in a way that is quite different from the way it is a crisis for the people of the Middle East and elsewhere where the water's literally disappearing. But the net effect is much the same. There won't be water to sustain life, and without that ability to sustain life, people are going to have to move.

I have no idea whether London will have to literally be evacuated so that people can move to areas where there will be sufficient water if it is not essential that they stay in

the city.

I have no idea whether we can lay on extra resources quickly.

But what I do know is that there is no way that we can solve the problems of water supplies in places where it is too hot for that water to now exist, at least on the surface where people can access it. And if that's the case, people will move. And we have to manage that.

And so far, neither of these crises appear to be on the agendas of our governments or international organisations. And yet they are so fundamental that all we can conclude is that they are sticking their heads in the sand, almost quite literally in some cases, because they're so frightened of the consequences of what is happening.

When will governments take water seriously is my question? If we don't, we face crises of scales that we have not imagined since time began because as far as we are concerned, time began when we could access water. We have always needed it, and yet we may be denied it, and that is the result of financialisation and a failed neoliberal economic system that has created this outcome.

If you want a definition of failure, nothing could be stronger than that, but still these politicians are dedicated to the perpetuation of what has caused this problem. And that, in itself, is the crisis that we face.