

# 14 questions Keir Starmer needs to answer about growth

Published: January 13, 2026, 5:19 am

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The only goal that we really know that our Labour government has is growth, but no-one really knows why that is, and they have never explained. So, I've set out 14 questions they need to answer to explain just what it is that they think growth will do for us.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXt8jTw64cw&si=gFT\\_wTvl5og0hbjP](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXt8jTw64cw&si=gFT_wTvl5og0hbjP)

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This is the transcript:

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I sat down and wrote out a series of questions about economic growth that I wanted to ask Keir Starmer.

When I started, I thought there might be 5, or 6, or 7, or whatever, and I'm sorry to say that this video has no less than 14 questions on growth that I think Keir Starmer needs to answer because I don't think any of us really understand why he is so obsessed with growth as the only real goal that his Labour government has.

We know that a strategy for growth failed the Democrats in the USA. They delivered it,

unlike governments in the UK, and they still didn't get re-elected. So why is it that Labour is so obsessed with this issue? Can it answer these questions?

The first is, "Why do you want growth?" And I think that's a really fundamental question to ask Keir Starmer, and I've never heard him answer it.

I know that he says that he will let Labour balance the books, but that's crazy because actually there are other ways to balance the books, and anyway, we don't need to balance the books.

And I'll tell you how I know we don't need to balance the books. Because he could, in fact, fund government without doing so, and not deliver inflation, because there's spare capacity in the economy, which means that inflation can't happen for reason of running a deficit.

And how do I know there's spare capacity in the economy? Because he thinks there's room for growth. And if there's room for growth, there is capacity that government spending could use, as well as the private sector, to deliver the growth he desires. So why does he want growth? I genuinely don't know.

What he doesn't also answer is the question, "What do you want to grow?" It appears that he doesn't want to grow the government. That's obvious because whatever Rachel Reeve says, they are sticking to austerity and are trying to cut every government budget that they can. So, it must follow that what he wants to grow is the private sector.

But he can't explain why that is the case and why we will benefit as a result because if he understood what most growth in the private sector delivers right now, it is more profit that is enjoyed by a very few.

And in fact, that leads to the third question, which is, "What will be the benefits of growth?" And again, we haven't heard that. Apart from this, "we've got to balance the budget, and growth will let us do that by increasing the amount of tax we'll collect whilst not increasing the level of government services" claim, which is going to seriously annoy people who are fed up with the quality of the service they're already getting. So, the benefits of growth aren't clear.

So, let's ask the next obvious question, which is "Who will get the benefits of growth?" This is where the Democrats fell flat on their face in the USA. The growth in the USA went to those who were already wealthy. It did not go to the middle classes, it did not go to the working classes, and those middle and working classes voted for Trump instead as a result.

It's not quite as simple an analysis as that as to why Trump got back into office, but it's a good enough explanation for most of what happened there. Because people did not

feel better off despite the fact that there was growth, they rejected the party that delivered that growth, that made the rich richer, but had nothing to do with them.

And that's the risk that Labour faces here. If Labour doesn't know who's going to benefit from the growth they're talking about, the chance is they'll deliver it for the rich alone.

So, "If we're going to get growth, what is it that we're going to have to give up to get that growth?" Because we do, of course, live with constraints.

And let's be clear. That is a fact. We haven't got finite resources in this country, whether that be people who can work or whether that be physical resources that we have in the country already, or which we can import. There are limits as to what we can do. That is the whole basis of the economic problem.

So, if we're going to go for private sector growth, and that is the goal that Keir Starmer seems to have, what are we going to give up to achieve that? Well, the answer would appear to be the NHS, education, social care, the police service, the armed forces, and everything else that seems to be quite important to a lot of people in this country. Those are the things which are not going to be funded so that Labour believes that growth in the private sector can happen, which it's going to deliver through lower taxation and lower regulation on that private sector activity, which will then result in the rich getting richer. We're going to give up services for everyone so that the rich can get richer via the private sector.

"Why are those things worth giving up?" is my next question. And my answer is, I don't know. Why is it worth giving up on health care so that a few people can get richer? Why is it worth charging students more so that a few can get richer? What is that trade-off? And why have they decided to make it? Again, I just don't know. And I wish Keir would answer that question.

But he also needs to answer, "Who will bear the cost of those things that are given up?" And what we know is that that's going to be those who are on lower incomes. Let's be totally honest, of course it is. Those who depend upon the state are going to pay the price for the sacrifices that are going to be made so that resources can be allocated to the private sector to deliver the growth that Keir Starmer wants, but can't guarantee to supply.

There's another question. And Keir Starmer has not addressed this one, and nor has anybody else in his government. And that is, "Is the growth that Keir Starmer wants sustainable in the context of the planet on which we live?" We live on a finite planet, and a planet that is also subject to the second law of thermodynamics, which means that the more energy we release, the less we have available to release in the future. That's a process called entropy. And if that is the case, is going for growth for the sake of enhancing the well-being of the rich a tradeoff that we really want to make? I don't know.

Let me ask another question. "How will Keir Starmer know when he's achieved his goal of growth?" What is the measure that he's going to use? Is that an increase in GDP, which, of course, does not take into consideration the distribution or benefit of growth, and which is itself, anyway, deeply subjective and doesn't measure a lot of the things that we really value?

It doesn't measure our well-being. It doesn't measure happiness. It doesn't have a measure for the consequences of poverty and inequality. It doesn't measure the cost of the pollution that is created in the pursuit of growth or anything else. It just measures money and very little more. And even then, it measures money very badly. The accounting inside our GDP - gross domestic product calculations, or national income, if you wish to think of it that way - is exceptionally poor.

So, "Can you actually be sure that you've got your measure of growth right?" Are you actually certain that whatever you do will really deliver growth, or are you simply playing with a statistic? As I used to say to classes when I was teaching, we could increase GDP really easily. We could have a massive climate catastrophe. The cost of clearing it up would increase GDP. That was seen in Alaska once. The single biggest increase in GDP in Alaska's history was the result of the Exxon Valdez tanker crashing into its shore and spilling vast quantities of oil, which had to be cleaned up.

Or we could make the whole country unhappy by having people divorce because divorces are incredibly expensive and require people to move homes, and therefore buy new ones, and therefore furnish them. But the sum of human happiness would not rise as a consequence.

So, is this measure of growth right? Does Keir Starmer know that? I don't know.

And "When will he know to stop growth?" What is the indicator that says enough's enough, and now's the time to look at those quality measures rather than those quantitative measures? Does he have an answer for that question? I very much doubt it.

Nor do I suspect that he will have an answer to my next question, which I think is the twelfth, and that is, "What will happen when you give up on growth?" Will the economy then collapse? Do you have a plan for stability? Because actually, that's the natural state of life.

Think about your body for a moment. In your body, you want a steady state of replenishment. All the time that we live, our bodies are in that state of replenishment. We create new cells to replace those that are dying. They turn over. If, actually, our bodies start to grow too fast, we have one of two problems. We've either got a problem of obesity, or more worrying still, we have a problem with cancer. And we have to actually then do something to prevent the growth. The natural state of life is stability. How will he manage that stability when the time for it comes, as surely it will, because

we are living on a finite planet? I don't know whether he can answer those questions.

And let's also just ask the obvious question that follows on from that, which is, "If you can't answer these questions, why can't you answer them?" Because before you chose to make growth a strategy, you must have considered the alternative, which was not growth, but which was stability, which instead chose to use the resources, the abilities, the capacities, and the whole desires of this nation to work in a different way from delivering growth by actually redistributing the resources it has to make people overall better off, which it would undoubtedly do.

"So what goal could you have instead of growth?" That's the other obvious question and the last in this series.

Could it be meeting need?

Could it be greater equity in our society?

Could it be sustainability?

Could it be enhanced well-being?

All of those would have been possible alternatives to growth, but we don't hear about them, even though, very obviously, they focus upon something much deeper than simply whether we can have another Mars bar or not. And yet, that's what he chose. He wants to increase the stack of things that we can consume, and consuming isn't the be-all and end-all of our well-being, as we all know.

So, Keir Starmer, answer my 14 questions, will you please? Tell us why you want growth, because I don't know the answers and I'm not sure that you do either, and that's why your government is in trouble.

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*These are the notes I made this from:*

### **14 questions about economic growth**

- \* **Why do you want growth?**
- \* **What do you want to grow?**
- \* **What will be the benefits of growth?**
- \* **Who will get that benefit?**
- \* **What will you have to give up to get growth?**
- \* **Why are those things worth giving up?**

- \* ***Who will bear the cost of those things?***
- \* ***Is the growth you want sustainable on a planet?***
- \* ***How will you know that you've achieved your growth goal?***
- \* ***How can you be sure your measure of growth is right?***
- \* ***When will you know that it's right to stop growth?***
- \* ***What will happen when you give up on growth?***
- \* ***If you can't ask these questions, why not?***
- \* ***What goal could you have instead of growth:***
- \* ***Meeting need?***
- \* ***Greater equity?***
- \* ***Sustainability?***
- \* ***Enhanced well-being?***