

Funding the Future

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As the [Guardian notes](#) this morning:

More than half of the increase in disability benefits is due to more mental health claims, according to research.

They added:

Whereas in 2002, mental health or behavioural problems were the main condition for 25% of claimants, it had risen to 40% by 2019 and has accelerated further since Covid-19. In 2024, the proportion of those receiving disability benefits whose main condition was a mental or behavioural problem had reached 44% (some 3.3% of the working-age population). It means that “55% of the post-pandemic rise in disability benefits can be accounted for by claims primarily for mental health”, [a new report from] the IFS report states.

That Covid and its aftermath have created such a situation is hardly surprising. It disrupted almost every aspect of life, and made life for everyone harder. This had a particular impact on those who rely on routines, support, and networks of dependency to get through life. These were disrupted. The residual fear that they might be so again is, in itself, deeply disabling. I am not surprised that permanent harm has arisen.

Covid, by itself, is not, however, sufficient to explain this change. Many in our society are increasingly aware that our economy essentially exists to exploit them. It deliberately promotes inequality, exploitation of the most vulnerable through abusive employment practices, and the straightforward sucking of funds from those least well off by excessive charges for interest and rent. At the same time, it rubs the noses of the majority in the excesses of the wealthy through a continual stream of advertising for products that we are meant to aspire to own but which most will never do because the economy is set up to guarantee that we cannot.

Is it surprising that mental ill health has risen in that case? How are people meant to be resilient in the face of such deliberate systemic abuse that is actually promoted by the chosen politics of all the major parties in the country, leaving people feeling hopeless about the prospect of change?

The surprise should not be that so many are off sick, unable to work. The surprise should be that so many hang on, somehow. That is what is impressive and worthy of note. In the face of the enormous adversity that many millions face in this country, which very few politicians seem to have the slightest inkling of either understanding or wanting to do anything about, somehow life goes on, despite the cost to people of simply trying to make ends meet. This is indication of quite exceptional resilience. At the same time, it suggests we may be tottering on the edge of a system that is very close to failing, altogether.

All pervasive neoliberalism and a healthy population are incompatible. It is really that simple.

So, what are politicians going to do about that? Apart from reintroducing workhouses, that is?