

Where's the plan?

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/12/09/wheres-the-plan/>

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Too many campaigners talk about what's wrong, but never explain what must change or how it could happen.

Real campaigning means finding solutions: identifying causes, proposing reforms, and then doing the maths on the finances to show how they would work in practice.

In this video, I explain what effective campaigning looks like, why technical detail matters, and why those who want real social and economic justice must deal with funding, finance and resource allocation.

We need movements that create real change, and not just outrage, but without addressing finance, we'll get nowhere.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF40KyuRp8Q&si=N39W01vAhXmlAh6d>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=9vjup-19e4f45-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

I've been talking about campaigning on my Funding the Future blog of late, and one of the key themes that I've been highlighting is that moaning is not the same as campaigning.

I've been campaigning now for over a quarter of a century, and I have a style which I bring to that activity, which is what I call solution-focused. In other words, I will identify a problem; I will work out what the cause of it is; I will work out how we can address that cause; I will suggest a solution to the problem; and I will explain what the outcome that I anticipate is.

But when I look at too many other campaigns, all I see is something happening at stage one. People moan about the fact that something isn't working, and they demand that action be taken, and they claim the fact that it isn't is grossly unfair, but they're not willing to put in the hard graft to explain what the solutions are. And I believe that this is really important because if we are going to change the world, and I want to change the world, we have to do effective campaigning.

So, let's just talk about what I mean by campaigning. Almost everyone here knows I want to change how this world runs. I want to change it so that people on what we might call normal incomes or pensions, and those who need protection, can live well. I think that is possible if we manage the resources that we have available to us. I believe I'm asking for something realistic because this country could meet everyone's needs if it wanted to; the resources are available.

So for me, campaigning is simple: it's about how to work out, how to put the right resources in the right place so that the needs that we can identify are met.

But for most people, that isn't what they're trying to do. I read books and blogs and reports and watch videos, which are strong on analysis of everything that is wrong in the world, and some of these are written by very well-known people. But when it comes to saying, "What are we actually going to do about this?" they fall mysteriously silent.

You've read those types of books. 400 pages of analysis of what has failed, and then 10 pages at the end saying two things. One, here are a few ideas, and they are really very vague, and then "more research is needed." That is not good enough, is my message. Wearing your heart on your sleeve does not mean you've created an effective plan to deliver change. It just means you've had a good moan. Now, maybe you need a good moan, but the world needs something better than that.

I see this now in many NGOs and think tanks. They can say what they don't like endlessly. They can say everything is unfair, and they can say who they think is suffering as a result, and most of the time, their analysis is right. The problem is, they very rarely spell out what must change in any detail and explain how the process of change will really work. In other words, the nitty-gritty is absent.

The problem is that in most cases, they avoid saying what change in behaviour they want. After all, if you want change, you are going to change people's behaviour, the structures around their lives, the way things work, how the money moves. This is something that most campaigners feel desperately uncomfortable with because change is uncomfortable; that's a fact of life. Most of us are very comfortable with things carrying on as they are, especially if we are already comfortable. And most of those who are doing campaigning are, let me be clear, very comfortable as campaigners.

But what you've got to identify is who will be the winners and losers from whatever you demand, and if you duck that question of how change will actually be enforced, as well as put into place, then above all else, you are failing the people who you've identified who need real change to take place so that they can live in comfort as well. You've got to, in other words, address that most uncomfortable of subjects: finance. You've got to talk about funding, finance and its consequences and how you're going to raise it, how you're going to distribute it, and what the outcomes will be. You have to do your maths unless you're in the States, when you have to do the math.

Whichever way you look at it. This requires what I call the solution focus that I adopt. I see the same unfair world as everyone else does on the left.

I see low pay.

I see bank exploitation via high interest rates.

I see landlord power forcing people to live in poverty housing.

I see monopoly abuse.

I see discrimination all around me that is real.

And I'm angry about it, let's be clear. I hope that's obvious. That motivates why I get up in the morning to do this sort of work. I know that there are things to change, and I will moan about them, but I won't end there. What I'm always interested in doing is coming up with a solution.

So, when nearly 25 years ago, at our very first meeting, John Christensen asked me the question, "How do we stop multinational companies tackling tax abuse?" I came up, on the spur of the moment with the idea, which became country-by-country reporting.

Country-by-country reporting is a way of forcing multinational companies to account for their use of tax havens, which they have to report to their tax authorities, meaning that those tax authorities now have information that they did not have a quarter of a century ago to stop tax haven abuse by these companies. And it's the law in 80 major jurisdictions around the world, including the UK.

The answer was simple. It was to force these companies to disclose where they make

their profits and where they pay their taxes. It came from a deep technocratic understanding on my part of how accounting works, but it was a practical proposal drafted in detail that could be implemented. It took more than a decade to get there. I thought the idea up in 2002; it was adopted by the OECD in 2015 and became law from 2017 onwards. That's what campaigning looks like. But the point is this, it was totally solution-focused from the beginning.

So too are my proposals with regard to reforming individual savings accounts or ISAs in the UK, and pensions, and joining them up with the opportunity to create real investment. I know, because of a technical analysis of how ISAs and pensions are used, that they are not funding real investment in the UK economy, and now they are basically either putting cash into dormant bank accounts or the funds are being used to buy secondhand shares and properties. If only we could turn that dormant money into capital for housing, infrastructure, energy, education, and training, we could transform the UK, and I've explained the mechanisms that could be put in place to make this work. This is an answer to the point which most people reach, which is saying, we need to invest. I've gone beyond that and said, "This is how we find the money to invest." That's what good campaigning does.

And another example is my promotion of modern monetary theory. I know that this is contentious, but I do it because this talks about how the relationship between the government and those who use money can be changed, and changed forever. It changes the balance of power between the state, the City, and democracy in favour of the state and democracy and against finance. If only government understood money, it's my argument that the government could then use it to serve people instead of markets. That's a systemic shift rooted in technical detail and not in slogans, but it's an answer to the question, "How do we solve poverty?" And my answer is, find the money, and modern monetary theory helps us do so. That's why it's important.

And it also shows that I'm not interested in tinkering. Sticking plasters are fine. There are campaigns that are incredibly popular that just apply sticking plasters, but that's not what I'm interested in. Those campaigns, like it or not, however photogenic they might be, and they are, do not create systemic change because they don't ask the big question, which is, "Why is this person in poverty?", or "Why is this person being discriminated against?", or "Why do we have global injustice on whatever the issue might be?" If we create systemic change, we have to ask those questions, and the consequence is a fairer, more just, more sustainable world for many and not the few.

Yes, that will mean harming the interests of some, and most especially in the work that I do, at least, the interests of bankers, landlords, and monopolists. And they are the losers, and I name it. I know that my work will upset them. I don't worry about that because that is the inevitable consequence of creating tax and social and economic justice in this country. They might abuse me for doing so, and I'm indifferent to their abuse because I've got a goal in mind, which is the relief of poverty, injustice, and discrimination, and abuse is the cost of serious campaigning.

So I won't just complain and do nothing.

I won't sit in a permanent seminar about how bad everything is.

I won't pretend that raising awareness is the same as having a plan.

And I won't do those things because my experience is that only solution-focused work actually delivers change.

We have to do the detail.

We have to prepare the proposals that explain how the nuts and bolts, and in particular the change in finance and accounting and tax rules, or anything else that is necessary to bring about the actual practical on-the-ground difference that will relieve poverty or whatever else it might be, is going to happen.

We can't just say, "We must do something". We've got to show what needs to be done. Without worked through examples, we just can be dismissed. Those in power can say "they don't understand the pressures on government", and as a result, we are swept aside.

So the biggest missing element in almost every campaign that I see is the explanation of the funding for what is desired. Almost no one explains how their proposals will actually be paid for. They just make flippant comments like, government is big enough, there must be some spare money for this purpose, but that isn't true.

Governments have to be persuaded to reallocate resources, and anyway, money is not the resource they are really transferring. Money just changes the allocation of real resources, people, skills and materials towards an outcome which you want done. So you've got to explain why and what the consequences are. Funding is just the way we allocate the real resources we have in our society, so start thinking there and then talking about how much money is required to reallocate them to what you want.

We must therefore embrace this level of detail. It's not good enough to say "we'll deal with the technical stuff later." Leaving the technical stuff aside is a catastrophic mistake for those who want real change, and for those who need it to happen. If we leave money and debt to the right, we hand them the power to say no. If there's one line you need to remember out of this video, that is it. If we leave money and debt to the right, we hand them the power to say no. It's very rare that I repeat a line, but I think it was essential to do so on this occasion.

Resource allocation is at the heart of political economy, and we on the left should own that.

Real campaigning must say what the change we want is.

It must say why it is needed and who it is needed for.

It must say when it must happen.

And most especially, it must explain how it will happen.

But above all of that, it must do that most uncomfortable thing of all; it must explain the maths. Without the maths, without showing your workings, then you are not going to get the result you want. If you want to change the world, you've got to deal with the details. Nothing else is good enough.

What do you think? As usual, there's a poll down below. What I'm asking you is, are you happy with the state of campaigning in the world that you see now? Are the campaigns good enough, or are they just sticking plasters? Do they deliver real change, or are they just moaning? How do you know that somebody you're supporting is really the master of what they're demanding?

Let us know in the poll, in the comments. We do pay attention to them. They really do influence how we make videos.

Poll

[poll id="267"]

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