

Neither Labour or the Resolution Foundation can solve t...

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I surprised myself yesterday with my desire [to respond](#) to the Resolution Foundation's publication of its new book, *Unsung Britain*.

The book is meant to reflect a moment when we realise that not everyone benefits from how the British economy is run, with poverty remaining a serious and persistent threat to the well-being of many.

I noticed several media references to it during the day, suggesting that it must have had some initial impact, but my overwhelming concern, from the moment I first read the promotional email sent to me, to reading the list of highlights that I focused upon in my commentary [first thing yesterday](#) and [today](#), is the inadequacy of the response that has been made.

To summarise that concern, almost everything that the Resolution Foundation suggested represented tinkering at the edges of a system which is, itself, very obviously failing. That was implicit in, first, what the Resolution Foundation actually did, and second, its failure to question the system that created this outcome and why it could produce consequences so disastrous for so many in the UK, even as others live in considerable comfort. For a supposed left-of-centre think tank, which is how the Resolution Foundation would frame itself, this appeared to be quite extraordinary, and an obvious matter of concern.

To put this another way, the Resolution Foundation clearly accepted the neoliberal framing of our society when undertaking this work. If it had not, *Unsung Britain* could not have been written as it is.

My observation is straightforward: although neoliberalism has set out to be destructive, the Resolution Foundation is not questioning it. This is despite the fact that the politics of destruction that it represents is deliberately intended to:

- * Undermine democracy.
- * Increase corporate power.

- * Increase income and wealth division within society.
- * Permit the extraction of rents of increasing value from the activities undertaken within an economy.
- * Perpetuate inequality, and so poverty.

As a consequence, although neoliberalism, as a politics of destruction, has as its intent the undermining of society as we know it, there is no challenge to its ideology within the Resolution Foundation's book, *Unsung Britain*.

That fact is what has motivated my two responses. Unless, and until, we challenge this politics of destruction, we will end up with (if we have not already got) a society dominated by a deliberate economics of failure, created with the intention of demonstrating that state provision does, at present, fail to meet need, thereby creating the justification for further reducing it rather than putting in place the systems that people really need.

In my response, [*published this morning*](#), I emphasise systemic changes that I think are required. My bias in that thinking, as it is in everything I do, is towards the poor. I am unashamed about that.

I am aware that my mother was brought up in extreme poverty, whilst my father lived with the consequences of deep insecurity within his family, and the combination scarred both of their outlooks throughout their lives, even when they did appear to have assimilated into the middle classes. That opportunity was provided to them by a fully-functioning and caring state that delivered the post-war consensus of which they were unquestionable beneficiaries. I am aware, as a result, of just how much I also owe to that same political consensus, which provided me with security, an economic chance, free education, a belief that there was a social safety net, and an understanding, above all else, that we were all in this together despite our many and various differences.

My parents never let me forget that we were only ever one step away from poverty, and that precariousness was a quality of life of which we should all be aware. For a long time, I doubted that it was entirely healthy, but I now appreciate that, as poverty is growing so rapidly again, just how right they were. Their understanding is precisely why I think that eliminating fear is such a fundamental goal within both politics and economics. There is almost nothing that does more to threaten well-being than the overwhelming sense that a person has that they are living in continuing economic peril with little or no chance to do anything about it.

This is the lived reality of millions of people in this country.

This is also why millions of people are turning, in despair and wholly inappropriately, to Reform for political answers to the problems they think they face, being conned by

Nigel Farage and his rhetoric into believing he has answers to their problems, when the exact opposite is true. But do not blame them for that. When you are desperate, you cling to any chance of survival, and he is deliberately exploiting his knowledge of that fact.

I do not think that the framing of the Resolution Foundation book indicates any awareness of this reality. If that awareness existed, they would not have written the timid solutions they offer, whilst leaving in place the economic system that created the very precariousness they are supposedly tackling. Put bluntly, you cannot tackle the systemic delivery of poverty without changing the economic system and the political structure that frames it. That is not possible.

My responses are designed, as a result, to indicate my acceptance of the need to reframe that economic structure of society.

I talk about moving the economic goals of society away from growth and towards the relief of poverty for the overall benefit of well-being.

I implicitly reject trickle-down economics.

I reject the idea that inequality is structurally beneficial, which I think the Resolution Foundation continues to maintain, because it is implicit within neoliberalism that inequality is a motivator for individuals when it is plainly obvious that it is nothing more than a trap.

I argue very obviously that so-called “free” enterprise can be abusive, and that regulation to control its capacity for delivering reward to a few at cost to many must be strengthened.

I make it clear that regulation must be radically revised as a consequence. Far too much of that we have is, and is clearly meant to be penal. We live, again, in a society where it is assumed that the poor must be punished because their poverty is the consequence of a moral failure on their part. The systems that we now have suggest that we have not got over the Victorian ethic on this issue, which is staggering. We should, instead, live in a society where generosity characterises what we do, instead of punishment being the goal.

One of my continuing themes is the prevention of rent extraction, whether by landlords, energy companies, or anyone else. We could do that.

*When I reflected on where I had drawn ideas from when creating this response, I realised that some of the items that I propose were in my book *The Courageous State*, published in 2011. Some of the thinking about rent is influenced by the Common Weal think tank in Scotland. The Common Sense Group at Northumbria University, who featured on a recent podcast on this blog, influenced some of the discussion around*

universal basic income and minimum income guarantees. Discussions that I have had over a long period of time on universal basic services influence the ideas around essential costs and their management. The GDP discussion has appeared here often, over time. I am not, therefore, claiming that all the ideas that I represent are original. It would be ridiculous to do so. What I do, however, note is that the Resolution Foundation could also have drawn on many sources for ideas, and seems to have cast its net in a very different place from that in which I looked for inspiration.

All this being said, there are also many aspects of the Resolution Foundation's work which highlight absences in their thinking.

To take just a few examples, they did not discuss energy pricing when looking at energy arrears. There was no hint of that issue in their work that I can see.

Nor did they highlight serious tax reform, beyond the reform of council tax, as a mechanism to tackle inequality.

What is more, I have a deep sense that they believe that tax will constrain anything they wish to do, and have accepted that idea, which shows a remarkable lack of understanding of the macroeconomy and the role of money creation and taxation within it.

There was also, as far as I can see, because I have not read everything yet, insufficient consideration of the boost to growth that would happen if measures of the sort I describe were put into place, precisely because those in receipt of funds released by policy tackling inequality would stimulate very high multiplier effects, creating consequent economic growth. That factor does not appear to be part of the justification for the policy proposals made by the Resolution Foundation, not least because administrative tinkering is never going to achieve that outcome.

My perception is that, more than ever, I understand why I work on this issue and that I should, perhaps, create my own book, although I am not sure how I will find the time to do that. If the Resolution Foundation cannot even see, let alone understand or tackle, the systemic issues that will continue to create poverty in this country, even if the reforms that they propose are made, then we have a systemic political problem in this country, which is a lack of understanding of this issue, meaning that it will be perpetuated. That is why I have responded in the way I have to what I have read.

We do not only have a poverty of means that is affecting too many in the UK, but we also suffer from a poverty of understanding of that issue, and a most definite poverty of ideas on how to tackle it. That is the crisis we face.

That is also why I make no apology for the number of words I have devoted to this issue over the last 24 hours or so, rather than focusing on the minutiae of the supposed political crisis engulfing the Labour Party.

Ignoring that minutiae might, in fact, be important. What I have written does, in fact, tackle the real crisis within that Party, which has, in recent years, been heavily influenced by organisations such as the Resolution Foundation, to the extent that the former chief executive of that organisation is now a Treasury minister in the Labour government.

The Labour Party's crisis, if we stand back, can be seen as identical to that the Resolution Foundation obviously faces. Precisely because neither can see the threats implicit in neoliberalism, they are utterly unable to identify solutions to the problem this country faces. When they have decided that the neoliberal system works despite creating poverty and profound precarity for many, they have, by definition, prevented themselves from solving the problems that real people face. That is why they are no solution at present, and why we need something radically different if we are to have a country worth living in again.