

New glossary entry: Woke

Published: February 16, 2026, 8:05 am

“Woke” originally meant being alert to injustice, whether it be racism, inequality, exploitation, or the ways power harms those with the least protection. It has since been turned into a term of abuse, used to mock empathy, deny injustice, and delegitimise calls for fairness. In the language of political-economy and Funding the Future, “woke” has become a shorthand for caring about other people.

First, being woke is about awareness. It is recognising that poverty, discrimination, environmental damage, and exclusion are not accidents but consequences of policy and power. To be woke is to see how illicit financial flows deprive countries of revenue, how austerity weakens public services, and how inequality damages health and democracy. Awareness is the beginning of accountability.

Second, the attack on “woke” is political. When those who challenge injustice are ridiculed, an attempt is being made to silence debate. Calling concern for social security, climate policy, fair taxation, social justice, gender equality or anti-racism “woke nonsense” is a way of avoiding responsibility. It is rhetoric designed to defend privilege.

Third, “anti-woke” politics often accompany the politics of destruction. When neoliberal policies create insecurity and stagnation, anger must be redirected. Culture wars deliberately replace economic debate. The blame is shifted to minorities or campaigners rather than to policies that underfund public services or favour rent extraction.

Fourth, being woke is not about moral vanity. It is about recognising interdependence. Health depends on housing, income, education, and environment. Democracy depends on fairness and inclusion. An economy that ignores these realities fails. Inequality is destructive to everyone, not just those who suffer discrimination the most.

Finally, in the Funding the Future sense, to be woke is simply to care enough to ask whether our economy serves people. If “woke” means valuing social security, fair taxation, strong public services, environmental responsibility, and dignity for all, then it

names the first step towards politics for people and a politics of care.

“Woke” is therefore not an insult. It is awareness of injustice and the determination to correct it, and that is a necessary quality in any society that hopes to build a fair and sustainable economy.