

Why are people angry?

Published: February 21, 2026, 7:09 am

People in the UK are angry, and they have good reasons. Stagnant wages, housing costs, collapsing public services and growing inequality are real. But the far-right exploits that anger instead of solving it.

In this video, I explain:

- The real economic causes of anger
- How neoliberal austerity created insecurity
- Why migrants are scapegoated
- Why a politics of care is the real solution

This is Funding the Future in practice - an economics of hope, not hate.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5hAlr1cgZI?si=P3mVcKYudjZ_x2Za

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=sverc-1a4f716-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:

People in the UK are angry. Inequality is driving that, that's obvious, and some people are turning as a result to the far-right; we know that is true. And you can see why. The anger, which people are suffering, has very real causes, but my argument is that only a politics of care can address them and that the far-right can't, and that's what this video is all about.

Let's be clear. The left cannot dismiss the far-right by just saying ignore them. The far-right are hearing and responding to, as well as exploiting, real concerns. Real concerns created by the neoliberal politics of destruction of the single transferable party, and let's be clear what I mean by the single transferable party. The single transferable party has been in power in the UK for a long time. It is the Conservatives, it is the Labour Party, it is in part the SNP in Scotland, although the membership are most definitely not aligned with what the leadership has been doing.

The problem with the single transferable party, to which the Liberal Democrats are also aligned, of course, because they were in coalition government with the Conservatives at one period of time and delivered austerity, is that it is committed to the politics of destruction, and that is what neoliberalism is.

It's the politics of the household analogy.

It's the politics that has delivered austerity.

And you cannot ignore that fact because these are the policies which have created the situation, which is giving rise to the anger as a consequence of the feeling of failure that people are suffering.

So, I am saying we can't dismiss the feeling of voters about the fact that this has happened, because it's a reality. What we now have to do is understand people's anger, because anger without explanation becomes hate, and hate becomes dangerous politics, and that is my precise concern.

So what am I going to do in this video? I'm going to look at why people are angry and then say what we can do about it. There are a number of very real causes of this anger, and I'm going to work through a number of them. I'm not suggesting my list is complete, but it's a good introduction.

The first cause of anger is economic insecurity. Let's be real about this.

Real wages have been stagnant in the UK for fifteen years and maybe somewhat longer for many people.

At the same time, housing has become increasingly unaffordable. Whether that be mortgage costs or rental costs, it doesn't matter which; the price has gone up, and people are feeling the strain. Every household who is having to pay for its living accommodation is literally stressed to its limits. Only the more elderly who own their

own homes are free of that risk, but even they can see the stress on younger members of their families.

At the same time, energy and food costs are rising normally at rates higher than inflation, with an impact on lower-income households that is disproportionate and not reflected in official data.

At the same time, secure jobs have disappeared. For many people, the prospect of getting a job for life is now just a remote dream. There is no such thing. There isn't even a job with security built into it. Precarious work, zero-hours labour, and so on, is the norm for so many people that it's become literally part of our economic infrastructure.

But people feel the risk of that. They have been made to bear the risk and consequences of this politics of destruction that the single transferable party, arranged between Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and others, has delivered for them. People feel the economy is no longer working for them, and they're right.

The second cause of this anger is inequality. Wealth is concentrated in fewer than ever hands in the UK, and the disparities between the wealth of the few and the situation of the many has become greater.

Billionaires celebrate while social security is cut.

Tax avoidance is tolerated and even praised inside our economy.

And public services are starved.

That is the situation that we face. This is reality. People sense the unfairness of this because it's real, and they conclude, as a consequence, that the system is rigged against them, and why not? Because let's be blunt about this. It is.

The third cause of this anger is the collapse of public services. We can see it all around us.

NHS waiting lists are long, and if anything, getting longer despite everything that Keir Starmer would like to claim.

Schools are underfunded. Children with special needs are under threat of having their support withdrawn.

Local governments are, in many cases, near bankruptcy and have cut back their services to the absolute minimum that can be supplied, and that is having a real impact on people's lives.

At the same time, infrastructure is crumbling. We can see it from the potholes onwards.

It is obvious that something is deeply wrong in our country when it is literally falling apart in front of our eyes.

The key point is that this is the lived experience of austerity. People know that this is happening, and let's not pretend otherwise; public services are collapsing.

The fourth cause of this anger is the loss of dignity that people feel, and this is absolutely incredibly important.

People want to feel they matter. They don't want to feel ignored. But the truth is that under austerity, and under the hollowing out of the UK economy that happened from the time of Margaret Thatcher onwards, when industrial activity was displaced by financialisation, communities have been left aside.

Far too many, particularly in the North and Midlands; they have been left hollowed out. And in Wales and Scotland, too, you'll see exactly the same thing happening, whilst the Southwest is virtually a forgotten zone with regard to economic development.

High streets are empty, secure employment has gone, and people are told their problems are all their own fault because, to quote the late Norman Tebbit, a Tory minister who was responsible for bringing in this whole vile culture of the politics of destruction, they refused to "Get on their bike" to get a job.

They shouldn't need to. The fact is that this country is made up of communities, not mobile people who are required to move for jobs. There should be jobs where people are. There should be well-being in the places where people live in community and with their families, but it's not there. Those communities have been hollowed out. People have been left without dignity. They've been effectively told they don't matter. Neoliberalism has replaced solidarity with blame.

The fifth cause of this anger is political failure.

The political parties I've already named have promised change, but in practice, they've delivered austerity.

They're with growth over well-being, and people know that growth does not trickle down despite all the promises.

And fiscal myths have been put forward around taxpayers' money, but people know they haven't got any taxpayers' money to spend. Many of them can't even afford to pay any tax because they don't have the income to do so.

There is no honest debate about how government spending is working as a result. That is the problem. The political failure is to engage with the reality that is going on in life. People conclude as a result that democracy no longer listens. And when politicians don't keep their promises, people believe that politicians are indifferent to them.

The sixth cause is fear and misinformation. Let's be clear about this. There is a massive amount of fear and misinformation. There has been a deliberate programme put forward of blaming migrants for the structural problems that exist in this country. Let's not pretend otherwise.

We've seen it in our newspapers, the Daily Mail, the Daily Express, and the others who make up the gutter press of the UK have done this for years. They have blamed people who have never created the problems in this country and who have, in many cases, filled the gaps which would otherwise have appeared.

Culture wars have been used to replace real policy, and social media has amplified anger.

The far-right has offered simple answers, but simple answers to complex problems are lies.

All of this is about promoting fear, and much of it is based upon misinformation, but that's not by chance ; that's deliberate, and that is a cause of anger in its own right. So that one is not based upon reality; it's based upon myths, but nonetheless, it's real.

The seventh cause is the media and manufactured fear. I'm building on the previous idea here, but bringing in quite specifically now, the fact that we live in a world where there are multiple demands on our attention and where those who want it know that fear is profitable. As a result, they deliberately provoke social media outrage and newspapers, scapegoat migrants, and, as a consequence, we are seeing this pernicious attitude that I previously noted, but there is more to it than that.

Advertising, as I have often argued, is deliberately designed to make us unhappy with our lives. This isn't by accident. They want us to buy whatever they're offering to supposedly make our lives fulfilled when, at present, apparently, they are not, and that is what I'm really worried about.

This is the sense that we are missing out that the media deliberately creates which has undermined people's sense of well-being, even when, if truth be told, many people are materially better off than they have been for a long time. But that sense of difference, that sense of inadequacy, this sense that the media has created, that there is a 'them' and 'us' with so much of the media focusing upon the 'them' who have everything and the 'us' who have little are ignored, that is what has created dissatisfaction, anger, and people who want someone to blame for the fact they feel that they are being left behind. A frightened population is easier to manipulate, and that is what the media has created.

The eighth cause of this anger, fear of the future. In the background, but real nonetheless, is a recurring fear of that future. Whether it is climate change, AI, war, or economic instability, people are sensing very real uncertainty now, and why not?

Because it's there. It is real. It's absolutely rational to be frightened of this thing that you can't control, called the future, where everything looks really rather horrible as a consequence of the decisions of the politicians all around you.

And when those politicians have no idea what to do about what we are facing, that just makes this fear even more justified. Without a credible vision of hope, fear turns into anger, and anger looks for targets, and very few of our politicians are able at present to offer any credible vision of hope.

So what is happening? For all these reasons, anger is turning into fear, and fear is turning people to the far-right.

The far-right are promising certainty.

They're offering someone to blame, almost invariably, migrants at present, but not just migrants. There's also the supposed elite of universities, and teachers, and lawyers, and others who are to blame. And they pretend to defend the community from these people who, it is said, will be abusing them, but they are actually exploiting the genuine suffering of people without offering any real solutions that might relieve that suffering in any real way.

This is the politics of hate built on real hardship.

In all of this, there is a lot the far-right ignores.

Migrants did not, for example, cut NHS spending.

Disabled people did not cause austerity by having needs that must be met.

Public servants did not deliberately drive inequality; there's no sign that that is true.

But billionaires and bad policy that favoured the wealthy did most definitely deliver inequality, and those are things that the single transferable party of the Conservatives, of Labour, the Liberal Democrats and others have delivered.

The point is this: the far-right is misdirecting people's anger.

Anger should not be aimed at the people who claim benefits.

Anger should not be aimed at migrants.

Anger should not be aimed at failing communities where support is not available.

Anger should be aimed at those who let this happen, but the far-right doesn't want to do that because they have no more vision of the future than does the single transferable party. They, in fact, if anything, have a smaller vision of the future because

they have no ideas at all. But they are using the politics of distraction to hide that fact by creating an artificial anger with people who are entirely innocent of blame for the situation we're in.

So, what is the real economic story we should be talking about?

The fact is, governments chose to do austerity. They didn't need to. That was never necessary. There were always funds available to deliver the type of society that we in the UK wanted, but governments chose not to spend those funds because it said we had to live as if we were constrained like a household, and that was always untrue.

We were sold lies, in other words, and of course, we're angry about that. Governments have permitted tax abuse; they've even encouraged it.

They've undertaxed wealth deliberately; and that has led to the feeling that we live in a two-tier society and that has justification. It's true.

All the while government weakened labour.

It put in place trade union laws that made sure that wages were not protected.

It put in place those laws to ensure that flexible hours became the norm.

It literally undermined the rights of people to work in the way that they wanted.

All of these were political choices. None of them was inevitable. Other options were available, and there were consequences. There were obvious consequences, which were predicted at the time, but which we now see all around us. Growing social division, attacks on minorities, collapse of democratic norms and authoritarian politics. History shows where this road leads.

The politics of care is the alternative.

A politics of care would mean secure incomes for everyone, whether by fair wages or by the delivery of a social safety net to ensure that everyone could live with freedom from fear.

There would be investment in public services.

There would be fair taxation of wealth and corporations to balance up the equation within society to ensure that everybody can partake on an equal footing.

And there will be jobs that provide dignity. In other words, you would not be put on the scrap heap the moment your employer decides that they wish to do just that.

Care would create belonging. The idea that people matter would be central to this

politics; profits would be secondary. This is a reorientation. It's a massive change of mindset, but it's fundamental. It's only by doing this that we can change.

We would create economic justice. What would it look like? We would end austerity myths. We would use public money to meet real needs. We would tackle tax havens, and avoidance, and tax wealth properly.

We would make Britain fair again.

We would build housing, green energy systems, a proper health service and education fit for purpose for everybody from cradle to grave. In other words, it would provide nursery education and lifelong education as people face the challenges of work, as the economy changes around them.

This is funding the future in practice.

We need to rebuild trust to do all of this; we need to tell the truth about government finances as a consequence. We cannot carry on with the myths and the lies.

We have to admit past mistakes.

We must put people before markets.

We must measure success by well-being, and not by GDP.

We must worry about inequality because it matters to real people.

And we must explain how money really works so people understand the constraints on government, but what it can do for them as well as what it can't do, which is all that it talks about now.

And we must put people's savings to work in the communities where they live. We must reform ISA tax reliefs and pension tax reliefs so that the money that people actually save is not used by exploitative financial services companies to gamble in the City of London, which is what happens now, but so that much of that money is returned to the places where people are to provide the infrastructure that they need to live well, whether that be a community centre, a GP surgery, a hospital, a road system, a local transport system, viable community-based energy systems, or whatever else. Hope must become credible.

Each of us has a role in this.

We must challenge misinformation.

We must demand accountability.

We must support inclusive politics.

We must vote for policies of care.

But most of all, and perhaps this is the most obvious thing to do and yet the one that has to be pointed out the strongest: we must talk to people. We must talk on social media. We must phone into radio programmes. We must talk anywhere we can, because unless we talk, nothing will change, because people won't hear that there is an alternative, and that's our role now.

Democracy requires participation. We can only beat fear by saying that there's something better. And there is something better. The politics of care is not just about tackling all the problems that we've had, and those problems are real, let's not dismiss them for a moment, but we have to talk about the fact that instead of going down the route of hate, which is what the right wing are doing, we can go down a route of care, which is participative, which embraces everyone and delivers for us all so that everyone is better off. That's what we need.

We cannot be pushed into a situation where the only alternative people can look at is the far-right.

People aren't stupid; they're only going there because there's nothing else for them to look at.

The Greens are trying, and I applaud them for that, but it needs to get better.

Plaid Cymru are trying in Wales. I applaud them, too, for that.

But the point is, people are hurt. If we want to defeat hate, we must deliver care, security and hope: freedom from fear. We can. We should, and this is the politics that I think Britain needs.

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below.

Poll

[poll id="330"]