

The bottom is rising

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Young people are beginning to realise something that previous generations rarely had to face: the economic system no longer works for them.

In this video, I begin with an unexpected political message from the United States. A Democratic Senate candidate from Maine, Troy Jackson, summed up today's politics in a single sentence:

“We are from the bottom, and we are rising.”

That phrase opens up a much bigger discussion.

To do so, I look at why millions of graduates in India cannot find work, why corruption has intensified young people's anger there, why young people in Britain increasingly question whether university is worthwhile, and why apprenticeships and decent jobs have become so difficult to obtain.

More importantly, I ask why this has happened.

Is this simply bad luck, or have governments and central banks deliberately created an economy that keeps unemployment high, house prices out of reach, and opportunities increasingly scarce?

This, though, is also a discussion about two very different ways of thinking.

Top-down thinking begins with ideology and forces reality to fit it.

Bottom-up thinking begins with people's lives and asks what actually needs to change.

If we continue denying younger generations hope, they will eventually demand change.

The real question is whether today's political and economic institutions are prepared for the moment when their top-down thinking fails, and the bottom-up thinkers amongst our young people overthrow them?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAPAcIBwK1w?si=OuOnPHKHRtPBdovt>

This is [the audio version](#) (it will not embed this morning, but the link will work)

The Debate Ammunition for this video is available here.

This is the transcript:

Sometimes I read a line in a news report, and it just triggers a series of ideas. I happen to have done that with regard to a report which I read in The New York Times. It's about a guy called Troy Jackson. He's just been chosen by the Democrats in Maine, in the USA, to stand as their candidate for the Senate in the USA as a whole.

He has previously been a local candidate for Senate in the Maine Senate, but now he's running in the country at large, and he said something really interesting. He said, "We are from the bottom, and we are rising." I liked that idea.

Troy Jackson is a lumberjack, a pretty ordinary guy in his own words. He's not an academic. He's never been a professional politician. He's only done local politics, and that is not a full-time job in the USA. He is, however, running to be a senator because he's from the bottom and it's rising.

And that to me is a fundamentally important idea. It's an idea whose time has come. It's an idea that does have an expression in philosophy, by the way. There are two types of approach to thinking. One is bottom-up thinking, and one is top-down thinking. Top-down thinking decides a set of rules and tries to fit the world to them. We know how that works. Neoliberalism and our economic system do that.

It assumes that markets are good. It assumes that governments are bad. It assumes optimal outcomes come by giving people maximum control over their money. It decides as a consequence that tax is a bad thing. You know all the rest of this stuff. And that is top-down thinking. The assumptions are made, and the facts are forced to fit them.

The alternative is something called bottom-up thinking. In bottom-up thinking, you look at the world, you look at the facts, and you try to explain them. You explore the possibilities, and you are solution-focused. You're

trying to find an answer to the question: what is going on here?

Top-down thinking says, we know what we want and we'll impose it.

Bottom-up thinking says, we are in a mess. How do we get out of it?

Troy Jackson said something which implies that he's a bottom-up thinker. We are from the bottom, and we are rising. He's thinking differently, and I like that. And that's essential in this world at the moment because, in the same report that I read in The New York Times where he was talking about this issue, they were also talking about the problem of young people in India.

Young people in India are very angry people at present. Earlier this year, a judge in India, the senior judge, as I understand it in India, described young unemployed graduates in that country as cockroaches. They didn't like being called that. Unbelievably, up to 40% of all graduates under the age of 25 in India are unemployed. They're creating vast numbers of graduates. There are no jobs for them.

If you think we have a problem with youth unemployment and graduate unemployment in the UK, you should look at India if you want to understand the scale of this issue, and this is in a country where about half the population is aged under 30. It's a young country. They have a massive youth unemployment problem, and those young people are angry.

And they're also angry because of corruption. Corruption in the exam system is what has got their goat. Earlier this year, there was to be an exam for entry into medical school. Around 2.2 million young Indians registered for those exams. There were 140,000 places available, and on the day of the exams they were cancelled because it became clear that the questions had been leaked to some of the candidates.

Obviously, it was right to withdraw the paper on that day because there would've been an unfair outcome. Those who were going to be marking didn't know who got the questions in advance. There had to be a level playing field. But that corruption has, in itself, triggered the anxiety about this whole exam process; the fact that young people in India are being forced to pass through so many hoops to get a job.

There were 35,000 jobs available on Indian railways this year. More than a million people applied. I think it might have been many more than a million. The point is, again, the desperation to get work in India is real. Young people are angry. The bottom is rising. They need answers.

They've now forced out Modi's Education Minister. That was one of their key

demands. They didn't trust the man. They wanted something different. Modi has appointed a new education minister, a tech billionaire. Does he understand the position of those young people? No, he doesn't. He doesn't understand about the bottom because he's the top. He'll try and impose his solutions on a world where different answers are required.

And that's of course true in the UK as well. We have a problem of youth unemployment in the UK. We have a problem of graduates who can't find jobs in the UK. I was talking to a young person this week, an 18-year-old. She's waiting for her A-level results. I previously talked to her about the possibility of going to university and offered some advice, because I know a bit about this subject, unsurprisingly. I am, after all, a retired university professor amongst the many other things I've done.

And this week I asked her, what were her plans? And she said, "I've given up the idea of going. I can't see the benefit. I can't see it will improve my chances of getting a job." I said, "What are you looking for?" "I'm looking for an apprenticeship," she said. "How are you going?" "Every single application I've made has received no response as yet," she said, "and I've applied to everybody I can think of, and every post I can see."

Now, she's a bright young person. She appears to me to have the world at her feet, but not according to potential employers. This is the problem we've got. We have young people in the UK where young people are in short supply, and we need them to be in jobs to build the prosperity that people like me are going to require in only a few years' time when I can't work. And we have India facing the same problem with a surplus of young people; those who could be supplying the world in years to come.

In both countries, the young are being treated abysmally, and the answer is going to come from Troy Jackson. "We are from the bottom," he said, "and we are rising."

Those young people are going to rise. They're not going to accept this outcome for much longer. They're not going to be told they have to stay in place. They're not going to accept being told that they're cockroaches living off the system. They're not going to accept Andy Burnham telling them, "You can have your benefits, but only if you go litter picking." This is not acceptable. These are bright, intelligent young people who want the chances that I had when I was their age.

In the 1970s, it never occurred to me or anyone else who was at university, or those who I was at school with who did not go to university, let me say, and I remained friends with many of them for many years after I left school; none of us thought we wouldn't get jobs. Every single person did.

And we got jobs that were good, jobs that we wanted because they were available, because we had an economy that could supply them. And it didn't occur to us that we might end up without a home of our own because we presumed we would, because homes were within reach. And now they aren't. And so the bottom will be rising. That is still the point.

We have built a world where the top is crushing the bottom, and that is unsustainable. Tops that try to crush the bottom ultimately shatter their foundations. They fall apart. That is going to happen. I have no doubt at all that's the risk that we are facing. We have to get on with securing the foundations of our society, or it will fall apart. And the foundations of our society are the young people who are being denied hope at present.

How do we give them hope? We give them hope by providing them with jobs. We do that by changing our thinking about the economy. Andy Burnham keeps on talking about opportunities for young people whilst the Bank of England is deliberately holding interest rates high with the intention of creating unemployment.

We do not have unemployment by chance in the UK; we have it deliberately.

There is no chance that unemployment in India is accidental. It is deliberate. They too follow monetary policies.

There is no chance that we have a situation where house prices are too high because that has been allowed by institutional oversight, if you like, because we have allowed lending against housing costs that has become extortionate and pushed the price of a property beyond the reach of a person on an average salary, which is the best that most young people can aspire to. They have no chance of buying unless they get parental support. This is unsustainable. The bottom will rise.

In that case, we have to provide jobs for people.

We have to provide a chance for people.

We have to stop denying who young people are.

Young people now realise they're diverse.

They now realise they have potential that is not recognised within systems.

They realise, with the education that they've got, that there are questions unanswered and top-down thinking will not let them explore the possibilities that exist in this world.

They realise that accumulated wealth is denying them the chance to become wealth-owners.

They realise they're being excluded.

They realise they're at the bottom. That bottom is going to rise.

We have a choice, therefore. We can either decide to maintain the current institutions of power and the current forms of thinking like those used by the Bank of England, which oppress young people by choice, or we can change our thinking. We can decide that we make young people our priority, because unless we give them a chance, the rest of us have no hope at all, because we're always dependent upon young people at the end of the day.

We have to make that choice. We have to change, and we have to design a world that young people can live in. So we have to embrace that reality. The bottom is rising. Let's get on and accept that fact.

That's my opinion. What's yours? Let us know. Share this video, and if you like what I've had to say, well buy us a coffee. Tom and I need coffee. That will be a great way to support this channel

Poll

[poll id="474"]