

Why governments keep failing

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Every year the warnings on climate change become more urgent.

Every year temperatures break new records.

Every year politicians promise action.

And every year, far too little changes.

Why?

In this video, I argue that the failure to tackle climate change is not because we lacked scientific evidence or practical solutions. Scientists warned us decades ago, and they were right. We also had credible alternatives. I explain why the Green New Deal, which I helped develop before the financial crisis of 2008, offered a practical programme linking climate action, investment, jobs and stronger public services, and why politics chose to ignore it.

The deeper problem, I suggest, is that modern politics has lost the ability to imagine a different future. Too much of economics assumes today's system is inevitable. Politicians defend existing institutions instead of asking whether they still work. Meanwhile, powerful vested interests continue to profit from fossil fuels and resist meaningful change.

Climate change has exposed something much bigger than an environmental crisis. It has revealed a crisis of political imagination.

If we continue trying to repair yesterday's economy instead of building tomorrow's, the consequences will become increasingly severe. We can no longer afford the inaction that is our politicians' preferred policy choice. Either they must change, or we will have to be rid of them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3mcah3KPno?si=Bxrk7JbUofPm1EDC>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=8k92x-1b20dbd-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

The Debate Ammunition for this video is available here.

This is the transcript:

As we're recording this, we're in another heatwave in the UK. The temperatures are rising. It's hot in this studio. We won't be able to record for long, and across Europe fires are burning. We see it in the news in France, in Spain, but also in Scotland and in other places. Every year seems to bring new extremes, and none of this is unexpected.

We knew we were going to face a crisis from climate change. So, why did we fail to prepare? That's what I'm going to ask in this video.

Scientists have warned us about these changes for decades. Their predictions have proved to be remarkably accurate. We understood the risks, those of us who bothered to stand back and read the data, and we also understood many of the solutions. Knowledge wasn't lacking about the climate crisis that we are now facing, but action was, and that's not because we lacked a plan.

The Green New Deal was one practical response. It helped develop a programme that would've tackled the whole problem of climate change. I co-authored it in 2007-2008 before the crisis of that year, and it went worldwide. Barack Obama talked about it when he was running for president the first time round. It linked climate change, jobs, and investment. It would've strengthened communities and public services. It offered economic renewal, but most of all, it talked about how we could deliver sustainable outcomes for our planet. And then politics chose to ignore it.

The global crisis happened. It passed. And the politicians who said we should move on to where we'd been before won the day, and the Green New Deal and everything to do with climate change was ignored. In fact, many scorned it; they still do. We have the Tories in the UK denying that climate change is an issue. And for those on the far right, it is now a badge of honour to say that we should do nothing about climate change,

even when it is quite literally burning at some people's doors.

That scorn was revealing. Climate change has revealed a much bigger problem. The reality is our political system struggles to imagine alternatives to the way things have been. It spends its time trying to repair yesterday's economy, but no one within our politics is trying to build tomorrow's economy. Our politicians, based upon our economics, which all looks into the rear-view mirror, mistake familiarity for wisdom, and that is the crisis we are facing.

There is no imagination in our politics. There is no curiosity. There is no questioning of what should we do? And that is why our politics is becoming dangerous and why it is so unable to deal with this crisis that we are all facing.

Too much of our economics in particular assumes today's systems are inevitable. Markets are treated as the answer to every problem, even though we know they are not. Growth is always the unquestioned objective, although it is glaringly obvious that the limits of growth are very real on a finite planet. And government is always told to stand back, even though we know that government must provide the answers to many of the questions that we're asking.

A small state is always demanded, and new ideas are dismissed before they're tested. Imagination and, even more vitally, curiosity have been entirely eliminated from our economics.

Politicians are following the same script. They promise stability, but in the process, they defend existing institutions when they have so clearly failed or have failed to deliver the answers we need. They fear challenging established interests. Those who sponsor them prevent this happening, and that is perhaps the biggest problem of all that we now face. And they rarely, if ever, ask bigger questions as a consequence.

They don't ask why fossil fuels are dangerous, because fossil fuels are funding them. They manage decline instead of creating change as a consequence, and our politicians have also lost their inquisitiveness, their ability to see through what is, to see what should be. The result is paralysis.

Every disaster brings more promises. Every report calls for urgent action. Every summit repeats familiar words, but fundamental change never arrives. We can see what is happening. We can see the failures. We can see the suffering, but those in charge seem quite unable to imagine acting differently. For them, this is somebody else's problem, as they think everything is in a neoliberal world where the assumption is that no politician has an answer, and the market always has, when it is the market that has created the problems that we are now facing.

So, why does this happen? Why are we living in this world where there seems no possibility of change? The answer is, there are powerful vested interests. There are

fortunes built on the old economy: on the supply of oil, of gas and coal, and on the substances made from them. The things that we will have to learn to do without or to substitute if we are to survive.

There are careers built on old ideas, which people do not wish to forgo because they do not wish to learn something that is new. They're comfortable with what was.

These are the institutions based upon hierarchies of power that defend the structures themselves built upon fossil fuels that have created our climate crisis.

So, evidence is ignored because change threatens power, and the powerful don't like that. That is why we are getting no change. The explanation was in fact provided by a person called Upton Sinclair many years ago. He said, "It's difficult to get a person to understand something when their salary depends upon them not understanding it." Too many politicians and economists face exactly that problem now.

They do not want to understand the problems that they face, because their power, their prestige, their status, and their economic well-being all depend upon them denying the truth that we are in crisis, and the crisis is human-made, and the crisis is about climate change.

The system rewards them if they defend the status quo. It does not reward them for challenging it. That is the whole problem. That is the consequence of allowing political donations in the way that we do, and the whole of the lobbying industry, which is designed to maintain the structures of power that we have, which are harming us all.

Even when the evidence makes it clear we must get change, the dollars and pounds of the wealthy deny that and say, "no", and the evidence, evidence from people like the International Climate Change Committee, is just ignored, and that fact is the obstacle to our survival. Let's be as blunt as that. The denial of truth is what is denying us a chance.

Climate change is going to force a choice, though. We have to face up to it. It isn't going away. We can try to cling to the past, or we can imagine a different economy, a different politics, and a different society because that is what is going to be necessary.

In that case, we can protect vested interests, or we can survive. That is the choice that we face. We can be curious and build a better future, one built on care, resilience and sustainability, or we can sink, quite possibly, literally even as the world burns around us, but as the world's waters rise at the same time.

We knew that choice. When we wrote the Green New Deal, we knew it was real. We knew we needed to change. We knew we needed to look at the world in a different way. The real question now is whether we are finally ready to think differently or are we going to curl up in a corner and let the oligarchs destroy us?

That is the choice we have, but it isn't a choice in reality. There is no choice because we have to change, or the fires that are now lapping Bordeaux and Madrid will one day threaten us, and if it isn't fires that will threaten us, something else will. Temperature, the rise of the sea level, or something else is going to come to our doorstep and make our lives intolerable.

So, we do not have a choice. We must change. That is the only option available to us. But our politicians and our economists deny it. There's one answer to that. They have to go.

That's my opinion. What's yours? There is, of course, a poll down below, and there will be plenty of opportunity for you to pass comment. I like those comments. We try to read as many of them as we can. And please do share this video. Please do subscribe to the channel and ring that bell because that ensures that you get notifications from us. And if you'd like to buy Tom and me coffee, well, that helps because these videos do have a cost and we do need refreshment.

Poll

[poll id="471"]