

The cost-of-living crisis is hiding in plain sight

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Britain's pubs can be busy, football grounds can be full, and airports can be crowded while millions of people are still struggling to pay for life's essentials.

The cost-of-living crisis has not disappeared simply because some people cannot see it.

Britain remains a wealthy country, but that wealth and the incomes it generates are very unevenly distributed. Some people can still afford football tickets, meals out and foreign holidays. Others are struggling with housing costs, energy bills, food and transport. Both things can be true at exactly the same time.

And when it comes to visibility, there is another issue to consider. Spending does not necessarily indicate financial security. People use savings, credit cards and debt to maintain their lifestyles when their incomes no longer cover their costs. A pint in a pub or a week abroad tells us very little about someone's underlying financial resilience.

Political economy asks us to look beyond these superficial signs of prosperity. Who isn't at the football match? Who cannot afford the pub? Who isn't travelling through the airport?

Those missing people matter.

The cost-of-living crisis is an inequality crisis. If we want to understand what is happening in Britain, we need to look at those who have become economically invisible, not just those we can still see spending.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnEwh18Q9IE?si=SYyAX-ZKf0JjWr03>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=wtwxv-1b368ab-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&font=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:

The cost-of-living crisis in the UK is real. It's just that some people are claiming not to see it. Those people are claiming, and they're telling me, that it is little more than a myth. They say that the start of the football season, and large crowds, and people in pubs, and busy airports are evidence that people have ample to spend and that there is no cost-of-living crisis.

That argument mistakes appearances for reality, and comfort is allowing some people to choose not to see this crisis, which is, at current estimate, affecting at least 14 million people or roughly one in five people in the UK, who are living in real poverty. The people who are denying the existence of this crisis are those who are not suffering it, and the point is, the visible people that they see are not the whole country.

Britain does remain a wealthy country overall. Let's be clear. That is true. I'm not saying otherwise, but the point is, wealth and income in the UK are distributed very unevenly. Millions are struggling while others are remaining totally financially secure, able to buy all those things from an expensive football ticket to a visit to the pub and trips abroad for their holidays. Both those realities can exist at the same time. That's a fact in the modern UK, but this crisis is real nonetheless. Let's not pretend otherwise.

This crisis is about the problem that many families and people in the UK have in paying for essentials. Housing, energy, food and transport have all become much more expensive over the last decade or so, and many incomes have simply failed to keep pace. Incomes might have risen, but costs have risen even more, and the pressure falls hardest on those with the least. That is why our cost-of-living crisis is real.

The comfortable may also be hiding their financial insecurity. People under pressure do not stop all their discretionary spending. That is what credit cards are for. They cut elsewhere, they use their savings, and then they take on debt. That's what happens when people are under pressure. They don't want to recognise the reality of the crisis they are personally facing, and so they descend into a personal financial crisis, which then spills over into a nationwide cost-of-living crisis.

A pint, or a holiday, proves very little about a person's financial resilience. People can pay for these things on credit, and the evidence is that resilience is steadily declining in the UK. Credit card defaults are rising. The defaults on paying for things like energy are increasing. There's over £5 billion of energy debt outstanding in the UK economy at present. And do remember that over 50% of people in the UK never travel abroad on holiday, so the appearance that airports are busy does not prove that everyone in the UK is doing well. It's just a myth.

And looking only at averages also conceals the truth. Millions can afford holidays while millions cannot pay essential bills. There is no contradiction between those two facts. Anecdotes from the perspective of the comfortable hide real distribution problems and deep inequality in the UK, but if you don't look beyond your own comfort zone and your own circle of friends, you can believe that those who claim they have a cost-of-living crisis are making everything up. But that need not be true.

Political economy looks through those anecdotes and those myths and asks who is being left behind in the real world, and it goes out of its way to look for them. That is the importance of political economy. It does not accept the superficial as evidence. It looks for the facts. And doing so, it recognises that choosing not to see is a part of the problem that wealth creates. It is a privilege of wealth to ignore the reality of some people in a society.

We know that this has always happened. There are maps of London in the 19th century that were prepared to show the proximity between those living in massive well-being and those who were living in deep poverty. They were often only a hundred yards or so apart. And yet those with wealth failed to recognise the issue then, just as they do now.

Political economy is the discipline that looks at that social gradient, that difference, and tries to make it visible. The point is we need to make it visible because at the moment there is a collective denial that we do have a problem in the UK. The absence of evidence that people are living in hardship because those people are, by and large, hidden away from view because they can't afford to do anything else is mistaken for evidence that they do not exist. That denial does itself make this crisis harder to tackle.

And I stress, looking away is itself a political choice. Political economy demands that we look.

We must ask who is absent from the football crowd.

We must ask, who cannot afford to go to the pub, or to go on holiday?

The gaps that are then revealed show the reality that headlines often ignore.

This is where serious political analysis begins.

The politics of care means seeing everyone. Good politics, the politics of care, speaks

for those who are made invisible by their poverty. Real evidence lies beyond the superficial appearance. The cost-of-living crisis is fundamentally an inequality crisis. We must judge society by those who are excluded and not by those who are still spending. When we do that, we begin to understand the scale of the action that we need to take to make sure that everybody in this country can have the chance to thrive.

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below. Please do like and share this video. Please do subscribe to our channel. Please ring the bell. That means you're told when we make another video. And if you'd like to buy Tom and me a coffee, that would be great, partly because, well, we can't make these videos without it, and because they cost money to make, and any contribution you'd like to make would be much appreciated.

Poll

[poll id="487"]