

Is Burnham's government planning a crime against society...

Published: October 2, 2026, 7:06 am

The Guardian [has reported this morning](#) that:

Ministers are working up sweeping plans for welfare changes including scrapping a key disability benefit for under-25s and replacing it with a multibillion-pound package of support to get into work, the Guardian has learned.

They added that:

The plans are still awaiting the conclusions of reviews [by Alan Milburn](#), who is looking at young people's employment, and [the Timms panel](#), which is examining the personal independence payment (Pip), a non-means-tested benefit that helps sick and disabled people with support costs.

However, a central option under consideration for young people is removing the health element of universal credit for claimants under 25, which has already been almost halved to £217 a month, and offering intensive support for people to get into work. The possibility of removing it for existing claimants – not just new ones – is being looked at.

I could start by giving this report the benefit of the doubt by suggesting that this may not be what Burnham's government is planning to deliver because all of this may refer to inherited plans, but I have quite a strong feeling that this would be untrue.

Presuming that I am right to dismiss this idea, I am deeply dismayed, to the point of being very angry, about the proposal apparently being investigated.

Personal independence payments are not payments for being unemployed. Nor are they payments, as such, for having a disability. They are exceedingly difficult-to-secure payments to compensate for the additional costs imposed by that disability, so that people have a chance to compete on a level playing field despite the health and disability conditions that they have.

In my opinion, the health element of Universal Credit can be viewed in the same way.

No one wants to claim this benefit. Anyone who does so has to prove their need. That need arises because they do have additional costs compared to the “normal person” whom the government would like to exist to meet the needs of the universal employer they have in mind when defining that each and every one of us must find our fulfilment through work, however meaningless much of modern work might be.

But what really angers me most of all about this proposal is the assumption implicit within it that everyone under the age of 25 has someone, other than the government, who might care, provide for, and meet their needs if they exist, even if they impose significant additional costs upon them. That might be true in the arrogant, conceited world within which most in Westminster might exist, but in the real world this is total nonsense.

In the real world, there is actual poverty. 20% of people in this country live in it. It is as if the government has not noticed.

Many more young people live in families where, even if they are not defined as being in poverty, the cost-of-living crisis is very real. Maybe the government has not noticed.

In addition, a great many young people do not have families who can support them, or who they are in touch with. They are alienated from their families, or they do not know who they are, or they are dead, or that family might abuse them, and any number of other reasons might be available as to why this situation exists. Maybe the government has not noticed, yet again.

Whatever the reason, the consequence is that there are very large numbers of young people who, almost by definition, will be amongst the most vulnerable people in our society, who do rely on health-related benefits or personal independence payments to have some chance to take part in the society in which they live, although, such is the meanness of such benefits, doing so will always remain challenging.

And now, these people are to be sacrificed to the supposed goal of forcing these people into work, when there is no work for them to do.

There is already around 5% general unemployment in the UK economy, with an unemployment rate of around 10% for younger people. If the market had work for people to do, the policy being proposed might make some sense. But there is no such work. Ministers are pretending that there is full employment. There is no such thing. This means that not only are they imposing profound punishment on people who do not deserve it, they are doing so instead of taking action to create jobs, which is unforgivable, but will not happen because they are terrified of the idea of industrial planning in its broadest sense, believing that to be socialist, and that would never do in the modern Labour Party.

At the same time, they are ignoring the fact that the Bank of England is clearly on a

trajectory to raise base interest rates in this country, with the deliberate, albeit unstated, intention of increasing unemployment as a consequence. In other words, these very same ministers are letting a government agency pursue a policy which will deliberately deny opportunity to the more vulnerable members of our community at exactly the same time as those same ministers are quite deliberately planning to withdraw the benefits that those same vulnerable people require to be able to eke out an existence, and I think that a fair description.

Three questions have to be asked.

The first: have these ministers gone out and checked their facts? Do they know why these benefits are being claimed? The reality is that there is no evidence that they do.

Second, do they understand the macroeconomic environment in which they are operating? The evidence suggests they do not.

And finally, do they understand the wider context of their proposal? There is unemployment in this country. It is a consequence of their choices. They could decide that we should have a policy of full employment. They could create a fiscal policy with that goal in mind. They could instruct the Bank of England to end its policies deliberately intended to increase the rate of unemployment in this country. They are doing none of these things.

In that situation, what they are proposing is not just wrong; it crosses the boundary into gross negligence, to the point where it might be considered not just a crime against society, but a crime against the people within it.

The Guardian speculates on whether there might be a backbench revolt on this issue. I sincerely hope there will be.