Funding the Future

Blaming NEETs is an exercise in toxic indifference

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I wrote the articles I share for the second time on this blog this morning in May, when Alan Milburn, the former Labour health secretary from the Brown/Blair era, produced his first-stage report on solving what the current Labour government defines to be the problem of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

Nothing has changed with regard to what I have to say since May.

The Bank of England is still pursuing a policy of deliberately creating unemployment in the UK to supposedly control inflation, although there is no credible relationship between higher unemployment and bringing inflation caused by external price shocks under control.

And nothing has been done to change the work environment for young people with disabilities or neurocomplexity, or the support that they might need that they were offered when at school, the need for which has miraculously disappeared by the time they reach their 20s.

Because of that, I can say for certain that today's report from Alan Milburn is an exercise in what I describe as 'othering', which is a process of pointing fingers at those in society whom those with power would like to blame for the supposed problems facing the economy, but which those being blamed did nothing to create.

As many who are old enough to recall might be aware, there was a meme just after the 2008 financial crash, and the associated onset of austerity under George Osborne, that blamed the excessive cost of librarians in Wolverhampton for the UK economy crashing. That meme was, of course, ridiculous.

Today's report from Alan Milburn is going to be equally ridiculous. It is based on the premise that young people in this country, for whom the neoliberal system of economic organisation that we now have within the workplace can provide no employment, are the people to blame for the supposed financial crisis that this country faces. This is despite the fact that there is no crisis with social security costs in this country, and no

crisis with regard to our capacity to fund the government, now or into the future, as I keep on pointing out.

We do, however, face multiple very real crises.

The first is a crisis of neoliberalism. It has failed. Its toxic approach to people in society is the fundamental cause of the problems that we face. The sooner we recognise this, and stop trying to force people to adapt to its demands, and instead create a society that cares, the better off we will be.

Second, we face a crisis of comprehension amongst economists, the Treasury, politicians and commentators who collectively believe that money is an exogenous variable within the economy, provided by the private sector to the government so that it might spend, when in fact it is only by government action that the money in question exists, is in circulation, and can even be deposited with the government in the form of savings bonds. Incomprehension on this scale can only be described as a significant contributor to the crises that we face.

Third, we face a crisis of cruelty, and this is common to all our leading political parties who, without exception, are saying that we cannot afford to care. They deliberately renamed social security as welfare to excuse this cruelty. In the process, they are trying to give themselves cover when blaming those most vulnerable for failures that they have created, for which they are responsible, but for which they will not accept blame.

It is not young people who have failed this country, as Alan Milburn will implicitly claim today, with his report then being used by Andy Burnham as an excuse to punish them by withdrawing benefits they need. It is Burnham, Badenoch, Davey, and Farage who, with their neoliberal beliefs that demand victims to sacrifice, are failing young people and all those who care about them in this country.

Their systemic failure is collective, toxic, and unforgivable because it is chosen. That is why the whole lot of them deserve to be swept from office for good, for the crimes against society they commit in pursuit of their own gain.