

Real Talk: Austerity

We've been told that we're all in this together! And no, this is not Disney's High School musical, there's no happy ending here. This is our country, eight years on from the Tory rallying call to a united austerity, we ask, what happened to all in this together?

This is how GREAT Britain is today, there are [3.9 million children living in poverty; 2.3 million of those come from working households](#). [A 169% rise in rough sleepers, people are freezing to death](#), not only on the streets but thanks to extortionate energy costs in their homes too. Mass social cleansing of affluent areas continues with the selling of social housing. [Soaring suicide rates linked to benefit cuts](#). Joining the vulnerable on the austerity execution block, public services, all CUT, gutted, slashed to the bone. As we witness the axe of austerity wielded down onto the working class, we notice, no bankers or tax avoiders dragged into this public arena of shame and slaughter. How did our government effectively make the poor pay the price for a global economic crisis caused by the rich?

The answer comes in the form of a common narrative that demonised an entire class of people. UK media became saturated with the same blaming headlines. The poor were renamed scroungers, the disabled, lazy and immigrants, drains. While we continued our admiration for filthy rich tax avoiding celebrities, White Dee, a poor single mother became austerity poster child for everything that was wrong with our country. Then, just in time George Osbourne, the austerity superman, reassured the nation by promising welfare reform. But as the dust settles on austerity and we survey its deadly effects, we are left asking, what happened to together? I put this question to David Whyte a professor of Socio-legal studies at The University of Liverpool and co-editor of the book [The Violence of Austerity](#).



Photo Credit: Rachel ifon

David are we all in austerity together?

Obviously not, and the reason we know that, is while the belts are tightened on public services we don't see the same happening in big corporations, in fact, what we see, is, corporate sector, profits and pay packets still rising and tax reductions for the wealthy. Meanwhile, public sector pay freezes and soaring poverty rates continue. So basically, the working class and poor are paying the price of austerity.

Looking at the government claims for the causes of austerity, they use this vague phrase that we "maxed out our credit card." Yes, household debt was pushed to the limit, But the root of the crisis and system collapse was that fundamentally we had an economy driven by principles of financialization. Meaning, by relaxing lending regulations, the government gave more power to banks and major investment organisations, enabling them to speculate and gamble more freely. The result being, a lot of risky investments built on unstable foundations. Which lead to an economic crisis and a government bailout funded by Austerity. And so, this narrative of all being in this together is a lie.

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Was the government right in enforcing its heaviest cuts on the welfare state?

The welfare state is something we fought for. Because we recognise that working people at the bottom of the wrung generate the wealth for the economy. Consequently, if you want a successful economy you must look after the people that create the wealth. It's important to think of the welfare state and public services as a social wage. Part of that wage is that we look after our vulnerable. The government's response to austerity was to dismantle the welfare state. By eroding that social wage, you erode the common wealth of the country effectively dismantling the fabric of our societies.

Did a narrative blindsides a nation?

Blame has always been a political device used to scapegoat the marginalised. Anyone who's different or weaker is always traditionally blamed for society's problems. History shows us how that's led us to extreme violations of humanity in the past. The dismantling of the welfare state has had extreme violent effects. Blame has always been an easy way for governments to simplify complex problems. It's important we learn to recognise blaming narratives at play. Instead of pointing the finger of blame, let's start thinking about how **we solve problems collectively**.

But, interestingly, looking at the last election people stopped listening to the newspapers and television preferring to rely on their collective shared experiences for political information. I'm hopeful that as communication moves forward, we will start to undercut these traditional political devices of blame.