

Britain - Divided: Debt, Poverty and Homelessness in the UK

By [True Publica](#)

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Winston Churchill famously said in 1940, a time of the Battle of Britain, that 'If the British Empire and its Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say, this was their finest hour.' Without any doubt, the Tory party can now claim for its entire existence, that right now, this has been their worst. Their party and more importantly the country is more divided than ever. Even the middle ground on Brexit has now completely collapsed, according to a new [POLITICO-Hanbury poll](#) - leading to voters so fed up that they would rather risk either revoking Article 50 or pursuing a no-deal Brexit. Both will be disastrous for a cohesive society in the years ahead.

In the background, away from the headlines of Brexit, Johnson, Trump and oil tankers in Iran - all of which are crisis upon crisis, the crisis of daily life continues in the sixth-largest economy in the world where the rich get richer and the poor are made to pay the price.

Death, despair and poverty

A struggling dad of three [took his own life](#) after being driven into debt and given an eviction order because of the minimum five-week wait for Universal Credit, it has been reported. Phillip Herron, 34, had just £4.61 in his bank account when he took the unimaginable decision to commit suicide, leaving behind three children. He took his own life shortly after uploading a tearful video to social media, in which he apologized to friends and family for what he is about to do. A suicide note read that Mr Herron believed his family "would be better off if he wasn't there any more", said his mother Sheena Derbyshire.

Meanwhile, 61 top civil servants working for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), who were charged with implementing widespread and draconian cuts to vital social security benefits, have been rewarded with as much as [£17.5k each in bonuses](#) while low-income households struggle to put food on the table.

The news comes as figures from the UK's largest food bank network, the Trussell Trust, reveal that a record 1.6m food bank parcels were given to people in desperate need over the last year, including more than half a million children from low-income households.

SNP MSP Shona Robison said:

"People will rightly be asking questions about where the DWP's priorities lie. They scrapped the £10 bonus for people struggling over Christmas and inflicted cuts on low-income families across Scotland but are rewarding senior staff with huge bonuses."

In a TruePublica article entitled '[Killed by the State](#)' written by independent disability studies researcher Mo Stewart – it was determined that 80 people a month are dying after being declared “fit for work”. These are complex figures but analysis pointed to two notable facts. First that [2,380 people died](#) between December 2011 and February 2014 shortly after being judged “fit for work” and rejected for the sickness and disability benefit, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). It was also determined that 7,200 claimants died after being awarded ESA and being placed in the work-related activity group, by definition, people whom the government had judged were able to “prepare” to get back to work.”

When it comes to poverty, the UK’s social safety net has been “deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos”, a report commissioned by the UN has said. Special rapporteur on extreme poverty Philip Alston said “[ideological” cuts to Britain’s public services since 2010 have led to “tragic consequences”](#)”.

Poverty has other consequences. Take children for instance. Referrals to [child mental health](#) units from UK primary schools for pupils aged 11 and under have risen by nearly 50% in just three years.

In the meantime – workers’ representatives have expressed anger over the decision to award [MPs a pay rise above inflation](#). The 2.7% pay hike for MPs, took their basic annual salary from £77,379 to £79,468, and is presumably in recognition of their outstanding performance while in government in ensuring the best outcomes for the citizens of Britain!

The £2,089 increase to their income announced last February by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (Ipsa), that became effective from 1 April 2019, far outstrips the [current inflation rate of 1.8%](#) on the main CPI measure.

Houses and apartments apartheid

If you’re homeless, on average, you’ll only live to the age of 44. People sleeping on the street are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence and homeless people are over nine times more likely to take their own life than the general population. Official figures show that homelessness has doubled since 2010 but as many don’t get on to official records as homeless, that number is likely to be much greater. Last year 57,890 households were accepted as homeless in England. A recent investigation found that about [ten homeless people now die on the streets of Britain](#) each week.

Meanwhile – Persimmon Homes, the UK’s most profitable housebuilder faced some criticism after a pay scheme tying rewards to share price performance caused a furore, with [£500m in bonuses](#) paid out to 150 executives amid a sector-record annual profit of [£1.1bn](#) on the back of the government’s Help-to-Buy scheme. That scheme, politically sold to the public by Tory chancellor George Osborne, as a scheme to help young couples and families get on the housing ladder, has now be mired in scandal as it doesn’t actually help that many who would normally struggle to attain homeownership. It turns out that the majority of people who bought a home thanks to Help-to-Buy were actually some of the most privileged already. A [report released](#) from the National Audit Office showed that two-thirds of the people who benefited from the scheme would have been able to buy a property anyway and a small but not insignificant number of recipients used the scheme even though they had a household income of more than £100,000.

Further evidence shows that the scheme has [also driven up house prices](#), further boosting

the wealth profile of not just homeowners, but housebuilders like Persimmon – whilst keeping voters, particularly wealthier voters happy with properties they already owned increasing in value. The economic outturn of house prices that increase faster than average wages inevitably increases homelessness numbers.

Bashing the bedridden

“Bashing bedridden citizens” – a slogan displayed on banners by disgruntled pensioners were protesting outside the BBC’s headquarters across the UK last month over its ‘scandalous’ decision to axe free TV licences for over 75s. Perhaps what these pensioners knew little of was that the person who opened the way to allowing the BBC to scrap blanket free TV licenses for the over 75’s in the first place is none other than Tory leadership hopeful [Jeremy Hunt](#).

Meanwhile – the [BBC showered its top executives](#) with pay rises by as much as £75,000 a year and increased not just the [pay of its top](#) male lineup such as – Gary Lineker on £1,750,000, Chris Evans – £1,250,000, Graham Norton – £610,000 and Huw Edwards on £490,000, but also dramatically increased their female stars pay to close the scandalous pay gap.

Healthcare into wealthcare

Earlier this year it was reported that the NHS has been priced out of buying a life-saving drug by pharmaceutical company Vertex. The cystic fibrosis drug, which can extend the life of children, now costs £105,000 a year – a price which the NHS says is “unaffordable” and despite requests from the NHS, the big pharma company has refused to make it available at a lower price. It is understood that the fair price for this particular drug would be around £5,000 a year.

Meanwhile – The same company made a whopping £2.5 billion from sales of the same drug in 2017. But they didn’t even pay for the research to develop it. It was discovered in the first place thanks to money donated by none other than ... drum roll ... through a cystic fibrosis charity.

Staying with the NHS, many people believe that the NHS is too precious an institution for the Conservatives to destroy without risking political suicide. Again, what many do not realise is that a group of ambitious MPs co-authored a book in 2005 called [‘DIRECT DEMOCRACY – An Agenda for a New Model Party’](#) (no need to pay here’s a free copy in pdf if you really want to read it). Contributors include Douglas Carswell, Michael Gove and most importantly, Jeremy Hunt who explicitly lays out the desire of the authors, (including Jeremy Hunt himself), to fully privatise the NHS.

Interestingly, the book is just 128 pages long but costs ... £139.98. It has one 4-star rating and all the others are 1-star with review comments such as ‘despicable tripe’, ‘pigs at the trough’ and so on.

One of the two Tory front-runners to be crowned Prime Minister is, of course, Boris Johnson. A trade deal with the USA will then be a top priority for Johnson, who has already demonstrated his will to ensure Britain bends over backwards for President Trump. Trump has insisted, if it is signed will include full access to the health and welfare systems of the UK.

When that happens, Britain will be fully divided into two groups – those that have (insurance) and those that do not – as the NHS is very much regarded as the last institution that upholds the value of healthcare for all at the point of need.

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