

UK: Martin Lewis and Sir Michael Marmot warn of “humanitarian calamity” and “civil unrest”

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Two of Britain’s more informed social commentators, Martin Lewis and Sir Michael Marmot, have warned of an “unprecedented” cost-of-living crisis and “civil unrest”.

Lewis has built both a substantial personal fortune (£123 million according to the *Sunday Times* Rich List) and a personal following through his MoneySavingExpert website, whose weekly newsletter goes out to 8.5 million people.

In an interview with the *Sunday Telegraph* this weekend, he warned, “We need to keep people fed. We need to keep them warm. If we get this wrong right now, then we get to the point where we start to risk civil unrest. When breadwinners cannot provide, anger brews and civil unrest brews—and I do not think we are very far off.”

Lewis described the situation for household finances today as “the worst since I started” and “the time I’m most scared for people.”

MoneySavingExpert has a new column called “Heat the Human”, he explained, “I feel slightly sick about doing it. We are talking hot water bottles in sleeping bags territory.” Other recommendations include “have at least one hot meal a day” and keeping your feet up off the floor when sitting down to avoid losing heat. “It is not an exaggeration to say that there are people we have to prevent freezing or starving.”

Marmot, a Professor of Epidemiology at UCL, director of the Institute of Health Equity and distinguished researcher on health inequality, made the same points in the *Guardian* two days earlier.

He concludes his article, “In the decade before the pandemic, improvement in health in the UK slowed dramatically, inequalities increased, and health for the poorest people got worse. This was all amplified by the pandemic. Unless we deal with the inability of people to meet their basic needs, by adequate income and services,

we are in danger of inflicting a humanitarian calamity in one of the richest countries in the world.”

Naturally, neither Lewis nor Marmot use the words, but what is being described is a campaign of class war and social murder against the working class.

As Marmot explains, this is an acceleration of a decades-long process. Following the 2008 financial crash, billions of pounds in cuts were inflicted on social services to make good the debts incurred by an unprecedented government bailout of the banks and the corporations. A decade of “austerity” in government spending was coupled with the weakest ten years of pay growth in Britain since the Napoleonic wars, as businesses sought to protect profits.

From 2010-11, the long-term growth in UK life expectancy began to stall. By the end of the decade, an actual decline in life expectancy began, centred on the poorest sections of society but impacting on the whole working class. Health Foundation director of health Jo Bibby told the *Financial Times* last month that the fall was due to the “fraying in the wider role of the state”.

A paper published in the *BMJ Open* last October associated cuts in health and social care in the five-year period 2010-2014 with an additional 57,500 deaths. This broadly confirmed an estimate by the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2019 that austerity had been responsible for 131,000 preventable deaths since 2012. The think-tank predicted the toll would reach 200,000 in 2020.

That prediction was blown out of the water by the COVID-19 pandemic, through which the ruling class carried out an assault on the health of the working population unprecedented in peacetime.

Rather than enact and maintain the necessary public health and economic support measures necessary to eliminate the virus, the Johnson government dwarfed the

2008 bailout of the super-rich with new rounds of corporate handouts and money printing. It pursued a “herd immunity” policy designed to keep the economy open and profits flowing while, in Johnson’s own words, letting “the bodies pile high in their thousands.”

Over 190,000 have been killed by COVID in the UK in the space of just two years, and well over a million debilitated by Long COVID. Life expectancy fell by 1.2 years for men and 0.9 years for women in 2020, the biggest drop since the Second World War, with the worst outcomes recorded in the poorest areas.

Now a combination of the vast funds pumped into corporate bank balances and the stock market, supply chains disrupted by capitalism’s criminal response to the pandemic, and the economic shocks of the NATO proxy war with Russia in Ukraine have sent prices soaring. To protect profits from inflation, the ruling class insists that wages take the hit—a “historic shock” to incomes, in the words of the governor of the Bank of England.

According to the Resolution Foundation, wage growth in 2021, discounting the distorting effect of workers’ coming off 80 percent furlough rates, was just 2.7 percent. CPI inflation for that period was 4.9 percent and RPI 7.8 percent, meaning workers’ incomes have already been shredded.

With the CPI rate of inflation currently at 6.2 percent and expected to rise towards 10 percent, households will be left thousands of pounds out of pocket. The Bank of England predicts a fall in real take-home pay some 50 percent worse than in the year following the 2008 financial crash. Lewis points out that for the poorest, with budgets more heavily skewed toward fuel and food, inflation will feel “nearer 20 percent”.

Taking every increase into account, above all for gas and electric, households face a brutal increase of £2,620 in their bills and other costs. Nothing is on offer from the government to cushion this fall. The austerity agenda is being renewed, this time to service not just corporate profits but imperialist war plans against Russia and ultimately China. Millions more thrown into financial hardship, poverty and destitution will mean more years of life lost, more early and preventable deaths.

Lewis’s warnings underscore the utter bankruptcy of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. This multimillionaire has more contact with and care for the concerns of the working class than all the Labour Party put together.

Amid a social catastrophe, party leader Sir Keir Starmer is focussing his May local elections pitch on being “tough

on crime”—that is, on convincing the ruling class he can violently repress opposition in the working class. Labour has launched a “community crime crackdown” campaign, with *Politico* commenting, “Every week is crime week.”

Indeed. Not the petty criminality that obsesses Starmer, but the systematic looting of society by the financial oligarchy. Meanwhile Labour’s interventions on the national stage are geared towards supporting the Tory government’s “living with COVID strategy” and NATO’s war drive.

The trade unions play the same role: demobilising strikes and protests, supporting militarism and above all seeking to prevent a direct confrontation between the working class, and the government that would explode the myth of “national unity” they have tried to uphold throughout the pandemic.

Attempts by the pseudo-left and Stalinist organisations to provide the bureaucracy with a left cover have only confirmed their own complete detachment from the working class. Demonstrations organised by the People’s Assembly Against Austerity over the cost-of-living crisis have scraped together at most a couple of thousand people nationally.

This does not reflect a lack of popular anger, but a deep and justified distrust of Labour and the unions.

If the ruling class assault is to be defeated, the rejection of these moribund organisations must give way to an embrace of a new, socialist movement of the working class. In the class war being waged jointly by the Johnson government, Labour and the trade unions, workers must draw up their own battle plan for the defence of jobs, wages, social services and living standards, and against war and the pandemic.



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