Leaders | Still aloft

Inflation will be harder to bring down than markets think

Investors are betting on good times. The likelier prospect is turbulence

Feb 16th 2023

you may not have noticed that financial markets are floating high on optimism. Yet there is no other way to describe today's investors, who since the autumn have increasingly bet that inflation, the world economy's biggest problem, will fall away without much fuss. The result, many think, will be cuts in interest rates towards the end of 2023, which will help the world's major economies—and most importantly America—avoid a recession. Investors are pricing stocks for a Goldilocks economy in which companies' profits grow healthily while the cost of capital falls.

...

This is a rosy picture. Unfortunately, as we explain this week, it is probably misguided. The world's battle with inflation is far from over. And that means markets could be in for a nasty correction.

For a sign of what has got investors' hopes up, look at America's latest consumer-price figures, released on February 14th. They showed less inflation over the three months to January than at any time since the start of 2021. Many of the factors which first caused inflation to take off have dissipated. Global supply chains are no longer overwhelmed by

...

Yet fluctuations in headline inflation often mask the underlying trend. Look into the details, and it is easy to see that the inflation problem is not fixed. America's "core" prices, which exclude volatile food and energy, grew at an annualised pace of 4.6% over the past three months, and have started gently accelerating. The main source of inflation is now the services sector, which is more exposed to labour costs. In America, Britain, Canada and New

...

America's is the lowest it has been since 1969. It is hard to see how underlying inflation can dissipate while labour markets stay so tight. They are keeping many economies on course for inflation that does not fall below 3-5% or so. That would be less scary than the experience of