

OK as we are?

One of the arguments that I hear regularly from NO supporters is that we are “**doing OK as we are**”. It gets very frustrating to hear this continually being mooted as a reason to retain the Union because it does not stand up to scrutiny. Those who use this argument have clearly not checked the facts.

I am now 65 years old. I left school in 1964 aged 15 with no qualifications. Here in the West of Scotland at that time apprenticeships were available to most of those who wanted them. University places were for the really clever people. Those who were a wee bit clever could strive towards the most sought after apprenticeships like tool making, engineering and electrical. I managed to find a place as an apprentice electrician in John Brown's yard in Clydebank.

There were many other trade apprenticeships available to those who wanted them, trade apprenticeships that would be almost guaranteed to lead to well-paid jobs. Those who didn't fancy a trade could find semi-skilled jobs in manufacturing , etc. These often paid double what apprentices earned but that was the choice that we could make.

In the West of Scotland we had large employers everywhere. We had manufacturing, car works, coal mines, steel works, shipbuilding and heavy engineering. In my small local area (the Vale of Leven) we had the Royal Naval Torpedo Factory, Westclox, Wiseman's Optical, Burroughs Machines, Polaroid Cameras, the British Silk Dyeing Company and many smaller manufacturing companies. All big employers and every last one of these is gone.

The Clyde shipyards and Singers massive plant in Clydebank were all close by. Unemployment was really only for those that chose it. This continued into the 1980s but these industries are no more and they have not been replaced but still these unionist people claim that “we are OK as we are”.

Back in the day I could get an appointment with a doctor on the same day it was requested. In fact all we had to do was turn up at the surgery. No appointment was required. “Waiting list” was a term seldom used in relation to the NHS.

I personally find it very sad when I see proud, skilled tradesmen in their middle years struggling to find jobs as greeters and check out operators in ASDA and if you are over fifty forget it! Unashamed ageism is rife. The service industry is mostly populated with people being exploited on zero hours contracts or on minimum wage. Employment statistics are doctored to make them look much better than they are and I think it is so sad when I see young friends posting on Facebook in jubilation when they find a minimum wage job. No one asks what the salary is for these jobs any more. They just accept that it will be minimum wage.

Arguments can be made from both sides but in the light of so much evidence to the contrary it is just daft to claim that **we are OK as we are**. Scotland has been in decline for many years under Westminster's watch. We have one of the lowest retirement pensions amongst equivalent European countries and we regularly top various polls for being the sick man of Europe. Our life expectancy is the lowest in the UK and 25% of males in Glasgow won't see their 65th birthday.

This bleak picture is where we are now and anyone who thinks that this is going to change anytime soon under Westminster is deluding themselves. They had their chance. Now we have ours. We must take it.