

Child Poverty in Dundee

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The percentage of children living in poverty in the Lochee ward of Dundee City Council is 31 per cent.

In Denmark it's in single figures.

The percentage of households in the private sector in Dundee living in fuel poverty is 25 per cent.

In Sweden , the percentage of households who cannot afford to keep their homes adequately warm is 1 per cent.

Why have countries such as Demark and Sweden managed to do this without the benefit of North Sea oil revenues ?

These are questions that might emerge from the figures produced in the End Child Poverty in Scotland report earlier this month.

End Child Poverty in Scotland places Dundee as the second worst area in Scotland for children in poverty at 27 per cent , second only to Glasgow (35 per cent).

Breakdowns for individual council ward areas in the city are provided , but each cover groups of individual communities whose individual problems are masked by the overall figure.

Nonetheless, the figures for almost all wards are dreadful :

East End 36 per cent

Lochee 31 per cent

Coldside 31 per cent

West End 22 per cent

Maryfield 30 per cent

North East 32 percent

Strathmartine 28 per cent

The Ferry 6 per cent

Poverty means lower life expectancy, lower educational qualifications, lower job opportunities, lower birthweight, and, altogether, lesser lives for us all.

It's the daily despair of having to choose priorities amongst the things that are essentials for life which others can take for granted as affordable, the ever-present fear of debt, and being unable to give their families the comfort of a financially secure way of living.

The report records national studies which found that almost 1 in 10 single parents cannot afford two pairs of shoes for their families, nor can they afford celebrations with presents at special occasions.

Oxfam Scotland report that Scotland's poorest families face food shortages similar to rationing in the Second World War because of surging prices, with many struggling parents foregoing meals for themselves to ensure that their children are fed.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation quotes the "Voices of people experiencing poverty in Scotland" :

"I now buy food and bring it home – cooked chicken and things like that, because I'm scared to use the oven because I know it costs too much money. I only use the washing machine twice a week because I'm scared of what it costs."

"My husband works all night and then I'm out at college all day. All his money goes on council tax, rent and bills. We don't have a penny extra and I never see him. We'd be better off if he didn't work but he feels like he has to."

The poverty line today is officially drawn at " the household income below 60 percent of median income"

The median weekly household income in Scotland after housing costs are accounted for was £375 in 2009/10.

The previous Labour Government missed its ambitious target of cutting child poverty by half by 2010 on the road to abolishing it completely by 2020

It reduced it by just a quarter instead, producing figures far below the previous Tory years of government, but much more was rightly expected than that.

Now with a Tory Government in office, think-tanks such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies forecast a rise once more in poverty with 300,000 children across the UK being pushed into poverty.

While there has been a race to the bottom over tax levels in this country in recent decades , Scandinavian countries are well known for their high taxation that finances second –to-none living standards.

In 2010 total tax revenue in Sweden accounted for 46 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product, exceeded in the world only by Denmark .

In Britain, it was much lower at 35 per cent.

A British lecturer working in the Sweden told the Guardian,

"Swedes are very attached to the idea of the state as the People's Home. Everyone in society is under the same roof, everyone will be protected. Sweden is now a more diverse society, but this idea still persists. "

and he continued, "Most people trust the state to manage taxes well. There's a broad, deep faith that the money going into the welfare state will be employed usefully."

So taxation and government spending finance social cohesion and there is public confidence in public organisations.

Save the Children's study in 2010 ranked Sweden the best place in the world where a child can grow up and the fourth best place to be a mother.

Norway, Sweden and Denmark were amongst the top 5 places to be a mother.

The selection was made "on an analysis of indicators of women's and children's health and well-being, and clearly illustrates that providing mothers with access to education and economic opportunities gives mothers and their children the best chance to survive and thrive."

Furthermore, " it is that the quality of children's lives depends on the health, security and well-being of their mothers."

Yes, there is child poverty in Scandinavia , and there is deprivation , but obviously it is much removed from most of our everyday observations here.

So how does Scandinavian -style belief in redistributing wealth throughout society for the common good from the proceeds of high taxation resonate in Scotland?

A sobering report from Scot Cen/British Social Attitudes (December 2011) investigated a long-established view " Is Scotland more left-wing than England?"

Since 1999 with the coming of the Scottish Parliament, this barometer of political attitudes has posed several questions annually to discover if Scots are more social democratic than their English , and to what extent.

(The survey takes Social Democratic , the traditional description of left-of-centre parties in Europe to be the equivalent of Labour/the Left in the UK.)

It defined the Left-winger/social democrat as " someone who is concerned about economic inequality and believes that the state should take action to reduce it."

In 2010 -

*78 per cent of those interviewed in Scotland agreed that that differences in income are too large, but only 43 per cent agree that the government should intervene to redistribute incomes from the well-off to lower income groups.

* Respondents were asked , if a government had to choose, it should increase taxes on health, education and social benefits rather than maintain the status quo , or reduce both taxes and spending.

Only 40 per cent said that taxes should be increased to spend on the NHS, education and social benefits.

The report said that the level of greater agreement with these social democratic views found in Scotland than in England was " modest".

The proportion of those in favour of increasing taxes to spend more on the NHS, education and social benefits fell in Scotland from over 60 per cent in 2001 to 40 per cent in 2010.

The survey appears to challenge the perception of a much more social democratic view in Scotland than England.

While it certainly applies to voting behaviour , ten years after the creation of a Scottish Parliament strong support for social democratic doctrine seems less sure.

Support for traditional "tax-and-spend" Left of centre policies in the last decade appears to have fallen sizeably in Scotland.

However, these surveys were all taken before the advent of David Cameron's Tory Government and the familiar friction between Scotland and Tory Governments will raise again the need to make the redistributive case against social injustice, even in colder political climates.

There is anger and disgust at the ostentatious excesses of banks and their stratospheric bonuses.

The Public and Civil Service Union estimate that £25 billion is lost each year annually in tax avoidance along with a further £70 billion in tax evasion by big companies and wealthy individuals.

A further £26 billion in taxation is lost through not being collected.

As the union says, "Closing the tax gap, as part of overall economic strategy, would negate the need for devastating cuts."

These, and many other examples, are contrasts that require to be fashioned into a new statement of what social democracy can achieve in lean times, at all levels of society.

In 1945 when Britain faced a massive deficit resulting from debts accumulated during wartime, Atlee's Labour Government didn't take the decision, like the Tory government today has, that the deficit had to be reduced as quickly as possible.

Instead its priority was the creation of the welfare state.

All respected impartial analysis of the Tory Government's "deficit reduction" tell us that the poor will be the hardest hit.

All our best instincts tell us that poverty must be tackled in a radical manner.

Since coming to power in 2010, the Tories' mismanagement of the economy alone has already added a further £150 billion to the deficit.

That is five times the estimated annual expenditure of wiping out child poverty in the UK by 2020.