

If the SNP can tackle child poverty in Scotland why can...

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As regular readers are aware, every now and again a comment arrives on this blog that I think should be an article in its own right. This happened yesterday, when regular commentator Ken Mathieson posted a comment in response to [my questioning why Labour will not promise to eliminate child poverty](#), even though they very obviously have the capacity to do so. Ken said:

There's a very informative piece about this topic in a speech Danny Dorling gave in a book shop in Edinburgh. It's at Shattering nations, Scotland vs England and inequality: Danny Dorling at Edinburgh's Topping Books ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)) and Danny starts to address the topic at 5:30 in. The source for this was Leah Gunn Barrett's blog of 20th May : dearscotland.substack.com

For those who are too short of time to listen to the entire youtube entry, she transcribed the relevant part about child poverty as follows: "... a European country in 2020 that, when faced with the cost of living crisis and a pandemic, convened a government emergency committee and introduced a payment of £10 per week for each child under the age of 6 in families receiving benefits. In 2022 this was then increased to £25 per week for each child under the age of 16. For a family with 3 children, this meant an extra £4k per year. He asked the audience to guess which country he was talking about. Someone immediately responded, "Scotland."

When he poses this question to his average English audience, he said it takes ten guesses to land on Scotland. That's because England has no idea what Scotland has done to blunt Westminster welfare cuts or anything else for that matter. The media doesn't report it, although it has to be said Scotland's unionist media doesn't relish reporting things that Scotland does well.

Professor Dorling said the Scottish Child Payment is responsible for the biggest reduction in child poverty in a year anywhere in Europe since 1989. The Scottish administration accomplished this within the Westminster-imposed Barnett Formula budgetary straightjacket. It just goes to show that alleviating poverty is a political

choice.

He gave a quick history of the UK's economic deterioration and rising inequality. Both began at the end of the 1970s. In the 1960s, only Sweden had a lower rate of inequality than the UK. In 1974 inequality in the UK reached its lowest level, competing with Finland and Norway, and the UK had the highest life expectancy and lowest infant mortality rates in the world. From the 1980s, it's been downhill as neoliberalism, ushered in by Thatcher, took hold. By 1992 inequality in the UK was worse than Portugal but Tory voters were doing well. New Labour did little to reverse inequalities. By 2016, only Bulgaria was more unequal than the UK. The UK government's excuse was "At least we're not as bad as South Africa or Brazil."

The 2008 financial crisis followed by Tory austerity and the pandemic have accelerated the UK's social and economic nosedive. It's telling that when the UK left the EU, the European Parliament lost its largest bloc of far-right MEPs made up of UKIP and the Tories.

The Resolution Foundation's Living Standards Outlook 2023 reported that 56% of children in the UK with 2 siblings were going hungry 2-3 times per month, figures not seen since the 1930s. Imperial College's School of Public Health found that the average height of children in the UK is falling - UK five-year-olds are shorter than their European counterparts. The height decline began in 1985 and experts suggest that poor nutrition is stunting their growth.

In addition, UK life expectancy is decreasing while depression and other mental illnesses are soaring. Failure is being normalised. In my local grocery store, there's a sign asking shoppers to donate to the local food bank. Food banks didn't exist before 2000 - now there are over 2,500.

This is why I routinely refer to the "failing UK." A state is failing when it fails its people - their health, their welfare, their education, their futures.

And Keir Starmer's English Labour party, a party which Dorling says 'lost its soul' in the late 1990s, is comfortably in bed with its corporate donors so won't change the downward trajectory of this failing state but continue it.

My take: if Scotland can do it with the entire funding of its economy effectively controlled by Westminster via the Barnett consequentials, Starmer has absolutely no excuse to naysay its adoption UK-wide.

I agree with Ken's conclusion.