



Evidence is clear Scotland is worse off within the Union, Westminster has not only broken its vows of substantial more powers for Scotland within the union, the evidence is clear that promises of Scottish families being better off in the UK are also unravelling.

The “worse off with independence” claims were a project fear speciality but they have not matched up to reality. Last year the Treasury claimed we would be £1,400 worse off independent and Gordon Brown, a little less cataclysmic, claimed every household would be £450 worse off. As the Yes surge made the vote too close to call most observers believe that the No campaign won narrowly based on the combination of claiming people would be worse off, unmet promises of more powers and a bevy of big business friends of David Cameron claiming prices would go up.



Now a year later Labour supporting union Unison is claiming Westminster cuts will mean that 200,000 households across Scotland including 30,000 in Glasgow, will lose out under the Conservative’s tax credit cuts. Unison claims that 40 per cent of working families with dependent children could find themselves as much as £3,000 a year worse off when welfare reforms come into place in April 2016 just weeks after what would have been Scotland’s independence day. Frank Field, the veteran Labour MP who chairs the Commons Work and Pensions Committee has claimed that “Just before Christmas 3.2 million UK low paid workers will receive a letter from the Chancellor telling them he intends to cut their wage packets on average by £1,350 a year”.

So parents in Scotland with two children, and by my calculations approximately five hundred thousand low paid workers in Scotland, will be roughly £1,400 a year worse off and not £1,400 better off as claimed by Better Together. This is due to Westminster welfare reforms that wouldn’t have applied in an independent Scotland.

You might argue that Labour and Unison supported a No vote hoping for a Labour majority in Westminster but that argument would have more gravitas if Labour had bothered to vote against the welfare reforms they are now complaining about. For that matter new shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has pledged to support the Tory’s ‘budget responsibility’ charter – which commits to wiping out the deficit by 2020 – despite campaigning against spending cuts. They say their cuts will have less of an effect on lower earners and that they will go after big business instead. There are already signs that Labour’s more centralist supporters (the majority of voters not members) and their friends and donors in big business are defecting en masse to the Conservatives.

One former Labour big business No campaign collaborator was Sir Ian Cheshire the former CEO of B&Q, one of those rolled out to claim that retail prices would go up in an independent Scotland, this week launched an attack on the plan to increase the minimum wage. Cheshire wants the Living Wage promise reviewed after 2 years and the No Campaign’s Tory business club the CBI also attacked the Conservatives’ plans saying that paying a fairer wage will hit profits and jobs. Cheshire also claimed rising costs would happen in an independent Scotland due to uncertainty as to whether we would remain within the EU – which if this was in any way accurate, he would have voiced the same concerns about the EU referendum and possible exit but I can’t find any such comment? This essentially means that Sir Ian who claimed we would be better off within the union is now campaigning to make people worse off within the union. This is a problem for the Conservatives as their argument is that the welfare cuts are balanced out by the increased wages but not only does this claim not stand up to scrutiny, the party’s big business backers are up in arms about the Conservatives faux Living Wage.

The real Living Wage as defined by the Living Wage Foundation is £7.85 per hour throughout the UK and £9.15 in London and represented the hourly wage people need to live a basic life without falling into debt. The minimum wage will rise from £6.70 to £7.20 an hour (admittedly an improvement) but still will exclude under 25’s who make up the bulk of the people on the current minimum wage and they are also one of the hardest hit sections of society by the cuts in housing benefits.

Now for sure the deficit needs to come down and over time the national debt as well. The Tories want to cut benefits and claim people won’t be worse off due to their faux Living Wage but that’s not true. Labour say they would match the Tories’ deficit reduction targets by getting more tax from big business. However both sides are claiming they will tackle big business tax avoidance, and Labour look likely to be carping from the side lines for a generation. The more sensible path is to increase wages to a real Living Wage over a period of time.

Higher pay means less people will qualify for benefits and the welfare bill will fall. As more and more people earn more they will become more economically active, pay more taxes and boost the retail and service sector safeguarding and even creating new jobs. There are 414,000 low paid workers in Scotland earning less than the Living Wage. In many cases they work for big multinationals in retail and hospitality and as they don’t earn enough to live on most qualify for welfare payments. Housing benefit, Working Tax Credits, Child Tax Credits and Child Benefit mean that the tax payer is subsidising wages so that businesses don’t have to pay a fair wage. These welfare payments to low paid workers amount to between £800 and £850 million pounds a year from Scotland’s budget alone. The extra Income Tax generated and National Insurance contributions from the increased wages would also generate between £220 to £250 million of additional revenue for Scotland. This means that, even before the economic stimulus effect from higher consumer spending, subsidising mostly big businesses so they don’t have to pay a fair is costing Scotland £1 billion a year.

Last year Better Together said that people would benefit from staying in the UK by £1,400 per person and some of the same people are now saying we will be £1,400 worse off. Apparently a year is a long time in politics.

The SNP conference in Aberdeen never revealed any major surprises, with the exception of one. SNP supporters and Independence activists alike were hoping that Nicola Sturgeon would lay out the timetable for Indyref 2, she never quite did. Although Nicola explained that there are triggers that would make indyref 2 take place, Scotland being pulled from the EU against its will, the renewal of Trident, the continuing brutality of the Conservatives austerity, the ever likely renegeing on the Vow/Smith Commission to name a few, a firm commitment to a second Independence Referendum in the next Parliament was never made.

However, she did say "*As you might have noticed, I get asked regularly what our manifesto will say about a second independence referendum.*

So let me address that question directly. Our manifesto will set out the details. But today I'll tell you the principles that will guide it. Those principles are respect and democracy. Friends, I believe with all my heart that Scotland should be an independent country. But I respect the decision that our country made last year.

Let me be clear, to propose another referendum in the next parliament without strong evidence that a significant number of those who voted No have changed their minds would be wrong and we won't do it. It would not be respecting the decision that people made. But, over the next few years, as the Tories impose even deeper cuts, press ahead with Trident renewal and fail to honour in full the vow of more powers for our parliament, I think support for independence will continue to rise. So let me also be clear about this. If there is strong and consistent evidence that people have changed their minds and that independence has become the choice of a clear majority in this country, then we have no right to rule out a referendum and we won't do that either. No one has the right to stand in the way of democracy"

In other words if we the people of Scotland want another bite at the cherry and can show significant change in support for a Yes vote the SNP will have no hesitation in calling Indyref 2. Some say that support has to be at around 60% for a consistent period of time, others believe that it should be called now whilst the polls show Yes slightly ahead. I personally am of the opinion that Independence Activists need to get to work and engage with the electorate to educate on the benefits of an Independent Scotland and to dispel the fears, lies and too wee, too poor, too stupid message pedalled by Project Fear (Better Together, MSM, BBC) all through the 2014 Referendum.

So if you are a YES voter, now is the time to get the facts out and start talking, if you are a NO voter, please have a look at the facts, don't rely on the lies and spin provided on a daily basis by the Establishment media. Like we have always said, "If you read it, or hear it, please Research it".

Coal bed Gasification Why it's not a good thing for Scotland. Way back in the late nineties, my old friend and renowned macro economist Dr Arthur Hodkin was involved in a proposal I worked on, to design a hypersonic aircraft. This was a notion to fly from Sydney to Prestwick in three hours flat. But we needed to look for a new low cost, low emission fuel. So we looked at various alternatives. Including coal gas, from a process called coal bed gasification.

The gas had a high concentration of methane, a low carbon, room temperature gas. So we considered using it in a slushy mix with hydrogen. But my point is that until then I'd never heard of coal gasification and until very recently I never expected to hear about it ever again.

Because even back in the nineties, the idea was just theoretical. It involved deliberately setting fire to a coal seam in a deep pit, (typical of mines on the east coast of Scotland). The resulting fire would be controlled by restricting the air supply, to cause a very slow, low temperature burn. This would release clouds of coal gas (smoke) which would then be extracted up another shaft, and collected and compressed at the surface. All sounds perfectly simple so far. But there were one or two teensy problems with this notion.

Firstly, how to control the oxygen supply. It needs pumps on the surface, fitted with safety blowback valves. It would vary depending on how large or small the seam became during the burn. Then there was the big problem of methane gas pockets. These were often responsible for explosions in twentieth century mines and killed hundreds of miners. Thirdly, there was the risk of a fire getting out of control as many coal seams are highly irregular and may veer off in undesirable directions. So a fire front could veer away from the sea and start burning under land and houses. And finally there's a big probability of uncontrolled coal seam collapses, when the voids created by the partially burnt coal seams fall in. This is likely to cause fissures in the rock strata and contaminate the water table with sulphurous ash.

So when I heard some firm hoped to try this amazingly dodgy gas extraction technique underneath the Forth estuary, I was stunned. No sooner had the Thatcherites concreted over all of Scotland's coal pits, some of their pals wanted to open them up and set them on fire. At first I thought it was a bizarre case of overkill, before I realised this was a serious business proposal.

You may notice it's happening in Scotland and after we voted against Independence. If we had voted yes, this loony company would never have found guinea pigs like the Edinburgh folk to inflict it upon.

Backed by public support the Scottish Government have placed a moratorium on Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) pending a study into safety, the environmental and economical impact, it is expected that like the Fracking moratorium the study should be complete around the spring of 2017.

Contrary to what has been reported in the media/TV the SNP never held a vote to ban fracking/UCG at the autumn conference in Aberdeen, therefore, there was no narrow victory/defeat on the issue.

The **Friends of the Earth** blog (<http://tinyurl.com/nlduukx>) reports the facts of what actually happened, "*This example: 'SNP narrowly votes against all-out fracking ban' suggests that there was a motion to ban fracking and the delegates voted against it. Completely wrong. There was a motion calling on the Scottish Government to consider have a moratorium on Underground Coal Gasification – something it did last week. The many motions submitted which did call for a ban were not selected for debate and even the one that was watered down before it got to the conference.*" Like it reports at the end of the blog the Scottish Government will have no difficulty in understanding what happened and what the people of Scotland want and will have to be bolder and tougher in Spring 2016.