

As somebody who has stayed in Sunderland and not moved to another part of the country after completing my education in the 1960s, I used to be slightly contemptuous of those who left to go to University or College and then never came back. They would profess an undying love for the Sunderland and probably the football team, but never dream of returning to use their gained expertise to help make it a better place, despite having plenty of scope in which to make this happen.

This in many ways was a mistaken, somewhat pompous feeling on my part, because I was gently reminded several years ago by another school colleague who also remained, that I had no knowledge whatsoever of the personal circumstances of that person or their family, why they left and never came back.

So since then, unlike others, I have kept quiet and not pre-judged people with my own prejudices, just in case I put my foot into a delicate situation about which I knew nothing. In addition, I began to think that it was obviously a free country, people had every right to choose where they lived and at the very least Sunderland had set them on their way.

Nevertheless, I still would have much preferred that the young talent which left our City had returned. Their increasing experience and open-mindedness not only could have assisted business and culture, but would have been a welcome contrast to some of those well-meaning and generally hardworking people who have stayed, but just cannot escape from the past. This tendency is really unfortunate and it is getting no better even decades later. The post-war history of Sunderland, which covers my lifetime, is something that must never be forgotten, good or bad, but when repeated time after time, either for political reasons or just plain nostalgia, it becomes a liability to progress and forward-thinking, just like a dead-weight holding Sunderland down.

There are many people in positions of some influence in my home City who revisit the 1980s, given the slightest excuse. Some of these people are very intelligent yet do not seem to realise they do few favours to the younger or current generations, who are perfectly capable of grasping the globalisation that did take place in the 1980s and has done so since 1997. Vital contributions were made by all political parties to bring fresh industries to the City, so why not just leave it at that.

There is a fair degree of common ground in the aspirations for Sunderland so let us accept that right and wrong past decisions were made, but that the easy option of repetitive, negative history lessons, is not the way to promote the future of what we hope, one day, will be the outstanding city in which we all live.

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