

A Brexit that puts jobs and living standards first

Jeremy Corbyn writes for the Sunday Herald on Labour's plan for Brexit:

One year on from the EU referendum, Theresa May's minority Tory government has finally started the Brexit negotiations weakened and in disarray.

This week's threadbare Queen's speech underlined that the Conservatives have ran out of ideas and lost their political authority.

They are divided and ill-prepared to carry out some of the most important negotiations our country has ever faced.

Two months ago the Prime Minister called a general election to win a landslide and a mandate for a Tory Brexit that would see a race-to-the-bottom in jobs and living standards. She failed and lost her majority instead.

The Conservative government's approach to Brexit threatens to damage links with our most important trading partners, ditch workers' rights and environmental protections, slash corporate taxes and lead to even deeper cuts to our public services.

A Tory Brexit would put British jobs and living standards at risk, damaging our economy and threaten to take Britain over an economic cliff, worsening the already outrageous levels of poverty and inequality here in Britain.

Labour would do things very differently. We are clear, just as we were during the election, that the issue of Brexit has been settled. We are leaving the EU. The question is what kind of Brexit we will have.

A Labour Government would negotiate a Brexit deal that puts jobs and living standards first, and secures workers' rights and environmental protections.

We would seek a close relationship with the EU – not membership, but a partnership for peace, trade and co-operation – that strengthens trade and security, and underpins the investment in jobs and the industries of the future that will raise living standards for all British people.

Unlike the Tories, who started the negotiations with megaphone diplomacy, Labour would work sensibly with our European neighbours to ensure a flourishing post-Brexit economic relationship that works for both sides.

That is the kind of jobs-first and community-first Brexit that Britain, and Scotland, need.

Labour's Brexit team would seek continued tariff-free access to the single market, with no new non-tariff burdens for British business.

The precise institutional mechanism for achieving that is less important than ensuring that jobs, the economy and living standards are protected and expanded, not cut or damaged. We need a Brexit that delivers for the many, not the few.

Yet we have a Prime Minister, who having failed to secure the mandate she wanted for a Tory Brexit, appears to be willing to give up on tariff free access to the European single market before negotiations have even begun.

Leaving the EU means Britain will have a different relationship with the single market. The government's focus must be on securing a new partnership with the EU that maintains the benefits of both the EU single market and the customs union.

How that is best achieved, along with the freedom to negotiate new international trade agreements, should be part of the negotiations.

When it comes migration, our reform of the immigration system would put jobs and the needs of the economy first. Leaving the EU will mean that freedom of movement will end.

In its place, we support fair rules and reasonable management of migration, underpinned by tough action to end the undercutting of pay and conditions by unscrupulous employers and stop overseas-only recruitment.

This week, Theresa May has finally put down her first offer on the rights of EU Nationals in Britain, by promising a "settled status" for those who have lived in Britain for 5 years. This is too little, too late and falls far short of the full guarantee Labour would make.

Labour would give a clear commitment to all EU nationals who live and work in Britain, and make a huge contribution to our society, that they will retain their existing rights.

From my own discussions with European leaders, it is clear that unilaterally guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens to remain in Britain would be the best way to secure the rights of British nationals living in other parts of the EU.

For Scotland, we are clear that the voice of the Scottish people must be heard – and the same goes for the other devolved administrations.

The EU will only negotiate with the British government. But Scotland needs a clear input into the Brexit negotiating process. The Scottish government must have regular and systematic access to the British negotiating team so that the Scottish perspective, especially in those areas for which the Scottish Parliament is responsible, is fully taken into account.

That is of course a two-way street. The Scottish government also needs regularly to share the content of its dialogue with the Westminster government with the Scottish people through the Scottish parliament and the other political parties in Scotland.

Of course Brexit is going to be difficult and the negotiations will be challenging. But with the right approach and negotiating plan, I am convinced we can negotiate a new relationship with the EU that works for all our people, not just a privileged few.

We have set our plan for the Brexit negotiations, and we believe that only our plan can protect living standards and our wider economy, and deliver a Brexit for jobs, living standards and investment in our future.

The Tories have no mandate, no authority and no vision for our country's future. Labour is determined to build the fairer Britain that the millions who voted both 'Remain' and 'Leave' last year want to see.

Labour is the only party which can deliver a jobs-first, people-first Brexit that brings our country together. We are now a government in waiting, ready to provide that leadership.

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