

It's time for a united Britain that works for the many, not the few.

23 June 2017

Kezia Dugdale writes for the Times Red Box on the Queen's speech:

When Theresa May planned the Queen's speech before calling her snap General Election, she would have thought it would be anything but threadbare.

She was planning to have a commanding Commons majority, allowing her to force through a raft of policies to punish the poorest in our society.

But her gamble backfired spectacularly, and her dreadful campaign and floundering attempts to stitch a deal together with the DUP has left her with no mandate and no authority.

As a result, we saw a Queen's speech reflecting the position of a Prime Minister in name only, while Jeremy Corbyn's government-in-waiting watched on.

Labour MPs, including the seven that Scotland sent to the Commons, will relish every chance in this parliament to derail the Tories' agenda.

The Queen's speech offered very little for Scotland. No further support for our vital oil and gas industry, no measures to protect the 250,000 WASPI women in Scotland affected by the botched acceleration of the state pension age, and no attempt to scrap the emergency services tax, which sees Scotland's overstretched fire and police services pay millions of pounds in VAT.

The General Election should have sent a clear message to the Prime Minister. She needs to abandon the failed politics of austerity. Seven years of painful cuts have simply gone too far.

Our public services are at breaking point, working families are struggling to make ends meet, and the Tory government lurches from crisis to crisis. It simply isn't good enough.

The parallels between Theresa May and Nicola Sturgeon are now striking. Both have lost all authority and their supporters are deserting them – both in the country at large and within their inner circles.

Their brand of isolationist, nationalist politics feels outdated to an electorate sick of division.

Both now lead governments which are exhausted, having completely run out of ideas.

It is more important than ever that people in Scotland and across the UK

realise there is an alternative to the extremes of Tory and SNP nationalism.

That alternative is the Labour Party. Our pro-UK anti-austerity message that together we're stronger is what the majority of Scots want.

That's why in the General Election we overturned huge SNP majorities and slashed many more. When the next election is called, we are ready to seize more seats from of an out-of-touch SNP – and we will kick Theresa May out of Downing Street.

After seven years of Tory austerity, and a decade of SNP division, it's time for a united Britain that works for the many, not the few.

This article first appeared in the Times Red Box on Friday 23 June 2017

The Queen's speech is a 'weak, vague and mean-spirited programme from a government in meltdown'

Shadow Scottish Secretary Lesley Laird said the proposals from the Tories fail to reflect the message that voters sent Theresa May in this month's General Election.

The Prime Minister has no mandate for her pro-austerity policies or her plan for a Brexit that will leave people worse off.

Some Tory manifesto pledges have been abandoned as a result of the General Election, while Theresa May struggles to stitch together a deal with the DUP to stay in office.

Speaking about today's Queen's speech, Shadow Scottish Secretary Lesley Laird said "This was a weak, vague and mean-spirited programme from a Tory government in meltdown.

"Theresa May has no political authority, and while she struggles to stitch together a deal with the DUP to stay in office, she has been forced to ditch policies from her wildly unpopular manifesto.

"But it is deeply disappointing that this government appears determined to

press ahead with deep cuts to public services and a failed austerity programme that has lost public support.

“The Queen’s Speech offers very little for Scotland, with nothing for our vital oil and gas industry, no measures to protect the 250,000 WASPI women in Scotland affected by the botched acceleration of the state pension age, and no attempt to apply a VAT exemption to our stretched fire and police services.

“While Brexit will undoubtedly dominate parliamentary proceedings, Theresa May must revisit her reckless plan for a Brexit that will leave people worse off.

“Labour is ready to take up the reins when this chaotic Tory administration implodes.”

[Five things that need to be in the Queen’s Speech](#)

20 June 2017

This week Theresa May will attempt to produce a Queen’s Speech. Here are five things that need to be in it.

Reverse planned cuts to social security

Tories plans to slash social security will see low income workers, families and the most vulnerable lose out over £1 billion by 2020/21.

Make austerity history

Day to day spending in Scotland is set to fall by a further £1 billion in the next three years. The General Election was a wake-up call to the Tories – austerity needs to end.

Protect the WASPI women

Over 250,000 women in Scotland have had their state pension age changed without fair notice. That just isn’t fair, so the Tories should commit to transactional protections for the WASPI women.

Scrap VAT on Scotland’s Police and Fire Services

The way the SNP government centralised Police and Fire Services left them with a £35 million a year VAT bill. This is a mess of the SNP’s making, but the UK Tories need to drop the point scoring and give our emergency services a tax cut.

More support for Oil and Gas

In the last UK Budget, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) downgraded its forecast for offshore receipts by 37 per cent. The North Sea needs real support, not just warm words.

We need to see investment in the North Sea oil and gas industry to protect jobs in the short and long term, and plan properly for decommissioning. We also need to look at taking vital pieces of infrastructure into temporary public ownership to stop them being decommissioned prematurely.

Agree with our plans for the Queen's Speech? [Then help spread our message.](#)

We deserve to hear the truth behind Theresa May's Brexit talks

This time last year I was campaigning hard for Britain to remain in the EU. Twelve months on, and not only have we been through a referendum when voters chose to leave the EU, we have a different Prime Minister who is now hanging on to her job by a thread.

It has been an extraordinary period of upheaval in British politics.

This week, the Brexit talks got under way but we still have no idea what the final outcome will be.

Theresa May was intent on a hard Brexit, yet her authority has been crushed after a general election which saw her lose her majority. Her vision of an extreme Brexit has been rejected.

Jeremy Corbyn is assembling a government in waiting at Westminster, and the formidable Keir Starmer is leading our constructive approach to Brexit.

He has made clear to the Prime Minister that she must take a different tone and approach, and be much clearer about the benefits of the single market and the customs union. And she has to be clear about how she's going to allow Parliament to have a much greater role in scrutiny as we go through the process of leaving the EU.

Alternatively, she could step aside and let Labour guide us through the process instead.

We want to scrap the Conservatives' Brexit White Paper and replace it with fresh negotiating priorities that have a strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the single market and the customs union – which are essential for maintaining industries, jobs and businesses in Britain.

Labour will always put jobs and the economy first.

The outcome of the Brexit talks will have major ramifications for Scotland. Nicola Sturgeon is quietly hoping it is a disaster – anything to build up a fresh grievance for her campaign for independence. She doesn't care much about getting a good deal.

The UK Government should be transparent and open as talks get under way, and that includes involving opposition politicians and devolved administrations.

The Welsh Labour Government are committed to making the process work for the entire UK, unlike Sturgeon. That's why she must first publicly remove a second independence referendum from the table.

The outcome of Brexit should not be used by the SNP to demand a second vote. Even Sturgeon must see that it makes no sense to ask to join the UK negotiating team at the same time as calling for a vote to leave the UK.

As there are demands for a cross-party Brexit team, similarly the First Minister should meet with opposition parties prior to each negotiation meeting to ensure she presents the broad view of the Scottish Parliament, not just of the SNP.

And she should report back to other parties and to Parliament about how she's got on. What she claims other people said can no longer be trusted, so the negotiations must be open, transparent and properly recorded so we can see the whole picture.

We are embarking on a pivotal moment in our country's history. My fear is that May and Sturgeon are not up to the job.

This article first appeared in Kezia Dugdale's Daily Record column on Tuesday 20 June 2017

[Supporting Scotland's carers](#)

16 June 2017

This week is Carers Week. They are the unsung heroes of our country.

There are at least 759,000 carers aged 16 and over in Scotland and 49,000 young carers. The value of care provided by carers in Scotland is more than £10 billion every year.

At some point of our life, three-out-of-five of us will become carers. Here's how Labour would change Scotland to support carers.

Increase Carer's Allowance

Carer's Allowance is the payment made to carers to help them with additional expenses.

Holyrood has the powers to increase Carer's Allowance and Labour would increase it by £11 a week – or nearly £600 a year.

Get more carers claiming Carer's Allowance

The last official figures showed that more than 50,000 carers who were entitled to Carer's Allowance weren't claiming it.

That's £170 million that could be going to carers, but isn't. Maybe they don't know they are entitled to it, or are put off by the process of applying.

Labour will push for a legal duty on Scotland's new social security agency to ensure everyone gets what they are entitled to.

Labour MSPs got the Scottish Parliament to agree to this plan last year – and we'll push the SNP government every step of the way towards creating the new agency.

Stop the cuts to public services

The SNP government has taken Tory austerity and passed it on to Scotland's communities.

Local council budgets have been slashed – with more than £1.5 billion slashed from local government budgets since 2011.

That means increased pressure on services like respite care and support at school for young carers.

Only Labour is making the case to use Holyrood's new tax powers to stop the cuts to public services and invest instead.

Like our plan? Then help [spread our message](#).