

“Labour stands for stopping the cuts and investing in public services” – Kezia Dugdale



Thursday 2 February 2017

Below is the full text of Kezia Dugdale's speech on the budget in the Scottish Parliament today:

Today this Parliament has an important decision to make.

One of the most important it has ever made.

We can deliver on the promises the majority of us in this chamber made to the people of Scotland at last year's election, when all but one party represented in this chamber said that we would stop the cuts to valued public services and invest in our economy instead.

Or we can walk by on the other side.

Walk by as teachers struggle with fewer resources with which to educate our children.

Walk by as more and more carers are reduced to fifteen minute visits to our elderly family members.

Or walk by as welfare advisers who support those most in need face even more cut backs.

Now I listened to the First Minister very carefully at lunchtime today and she said this to Ruth Davidson.

She said: "Given the pressure on public services as a result of Tory austerity, it would be wrong to cut taxes for the top 10 per cent of income earners."

Equally, however, it would be wrong to take that Tory austerity and pass it on to the poorest Scots in the face of these public service cuts.

And Labour isn't prepared to do that.

I got into politics to stand up for the very people who will be hit hardest by the SNP's cuts.

And I also heard the First Minister refer to Labour's position on the budget as somehow playground politics.

So can I say to her: I met with Derek Mackay several times throughout this

budget process.

And I spoke to him on the phone as well.

Those conversations were cordial and they were constructive.

And I know he knows that and I know he would agree with that.

So I reject the suggestion that the Labour Party has been playing games.

We have been very clear from the outset.

We said the price for our vote was no cuts to public services.

The more they try to bait me to say that Labour was never serious about engaging in this budget, the more inclined I might be to say exactly what we were talking about in those meetings.

Because the truth is, Presiding Officer, in those meetings this Finance Secretary spent the first half of the meeting telling me there were no cuts, and then the rest of the meeting saying "how much do you need to get rid of those cuts, we won't do it after all".

Completely duplicitous.

The Finance Secretary said to me that he had no mandate to increase taxes.

He said he had no mandate in his manifesto to increase taxes.

And I said to him he has no mandate for these cuts to public services either.

And in the concession he has given to the Green Party today to move away from his manifesto commitment on the higher rate of income tax, he has abandoned that principle of sticking to his manifesto.

And it leaves him open to the accusation: why not use that 50p top rate of tax?

You have moved away from your manifesto once, do it again in the name of protecting vital public services.

And it has been Labour who has been honest enough to say that if we want high quality universal public services then we have to talk about how we pay for them and, crucially, who pays for them.

That's why we have tabled an amendment to use the tax powers of this Parliament to stop the SNP's millions of pounds worth of cuts to local schools and care of the elderly.

Services that are the very fabric of our communities across the country and services that the Labour Party will always fight for.

But Labour's amendment isn't just about stopping the cuts.

It's about growing the economy.

Because for Scotland's economy to thrive we need strong public services.

That means good, well-funded schools giving young people the skills they need to compete for the jobs of the future.

And it means investing in the infrastructure projects essential to businesses across the country.

In this globalised world, if we are to fight for our futures we need to be able to attract that investment into Scotland.

We are competing with the world's major economies for investment and jobs.

Nations like China and India are investing to grow their economy.

Scotland must, and should, do the same.

But the SNP's budget does the opposite.

The employers looking for a high-skilled, well educated workforce will go elsewhere if we don't invest in the greatest resource this country has – its people.

And we know that the SNP's constant threat of another independence referendum isn't good for our economy either.

And it certainly isn't good for our future prosperity.

If Scotland were ever to leave the UK we know it would be devastating to the public services that we all value.

And that is why Labour will not and cannot back any SNP plan to impose another referendum on the people of Scotland.

There is a different path that is available to us because of the new powers of this Parliament.

Powers that so many of us fought for.

It is our responsibility to put them to good use.

Because this Parliament doesn't have to be a conveyor belt for Tory austerity.

And that's why we have come to this chamber with an alternative to the SNP's millions of pounds worth of cuts.

In fact, we are the only party to have tabled any amendments to this budget.

But I make no apologies for saying that Labour will not vote for a SNP budget that imposes millions worth of cuts on local services like schools and care for the elderly.

We just won't do it.

It would be a betrayal of the voters who sent us here in the first place.

I know the impact of the SNP's cuts from my own work in Edinburgh.

I want to make a particular appeal here to Patrick Harvie.

He has campaigned against austerity his entire political life.

And he has spent the months since the government published its draft budget warning about the impact of the SNP's cuts on communities across Scotland.

I agree with him.

All I ask is that he maintains his opposition to the cuts to local services like schools and care of the elderly.

Here's what the Green manifesto actually called for:

- A 60p top rate of tax
- A 43p higher rate of tax.

These were the lofty progressive ambitions of the Greens and today they have settled to be the fig leaf the Nationalists so desperately want and desperately need.

The tax changes announced today constitute £29million of new money.

That's one tenth of the money we need to stop the cuts, and it's one thirtieth of the amount of money the Greens' manifesto said was needed to stop the cuts.

To accept anything less than bold use of this Parliament's tax powers is an astonishing and deeply disappointing revelation from the Greens.

Let's not kid ourselves – this isn't the Greens' responsibility to Parliament shining through.

It's their responsibility they've put on themselves to do nothing which might jeopardise the prospect of another divisive independence referendum.

Nationalism first.

Austerity second.

And somewhere down their list you might just find their environment credentials if you look hard enough.

If the Greens vote for this budget tonight, a budget that passes Tory Austerity on to Scots in the face of a better way, it will be remembered as the day the Greens abandoned any claim to be a party of the progressive left.

We can all remember Nicola Sturgeon the anti-austerity crusader from the 2015 General Election.

Now she has become the Minister for Cuts.

The nationalists who claim to be stronger for Scotland now want to weaken our public services and rip the heart out of our communities.

Today all parties have the chance to back up their previous commitments with action.

To say to the people of Scotland that the policies we put forward aren't just to get through an election but are promises to be delivered.

It's make your mind up time.

Labour stands for stopping the cuts and investing in public services.

There is a better way and I ask members to join Labour in that fight.

It's time for serious politics – not the SNP's game-playing

By Kezia Dugdale, Scottish Labour leader

WITH the Tories' Brexit Bill now published, Britain has moved even closer to the European exit door.

Every move by Theresa May, as she embraces the horror of a hard Brexit and the economic hardship that will cause, is a reminder of how reckless the Tories are in government.

Now, more than ever, we need political leaders who are ready to work in the national interest.

Theresa May has no such interest and is only concerned with keeping the hard right MPs in her party happy. Her claim that the Union is 'precious' to her is simply just empty talk.

And the divisions the Conservatives are causing create a political climate the SNP thrives upon.

Nicola Sturgeon is little better than Theresa May – she also refuses to put the national interest ahead of party interest.

It is time for her to stop playing political games.

One minute she says an independence referendum is 'highly likely', next she says it's off the table, then she says she's not 'bluffing' about holding another contest, then she ruled out a vote this year, and now she is threatening a referendum once again.

It is not just inconsistent and it is not just embarrassing – it is downright dangerous.

Last week's Supreme Court ruling made it clear that the triggering of Article 50 is a decision for the UK Parliament.

It was, of course, a UK-wide referendum.

That is not to say the Scottish Parliament's voice should be ignored, and indeed it will not be ignored.

So there will be a debate in Holyrood, and we will make clear that we oppose both the SNP's separatism and the Tories' separatism.

Let's be clear what any Holyrood vote is not: it is not a vote in favour of a second independence referendum.

There are absolutely no circumstances in which Scottish Labour will support another referendum.

As Jeremy Corbyn said when he was in Glasgow earlier this month, Scottish independence would lead to 'turbo-charged austerity'.

That fact infuriated Nicola Sturgeon, as she prefers to deal in what Donald Trump would call 'alternative facts'.

The reality is there is a £15billion difference between what Scotland raises in tax and what we spend on public services. That's a black hole that would cause further austerity in an independent Scotland.

Labour is the party for Scotland's workers, and we will never support something that would put jobs and livelihoods at risk.

Last week, new export figures revealed the value of the UK single market is four times more important to Scottish trade than the EU single market.

So while I will continue to argue that Brexit is bad for Scotland's economy, the SNP government's own figures show that independence would be considerably worse.

It is simply a reckless nationalist gamble to put access to the UK single market, and all the jobs that depend on it, at risk.

Contrast the SNP's dangerous approach in Holyrood with Labour's approach in Westminster.

Labour has tabled a number of targeted amendments to the Article 50 Bill, designed to ensure Parliament is able to hold the Government to account

throughout the negotiations.

Labour has also tabled an anti-tax haven amendment to ensure the Prime Minister does use Brexit to weaken Britain's laws concerning tax avoidance and evasion.

In Scotland, we want to continue working with the Scottish Government to get the best deal for Scotland within the UK, but that will not extend to blind faith.

Unity cannot be achieved by a politics that sees one half of the country constantly facing off against the other. We are divided enough already.

Only Labour is standing up for what the majority of Scots want – a strong Scottish Parliament within the UK and close ties with Europe.

We are facing the biggest constitutional upheaval in this country for generations.

This is a time for serious politics, not the SNP's game-playing.

The Nationalists should ditch their obsession with independence and work with Labour to help secure the best deal for Scotland and the UK.

Nicola Sturgeon should be standing up for Scotland, not standing up for her party's own self-interest.

*This opinion piece first appeared in Scotland on Sunday on 29/01/17

[Kezia Dugdale responds to Supreme Court Brexit ruling](#)



Commenting on the Supreme Court's Brexit ruling, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

"The Supreme Court has made its view clear and it's right that the UK Parliament should get a vote on triggering Article 50. It's clear now that this is a decision for the UK Parliament.

"Labour in the UK Parliament will seek to amend the Article 50 Bill to prevent the Conservatives using Brexit to turn Britain into a bargain basement tax haven off the coast of Europe.

"We will continue to work with the Scottish Government to get the best deal for Scotland within the UK.

"But both the SNP and the Conservatives are casting about for an expedient political position rather than working in the national interest. Unity cannot be achieved by a politics that sees one half of the country constantly facing off against the other.

"We are divided enough already. That's why there will be no support from Scottish Labour for any SNP plan for a second independence referendum.

"Only Labour is standing up for what the majority of Scots want – a strong Scottish Parliament within the UK and close ties with Europe."