

Brexit announcement: Molly Scott Cato full speech



Green Party

2 May 2017

Caroline Lucas today (May 2) gave voters the chance to remain in the EU as she announces the Green Party's new Brexit pledge.

Molly Scott Cato's full speech (check against delivery):

Firstly, as an MEP, working in the European Parliament; seeing firsthand the many positive things the EU is doing, I would like to congratulate Caroline for refusing to vote to trigger article 50.

I would also like to thank the 113 other MPs – from Labour, LibDems, SNP, and Plaid Cymru – for doing likewise. What we saw on Article 50 was a genuine progressive alliance against the government's plans for an extreme Brexit.

It is only a tragedy that so few Labour MPs followed their hearts and their minds and instead capitulated both to Theresa May and the whips within their own Party.

Since the 24th June last year, it seems to me that it has been the Tory government that has been moving us towards the hard Brexit cliff edge, but Labour that has stood ready to push us off.

The Party has shown itself hopelessly divided and the failure to oppose the government on this the most critical issue for generations has played straight into the hands of the Tory Right.

By voting in such large numbers to trigger Article 50, without fighting for any conditions, Labour MPs have effectively handed Theresa May a blank cheque.

And we know what the small print on the back of this cheque is:

Invoking delegated powers, which would enable the government to make post-Brexit laws behind Parliament's back.

A Great Repeal Bill allowing the government to tear up EU legislation that has both improved and protected our environment, and defended workers'

rights. This bonfire of regulation is a threat to everything we hold dear – clean air, clean water, landscapes where wildlife can flourish – and my meetings with businesses tell me that it is not what they want.

We have also seen the politics of consensus between EU nations replaced by the language of hostility, whether it be the threat of gunships to solve a dispute about Gibraltar or the threat of creating a tax haven if you cannot get your way on trade deals.

But wait. Didn't we hear Labour's Brexit spokesperson, Keir Starmer, say that Labour would rip up Theresa May's Brexit plan?

We should not be taken in by Labour's apparently softer more considered approach to Brexit. Their message is confused and contradictory and still has some uncomfortable hard edges.

They promise to guarantee existing rights to all EU nationals living in the UK, but say they will end free movement. Yet they also want to retain the benefits of the single market and the customs union.

Taking a tough stance on freedom of movement is incompatible with membership of the single market, something Keir Starmer himself acknowledged.

Greens believe that remaining in the single market is vital for protecting jobs and workers' rights. That in turn means defending free movement. In particular, we want young people to continue to enjoy the rights enjoyed by their parents and grandparents – the right to travel, study and work across Europe.

If Labour believe, like the Tories, that the fundamental rules of the club – such as the four freedoms – will be bent or watered down to accommodate a hardline UK, they clearly do not understand that the EU works by unity of purpose. Theresa May's attempt to portray the remaining 27 EU members as somehow ganging up on Britain shows that she shares her party's inability to understand how the EU works. Her approach to the negotiations demonstrates that she is constitutionally unable to cooperate and her confrontational stance is damaging our relationships with our closest neighbours for generations to come.

Like Labour, we will of course ditch the great repeal bill, but we would replace this with a Great Reform Bill, to deliver a fair and proportional election system, reform the House of Lords and introduce a written constitution, so we know what our rights are.

Labour say they would prioritise jobs and the economy in negotiations with the EU. These are of course vital, which is why we say we should stay in the single market. But such a focus risks side-lining the environment. This is why the Green Party is committed to both a new Environmental Protection Act and a Clean Air Act to ensure environmental protections are maintained and enhanced.

Labour's call for parliament to be given a truly meaningful vote on the final Brexit deal is welcome, but their reluctance to give British people the same

right shows a blatant disregard for democracy.

This brings us to our policy announcement today. Greens believe that the people of the UK must be given an opportunity to have their say through a ratification referendum. It is a democratic requirement that when we get to the end of the negotiating process, and we see what Brexit really means as opposed to a series of promises that cannot be fulfilled, we have a chance to decide whether that is better than continued EU membership.

Take back control was the strap line which persuaded many to vote Leave in the referendum last year. It's now clear what that meant. A power grab by the Tory right so they can make a bonfire of regulations which protect our rights and environment; and an opportunity to hand control to powerful corporations and wealthy elites and turn us into a tax haven.

A ratification referendum is the chance to *give* back control.

In two years time, we must give back control to the people, providing them with an opportunity to accept or reject the future that is on offer, or decidewhether actually we are better off remaining a full member of the EU.

So on June 8th:

Vote Green to block hard Brexit.

Vote Green to have a real say on our shared future.

Vote Green to Give Back Control.

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