

Brexit - like independence – is bad for Scotland’s economy

By Kezia Dugdale

The Brexit process is a shambles. First Theresa May said there shouldn't be a vote in Parliament, then her hand was forced. Next she said she wouldn't be publishing a White Paper on her plans for leaving the European Union, but again she was forced into a u-turn.

With each passing day it becomes clearer that this isn't a government in control but an administration being dragged further to the extremes in order to win over support on the Tory backbenches.

As opposed as I am to leaving the EU, I accept that the referendum result didn't go my way. This was a UK-wide vote and the UK voted to leave. We have to accept that we are leaving the European Union. The battle must now turn to how we get the best deal for the country.

That's why today in the Scottish Parliament Labour will vote against the government's current plans to trigger article 50 and begin the process of withdrawal. Brexit is happening, but it doesn't have to be the right-wing version that Theresa May is advocating.

The Tories are threatening to inflict economic vandalism on our country and we must fight that.

But the only thing more damaging for our economy than a Tory Brexit is the SNP's reckless plan for independence.

Labour will not support another independence referendum under any circumstances.

This isn't a knee-jerk reaction. It's based on standing up for the working people the Labour Party was founded to represent.

Brexit will be terrible for Scotland, but independence would be an outright disaster. Our public finances are already struggling. The SNP's budget will impose nearly £170million of cuts on local services like schools and care of the elderly. But leaving the UK would turbo charge that austerity, meaning £15 billion in cuts over and above those already happening today.

That would put the life chances of the next generation of Scots at risk, and have severe consequences for our health service, the payment of pensions and defence in a separate Scotland. Being part of the UK means all of these things are protected. Remaining in Britain secures jobs, helps our economy and bolsters our public finances.

But just as important as the impact of actually leaving the UK, another independence referendum would be deeply divisive.

We all remember what happened the last time – family rows, difficult relationships at work, and communities ripped apart. Scotland is divided enough already, whether along constitutional lines or between the richest and the rest. We can't afford any more division, but that is exactly what another independence referendum would bring.

The majority of people in Scotland voted for working together, in both the EU and Scottish referendums. People know that together we're stronger – as a nation and as communities across the country.

So instead of trying to use Brexit as an excuse to force another independence referendum on the people of Scotland, the Nationalists should stick to the day job.

This article first appeared in the Daily Record on 07/02/2017