

Jeremy Corbyn statement to the House on the triggering of Article 50

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr Speaker,

I would like to thank the Prime Minister for the advance copy of her statement.

Today we embark on the country's most important negotiations in modern times.

The British people made the decision to leave the European Union and Labour respects that decision.

The next steps along this journey are the most crucial and if the Prime Minister is to unite this country, as she says she aims to do the Government needs to listen, consult and represent the whole country, not just the hard-line Tory ideologues on her own benches.

Britain is going to change as a result of leaving the European Union. The question is how. The Conservatives want to use Brexit to turn our country into a low wage tax haven.

Labour is determined to invest in a high skill, high tech, high wage future, to rebuild and transform Britain, so no one and no community is left behind.

Mr Speaker, the direction the Prime Minister is threatening to take this Country is both reckless and damaging and Labour will not give this Government a free hand to use Brexit to attack rights and protections, cut services and create a tax dodgers' paradise.

So let me be clear, the Prime Minister says that no deal is better than a bad deal but the reality is; no deal is a bad deal.

Less than a year ago the Treasury estimated that leaving the European Union on World Trade Organisation terms would lead to a 7.5 per cent fall in GDP and a £45 billion loss of tax receipts.

Has the Treasury updated those figures or do they still stand? If updated, can they be published? If not, what deal could be worse than those consequences of 'no deal'?

It would be a national failure of historic proportions if the Prime Minister comes back from Brussels without having secured protection for jobs and living standards.

So we will use every parliamentary opportunity to ensure the Government is held to account at every stage of the negotiations.

Mr Speaker,

We all have an interest in ensuring the Prime Minister gets the best deal for this country.

To safeguard jobs and living standards Britain needs full access to the single market.

The Secretary of State for exiting the EU seems to agree with this. He stated in this House on 24 January the Government's plan is a:

"comprehensive free trade agreement and a comprehensive customs agreement that will deliver the exact same benefits as we have"

That is what they have pledged. So will the Prime Minister confirm today, that she intends to deliver a trade and customs agreement with "the exact same benefits"?

The same goes for protecting workers' rights and environmental standards, protecting Britain's nations and regions, protecting Britain's financial sector and services and making sure there is no return to a hard border in Northern Ireland.

And when does she expect to be able to guarantee the rights of all those EU nationals who live, work and contribute to this country?

And
for those British nationals who live in the EU, including guaranteeing their
UK
pensions will not be frozen post-Brexit?

Mr
Speaker, Brexit would be a huge task for any government.

Yet
so far they seem utterly complacent about the scale of the task ahead and
government ministers can't make up their minds about their real objectives.

The
Foreign Secretary said in October: "Our policy is having our cake and
eating it."

Today
the Chancellor said: "We can't have our cake and eat it."

These
might seem flippant exchanges from ministers, but these reflect serious
differences about Britain's negotiating aims.

The
Government must speak with a united voice.

The
Foreign Secretary is the same man who promised our NHS £350 million pounds a
week once we left the EU.

Now
he believes that leaving the EU without a deal would be "perfectly ok".

It
would not be "perfectly OK". It would damage our economy and people's living
standards.

Will
the Prime Minister confirm she rejects such complacency?

Labour
has set out our tests for this Government's Brexit negotiations

And
we will use all means possible to make sure we hold the Government to their
word on full access to the single market, on protecting Britain from being
dragged into a race to the bottom, and ensuring our future relationship with
the EU is strong and co-operative.

A
relationship where we can work together to bring prosperity and peace to our
continent.

If
the Prime Minister can deliver a deal that meets our tests, we will back her.

More
than ever, Britain needs a government that will deliver for the whole
country,
not just the few.

And
that is the ultimate test of the Brexit deal that the Prime Minister must now
secure.

Ends