

Kez: 'Vote Labour to break the hold of nationalism'

Speech by Kezia Dugdale, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Let's hear it for Michael Shanks and Kate Watson. Two serious talents that represent Labour's next generation of parliamentarians.

Friends, when people here in Glasgow and across the country vote on June 8, I want them to elect MPs like Kate and Michael.

Two people absolutely committed to the communities they serve.

Two people who have devoted their own lives to changing the lives of others.

And that's what I want to talk about this morning.

The choice that everyone across Scotland has to make three weeks tomorrow.

Because this is no ordinary election.

It is an election that will set the direction that this country goes in for years to come.

And it could determine whether there is a United Kingdom at all.

Because the SNP and the Tories – both purposefully and ignorantly – are ripping our country apart.

That is how important this election is to the future of our country.

Normally in elections we talk about the economy, jobs, schools, our national health service, or our place in the world.

And they are all on the ballot paper on June 8.

But instead of debating these issues, we are locked in a constitutional straightjacket.

And it will poison our politics for years to come.

Our nation is deeply divided, but our two parties of government – the SNP and the Tories – want to spend more time exploiting those divisions than doing anything to heal them.

They are both engaged in a conspiracy of silence where improving our schools, fixing our hospitals, and growing our economy are all on the backburner.

And let's just be explicit about this – that suits both the Tories and the SNP.

It suits them not to talk about public services or jobs.

Why? Because for as long as they turn and face each other, their backs will be to the very people who need them.

People who need to believe another way is possible.

It also suits them because both their respective records in office are dismal.

This conspiracy of silence between the SNP and the Tories cannot and must not continue.

And here's why – starting with the Tories.

Not once have we heard Ruth Davidson explain why working people are worse off now than they were seven years ago.

Why people in this country, our country, can work a full week and still not make ends meet.

Why the price of the deficit has to be paid by victims of rape rather than those at the top.

Ruth Davidson will run to a camera to oppose independence but is running as fast she can from her government's own record.

And as for the SNP, we have a First Minister whose whole justification for a second referendum is Brexit.

But to this day can't tell us whether Scotland gets to stay, has to reapply or whether she'll settle for EFTA: the Norwegian model with all the rules but none of the representation. Oh the irony.

A First Minister whose defence for her dismal ten-year record in education was simply to argue that literacy isn't really that important after all.

Read between the lines and it's clear: the SNP will always put campaigning for independence before governing in the interests of working people.

And the product of that ten-year campaign is a society more deeply divided than it has ever been.

We have three weeks to make the case that Scotland can opt for something other than two different brands of nationalism. Something better.

Neither flag waving Scottish nationalism nor flag waving British nationalism represents the best future for our country.

Here's the argument I'll make instead.

There is a clear majority of people in Scotland who want to reject the Conservatives and opt for a real progressive option.

There are others who want to reject the SNP and to make absolutely clear to Nicola Sturgeon that she does not speak for them.

In vast swathes of the country, the only party that can do this is the Labour Party.

I'm calling on all those people who want a change of government in the UK, and all those people who want to reject Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP, to think carefully about how they use their vote on June 8.

Because there is a majority for change in Scotland – and people need to think carefully in their own area how they want that change to happen.

Friends, Labour has been out of power in Scotland for a decade and across the UK for seven years.

When we were in government, we transformed lives and livelihoods.

We made our communities better places to live, work and raise a family.

I'll never apologise for a Labour Government when it raised family incomes, protected working people with tax credits, invested billions in our public services, outlawed discrimination in the workplace, and changed the way our country was run with devolution.

We did great things in government, and that's exactly why I want Labour to be there again.

By June 9, we will have had eight elections in Scotland since 2012. We have been constantly asking people their opinions.

But when it comes to the problems facing people every day in their lives, nothing seems to change.

It's no wonder that people feel like politics is broken.

There is a deep desire in this country for progressive change, but neither the Tories nor the SNP are going to make it happen.

They are more interested in their own narrow party interest than the national interest.

Think about what has been sacrificed over recent years just to keep the narrow interests of either the Conservative Party or the SNP happy.

Living standards in decline, because the Tories' austerity policies choked off the recovery, and now Brexit looks set to deliver another blow.

The Scottish economy on a downward trajectory and heading towards recession, as businesses become wary of the twin threats of both Brexit and independence.

Our education system – once the envy of the world – now tumbling down international league tables, and the gap between the richest and poorest children persisting.

Our NHS – the jewel in the crown of Labour’s achievements – under threat from an SNP Government that is leaving our hospitals woefully underfunded.

I fear for the future if all we are being offered in this election is a choice between the SNP or the Tories.

Not just because of the damage it will do, but because it doesn’t represent what the vast majority of Scots want.

Across Scotland, people voted both to remain in the UK and remain in Europe. But our votes are being hijacked by Tory and SNP politicians who want to make a different argument.

As a Labour Party, we put ourselves on the side of the vast majority of people across our country who rejected hard Brexit and rejected independence.

Hundreds of thousands of people voted that way, and they did it for principled and consistent reasons.

It was because they believed in the ideas that hold together both the EU and the UK.

And they understood that in a highly complex, interconnected world we are better facing the challenges of the future together.

There is a clear majority in this country in favour of that vision of our society. And I want to appeal to them today.

You are the majority for change: a majority who aren’t served by either the Tories or the SNP.

They are the people who are sick of the Tories’ lack of compassion, and the SNP’s obsession with another referendum.

And who just want us to be getting on with the job of governing and changing people’s lives.

In three weeks, the Scottish Labour candidate on the ballot paper is the option to reject the extremes of both the SNP and the Tories.

You can vote for a Scotland where we put the real issues of our jobs, our economy and our public services first.

Every Labour MP you elect to the House of Commons won’t be there to make the case for independence, or to force Brexit through at any cost.

They’ll be there to put your jobs, our economy and our public services first.

Ask yourself this: after two years in opposition at Westminster, what have

the SNP achieved?

And on all the big tests – whether it was reversing the Tories’ changes to tax credits, forcing changes to the Trade Union Bill, or even getting the powers we were promised in the Scotland Act, it was Labour MPs and Labour members of the House of Lords who made the difference.

That’s why in communities across Scotland, after ten years in government, the SNP’s cry of “Stronger for Scotland” rings hollow. Stronger for who, stronger for what?

Because it’s utterly meaningless unless there’s a plan to accompany it.

The manifesto which Jeremy Corbyn launched yesterday is that radical and transformative plan:

- A Scottish Investment Bank to unlock billions of pounds for our economy and to bring jobs back to Scotland.
- A £10 real living wage – making sure that if you go out and work hard, you receive not just enough to get by but enough to live a fulfilling life.
- And a commitment to transform how our country is run with a People’s Constitutional Convention.

Most importantly, it’s a plan for the most well off to pay their fair share, so that we can stop the cuts and protect our public services.

Next week we will publish our own Scottish Labour manifesto.

It will contain our commitment to oppose a second independence referendum.

But it will be about much more than that.

It will show how we will invest in our schools, our hospitals and in using the power of government to change our economy.

And it will be a rejection of the extremes of nationalism represented by both the SNP and the Tories.

That’s the prize in this election – changing our country for the better.

It’s what Labour has always done in government, and what I want us to be in a position to do again.

Before I conclude I want to talk directly to people across Scotland who are still making up their minds.

I know many of you want to tell Nicola Sturgeon that Scotland doesn't want another divisive referendum.

You are Conservative voters, Lib Dems and independents.

Some of you are even former SNP voters who are fed up with Nicola Sturgeon's

refusal to get on with the day job.

Some of you may never have voted for Labour before.

My message to you is this: in many parts of the country, the way to stop the Nationalists is to vote Labour.

To voters in Edinburgh South, it was Labour who didn't just hold off the Nationalists last time around, we took the seat off the SNP last year in the Scottish Parliament elections. We are the only ones who can beat them. In places like East Lothian, Midlothian and Inverclyde, Labour beat the SNP at the council elections, with the Tories a distant third.

To voters in East Renfrewshire, Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, Labour came second to the SNP in 2015.

The way to stop that happening again is to vote Labour in your area.

That's how we will begin to break the hold of nationalism on our politics.

It's how we will begin to put the interests of working people first again.

My message to Scotland is this:

Don't vote for the SNP to sit on the opposition benches, where they will seek to exploit every piece of Tory cruelty to make the case for independence.

And don't forget that a vote for Ruth Davidson's Conservatives is every bit an endorsement of the rape clause and hard Brexit, as it is opposition to independence.

Vote Labour. Vote for the values we've always held.

Those Labour values of openness, co-operation, solidarity, tolerance and mutual respect – which are needed now more than ever before.

This election will set the direction for the future of our country for years to come. It will determine the kind of country our children will inherit.

Let's fight to make sure that the politics of hope and solidarity wins out so that we can deliver for the many, not the few.

Thank you.

ENDS