

Send the Tories and the SNP a message

2 May 2017

Speaking in Edinburgh today, Kez Dugdale said voters can send the Tories and the SNP a message by electing Labour councillors on Thursday.

The full text of Kez's speech is below

Friends, when I asked Alex to be our local government campaign manager, I knew we would have someone who would lead by example.

But the miles he has clocked up as he knocks on doors in every corner of this country has astounded us all.

Alex, thank you for everything you have done to encourage people across Scotland to vote Labour when the polls open on Thursday.

And let me also thank Ian Murray.

He has taken the fight to the Tories in the House of Commons, and the Nationalists here in Edinburgh South, with the kind of grit and determination that makes me proud to be Labour.

But he hasn't been fighting alone. He has had you, and he has had nearly 230 Labour colleagues from all across Britain, because we are a party that believes in solidarity and working together.

Friends, the election is less than 48 hours away.

That's a sentence I have said an awful lot at events like these over the past few years.

In fact, since I joined the Labour Party in 2003 I have been involved in 12 national elections.

Twelve elections in less than 15 years.

It's no wonder, particularly here in Scotland, that sometimes we get election fatigue.

I am sure I am not the only one who empathised with Brenda, the Bristol pensioner whose angry and outraged reaction to the news of the snap General Election went viral.

But we keep going.

Because elections matter.

And this election is vitally important, because the very future of our local services is at stake.

Who runs our schools and how much we have to invest in Scotland's next generation is at stake.

The level of investment in social care is at stake.

The number of new houses we can build for families is at stake.

Yesterday we marked the 20th anniversary of Tony Blair's landslide election win in 1997.

It serves as a reminder that when Labour is in power, this country is transformed for the better.

That is why we continue to knock on doors, deliver leaflets and make our case for voting Labour.

And the council elections on Thursday and the General Election on the eighth of June are about two things:

Standing up for the public services that we all value, which the Tories want to decimate.

And sending a message to Nicola Sturgeon that the people of Scotland don't want another divisive independence referendum.

So let me say a bit more about those two issues.

After a decade of Tory and SNP cuts, Scottish public services are in a critical state.

There are 4,000 fewer teachers and 1,000 fewer support staff in our schools than when the SNP took office in 2007.

International league tables show a decline in maths, reading, and science.

Too many of our older people can't get the care package they need. And those that do get 15 minute visits – if they're lucky.

That should shame the SNP government.

NHS services across the country – from maternity units to children's wards, and from GP surgeries to entire hospitals – are at risk of cuts or closure altogether.

And yet almost every day of this campaign, Nicola Sturgeon has claimed that we need to vote SNP to protect Scotland from Tory cuts.

What a cheek.

Under the SNP £1.5 billion has been cut from local services since 2011 alone.

That's money taken from our schools and nurseries and care of the elderly.

Money taken from protecting our most vulnerable.

Money taken from services which offer hope and aspiration to those who feel left behind and forgotten.

Money which offers opportunity.

People want their children to get a decent education in good schools.

They want to know that further education is possible.

They need to hope that there will be decent jobs paying decent wages because the government is investing in the future.

The SNP does not offer that.

It might campaign against austerity but the SNP does nothing about it when in power.

The party – the only party – in this election with a plan to invest in public services is Labour.

Every Labour councillor elected on Thursday will fight for better schools and safer communities.

They are the people who will focus on ending poverty in their communities and offer opportunity to all.

They will stand up against the cuts, and work tirelessly to invest in the local services that we all rely on.

The SNP won't stop the cuts.

And the Tories will cut even more.

So to those thinking about voting Tory on Thursday, I want to say this.

Think carefully about what that vote means.

It's an endorsement of the abhorrent rape clause.

It's a vote for a hard Brexit, affecting jobs and workers' rights.

It's a vote for more severe cuts to schools and other valued local services across the country.

Because the more Tories in town halls, the more chance they have of actually getting their hands on local services – and cutting them even further.

So when you are out on the doorsteps over the next 48 hours, tell the voters this:

Don't vote for the Tories as a protest vote. Protest against them.

And don't vote for the SNP. Stop them from taking this country through another divisive referendum.

Nicola Sturgeon has been desperate to convince people that the coming elections aren't about a second divisive independence referendum.

She says that a vote for the SNP is safe, because it isn't really about independence this time round.

But she said that in 2015, and look what happened.

The day after her party won in Scotland she started her divisive campaign to break up the UK all over again.

And if the SNP win 56 seats at the General Election they will, once again, seek to claim a mandate for another divisive independence referendum.

Like you I am utterly fed up with the duplicitous nature of a party which pretends to stand up for Scotland when all it really wants is to tear the UK apart.

Friends, there is nothing progressive about nationalism.

There's nothing progressive about refusing to ask the rich to pay their fair share.

And there's nothing progressive about breaking up the United Kingdom, ending the very means by which we redistribute wealth across these islands.

Like many of you in this room, my belief in Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom isn't based on ideology.

It's not based on the love of one flag over another.

Rule Britannia! doesn't quite do it for me.

My passionate belief in the United Kingdom comes from lived reality.

From seeing the value of being part of something bigger in our everyday lives.

The UK pension that allows older people to live out their retirement with dignity.

The thousands of jobs that are sustained by being in the UK single market, where firms can trade freely between the four nations of our isles.

The shipyards workers, who are in jobs because of UK defence contracts that would be lost if we went our separate ways.

The schools that are built across this country thanks to tax revenues raised and redistributed across the whole of the UK.

The NHS –created by a UK Labour government, and funded by the contributions of working people throughout Britain.

The millions of people around the world who have been helped thanks to the

work of the Department for International Development in East Kilbride.

In every part of our country there is a reminder of the benefits we get from being part of Britain.

And there isn't just an economic and practical argument for remaining in the UK, important though that is.

There is a powerful emotional argument too

It's an argument that is written into the very DNA of our party.

That we achieve more together than by going it alone.

We are the party of solidarity.

We are the party of working together.

We are the party that knows that sharing resources isn't selling our nation out, it's part of building our country up.

So let the message ring out that together we're stronger.

On Thursday, every Labour councillor elected will fight to make their local community stronger.

A local champion who will protect local services from the Tory and SNP cuts.

A local champion who will be the last line of defence between the services people value...

... and the narrow-minded dogma of two opposing nationalist forces.

A local champion whose priority will always be improving our schools and our social care services, not obsessing about a second independence referendum.

So on Thursday send the Tories a message – tell them that Scotland does not want their austerity.

And send Nicola Sturgeon a message as well.

Tell her to abandon her plan for another divisive referendum and get on with the day job.

You can protest against the Tories and protest against plans for a second referendum on Thursday with one vote.

By voting Labour.

And in return, you'll get a local champion for your community.

Someone utterly committed to investing in the public services your family needs and deserves.

So let's get out there.

Thank you.