

Peter Dowd speech at the close of tonight's Budget debates

Peter Dowd MP, Labour's Shadow

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, speaking at the close of the Budget debates tonight, said:

Mr Speaker, last week the Chancellor painted a rosy picture of the nation's finances.

He claimed the Conservative Party's stewardship had been nothing short of miraculous.

A relaxed Chancellor attempted jokes throughout his speech.

The Prime Minister's shoulders shook with amusement.

Many members opposite chuckled away.

Some of the more experienced Members opposite were watching cautiously, as the nose dive gained velocity.

The Chancellor got it wrong – big time.

Within hours he was attacked by many of his own backbenchers.

He was left hung out to dry by the Prime Minister.

Unsurprisingly, he has faced universal criticism over his plans to raise national insurance to 11 per cent for millions of people who are self-employed.

As Sir Michael Caine, playing the character of Charlie Crooker in the iconic Italian Job movie said to his bumbling side kick.

“You're only supposed to blow the doors off!”

Well, the debris from the explosion is still in descending.

A manifesto pledge broken – pure and simple.

And since last Wednesday No.10 and No. 11 have been in a briefing war with each trying to blame the other for the fine mess.

Ostensibly, No.10 suggests the Chancellor sneaked the NI rise into the Budget.

Apparently, other shocked Cabinet colleagues have indicated that he failed to mention, that it would break their manifesto pledge.

It's worrying, Mr Speaker, that Cabinet Ministers don't know what manifesto commitments they made or perhaps they don't care?

Then again the Government has an insouciant attitude towards its manifesto commitments.

First, the Government committed to getting rid of the deficit by 2015 – a promise broken.

Second, they said it would be pushed back to 2019/20 – another broken promise.

Third, they vowed the debt would start to come down after 2015 – another broken promise.

The Government will have virtually doubled the debt and doubled the time they'll have taken to get it down.

And this is what they call success and fiscal credibility?

They seem to think that they can simply press the reset button when it comes to meeting their own fiscal rules and no one will notice.

The flip side of John Maynard Keynes' approach, namely when I change my mind the facts change with it.

When the Government's misses a deadline it's modus operandi is to set a new one and brazenly move on.

The immutable Tory law of economics – make it up as you go along.

What happened to the long term economic plan?

Well, it didn't last very long? Mr
Speaker

The Prime Minister and the
Chancellor have their finger prints all over every single financial decision
that has been made during the last seven years.

It's no surprise that
they have come under criticism from many in their own party including the
former Member for Witney.

Or the former Chancellor, Lord
Lamont, who called the NI debacle a "rookie error".

Otherwise known, in the real
world, as gross incompetence.

But regrettably it's other people
who will pay the price for that incompetence.

Mr Speaker, turning to Brexit,
I'll mention it even if the Chancellor doesn't, it's the tenth anniversary
since the production of

"Freeing Britain to Compete: Equipping the UK for
Globalisation"

This
publication was a wide ranging policy document authored by the right
honourable Member for Wokingham and friends.

It was endorsed by the then Shadow
Cabinet which included the current incumbents at numbers 10 and 11 Downing
Street.

The publication was hard to track
down as it has been removed from the Conservative Party website and for good
reason.

But I found a copy.

Its contents were toxic and all
the more so in the wake of the subsequent global financial crisis and remain
so.

But in the light of Brexit, and
the resurgence of the honourable member for Wokingham's influence, it will
soon
be getting a second run out.

Mr Speaker, it is worth appraising
the House of a few of the nuggets contained in its pages.

It includes policies such as the abolition of inheritance tax.

Charging foreign lorries to use British roads.

The potential abolition of the BBC licence fee, which it refers to as a poll tax.

The watering down of money laundering regulations.

The deregulation of mortgage finance.

Because it's the:

"lending institutions rather than the client taking the risk."

Try telling that to someone whose house has been repossessed.

It goes on:

"we need to make it more difficult for ministers to regulate, and we need to give the critics of regulation more opportunity to make their case against specific new proposals."

Remember this document, dated August 2007, was rubber stamped by the current Prime Minister and Chancellor at the same time Northern Rock was about to go under.

It continues:

"the Government (the Labour Government) claims that this regulation is all necessary. They seem to believe that without it banks could steal our money."

That is not quite the case but the taxpayer, at its peak, had liabilities for the banking crisis of £1.2 trillion.

But, Mr Speaker, many people did believe the banks were stealing their money.

It refers to wanting:

"reliably low inflation, taking no risks by turning fiscal rules into flexible friends."

As for Europe, in search
of jobs and prosperity, it says:

“An incoming Conservative
Government should go to Brussels with proposals to deregulate the whole EU...”

No wonder they wanted to bury the
evidence.

It's the autobiography of the hard
line Brexiteers.

It's the Tory blue print for a
post Brexit deregulated Britain.

It's a race to the bottom.

These policies are a telling
narrative of the views of the fundamentalist wing of the Conservative Party.

The Prime Minister is a hostage to
the far right of the Tory Party.

She is on the hook.

The stage directions are coming
from Wokingham, Haltemprice and Howden, North Somerset and Chingford and Wood
Green with occasional guest appearances by the Foreign Secretary.

The forlorn, melancholic
Chancellor is briefed against because he may just have a less hard-line
outlook
as far as Brexit is concerned.

These are the dusted off policies
of the hard Brexiteers who will stop at
nothing until Britain becomes a low wage, low tax, low regulation economy.

They want to turn our country into
the bargain basement of the western world.

They have the Prime
Minister in tow.

Parliamentary scrutiny is a
hindrance.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has
put Kamikaze pilots in the cockpit.

The Chancellor knows this too well and that is why
reportedly he is putting aside £60 billion, equivalent to a year's worth of
borrowing on the national debt to cope with the trauma.

It's not Brexit proofing the economy but rather proofing the economy from the toxic ideology of the hard Brexiteers.

Mr Speaker, ultimately, it comes down to choices and values.

The Government's choices in this Budget are informed by their values and they are not the same as the vast majority of people in this country.

The Government propose to increase Insurance Premium Tax from 10 per cent to 12 per cent, a regressive measure which will be a further hit on household finances and act as a deterrent to families wanting to obtain proper insurance cover.

It was a surprise to see this measure in the Autumn Statement, coming as it did from a government which constantly uses the high cost of insurance premiums as an excuse for curbs on victims' right to claim compensation for their losses, with particularly damaging effects for those injured in accidents at work.

We will oppose this rise.

And while the Government drives up insurance price for millions of families, it has chosen to forego £73 billion of revenue to give corporations and the wealthy few tax handouts between now and 2021.

A choice we would not make.

Their choice is informed by the value they put on elites and corporations, many of whom readily avoid paying their fair share of tax.

They plan to loosen the rules on the Business Investment Relief, increasing the scope for non-doms to avoid tax when they bring funds into the UK.

This is straightforwardly a giveaway to non-doms, which we will oppose.

There is little evidence that this relief has had a significant impact on inward investment since it was first introduced in 2012.

And there is little genuine reason to believe that expanding the relief now will do anything but give non-doms even more advantages over millions of UK taxpayers.

These and other tax cuts for elites and corporations come off the backs of public sector employees who have foregone pay rises for years.

Or those in the private sector whose wages and salaries remain in the doldrums and will for another decade or more.

Or the self-employed who are increasingly driving our economy who will see an increase to 11 per cent in National Insurance contributions.

We would make a different choice. We reject the kick in the teeth to self-employed people.

Not only does it hit many on low to middle income but will it raise anywhere near the £2 billion the Treasury projects?

It may also deter many people from setting up their own businesses, from innovating and excelling.

It's a moratorium on aspiration.

We would choose not to give tax breaks to those who do not need them.

Mr Speaker, in this Budget the Government claims it's giving lower and middle earners, the NHS, social care agencies, the self-employed, schools, businesses, pubs, the strivers, the entrepreneurs the thumbs up.

Mr Speaker, in practice, this Budget is not giving a thumbs up to all those people.

On the contrary, it's two other digits being put up to those people.

That's another choice that Labour would not make.

[Construction firm fined after worker](#)

fell from height

Construction company Kier Construction Limited has been fined £400,000 after a worker fell from height.

Westminster Magistrates' Court heard how Jair Morales was installing plywood boards covering holes on the third floor of a building at a construction site in Uxbridge, Middlesex when he fell a distance of 3.95m to the floor below.

The court heard no steps had been taken to prevent him falling through the opening as he installed the plywood boards. Mr Morales suffered fractures in his pelvis and his arm following the fall and has been unable to work since the accident.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Kier failed to ensure the work was properly planned and carried out in a safe manner.

Kier Construction Limited of Tempsford Hall, Bedfordshire pleaded guilty to breaching section 4 (1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005, has been fined £400,000 and ordered to pay costs of £1,534.

Speaking after the case HSE inspector Owen Rowley said: "This incident could have been a lot worse. The system that Kier Construction Ltd has in place to control the risk from installing the protection for openings was not implemented on site, ultimately resulting in the accident.

"The risks of working at height are widely recognised throughout the construction industry. This case highlights the importance of ensuring that all work at height is properly planned and carried out safely."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. It aims to reduce work-related death, injury and ill health. It does so through research, information and advice, promoting training; new or revised regulations and codes of practice, and working with local authority partners by inspection, investigation and enforcement. www.hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: www.legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.

News story: Defence Secretary announces 1,500th signing of Armed Forces Covenant

Building materials supplier Travis Perkins were revealed as the 1,500th signatory during the third annual Partnering with Defence employer conference at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London today.

Speaking at the conference, Sir Michael said:

By signing the Covenant, Travis Perkins joins firms across Britain committed to ensuring those who serve or have served our country are better supported.

Reaching this milestone also shows growing recognition of the unique skills and experience that reservists and former service personnel offer their organisations.

Amongst their commitments, Travis Perkins has pledged to provide Armed Forces personnel and veterans with a variety of work experience placements in their centres, branches, and stores across the country and are supporting members of the Royal Engineers in gaining NVQ qualifications for their construction skills.

Travis Perkins currently employs nine reservists and other members of the Armed Forces community across the country.

Maria Walding, a Compliance Manager at Travis Perkins, who is an Army Cadet Force adult volunteer, said:

The Travis Perkins Group has fully supported and values my role as a Reservist. I am proud to say I work for a company that consistently gives military personnel the chance to use their existing skills and build a lasting career outside of the military.

Travis Perkins CEO John Carter said:

As a business, Travis Perkins has long recognised the valuable skills and attributes those with a serving background can contribute, not only to our own workforce but also to the wider economy.

We are delighted to not only be here to celebrate the Group's commitment and ongoing support of the Armed Forces in our signing

of the Armed Forces Covenant, but incredibly proud and honoured to be recognised along with our community of ex forces and serving colleagues, as the 1500th organisation to do so.

Travis Perkins joins a growing number of businesses that are making tangible pledges to the Armed Forces community.

Earlier this week Defence Minister Mark Lancaster also announced that the UK's main broadband providers including Virgin Media, Sky, Talk Talk, BT, EE and Plusnet, representing 95 per cent of Britain's broadband market, had committed to waiving fees on contracts that personnel had to cancel when posted abroad or to another part of the UK, often at short notice.

Since 2013, the Covenant has helped to deliver these key improvements for the Armed Forces community:

- A new agreement with mortgage lenders allowing personnel posted abroad to rent out their homes without facing higher mortgage costs or having to change their mortgage;
 - Fairer mobile phone contracts, freezing the accounts of Armed Forces personnel and their families posted overseas and removing cancellation fees;
 - Better deals in motor insurance, allowing personnel to keep their no claims bonuses and avoid cancellation fees when posted overseas at short notice;
 - Employer networks in a wide range of sectors to support Service leavers through their transition to new careers;
 - Better access to banking, such as savings accounts to Service families posted overseas;
 - Tackling commercial disadvantage previously experienced by the Armed Forces community in relation to credit rating and access to mortgages on offer. For example, if their Service overseas forces them into a situation where they will need to rent out their home, members are now free from the need to switch to a 'buy to let' mortgage;
 - Better access to mentoring, work placements and employment opportunities for personnel leaving the Services;
 - Increased funding and sponsorship of military charities and sports events such as the Invictus Games;
 - Flexible paid or unpaid leave for mobilised Reservists;
 - Employment support for Veterans, Reservists, Service spouses and partners, as well as support for Cadets;
- Discounts and special deals for individuals and their families.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation, enshrined in law, ensuring that those who serve or have previously served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly and not disadvantaged by their service.

[Green Party Animal spokesperson welcomes vote to #EndTheCageAge for caged rabbits](#)



14 March 2017

Keith Taylor MEP: “This is great news for millions of rabbits across Europe and a great example of how the EU can take a lead on animal welfare. Greens have always opposed factory farming and I wholeheartedly welcome the result of today’s vote.”

Green Party Animals spokesperson Keith Taylor MEP is welcoming the vote to #EndTheCageAge for farmed rabbits across Europe. The MEP for the South East was among a majority of MEPs who voted to support a report calling for the practice to be outlawed at the European Parliament plenary session in [Strasbourg this afternoon](#). More than 4,000 people across the South East had contacted their MEPs calling for action.

Rabbits are the fourth most farmed animal in the world. An estimated 340 million rabbits are slaughtered annually after a life kept in barren wire cages where their natural behaviour is severely restricted. Many scientists have called for the cage system to be urgently replaced by one which allows for the natural needs of rabbits to be better taken into account.

The report adopted by MEPs calls for higher welfare standards for rabbits and concrete legislation that would ban the use of cages. Responding to the result, Keith said:

“This is great news for millions of rabbits across Europe and a great example of how the EU can take a lead on animal welfare. Greens have always opposed factory farming and as the Green Party’s Animals spokesperson I wholeheartedly welcome the result of today’s vote. The report prioritises putting an end to the inhumane conditions in which rabbits are kept and eradicating the other problems associated intensive rabbit rearing. The current system leads to the spread of disease and the subsequent overuse of antibiotics.”

“Rabbit farming is relatively small-scale in the UK, but the fact that the European Parliament has voted to end the cage age serves to highlight the key role EU membership has played and continues to play in raising the welfare of millions of farm animals in Britain and across the EU.”

“The closer the relationship the UK maintains with the EU, retaining animal welfare and wildlife protections through single market membership, the better the outcome for British animals. Animal advocates across the UK must continue lobbying the UK government to ensure the current legal protections, for all species, offered by European Union membership are maintained and

strengthened.”

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BCC comments on statement by Scottish First Minister

Adam Marshall comments on the prospect of a second Scottish independence referendum.

13th March 2017

Commenting on the statement by Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon that she will seek a second Scottish independence referendum, Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, said:

“Business communities all across the UK will be thinking, first and foremost, about the additional uncertainty that a second independence referendum would generate.

“Across Scotland – and throughout the UK – businesses want certainty, stability and confidence from governments. Firms understandably fear that another drawn-out constitutional debate would divert both Holyrood and Westminster away from delivering real-world practical support for business, investment, and growth.”

Liz Cameron, Chief Executive of Scottish Chambers of Commerce, added:

“It is welcome that the First Minister has indicated that the Scottish Government will continue to engage with the political process around the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. These are vital years ahead for the future of the UK and Scottish economy and it is crucial that Scotland has a voice at the centre of this process.

“Scotland has been through two referendums and two major elections over the past three years, and there is no doubt that this period of continual uncertainty has had a material impact upon businesses in Scotland. These are real and present business issues that are affecting business decisions and investment. A further referendum on Scotland’s independence would be no different, and the more that can be done to mitigate the duration of this uncertainty for business, the better. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce network will continue our process of engagement with businesses across

Scotland to understand how this prospect could affect them and how their voices can be most effectively articulated during this process.

“In the current circumstances, businesses need as much certainty, stability and confidence as possible and it is the role of our Governments to provide it. The message from Scottish Chambers of Commerce members has been clear and consistent – our priority must be to create the conditions that will enable businesses to thrive. That means focus and resources must be directed towards greater strategic infrastructure investment, developing the skills we need to sustain growth, fair business taxation that does not limit entrepreneurship and investment and clear guidance on entering and trading in overseas markets – all of which must have a clear evidential basis. These are the priorities for business and must be for our Governments too.”

Commentary from Chamber business communities in Scotland is available from our colleagues at Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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