

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

Beijing arrests 77 in crackdown against prostitution

Beijing police announced Tuesday that 77 suspects had been arrested in connection to organized prostitution.

After a raid on Dec. 23, 2016 at three alleged brothels that were operating as entertainment venues, the police submitted an arrest request to the procuratorate so that those linked to organized prostitution could be detained for questioning.

The arrest warrant was approved on Jan. 26, 2017, and the investigation continues.

Skills Minister outlines plans for aligning Apprenticeships to the needs of the Welsh Economy

That is the message from Skills and Science Minister, Julie James, as she launches the Welsh Government's new Apprenticeship policy today (7 February).

Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh Economy sets out the Welsh Government's vision for addressing the needs of Welsh businesses

and the wider economy and has been designed to increase skills levels in priority areas, including where shortages have been reported.

Developed in consultation with businesses, the policy and its five year action plan sets out how the Welsh Government will support the delivery of its manifesto and Taking Wales Forward commitment to create a minimum of 100,000 high quality apprentices in Wales over this Assembly term by focussing on four priority areas:

- Increasing the number of apprentices aged 16-19 by increasing the take-up of quality apprenticeships amongst school leavers.
- Addressing skills shortages by developing apprenticeships particularly in growth and emerging sectors such as the ICT, Engineering, Construction and Financial and Professional Services.
- Developing higher level skills by focussing on apprenticeships at level 4 and above where returns tend to be higher.
- Developing skills pathways by integrating apprenticeships into the wider education system and making it easier for someone to enter into an apprenticeship from another learning route.

Skills and Science Minister, Julie James said:

“This policy highlights our intention to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, which will require higher levels of competence than in the past.

“It also contains a stronger focus on both technical and professional skills needed for high quality employment opportunities within our communities. This will send a strong message about the value of apprenticeships and technical education in supporting people into sustainable employment and self-employment.”

The policy and supporting information also outlines how the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy – a UK Government employment tax due to come into effect on 6 April 2017 – will be managed in Wales.

The Minister added:

“We have said all along that this levy directly conflicts with areas of devolved responsibility, completely overlooks and undermines our very distinctive approach to supporting apprenticeships in Wales and its introduction means that no new significant money is coming to Wales.”

“To help minimise the impact of the levy in Wales the Welsh Government is taking a different approach to its counterparts in England, one which is better aligned to and supports the growing needs of Wales, its people and economy.”

Support for businesses to recruit new apprentices is already available in Wales and will continue to be available to both levy and non-levy paying employers provided the funding supports apprentices in the identified priority areas.

To deliver these priorities the Welsh Government will be increasing its investment in apprenticeships from £96m to £111.5m for 2017-18. This brings our total investment in apprenticeships and traineeships next year to over £126m.

Of the additional funding, £15.5m will be invested this year to ensure that both public and private sector employers are not disadvantaged as a result of the Apprenticeship Levy.

Julie James added:

“Our public services are essential to maintain functions related to education, fire services, waste management, social services and healthcare. We are committed to working with public sector organisations to help them achieve greater consistency and meet future challenges. This will include the publication of specific apprenticeship plans for Local Authorities, the NHS and the ‘blue light’ services.”

The announcement is being made during the Welsh Government’s Jobs Week.

The policy: Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh Economy, its five year [action plan and additional supporting information](#) (external link) is available on the Welsh Government website.

[The Sustainable Drainage System \(SuDS\) Strategy](#)

Wokingham Borough Council has adopted a new strategy to ensure new developments have appropriate sustainable drainage systems to manage the risk of flooding, improve water quality, and biodiversity. Please find below their press release:

Suds now part of major builds

Wokingham Borough Council has adopted a new strategy to ensure new developments have appropriate sustainable drainage systems to manage the risk of flooding, improve water quality, and biodiversity.

The Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) Strategy, approved by the borough council's decision-making executive, is a blueprint based on national standards for developers and civic planning officers when designing developments ranging in size from minor schemes up to the scale of Strategic Development Locations.

SuDS mimic nature, dealing with rainfall where it falls; allowing it to evaporate or soak into the ground. Any remaining water is then drained to the nearest traditional watercourse or sewer at the same rate and volume that would have happened naturally before the new development was built.

"A healthy and safe water environment is fundamental," said Cllr Angus Ross, executive member for environment.

"There are areas in our borough with increased risk of flooding, and some of our watercourses have poor water quality. This strategy shows how SuDS address these. SuDS use cost effective solutions with low environmental impact. They're designed to be easy to manage, resilient, needing in some cases only sunlight to work, and are aesthetically attractive."

SuDS are increasingly being used to counter the problems of flooding caused urbanization where natural surfaces and vegetation are replaced by concrete, asphalt, or roofed structures. Where this happens heavy rainfall cannot easily be absorbed back into the environment without overloading more conventional drainage systems, creating flooding, contaminating drinking water sources, and harming wildlife and the environment.

Examples of SuDS include basins (shallow landscape depressions that are dry most of the time when it's not raining), rain-gardens (shallow landscape depressions with shrub or herbaceous plants), swales (shallow normally-dry, wide-based ditches), filter drains (gravel-filled trenches), bio retention basins (shallow depressions with gravel and/or sand layers), reed beds and other wetland habitats that collect, store, and filter dirty water along with providing a habitat for wildlife.

A consultation last summer into the borough's SuDS Strategy was carried out, and the majority of those taking part were very supportive of it. Now that the new SuDS strategy has been adopted by Wokingham Borough Council, planning applications for developments will need to meet the requirements of the local standards set out in it. Planning application approval, if granted, will then need to include clear instructions on how the SuDS for that development will be maintained.

Further information: More from Cllr Angus Ross, executive member for environment at email: angus.ross@wokingham.gov.uk

Press release: Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood statement on Israel's Land Regularisation Bill

From:

First published:

7 February 2017

Part of:

Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood statement on Israel's Land Regularisation Bill being passed through the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset.

Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood said:

It is of great concern that the bill paves the way for significant growth in settlements deep in the West Bank, threatening the viability of the two-state solution.

As a longstanding friend of Israel, I condemn the passing of the Land Regularisation Bill by the Knesset, which damages Israel's standing with its international partners.

We reiterate our support for a two-state solution leading to a secure Israel that is safe from terrorism, and a contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

Further information