

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

[The Government must urgently provide assurances about the future of Moorside – Rebecca Long-Bailey](#)

Rebecca Long-Bailey, Shadow Secretary of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, commenting
on the bankruptcy of Westinghouse said:

“This announcement throws into doubt the Moorside new nuclear plant that could create 20,000 jobs in Cumbria.

“Questions
have been raised over Toshiba’s role in Moorside for some time.

“When
Westinghouse’s viability was first called into question, Labour said the Government should step in to underwrite the company’s investment if the project
was at significant risk of collapsing. Unfortunately, the Government dragged its heels.

“The Government must now urgently provide assurances about the future of Moorside. Relying on the private sector alone, in absence of a robust contractual legal structure, has failed.

“If
this government is at all serious about delivering its industrial strategy, it
must act swiftly to ensure the security of our energy supply and guarantee the
creation of thousands of highly-skilled and well-paid jobs that communities

in
Cumbria need and deserve.”

[The Government's handling of the schools budget is nothing short of a scandal – Angela Rayner](#)

Angela

Rayner MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, commenting on the Public Accounts Committee's report on the Financial Sustainability of Schools, said:

“The Government's handling of the schools budget is nothing short of a scandal.

“Ministers clearly don't have a clue what is going on in our schools, and apparently they haven't even asked. And while they continue to bury their heads in the sand, our children's futures are being put at risk.

“The Tories made a clear promise at the election: to protect the money following every child throughout school. They must urgently act on the Committee's recommendations, and keep this promise.”

[Labour is determined to ensure we can rebuild and transform Britain – Corbyn](#)

Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party, speaking ahead of the triggering of Article 50, said:

“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.

“Britain is going to change as a result. The question is how. The

Conservatives want to use Brexit to turn our country into a low wage tax haven. Labour is determined to ensure we can rebuild and transform Britain, so no one and no community is left behind.

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

“That’s why Labour has set the clear priorities of full access to the European market, rights at work and environmental protection. And we will hold the Government to account every step of the way.”

[The decision to extend the pay cap for another year is totally self-defeating and unsustainable – Justin Madders](#)

Justin

Madders MP, Labour’s Shadow Health Minister, commenting on the annual NHS pay announcement, said:

“The decision to extend the pay cap for another year is totally self-defeating and unsustainable. By squeezing pay for years on end the Government is driving an NHS workforce crisis, forcing people out of health professions and putting others off starting in the first place. Hospitals are already forced to pay huge sums for temporary staff to plug the gaps and there is still no sign of how the Government plan to deal with the NHS workforce implications of Brexit.

“The NHS Pay Review Body say the Government’s pay policy is “under stress” and make clear the pay cap cannot last in the longer term. The Review Body say that workforce issues are “being neglected” nationally and that there is a “piecemeal and short-term” approach to pay. It is clear that the Government’s mismanagement of NHS workforce strategy has reached its limit.

“It’s time that the NHS pay cap was lifted so that the nursing staff, paramedics, midwives and other key workers who care for us when we need it most are paid at a level which recognises the skill and dedication which they bring to their jobs.”