

Kezia Dugdale responds to Brexit

Commenting on the triggering of Article 50, which will start the Brexit process, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

“This is a deeply divisive moment in our country’s history. The letter signed by the Prime Minister will have a seismic impact on Scotland’s economy, risking thousands of jobs and livelihoods.

“At a time of such uncertainty, Scotland deserves better than two governments – the Tories and the SNP – which have adopted such extreme constitutional positions and are so determined to create deep divisions with our closest neighbours.

“I accept that those of us who backed Remain lost the EU referendum and the strength of our democracy rests on our respect for the will of the people.

“But while I accept that the UK is leaving the European Union, I am not prepared to stand by as Theresa May forges ahead with a plan for a settlement that will do incalculable damage to Scotland and the UK.

“Leave voters didn’t back Brexit to make themselves poorer, but that is exactly what will happen under the current plans.

“I have written to the Prime Minister urging her to change her approach and secure the best possible Brexit deal, which should include free access to the single market for Scottish exporters, and allow Scottish firms to continue to recruit workers from elsewhere in the EU.

“The only thing more damaging for our economy than a Tory Brexit is the SNP’s reckless plan for independence. We will never support something that brings greater hardship to working families. Unlike the SNP and the Tories, we will always stand up for Scotland and the best interests of people who live and work here.”

Read Kez's letter to the Prime Minister

here: <http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/blog/entry/kezia-dugdale-outlines-best-brexit-deal-for-scotland>

The SNP isn’t listening to teachers or parents on education

John Swinney made a big speech on schools last week.

The SNP Education Secretary said the “data” told him that “the status quo was not an option”, and then expressed his disappointment that “there is a strong body of opinion that does not accept the need for change and what is perhaps most worrying is that body of opinion is from within Scottish education.” Most coverage described this as an attack on the “complacent educational establishment”.

In doing so, commentators fell into a double trap. To oppose Mr Swinney’s proposed changes to schools is not to oppose any change at all. The overwhelming response to his “Governance review” is that they are the wrong changes.

Secondly, this analysis accepts that the status quo is something John Swinney has stumbled upon. In fact, today’s status quo in schools is the legacy of ten years of SNP government.

That status quo is declining budgets, 4,000 fewer teachers, 1,000 fewer support staff, a teacher recruitment crisis, and dysfunctional government bodies (Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority). Yes, change is needed alright. Just not John Swinney’s changes. For example, the SNP plans to centralise the setting of school budgets, and create unaccountable “regional boards” for a purpose which it cannot explain, except to say it wants to “strengthen the middle”, whatever that means.

In Dunbar, in my constituency, the local primary has over 1,000 pupils, while a few miles away, Stenton school has 19. The idea that a civil servant with a formula knows enough about such diverse schools and the communities they serve to get their budget right is simply laughable. That decision has to be taken locally. What is more, if a head teacher or parent council think the budget is wrong, they can argue their case locally, and they do. Good luck trying that with a faceless bureaucrat in the Scottish Government’s offices in Victoria Quay.

When Kezia Dugdale raised this at First Minister’s Questions, Nicola Sturgeon was outraged. After all she is devolving £120m of Pupil Equity funding direct to schools. That is true. But the core budget for schools is over £4billion. Only in the world of the SNP could centralising £4bn and devolving £120m be presented as “all power to the head teachers”.

This is not the only “through the looking glass” aspect of the position into which John Swinney has manoeuvred himself. He described his Governance review as “...a vision of empowerment and devolution.” It is full of declarations about teachers and parents “knowing best”.

Mr Swinney’s problem is that the responses to his review from head teachers,

teachers, parents and communities almost all reject his reforms, and tell him that what is needed is more resource, along with reform of Education Scotland and the SQA. John Swinney's speech was clear – he intends to ignore them. They will be empowered, against their better judgement if need be. The Education Secretary is telling head teachers, teachers, and parents that they do not know best – he does.

We should not be surprised. When the Scottish Parliament's education committee gathered evidence from hundreds of teachers that they had lost any faith in Education Scotland and the SQA, Mr Swinney simply rubbished the committee's work as statistically invalid. Instead, he said, he would base his views on the teachers he spoke to when he visited schools. Happily, this "balanced sample" seemed very happy with everything he is doing. It is presumably only "bad" teachers and parents who have responded to his governance review with malice aforethought, and he intends to ignore them.

John Swinney loves to talk about how much he respects teachers. As well he might. They are the only thing keeping our schools going through the SNP's ten years of incompetence and budget cutting. If he won't listen to them his respect is just empty talk.

The status quo for teachers in Scotland is ten years of under-resourced curricular reform, lower salaries than colleagues in other countries, less preparation time, and the largest classes anywhere in the developed world. Nothing John Swinney is currently proposing will change that status quo, fashioned by him himself over his eight years as finance secretary.

All of this was laid bare in a recent parliamentary debate, where Holyrood defeated the government and passed a motion roundly condemning their handling of education. Last week's speech tells us that John Swinney is not just ignoring parents and teachers, but parliament too.

That will of parliament, so sacred when it comes to an independence referendum, would seem of no import with regard to our children's future.

Iain Gray is Scottish Labour's Education spokesperson. This article originally appeared in the Herald on March 29th 2017

[Together we're stronger](#)

28 March 2017

The SNP and the Greens have forced through the Scottish Parliament a vote calling for yet another divisive referendum.

Every Scottish Labour MSP voted against the plan. Scotland is divided enough – we do not need to be divided further. If you agree then sign our pledge at www.togetherstronger.scot and send a message to the Nationalists that they should focus on the job of governing instead of trying to divide us.

Commenting following tonight's vote in the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

"Scotland doesn't need or want a second independence referendum.

"There is absolutely no evidence that another divisive referendum is the will of the people of Scotland.

"We need the SNP government to get on with the job of governing. That means focusing on jobs, growing the economy and helping family incomes.

"Holding another referendum on leaving the UK is the wrong thing to do for Scotland's economy, especially when there is so much economic uncertainty from the Tories' reckless plans for a hard Brexit.

"There absolutely should not be another independence referendum until after Brexit. We have no idea what Brexit looks like, or how it will impact our economy and families in Scotland.

"If there is to be another vote, the people of Scotland deserve clarity on what they are being asked to vote on.

"This process cannot be a stitch-up between Nicola Sturgeon and Theresa May.

"Both governments must make it an immediate priority to focus on the Brexit negotiations and securing the best possible deal for Scotland and the UK.

"If, after Brexit, the people of Scotland want a referendum on leaving the UK then it isn't the job of the UK government to stand in the way of that.

"The Labour Party I lead will never support independence. We believe that together we're stronger."

THE WILL OF THE SCOTTISH PEOPLE SHOULD BE RESPECTED

28 March 2017

THE WILL OF THE SCOTTISH PEOPLE SHOULD BE RESPECTED – DUGDALE

The SNP should respect the will of the Scottish people by scrapping its plan for another divisive referendum, Kezia Dugdale said today.

Speaking in the latest Scottish Parliament debate on independence, the Scottish Labour leader said that Scotland is already divided enough.

If you believe that Scotland should remain part of the UK, sign up to our website www.togetherstronger.scot and add your support.

Here is the full text of Kezia Dugdale's speech in the Scottish Parliament:

Last week we came together to remember those who lost their lives or were injured in the Westminster terror attack.

We united in our condemnation of a barbaric act, and reaffirmed our commitment to the values of tolerance and integration, freedom and solidarity.

It was right that last week's debate about a second independence referendum was postponed.

But the business of the Scottish Parliament has now resumed.

And here I am once again responding to remarks from the First Minister about a second independence referendum.

If it feels familiar to those of us in here just imagine how familiar it must feel to those outside of this chamber.

To people who very rarely tune in to these discussions.

Who just want political leaders to focus on the business of government by delivering good schools and hospitals, and on growing the economy to provide jobs and prosperity.

But once again they see us debating the issue they thought had been decided in a once-in-a-generation vote in 2014.

Yesterday's meeting between the Prime Minister and the First Minister summed up where we are in this country.

Two intransigent leaders focussed only on the constitution, while the business of government gets pushed to one side.

Nicola Sturgeon demonstrated that she has given up any pretence that she wants the best Brexit deal for Scotland.

Instead of fighting for more powers to come to Scotland from Brussels, it's independence or nothing for the First Minister.

And we had the spectacle of Theresa May claiming to be the best protector of the Union.

Just ponder that for a moment...

The leader of a Conservative Party that has caused so much division in our society.

That set Scotland against England in the General Election.

And whose reckless Brexit gamble brought us to this point, where leaving the EU just provides the SNP with the latest excuse it was looking for to push for another referendum.

So some humility from the Tories, and a genuine desire to probably engage with this place wouldn't go amiss.

Presiding Officer, in the week since we last met to discuss, at least three issues which would normally dominate the front pages of our newspapers have been buried in the back of the book.

We have learned that the SNP has abandoned a promise to reduce the working hours of junior doctors. A promise made by the former First Minister to the parents of a woman who lost her life.

We have seen a damning report into the quality and provision of child and adolescent mental health services.

And just today, it has been confirmed that Scotland's cancer waiting times have not been met for four years.

Each of these 3 issues constitutes an individual scandal.

Together they represent a complete abdication of responsibility.

But we aren't discussing any of those things. After all, why would the government responsible for the NHS want to debate its 10 year record on the health service?

Not when there is yet another independence debate to be had.

We all know the outcome of the vote tonight.

The compliant Greens will once again back their fellow Nationalists in the SNP.

Let's not pretend that this SNP-Green push for another divisive referendum reflects the will of the Scottish people.

Because it doesn't.

85 per cent of the population voted in the last referendum, and we voted decisively to remain in the UK.

That's the will of the people and it should be respected.

My message to the First Minister remains unchanged: we are divided enough – do not divide us again.

Because leaving the UK would mean £15 billion worth of extra cuts to schools and hospitals in Scotland.

And every time I am in a tv studio with a member of the governing party, as I was this morning, they seek to try and rubbish or ridicule these figures – but they simply can't deny that these are the government's own numbers.

The government's own stats say Independence would be catastrophic for working families.

That's why I could never support a policy that would hurt our poorest communities, so the question beckons, why would the First Minister?

We are just hours away from the start of the formal process of leaving the European Union.

The First Minister and I agree that Brexit risks damaging our relationship with Europe.

It will threaten thousands of jobs right here in Scotland and hold back our economy.

But like her I, accept that Brexit is going to happen. Scotland is leaving the European Union.

The First Minister has finally dropped the pretence that we could remain in the EU and that clarity is welcome.

The First Minister has another decision to make now too.

Is she going to spend the next 2 yrs and 100% of her time campaigning for Scotland to leave the UK, at the expense of governing... or will she roll up her sleeves from today and seek to secure more powers for this Parliament when they return from Brussels to Britain?

Because tomorrow I will be in Cardiff doing just that.

Working with the Labour First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, who is prepared to put in the hard work necessary now to secure the best Brexit deal for Wales and for the United Kingdom.

Because this isn't a battle between independence and the status quo.

It's about the SNP's never ending campaign for separation and what the people want – and voted for – a powerful Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom.

These benches will campaign with everything we have for Scotland to remain in the UK.

A UK where political and economic power is in the hands of the many, not the few.

A UK that delivers for the people of Scotland.

That was our manifesto commitment and we will honour that tonight by voting against the SNP's plan for another divisive referendum.

Let's End Period Poverty

Scottish Labour has stepped up its campaign to tackle period poverty with the launch of a new website.

Following a round-table meeting with experts and campaigners, Labour MSP Monica Lennon has set up a new website encouraging people to get involved in the fight to help women and girls who cannot currently access or afford sanitary products. The website can be accessed at www.periodpoverty.scot and provides advice for those looking to support the campaign.

Monica Lennon has already announced plans to launch a Member's Bill in the coming months to tackle period poverty, which could help thousands of women in Scotland.

The Labour MSP hosted a discussion with key campaigners yesterday, including representatives from the office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, the EIS, the Glasgow Simon Community and others.

Labour's inequalities spokeswoman Monica Lennon said:

"Poverty, health conditions and a lack of access to sanitary products all make managing menstruation difficult."

"In many homes, schools and workplaces embarrassment and stigma around periods is a barrier to hygiene and health care. We need to tackle the scandal of period poverty by first talking about the problem and then taking action to eradicate it. By launching a new website I hope to encourage people to get involved in this campaign."

"The generosity of Scots is helping food banks and shelters to distribute sanitary products but it should never come to this. My Bill will seek to change the law and make period poverty and stigma a thing of the past."