

Nicola Sturgeon isn't offering Scotland a say, she is offering false hope.

By Kez Dugdale

Just over two years ago, Nicola Sturgeon used the pages of the Daily Record to tell readers that improving Scottish education would be the driving and defining priority of her government.

So much for that, then.

After her speech yesterday, here is my message to Nicola Sturgeon : [Our country is divided enough, it should not be divided again.](#)

The vast majority of Scots don't want to replay angry arguments between family and friends.

Nicola Sturgeon should think back to those bitter arguments before she tries to divide us again.

Specifically she should think about how wrong she was then and how wrong she is now.

The SNP said the only way to have a fairer Scotland, to end austerity, was independence.

That argument has now fallen apart. The SNP's estimates for oil for the first two years of an independent Scotland were out by £21billion.

That's more than our country's annual health and education budgets put together. This isn't just about the black stuff – it's about the future of our schools and hospitals.

Labour warned that the SNP's plan was reckless at the time. The SNP Government agreed with us. In secret.

An official analysis paper prepared by the civil service for them outlined the cuts that would happen with independence.

Rather than release the paper, the SNP tried to hide it. The SNP knew the sums didn't add up. But they offered false hope, especially to the poorest in our country.

Nicola Sturgeon told people independence could end austerity, knowing that wasn't true. She knew it would mean even bigger cuts to our public services and told people the opposite on doorsteps.

That's not clever PR, that's misleading the country on an industrial scale.

Thousands of Scots voted Yes on the basis of a lie the SNP knowingly sold them. Nicola Sturgeon should be ashamed.

Two years on, she is ready to do it again.

None of the fundamental questions of 2014 have been answered. The SNP still don't know what currency an independent Scotland would have. They still can't explain how they would pay for pensions and there is still no reply to how our public services would cope with unprecedented cuts.

Even if oil revenues had not fallen through the floor, an independent Scotland would still have faced public spending cuts much worse than whatever the Tories have been planning. With thousands of Scots in need of a payrise, the SNP can't say what their wages will be paid in – and if they would be worth the same as they are today.

Having campaigned to remain in one political union last year, the SNP now can't explain why we should leave one which is four times as important to our economy and through which we built the NHS and the welfare state.

Just over two years ago, our country debated independence. It was the biggest democratic exercise in history. For two years there wasn't a pub, coffee shop, workplace or Facebook timeline without people having their say.

And after those two years of debate. A record turnout saw a staggering 85 per cent of people vote in the referendum and the answer was clear: Together, we're stronger.

That is why Scottish Labour MSPs will vote against a divisive second independence referendum at Holyrood next week.

We should be using the new powers of Holyrood to look to the future, which is why Labour will hold a People's Constitutional Convention to chart Britain's course for the next generation.

Labour want to see a radical federal solution that will mean more powers for the Scottish Parliament while keeping the security and opportunity that comes with being part of the UK.

That is a plan to unite our divided country. An alternative answer that will mean more powers influence and control not just to our Scottish Parliament but down to our own communities and right across the UK.

More than 200,000 children in Scotland live in poverty. Attainment in our schools is falling. Our NHS does not have enough doctors and nurses. Our economy is sluggish, jobs are too often low-pay, low- skilled and short-term.

None of these problems is addressed by a second independence referendum.

Only a nationalist could think they are, because their obsession with winning independence trumps everything else – even telling people the truth about independence.

The questions of 2014 remain unanswered.

The economic case of independence, which was tissue-paper thin in the first place, has collapsed.

Nicola Sturgeon isn't offering Scotland a say, she is offering false hope.

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Agree with Kez? Sign the pledge against #indyref2

here: <https://www.togetherstronger.scot/>

[Scottish Labour will vote against another independence referendum](#)

Responding to Nicola Sturgeon's speech calling for another independence referendum, **Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:**

"Scotland is already divided enough. We do not want to be divided again, but that is exactly what another independence referendum would do.

"Two years ago, 85 per cent of Scotland's voters took part in the independence referendum and the result was a clear vote to remain in the UK.

"With our country facing all of the uncertainty around the Tories' reckless plans for a hard Brexit, the last thing we need is even more uncertainty and division.

"A clear majority of the people of Scotland voted to reject the SNP's false hope and lies, and backed working together with the other nations of the UK.

"The reality is that leaving the UK would mean turbo-charged austerity for Scotland, putting the future of our schools and hospitals at risk.

"Labour believes that together we're stronger. That is why we firmly oppose a second referendum and Scottish Labour MSPs will vote against the SNP's proposals next week. We will stand up for the people of Scotland, who do not want a second independence referendum.

"Nicola Sturgeon could have made a passionate case for bringing powers from Brussels to Edinburgh, instead she did what she always does: sought grievance and division.

"Scotland deserves better than this. Nicola Sturgeon's government is presiding over an education system with a growing gap between the richest and the rest, a health service that doesn't have enough doctors and nurses, and an economy which sees more than 200,000 Scottish children live in poverty.

"Scotland would be a better place if the First Minister stopped dividing the

country and started actually governing the country.”

If you agree with us, visit www.togetherstronger.scot to back our campaign against a second independence referendum.

[97 per cent of key modern apprenticeships in Scotland are taken by men](#)

97 PER CENT OF KEY MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS TAKEN BY MEN

New research by Labour has revealed that 97 per cent of Scottish modern apprenticeships in construction, the motor industry, manufacturing and engineering are taken by men.

In a speech at Reform Scotland to mark International Women’s Day and the Budget earlier this week, Kezia Dugdale published new research showing that just 3 per cent of modern apprenticeships in key industries are taken by women.

Research by [Engender](#) revealed that just 25 per cent of company directors in Scottish FTSE 100 companies are women.

More details about modern apprenticeships in Scotland can be found [here](#).

Speaking at Reform Scotland, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

“In planning for the future we should be planning for a Scottish economy that puts equality at its heart.

“By that I mean the whole gamut of equality. We need an economy that works for all, regardless of who you are, where you live and the sector you work in.

“For those in professional sectors the tide is turning but it is still not nearly good enough.

“As Engender’s Sex and Power report said earlier this week, only 25 per cent of company directors of Scottish FTSE 100 companies are women, and not a single chief executive of a Scottish FTSE company is female.

“At all senior levels in public life, and in the private sector, women are still not getting the top opportunities. As we look to the future, we have to ensure that this same inequality isn’t sustained into the next generation.

“Earlier this week, I had the privilege to meet some of the new apprentices

at Standard Life. These are young people getting front line experience of the finance sector and gaining valuable real-world experience. It's a great scheme.

"But across the country, the next generation of workers are still finding themselves setting out on their careers being segregated by gender.

"Ninety-seven per cent of the modern apprenticeships in construction, the motor industry, manufacturing and engineering are taken by men, while more than half of apprenticeships in sport, health and social care and administration are taken by women.

"These apprenticeships are meant to provide the best start for young people beginning their careers. We cannot have a situation, as we do right now, where inequality is being hardwired into the future workforce in these sectors.

"The SNP should be taking action to make sure that this situation doesn't persist into future years of the scheme."

"Under the Tories living standards are being squeezed and public services are being cut"

The Chancellor's Budget will impose further cuts on the public services we all value.

Philip Hammond claimed it was an upbeat Budget, but the reality is that by the end of this decade up to £1 billion will have been cut from the Scottish Parliament's funding. That means less money to spend on schools and hospitals.

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

"This was billed as a Budget that would be upbeat, but what we got instead was an insight into the devastating impact a chaotic Tory Brexit will have on families across the UK. Under the Tories living standards are being squeezed, debt is on the rise and public services are being cut.

"The Chancellor could have brought an end to seven years of damaging Tory austerity, but instead he doubled down by imposing cuts to public services and welfare. Despite the £350 million extra for the Scottish Government announced today, the reality is that by the end of this decade up to £1 billion will have been cut from Holyrood's budget – cuts the SNP chooses to meekly pass on to families here in Scotland.

“The fact that the Chancellor barely mentioned Brexit at all is a sign of the Tories’ complacency. Brexit will not only damage our economy but it has also provided the Nationalists with the excuse they have been looking for to impose another destabilising independence referendum on the people of Scotland. The Tories cannot be trusted on the Union.”

With major new tax and welfare powers being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, there is a chance to do things differently. For example, Labour has set out a plan to top up Child Benefit by £240 a year by 2020. This will lift 30,000 people out of poverty.

Kezia Dugdale added:

“We don’t have to pass on Tory austerity. The SNP should stop using the Scottish Parliament as a conveyor belt for Tory austerity and back Labour’s plan to stop the cuts and invest in valued local services like schools and social care.”

One of the big mistakes of the Budget was the Chancellor’s change to National Insurance. It means that self-employed workers – like tax drivers and plumbers – will face a National Insurance contributions hike. This breaks a Tory manifesto promise from 2015, where they said that National Insurance would not increase.

Commenting on the National Insurance increase, Scottish Labour Westminster spokesman Ian Murray said:

“This is yet another broken manifesto promise from the Tories. At the General Election in 2015 the Tories made a very clear commitment not to increase National Insurance, yet today the Chancellor did exactly that.

“This Budget proves once and for all that ordinary working people just cannot trust the Tories. The Tories are increasing taxes on those who set up their own businesses and drive our economy while cutting taxes for big business.”

[Tories and SNP need to listen on the budget](#)



By Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale MSP

Tomorrow, Tory Chancellor Philip Hammond will continue to pursue his failed austerity agenda.

Time and again, the Tories have been shown up for failing to grow our economy.

Real wages are down, while the cost of living is up. Hard-working families

are being squeezed, while the Tories refuse to ask the richest in society to pay their fair share.

It is society's most vulnerable that are paying the price of Tory failures. And Theresa May's pursuit of a hard Brexit will only make the situation worse.

Mr Hammond will continue to try to balance the books at the expense of the worst-off, while his boss simultaneously wrecks our economy by pulling us out of the single market.

It doesn't have to be this way.

The last Labour government presided over the longest period of sustained economic growth since the Second World War. We delivered tax credits and the minimum wage, to name just a few policies designed to help – not punish – hard-working families.

That is the kind of agenda Philip Hammond should be pursuing – and I have written to him setting out Labour's demands.

With austerity having failed and Brexit a profound threat to the Scottish and UK economies, a change of course is not just necessary – it is vital.

I want to the Tories to:

- Reverse planned welfare cuts.
- Do more support for our North Sea oil and gas industry.
- Take action to end the anomaly by which the police and fire services in Scotland are required to pay VAT, at a cost of around £35 million a year.

Policies that disproportionately affect women and lead to increases in child poverty are fundamentally unacceptable. That's why he should reverse planned social security cuts.

But here in Scotland, we also have the powers to take a different path. Our Scottish Parliament has the ability to make the richest pay their fair share. But we know that Nicola Sturgeon – the anti-austerity champion of the 2015 General Election – has been found out.

Where she could tax the richest, she has chosen to cut £170million out of local services. Where she could invest in education, she instead argues for a tax-cut for first-class air passengers. Where she could focus on building a fairer, more progressive society, she instead obsesses over breaking up the UK.

The SNP has turned the Scottish Parliament into a conveyor belt for Tory austerity, with a government whose only aim is to drive a wedge between us and our nearest neighbours.

I will always fight austerity economics and nationalist politics – be that from the Tories or the SNP. I will always stand-up for hard-working families, because that's what Labour politicians do.

It was pressure from Scottish Labour that finally forced the SNP into action over the bedroom tax. Thousands of people are better off in Scotland today because we never gave up the fight, despite nationalist reluctance.

Just last week, I put forward our plan to use the new powers of the Scottish Parliament to top-up child benefit – a move that could take 30,000 children out of poverty.

These are the kind of policies Labour will fight for.

I hope Philip Hammond and Nicola Sturgeon sit-up, take notice and realise

there is a better way.

This article first appeared in the Daily Record