

“Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin”

7 February 2017

Speaking in a debate in the Scottish Parliament today, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said that Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin. Here is the full text of Kez’s speech:

I welcome the chance to speak in today’s debate.

It’s important that this chamber makes its voice heard, although we must accept that ultimately it is for the UK Parliament to have the final say.

Those on the SNP’s benches may not like that, but people in Scotland voted to remain part of the UK and that should be respected.

Labour’s amendment accepts that the UK is leaving the European Union.

There was a UK-wide vote and those of us who backed remain lost.

The strength of our democracy rests on our respect for the will of the people.

Now I am not happy about the result.

I fear what will happen to our nation.

I fear what will happen to EU nationals who have made Britain their home, but who have yet to receive any reassurances about their future.

I fear the impact Brexit will have on our economy, on jobs and on our public finances.

So while I accept that the UK is leaving the European Union, I do not accept the terms Theresa May has set out.

And that’s why I don’t believe article 50 should be triggered right now.

Not when the Tories seem determined to deliver a settlement that will do incalculable damage to the country.

I cannot and will not sign up to Theresa May’s vision of Brexit.

Leave voters didn’t back Brexit to make themselves poorer.

But that is exactly what will happen under the current plans.

Presiding Officer, I want to address another part of our amendment.

That’s the section on SNP plans for another independence referendum.

The only thing worse than Brexit for Scottish jobs and the economy would be independence.

The SNP government's own figures show that being part of the UK is even more important to Scotland than remaining in the EU.

The economic links built up during our 300 year Union are deep and of great benefit to Scotland.

On trade, currency, jobs and so much more – together we are stronger.

As our amendment makes clear, Labour will not support any SNP plan to impose another independence referendum on the people of Scotland.

Our nation is divided enough.

Another referendum would do irreparable damage to the very fabric of communities across Scotland.

The message from a clear majority in September 2014 was that we should remain in the UK.

And the SNP should respect that.

But the reality is that the SNP has only been given the excuse to seek another referendum because of the mess the Conservatives have made of this whole process.

Ruth Davidson never fails to try and tell us that the Union is safe in Conservative hands.

She spends her days straddling tanks and waving a Union flag just to emphasise the security of the realm.

Meanwhile the actions of her own government have exploited the insecurities people feel in their own lives and reopened the divides of the last referendum, despite their apparent willingness to move on from it.

Yet let's look at how the Conservatives have behaved since the independence referendum in 2014.

We had David Cameron's half-baked English votes for English laws plans.

Playing straight into the hands of the Nationalists.

Then there was the 2015 General Election campaign, fully signed up to by Ruth Davidson, which sought to divide our country further by setting Scotland against England.

A gift to the SNP.

And now we have Brexit.

The EU referendum was a device designed entirely to appease the right wing of

the Conservative Party.

Instead of standing his ground, David Cameron capitulated in the hope of buying off a few UKIP votes and the applause of people like David Davis and Liam Fox.

I haven't got time to do to go into the detail of Tory attacks on social security and there multiple attempts to undermine workers' rights – again pouring petrol on the fire for independence.

Time and again the Conservative and Unionist Party has put Scotland's place in the UK at risk.

And yet the Tories have the brass neck to come to this place and claim to be the party of the Union.

Ruth Davidson now finds herself voting for something she knows will damage the UK economy and Scottish job prospects – issues she claimed UK-wide plaudits for following the TV debates.

She does so without a word of regret.

And we wonder why faith in politics and politicians is so low.

I want to conclude, Presiding Officer, by saying this.

I voted to remain in the EU last year for many of the same reasons I voted to stay in the UK in 2014.

Because I reject a narrow nationalist view of the world.

The view that blames something or someone else for our country's problems – whether that's England or Westminster, immigrants or the EU.

Nationalism, an ideology on the rise the world over, is about breaking apart and creating division.

Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin.

I believe in working together.

In solidarity with our friends and neighbours.

I believe that we can achieve more together than we ever could apart.

I believe in pooling and sharing resources.

Whether that's with the EU to tackle climate change, the refugee crisis or international terrorism.

Or whether that's with the rest of the UK to fund our public services, pay pensions or to grow our economy.

That's what Labour's amendment calls for and I urge members to back it.

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.

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[‘Together We’re Stronger’](#)

6 February 2017

Scottish Labour is to hold its annual conference in Perth this month, unveiling the theme **‘Together We’re Stronger’**.

Leader Kezia Dugdale will welcome UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, London Mayor Sadiq Khan, UK Labour deputy leader Tom Watson and other high-profile speakers to the Fair City.

To attend the conference, click [here](#).

As part of the ‘Together We’re Stronger’ theme, Scottish Labour will firmly oppose the SNP’s divisive plans for a second independence referendum and the austerity of the Tories and the SNP that is dividing communities.

The conference will be held in Perth Concert Hall between February 24 and 26.

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

“I’m delighted that Scottish Labour is returning to Perth this year for our annual conference.

“We always receive a great welcome, and the hundreds of Labour delegates attending will help to boost the local economy. I look forward to welcoming Jeremy Corbyn, Sadiq Khan, Tom Watson and our other speakers to the city.

“The last few years have been among the most dramatic in UK political

history. The full implications for our country may not be known for some time, however one thing is clear now more than ever – people need a strong Scottish Labour Party focused on growing our economy, investing in public services and giving everybody a fair chance in life.

“Our country is divided enough, which is why Scottish Labour will firmly oppose the SNP’s reckless plans for a second independence referendum. Together, our country can be stronger.”

UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said:

“I will be bringing a message that only a Labour government would hand back wealth and control to people and communities.

“That only a Labour Government would put the public back into our economy, fix our rigged economy and break the grip of vested interests to help the many not the few.

“That only a Labour Government would redistribute power and wealth and shrink the gap in income and wealth, making sure the corporations and the richest pay their fair share of taxes.

“And that only a Labour Government would end the race to the bottom in the jobs market and guarantee education and employment rights for all.”

London Mayor Sadiq Khan said:

“I’m very much looking forward to visiting Perth for Scottish Labour’s annual conference.

“I’m working to grow the relationship between London and the great Scottish cities such as Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. London and Scotland share many of the same challenges following the Brexit vote.

“Kezia Dugdale has set out a welcome and ambitious vision for our United Kingdom. As Mayor of London, I am forging a new cross-party consensus on further devolution to the UK capital.

“As in Scotland, this is about protecting jobs, wealth and prosperity. Londoners should have more control over how taxes raised in our city are spent.

“The entire country will benefit from this – if we increase investment, London and the UK will grow.”

[“I will miss Gordon’s smile, his](#)

Laugh, and his energy”

3 February 2017

Gordon Aikman, who raised £500,000 for MND research and successfully campaigned for a doubling of the number of MND nurses in Scotland, has died. Gordon worked for the Labour Party in the Scottish Parliament and was the Director of Research at Better Together, making a massive contribution to Scotland. You can donate to MND Scotland [here](#).

Below is a comment from Kezia Dugdale following the announcement of Gordon’s death:

“I am utterly bereft. Although we all knew time was precious, Gordon’s death comes as a shock.

“I have lost a best friend and the world has lost a man who made it a better place. I will keep Gordon’s husband Joe and all his family in my thoughts and prayers. The wedding of Gordon and Joe was one of the happiest days of my life. I will treasure those memories.

“I will miss Gordon’s smile, his laugh, his energy, his brilliant dance moves and terrible singing voice, and his positive outlook on life despite the hand he was dealt towards the end. I will miss his advice and I will miss campaigning with him to advance the causes dear to us. But most of all I will miss just spending time with my friend.

“All of us in the Labour Party will be forever grateful for his commitment to our movement, particularly during his time working in the Scottish Parliament and his pivotal role in the Better Together campaign. His death will be mourned by all those who had the pleasure to work alongside him.

“Although we grieve for Gordon, we must not allow our sadness to erase the many happy memories we have of his time with us. To respond to his MND diagnosis by raising more than £500,000 for research into this horrible disease so that others don’t have to suffer like he did should inspire us all.

“Gordon’s constant determination to do good for others was an antidote to a world so full of fear and anger. I hope that will be his legacy.”

“Labour stands for stopping the cuts

and investing in public services” – Kezia Dugdale



Thursday 2 February 2017

Below is the full text of Kezia Dugdale’s speech on the budget in the Scottish Parliament today:

Today this Parliament has an important decision to make.

One of the most important it has ever made.

We can deliver on the promises the majority of us in this chamber made to the people of Scotland at last year’s election, when all but one party represented in this chamber said that we would stop the cuts to valued public services and invest in our economy instead.

Or we can walk by on the other side.

Walk by as teachers struggle with fewer resources with which to educate our children.

Walk by as more and more carers are reduced to fifteen minute visits to our elderly family members.

Or walk by as welfare advisers who support those most in need face even more cut backs.

Now I listened to the First Minister very carefully at lunchtime today and she said this to Ruth Davidson.

She said: “Given the pressure on public services as a result of Tory austerity, it would be wrong to cut taxes for the top 10 per cent of income earners.”

Equally, however, it would be wrong to take that Tory austerity and pass it on to the poorest Scots in the face of these public service cuts.

And Labour isn’t prepared to do that.

I got into politics to stand up for the very people who will be hit hardest by the SNP’s cuts.

And I also heard the First Minister refer to Labour’s position on the budget as somehow playground politics.

So can I say to her: I met with Derek Mackay several times throughout this budget process.

And I spoke to him on the phone as well.

Those conversations were cordial and they were constructive.

And I know he knows that and I know he would agree with that.

So I reject the suggestion that the Labour Party has been playing games.

We have been very clear from the outset.

We said the price for our vote was no cuts to public services.

The more they try to bait me to say that Labour was never serious about engaging in this budget, the more inclined I might be to say exactly what we were talking about in those meetings.

Because the truth is, Presiding Officer, in those meetings this Finance Secretary spent the first half of the meeting telling me there were no cuts, and then the rest of the meeting saying "how much do you need to get rid of those cuts, we won't do it after all".

Completely duplicitous.

The Finance Secretary said to me that he had no mandate to increase taxes.

He said he had no mandate in his manifesto to increase taxes.

And I said to him he has no mandate for these cuts to public services either.

And in the concession he has given to the Green Party today to move away from his manifesto commitment on the higher rate of income tax, he has abandoned that principle of sticking to his manifesto.

And it leaves him open to the accusation: why not use that 50p top rate of tax?

You have moved away from your manifesto once, do it again in the name of protecting vital public services.

And it has been Labour who has been honest enough to say that if we want high quality universal public services then we have to talk about how we pay for them and, crucially, who pays for them.

That's why we have tabled an amendment to use the tax powers of this Parliament to stop the SNP's millions of pounds worth of cuts to local schools and care of the elderly.

Services that are the very fabric of our communities across the country and services that the Labour Party will always fight for.

But Labour's amendment isn't just about stopping the cuts.

It's about growing the economy.

Because for Scotland's economy to thrive we need strong public services.

That means good, well-funded schools giving young people the skills they need to compete for the jobs of the future.

And it means investing in the infrastructure projects essential to businesses across the country.

In this globalised world, if we are to fight for our futures we need to be able to attract that investment into Scotland.

We are competing with the world's major economies for investment and jobs.

Nations like China and India are investing to grow their economy.

Scotland must, and should, do the same.

But the SNP's budget does the opposite.

The employers looking for a high-skilled, well educated workforce will go elsewhere if we don't invest in the greatest resource this country has – its people.

And we know that the SNP's constant threat of another independence referendum isn't good for our economy either.

And it certainly isn't good for our future prosperity.

If Scotland were ever to leave the UK we know it would be devastating to the public services that we all value.

And that is why Labour will not and cannot back any SNP plan to impose another referendum on the people of Scotland.

There is a different path that is available to us because of the new powers of this Parliament.

Powers that so many of us fought for.

It is our responsibility to put them to good use.

Because this Parliament doesn't have to be a conveyor belt for Tory austerity.

And that's why we have come to this chamber with an alternative to the SNP's millions of pounds worth of cuts.

In fact, we are the only party to have tabled any amendments to this budget.

But I make no apologies for saying that Labour will not vote for a SNP budget that imposes millions worth of cuts on local services like schools and care for the elderly.

We just won't do it.

It would be a betrayal of the voters who sent us here in the first place.

I know the impact of the SNP's cuts from my own work in Edinburgh.

I want to make a particular appeal here to Patrick Harvie.

He has campaigned against austerity his entire political life.

And he has spent the months since the government published its draft budget warning about the impact of the SNP's cuts on communities across Scotland.

I agree with him.

All I ask is that he maintains his opposition to the cuts to local services like schools and care of the elderly.

Here's what the Green manifesto actually called for:

- A 60p top rate of tax
- A 43p higher rate of tax.

These were the lofty progressive ambitions of the Greens and today they have settled to be the fig leaf the Nationalists so desperately want and desperately need.

The tax changes announced today constitute £29million of new money.

That's one tenth of the money we need to stop the cuts, and it's one thirtieth of the amount of money the Greens' manifesto said was needed to stop the cuts.

To accept anything less than bold use of this Parliament's tax powers is an astonishing and deeply disappointing revelation from the Greens.

Let's not kid ourselves – this isn't the Greens' responsibility to Parliament shining through.

It's their responsibility they've put on themselves to do nothing which might jeopardise the prospect of another divisive independence referendum.

Nationalism first.

Austerity second.

And somewhere down their list you might just find their environment credentials if you look hard enough.

If the Greens vote for this budget tonight, a budget that passes Tory Austerity on to Scots in the face of a better way, it will be remembered as the day the Greens abandoned any claim to be a party of the progressive left.

We can all remember Nicola Sturgeon the anti-austerity crusader from the 2015 General Election.

Now she has become the Minister for Cuts.

The nationalists who claim to be stronger for Scotland now want to weaken our public services and rip the heart out of our communities.

Today all parties have the chance to back up their previous commitments with action.

To say to the people of Scotland that the policies we put forward aren't just to get through an election but are promises to be delivered.

It's make your mind up time.

Labour stands for stopping the cuts and investing in public services.

There is a better way and I ask members to join Labour in that fight.