

“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.