

Kezia Dugdale speech to the STUC

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale today said the General Election is an opportunity to boot the Tories out of office and put a Labour government 'in power in the interests of working people'.

Speaking to the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), Ms Dugdale said the starting point for a Labour government is 'making sure that everyone has a decent high quality job that pays a real living wage'.

She said the Tories' handling of Brexit has 'shown us the risks they're willing to take with our country's economy'.

Ms Dugdale said a Labour Government will end the Trade Union Bill, abolish the rape clause and ensure fair wages and decent work for all.

Here is Kez's speech in full:

Thank you Helen [Connor, STUC President].

Let me begin by paying tribute to the STUC, to Helen and to Grahame Smith, your General Secretary.

The STUC has always been the voice for working people across Scotland, highlighting injustices and fighting for people's rights, not just in Scotland but right across the world.

In the past, and still today, you have fought for the rights of people at work, and shone a light on racism, sexism and homophobia.

As leader of the Scottish Labour Party, I am proud to have the STUC, and your member unions, as part of our Labour family. You make us stronger, and nothing will ever call into question the historic link between the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Friends, when I accepted the invitation to speak here at your congress, I didn't expect to be facing the circumstances we are dealing with today.

In just a matter of weeks, we will go to the polls again to elect a new UK Government.

The stakes at this election really could not be higher.

It's a choice between a hard right Tory Government, intent on pursuing a hard Brexit at any cost.

Or a Labour Government that is offering better and fairer choices, and will put workers' rights and the values of trade unionism at the heart of everything we do.

That is the choice that is on offer on June 8.

And what an opportunity that is.

Think about what this Tory Government has meant for people across this country over the past seven years, and then think of getting the opportunity to boot them out of office in just a few short weeks.

This is the Government of the bedroom tax, which led to tens of thousands of the most vulnerable people in our country being forced out of their homes.

It is the Government of a cruel and unusual sanctions regime which sees the sick and disabled penalised.

And, if we needed a more recent reminder of the cruelty of the Tories, this is the Government of the rape clause.

A policy implemented by Theresa May and defended by Ruth Davidson here in Scotland.

Friends, if the mark of a civilised society is how we treat our sick, our disabled and the most vulnerable, this is a Government that is failing every test.

And that is why this election is an opportunity.

It is our opportunity to bring about the change that this country needs with a Labour Government, led by Jeremy Corbyn.

Our country stands at a crossroads in this election.

More than ever, people here in Scotland, and right across the UK, feel left behind and marginalised.

They continue to feel that politics isn't working and that politicians aren't doing enough to address their concerns.

Our job is to change that.

And, as the Labour Party has always done, our starting point is making sure that everyone has a decent high quality job that pays a real living wage.

Because making sure that people have good jobs isn't – as you know – just about creating a stronger economy.

It's about giving people their place in society, and the dignity they deserve.

It's not just good enough to give people jobs, they have to be well paid and they have to come with rights and protections, guaranteed by trade unions.

But under this Tory Government, we've seen our country's economy driven to low wages, low productivity and low investment.

Workers across the country have seen their incomes stagnate over the past decade, and even today real wages are 10 per cent lower than they were in 2007.

5.7 million people across the UK are in jobs that pay less than the living wage.

And the productivity gap, that even the Chancellor has admitted is "shocking", still goes without any real solution, and the UK continues to have some of the lowest productivity in Europe.

All of this means that people are working longer and harder for less.

But while people at the very top are getting tax breaks, working families are on average set to be £1,400 a year worse off by 2020.

And the Government now even have to admit that their "National Living Wage" won't hit the £9 they promised by 2020.

Meanwhile, Scotland's economy shrank in the final quarter of 2016 and continues to lag way behind the UK's GDP growth.

Our two biggest industries – finance and oil and gas – which employ tens of thousands of your members continue to go through tough times.

The North Sea has not recovered from its most recent slump, and experts predict that we may be about to lose 20 per cent of Scotland's jobs in the financial sector to automation over the next two years.

Already, thousands of people in administration jobs in Edinburgh have lost their jobs because they have been replaced by machines.

And this is a trend that is only going to increase in the coming years.

So, we need solutions to our economic problems that address both the challenge of low living standards, and the risks presented by the changing nature of the economy across the UK.

That's why we'll start by making the National Living Wage a real living wage of £10 an hour.

And we'll write the real living wage into law so that everyone will have enough to live on.

This change would bring an immediate increase in living standards to people across our country, but it would also provide a much needed economic boost. And we must also guarantee the rights of people at work, and the rights of people to organise and be members of trade unions.

That is why the next Labour Government will stand by its promise and repeal the Tories' anti-Trade Union Bill.

Trade Unions don't need more restrictions on your ability to organise. You need to be able to organise in even more workplaces, and be recognised for the benefits you can provide to employers as well as employees.

Employers like Lidl, who I have lobbied recently after USDAW highlighted the difficulty they have been having trying to organise there.

It's the responsibility of all of us to show the benefits that unions can bring and the real difference they can make.

We also need to get to grips with the structure of our economy.

For too long, London and the south east of England has raced ahead of the rest of the UK, while too many other nations and regions have fallen behind.

If our country is to be successful, it needs to be firing on all cylinders.

And that means every part of the United Kingdom working at full capacity.

That is why the next Labour Government would establish a National Investment Bank and Regional Investment Banks across the UK, to help unlock £500 billion of investment and lending, including a £20 billion Scottish Investment Bank.

That's the real change that's on offer with Labour at this election.

And, friends, with Brexit around the corner it is more important than ever that we begin to think about the kind of country we want to build after the UK leaves the EU.

With the Tories it's absolutely clear what that will look like.

Theresa May has already made it clear that she's willing to turn Britain into a bargain basement tax haven if she doesn't get a deal on Brexit.

We can't allow that to happen.

The Government's handling of Brexit has shown us the risks they're willing to take with our country's economy.

Threatening to walk away from the EU without a deal is no worse than Nicola Sturgeon's threat to walk away from the UK with independence.

Both the Tory approach and the SNP approach would lead to job losses and even more austerity than we're already facing.

And the UK Government's refusal to take EU nationals off the table as bargaining chips is just another example of their lack of compassion.

That's why I'm proud that Labour's Shadow Brexit Secretary, Keir Starmer, made absolutely clear yesterday that we would unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU migrants on day one of a Labour Government.

Why? Because, friends, it is the right thing to do.

These are people who have chosen to come to the UK, to make their lives here, to raise families and contribute to our economy here.

We shouldn't then make them bargaining chips in our negotiations with the EU.

Ruth Davidson must now commit the Tories to providing the same guarantee in her party's manifesto.

Anything else would add to the growing evidence that she isn't a different kind of Tory after all.

In our approach to Brexit, Labour would take a very different direction to the Tories, putting the rights and protections we have gained by being part of Europe right at the heart of our country's future.

But it also provides us with an opportunity here in Scotland to build on the rights we already have.

Earlier this year, at our party conference in Perth, the Scottish Labour Party endorsed federalism as our preferred constitutional model.

This would mean putting power closer to people in every nation and region of the UK – providing an answer to people who feel that politics is too detached and too remote.

For us in Scotland, this would mean considerably more powers for the Scottish Parliament.

These aren't power for the sake of it.

When Labour has argued for more power for Scotland in the past – right from the early days of devolution – it has been about giving us powers for a purpose.

There is no point in hoarding power in Holyrood. They have to be used.

Our starting point is that any powers returning to the UK that are already devolved should not be re-reserved. That means that powers over things such as agriculture, fisheries and development programmes should come straight to Holyrood, along with their budgets.

But I don't think we should stop there.

Brexit provides us with the opportunity to go even further.

With the application of the social chapter ending in the UK, now is the right time to think about where power best lies over other areas such as employment law and immigration.

I believe the UK should guarantee a minimum set of rights across the whole country, but the idea of allowing nations or regions of the UK to build upon this is a strong one.

So here in Scotland, we could choose to extend employment rights or top up the minimum wage.

We would want to consult fully with all trade unions before making such a change, but the argument is compelling.

Similarly, the UK will now have to develop and design a new immigration system fit for a post Brexit UK.

Here in Scotland, we have long had different migration needs from other parts of the country. That is why it is right that we should now look at devolving powers over who is able to come in and out of the country.

This would allow us to create a fair and flexible system to meet our needs.

I'm pleased that the STUC have also endorsed these calls earlier in the week, and I'm looking forward to working with you and hopefully making them a reality in the future.

Friends, the next six weeks are going to be a crucial time in the life of our country.

This is when we will decide the direction we will take, and with it the character of the decisions that will be made about Brexit and the future of our country.

My message to you today is this:

We have a chance to get rid of this Tory Government.

And you can only do that by standing with the Labour movement, and supporting the Labour Party.

Clause One of the Labour Party's rule book says that the purpose of the Labour Party is 'to organise and maintain in Parliament and in the country a political Labour Party'.

In this election campaign over the next six weeks, I will do all I can to make sure we have a Labour Government.

A Labour Government that will end the Trade Union Bill, abolish the rape clause and ensure fair wages and decent work for all.

A Labour Government, led by Jeremy Corbyn, with real compassion.

A Labour Government, friends, that puts our principles into practice in the place where Labour should be: in power in the interests of working people

Thank you.