

We need to renew the UK and bring Scotland together.

By Kezia Dugdale

The effects of Brexit and the drumbeat of a second independence referendum coming from Nicola Sturgeon means that questions about how we run our country are again at the centre of our politics.

But what is clear is that neither a Tory hard Brexit nor a divisive second independence referendum is what the majority of Scots want.

People want change, but they don't want the country to be divided again. Instead, we need to start thinking about how we work together. We need a new deal for how power is redistributed in this country. One that brings power closer to communities. Not just in Scotland but across the whole UK.

Nicola Sturgeon and Ruth Davidson sit in the Scottish Parliament chiefly because of the efforts of the Scottish constitutional convention in the 1980s, which led to the creation of the Scottish Parliament.

It was Labour that championed devolution for decades. And it is bitterly disappointing to Labour politicians like me that in a decade of SNP government, they have not unlocked the potential of devolution.

That potential includes bringing power closer to the people, bridging the gap between the governed and those who govern and to give people more influence over the decisions that affect their lives.

The vote for Brexit isn't just the failure of the Remain campaign; it's a failure of our system of government.

If you think Westminster feels remote in Glasgow then imagine how it feels in Wigan or Sunderland.

I lost count of the number of colleagues from across the rest of the UK who reported back from the doorsteps during the EU referendum that people were willing to gamble on Brexit because, really, how much worse could it get?

In Scotland those feelings revealed themselves two years earlier during the independence referendum.

Then it was my turn on the doorstep to hear that, while the SNP had not made the case, people were willing to take a leap into the dark because, really, how much worse could it get?

In a generation the UK has gone from feeling that things can only get better to things can't possibly get worse.

That's why we need to change how we govern ourselves.

Our system of government was not doing the job it should have done before Brexit or the independence referendum.

That's why I want to see a People's Constitutional Convention and a new Act of Union to renew the UK for a new age.

This proposal means more powers for Scotland but strengthens the whole UK as well.

It seeks to build out from the benefits we already derive from being part of the UK, and it would bring power closer to people.

Our country feels so divided just now. Between remain and leave, yes and no, rich and poor. But together we're stronger. That's why Labour is making the case for bringing power closer to communities, redistributing power through the UK the way we redistribute wealth through the UK.

That's a better future for Scotland than a hard Tory Brexit, or a divisive second independence referendum.

That's why we need to change how we govern ourselves.

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"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.”