

Tom Watson says next step for Parliament must be to procure a referendum before a general election

On Wednesday 11th September 2019 Tom Watson will make a major speech arguing that when Parliament resumes in October it must focus on securing a public vote on Brexit before a general election. He will decry the idea of a single-issue election and say it may not break the Brexit deadlock – the only thing that can certainly do that is a referendum.

The speech will take place on Wednesday morning at Somerset House and is hosted by the Creative Industries Federation. Tom will also talk about the disastrous impact of no deal on the creative industries saying the “narrow, isolationist, ‘bring down the portcullis’ mentality represented by no deal runs counter to everything the UK’s creative and cultural sectors stand for.”

Tom will say that a ‘Brexit election’ “might at this moment seem inevitable, but that doesn’t make it desirable. Elections should never be single issue campaigns.”

He will point to the huge social issues that need to be addressed in an election and that have been ignored during these years of Brexit chaos, such as homelessness, crime, deprivation, the NHS and say these issues could be drowned out by “the braying bullies of the Tory leadership” who will shout Brexit do or die.

Tom will rip into Boris Johnson, saying the scale of the damage he is threatening the country with is ‘worse than Thatcher’ and call out “his naked contempt for democratic institutions – not just the EU, but the UK Parliament, the British constitution, the Conservative party – he’s trying to trash them all.”

Tom will say that to repair the country that Boris is destroying we need an election, but we should first settle the question of Brexit with a referendum. “Boris Johnson has already conceded that the Brexit crisis can only be solved by the British people. But the only way to break the Brexit deadlock once and for all is a public vote in a referendum. A general election might well fail to solve this Brexit chaos.”

He will say that once Parliament comes back in October its first priority must be stopping no deal, but once it has done that it should focus on securing a referendum before an election.

He will say: “Very difficult though it was, I and many others respected the result of the 2016 referendum for a long time. But there eventually comes a point – and we are very far past it now, well into the fourth year since the referendum –when circumstances are so changed, when so much new information has emerged that we didn’t have in 2016, when so many people feel differently to how they felt then, that you have to say, no, that years-old plebiscite is no longer a valid basis on which to take such a momentous decision about the future of the United Kingdom.”

He will say “The only proper way to proceed in such circumstances is to consult the people again. Why are Boris Johnson’s Tory faction so terrified of that? If there is still a majority for Brexit, what do they have to fear? If there isn’t

any more, how can it then be democratic to leave, just because there used to be a majority for it more than three years ago, when so many things were so different?"

But he will say that if a general election comes before a referendum, then "Labour will decide it's position at the Clause V manifesto meeting, but I will be arguing that our position going into that election should be totally clear - we must unambiguously and unequivocally back remain".

He will say we should do this "not for electoral or tactical reasons, but because it is the right thing to do for the country at this time of greatest crisis since the second world war."

He will say that "There is no such thing as a good Brexit deal, which is why I believe we should advocate for remain. That is what the overwhelming majority of Labour party members, MPs and trade unions believe."

He will say that "we only create the space for our important domestic agenda on the NHS, on crime, on environment, by being crystal clear on Brexit. Labour is remain."

He will say that some people argue it's "too late" for Labour to win back remain voters, but "I don't believe this. My experience on the doorstep tells me most of those who've deserted us over our Brexit policy did so with deep regret and would greatly prefer to come back; they just want us to take an unequivocal position that whatever happens we'll fight to remain, and to sound like we mean it. It would be easy to be four hundred thousand voices sounding like we mean it, because we do. And if we did it we could win, whereas if we don't I fear we won't."