

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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KEIR STARMER

AM: You've let her off the hook basically, haven't you?

KS: No, we've pushed the Prime Minister all the way on the really big issues, and the two most important for this week are the customs union and a meaningful vote. And if – and I urge Tory MPs who care about this to vote for those amendments – if Tory MPs who do care about those amendments vote with us there is a real chance for parliament to change the course of the Brexit negotiation and to bring some order where there's real chaos, because on this question of a customs union we're going backwards and forwards for months on end. The government's not further forward. So on the really big vote, which is customs union, on the meaningful vote, which allows parliament to decide what happens if Article 50 is voted down, they're the really big ones to-

AM: You say they're the really big ones but nearly half of the Labour peers voted for Britain to stay inside the European Economic Area, the EEA.

KS: Yeah.

AM: And many people saw that as an absolutely crunch vote, and you are ordering Labour MPs, many of whom agree with their peers, to abstain. Why?

KS: Well, I'm sympathetic to the argument that we need a single market deal. I think a lot of discussion this morning has been about the Northern Ireland border. In order to make good on the solemn commitment that there shouldn't be a hard border in Northern Ireland you need two things, you need to be in a customs union –

AM: Which the EEA would give you.

KS: - in a customs union and – well, I'll come back to that. You need to be in a customs union with the EU, and you need a single market deal. And that's why we put down the amendment -

AM: That the EEA would give you.

KS: - which is the amendment we're - Well, you say that Andrew, but the EEA is the agreement hatched out in 1992 by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and I went to Norway. In fact, if you're in the EEA you are not in a customs union with the EU, and to test that proposition, because I think this is really important and you put it to me, to test that proposition I went to Norway and then I went to the Norway-Sweden border to see for myself what does a border, what's an EEA border look like? There is infrastructure there, there are checks there, you have to hand in your papers. It is totally incompatible with a solemn commitment to no hard border in Northern Ireland.

AM: So you're going to get less of a border than if we were inside the EEA.

KS: Well, the EEA –

AM: I just don't understand how you are going to do it.

KS: The EEA on its own is a group of countries that are outside of a customs union, so the amendment –

AM: It's a kind of annexe to the EU.

KS: The amendment that we have put down is one which doesn't tie us to a model that won't work for Britain. The Norway model works for Norway. I can see why people are attracted to it. But it won't work for the United Kingdom. So we've put down one that doesn't tie to one, but does answer the question should there be a single market deal, by saying yes, there should, and it needs to go together with the customs union arrangement that we put on the table some months ago.

AM: The trouble with the motion that you've put down is it says you want all those good things, you want frictionless access and jobs and so forth, but you also want an end to free movement, and again and again, almost everybody with any authority inside the EU, up to and including President Macron of France, has made it crystal clear you can't have that.

KS: Well, what we say in our amendment is that we recognise there are going to have to be shared regulations and shared institutions. And again, in Northern Ireland you can't have standards one side of the border with different standards the other side of the border. Everybody, I think, knows and understands that. So, we're answering that question. On the question of freedom of movement, of course that's going to have to be part of the negotiations. In our manifesto we made it clear that freedom of movement will end when we leave the EU. The question is what comes next. And we need to spell that out and it needs to be spelt out against a changing position in Europe. As Gordon Brown -

AM: You're saying basically we want all the advantages plus we want no freedom of movement.

KS: No, Andrew, Andrew, the obligations -

AM: Yes, yes, that's what you're saying.

KS: - the obligations of the single market are that you share regulations, you have common standards and that you have shared institutions.

AM: And you're part of the four freedoms, which includes freedom of movement.

KS: Now, we're facing up to that. We would have to negotiate on the four freedoms, freedom of movement. We need to set out what we want, because this conversation is in a vacuum at the moment. What is very likely, it seems to me, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that we're going to need an immigration policy that does allow people to cross borders across the UK - across the EU to work. We want people to be able to join their families. We want the best students to come to the UK. So we need to spell out what actually we're asking for, whilst negotiating with the EU against a changing backdrop. As you heard earlier on, in France there's great concern that freedom of movement should change so far as workers are concerned across borders. There's lots of work on labour market enforcement. If you talk to the EU 27, there is lots

of shared concern about what the future of freedom of movement is. That's the debate that ought to be going on. That's the debate that ought to have happened over the last 18 months.

AM: Well, you mentioned the customs union. Do you accept that if the EU is a customs union there has to be a border somewhere?

KS: Yes, around the customs union countries, at the edge of the customs -

AM: So where should the border be?

KS: Well, our proposal is that the UK as a whole is in a customs union with the EU, and that mean there wouldn't be a border either in Northern Ireland or in the Irish Sea.

AM: So, you say that, but we would also have to be part of the single market for that, for there to be no border, because of all the regulatory requirements.

KS: Yes, I accept that. In other words -

AM: So we would be inside the single market and inside the customs union.

KS: Well, we would be - we would have a customs union with the EU. We're going to have to have a new agreement. We need a single market deal. At the moment both the customs union arrangements and the single market arrangements are hardwired into the membership agreement. We're leaving that, we need to recreate the right agreement for the UK, which will be a new agreement. And that really is - that should've been the focus of what we're discussing -

AM: A lot of your own MPs have looked at this as well, very, very closely, and they still think that the EEA, this annexe agreement, is by far the best way of doing it. Neil Kinnock, former party leader, said this week, he said, "not continuing in the EEA would mean endangering, sacrificing thousands of skilled and decently paid good jobs, and with them the life chances of countless families and communities. It would be a serious evasion of duty if Labour did not seize this chance to protect our country from the rockslide of a hard Brexit."

KS: Well, I understand the concern that Neil Kinnock and others are expressing, because -

AM: But you're not responding to it.

KS: the chaos - I mean, people are genuinely concerned, more than at any time I can remember in this process, about whether this government is actually capable now of bringing home a deal. Most people are saying to me, "we recognise the EEA, the Norway model, isn't actually the right model." Almost everybody's saying that. It'd have to be massively changed. It doesn't have a customs union. Agriculture is left out. What they're saying to me is, "we know it's not quite the right model but we're going to cling onto it because we're now so worried about what the government is doing." What I'm saying is let's step back, let's accept the challenge about the single market, but set it out in a way that makes sense for the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the UK.

AM: As a result of doing that, and putting down your own front bench Labour motion instead, which will not be backed by many Labour, many Tory rebels, as we're reading today in the papers, you are ensuring that Theresa May is not going to be defeated on anything substantial this week and goes on. You had a chance to bring the government down and you've skipped it.

KS: Well, Andrew, two answers to that. The first, as I think you and others know very well, there are a number of Labour MPs who are very concerned about the EEA who will not vote for it, and therefore we can't pretend this is a winnable vote. But let me answer more, let me answer more substantially because this is a really important issue. We have laid the same amendment to the Customs Bill and the Trade Bill, which are now supposedly coming back before the summer, so in the next three, four weeks, and they are different Bills where we can have a substantive vote and where Tory rebels who care about the single market can lay down their own amendments and we can vote on it then. So the idea that this Tuesday or this Wednesday is the last chance saloon on a single market deal is misconceived. There will be another

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chance with those Bills. I hope we get significant victories this week on the things that matter, which is the meaningful vote, the customs union. That will be the test, and I do urge Tory MPs who care about this – I know it's difficult – to back those amendments, and we will back those amendments, and if that happens that will be a defining change this week, and it could happen if those Tory MPs vote with us, and I urge them to do so.

AM: Keir Starmer, thanks very much for talking to us.

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