Q: Now Ian Hislop, persuade him.
EM: I was the guy that didn’t want the referendum. I – if there’d been a Labour government, if I’d been Prime Minister we wouldn’t have had it. I fought heart and soul for remain, but when I was doing that I said we’re going to accept the result and that’s why I am accepting the result. And I feel like that’s what we’ve got to do. And I feel that for a principled reason, which is we had the referendum and there was a result, but I feel it for a pragmatic reason too. There are massive decisions to be made in the next two years, and beyond actually, about the future shape of this country. Decisions of a gravity that we’ve haven’t made for 40 years and we can’t leave it to the right and centre right, who by and large are on the Brexit side of the argument, to make those decisions. And in a way even more so because I think they want to use the referendum, or use the pretext of the referendum to do things were not the mandate of the referendum. Cut taxes, deregulate, slash workers’ rights. Progressers have got to get on with the pitch and not simply fight the last war.

Q: Well, doesn’t that – all of those horrors as you see them, isn’t that a pretty convincing argument for going back to the country once a deal is done, or once no deal is done and say do you want to remain or leave?

EM: No, because that assumes that it is inevitable that the outcome of Brexit is the things I said that we didn’t want to see. I think progressive politics is harder with Brexit, significantly harder. That’s what Hilary Ben and I say in our piece this morning. But it’s not impossible. And you know, if you think about the 1945 Labour government, they came to power in the most dreadful circumstances but they didn’t say it’s impossible to change things.
And part of my point is: it’s right to say we need to limit the damage, avoid hard Brexit, we’ve got to do more than that though. So take workers’ rights for example. I hear people saying we can’t let workers’ rights be reduced. Well sure that’s right, but one of the things I heard in the referendum was insecurity at work was actually an issue in this referendum. This wasn’t just a referendum about our relationship with Europe, it was about the state of Britain. So let’s argue for stronger workers’ rights. Let’s use the Brexit legislation to make the country more progressive. It is never impossible to do that.

Q: What do you think of how Labour’s policy on Brexit has evolved?

EM: Well I think the tests that we set are right.

Q: Do you think could you have done with those three months ago?

EM: I think second guessing leaders or spokespeople - I had too much of that in my time.

Q: Forgive me, second guessing would be trying to predict the future. I’m saying what do you think of what they did?

EM: Well, I think Keir Starmer, Jeremy Corbyn, have been handling a very difficult situation as best they possibly can frankly, because look – it’s easier for other parties. If you’re the Greens or the Liberal Democrats you’re essentially fishing in the 48% pool. If you’re Ukip you’re fishing in the 52% pool. Labour is trying to do something much harder which is to try and speak for the whole country. And by the way, that’s another part of my argument. Our attack on Theresa May part of it she’s ignoring the 48%. I think the sort of ignoring the verdict, going into this saying let’s overturn it I’m afraid looks like ignoring the 52%. We’ve got to
speak for those. And by the way, I think there is more that unites remainers and leavers than might first appear, because they share common concerns about the way the country is run.

Q: You mentioned right at the start of the interview that had things gone differently you’d be Prime Minister and there would be no Brexit. How much did you in the hours, days and weeks after defeat think about that?

EM: Well, about the prospect of the referendum you mean?

Q: Well no about what you were unsuccessful in achieving and the ramifications of that. You, I presume, took some personal responsibility for that?

EM: Well I take total responsibility, yeah.

Q: And how did you deal with that as a person?

EM: It’s tough.

Q: How did you deal with it? Did you cry?

EM: No, I don’t recall. But look it was very upsetting. I mean the days afterwards were very, very upsetting days.

Q: Were you depressed?

EM: I wouldn't describe it that way. Look, it’s hard, very hard. Hard for the – as I watched what’s happening to the country.

Q: How did you deal with it? Did you seek solace in friends, did you talk to people about it or did you sit quietly?
EM: My family. I think the – you know obviously my family, my kids know who I am now which is important. No, I’m kidding, but you know, there’s something about being leader of the Opposition. It’s hard to have a sort of normal life. I’ll tell you what has been one of the biggest pieces of solace for me, is the British people actually. The people you meet on the street. I mean sometimes I ended up comforting them about it. It’s when people say to you, ‘when that exit poll came out wasn’t it terrible?’ And you say, ‘yeah I was there too.’ But you know people saying you know, ‘look I supported you,’ or ‘I liked some of the things you were saying,’ or ‘I didn’t support you, but I think some of what you might have been saying was right.’ I think it’s part of it. And also look, the other things is, because I don’t think one should be too introspective about this and I’m not generally an introspective person –

Q: No I just thought I’d ask you since you were here.

EM: No, no sure, but I suppose I knew straight away that I didn’t want to leave British politics, because I meant what I said when I resigned which is: there’s other ways than being Leader of taking forward the argument about the country.

Q: By the way, did you – there are various accounts of polling day that have been written by various people. They all seem to agree that you had, while you weren’t cocky, you had a realistic expectation on the day that people were voting that you would be Prime Minister.

EM: Yeah, I was hopeful. I was hopeful that we would win, sure.

Q: So that exit poll must have been especially crushing?
EM: Yeah it was, it was a terrible shock. Of course it was a terrible shock. I think it was a terrible shock to lots of people. I believed the polls. I won’t believe them again.

Q: Do you believe the 25% for Labour polls?

EM: Well, let’s see what happens.

Q: But that’s where you are.

EM: Yeah, it’s a tough situation.

Q: Do you believe it? Do you think that’s where Labour is?

EM: I don’t know exactly here we are and as I say I don’t –

Q: But it ain’t great.

EM: No, it’s hard and I think it’s particularly hard because of this issue of Brexit. Because we are trying to speak to the whole country and that is difficult, but you know I genuinely mean this, you know when I was the leader I didn’t appreciate people commentating on me and I never thought it did much good and I don’t – and I’ve been very, very sparing about commentating on Jeremy Corbyn.

Q: Well let’s talk something you did as leader then which was change the leadership rules and there are some people, and of course Jeremy Corbyn fans are very excited about the leadership change, and they think that’s great for Labour. Labour is now more a part of the left they say. But there are others who say it’s that rule change that you were instrumental in bringing in that’s put Labour where it is.
EM: I think it’s a mistake to think about it like that because Jeremy Corbyn won in every section of the membership. The idea of –

EM: Once he got on the ballot.

EM: Yeah and he had to pass a threshold for that. But the idea of the membership electing the party, the membership and the board selecting the party was something that was widely endorsed across the – across the Labour Party and I think it misses something here which is why has Jeremy Corbyn won two leadership elections? Because of a sense among party members, but not just among party members that they felt there needed to be a more radical programme. By the way, a more radical programme even than is offering and in a way I’ve got the humility to sort of accept that. I don’t think it was just a sort of accident. I think it went deeper than that and you know I think that from all wings of the party you have to learn the lessons of that.

Q: You said last summer that Jeremy Corbyn’s position was untenable. And yet here he is.

EM: Well, I supported Owen Smith against him in the second leadership election and Jeremy won. And you’ve got to accept the result. A bit like what I say about Brexit. You know I accept the result and as I say, I think the role particularly of ex-leaders across the party is this is a collective effort and you’ve got to focus on the collective effort.

Q: And thinking of humility, do you think it’s possible that Jeremy Corbyn supporters are right and that Labour hasn’t really tried a proper left-wing agenda for many years. It hasn’t won an election on your sort of platform since 2005. Instead of people carping at Jeremy Corbyn shouldn’t they get fully behind him?
EM: Well I think that's what by and large people have done since the won his second mandate and I think people recognise that it's important for him to be able to lead. And as I've said, I do think that he in his leadership campaigns spoke to a sort of yearning that people had. Not for sort of utopia, but for radicalism. Now I don't quite agree with your characterisation of my programme because I think I offered some of that radicalism, some of which we're seeing adopted not just by the Labour Party but even sometimes by the Conservative Party. And I think there always lessons to learn and I think there are lessons to learn from his election, definitely.

EM: Ed Miliband, good to see you.

Ends