ANDREW MARR SHOW, 3RD FEBRUARY, 2019

BARRY GARDINER, MP
Shadow International Trade Secretary

AM: Barry Gardiner, welcome. Can I start by asking you – so these talks have started with Jeremy Corbyn, what is the absolute bare minimum you would accept in order to back Theresa May’s deal and get it through parliament?

BG: The first thing I want to do, Andrew, is to say that I was really upset by what Mary Lou McDonald just said about Westminster only being interested in Britain. That is absolutely not the case. Politicians in Westminster are working hard to make sure that all parts of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, are considered and respected and upheld. And the upholding of the Belfast Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, is one of the central things that we’re looking to do.

AM: Very important. But I come just back to these talks going on right at the moment between Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May. So it is possible that she could get this deal through with the House of Commons with Labour support. What I’m asking is what would she have to give Labour, as it were, to win that support? Bare minimum.

BG: Well look, what we have said all the way through is that we need to have a customs union in which we have a say, that we need to see that rights at work and also in terms of environmental protections and standards are upheld, and what we also need to do is we need to have a close relationship with the single market. Now all of those three would mean that we could then look at the deal. But the key thing here is can she negotiate something with the European Union? And what really did emerge I think from the interview that you’ve just done with Mary Lou, was precisely that the loss of trust in Theresa May and this government by Europe, and in particular by Ireland – because don’t forget that the
backstop as it stands is actually a concession from the original backstop. Originally it was going to be Northern Ireland only, she then said look, if you give me a customs arrangement that encompasses the whole of the UK —

AM: We do understand that. She’s moved beyond that. We get that.

BG: Then we can go – get this through parliament. And she couldn’t. It failed by the largest margin in parliamentary history. But there’s a lack of trust now that anything they do agree can be delivered on.

AM: But from what you’ve just said it’s a huge jump for her to actually win over official Labour support. In effect it’s not going to happen. So what do you say to those Labour MPs who have gone and talked to her about having money sent to their constituencies, very poor parts of Britain often – people like John Mann in Bassetlaw and elsewhere, Dennis Skinner and so forth, in return for voting for the Conservative deal?

BG: Look, I understand why their constituents are crying out from the lack of investment under the austerity of this government. Of course I do. But we had a manifesto. That manifesto was about a 500 billion transformation fund. It was about regional banks. It was ensuring that those areas that have been left behind by this government actually had the investment that they need. Why would you as an MP, as a Labour MP who stood on that manifesto say, you know what? If I can get a little bit of money extra into my constituency I don’t mind about the rest of the country not getting what actually we promised in our manifesto which was investment as a whole into those areas to revitalise all parts of our economy. You know, my vote is not for sale, right?

AM: So you agree with John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor who says this is transactional politics which is shaming our political system?
BG: Well look, the American system for many many years has been based on pork barrel. It’s been based on if I can get something for my state, my constituency, then I’ll do a deal. But they have a very different system. That’s why in the UK we have put forward a manifesto that actually would deliver what is needed in Bassetlaw, in those other areas. But actually I think anyone who reflects on the manifesto that they stood on and the benefit that that would do for the whole of the country in getting investment through would have to say I can’t just be selfish about this. I can’t simply take care of my own immediate community. We have to take care of the whole country and that’s why we need the investment programme that Labour put forward.

AM: So they voted with the Tories on this occasion, should they be punished for that, should there be sanctions taken against them for breaking the Labour whip?

BG: Look, that is a matter for the Chief Whip, it’s not a matter for me. We need – and let me

AM: What about the frontbench colleagues who abstained on that programme?

BG: - let me respond to it, because it’s a fair question. We are in a situation now where in parliament there is fractures in all parties. Actually many more in the Conservative Party than in Labour. But what we’re trying to do is we’re trying to somehow say we look at a divided country and we need to try and bring it back together. And that means that we have to hold together the different views that are in our party. We managed that very well at our party conference, we sat down for hours, literally for hours, six hours to try and bring a consensus there and we managed it. I believe that that’s what we need to do. We have to listen to each other as MPs, understand the concerns and the problems that each of our communities are facing, but try and resolve them together.

AM: You’ve made it pretty clear that you want to make the best of Brexit. You are pro Brexit in the sense that you think that good
things can come out of that. Can I ask you the big picture question. How does the left do well out of Brexit?

GB: Look, I am not pro Brexit, okay? I am pro-democracy and the people of this country said that they wanted Brexit, okay? I voted against Brexit, I campaigned against Brexit. And I did so because of

AM: But you’ve talked about Labour’s positive vision for Brexit.

BG: I did so because of the economics. But there are other things that people were voting for. They were voting because they didn’t like a greater political union in Europe. They didn’t like the direction of travel in Europe. They didn’t like the feel of what was developing as a super state. I understand that. I get that. And that’s why now, given the referendum, decided as it did, I believe that democracy means that you then say fine, we will try and deliver it. But we’re trying to deliver it in a way that does minimal damage. Unfortunately the Conservatives are wedded to their red lines.

AM: What is clear is that if you win power you’re likely to win power after we have left the EU and therefore that you will win power on the terms of what you would call a Tory Brexit. And at the moment it looks like lots and lots of big companies, manufacturers, banks and so on are taking investment out of Britain into the continent before that happens, which means that Labour will take power in a situation where the tax base that you need to rebuild public services as you would see it, isn’t going to be there in the same way. You are going to take power in a very, very difficult situation economically and that will be as a result of the Brexit which lots of your colleagues think that you and the Labour frontbench are facilitating.

BG: Well look I’m delighted that you’re so confident that we’re going to take power in any subsequent General Election.

AM: If ...
BG: What I would say is for all the reasons that you have just outlined about the damage that Brexit can do to jobs and our economy that is the reason that we are saying to Theresa May now look, you must get a deal through parliament that is acceptable. That means you must change your red lines about a customs union. It means you must look again at the way in which the future political framework is so vacuous. What we’re saying is because of all the things that you’ve just outlined she has to bend. She has to change those red lines.

AM: She won’t.

BG: Well you know she’s saying that about the European Union, they’re saying that about her. The problem is this. Last week Theresa May persuaded her own MPs to vote against her own deal that she had negotiated –

AM: And became stronger as a result perhaps, rather oddly.

BG: - after having told them that no other possible deal was available. Something’s going to have to give.

AM: We have to move on to one other subject, I’m sorry, which is that there are now two people in Venezuela who claim to be President. Which of them do you back?

BG: Look, I believe there needs to be negotiations between the two parties in Venezuela. I abhor what’s gone on in Venezuela as you know. I think the extra judicial killings that have taken place, firing live ammunition on protestors who are some of them, you know, suffering from malnutrition because of what’s happened in that economy, that needs to be resolved. But it’s not –

AM: The opposition have said that by midnight tonight there has to be an announcement there’s going to be a new election. Would you back – do you think that has to be a new election now in Venezuela?

BG: My view is that there needs to be discussion between both parties. Not ultimatums issued by one or the other and it must not be the case that external governments like the United States are coming in interfering in that situation. I welcome the fact that the Pope, His Holiness the Pope, and indeed the Lima States around
South America have offered to conduct those negotiations. But it must be the people of Venezuela that decide and we must not return to those days when the United States was dictating terms and who was the President of which country in Latin and Central America.

AM: I absolutely understand that, but of all the world leaders around the place at the moment that Mr Maduro might listen to, Jeremy Corbyn is very high up there. We know that is Jeremy Corbyn calls him Maduro will listen. Would it not be helpful for Jeremy Corbyn to call Maduro and say do you know what, as a brother socialist party we think it is time for you to opt for elections?

BG: I’m sorry. Can I just point out that there are other socialist parties in the opposition who are actually our sister parties -

AM: The opposition are your sister party in fact.

BG: who are a sister party. So the idea that there is this closer link with Maduro is not the case. But the point is this. Of course Jeremy has already spoken out against the human rights abuses in Venezuela and that is something that we are consistent on. We speak out against human rights abuses, not just when it’s a right wing country but also when it’s a left wing country. Because the point is if you don’t uphold human rights wherever you see them being violated then you have no moral platform to stand on. And that’s why it’s so vital that we in the Labour Party speak out, yes in Venezuela, but also – and this is something the government could learn from – in Saudi Arabia, when it comes to Honduras, in other parts of the world where they’re happy to sell arms to those governments, arms that are being used for internal repression and external aggression.

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