ANDREW MARR SHOW, 3rd JUNE, 2018

STELLA CREASY, MP
Labour

AM: Can I first of all ask you actually what your amendment, if it was passed, would do?

SC: So, let me be very clear. In this country and across the whole of the United Kingdom our laws on abortion are governed by something called the Offences Against the Person Act that was passed in 1861. And it puts abortion in the same category as rape, child stealing and using gunpowder to blow people up. So what that means if that right now in Northern Ireland, where there are no exemptions to this law, if you are raped and you become pregnant as a result of that rape and you seek a termination you would face a longer prison sentence than the person who attacked you. Now in Northern Ireland, as in England and Wales, this legislation is key. By repealing this piece of legislation –

AM: You want to take away the Offences Against the Person Act completely?

SC: Yes. So in actual fact and I want to be really clear about this, the proposal we have, and it’s a cross party proposal, is devolution respectful because it’s about repealing a piece of UK legislation that stops people in Northern Ireland having medical rather than criminal laws about abortion.

AM: Now I have read that if your amendment was successful what that would mean is the decisions about terminations in Northern Ireland would be in the hands of civil servants and NHS staff. Why would that be?
SC: Well, because we don't have an Assembly in Northern Ireland right now. Now that's not within our purview and I think some – I mean one of the things I worry about is people are talking about having a referendum in Northern Ireland. I think that does stray into the jobs of the politicians over there, so they don't have an Assembly. So it would be up to the civil servants. But they can't do anything on abortion in Northern Ireland unless this piece of UK legislation is repealed.

AM: Stella, aren't you against a referendum in Northern Ireland because you might lose it?

SC: Actually no. If you look at the evidence about opinion polling in Northern Ireland, even DUP voters recognise that situation I just described about rape. The fact that you can't have an abortion if you're a victim of incest. The fact that if you have a fatal foetal abnormality you can't have abortion. They recognise there is time to change. There is a clear majority in Northern Ireland for a medical rather than a criminal approach, but that's up to the people of Northern Ireland.

AM: There is also a majority of people in Northern Ireland, according to the polling which is all we have to go on at the moment, who are against abortion if the woman simply does not want that child. So that is a different view.

SC: But what we're talking about right now is repealing this piece of UK legislation that stops anybody in Northern Ireland making a decision about that on a basis of medical grounds rather than criminal grounds. So it would absolutely be up to the people of Northern Ireland what happens next but they can't do anything without that change.

AM: Except, do you understand there's an awful lot of people in Northern Ireland who say this is our business. It is not the
business of London MPs, it’s not the business of metropolitan, English politicians to change our laws. We change our laws, that is what devolution means.

SC: And I completely agree. I’m talking about changing UK legislation because this would also have an impact –

AM: In order to change the law in –

SC: - but it would also have an impact on my constituents in Walthamstow. Indeed people from Seven Sisters to Southampton, to south Belfast, to Scotland would be affected by this change. I think it is right that we look at legislation that’s 150 years out of date.

AM: But you’re really doing it to change the situation in Northern Ireland, aren’t you?

SC: Well it would force the people in Northern Ireland – But look, three woman a day in Northern Ireland either travelled to the UK or had to take the pills to secure an abortion. The legislation is completely out of date. It is absolutely right that we give people the opportunities to update that legislation. It would be up to the people of Northern Ireland how they would do that, but so too that would have an effect in England and frankly, I don’t think just because the DUP are at Theresa May’s table that should stop us looking at UK abortion law.

AM: A really important question, do you have the numbers, because there’s a story in the papers today that the SNP for instance are against you because they think it tramples over devolutionary settlements?

SC: I’ve been talking to members of every political party, because abortion –
AM: Including the SNP?

SC: Yes absolutely, because abortion is not a party political issue and I would be very against anybody trying to turn it into that. We’ve been talking to them about how this does respect devolution and I think if people like Ruth Davidson and Hannah Bardell and co look at this legislation and what we’re talking about I think they would support it, because it does absolutely put power back in the hands of every nation to set modern abortion laws. What it also does it says that you can’t ignore this issue anymore.

AM: Can I turn to one other subject, because you’ve put your head above several parapets at the same time.

SC: It’s the nature of politics at the moment I’m afraid.

AM: I know. You’ve signed an open letter to Jeremy Corbyn with a lot of other London Labour MPs like Labour MPs from Wales and the north east of England doing the same thing, saying please change policy and commit yourself to a second referendum, or a second ‘people’s vote’ you call it. Is there any chance of that happening at all do you think?

SC: Well, we are a political movement that should and indeed is having this debate. I mean I don’t think anybody can look at Brexit right now and think it’s going well, so I think it’s absolutely right. Let me be very clear. Nobody’s talking about rerunning the referendum. What we are saying is once you have a deal, so once you know what leaving is like, the idea that only 650 people in this country because they happen to be in Westminster get to say whether that’s what this country wants, isn’t right to us. So we think the public should have a say now they know what leaving actually entails. You know, nobody talked about £40 billion divorce bill when the referendum was happening. Nobody talked about
leaving the single market in the way that we’ve now seen the
government say they want to do. Things have changed, it’s
absolutely right and frankly whether you voted Leave or Remain
surely you should want to have a say.

AM: I’m not going to channel Jeremy Corbyn, that would be
implausible to say the least but I think what you would –

SC: You’d be Tracy Ullman.

AM: Not nearly as good as that. What I think he would argue is
that the trouble with saying that you’re committed to another
vote, another people’s vote suggest that you don’t really accept
the result of the first one and that is lethal. An awful lot of Labour
MPs in the north whose voters voted to leave the EU.

SC: And I don’t think that’s the case. Look, nobody is trying to
dispute the fact that we had a referendum. Yes, I campaigned for
Remain. Yes, I voted against Article 50 because I thought at the
time this is a bad way of doing this. But absolutely we needed a
way of doing this to find out what leaving would look like. We will
know what leaving looks like when the government presents a
deal. I think it’s absolutely right to say is that what the public
wanted? I don’t think that’s about undermining the last
referendum, we know so much has happened in the last two
years. And actually, if you are confident it’s the right deal for
Britain, if you are one of these people like Jacob Rees-Mogg or
Boris Johnson you should relish the opportunity to sell that to the
public.

AM: Well I’m not sure that I relish a second referendum, another
referendum from reportedly terms, but for the time being Stella
Creasy thanks very much indeed for talking to us

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