

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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NEIL KINNOCK

AM: The leader battling the Left is a very familiar theme in the Labour Party, but to have a leftwing leader deserted by the majority of his parliamentary colleagues is uncharted territory. Neil Kinnock fought off 'Militant' back in the mid-1980s, how does he view Labour's predicament now? Lord Kinnock, welcome to you. You have called on Jeremy Corbyn to go, but in a sense why should he? He has got the backing of the membership, huge numbers of people have come out on the streets over the weekend saying Corbyn must stay, social media and all the rest of it. He has a very, very large constituency.

NK: There are lots of people outside parliament who support him. It remains to be seen how many members of the Labour Party, in a vote, would support him, because, as you will have seen from this morning and recent days' evidence, there has been a significant shift away from Jeremy. And members across the country, including newly-joined people, have got deep residual doubts about the possibility of him leading the party to election victory. And that means that he should reconsider his position on those grounds. But in addition, the constitution provides, very sensibly, for a party in parliament and also provides that the leader of the party must have a substantial amount of backing from Labour Members of Parliament. I can read in a couple of seconds the provision explicitly in the party constitution. And that means that unless the leader can have that substantial support in parliament, then there should be a contest or the leader should consider his position and do his duty to the party and resign.

AM: Do you think that Jeremy Corbyn needs a certain number of nominations to get onto the ballot paper.

NK: Yes.

AM: Because happened to you when Tony Benn, I think, took you on.

NK: Yes, yes.

AM: And you had to go and get 50 nominations.

NK: In 1988 – it had faded in my memory to tell you the truth, but because of the current conditions I looked back at that history, and the situation was that a section of the Labour movement, with indeed Jeremy Corbyn as the secretary of the campaign group in parliament, accumulated nominations for Tony Benn which satisfied the threshold in those days, and obviously I had to secure nominations. The actual figures were 29 for Tony, Tony Benn, and 130 for myself. And we went to the party and the party decided by 88.6 per cent –

AM: You remember the point?

NK: No, I do know because I've swotted it this week just to see what happened. Obviously you don't dwell on these things and you don't carry on for years thinking about it, but that's what happened. And of course it meant that there was a straight contest, and the party decided, with the constituency parties, supporting me by more than four to one.

AM: Of course the situation is different now and Jeremy Corbyn's supporters think that because he has got such support in the party outside parliament he has an absolute right to be on that ballot. And if that happens, the question is what if he wins again?

NK: Yeah, but let me read – just – it'll only take a second or two – this is very tiresome, I know. The provision in chapter four of the Labour Party rules, I'm sorry –

AM: We heard it here first.

NK: Indeed. 'Where there is no vacancy nominations may be sought by potential challengers each year prior to the annual session at party conference. In this case,' mark these words, 'any nomination must be supported by 20 per cent of the combined Commons members of the parliamentary Labour Party and

members of the European parliamentary Labour Party. Nominations not attaining this threshold shall be null and void.’ Now then, in circumstances in which 172 Labour MPs voted for a motion of No Confidence in Jeremy and only 40 voted against, his position patently, under the constitution, under the rules of the Labour Party, under the democratic provisions of the Labour Party and the commonsense provisions of the Labour Party, that a leader must have substantial support in the parliamentary party, obviously there’s no basis on which Jeremy really could or should stay.

AM: So what about all those people who are watching this programme, Lord Kinnock, who paid their three pounds, many of them very idealistic young people who backed Jeremy Corbyn. So, what, I don’t count anymore? My say has been negated?

NK: Not at all. They are very welcome in the party and some of us have been at pains to express that very emphatically, because they provide an energy, a vibrancy, a potential for the future of this democratic socialist party that we were needing. Now then, they’ve got to then decide whether they are serious about putting their principles into power by democratic election under a leader that is credible in a party that is united, or whether they actually joined up to a social protest movement that is content to complain and to turn up at the funerals of communities and industries while the Conservatives have yet more decades of power. That’s the decision that comes before these people, who are serious about their politics – which is why they joined – but they must understand – and they do understand in their thousands, that the purpose of being engaged in politics is to secure democratic power. And Jeremy can’t do that.

AM: Your old friend, Alistair Campbell, has called on people to join the Labour Party, as it were, to oppose Jeremy Corbyn. Would you do the same? Is that what you’d like to see?

NK: I haven't made that call. I have met several people in the course of this week, as recently as yesterday actually, who have joined explicitly for that – many of them Labour supporters for – throughout their adult lives. But now knowing that their participation can make a difference to the potential of the Labour Party for securing power.

AM: Okay, I'm about to talk later in the programme to Len McCluskey, who is, as I said, an effective big power broker these days.

NK: Secretary of my union.

AM: So what's your message to him?

NK: Think about your members, Len, which he constantly does. Recognise that sentiment in our union on the basis of the polling evidence and the basis of acquaintance with members of the union know that they have moved away from Jeremy Corbyn, and if you heed them, take the stance that says to Jeremy, 'for the sake of the party and its potential, for the sake of democratic socialism, Jeremy, you have to step down.'

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