AM: You’ve said that you suffered bullying and abuse. Can you just explain to us what you mean by that?

CK: So I’ve been the leader for ten years, as a borough leader, as any sort of politician in a frontline role you become pretty resilient. I have to say in the last two years my experience has been that I’ve experienced more threats, more bullying, more intimidation than in the previous eight years put together.

AM: And you think it’s sexist as well.

CK: It’s absolutely sexist, and that runs from the way that I was treated by the national executive of my party just last week, and I don’t believe that a man would have been treated in the same way, through to examples of in council meetings where Labour Party members at the end of a meeting have shouted at me and sung a Police song: Every Breath You Take.

AM: We’ll be watching you.

CK: As a means of intimidating me. That is a song about stalking. A man would not have been treated in that way.

AM: Who do you blame for this?

CK: I think I’d point to a particular political toxic culture. I don’t blame individuals because these acts, if you look at them in isolation perhaps don’t look too significant. When you put them together you see a whole culture. And we see it across the country. We see it in the way that Jacob Rees-Mogg was treated at the weekend. We see it in the way Diane Abbott receives
abuse. We see it in the fact that the political editor of the BBC has to take bodyguards to Labour Party conference.

AM: A lot of people have said directly that this is caused by Momentum. Momentum are very, very clear and strong that they deny any involvement. You accused Jon Landsman, for instance, saying that you were incompetent and he said he absolutely did not say that. Is there not a danger of smearing Momentum?

CK: I was very clear that allies of Jon Landsman, and it was reported to me in a NEC meeting, claimed that I was incompetent and should be removed from office. I’m a senior Labour council leader, I’ve done the role for a long time. I think that is outrageous behaviour.

AM: With respect, this is mostly hearsay so far. Do you have hard evidence, and if so why have you not complained to the party? Because there is a procedure, you could take this to the Labour Party and complain formally. But you’ve chosen not to do that.

CK: So to take one example of Momentum’s behaviour in the last year that I’ve experienced. At a council meeting last summer I proposed a motion against anti-Semitism. Momentum called – locally Momentum called a demonstration to that meeting to protest against that motion.

AM: Demonstrations are lawful and fair enough.

CK: Of course. And you know, they’re part of the political discourse. But we were screamed and shouted at in that meeting. My members were told – shouted at that they would be seen in their constituency Labour parties. This cannot be an acceptable part of the political debate.

AM: So why did you not complain to the Labour Party?
CK: Because in complaining to the Labour Party I would complain to the very body that I feel most disillusioned by, which is the national executive committee. Why would I complain to people who have treated me in this way?

AM: Let’s turn to the actual issue itself, which is this Haringey development vehicle. You got into bed, as it were, with an international Australian-based property company, and a lot of local people feel that that company was going to demolish their houses and they were not going to be provided with sufficient quantities of low cost housing so they could stay in the area, that they would have to leave the area. Hence the phrase ‘social cleansing’.

CK: So I think we need to take a step back and look at the housing crisis as it exhibits itself in my borough. Nine thousand families on the waiting list without the security of a home, very little prospect of a council home. Three thousand families in temporary accommodation, more children than ever being referred to social services because of their housing situation. The question is what do we do about that? Councils at this point in time simply do not have the powers or the resources or the expertise to deal with that on their own. So the question is do we say, look, ideologically as the Labour Party we believe that we can only work with — as the state, we can’t work in partnership with the private sector? Or do we say there’s compromise but we have to work in partnership in order to deliver for communities?

AM: I do hear all of that but there’s an awful lot of local people who simply don’t buy that solution and they’re not limited to the hard left or Momentum or Corbyn supporters or whatever. David Lammy, the local MP, who’s not a Corbyn supporter particularly, or certainly not a Momentum supporter, says, ‘I’m not convinced the HGV will deliver the social and genuinely affordable homes that we need in Tottenham.’ And if you look around London
there’s very good reasons for saying that. If you think of the Elephant and Castle development at Heygate, they were promised there was going to be 500 social housing units when that was all over. It turns out there were only 87. And you see the same company that you’re working with and you see the same pattern all over the place. Great big promises by private developers, but when it actually comes to local people wanting those houses at affordable rates, they’re not there.

CK: Structurally this was very different. This wasn’t the traditional development agreement. It was a partnership deal. However, you know, I understand that there are risks. You talk about the local community. There has been noise around this, and so I spent the summer with a group of councillors knocking on doors, 450 doors, on the very estates affected by these schemes.

AM: And lots of people oppose it?

CK: Well, actually when I knocked on doors that wasn’t what we found. We found a handful of people who said they had concerns. But I heard many more people saying, ‘when can we move, our housing situation is intolerable, there’s three generations of our family living in the same’ – and we don’t see any other way through this.

AM: Okay, let me read you something, Aditya Chakrabortty from the Guardian, who comes from this area, wrote this week about it. Said, ‘please ditch the clichés about Corbynistas and suburban revolutionaries, the death of HDV is a victory for local people over multinational business, for democracy over machine politics and a victory over big finance by the rest of us.’

CK: Well, I don’t this there’s any cause for celebration because actually there are still thousands and thousands of families in my community who have no housing security, and this week they
have even less. And actually being told that this is a victory when the activists who were campaigning against it have no alternative that will deliver anything like the scale of housing, to me feels like the politics of jam tomorrow. And that’s simply unacceptable.

AM: Isn’t the fundamental truth about this that your version of Labour politics – you were a supporter of Tony Blair and all the rest of it – are losing in the party and you’ve left because you are losing?

CK: Let me just be honest. I’ve been a party member for 20 years, a loyal party member to every Labour leader. I haven’t spoken out against any Labour leader. But I’m a politician that’s been in role for ten years in a borough that’s faced problems, and that means that my politics of course is defined by pragmatism and problem solving because I want to make life better. And actually I really worry about the fact that we’re moving into an era where the politics of ideology, the politics of blinkered dogma, is going to trump the politics of pragmatism. I’d say the only losers in that scenario are the communities that need a Labour government most.

(ends)