AMBER RUDD
ANDREW MARR SHOW
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AM: Can I start by asking whether you have complete confidence in civil servants, particularly Treasury civil servants, in their impartiality, their integrity and their professionalism?
AR: Yes, I do. I have complete confidence in them. We are envied the world over for the high standards of our civil servants, and I would say now more than ever we need to make sure we attract the best into our civil service to take on what is an enormous challenge in terms of leaving the EU.

AM: So when, Mr Rees-Mogg, for instance, says they’re fiddling the figures and others suggest this is propaganda, what’s your message to those Conservatives?
AR: Well, I’m very surprised at Jacob, because he is famously courteous, famously thoughtful, articulate. So I’m very surprised that he’s used that language. I think that they are wrong, he is wrong here, and this document that he’s particularly referring to is not a Treasury document anyway. It’s prepared across different departments and it’s a tool, it’s a tool for informing those of us who are on the EU subcommittee about the choices that are going to be made. It’s not about projecting one way or another. So I think they’re wrong.

AM: Can you point to me, on the subject of wrong, to a single government forecast that has been accurate?
AR: I can reassure you that we need to have those forecasts whenever we embark on big policy decisions. The Treasury has them ahead of the budget. We need to have them -
AM: Are they ever right?
AR: Well, they are what they are, Andrew. They’re made up of a –
AM: Wrong.
AR: No, sometimes wrong, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have them.
AM: No it doesn’t.
AR: The UK government has to have forecasts in order to make certain decisions. Sometimes they’re wrong, but sometimes they’re wrong by degree, they’re still right about the direction it’s taking.

AM: They’re still useful. Okay, so you don’t agree with Steve Baker, the Brexit Minister, that civil servants’ forecasts are ‘always wrong and wrong for good reasons’?
AR: No. I think that Steve Baker has had an interesting week this week where he also — you know, over the whole debate about what was said when — was gracious enough to issue an apology. We all use forecasts. It doesn’t mean we put all the weight that people might expect on them. We have to approach them with a certain amount of cynicism but they help inform the debate and the decisions we make.

AM: Now, it’s hard to remember all the time that civil servants are people too and they’ve got feelings and some of them are watching this programme perhaps. There’s a lot of hurt inside the civil service about some of those comments. In fact, they feel they’ve been dragged into the middle of the political argument. What again is your message to those people?
AR: They are valued, they are important to us, we respect their objectivity and they are internationally admired for the system that we have, and we need to make sure that we continue to attract the best into the civil service.

AM: Now, you say that these forecasts are credible if they’re not exactly accurate. And we should remind viewers that in the three options for leaving the EU that they model, British growth drops between eight per cent, five per cent, and two per cent. In other words, in each case this is a really significant fact. What did you
think when you were – the door was unlocked and you were
allowed to read them?
AR: Well, they are tools for helping to inform decision making as
we go into this critical stage for leaving the European Union. They
are not forecasts for certain consequences of the decision making
because they can’t model for the domestic policy that we might
take, the adjustments that we would make, in order to make
changes in the country as we go forward. So for instance, it
doesn’t model the changes to industrial policy, it’s not going to
model the changes to –
AM: The future is unknowable is what you’re saying.
AR: The future is unknown, exactly.
AM: Of course. But you must have been concerned about those
numbers.
AR: I’m aware that there are consequences to certain – if you
bring down trade – if you set up trade barriers there is a
consequence to a trading nation. So I am very enthusiastic for
making sure that we have as few trade barriers as possible. The
Prime Minister has said she wants frictionless trade at the border.
That’s what we need to achieve. If we put up trade barriers it
won’t help our economy.

AM: Do you think when we leave the EU we will grow or we will
contract?
AR: We’ll absolutely grow. We have continued to grow over the
past two years and we will continue to do so. What is important
about the strength and the growth of this country –
AM: But we will grow less than we would have done had we not
left.
AR: It depends on the actions that we take. I mean, the wealth of
the country is not made up entirely from trade. It’s made up from
its culture, its rule of law, its ambition, its enterprise, all these
other things which we need to invest in.
AM: I absolutely hear all of that, but let me remind you of what Phillip Lee, the Justice Minister, said this week. He said, talking about these very same forecasts: ‘We can’t just dismiss this and move on. If these figures turn out to be anywhere near right there will be serious questions over whether a government could legitimately lead a country along a path that the evidence and rational consideration indicate would be damaging.’

AR: Well, I would say two things to that. The first is it’s not the whole picture. These forecasts are tools for decision making but they don’t put in place the other elements that we hope to, in terms of other trade deals, but also in terms of domestic policy to mitigate it. But the other thing I would say is the decision to leave the European Union was not all about the economy. We know that. It was about sovereignty as well. So for instance, in my constituency in Hastings we hate the Common Fisheries Policy, it has not been good for the communities. We would like to make sure that the fishermen all through coastal communities –

AM: Get a better deal.

AR: Get a better deal. Now, that’s not about per capita, it’s about communities, it’s about independence.

AM: Now, the other thing of course about all these models is they conspicuously did not include what the Prime Minister wants, which is this generous bespoke deal that she keeps talking about. I described it at the beginning of the programme as being a bit like a unicorn: talked about but never actually seen. Have you seen it?

AR: Well, we are having discussions around what we want out of it. The proposals that we saw in terms of the leaked document that we were talking about just sets out consequences of certain choices. In terms of a bespoke deal, she has said what she wants and what we all want in terms of delivering that deep and special partnership with the EU.

AM: Okay, can I ask you a little bit about that, in that case?
AR: Yes.
AM: So what we’re talking about is some kind of Canada-like trade deal but with things attached to it to help us specifically. Like a special deal for the City, like a special deal for services generally.
AR: Well, I’m not going to get drawn, I’m afraid, too far into those different sectors. We are having those meetings this week.
There’s been a lot of criticism about pre-leaking ahead of those decisions themselves, so I’m not going – and I’ve been one of the ones who’s been most critical of that – I’m not going to go into that. What I can say is that we’re all agreed on wanting to deliver on what we said, which is frictionless. We want to make sure that the Irish border gate doesn’t go up again, particularly significant having listened to your interview with Gerry Adams, and that we’re free to do trade deals outside the European Union. Those three things are what we’re aiming for.

AM: When people like you rightly chastise people like me for listening to briefings and leakings and so forth, very often you say ‘go back and read the Lancaster House speech, it’s all there’. So I have done. And I’m going to read you what Theresa May said about the customs union. She said: ‘Whether that means we must reach a completely new customs agreement, become an associate member of the customs union in some way, or remain a signatory to some elements of it, I hold no preconceived opinion. I have an open mind on how we do it.’ Is that still policy?
AR: Well, she has an open mind on it. We published a document last year saying how we would do it, and we proposed either a customs arrangement or a customs partnership. Those are both alternatives that we could look at.

AM: But the possibility of a customs – she’s talking there about the possibility of a customs union of some kind with the rest of the EU.
AR: Well, I think what she’s highlighting there, which we highlighted in the paper we published last year, is that we do not
want to have tariffs at the border. So that is a form of customs agreement, arrangement, partnership.

AM: To get that you have to have some kind of customs union.

AR: Well, it is likely to have something within the customs framework, but I don’t want to be drawn into this whole *a* or *the* customs union.

AM: It sounds like, if I may say so, you are so intimidated by the other side of the argument you won’t actually say the words ‘customs union’.

AR: No, I think I’ve said it rather a lot already so far. We’re not intimidated; I’m not intimidated at all, Andrew. I’m happy to reassure you. We need to make sure that we’ve given a sense of direction, which we have, about what we want to achieve. But it would be wrong to think that as we enter these negotiations we can give all the commas and full stops and the details.

AM: Okay, I keep reading things actually, I’m terribly sorry about this, but Liam Fox, again it’s unmissable. He says: ‘it’s very difficult to see how being in a customs union is compatible with having an independent trade policy’. And Bernard Jenkin, you’d have seen in today’s papers as well. Making something that sounds quite like a menacing threat if you go too close to a customs union.

AR: So that’s why I’ve said those are the three things we want. We want frictionless trade at the border, we want to make sure there’s no border on the island of Ireland and we want to make sure that we can do trade deals outside of the European Union. That’s the deal we’re looking for.

AM: That is cake and eating it however, in the sense that everybody seems to agree that if we’re in a customs union we can’t do those great big deals around the rest of the world. But if we’re not in a customs union we have the border problem with Ireland and we have the friction full trade problem as well.
AR: Well to be fair you have brought out all the problems there. We know they’re there. That’s why we’ve said that we want to have a bespoke agreement. Now, we’re not going to surrender before we’ve had that battle. We’re going to be having those discussions this week in our committee Cabinet.

AM: After we’ve had that – you’ve had this two day meeting and so forth, Michel Barnier is coming over this weekend, negotiations are restarting. By the end of this coming week will we have a much clearer idea of what the British government actually wants to negotiate?

AR: Well it depends – well I take issue with what you say. I think that it’s clear what we want to negotiate, we haven’t achieved that yet, we’ve made a lot of progress in protecting EU citizens and setting out the transition agreement, but we need to make sure that we have this wider agreement. I don’t know how far that will go over the next few weeks, but I hope that the government will be given the space to try and achieve that.

AM: Now you mention the transition agreement. As Home Secretary are you absolutely clear that it is a red line, that once we have left the EU next March, we’re in this transition period, EU citizens won’t have the same rights as they have now?

AR: The critical thing for EU citizens during the transition period is that they will be able to come and go to work here. They will need to register in order to show us that they are here during that two year period. The Prime Minister has said that she wants them to have different settlement rights to the people who arrived before the specified date.

AM: And that is a red line?
AR: Well I’m not going to get drawn on red lines because these negotiations are only about to start, but she has said that is what she’s seeking in order to make sure that there’s a reasonable distinction before the specified date.

AM: Can I put it gently, because we’ve heard both Mr Barnier and Mr Verhofstadt said there’s no way that we’re going to accept that. We’re going to fold again aren’t we on this?

AR: I think that you are being too – surrendering too quickly here, Andrew.

AM: Yes, but you’ll surrender slowly but you’ll still surrender.

AR: No, no. I think it’s right to have a distinction between EU citizens who arrived here before March 2019 and the ones who came afterwards. So I think it’s right the Prime Minister’s gone out to do that. There’s a further negotiation to have. I’m not having the negotiation but I support her in taking that position.

AM: And this being – because she calls it a red line. This means to be absolutely clear if the EU won’t accept our position on the transitional rights of EU citizens coming here, as we’ve just been describing, there will not be a transition period?

AR: No. I think our offer to EU citizens, both before and after the transition period is fair, open and generous and it takes into account what we want for UK citizens in the EU as well. I hope that they’ll see it in those terms.

AM: Essentially the Brexiteers, or however we describe them, are saying in today’s papers again and again, ‘we have the numbers’. You people, people like Amber Rudd and Philip Hammond and possibly even Theresa May are going to have see things our way or else.
AR: I have a surprise for the Brexiteers, which is the committee that meets in order to help make these decisions, that’s meeting as you rightly say twice this week, is more united than they think. We meet in the committee, we meet privately for discussions, I think that we will arrive at something which suits us all. There may be – there will be choices to be made within that, but we all want the same thing which is to arrive at a deal that works for the UK, that looks ahead – it’s not just about protecting trade behind us, it’s about looking ahead to what kind of country we want to be afterwards, we all have those interests at heart and I think can work closely together to deliver it.

AM: Okay. The weirdest suggestion in the papers today, and it is a fairly weird one is that you might be Boris Johnson’s Chancellor of the Exchequer. Could you ever imagine serving under Boris Johnson?

AR: That is such a difficult question on so many different levels, I’m going to pass.

AM: Okay, you’re allowed to pass. Let’s talk about the position of women. A hundred years after some women, not all women, got the vote and Millicent Fawcett and all of that. Now there’s been a lot said about where women are now and we’ve had an extraordinary week. We’ve had yet more Harvey Weinstein allegations with Uma Thurman and others today, we’ve had the President’s Club, we’ve had lots and lots of debates about women going to darts matches, parading around darts matches and the beginning of Formula One. Just give us a sense of where you think the cause is right now.

AR: Well as you rightly say it’s a hundred years since women got the vote and it is something absolutely to celebrate. The significance is not just getting the vote but then getting the MPs,
and then getting women into government. Because only by having women in government do you get women’s lives properly considered by government, and we saw that with Harriet Harman who did so much for women’s working lives and we see it now I think from this government delivering on the gender pay gap, on making sure that action is taken against violence against women and girls.

AM: There’s a big cultural change going on. Would you like to see the parading of women at the beginning of boxing matches for instance to end as it’s going to end with Formula One racing?

AR: Listen, I think it’s up to different sporting organisations to make those decisions. But actually I think the women in sporting events that really inspire me are the women playing in football. The women playing on the field delivering on the athletics field. And those are the women who I want to inspire the younger women coming up behind us.

AM: The President’s Club event really shocked a lot of people, but up and down the country on high street – or not high street – behind high streets, there are gentlemen’s clubs everywhere where there’s pole dancing or lap dancing and the same kind of atmosphere pertains. Would you like to see that ended in this country?

AR: Well I think we are reaching a tipping point now and the President’s Club was objectionable and I think that women who were working there particularly and women working anywhere should feel safe in their working environment. What worries me most is the women working in the environment some of the ones you’re suggesting there may not feel safe in that working environment. That’s what matters most. And I think that women who are in business, who are working, they expect to be in an
environment where, you know, sexual titillation isn’t part of the offer. That’s what I think has changed.

AM: The Fawcett Society have suggested that misogyny should be made a hate crime. Do you approve of that?

AR: Well, we’re not going to move ahead with that at the moment, but I’m always going to look at what the Fawcett Society are suggesting so I’ll keep a careful eye on their proposals.

AM: Now there’s the Gender Recognition Act coming up as well. Are you as enthusiastic about that as Justine Greening was?

AR: Well, we’re going to be consulting on the Gender Recognition Act, seeing how far we need to go with it. I saw today that Women’s Aid are going to be reviewing their arrangements for allowing transgender people to work in women’s only spaces. I think this is a very sensitive issue. I want to consider it very carefully. We will be consulting on seeing what changes we need to make, if any.

AM: What about transgender people going into women’s prisons for instance?
AR: Yes, again that’s something we need to look at very carefully. I want to make sure that transgender women are treated with respect and properly and are always safe. At the same time, I want to protect women’s safe spaces, which is why it’s right that Women’s Aid are reviewing their own arrangements at the moment and maybe we can learn from them.

AM: And what would you say to women, including many feminists who look at what’s happened in the Women’s Aid situation for instance and are alarmed and worried about the possibility of people who are not yet biologically fully women of being in charge of those spaces?
AR: I mean I hear them and I would say let’s look and wait and see what happens with Women’s Aid. Let’s look at the review that they’re having. Let’s make sure we don’t rush to judgment. But above all the exception within the Equality Act for only women working in women’s safe spaces is not going to be touched.

Ends