

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 4TH NOVEMBER, 2018

ARRON BANKS

Co-founder of Leave.EU

AM: Arron Banks made the single biggest donation in British political history when he passed £8 million to the unofficial Brexit campaign. This week he was referred by the Electoral Commission to the National Crime Agency which investigates serious and organised crime, in particular, the Commission doesn't believe Mr Banks when he says that he was the real source of that money, he's with me now. Were you the real source of that money?

AB: Well thank you for having me on, first of all. Of course I was. The money came from a UK registered company, it was generated from cash, generated from businesses in the UK. The whole misunderstanding resolves around the role of Rock Holdings as a holding company. And before we start I'd just to say absolutely for the record, there was no Russian money and no interference of any type.

AM: All right, well let's follow the money as it were.

AB: I just want to be absolutely clear about that.

AM: So where did the money come from? When it went into Leave.EU's accounts, where did the money come from then?

AB : The money came from Rock Services which was a UK limited company. It was generated out of insurance business written in the UK. It's contrary to some of the press reports and the FT and other remain leaning publications, we insure nearly half a million customers a year, the size of Manchester. We turn over £250 million of premium, it's a sizeable business.

AM: I'll come onto that in a moment

AB: I'm just making clear where it came from.

AM: Just to clear up where it came from. So Rock Services is what we call a shell company. It doesn't do much of its own, does it?

AB: Well, it's a service company, but it's a UK based service company.

AM: But it's not a trading company. It doesn't generate that kind of money.

AB: I'm telling you that it came from insurance business written in the UK. So Rock Holdings is a holding company based in the Isle of Man that owns Rock Services.

AM: So did any of the money coming into the Leave.EU come from Rock Holdings?

AB: Well that's where I'm confused with the Electoral Commission referring this to the police. We've not been asked by the Electoral Commission to actually produce our bank statements but I think we have produced them to your show and what is absolutely clear is it's a holding company and during '15 and '16 there were no sizeable amounts of money went into Rock Holdings. It is not possible for any money to have come from Rock Holdings to Rock Services.

AM: So Rock Holdings was not connected in any way to money going into Leave.EU?

AB: No. Absolutely not.

AM: It all came from Rock Services?

AB: Correct.

AM: Now you told MPs that the money came from quotes: 'another company that I own.' Which other company was it?

AB: No, I've said that Rock Services is where the money came from. It was generated from insurance profits made there.

AM: You told MPs that Rock Services just delivers the cash, 'the actual loan came from another one of my companies.' I'll ask again, what was the other company?

AB: Well, the structure of the companies that Rock Holdings is the holding company that is the owner of a number of different companies, Rock Services, Southern Rock Insurance and other businesses.

AM: So I ask again, what was the company

AB: So I'm saying.

AM: - that gave you the loan?

AB: I'm saying that, you know, it's UK generated cash from my group of companies. There was no money came from the Isle of Man Rock Holdings. That is what is a question with the Electoral Commission.

AM: Well, the Electoral Commission simply doesn't believe you about that.

AB: Well, then why haven't asked for the bank statements of the company they're questioning?

AM: You've given me the bank statements but it's only a snap shot and some of it's redacted. It doesn't really prove anything.

AB: Well you can have the unredacted copy if you want but it's not fair to put people's bank details there, is it? You know redacted –

AM: And we don't know how many bank accounts Rock Holdings has.

AB: But in any event, Andrew, well you could keep on going on that line of questioning forever, couldn't you?

AM: Yeah, why not? In a sense – I mean Rock Holdings let's be honest -

AB: I want to put to you –

AM: - is an Isle of Man company which is opaque. Why is it opaque?

BA: Well, the Isle of Man holding company owns international businesses and it owns businesses in the UK. You know the Remain campaign got money from Goldman Sacs, JP Morgan

AM: That's irrelevant to this.

AB: No, it's not irrelevant.

AM: it's irrelevant to this.

AB: They are – well hold on.

AM: This is about what money went into Leave.EU and where it came from.

AB: I disagree, it's not irrelevant because those are foreign owned entities, only UK subsidiaries. We went to a QC to get the loan structure signed off –

AM: Yeah.

AB: And he signed it off and we put it forward in the right correct form.

AM: I've seen that judgement and the point is he doesn't refer to either Rock Holdings –

AB: Okay.

AM: - or Rock Services, it was about a different issue. I'm asking you again, where did the money come from?

AB: I've told you. Rock Services –

AM: And where did the money come in – so the money came from Rock Services from where?

AB: We have an insurance business that generates a large amount of cash, 20 to 25 million pounds a year. We insure half a million customers.

AM: So this is the same company that made a loss of £32 million in 2016?

AB: Well, you're referring to a different company there. You're referring to the Southern Rock Insurance that made 42 million the year before.

AM: So which company is this that you're referring to now? Which is the company that you're –

AB: I'm saying Rock Services did not make – you just made a number up there.

AM: I'm just asking you what is the money?

AB: You've literally just made a number up.

AM: No, I haven't made a number up.

AB: Rock Services did not lose £32 million last year.

AM: I'm reading Financial Times copy for June.

AB: Yes, of course you are.

AM: 'The Gibraltar based insurance company owned by Arron Banks made the loss of £32 million in 2016.'

AB: That is not Rock Services. The previous year to that it made 42 million. It's a series of inter-company transactions.

AM: This is the Southern Rock Insurance Company.

AB: I don't to get heated with you. You're talking –

AM: I'm just asking you where the money came from.

AB: Yes, Andrew, you're talking about two different things there. The loan – sorry – the money came from Rock Services, went to Leave.EU. That's a UK based company that had the cash to donate it.

AM: But in a sense that doesn't really tell us anything.

AB: Well now you're asking – hold on

AM: Unless we know where the money came into Rock Services from.

AB: Now you're trying to you know say, well, I need to understand all of your finances.

AM: Yeah.

AB: Why?

AM: In a sense.

AB : Why?

AM: Because we need to know where the money came from. There are lots of people who don't think you're as rich as you say you are and don't really believe it's your money and it came from somewhere else.

AB: So BDO valued our business at £250 million in November '17 based on an EBITDA of something like 32 million, which I'll happily revive that sort of valuation. But I want read to you what the Electoral Commission –

AM: Why can't you give us the account that shows where the money –

AB: Why can't let me get a word in edgeways then?

AM: All right, come on then.

AB: It says, this is from the Electoral Commission. "I am concerned that the only source of information is at best hearsay evidence." They describe me as "enfant terrible", they go on to say "this is potentially a fishing expedition and the case officer says I do not think an investigation would be appropriate." They're saying overall –

AM: Now they've changed their mind and they did investigate you

AB: Now hold on hold on.

AM: - and you were found guilty of misreporting.

AB: Yeah, yeah. I'm just going to come onto that. So that's their initial position. They then go on to say: "in addition we will need to write to Steven Kinnock to advise of our decision to investigate." This is a politically motivated -

AM: This is all irrelevant – this is the Electoral Commission

AB: It's not irrelevant.

AN: have gone into your

AB; I'm sorry, this is not relevant. Why didn't they ask me for bank statements from Rock Holdings?

AM: Well, I don't know why they didn't but –

AB: Well you tell me.

AM: certainly the National Crime Agency can look at all of these things and will presumably follow the money.

AB: The National Crime Agency have had a referral from the Electoral Commission to investigate us. We're happy with that. We're going to cooperate with them, but I'm telling you that the Electoral Commission did not ask for our bank statements. Why?

AM: To really resolve this we need the paper trail of the money that went into Leave.EU and we haven't got that. We haven't seen the money coming into Leave. EU and we don't know where the money came –

AB: I'm sorry we have. That's all been evidenced to the Electoral Commission. The whole thing.

AM: Well, we have seen no documents showing the money coming in – showing exactly

AB: Well even the Marr Show, but that's not the almighty arbiter of the Electoral Commission law. We sent this to the Electoral Commission. I mean in another point by the way –

AM: It's the document you've chosen

AB: - they fined up for overspending. They said we overspent by 10% of the 750. They then in court papers, when we've taken them to court say, 'there appears to a transcription error.' The 77 thousand is now 55 thousand.

AM: This all getting too complicated.

AB: Yeah, well it would be now. You just want to smear me.

AM: No, I don't want to smear you.

AB: Yes, you do.

AM: I want to know £8 million, biggest donation in British political history came from companies involved with you into Leave.EU. Where did the money originally come from?

AB: Andrew. It's not like I'm using a super injunction to try and hid my affairs here.

AM: Where did the money originally come from?

AB: I'm telling you. It came from a UK company that had cash generated –

AM: Which company?

AB: - in the UK.

AM: Which UK company?

AB: Rock Services. We've evidenced that to the Electoral Commission.

AM: Rock Services is a shell company. It doesn't generate money.

AB: You've just said it's a shell company. You just read the FT.

AM: No, I don't. We go along to Company's House and we look.

AB: I mean the FT by the way and their analysis –

AM: We go along to Company's House and we look.

AB: The FT in their analysis of my business affairs missed out a whole company that supplies nearly 85% of the underwriting of my business. It's selective. Let's be honest about why this is happening.

AM: This should be easier for you to answer.

AB: I've answered it.

AM: It should be very easy for you to answer. What was the company that generated £8 million –

AB: I've answered it. Rock Services.

AM: But Rock Services is not a trading company.

AB: Well, we're going to have to agree to differ on that. I think I know my business affairs better than you.

AM: Okay. What does Rock Services do that generates that kind of money?

AB : Rock Services has all sorts of revenue that generates from insurance income.

AM: All sorts of revenue. What kind of revenue?

AB: We insure half a million people in the UK, Andrew.

AM: Rock Services.

AB: We turn over 250 million.

AB: Rock Services itself insures half a million?

AB: There's a – it's a group of companies. I know it's complex for journalists to understand.

AM: It's not complex,

AB: It's very complex.

ANB: - it's just that it looks like a company which doesn't generate that kind of money.

AB: Well, I'm sorry. As far as I'm concerned I've given you the answer to the question. We know what this is about. This is about undermining Article 50, it's undermining the Brexit result and it's a collection of very vicious Labour MPs that have grouped together with The Guardian and FT to try to undermine Brexit. We've provided the bank statements to you. You say they're redacted.

AM: You've provided Rock Holdings' bank statements.

AB : Rock Holdings shows –

AM: You haven't provided us with detailed ins and outs of money going to Rock Services which is crucial.

AB: Rock Holdings – no, it's crucial that it was reported that Rock Holdings was the source of donation. We've said, no money went

into Rock Services, or very – Rock Holdings or very limited amounts and now you're saying well we must the source of that. Rock Services is the source.

AM: No, I'm asking you the source of the money that went into Rock Services.

AB: It's a UK company that generated the cash and we'll be able to evidence that easily.

AM: There is no evidence of that kind of money in Rock Services accounts, which we have looked for in Company's House.

AB: I'm sorry, I'm sorry what you're saying is wrong.

AM: So the Company's House returns are wrong?

AB: I'm saying what you're saying is your understanding of it is wrong. But you know we're at the point now, aren't we, where you know we know the Electoral Commission have a bias on this, the Chairman has called it 'a collection of nonsense.'

AM: The MPs are biased.

AB: They've called for a vote.

AM: The Financial Times is biased. Everybody's biased -

AB : Well hold on a second –

AM: - against you.

AB: Well it's the Remain part of the equation. It's 52 versus 48.

AM: It's beginning to sound a bit like a conspiracy theory. The MP's Committee's terribly biased against you, they're all dreadful Remainers. The Electoral Commission are the same.

AB: Yeah.

AM: I don't know whether you think the National Crime Agency are biased against you as well.

AB: I don't think they are, and I think they're going to see it for what it is. But I go back to what the Electoral Commission said

when their own case enforcement officer said, you shouldn't be opening up a case on press speculation.

AM: You've told parliament that Rock Services was just a service company. You've told me something very different today.

AB: I haven't seen the actual transcript of that. I will go back and look at that, but I'm telling you that the source of the funding was Rock Services.

AM: One of the things the Electoral Commission says is that you kept changing your story. Why do you keep changing your story?

AB: Well, I don't think we have. We just expand – we expanded on it, gave the advice, you know –

AM: First of all you said it came from me, then you said it came from Rock Services.

AB: It has come from me. I am Rock Services. The companies belong to me.

AM: You are Rock Services?

AB: You know. I'm a UK tax payer, the source of my funding as long as it's legitimate and it's in the UK is legitimate.

AM: So, do you own Rock Holdings, can I ask you?

AB: Er, yes.

AM: You are the main shareholder -

AB : Yes.

AM: - and also the owner of Rock Holdings?

AB: Yes.

AM: And Rock Holdings has no connection with the money –

AB: Andrew, it's a group of insurance businesses that I own. I don't know how to be any plainer than that.

AM: Right. So show us the Leave.EU account in that case. Can you do that?

AB: Erm, yeah the Leave.EU accounts have been given to the Electoral Commission. They've opined on our spending. They've

been through it. In fact the Electoral Commission actually said that our loan structure was not wholly untransparent in their findings. What does, 'it's not wholly untransparent mean', Andrew?

AM: A bit opaque possibly, I don't know.

AB: It's not wholly untransparent. That means it's transparent.

AM: Let's go right back to the beginning again, and I'll ask you -

AB: Okay, let's do that.

AM: Let's do that. So there is this company, Rock Services, which you say is a massive insurance company.

AB: I'm not going to say, by the way, no, no, no, I'm not -

AM: A massive insurance company which can generate £8 million of spare cash.

AB: I'm not going to circle back. I've made my position crystal clear. You disagree with that position. You know the FT, Guardian disagree with it.

AM: It's not disagreeing -

AB: Of course you do.

AM: I don't - I mean we've looked at this. We don't see how Rock Services can generate 8 million quid worth.

AB: Well, are we not of the position where the Electoral Commission have referred it. We will explain ourselves and the accounting that went behind it, and I'm very happy with it.

AM: Well it's not just us. The DCMS Select Committee says that -

AB: Oh yes.

AM: - "it is unclear where Arron Banks obtained this money. He failed to satisfy us that his own donations had in fact come from sources within the UK."

AB: Well let's talk about real politics, you know. The Electoral Commission sat on this for five months. We've had no allegations put to us by the Electoral Commission. No correspondence in five months. They're due up in front of the Committee on Tuesday and what's going to happen is they're going to say, 'oh well it's not any

of our business anymore, it's now over to the National Crime Agency, aren't they?

AM: But you -

AB: For five months without any correspondence -

AM: You were fairly abusive about the Electoral Commission.

AB: Rightly so.

AM: You said 'bite me' and they bit you.

AB: Rightly so. They haven't bitten me. They're a corrupt -

AM: They've bitten, they sent you to the NCA.

AB: If you thought about the number of corrupt politicians that have sat in this chair over the years, you have to say what is the Electoral Commission? It's a bunch of ex MPs, from the SNP, Liberal Party -

AM: This is what you do.

AB: I'm sorry but that's -

AM: This is what you do.

AB: What do you mean, this is what I do?

AM: When people ask you questions you smear other people. You say they're all corrupt, they're all dreadful -

AB: I'm sorry, how can it be right - how can it be right for our democracy to be overseen by former ex politicians and MPs?

AM: How can it be right for our democracy -

AB: How can it be right?

AB: How can it be good for our democracy when you respond to criticism by Damian Collins, who's Chair of that Committee, a Conservative MP by writing to his constituents calling him 'a snake in the grass.'

AB: Well he is. Frankly.

AM: So you wrote to every one of his constituents. That is old fashioned, straight forward bullying, isn't it?

AB: No, it's not. I mean straightforward bullying by the way is The Guardian blackmailing a researcher of Isabel Oakeshott and actually then Lord Ashcroft had to fly her over into New Zealand -

AM: Of all the things I want to talk about, Isabel Oakeshott is down at the bottom of my list.

AB: I'm sure it is.

AM: What I do want to you ask you about is today's Observer story.

AB: Right.

AM: Where it is suggested that there's been a great tranche of emails come out of Eldon Insurance, your insurance company in Bristol which show that people were working there both for the insurance company and for Leave.EU. Was that reported?

AB: Now I can say that was reported to the Electoral Commission and people were – people that did work from Eldon were transferred over on short term contracts, legally and then it was reported through the Electoral Commission in the right way. This is where a lot of this confusion comes from. You're talking about emails that were stolen from us and you say you don't want to talk about Isabel Oakshott.

AM: I really don't.

AB: I know you don't. Because the guy was blackmailed and had to be flown back to Australia.

AM: I want to ask you one other thing however which is –

AB: - and I've got a lovely bit here from the BBC, by the way.

AM: There is a quote.

AB: Go on

AM: There is a quote in today's Sunday Times with you saying that you regret voting for Leave. That if you had your time over again you'd vote Remain. Is that true?

AB: Well, I think what I said was that the corruption I've seen in British politics, the sewer that exists, and the disgraceful behaviour of the government over what they're doing with Brexit and how they're selling out, means that if I had my time again I think we would have been better to probably remain and not unleash these demons.

Ends