ANDREW MARR SHOW, 5TH JANUARY, 2020

JESS PHILLIPS, MP

AM: That is the big question, isn't it really? It's only a poll, but in a poll of Labour members only 12% said that they would back you. Much bigger numbers for some of your rivals. Can you move from your position to a position where you can actually win the Labour leadership?

JP: Well look, I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't think that that was possible. I think that if we don't listen to what happened in the last General Election, but the last four General Elections and really think about how we have got to try and make the Labour Party win power again, if we carry on having this conversation about which bit of the party people come from and constantly harking back to the past, whether it's the Blair government, the Brown government or the Corbyn administration, we're not learning the lesson that the country has told us. So I actually think that the truth is that I can win the backing of lots of the Labour members from all different areas of the party.

AM: So let's look at the lesson. What is the lesson from the country you take from this election defeat in particular? What was the single thing or several things that produced this terrible result for you?

JP: There wasn't one single thing you know. There's been a huge amount of talk you know was it Jeremy Corbyn, was it Brexit? Was it the manifesto? The truth is –

AN: All of those three things it might have been.

JP: It was all of those things but there is something much more fundamental. The fundamental thing is that the country didn't trust us to govern. It didn't trust us to deliver on what we were saying and we have got to listen to that. Politics has changed and we have got to show that we can change with it. Doing the same thing again it just simply won't be enough. People have got to feel
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a connection with us again. People have got to feel like we are on their side and currently – I’ve heard it since the election, I’ve heard it before, they just didn’t trust that we were going to deliver the things that we said.

AM: The truth is for you to win you need lots of people to join the party again who left during the Jeremy Corbyn years. You need people to come back in again and vote for you.

JP: I mean it’s not just people coming back in actually and the Labour Party should always be looking out to the country and asking people to take part in our movement. When the Labour Party has had a shock like the one it has just had – and we need not just to win back the seats that we have lost, we also need to be to win the next General Election we need a 1997 swing to just get even. We have got to make our movement more representative of the people so of course people should join. Not just for me but because the Labour Party has got to start looking a lot more to the country.

AM: And do you trust the NEC, which is in charge of the process, to allow those people joining to vote for Jess Phillips to actually vote?

JP: Do you know what? I absolutely do trust because the reality is at the moment there is a huge amount of buzz around this contest for lots of different reasons and some of it is you know, nice things being said online, not so nice things being said online. But I think that actually in the public glare lots of people joining the Labour Party for the NEC to then say we’re not interested in you that would look so incredibly bad for the Labour Party in a time when it needs to stop looking just inside itself. And look outwards.

AM: A lot of people who don’t want you to become Leader of the Labour Party look at your record during the Corbyn years and particularly what you said to the newspapers not long before the
election when you said you didn't think the party could win an overall majority. Now that may well have been true but for an awful lot of activists it felt like a bit of a kick in the teeth when they were out there slogging on the streets. It felt disloyal and they ask why should we be loyal to Jess Phillips when Jess Phillips can't be loyal to Jeremy Corbyn and the leadership as was.

JP: I think that the fundamental part of the question you ask if did I tell the truth as I saw it. So much of politics –

AM; No, it's not actually. The fundamental part is whether you were loyal.

JP: But is it loyal to stand in front of the country and say something you don't think is true? I was in Berry yesterday and a woman on a market stall said to me, ‘the trouble is I don't believe what politicians say to me. I just think you all stand up and feed out lines and I want somebody who is going to tell me things, even if I don't like them.’ If the Labour Party had taken some heed of those of us who could see some of what was coming down the line perhaps we could have changed it. Now the loyalty question is a perfectly reasonable one and you know, hundreds and hundreds of activists –

AM: So what’s your reasonable answer to it?

JP: The truth is I am a Labour Party activist. Have been almost all of my life and hundreds of Labour Party activists came to help me whether it was in my own seat across the country and they heard what people were saying on the doorstep. This shouldn't be a test now of how we feel about each other in the Labour Party. This has got to be about whether the Labour Party can speak and connect and be trusted by the public. None of it matters about this fight with this person in the Labour Party unless we can win an election and Labour values is what matters to Labour members and activists. They don't want to see kids living in bed and breakfast, homeless people on the street. That is all that matters now and that’s what we have to focus on.
AM: Well let’s think about Jess Phillips Prime Minister. You laugh but I mean you know it could happen. We’re now in this crisis with the Soleimani killing. Is Jess Phillips the kind of Labour Leader who will always be marching against a potential war outside the House of Commons or inside the House of Commons supporting the British government when it’s getting dangerous?

JP: Look. I mean I marched against the Iraq War

AM: I know.

JP: and in fact left the Labour Party over it. But the truth is we have to be really careful that we don’t let things that have happened in the past always make our decisions for the future that way. But the Soleimani case nobody is crying any tears for Soleimani and this is not about whether we think that he should or shouldn’t have been killed on his own merits. Soleimani is responsible for the deaths of lots of people’s families in my constituency, but what we have to make sure is that when we take action it is legal, it is proportionate and that there is a moral case for it. And if those questions can be answered then I would absolutely take action to protect British lives.

AM: You would take action. You would go to war to protect British lives if the boxes had been ticked and you were confident that was the right thing to do?

JP: If there is a moral case and a legal case for intervention that has been met then politics isn’t easy and being a leader isn’t easy and people want there to be an easy to this question and there isn’t. The reality is that you can pretend that you would know what to do exactly in every situation but you have to make decisions based on what you see at the time and I would absolutely be willing to take action where there was a moral case and British lives were at risk.

AM: You had a very vivid phrase about the election. You said the manifesto was an avalanche when people needed a lifeline. Which suggests that you think there was far too much in it. Can I ask
you about some specifics in it, whether you would be in favour of
them. Do you believe in – would a Jess Phillips manifesto contain
the nationalisation not just of rail but of energy, water, power as
well?
JP: Again, leadership is about choices and as I have already said
the British public did not trust that we could deliver any of those
things and we lost them on some of the basics.
AM: So no to all of those renationalisations?
JP: That is not at all what I said. I think that the nationalisation
of the rail, the test has been met that the system that we
currently have serves literally no one. None of the franchises
seem to be working for actual ordinary people, but the
nationalisation of things like prisons, of the probation service
where people’s lives are being put in the hands of profit making,
that should absolutely be stopped. But we have to make choices.
AM: I asked you about mail, water and energy.
JP: Of course have to in the future look to how those services can
better serve the public and nationalisation is one of those ways.
But we have to make choices. While there are still homeless
people literally sleeping outside my office both in London and in
Birmingham we have to make the choices that people can trust
that we will deliver.

AM: But in power you can do more than one thing at a time so for
instance, what about free broadband for everybody? What did you
think when you saw that as a Labour Party promise?
JP: What I thought was actually what I think lots of people in the
country thought was I wasn’t sure how we were going to deliver
that when - and like I say we have to go back to the basics. My
son doesn’t go to school five days a week and while that is the
case and lots of people in the country they can give you their own
example. They can’t get social care for their parents. While that is
the case offering people free broadband was just not believable.
And we have got to be able to connect with people and take on
Boris Johnson on the things that he is on before we get a chance to be critical on that.

AM: Very quickly, what about compensating the Waspi women?
JP: Look my mother in law is a Waspi woman who actually took redundancy from her job to help me become a candidate in the election because you know, families all have to look after each other.
AM: 68 billion quid.
JP: And I have to say in the election a lot of Waspi women didn’t believe that we were going to be able to deliver that. There has to be some compensation for those women. These are women who did not have the free childcare that I had. They did not have the help and support. These women they were lied to by the government and we have got to find some way of compensating that loss. Especially for people like my mother in law who it left them in difficult circumstances.

AM: Final big policy issue is if you become Labour Leader we might have been out of the EU then by about three years. Is the Labour Party then a return to the EU party or do you accept that argument is over?
JP: Look, Boris Johnson has a majority of 80. The Labour Party losing the election has consequences that we have to deal with. So I have to face the fact that as somebody who - I have a leave seat but I campaigned for remain because I thought it was the best thing for the people that I represent and I thought it was the best thing for the country and I’m not going to just change my mind on that. But what we have to do is wait and see.
AM: So you’re a rejoiner now?
JP: No, we have to wait and see the situation where we are. People can sit and pretend that they know what it’s going to be but that is just a lie. We have to wait and see. But I will always think that we are better off, we are safer. All this conversation about Iran today –
AM: That’s really interesting. So if you’re Labour Leader in a few weeks time or a few months time, the Labour Party policy could be that eventually you’d like to return to the EU?
JP: You would have to look at what was going on at the time. If Boris Johnson – what our job is for the next three years is to hold Boris Johnson to account on all the promises. So if we are living in an absolute paradise of trade and we’re totally safe in the world and we’re not worrying about having to constantly look to America for our safety and security then maybe I’ll be proven wrong, but the reality is if our country is safer, if it is more economically viable to be in the European Union then I will fight for that regardless of how difficult that argument is to make.

Ends.