

ANDREW MARR SHOW, ANDREA LEADSOM, MP LEADER OF HOUSE OF COMMONS

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2019

ANDREA LEADSOM, MP

Leader of the House of Commons

AM: Andrea Leadsom, who stood against Theresa May in the last Tory leadership election, is Leader of the Commons and absolutely at the heart of the desperate struggles going on there right now. Andrea Leadsom, welcome. Did you welcome the fact that Theresa May offered her hand to Jeremy Corbyn?

AL: Well obviously not. I mean the point is what we have to do is to deliver on the referendum and three years on it is so disappointing that parliament hasn't found it in its heart to deliver on that, in spite of the very clear majority to leave. So what the Prime Minister has to do is to deliver on Brexit lest it slips away from us altogether. But that's what she's try to do and that's what I'm trying to support her to do.

AM: Well as we heard from Rebecca Long-Bailey a little while ago these talks are still ongoing and very much alive. If the Prime Minister agrees a customs union deal with the Labour Party, what's your reaction to that?

AL: Well you know, there are various different types of arrangements and those discussions are still ongoing. For me, whatever we deliver, it has to be Brexit. And so I will absolutely bend over backwards, I think the Prime Minister's proposal is an excellent proposal and it has a customs arrangement within it to ensure completely tariff-free and non-tariff barrier free customs arrangements for agrifoods and industrialised goods. So that is a type of customs arrangement. So we can't be purist about it. We're now at the point of Brexit slipping away altogether. We have to face what's in front of us.

AM: But is it thus far and no further, because clearly the Prime Minister is being pressed by the Labour Party to go further and go to a proper customs union. And Number 10 or somebody is

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briefing that if that happens there will be a legally binding vote in the House of Commons to back stop that against a future Tory leader, maybe Boris Johnson, maybe yourself, I don't know who might wish to tear that up. And I'm wondering if that happens, what then?

AL: Well no government binds the hands of a future government. But really importantly I think nobody would doubt the Prime Minister has been determined to deliver Brexit. So my expectation, and I'm not party to the discussions, but my expectation is that the Prime Minister will only seek to agree those things that still constitute Brexit. And I know for many of my colleagues –

AM: Sorry to interrupt. Does a customs union constitute Brexit?

AL: As I was trying to explain earlier: it depends on what that means. So there is a customs arrangement in the Prime Minister's deal which I have supported every time. It depends what it means. It depends whether – so Jeremy Corbyn originally said he wanted a customs union with no free movement and with the ability to negotiate our own free trade deals. That was his policy. Now that's what the Prime Minister's own customs arrangement offers. So then that begs the question so why aren't Labour supporting it? And then you get back to the issue that there is a huge amount of party politics involved here. We have a hung parliament. The only way we can get business through is by negotiating across the House, so this idea of reaching out is nothing unique. You know we've already had Royal Assent for 43 Bills in this session alone and that has been by negotiating across the House. So through gritted teeth, on this occasion we are also going to have to listen carefully to what the Labour frontbench has to say in spite of disagreeing with them on almost everything!

AM: And by doing that you acknowledge, do you know, that you're giving Jeremy Corbyn a new platform and a great new opportunity?

AL: Well no, I don't agree with that. I think it's simply facing up to the reality which is that working with Jeremy Corbyn is not

something I want to do at all. It's not something the Prime Minister wants to do, but far worse than that would be to fail to deliver on Brexit. That would be the appalling thing because we were quite clearly told by the people in 2016 to leave the European Union and every single politician who went on the air said, what you decide we will implement and Parliament has failed to do that.

AM: This is really interesting. So your position is that to get Brexit delivered it's worth doing a deal with Jeremy Corbyn, even if that moves you a little bit away from the Prime Minister's current red lines?

AL: Well, specifically, provided we are leaving the European Union then it is important that we compromise. That's what this is about and it is through gritted teeth. But nevertheless the most important thing is to actually leave the EU. And if I may I think there's been quite some confusion. The Withdrawal Agreement is the internationally binding treaty that means we actually leave the EU. Now Jeremy Corbyn has always said that Labour don't have a problem with that.

AM: You're talking about political declarations.

AL: And yet they voted against it. Yes, but they voted against it three weeks ago. It would have given us the opportunity to move on, to get out of the EU and then talk about the political declarations.

AM: With respect that's past history. We've also heard that in these talks the possibility of another referendum is being raised by the Labour Party. You in the papers today describe that as the ultimate betrayal.

AL: I totally stand by it. It is appalling to consider another referendum, mainly because people sort of talk of it as a confirmatory referendum – no it's not. It is an attempt by those who are on the remain side of the argument to run it again, to put it back to the people, with by the way, remain on the ballot paper.

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Nobody is for one moment suggesting this is just to confirm the Prime Minister's deal or even WTO withdrawal. It is to try and rerun the referendum. We had a people's vote in 2016 and we have to do what we were told to do.

AM: The reason I'm slightly confused is that the Chancellor, Philip Hammond, has called it 'a perfectly credible proposition,' and said 'there are no red lines anymore.'

AL: Well, you know I can't speak for the Chancellor. I'm not inside his head.

AM: Go on, try.

AL: No, I think what's really important is you know people sort of say 'oh well you know the referendum wasn't decisive,' and yet here in the last week we've had votes in parliament on a draw, we've had them won by one vote, by three votes, nobody's challenging their legitimacy and yet people feel they can challenge the legitimacy of the vote to leave the EU. They simply can't.

AM: But voters watching must be really confused. Who do I believe when it comes to the referendum? The Leader of the House of Commons, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

AL: Well I don't think – I'm not aware that the Chancellor was advocating a second referendum.

AM: 'It's perfectly credible,' he said. 'A perfectly credible proposal.'

AL: Well okay, well what I'm saying is that it would be – it is absolutely not government policy. I'm absolutely assured that there is no intention whatsoever to seek a further referendum. But I would just like to make the point which I feel I must do as Leader of the Commons, that we are in a hung parliament and we are already seeing that some backbenchers are attempting to force the government's hand in extending Brexit, in taking no deal off the table, by seizing control of the Order Paper, which overturns many many years of parliamentary convention.

AM: Yes, absolutely.

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AL: Whereby those who didn't win office are now seeking to determine what government business is which is an absolutely appalling measure which we can't rule out.

AM: And in this coming week we have a series of possibly more votes on the way forward. The Prime Minister has said that she would be bound by those votes. What I wonder is as Leader of the Commons the last set of votes as you say didn't get any majority for anything. How will this voting be done? Have you agreed a new voting system or a different voting system or will it be the same one?

AL: Well, what the Prime Minister has said is she is trying to find a way through this with the Leader of the Opposition so that we can have a deal that is Brexit and that parliament can vote for as a whole so that we can get a majority. That's plan A. Plan B, if that is not successful is then to come forward with some alternatives and the process of that hasn't been decided yet. But Rebecca Long-Bailey was sort of suggesting that these chats can go on a long time. I just do want to point out – we are out of time. We should have left on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. This week we have the EU Council, we are then forced to agree a review of the extension to Article 50. This ordering Council to fight –

AM: I'm going to come onto all of this in just a second, but I just want to hover over these votes in the House of Commons and ask whether you know how they are going to be conducted, if they are?

AL: That has not yet been decided. We're discussing different alternatives but it's not yet been decided.

AM: And if those votes happen in the House of Commons and say some version of the Ken Clarke motion on the customs union got through, would you as a government be bound by that?

AL: No. As a matter of fact when the House votes on something, in favour of something, that is the opinion of the House. So as a matter of legal fact the government is not bound by that. The

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government is only bound by statute. However you're right to say that the Prime Minister has said that she would put forward some votes and then she would act on the outcome of those votes.

AM: So would you be part of a government that acted on staying inside the customs union, if that was the view of the House of Commons?

AL: Well we're back at where we started which is, it depends what that customs union may look like.

AM: So you might. That's very, very interesting.

AL: Well, I've already voted for the Prime Minister's deal which has within it a customs arrangement so those things are not mutually exclusive.

AM: Now it may well be that at the end of this week the EU has not agreed an extension. Is it your understanding that we will definitely get an extension?

AL: I would think that the European Union would want to have an extension. I would think that they would want to avoid no deal. On the other hand, the other side of it is they will also want to avoid the UK fighting European elections which is something I'm also extremely keen to avoid.

AM: Why?

AL: Because it would just be appalling. You know three years on from the referendum and there we are fighting European elections. It's utterly unacceptable. And I think we should go a very long way to avoid doing that which is why again we're trying to find a way forward that parliament can support before it comes to April 11<sup>th</sup>, which is the deadline for the Ordering Council that sparks the European elections.

AM: It's suggested in the papers that if the Prime Minister leads the Conservative Party towards European elections she will be removed by Cabinet members.

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AL: Well, you know, I, myself, do not want us to be fighting European elections. But as I said just now we are really short of time. The House has to come together and support Brexit because we have to do what the people clearly told us to do and what the vast majority of us said that we would do. Should the people vote to leave we would then leave the European Union. We have to do that. So I do not under any circumstances want to be fighting European elections. But the reality of the parliamentary arithmetic is that if parliament does not support leaving then parliament is highly likely to require the Prime Minister, in primary legislation, to extend the Article 50 to such a point where we have to fight the elections.

AM: The other alternative, which might happen right at the end of this week in parliament, is faced with leaving with no deal, if we don't get an extension, we've got the choice of leaving with no deal or revoking Article 50. Which of those would be the worst option for you?

AL: Revoking Article 50.

AM: So you would never support that?

AL: Never. No. No.

AM: Okay, and that takes us towards no deal, which as I say again could happen at the end of this week –

AL: And actually, I would just say, you know, my very good colleague Chris Heaton Harris wrote in the Telegraph yesterday about no deal. He was the No Deal minister until he resigned last week. The efforts of the civil service have been superb in preparing us for no deal. Now, we don't want that. It's absolutely not what we wanted.

AM: And yet, despite their efforts the head of the civil service, Mark Sedwill said this week that it would threaten the security and safety of the United Kingdom, it would dislocate the union, it would see food prices going up by ten per cent, and more than that for fresh food. It would have lots of effects, including a crash

in the pound. And he laid out what looks like a pretty grim prospect for this country if no deal happens. Now, you were one of those people who sat on that chair during the referendum campaign and said it was all sunlit uplands, it was all going to be fine. What do you now think when you contemplate what's ahead of us?

AL: Well, with the prime minister's deal those sunlit uplands are just around the corner. If we voted on it next week, absolutely. To have a customs arrangement that protects our economy and jobs, at the same time to be able to write our own future trading relationships, to keep the close security partnership, to be able to seize the opportunities offered by Brexit to improve the plight of our farmers and our fishermen, to be able to build on the fourth industrial revolution opportunities, there are so many positives if we can support the prime minister's deal. All other eventualities – if we ended up with no deal we would survive and thrive. There is no doubt about that. I think your words are putting words into Mark Sedwill's mouth.

AM: I've got direct quotes from him here. I could read them out and it's pretty grim.

AL: Okay, well, it's not nearly as grim as many would advocate, and the civil service have done an amazing job of ensuring that we minimise the problems. Now, I'm not an advocate of no deal, but it would not be nearly as bad as many like to think it would be.

AM: I must ask you, what is the pizza club and what is its point?

AL: Well, a pizza club would be a group of people who ate pizza. But I mean, this is –

AM: What's your pizza club?

AL: Well, it's not really a pizza club. I mean, we happen to have some pizzas once as a group of Cabinet Ministers who are supporting the prime minister's efforts to leave the European Union.

AM: But you've got Cabinet, why do you need another group?

AL: Well, because Cabinet is quite a large number of people, and you know, it's very time constrained and so on and so on. So what this particular group seeks to do is to support the efforts to leave—

AM: So what kind of things do you talk about?

AL: Well, it's a private meeting of colleagues and it talks about different things at different times. But ultimately it's there to help the prime minister to deliver Brexit.

AM: Alright, can I ask you, you stood in the last leadership campaign and we're looking at all the runners and riders, now they're almost all men. Are you tempted to throw your hat in the ring one more time, you came second last time, you know?

AL: Well, you know, I'll be thinking about that when the time comes. But for now I'm supporting the prime minister to get Brexit through. That's the absolute priority.

AM: And what did you learn from the experience last time round?

AL: I think it's the Girl Guide thing of be prepared.

AM: You weren't properly prepared?

AL: Well, you know, the fact is I was really disappointed that David Cameron resigned. He had said that he wouldn't. And I think that all of those who've been very, very closely tied up in trying to support the Leave campaign had not had any thoughts about anything else. I don't think many people were prepared for that.

AM: I don't think you would say now that the Brexit process has been what you hoped for and expected. What do you think's gone wrong in that?

AL: I just don't find any merit in hindsight. You know, I mean, obviously privately I go through and look at what could have been done differently, but politics is really the art of dealing with what's in front of you. And right now the total imperative is to make sure

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that we leave the EU, and we have to do it, in my view, before  
we're forced to fight the European elections.

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