AM: What matters more than Brexit? I’ll tell you what matters more than Brexit. Climate change. We’ve had rallies by schoolchildren, naked protests in the Commons and the party which makes the environmental central to its politics is of course the Green Party. Hoping to improve its numbers of councillors in next month’s local elections. Caroline Lucas, the Party’s only MP is with me. Caroline Lucas, you were watching the Rebecca Long-Bailey interview there. What do you make of what’s going on?

CL: Well what I wish she had said is that they would be pushing – the Labour Party would be pushing for a long enough extension to allow us to have a people’s vote. In other words to go back to the public with a confirmatory referendum. Because essentially so much has happened in the almost three years now since the referendum in 2016 and we now know so much more than we ever did then. The Brexits on offer bear very little resemblance to the Brexit we were offered back then when we were going to have frictionless trade and we were going to have the exact same benefits. You know the only people it seems who aren’t allowed to change their minds on this are the public. The whole of the strategy of the Prime Minister is to try to browbeat her MPs into accepting that they have to go and vote for her deal and change their minds. Why won’t she allow for the fact that over the last three years the public have changed their minds? We at least need to check that and go and get that public vote.

AM: And is this a moment for compromise?

CL: I think frankly that for MPs like myself to say that we would be prepared to vote for Mrs May’s deal or indeed whatever deal comes out of the discussions that might be happening between Labour and the Conservatives, for us to say we will vote for that
as long as it is contingent upon a public vote. That to me is already a big compromise.

AM: And are you prepared to compromise?
CL: That is the position that I am taking. I am saying that even though I think a customs union for example is still nowhere near good enough. It doesn't sort out the problem with Northern Ireland, you’d still need some kind of a backstop. It doesn't help us when it comes to services. There’s a real irony, frankly when you consider that the whole banner of the vote leave campaign was about take back control and yet the customs union would mean that we’re actually rule takers, not rule makers. I think it’s vital that it goes back to the public and for Andrea Leadsom in the Telegraph today, if I can just say, it just seems to me absolutely ludicrous to try to say that a second referendum is somehow a betrayal. The betrayal is of young people, 70% of whom we know want to remain. How can we possibly be shutting off their futures by not enabling them to have a say on what’s going to happen next?

AM: You’ve been tweeting quite a lot of these subjects and you’ve said: ‘A single market and customs union membership could save our communities from the worst effects of this Brexit disaster.’ And then again in your Manifesto you said: ‘You would press for remaining within the single market.’ This week in the House of Commons there was a vote to remain in the single market and you voted against. Why?
CL: Well I’ll tell you why, because three years into this whole process so much has changed that we didn’t know about before that we need to make it conditional on a vote of the people. I will vote for a single market customs union version if it is linked to going back to the people. And the tragedy of courses was that the Hilary Benn amendment, that amendment that was basically a tie so the Speaker used his vote to vote against it, that amendment would have given us Monday to composite these different options.
So then you would have had I think the opportunity for a majority to come behind some kind of softer Brexit linked to going back to the public. Because the bottom line is that it can’t be right that MPs change their minds but the public isn’t allowed to express whether they have.

AM: Talking about close votes, Ken Clarke’s amendment for the customs union come within 3 votes and again you voted against it. And I think a lot of people can’t understand why somebody offered half the cake or not a full Brexit from your position is still voting against those, quotes: ‘Softer Brexit options.’ I don’t really understand it.

CL: Well, because the bottom line is three years after the first referendum so many people’s minds have changed, the evidence is there to show that –

AM: I understand the case for a second referendum. I do understand the case, all I’m saying is if you say this or nothing then you’re behaving like everybody else.

CL: No. I’m saying anything as long as it is linked to going back to the people because three years have now elapsed. So much new information has become available. Nobody was talking about for example the risks to peace in Northern Ireland back then. No one was talking about, you know, the concerns around access to medicines and so forth. The right thing to do now is not just for MPs to have the opportunity for another say, the public need the opportunity for that as well.

AM: Right, we’ve got the local elections coming up, the Green Party’s putting up lots of candidates. There’s something very strange going on on environmental politics it seems to me in this country, which is that if you look at the behaviour, particularly of younger voters and younger people they’re going Green in all sorts of ways. Veganism is strongly on the rise, vegetarianism too. People are giving up plastic, they’re stopping plastic cups. They’re applauding wind farms, you know they’re watching David
Attenborough and applauding him as well. The one thing they’re not doing is voting Green. And that’s unlike any other country. What’s going wrong do you think with the proposals made by the Green Party? Something’s gone wrong, hasn’t it?

CL: I’ll tell you what’s gone wrong. What’s gone wrong is an absolutely archaic electoral system that doesn’t allow people’s views and preferences to be expressed through first past the post. If I had ten pence for every time someone on a doorstep said, ‘I absolutely agree with everything that you’re saying but I daren’t vote Green because under first past the post I have to vote tactically.’ That is the difference with Germany, France, the Netherlands, you name it. That is the difference.

AM: It’s the voting system. And last time round your voting share halved. Was that again because of the voting system do you think?

CL: In 2017 we actually did some so called progressive alliances with other parties to try to breakthrough this archaic electoral system so we didn’t stand in as many seats as we would do usually. But right now, if I take you back to the local elections, we are going to be fielding more candidates than we’ve ever fielded before. What we’re finding on the doorstep is precisely that sense from people that they are so angry with the two main parties that I think you will see now more of the smaller parties benefitting from that because people are looking at what’s happening at Westminster and thinking this is complete chaos. We want something different. What the Greens are offering are local councillors embedded in their communities standing up for things like action on climate change, getting rid of plastics out of the councils and a lot more besides.

Ends