

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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AMBER RUDD

AM: Overnight she has left the government and the Conservative Party, and she joins me now. Amber Rudd, what was the crucial thing that made you leave?

AR: Two things really, Andrew. First of all the fact that 21 of my colleagues had the whip removed, and the reason they had the whip removed is the second reason that made me leave, which is they couldn't see sufficient concentration and planning on actually getting a deal. You're right, I support the prime minister in getting a deal, and if not, leaving without a deal. But the fact is there is a huge amount of planning and preparation around no deal. I've attended a number of those meetings. We are really stepping it up, which is the right thing to do. But I have not seen enough work going into actually trying to get a deal. When earlier in the week I asked Number 10 for a summary of what the planning was for actually getting a deal I was sent a one-page summary. So it's the combination of the fact that there's not enough work going into actually getting a deal – which, as I think, is not what the prime minister signed up to try to do. And secondly, the expulsion of 21 of my colleagues who are good, moderate Conservatives.

AM: In essence this is about trust. You are saying that you do not trust Boris Johnson to honestly try to get a deal with the EU.

AR: I'm not going to use those words, because I believe that he is trying to get a deal with the EU. I am just saying what I have seen in government is that there is this huge machine preparing for no deal – which is fine. You might expect in the balance between getting a deal and no deal, 50-50 in terms of work. But it's not that. It's like 80-90 per cent of government time going into preparing for no deal, and the absence of actually trying to work to get a deal is what has driven 21 of my colleagues to rebel, and I need to join them.

AM: So you think honestly he is trying to get a deal. What deal?

AR: I think he prefers to get a deal, and the government would want –

AM: So what deal, is the question?

AR: Well, that is the question.

AM: And you have no idea.

AR: I have no idea because what we know is that Angela Merkel and the EU have said, 'give us your proposal,' and we have not given them a proposal. Where is all the work that needs to be done to try and come up with alternative arrangements, to show where the landing place is, all that work that needs to go behind it? Instead we're just hearing, 'we are going to get a deal,' but there's very little evidence of it.

AM: Are you going to leave politics?

AR: No, I'm not leaving politics. I'm actually not leaving the Conservative Party. What I am doing is surrendering the whip alongside my colleagues, the 21 others, in order to stand with them. I don't think – I know I couldn't carry on in the Conservative Party at such a high level and see 21 of my colleagues, who are good, moderate people who also want a deal, excluded from it. I just needed to move and stand by them. I hope that we will all be returned before a general election so we can all stand as Conservatives. I am a Conservative. I believe the Conservative Party is a force for good in our great country, and I'd like to see us in government. We have been before. We've done great things.

AM: In your letter to the prime minister you say, 'I no longer believe that leaving with a deal is the government's main objective.' That is quite close to accusing the government of lying to the British people.

AR: Well, I'm not accusing them of lying, I am observing what I've seen.

AM: So what do you mean by the sentence?

AR: I'm saying that 80-90 per cent of the work that I can see going on on the EU relationship is about preparation for no deal. Can I just say –

AM: So this is about disproportion really –

AR: It's about disproportion, exactly. But I mean, when this was first entered into after Boris Johnson became prime minister, most people would have expected – I think everybody would have expected there to be a lot of work on trying to get a deal. A whole team of people trying to build those relationships, trying to work on alternative arrangements. And I haven't seen that.

AM: Is the purpose of this resignation to further undermine Boris Johnson or to tilt the government's direction of policy?

AR: The purpose of this resignation is to make the point that the Conservative Party at its best should be a moderate party that embraces people with different views of the EU. Under the last prime minister we had a lot of rebellions on EU matters. I think Jacob Rees-Mogg rebelled, I'm told, 100 times. Lots of people rebelled on her withdrawal agreement. If they hadn't of course we would have left the EU by now, and some of those are now in Cabinet. I think it's disproportionately unfair to single out this group who have a different view on leaving the European Union and remove the whip from them. That's the purpose, to try and get them back into the Conservative Party.

AM: In your letter you said there is no evidence of a deal.

AR: There is no evidence of a deal. There is no formal negotiation taking place. There are just a lot of conversations, and David Frost has been doing his best and going out there, I understand, twice a week, but I think we should be doing so much more to get the deal. I support getting a deal. Almost every one of those 21 want to get a deal, have voted for a deal in the past, and are longing to have another opportunity to do so.

AM: So you made your decision. When you went in to talk to the prime minister what was his reaction?

AR: I spoke to the prime minister last night, and he was obviously sad. Nobody wants to lose a colleague.

AM: Because you're quite close in some ways.

AR: We have been very close, and I was very frank about the reasons for it, and I spoke to him several times actually this week about how I thought that the expulsion of the 21 – it's not just 21 individuals, it's a big symbol that the Conservative Party doesn't embrace moderate people. Ken Clarke, Philip Hammond, these great Conservatives. And I kept on arguing against it, but I wasn't getting anywhere.

AM: Is this potentially the beginning of the end of the Conservative Party as we've known it?

AR: No. I certainly hope not. I will fight for the Conservative Party. The values that we have, which I think are in the national interest. I just couldn't stand by and watch these people on their own.

AN: Now, there are lots of other Tories who are trying to get the whip returned to at least some of those people. Theresa May is one of them. Have you talked to Theresa May about this?

AR: I haven't. But I have talked to other senior MPs about the fact that they would like the whip returned. And I hope that is where we end up. But you know, at some stage you have to act yourself, and I felt it was the right thing to do.

AM: Did the Cabinet know the legal advice on prorogation?

AR: We weren't circulated any, no.

AM: Why not, do you think?

AR: I can only speculate on that, which other people may do as well. I asked for it and I was not given it. It was only, I understand, on how prorogation folded into the Northern Ireland

Bill and I was told that I would get it, but after persistently asking for it I still hadn't got it and I resigned.

AM: Now, you're one of the Tories who, despite originally voting remain, accepted that we would leave at the end of October, 31st, without a deal if we couldn't get a deal. You have gone because you no longer believe the government is trying hard enough to get that deal. Are there other people in the Cabinet, do you believe, who feel the same thing?

AR: I think you'll have to ask them, Andrew. I think a lot of people are concerned. I think a lot of people joined the Cabinet, as I did, in good faith and were looking forward to the effort to get a deal and genuinely support the prime minister in his endeavours to do so, with the very much inferior, dangerous option of leaving without a deal as effectively our own backstop in negotiations. But there are concerns about the effort that's going into –

AM: So you may not be the last.

AR: I have absolutely no idea on that. I mean, this was a very personal decision and it was a very difficult decision.

AM: Do you feel the Cabinet is being treated properly, or do you think there is now a division or a tension between Cabinet as Cabinet and Number 10, the Number 10 machine? All this talk about Dominic Cummings and so on.

AR: I don't think the Cabinet is having proper discussions about policy. The issue of the prorogation, we were told on the morning rather than being a proper discussion. I would like to see a Cabinet where proper discussions take place.

AM: So if it's not the Cabinet who is running the country?

AR: Well, Andrew, if I knew that I would have perhaps had further conversations with the prime minister or them. But at the moment I can tell you there's not enough effort going into the actual Cabinet and decision-making.

AM: Looking ahead, the Conservative Party is obviously in some degree of trauma at the moment. The country is also very, very divided about Brexit. Do you fear for the future of the Conservatives in the country, do you fear for the tone of a debate which is people against parliament?

AR: I do think that the whole tone of people against the parliament is wrong. I think that it can escalate tempers and tension, as we've seen actually last night. There were way too many police were needed for the protests outside Westminster. But this is not unique to the Conservative Party. We've seen the Labour Party too over the past few days deal with their own problems with a great backbench MP, Diane Johnson, being slated potentially for deselection. I mean, this is both parties that are having difficulty maintaining their moderate side. And I'm in no doubt that the Labour Party have led on this with their real difficulties of holding moderate MPs in their home as well.

AM: Do you think we can be seeing violence at the next election if this carries on?

AR: Well, we've already seen some difficulty yesterday, which was protesting at Brexit. 2017 when we had the general election – many of my colleagues got intimidated. Some nasty intimidating posters and also some physical intimidation. I think it is the responsibility of all of us in politics to try and calm people down. To try and show there's careful thought and planning going into everything we do. I think it's a real mistake to stoke it up.

AM: There's some evidence that Boris Johnson himself has been upset by some of these withdrawal of the whip moves and has apologised to people and is upset by what's going on? Who is running Number 10? Is it really Boris Johnson or is it Dominic Cummings?

AR: Well, I don't know Dominic Cummings and when Boris Johnson was challenged on this at the 1922 Committee earlier in the week, he immediately said, 'it's not Dominic Cummings, it's

me. If you have any beef or any problems with what's happening in these strategy of Number 10 you have to come to me, not my advisers. I stand as the leader here.' And I think that's absolutely right. There's no point criticising the leader's advisers. You have to go to the person who is actually delivering this.

AM: Politicians never say – in that seat – 'I was wrong.' Can I put it to you that you were wrong to go into the Cabinet in the first place, you made the wrong decision at that point?

AR: Andrew, I have been wrong about things in the past. But no, I wasn't wrong about that. I entered in good faith, had frank conversations with the prime minister, and when I said I supported him on his strategy I was absolutely genuine.

AM: But this whole government is based on the idea of genuinely meaning that we will leave without a deal if necessary. You called no deal disastrous. No deal is now coming towards this country at quite a rate. Therefore you have shown, some people will say, bad faith in going into the government in the first place.

AR: Well, they are wrong. People will always interpret any politician's activities as being in bad faith for one reason or another. And you have to be pretty robust to do anything in politics at the moment. But I can just say what I saw and why I did it. I supported Boris Johnson in his approach and I believe I was right to do that. It's because of the consequences now – 21 senior colleagues expelled, and the lack of planning on actually getting a deal, that's made my position untenable.

AM: But by doing this you have weakened Boris Johnson and weakened this government. Again, many people out there will say you have made it likelier that Jeremy Corbyn will arrive in Number 10.

AR: Well, I don't agree with that. I think that we win as the Conservative Party by showing our values, which are moderate, strong, proportionate, one nation values. And if we become a

party which has no place for the type of moderates that I am, this is centre-right Conservatives, then we will not win. We need to embrace that whole level of people who – the five million people who voted remain last time, who voted for the Conservative Party, most of whom would just like a deal. Those are the people we need to continue to win.

AM: There have been broad hints that in the coming week Boris Johnson would ignore an Act of Parliament and not write that extension letter to the EU himself. What is the consequence of that?

AR: I think this government, any government, must always obey the law. And I would urge Boris Johnson and his advisers to think very carefully about that.

AM: And you believe he will obey the law?

AR: I think, yes, of course I believe he will obey the law. Yes.

AM: Amber Rudd, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

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