AM: Now all this started with reaction to the Brexit vote, so a very, very straightforward question if I may to start with. Which way did you vote in that referendum yourself?

JC: Remain. I’m surprised you even ask the question.

AM: Well I asked it because quite a lot of people around you suggested that you had never been a supporter.

JC: Nobody ever suggested I was going to do anything other than vote Remain, and I think you’re very well aware of that.

AM: Did you do everything you possibly could have done do you think to win that for the Remain side?

JC: Listen, I worked flat out. I travelled the whole country. I addressed union conferences, street meetings, public meetings, universities, colleges and lots of places urging people to vote Remain because of the general direction this country would go if we voted to Leave. I’m not uncritical of the European Union, as everybody knows, and indeed most of the population are not uncritical of the European Union and I’ve been reaching out. Yesterday I came back from Paris where I’d been – Friday rather – where I’d been meeting the Party of European Socialists to work together with Socialist parties, in some cases governments, across Europe on how we deal with this and what access we have to the single market in the future, and, protect the social conditions that we have got through the Social Chapter in the Treaty.

AM: Angela Eagle has now announced that she is going to stand against you. Have you any message for her this weekend?
JC: Well I’m disappointed, but obviously she’s free to do that if she wishes to. We have worked together in the past six months, nine months actually in the Shadow Cabinet and this is an opportunity when we could be putting enormous pressure on this Tory government on inequality and injustice, on poverty and all the issues this Tory government is -

AM: Would you like her at the 11th hour to think again in that case?

JC: Well, she resigned from the Shadow Cabinet. We had a conversation after she had announced her resignation from the Shadow Cabinet and I would ask her to think for a moment. This is the opportunity of the party to unite against what the Tories are doing to put forward an agenda which is different to the austerity agenda being put forward by the Tories and actually gain a lot of ground. We now have a large membership, over half a million people are members of our party. They have joined for a reason and they want to see a party that is active all the time opposing what this government’s doing.

AM: If she does stand are you confident you can get the 51 nominations you need to be on the ballot for the next Leadership vote?

JC: I’m expecting to be on the ballot paper because the rules of the party indicate that the existing leader, if challenged, should be on the ballot paper anyway.

AM: But the legal advice that’s been taken by the party says that you do need those nominations, as Neil Kinnock had to get them when he was challenged.

JC: That was – Neil should remind himself, that was in 1988 when the election of leader was done by the Electoral College system. That has
long since been abolished, we now have a one member one vote system. The rules in my view are absolutely clear and indeed I’m not sure that is legal advice is referring to, I have not been shown any legal advice to that effect.

AM: Have you taken legal advice of your own?

JC: I have taken much soundings from lawyers. There’s a lot of lawyers about you know.

AM: There are a lot of lawyers and what do the lawyers tell you? That you’ll be on the ballot come what may?

JC: Yes, indeed so.

AM: Some people say why should you be treated differently? I mean Neil Kinnock had to get those numbers of people. In the past Labour leaders have had to show that they have the support of a sizeable number. Actually just a fifth of the MPs and the MEPs. Why should you be different?

JC: That was in 1988, the Electoral College system has since been abolished. We now have a one member, one vote system and Members of Parliament have a role in that, of course they do, but at the end of the day the final say is by the members, affiliates and supporters of the party.

AM: But if you had to do you think you could get those 51 nominations?

JC: You’d be surprised how much support there is out there of people that feel that I was elected a year ago with a very large majority and a very large mandate and since then we’ve defeated the government on more than 20 occasions in parliament, we’ve won elections – I think we’re a party that’s going places and doing very well actually.
AM: This is something that’s going to end up with the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, the NEC this week. If the NEC decides that you should not be on the ballot paper without getting those nominations will you take that to court?

JC: I will challenge that if that is the view they take – but I would also
AM: In court?
JC: Hold on a minute, can I finish? I would just ask anyone in the party to think for a moment. Is it really right that the members of the party should be denied a decision, a discussion, a choice in this? Half a million people are members of the party because they want the party to succeed. Surely they’re the people that knock on doors, they’re the people that deliver leaflets. They’re the people that raise the money.

AM: But as Neil Kinnock has said, in the end the Labour Party is a parliamentary party. Its founding Constitutions to create and sustain a party in parliament. And if you have not got the support of 80% of your own MPs it’s very hard to see how you can be an effective leader, in opposition or perhaps one day in government.

JC: Well, Neil says that and I heard him say that and indeed I’ve heard him say it on a number of occasions. The reality is the party is a coalition of affiliated unions, socialist societies, individual members, registered supporters and members of parliament. They have to come together. I have reached out in a way that no other leader ever has in the breadth of the political views of people I brought round the Shadow Cabinet table. I’m not the one who’s been trying to box myself into a corner. I’ve reached out in the most – in the broadest way I could.

AM: Let’s go back to how this all started, it was that very dramatic night when Hilary Benn was fired by you in the middle of the night. What’s happened and why did you fire him?
JC: Well, Hilary confirmed to me in a phone call that he had indeed been collecting signatures for some days of wanting to have a mass resignation from the Shadow Cabinet because he didn’t agree with my leadership. I didn’t think that was a particularly colligate thing to do, particularly as we were actually involved in the EU referendum campaign at that time. I was the one who was travelling the country getting support for a Remain vote, and he confirmed he’d been doing that and we then discussed it, and he generously, as I generously said to him, I said, ‘well look, this really can’t go on’ and so we parted company.

AM: Well you’re two courteous people –
JC: Oh we’re very courteous. We both come from very courteous families.

AM: You parted company courteously, but after that 63 members of your team resigned, leaving you with a very kind of threadbare Shadow Cabinet if I may say so. There are lots of important jobs you can’t even fill and people doing more than one job. This is not really an effective opposition in the traditional way, is it?

JC: I’m saying to Labour MPs you have a responsibility to represent the party in parliament. We’re only any of us in parliament because of the work of Labour Party members and supporters and of course Labour voters and I urge them to recognise that. But also I’m keen to reach out. We’re going to come together, discussing how we deal with the possible UK negotiations over the next few months over the European Union. There’s an awful lot of policy areas where there’s a great deal of agreement, but I think the crucial one is the achievement of John McDonnell in turning economic policy around so that pretty well everybody seems to be now signed up to the idea you invest rather than cut in order to grow our economy.
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AM: But you haven’t got a proper Shadow Europe minister at the moment, you’ve got the same person is doing the Shadow Welsh job and – sorry – the Northern Irish job and the Scottish job and he’s English. I mean this is going to be very, very hard for the Labour Party do to the serious line by line criticism and opposition and holding the government to account that it ought to be doing.

JC: That’s why I say to Labour MPs get round the table, get together so that we can do the line by line criticism of what this government is doing. And I have to say this, that there are very many talented people in the Parliamentary Labour Party and I’m disappointed that some of them have declined to take on positions they’ve been offered. I ask them to think again about this because our duty is to stand up for the very poorest and most vulnerable people in the society and convince the majority that a better society is one that’s inclusive to all.

AM: The hard truth is that they have lost faith in you personally and it’s not just the Blairites, it’s not just the right. It’s people like Lisa Nandy, Ed Miliband who was a great, great supporter all the way through eventually said, ‘it’s not working, it’s over.’ These are people who supposed to be on your side.

JC: They have said that MPs control everything in the end of the day and decide what we do or not. I just ask them to think for a moment about the very large number of members of this party and people who joined our party in order to try and create a better society in Britain, don’t they have a right to have a say in all of this? Don’t they have a voice that should be heard in all of this? And I reach out and I’m quite prepared to work with people. I was given a huge responsibility and a mandate a year ago and I’m carrying it out.

AM: But those MPs have the votes of 9 million British people behind them as well. I mean here is Louise Haigh who voted for you in the Leadership campaign. She said, ‘I completely respect the mandate Jeremy has for the membership,’ as you’ve been talking about, ‘but in
order to lead Labour in Westminster he has to have a parliamentary mandate too,’ and you don’t. Or Lisa Nandy. ‘The lack of confidence in the leadership goes beyond the small group of MPs who have consistently opposed Jeremy since his election, it has become clear that he is unable to form a broad inclusive Shadow Cabinet that draws on the best of our movement’s traditions.’

JC: Then why doesn’t Lisa doesn’t come back into the Shadow Cabinet? Why did she feel it necessary –

AM: She doesn’t have faith in you.

JC: A week ago she was happily in the Shadow Cabinet. Two hours later she decided she wasn’t. I noticed the enormous pressure that’s been put – and MPs have told me about this – by a group saying you’ve got to get out of that, you’ve got to leave Corbyn alone, you’ve got to get away from him. Sorry, we have a Labour Party. Labour MPs have I think a responsibility to represent our party and I urge them to think again about what they’re doing at the present time. Surely, the Tory Party is in disarray, unemployment is rising. Inflation is rising, the pound is falling, jobs are closing –

AM: This is not the time for the Labour Party to be in disarray.

JC: Absolutely. This is the time when we should be out there doing that campaigning on an economic strategy very ably put forward by John McDonnell which does present a real opportunity and a real alternative for the people of this country.

AM: But people like Lisa Nandy are grownups, are now quite experienced politicians, they have taken their decision for their own reasons and it remains the problem that you do not have a majority of Labour MPs, nothing like it, in the Commons behind you. So one of two things can happen. Either you could decide suddenly to stand aside and end that particularly problem that way, or eventually, you
have to get rid of those MPs who oppose you. You have to have ballots and reselections and get them all out. Get 87 Labour MPs out.

JC: It’s a democratic party, not a dictatorship. I was elected by a very large majority of members and supporters. I did not have a majority of MPs supporting me at the very beginning; I haven’t enjoyed that position during the past nine months of leadership. I have reached out to all sections of the Parliamentary Party and I would respectfully suggest that a little bit of movement to help us develop policies and campaign against this government ought to be our priority at the moment.

AM: So what’s the movement coming from you? I mean there have been talks and negotiations and so forth, what have you been offering the rebels?

JC: Bring people together and decide how we deal with the very complex matter of the results of the referendum vote, the effects on industry and investment and trade in this country and the effects on environmental, human rights and social policies in Britain. The huge effects

AM: But when they say this is really about Jeremy Corbyn, we don’t have faith in Jeremy Corbyn and the way he is running the Labour Party and his office and its competence, that kind of argument isn’t going to satisfy them, is it?

JC: Come and talk about it. I’ve reached out to Labour MPs in a way that very few other leaders have. I meet them frequently, one to one conversations with many colleagues.

AM: You’ve talked to them but you haven’t actually done anything about it. I mean you haven’t put a –

JC: How do you know what I’ve done or not done about it?
AM: Well I’m asking you. If you can tell me that you have done something specific to meet their concerns to either change your operation or say I’m going to time limit my leadership, or if it’s not working by a certain time I’m going to stand aside, I mean those kind of things.

JC: Why should I time limit a leadership when I’ve been elected by a very large number of members and supporters in order to lead this party? If the end of the day an election somewhere results in a different leader, so be it. But I would be irresponsible if I walked away from a mandate that I was given and responsibility I was given. I ask colleagues to respect that as well.

AM: You have been under enormous personal pressure, you must have talked about this with your family and there was talk that there was a period when you did have a bit of a wobble. You thought is it really worth it, can I carry on personally doing this?

JC: Andrew, you read too many newspapers. You really do.

AM: It’s all I do.

JC: It’s all you do, read newspapers. Well can I tell you something? There’s no wobbles.

AM: I’m asking is it true?

JC: No, absolutely untrue. There’s no wobbles, there’s no stress, there’s no depression. I’ll tell you what real stress is. Real stress is when you can’t feed your kids. Real stress is if you don’t know you’ve got a job next day. Real stress is if your landlord is going to evict you from your home. That’s what real stress in our society is. Our job, our job, as politicians, as public representatives is to recognise the real
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stresses people face in society and try and bring about a society that deals with those issues.

AM: And you could only deal with that if you win power as a party and if 80% of your own MPs think that they can’t do that and it isn’t part of the fault, Jeremy Corbyn’s fault, they can’t all be your enemies, all them and nothing to do with me, surely some of it is to do with you.

JC: Look, I’m quite prepared to believe that everything goes wrong is my fault. Everything that’s successful is somebody else’s achievement. That’s fine, that’s what leadership’s about. But I just say this. We defeated the government on 20 occasions, 22 occasions. We’ve won parliamentary by elections with swings to Labour. We’ve increased our vote in local elections. We’ve won four Mayoral contests. There are three million families who are a thousand pounds a year better off because of the Labour opposition to the cuts in Working Tax Credits. Every person in receipt of Personal Dependence payments continues to get them because of Labour opposition. The forced Academisation of schools is not happening because of Labour opposition. There’s quite a lot that we’ve achieved in the past nine months we can be very proud of.

AM: Your MPs don’t completely agree with that, but can I ask you about another criticism

JC: Well they voted with me on those issues.

AM: Another thing they say – again it’s the leadership question. And people say to me how can it be that, you know, Tony Blair, much reviled today, but nonetheless he won a huge, huge landslide victory in the Labour leadership election to begin with, then he won another landslide victory in the country. He had all those votes behind him, and you voted against him 500 times. How can you then turn round to the Labour Party and say, ‘give me the loyalty that I never gave to Tony Blair.’
JC: I never attacked Tony Blair personally –

AM: No, but you voted against him.

JC: And I voted on issues of the Iraq war, on issues of the conduct of anti-terrorism and issues such as student fees and student loans. A number of issues, yes, of course I did. Over quite a long period. I also voted very happily – very happily and very proudly voted to bring in the national minimum wage, to bring in the Human Rights Act, to bring in, under Gordon Brown, the Equalities Act. And so, yes, and also –

AM: Neil Kinnock had a big mandate too, and you were part of the campaign to topple him. How can you turn round and talk to people and say, ‘I want your loyalty, the loyalty that I did not give to Kinnock or Blair?’

JC: There was a challenge that Tony Benn made to Neil Kinnock in 1988. It was unsuccessful. We then carried on working in the party to try and win the 1992 election, which sadly was not to be.

AM: Is the victory of the left inside the Labour Party more important than winning the next general election?

JC: What’s most important is to change the way politics is done in this country. To excite young people and older people into the idea that you can have a society that doesn’t divide people, that doesn’t have grotesque levels of inequality. And we don’t make the younger generation worse off than this generation and their children worse off than us. It’s a way of doing politics that has changed, partly engendered by social media, partly by social movements across Europe and North America. Times are a’changing, and the last people to understand that seem to be many of our media leader writers. If I may be so bold.

AM: You mentioned social media, and this has all been very genial, but the volumes of abuse being hurled at your opponents on the social media, by people who say they’re your supporters, is
now pretty vile and really horrible. I mean, I can read them out, but they’re really unpleasant.

JC: Nobody does vile abuse in my name with my approval, my support. I absolutely totally condemn it in every way, just as much as any abuse that’s hurled at me or anybody else. It’s simply wrong. I urge people to engage in political debate, not media abuse of any sort.

AM: So what Jay Marshall, who says he’s one of your supporters and describes Angela Eagle as, ‘you treacherous bitch.’ Judy Doran, who’s even worse, talks about Angela Eagle as, ‘Tory-supporting weasels like Angela Eagle or her gang of selfish Blairites.’

JC: Totally unacceptable language.

AM: I’ve talked to lots of MPs who are opposed to you who are now very worried that they are being forcibly deselected, that Momentum are moving into their constituencies, taking over branches and then taking over CLPs and getting them out. The mood is very, very nasty out there.

JC: I’ve made it very clear that debate should be respectful, debate should be polite, debate should be political. And I have to say that much of the criticism that’s levelled at me by Members of Parliament, some of it very unpleasant and some of it very public, is almost never political. Never political. They don’t say which particular policy –

AM: It’s also very personal, I absolutely agree with that, but –

JC: Well, it’s – surely a bit unfortunate isn’t it?

AM: Well, it is also the case that Momentum has made you its cause. If you go onto the Momentum website it doesn’t say, ‘we believe in this, that and the other,’ it doesn’t give you a list of left or leftish policies. It says, ‘we are here to support Jeremy Corbyn.’ And it’s your name and your face all over it. So in a sense you have personalised this.
JC: Well, Momentum has been developed as a way of bringing people into politics, getting people motivated.
AM: For backing Jeremy Corbyn really.
JC: Many of them are supportive of what my leadership is trying to achieve in economic policy, in human rights policy, in foreign policy, all these areas. I hope we can come together and recognise that the solutions to people’s problems out there are actually political.

AM: It seems unlikely – is there any part of you who’d prefer to split the Labour Party than stand down?
JC: Listen, I joined the Labour Party when I was 16. I’ve been in the Labour Party all my life. My family –
AM: Owen Smith says that you told him that you’d prefer to split the Labour Party than stand aside.
JC: I’ve no idea why Owen should say such a thing. I’ve had quite interesting, almost philosophical political discussion with Owen a week ago, and I’m slightly –
AM: But you didn’t say that?
JC: Absolutely not. I’m slightly surprised he would go out and say that. But I’m happy to have a discussion with Owen any time, so we can discuss how we take things forward. We worked together on the steel industry and other issues, and happy to do so again.

AM: Two other very, very big issues coming up the moment, not about Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership, though in a sense they are. The Trident vote is coming up. How will you whip your MPs?

JC: Well, I understand the vote is going to be solely on whether or not Britain has continuous at-sea deterrence, and I’m very surprised the government has put down a motion in that sense. If we, as a parliament and country vote to maintain permanent continuous at-sea deterrence, that actually takes away any opportunity for fulfilling our obligations under the nuclear non-
proliferation treaty, to reduce the number of vessels or warheads. And it actually takes away –

AM: So you’d tell Labour MPs to vote that down?
JC: We’re going to have to have a discussion about it. I recognise there are big differences of opinion on this. My views are very well known on this, the views of many others are very well known on this, and so there may well be MPs voting in different lobbies. But the point I’ll be making is that by maintaining – by a vote solely on this –

AM: So you’d actually insist on a whip?
JC: It actually reduces the opportunity for having future disarmament talks. Surely we all want to live in a nuclear-free world. It was a Labour government, by the way, that signed up to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

AM: We’re beyond ‘by the ways’ because we’ve got less than half a minute left? You heard David Davis talking about the Chilcot process, and that there’s going to be a motion of contempt in the House of Commons against Tony Blair for deceiving the House of Commons. How will you vote in that and what would you urge Labour MPs to vote?
JC: I urge colleagues to read the Butler report and read the Chilcot report about the way in which parliament was denied the information it should have had, the way in which there was lack of preparations for the post-invasion situation in Iraq and the way there were the assertions of weapons of mass destruction. Parliament must hold to account, including Tony Blair, those who took us into this particular war. That is surely what parliamentary democracy is about.

AM: I started with a yes or no. Let me try to finish with a yes or no. So vote for the contempt motion, yes or no?
JC: Well, I haven’t seen it yet, but I think I probably would.
(ends)