ANDREW MARR SHOW, 11TH JUNE, 2017

LORD HESELTINE
Deputy Prime Minister, 1995-97

AM: Welcome Lord Heseltine. You’ve written an article today in which you suggest that the EU, because of the extraordinary circumstances, offer Britain a new deal on immigration. The kind of deal they didn’t offer David Cameron, and that, in some respects, could keep us inside the EU. Would there not have to be a second referendum for that to happen?

HESELTINE: It could be, but it could be another General Election. But we’re going to face another General Election anyway in the context of the Brexit negotiations. And the problem now, put very simply, is that that Brexit is the cancer gnawing at the heart of the Conservative Party. And there’s a lot of talk of changing leader – it may well come to that – but it’s not about changing just the leader, it’s changing the policy. And why I think it needs a period of contemplation by particularly the Parliamentary Party, is to let them think through who and what is going to be the argument of the Conservative Party that will stop Jeremy Corbyn being Prime Minister in a couple of years time. It’s as serious as that.

My own view, in contrast to the European spokesman I heard talk about the need for stability and a united view of the British government, there is no stability, there is no united view and there’s not going to be in the present circumstances. We have a government which is at the mercy of events and of parliamentary votes and the DUP arrangement, whether it comes or doesn’t come, we don’t know, it’s certainly inherently unstable. I remember being in these situations before.

AN: How do you feel about the DUP?
Heseltine: Well, I’m closer to Ruth Davidson than I am to Arlene Foster and I think that will apply to large numbers of the
Conservative Party. It’s just not a stable relationship. It may keep together for a short period of time, there are great weaknesses in the argument, but it might keep the government there for a bit, but I don’t think actually that there’s any mood for a new General Election. Certainly not from the Conservatives, certainly not from the Scots Nats, and Corbyn can afford to wait. He can simply – he knows, we all know that we’re in for two things. A) an economy which is not going to improve in the immediate future, and secondly, the on-going controversy of Brexit which will reveal just how exposed the British government is in this negotiation. So he can wait and in the end by elections will give him what he needs when the public mood will be clamouring for change.

AN: You’ve seen prime ministers come and go, including female prime ministers in the past. How much longer do you think this prime minister has?

Heseltine: Well, that’s the sort of stuff that Fleet Street get preoccupied by.

AN: Kind of important -

Heseltine: If I could advise Mrs May, I would say that one great service you could do to this party is to allow the party the time to decide its future direction. Whether she would then revert to the views she held before the referendum or stick to the one she had after the referendum on Brexit I can’t tell you. But the fact is that if the Tory party doesn’t lance the boil of Brexit then you are opening the doors for Corbyn’s premiership. And I disagree with the European spokesman saying that the process is under way. That’s a sort of bureaucratic mumbo jumbo. The people who could influence Europe are Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron and if they were persuaded there was a genuine British view about immigration that could meet their own experiences domestically then I believe that the right leader of the Conservative Party could find a deal which will keep us within the European family but deal with the issue of immigration which is the underlying source of anxiety.
AN: So a lot of people will be listening to this and saying there he goes again, it’s an un-reconciled remainer rubbing his hands over the chaos and hoping that somehow after a clear referendum result we can reverse ferret and actually we can’t.

Heseltine: You know you’ve just described the Brexiteers over the last 30 years. They went on and on and on. And I think my democratic right is to do just what they did and to follow Nigel Farage’s advice when he thought he was going to lose the referendum he said there will have to be a second referendum. Nicola Sturgeon having lost is already – was until the election – talking of a second referendum. It is parliament that is sovereign in this country. They have the power and there is nothing sacrosanct about saying a Labour government has won a mandate, we must all get on our knees and thank God. I’ve spent my life fighting the decisions of the electorates electing Labour governments. In many cases we have won. It’s a matter of personal integrity. It’s a matter of national self-interest and sticking to your convictions.

AN: Lord Heseltine, fascinating to talk to you, thank you very much indeed.