

ANDREW MARR SHOW

11TH NOVEMBER 2018

EMILY THORNBERRY

SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY

AM: The Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry spoke to me a little earlier this morning and I asked her does she think that Brexit can be stopped?

ET: Well, let's start with the fact that we had a referendum and the results of the referendum ought to be abided by. But we do need to have an injection of democracy in between the result of the referendum and us going any further, and we've always said that. And what we wanted was a meaningful vote, and Theresa May is simply giving us a devil and the deep blue sea. She's saying that you can either fall off a cliff or get on this bridge to nowhere and you're going to have to vote on that. That's not a meaningful vote, that's not an injection of democracy. So we're saying if you're going to give us that, then we refuse to play that sort of game, and frankly, if you can't come up with a decent suggestion then we should have a general election. If we don't have a general election, which we think we should have, then yes, of course, all the options remain on the table and we would campaign for there to be a people's vote. But there are several stages before we get there.

AM: As I suspect you can guess, the reason I'm asking this is that Jeremy Corbyn, asked by a German newspaper directly, said, 'we can't stop it. We can't stop Brexit.' And there's a lot of people, including Labour Party members, who are desperate to stop Brexit and hope the Labour Party will help them do that, and are therefore very disappointed by what he said.

ET: Well, you have to look at the context of it. He's being asked by a German newspaper, 'why don't you just stop it?' And he was explaining that, as I've just tried to explain, that we had a

referendum, that we are democrats over and above everything else, and that we –

AM: I'm sorry to jump in –

ET: No, no, go.

AM: And they say, 'if you could stop Brexit would you?' Jeremy Corbyn: 'we can't stop it.' And the reason I asked that is that a lot of your own supporters think the party leadership is a bit complacent, a bit lazy about this whole business, and has decided that under all circumstances Brexit is going ahead, and you shouldn't.

ET: It's really not fair to say that we're lazy about this. I mean, the fact is we're not in power and we have been trying to keep this government honest throughout. You know, so that we talked about the importance of being in a customs union, and we've talked about the importance of having an agreement with the European Union, a free trade agreement that is a British-style free trade agreement which is based on the rules of the single market. We get all of that. That's the sort of things that we have to do. But, you know, there are some deeply anti-democratic forces out there and we're not going to be part of it. If we've had a referendum and that is the result, then we ought to proceed on the basis of good faith and we will do our best to try to deliver a Brexit that's good for the country. Now, we're not in power. So we have an incompetent government, who for two and a half years have not been able to deliver anything and we're running out of time and the point is this, is that as an opposition we then say you cannot go ahead like this, there must be an injection of democracy.

AM: Okay, well let me ask you about exactly what you want to do. Because you can't stop Brexit and you can't stop us leaving the EU, you say, in March next year. So you come to the House of Commons, Theresa May brings back, we must assume, some kind of deal – we don't know that, but she brings back some kind of

deal, and she says to your MPs, 'look, you may not like every aspect of it but it carries on, trade carries on, life carries on, we stay for the short term inside the customs union under this, it's this or it's no deal.' Something you yourself have called a catastrophe. And you have to make that choice.

ET: No, we don't have to make that choice. We do not have to make that choice.

AM: So how do you stop no deal happening?

ET: So what we say is –

AM: If you vote down the deal?

ET: No, no, no, no, absolutely not. We've said throughout -

AM: Well talk us through it then, talk us through it.

ET: – what we've said is, we have said you cannot simply come to the House of Commons with a bit of nonsense that makes no sense. You cannot expect the Labour Party to save you from your own backbenchers who are saying this deal makes no sense. And everybody knows it doesn't make any sense.

AM: All of this may be true, but you're still not explaining how you actually stop it happening.

ET: No, no, no.

AM: That's the question.

ET: So you accept that she comes to parliament with a deal, potentially, maybe, who knows? And then tries to put it before parliament. Her backbenchers are saying 'this doesn't work, we know it doesn't work, we can't possibly vote for it,' and the Labour Party has to save Theresa May? We want to save the country and we want to make sure that we have a –

AM: I accept all of that. I understand that, I do understand that argument. What I'm asking you is how you then stop us heading towards no deal, in practical, literal terms? You vote down her deal, therefore there is no deal, the clock is ticking. March next year is coming towards us. How do you stop us going through no deal?

ET: What we say is if you can't govern – which she won't be able to do if she can't come forward with a deal that makes any sense and that parliament can accept, then we should have a general election. That's what we should do. That's the old-fashioned way: if you can't govern, get a government that can. And we would be able to go back and negotiate properly in a way that she should have been doing for the last two and a half years.

AM: Every opposition always wants a general election. You may not get it. You may not get it. Tory MPs may want to vote down whatever deal comes through, but not want to vote for an election. You may not be able to get that. And I say again, the clock is ticking, parliament has voted. Article 50 has been triggered. March 29th next year is coming closer day by day.

ET: So we have said to her throughout, we've said to her we want a meaningful vote. That does not mean bringing us back something at the very last minute which is a bit of nonsense and you say a bit of nonsense or fall off a cliff. That is not a choice. That is not a choice. And we've always said that we must have sufficient time for you to go back to Europe and negotiate properly, and all she does –

AM: We're out of time for that now. We're out of time for that.

ET: No. She complacently sits there pushing ahead with some deal that she knows is not going to get through the House of Commons.

AM: Okay, one more time, what is the procedure? How do you actually do this?

ET: So first stage is we demand a general election, and that is what the proper thing should be. If we don't get a general election, then what we have said is all options remain on the table and we will be –

AM: There aren't any. I'm sorry, there aren't any. The Clerk of the House of Commons, Sir David Natzler, has said this is statute. Parliament has passed statute. You can't simply put a motion down to the House of Commons and reverse any of this kind of stuff. You can't amend some passing piece of legislation and stop this kind of stuff. There aren't any options on the table in front of you in the House of Commons in terms of stopping this at the moment.

ET: The difficulty is our system is such that we are in opposition. You know, there are many ways in which we would want to have proceeded over this period of time, and we have a government –

A: You lost the general election, that's the system.

ET: Yeah, but we have been doing our best to try to keep this government honest, try to keep this government focused on what's good for the country, and we have been entirely consistent about that. She knows what it is – unlike everybody else who's vacillating backwards and forwards, we've said six tests, we will vote for it, bring back a deal that we will agree to. If she's sensible, what she'll do is she'll negotiate properly and bring back a deal which means that we're in a customs union and that we're in a free market agreement with the European Union based on free market rules. And, you know, if she brings back something like that, then it may well be that she will get sufficient support. But she won't - hang on hang on, let me, because this is really important. She won't do that because she's more interested in saving her own skin and the Tory Party because what she will rely on is Labour votes and some Tory votes, and she doesn't dare do that. She ought to, because she's the leader of the country. That is not leadership.

AM: You've mentioned several times, Emily Thornberry, the six tests the Labour Party's going to apply. Keir Starmer suggested to me that these will be in the next general election manifesto of the Labour Party. That you'll put them into the manifesto. Is that right?

ET: Well, when's the election? You know, when's the election going to be? A manifesto that would have – no, no, no, no, no, if we have an election in the next few weeks then obviously a manifesto then would be very different to a manifesto that we might have to have in a year's time.

AM: Okay, within the next few weeks, the next few months, will the six tests be in your manifesto?

ET: So in the next few months what we would have in our manifesto is we would say we have a vision for this country, we have a vision for Brexit, we know that the best way to proceed on this is to try to get a deal which is – as I've said several times – the model that I've put forward.

AM: The six tests.

ET: Which is the six tests. And that's what we would be working towards, and we would go in as pragmatists and we would say to the European Union the grown-ups have arrived, we're no longer shouting at you, we are going to sit down with you pragmatically and sort out something which is good for our economy and your economy.

AM: And as grown-ups, you'd hold yourselves to the same standards you're holding the government. And at the pith of the six tests, the centre of it, is this idea of exact same benefits as staying inside the EU.

ET: Well, you say that, but there are six tests.

AM: That's the most important one.

ET: No, I think the other one which is important is making sure that we keep peace in Ireland actually. I think that's a pretty important test.

AM: Everybody is signed up for that.

ET: Everyone's signed up to it, but nobody's got a solution to it apart from the Labour Party.

AM: You have said the exact same benefits as staying inside. Can you point me to one piece, one shred of hard evidence that the EU would contemplate that?

ET: We have had discussions with the EU. I'm not going to go into the discussions that we've had. They know what our position is, they know what it is that we want to negotiate. They're not in a position to negotiate with us because unfortunately we're not the government.

AM: Okay. Michel Barnier: 'being a member of the European Union comes with rights and benefits. Third countries can never have the same rights and benefits.' Jean-Claude Juncker, 'someone who leaves the European Union cannot be in the same privileged position as a member state.' And on and on, again and again and again they have made it absolutely crystal clear you cannot have the exact same benefits after leaving as you have inside. And it's perfectly obvious.

ET: I hear you, I hear you, and I hear what they say. This will be a negotiation and the point is that when you go in to negotiate – you know, people talk about the disastrous speech that Theresa May made at Tory Party Conference, where the all the furniture fell apart and everything else, she lost her voice. That wasn't the disaster, the disaster was the one before when she put down stupid red lines that the government could never negotiate and put up ridiculous tests, and we have never done that. We have never said we'd be outside –

AM: And you're going to negotiate something unique? The EU has said again and again we will never allow a third country to have the same benefits as a member of the European Union, but you're going to come along and somehow you're going to do it? It reminds me very much of all those rightwing Brexiteers who said the negotiations are going to be a breeze and terribly easy. We just have to trust you, because you're the grown-ups and you're going to do it?

ET: We're not saying it's going to be terribly easy. We're saying that we should have spent the last two years negotiating properly. We're saying that we shouldn't have been turning up for an hour and a half with no papers and disappearing again. We would have been taking this seriously and talking to them properly. You know, before Theresa May made that speech I began those discussions with the European Union, and then she made that speech and I went back immediately afterwards and they said, 'there's no point in talking to you, Emily, you're not going to get a deal on the basis of what the prime minister is saying.' But they had been talking to me before then. I'm just saying there is a different way of doing things like this.

AM: Have you had a serious conversation with somebody serious inside the EU who has suggested to you you could get the exact same benefits after leaving as we have now?

ET: Oh, no, no, no, no. Of course not. But what we've had is we have had discussions and they know what it is that we want and they know that we are democrats, and if they were in our position they would be trying to negotiate in exactly the same way as we are. We understand each other and we respect each other, and we would work together and we would be able to get something out of that.

AM: With respect, a fantasy prospectus.

ET: It is not a fantasy prospectus.

AM: You have no evidence you can get anywhere like what you want.

ET: No, no, no. I don't agree with you. I don't agree with you at all. I believe that if you turn up and you have a proper attitude to negotiations, with clear ideas that are not contradictory about what it is that you want to achieve, you can get somewhere. The problem with the Tories has always been they have never even been able to agree amongst themselves as to what it is they want to achieve, which is why we're in the state we're in at the moment. I'm sorry but that is the truth.

AM: I'm just trying to look ahead as well. Donald Trump. Donald Trump. Have you had any conversations with your opposite number, or your potential opposite number, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo?

ET: No.

AM: Has Jeremy Corbyn had any conversation with anybody senior in the White House?

ET: I don't know about that. I don't think so, but I'm not sure. You'll have to ask him.

AM: So we will be electing – because we're going to have a general election very soon and you could be Foreign Secretary very soon – we would be electing a government at the moment which has no connection whatever with the White House of what is still, as you have said yourself, iour most important ally.

ET: We have a number of connections, important connections with America, and –

AM: But not the White House.

ET: Well, you know – well, if you're in government then you have to have connections and we'll need to make the connections. You

know, when the American President and his team were elected none of them had connections with any governments across the world. You know, they've done what they – what they've done.

AM: One domestic matter which affects your constituency as much as any, which is knife crime in London. Do you agree with the Labour Mayor of London that it could take ten to fifteen years to sort out violent crime in London?

ET: I think that it is a profound problem. I think that there are a number of things that you can do in the short term, but I think that Sadiq is right, that it speaks to a much deeper problem that cannot be fixed overnight.

AM: When Sadiq Khan said ten years to fix this, he horrified an awful lot of people in London.

ET: I understand that, but there are things, I think, that we can do immediately. And it's important that we do that. But I think it's also important to understand that the issue of knife crime, of drugs, of gangs, of the intimidation that happens, of people being frightened; when I have kids on my streets who are frightened and who think the best thing to do is to carry a knife to defend themselves. And of course carrying a knife means that you are more likely to be stabbed. And we have to keep that education going and that does mean, I'm afraid, speaking to children about this really horrible issue at an early age so they understand the true horror of knives. So it's not something that can be fixed overnight. I'm afraid Sadiq is right about that.

(ends)