ANDREW MARR: Can I start by asking about something that your leader has said today, about the ‘English votes for English laws’ proposal in the House of Commons, about which she seems very upset? A lot of English listeners will think, ‘well, that’s just absolute natural justice: you have your own parliament; English MPs should be able to vote on English-only matters’. What is the essence of your trouble with this?

STEWART HOSIE: Well, our trouble with it is that when a decision is taken in Westminster on ostensibly an English-only matter, if it changes baseline funding then there’s an automatic consequential cut to Scottish funding – a real impact immediately. And so the idea that some of the stuff certified or potentially certified as English-only won’t be and we simply cannot be carved out from voting on decisions at every single stage of the bill if it has a financial consequence to Scotland.

ANDREW MARR: So it’s that word ‘ostensibly’ and it’s the financial implications of apparently English-only measures that’s the crucial thing?

STEWART HOSIE: I think that’s absolutely critical.
ANDREW MARR:
OK. Can we move on to the budget?

STEWART HOSIE:
(over) I think that’s absolutely critical, yep.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s move to the budget itself. What can the SNP do – you’ve got some new powers coming along – what can you do to protect Scottish people from the austerity that George Osborne unveiled in London?

STEWART HOSIE:
Well, there’ll be certain things which can be done, along the lines of what the Scottish government are currently doing. So, for example, we are, at the moment, mitigating the entire consequence of the bedroom tax. But we’ve got to understand the scale of this. I mean, what George Osborne said last week is he… he was boasting he’s gonna run a surplus – around £40 billion a year – that, in essence, means he’s going to cut £40 billion a year more than he needs to, even to run a balanced economy. And we know that the welfare costs – or the welfare impact – of this alone in Scotland is somewhere in the order of £1 billion a year. So, while there will be limited powers to do some things, the scale of the impact in Scotland is huge; remember, we’re also seeing cuts to the Scottish budget, so it will be extremely difficult to mitigate everything – and that’s before we even get into the torture territory of whether or not we have the power to do certain things that we’d like to do. So, for example, on tax credits, where the big cuts have happened, tax credits are fully reserved – we can’t do anything to mitigate the tax credit cuts that George Osborne introduced last week.

ANDREW MARR:
Well, we haven’t seen all the details, but the understanding is that you are going to get powers over income tax rates and thresholds and possibly powers to have top up payments to welfare recipients. So the question is: are you going to raise taxes in Scotland to ensure some of the welfare cuts don’t fall so severely in Scotland?

STEWART HOSIE:
Well, we’ll have control if the current legislation goes through over rates and bands, not thresholds, not with starting thresholds, not the definition of income, and, remember, it’s only earned income, not unearned income on dividend or savings. So it’s actually rather modest. And in terms of the ability to top up, Universal Credit has been defined as fully reserved and any changes we wanted to make in order to top up or to mitigate require to be signed off by the Secretary of State. So there’s actually a veto by the Scottish Secretary – Scotland’s sole Tory – before we could even take those steps. So, we will look at the impact. Obviously we’re not going to write the manifesto for the 2016 election in the studio here today, but we’ll certainly look at, very carefully, what can be done within the powers that may come to Scotland.

ANDREW MARR:
What about the minimum wage? Do you want powers over minimum wage in Scotland?

STEWART HOSIE:
Yes, we do. And that was one of the priority powers we laid out at the election because, again, what we see last week, it was smoke and mirrors: a so-called living wage which isn’t; it’s simply a modest increase in the minimum wage. Now I welcome that – it’s almost exactly in line with what we said in terms of the minimum wage – but the living wage currently paid in Scotland, indeed everywhere outside of London, is higher than George Osborne is currently proposing. So we need to see how that’s going to pan out. It’s one of the reasons we wanted control over the minimum wage because it’s an important tool to genuinely make work pay, to genuinely be able to lift people out of poverty.

ANDREW MARR:
So if you had that tool, presumably you would use it for a higher minimum wage in Scotland would you?

STEWART HOSIE:
Well we laid out at the election that we wanted to see the minimum wage rise to £8.70 by the end of this parliament…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Less than George Osborne.
STEWART HOSIE:
…George Osborne went a little further last week, said it would be £9. I’m perfectly relaxed about that; it’s almost exactly in line. But let’s be clear: this is not the living wage, which he suggested it was. We already have a living wage in Scotland, which the Scottish government pays, which is higher than George Osborne proposed last week.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I turn to the other big story of the day, which is, of course, the crisis in Europe over Greece? Now Syriza fought a very strong anti-austerity campaign. They too had a referendum. They won their referendum. Now that’s all being overturned by the bankers and the European commissioners and the other countries. What’s your view of Syriza? Is the SNP feeling solidarity towards Syriza at the moment?

STEWART HOSIE:
Oh I think the SNP and almost every individual in Europe feels solidarity with the Greek people. I mean the austerity they’ve had to bear has been quite, quite extraordinary and the referendum result was extremely clear last week. Now, clearly Syriza have a mandate now to negotiate. I hope that a deal can be struck. Certainly, the Greek government, from everything I’ve seen, are perfectly happy and willing to make changes – structural changes, increase in tax, they’ve already put in a huge number of cuts – but clearly as things stand, where they are is unsustainable. So I hope that people stay around the negotiating table; I hope that a deal can be struck; I hope it does involve the proper, sensible restructuring of the Greek economy in a way that makes debt repayment sustainable and growth necessary and actually delivered. But we’ll have to wait and see given that we heard earlier the meeting of the foreign ministers has broken up.

INTERVIEW ENDS