AM: Can I ask first of all is it, so far as you’re concerned, true that rebel Tory MPs and others are working with the Speaker to take back control of the agenda of the House of Commons from the executive.

VC: Well, it’s not a conspiracy, but it is clearly happening, and we saw that demonstrated last week. And it’s very clear that opinion in parliament is crystallising. There is no support for the government’s deal. There is absolutely no support for no deal. And then that leaves us with a more limited range of options.

AM: Let me come on to those. But on the no deal question, it’s always been the case that although parliament’s against no deal – and that’s clearly the case – parliament’s not able to do very much about it, or wasn’t in the past, because in legislation it’s part of the law and therefore you need to pass another law to stop it happening. And ordinary MPs can’t initiate legislation. Is that what’s now changing?

VC: That is correct. But it is also very clear that no deal isn’t something we just fall into, it is a choice of government. They can bring forward legislation to stop Article 50. Sir John Major was advocating that this morning, and it’s slightly what should happen.

AM: But if they don’t, do you think backbenchers and opposition parties can now do that?

VC: Yes. That’s exactly what will happen and that’s exactly what we should be doing, because it would be absolutely outrageous and unforgivable if the chaotic circumstances of a no deal were allowed to happen. The government itself has demonstrated the folly and the dangers of going down this road and it can’t just allow it to happen by accident. So I think parliament will take control of this process, will insist that we pursue the option of no
Brexit. It can happen in one of two ways: it can happen simply by cancelling Article 50, which I think would be resented by lots of people. Or it can happen by parliament saying actually we go back to the public to have the final say through the people’s vote. I think that is now much more likely.

AM: You suggest in the papers this morning that you are going to, under some circumstances, back Jeremy Corbyn in these debates, in these votes. What would he need to do to win your support?
VC: Well, we’re not talking party political alignments with Jeremy Corbyn. I don’t know where that comes from. But, you know, we do believe that she should come off the fence. He’s played a very ambiguous role in Brexit, we don’t know where the Labour Party is. He was wanting to deliver Brexit a few weeks ago. But we do think he now has a key role and I hope he’ll be discussing this with you later in this programme where he could potentially change the game by coming firmly behind the idea of a people’s vote. That’s what most of his supporters and his MPs want, and with the other opposition parties and a large number of Conservatives I think that’s where we will get.

AM: We’ll certainly talk to him about that later on. But you talked earlier on about opinion crystallising in the House of Commons. And I just wonder how that’s crystallising, because on the remain side there’s also been a big division between those people who are absolutely set on another referendum, on the one hand, and those who are looking at what’s called Norway plus. In other words, Britain just staying inside the customs union and the single market in some form or the other. Is that division now beginning to end?
VC: Well, there is a division. I mean, there are some people who are looking for that, as it were, Norway compromise, which has many of the features of the European Union but aren’t actually members of it. I mean, the problem with that has always been, you know, why are we bothering to leave? We’re still subject to all
the rules and paying in cash and all this kind of thing, freedom of movement, but we have no say over it. And I would be very surprised if that progresses very far. But you know, there are clearly people who are striving to get a compromise and we're certainly not going down that road. I mean, we're very clear, we do need to send this back to the public for the final say.

AM: People are reading this morning about all sorts of furtive plots in the House of Commons and strange goings on in the cloakroom and the rest of it. Are you talking to Cabinet Ministers, are you talking to the opposition, directly to Jeremy Corbyn, directly?
VC: Well, I'm certainly talking to Cabinet Ministers, other Conservatives and Labour and nationalists, other parties, and it's absolutely right that we should do so. I mean, part of the problem with had bedevilled this whole issue is narrow party politics. And the government approached this as an internal issue within the Conservative party, and of course it's fallen apart. The Labour Party's also been divided. We're going to have to work across party boundaries, not just now, to bring the country together at the end of it.

AM: I talked about the clock ticking towards no deal. If we get to no deal and we go out with no deal, do you think we're going to see Cabinet resignations and the beginning of falling apart of the Cabinet?
VC: Well, we will see much more than that. They're talking they will leave the party if this disaster is allowed to happen. I mean, let's be very clear about what the issue is here. I mean, we're potentially hundreds of thousands of jobs at risk if we go through this. People are trivialising it with these glib phrases about WTO rules, which don't really exist.

AM: Do you think you're going to actually see Conservatives coming across the floor and joining the Liberal Democrats, for instance?
VC: I don’t know what they will do. I certainly believe that our party will be greatly strengthened as a result of this. But I’m not treating this as a party political game.

AM: Which leads me to the final real conundrum in all of this story. Why is it the Liberal Democrats, as a fervently pro-remain party in a country where there are many, many millions of people want to stay inside the EU are doing so badly. You’re in single figures at the moment in the polls. What’s going wrong?
VC: Well, the dust hasn’t settled on this whole Brexit issue, and when it does people will make up their mind. There was a YouGov poll a week ago that suggested that if the Labour Party remain in their current position our support will go up to 25 per cent overtaking the Labour Party. This is reflected also on the ground. Every Thursday we have local by-elections. we’re doing as well as that. So I think when this settles in a few weeks’ time our position will come across as very much stronger than it appears to be.

AM: Do you ever look in the mirror and think, do you know, Sir Vince, you may be the problem?
VC: Why am I the problem? (laugh)
AM: Well, I’m just wondering, because in a sense you should be driving this, you should be on the front pages all the time. You are an absolutely central part of this debate and yet the Lib Dems are not cutting through. That is vital, isn’t it?
VC: No, it’s not a personal problem. I’m here talking to you, I’m going round the country speaking to rallies and leading the party. We have been in this position now for eight years, since the beginning of the coalition. We are rebuilding, membership’s very strong, we’re doing well locally and I think we will break through whoever is leading the party in a few years’ time.
AM: As ever when we have you on, it’s very nice to talk to you, Sir Vince. Thanks very much indeed.
(ends)