ANDREW MARR SHOW
EMILY THORNBERRRY

AM: This week Jeremy Corbyn appeared to signal a big shift towards another referendum, but it’s still not clear, as we’ve just heard, if the party will now campaign to remain in all circumstances. And so let’s ask the Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry. Is Labour now a Remain party?

ET: Well, our policy is that anything that this government comes forward with, particularly if they’re going to come forward with no deal, we are going to ask for there to be a public vote, we’re going to ask for Remain to be on the ballot paper and we’re going to campaign to remain. So sounds pretty Remain to me.

AM: That’s a flow chart. I ask again, is Labour now a Remain party in all circumstances. Ed Davey says no, you’re not because you go into the next election committed to a Labour Brexit.

ET: No, we’re not.

AM: You’re not going into the next election –

ET: Can I just – let’s just squash all of this. Our policy is that anything that this government comes forward with, or indeed any government comes forward with, we wish to put it back to the people. We want Remain to be on the ballot paper and we will campaign to remain. That’s our policy. Now, the trade unions have a different policy and people are getting that confused and Ed Davey perhaps doesn’t understand and he thinks that part B is Labour’s policy. It’s not.

AM: So at the next election there are no circumstances in which Labour will be campaigning for Brexit?

ET: I don’t know what’s going to be in our next manifesto, if that’s what you’re asking me.

AM: If you’ve just said what you’ve just said that must follow, must follow.
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ET: Yeah, well, I understand, I understand. I’m telling you what our policy is, and then I have to tell you that I can’t tell you what’s happening in our next manifesto because that’s the question people keep asking us and I think that it’s not fair because no party can tell you what’s in their next manifesto. And we’re a big old democratic party with half a million members and we have to consult them, and we will work out what our policy is and what our manifesto will be when the time comes.

AM: And your shift or your pivot this week was towards a referendum. Now, the problem with that is that there are no –
ET: I’m speaking this afternoon –
AM: At the People’s Vote rally, I know that.
ET: - in the People’s Vote really, yeah.

AM: Exactly, it’ll be great fun I’m sure. But in the House of Commons you don’t have the votes for that, and that is the hard truth. Therefore, if the pivot to a referendum means anything at all you need a general election to get there. And in that general election the Labour Party needs to put a referendum into its manifesto. Needs to. Otherwise it means nothing.
ET: Of course.

AM: So the Labour Party will go into the referendum – into the general election with a referendum in its manifesto?
ET: I mean, I would have thought so. But I am not someone –
AM: Just say yes.
ET: Yes, I get the logic. It’s just that I’m just being a bit disciplined about this, because I’m not allowed to write the manifesto. The Tories may have a couple of clever boys that go into a backroom and write their manifesto, we do it democratically. So I can tell you what I would argue for, and I can tell you what I think is likely to be in the manifesto, but I can’t tell you what will be in the manifesto because it isn’t written yet and we haven’t got an election.
AM: Let’s look at what we do know is likely to happen, which is the Conservative leadership contest going on. It looks as if Boris Johnson’s going to win that and he’s going to come into parliament committed, if necessary, to taking us out without a deal at the end of October. Now, Labour MPs face a genuine, really hard choice in those circumstances. Do they allow the government to pass some kind of withdrawal agreement, do they vote with Boris Johnson as Caroline Flint, in that chair, was suggesting a couple of weeks ago to get the withdrawal agreement and to avoid no deal? Or do they say, no, no, we’ll have nothing to do with the Tories under any circumstances and risk no deal? Which way would you advise them to go?

ET: We should not be blackmailed. The point is that we have never agreed with Theresa May’s deal. If Boris Johnson comes back with Theresa May’s deal in a different font, it still has all the problems that it had before. And so he’s threatening us with, ‘agree with this or we will have no deal.’ That is unacceptable and we need to have an injection of democracy, as I’ve always said, and that should either be a popular vote whereby he tells us, okay, do or die – that’s what he’s saying, he’s saying do or die. Have you heard that? He’s talking about do or die. What does that mean? The death of Britain unless he gets Brexit? I mean, what? Really we need to go back to the people. We need to say to them, ‘is this what you voted for when you voted to leave the European Union? Did you vote for this nonsense?’ And that’s why we need to go back and ask them. If we don’t get that we need to have a general election, but frankly, we cannot just hand our country over to Boris Johnson and let him do whatever he wants with it. We’ve got some sort of gentlemanly coup going on at the moment, with people in the home counties deciding who the next prime minister is going to be.

AM: Did you watch the Panorama programme on anti-Semitism?
ET: I did.
AM: And what did you feel about it?
ET: I thought it was awful.
AM: The programme was awful or the revelations awful?
ET: Both, I think. But more importantly, the revelations. And more importantly, the fact that this has been going on for a very long time and despite the efforts of our new General Secretary and the fact that she has improved processes and she has done a lot of work on it, it still has not been sorted out.

AM: We watched testimony during that from former members of the party itself. Young people often very, very upset indeed. Do you regard them as credible witnesses?
ET: I think that we shouldn’t be going for the messengers, we should be looking at the message. I think that is what is important.

AM: Which is not what the Labour Party has said about it. The Labour Party has said, ‘there are already lots of Labour MPs who are talking to us saying they want to help get this over the line. It appears that these are former, disaffected officials who have both personal and political axes to grind. This throws into doubt their credibility as sources.’ Do you agree with that?
ET: I can understand that and I understand that the Labour Party has concerns, and you know the Labour Party has put in a complaint about the way in which that programme was done. My point is something different, which is nobody can pretend that there isn’t an ongoing problem within the Labour Party about anti-Semitism, about our processes for dealing with it. And I think it’s right, it’s fair to say that Panorama didn’t really look at the way in which we’ve improved our processes. But I don’t pretend that they’re perfect because they’re not. And that’s why I think it’s – go on.

AM: It’s not just the BBC. This is going on and on. The Sunday Times has another whistleblower, Tim Dexter, this morning. Can we just hear a little bit of what he said.
TIM DEXTER QUOTE:

"Within an average week we would see dozens, if not hundreds of complaints of anti-Semitism being received by the party. Sometimes this could be the most vile, disgusting things where people were openly talking about the holocaust, how it wasn't a bad thing, how it was deserved. The power to make initial decisions on cases lay with the disputes team. That power was taken away from the disputes team into the hands of an individual person. On a number of occasions on a quite regular basis you'd see decisions when they did come back seemed to be incredibly lenient."

AM: He's a member of your disputes team, or was. Do you accept what he's saying?
ET: Some of the disputes, some of the complaints will have been complaints from me. I mean, I get – I'm not Jewish but I get a lot of abuse as well. And I report it. I mean, you know, my children are of Jewish heritage. I hate the fact that they have friends who say, 'we cannot support Labour in current circumstances.'

AM: And on it goes. That's the trouble. Another of the former investigations officers, Dan Hogan, has said, 'Labour MPs,' – and he's talking about people like you – 'need to be much – have a much firmer stance on this and demand that people are held accountable. This means senior Corbyn aides are removed from their positions, heads need to roll.'
ET: I don't want to personalise this, because I think this issue is more important than a soap opera. I think that the Labour Party has to deal with this issue. And frankly I welcome the fact that the – it is – it's a shame and a disgrace that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission have been brought in to look at the Labour Party. But they have and I think we should now welcome it, and I think we should open – wait a minute – we should open our doors up and we should say to them, 'right, we have been trying to
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improve our processes, clearly it’s still not working, can you help us?’ And if we can set up, as a result of working with them – and I know that they’re listening to us and I know that we’re listening to them – hang on – if we can set up a process that is tough and that works and is an example of good practise, I actually kind of think that that would be – that at least would be a good result. And other parties, perhaps, who also have problems with racism, might look at it as an example of good practise.

AM: Well, let’s turn to exactly what that might mean. Would you support a change in the structures to allow a completely independent unit inside the Labour Party, independent of the leader’s office, to look at anti-Semitism allegations? Because that’s what it needs.

ET: I have been saying for – since Shami Chakrabarti came out with her report during the time of the previous General Secretary, where she said we need to have an independent process, independent of politicians. We needed to have a quasi-judicial process. And unfortunately those recommendations were not implemented in full fast enough, and that, I think, is one of the reasons we are in the state that we’re in now. I think that that report was traduced by too many groups who didn’t really look at what it was that she was saying. If we had done that then, we wouldn’t necessarily be in the mess we are in now.

AM: I understand all of that. But just to be clear, you would support an independent unit to look at these allegations?

ET: I would support whatever the Equalities and Human Rights Commission comes out with as recommendations. We need to hear what it is that they say and we need them to work with us.

AM: Have you read the Labour Party’s response to the Commission?

ET: No, I haven’t.
AM: Do you think you should read it? Do you think you should be given it to read?
ET: I think the trouble is that we have a – again this is part of our structure, and it would be interesting to look at it – but we have the Shadow Cabinet that deals with the politics, national politics, and we have the National Executive Committee that deals with the party. I’m not on the National Executive Committee, which is why I’ve not been given a copy of it.

AM: Tom Watson thinks that the Shadow Cabinet should read it as well. He’s been engaged in what has become an extraordinary war of words at the top of the party. Swear words cast all around, people getting very, very angry. Jennie Formby, the General Secretary particularly angry. This is what she said to Tom Watson recently. She said, ‘By choosing to ignore the steps taken by the party and commenting to uncritically about the Panorama programme, you are complicit in creating a perception that anti-Semitism is more prevalent in the Labour Party.’ So you think that he’s complicit in that?
ET: I wish he wasn’t attacking somebody who’s going through chemotherapy. I think that is a mistake. She’s the General Secretary of the Labour Party, but we know that she’s very ill. I think it’s completely inappropriate to personalise this. That is my point.

AM: Len McCluskey called him an ‘effing disgrace’.
EM: I know. I know.
AM: Do you agree with that?
ET: I think that Len and Tom and Jennie have a great deal of history, and we are not talking soap opera. I don’t care, I’m afraid, about the soap opera. I actually care about the fact that I have a Jewish member of staff who when she goes to family weddings can’t say who she works for – even though I fight on this issue a lot, she cannot admit who she works for or what she
does because she doesn’t want to spend the rest of the day defending herself. I don’t want that. I want us to sort this out.

AM: But for goodness’ sake, this has gone on for two years now. Why is it not being sorted out? Who’s responsible?
ET: I think that it is – there’s a large number of reasons, that somebody could spend quite a long time about it. I think that we didn’t follow Shami’s recommendations, and we should have. I think that we didn’t understand the importance of quasi-judicial processes. I think that people also, you know, on the one hand they say there shouldn’t be political interference, and then they say Jeremy Corbyn should sort this out. Which obviously there’s a contradiction in that. If we had a process that was robust, that was properly-funded – I mean, it is better, it’s four times faster than it used to be – so we have come a long way, but I’m afraid we still need to go much further.

AM: Okay. One last thing I must ask you about. Sir Kim Darroch and the row over that. Do you think the Mail On Sunday was right to publish those tele- you may well be Foreign Secretary in due course, you probably know Kim Darroch and you know what’s happened to him. Was the Mail right to publish?
ET: Listen, it’s newsworthy. Any journalist who’s been handed something –
AM: By and large, yes.
ET: It was wrong for it to be leaked. It was wrong for President Trump to throw a wobbler and behave like a toddler. It was wrong for Theresa May to be as weak as she was. But the real villain of the piece is Boris Johnson, who refused to stand with one of our most senior diplomats. That is not the way to behave.

AM: Emily Thornberry, thanks very much indeed for talking to us today.
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