AM: I called you Sadiq Khan. I’ve been calling you Sadiq Khan for years but I’m wrong.
SK: Well, it’s not the most important thing, but yeah, my name is Sadiq (pronounced Sar-dik). It comes from the Arabic alphabet, and I don’t really mind if it’s Sadiq or it’s Sadiq. But yeah, it is Sadiq.
AM: I’ll still with Sadiq then.
SK: That’s be nice. My mum will be grateful.

AM: Okay, when you became Mayor of London you made big promises about getting on top of knife crime in this capital and you’ve completely failed haven’t you?
SK: You can’t begin a conversation about knife crime without talking about the victims and the families affected. I meet them on a regular basis, so it is the case, we have a problem in London and around the country with an increase in violent crime. Violent crime began rising in London and around the country in 2014. Serious youth violence since 2012. So we’re doing lots of things from City Hall to grapple with this, and the good news is – and it is good news – that this Prime Minister and this Home Secretary finally accept there is a link between massive cuts and the increase in violent crime.

AM: So that people can understand what we’re talking about, let’s just look at some of the numbers of knife incidents throughout your time as Mayor. Under 10,000 in 2016 and right up to nearly 15,000, 5,000 more last year. That is a huge increase. Something fundamental is going wrong. What do you think’s going wrong?
SK: Yeah, and this graph demonstrates, if you look back a bit, the increase – we’ve looked at this – in serious youth violence began in 2012. Violent crime 2014, across the country. And there is a
link between deprivation – I’m not excluding criminality by the way – deprivation, inequality, some exclusions as well. Also the fact there’s poor mental health and the increase in violent crime. Now, some of this is of course, and its accepted now by the government, the cuts in police numbers. Some of it though is the massive cuts in preventative service. So if a young person has had the youth club closed down, the youth services being cut, after schools facilities not there available, what happens is they may join a criminal gang or think it’s okay to pick up a knife.

AM: Now, I know that some of those things are not in your powers as London Mayor, but nonetheless there should be a sense of national emergency about this. There should be much more going on, much more coordination. Haven’t you slightly been asleep at the wheel when this has been happening?
SK: Well, we’ve been doing lots of things in London since May 2016. We could talk about some of them. So using council tax and business rates to invest in more policing at a time they’ve been cut from national government. Using council tax and business rates to invest in young people, including youth facilities. But also we’ve set up in London, England’s first violence reduction unit. What I’ve had for the last three years is a government saying, ‘it’s not our problem, it’s your fault.’ And I’m trying to work with government, and I’ve got to say this Home Secretary and this Prime Minister have finally woken up to what we’ve been saying. But I tell you this, every day when there are further cuts being made to councils, to youth services, to our police it means, every day another young person potentially losing their lives.

AM: So you’re a rare Labour politician in welcoming Priti Patel into the Home Office and Boris Johnson into Number 10?
SK: Well, the two former prime ministers, David Cameron and Theresa May, refused to accept cuts have consequences. I’ve worked now– Priti Patel’s my fourth Home Secretary. I’ve already met with her. She understands the importance of investing in
police. I’m trying to persuade her and the government to also invest in youth services, preventative services, young people. Let’s divert young people away from criminal gangs or picking up a knife.

AM: Don’t you just need to just up the amount of energy and involvement in this? 109 murders in London so far this year. Worse than last year already. You are going to be remembered as the Mayor who’s overseen bloodstained streets if this carries on.

SK: Well, look, we’re talking about people here. There are 22 teenagers who’ve lost their lives and I think of their families. What this is about is trying to first stabilise and then reduce violent crime. There is some progress being made. So in the last year, if the Commissioner was here she’d be talking about the fact that over the last year we’ve had a 20 per cent reduction in young people involved in violent crime. We’ll talk about the fact that the Violence Crime Task Force by City Hall has made more than 6,000 arrests and taken more than 2,000 weapons – and that includes guns and knives – off our streets. So we’re making progress, but what we need is, from the government is more investment. But also we need to realise this is a challenge that’ll be solved by all of us, not just the police, but by parents, by teachers, by youth workers, by politicians, by faith leaders working together.

AM: You mentioned guns there. Guns are becoming much more freely available on the streets of London. There’s clearly a gang war going on in parts of North London at the moment. They’re using guns more. What can you do about that? What can the police do about that? And the other thing that you mentioned there is exclusions from schools, large numbers of kids have been kicked out of schools because they want higher exam results, and there aren’t enough places in the pupil protection units around the country. They’re not being looked after properly and they are fresh meat for the gang leaders to grab.
SK: These are both issues. So teachers work incredibly hard trying to make sure their classes in schools are safe places to teach all children. I don’t criticise a head teacher who decides to exclude a child because he or she brings a knife to school and is violent. What we need to do is much earlier intervention to stop a young person doing those sorts of things. Children who get excluded often have adverse childhood experiences. In Scotland they’ve managed to reduce exclusion to almost zero. In London it’s almost doubled over the last four or five years. The pupil referral units often do good work, but often they’re places where people can be on a pathway to joining gangs. As far as guns is concerned, the Met Police is working incredibly hard with the National Crime Agency, working incredibly hard with police forces around Europe – these are organised criminals bringing guns into our country. I tell you this, it will be more harder and not easier to take guns off our streets if we’re outside the European Union where we can’t work with our partners in the EU.

AM: You mentioned the EU, let’s talk about – we’ve been talking about one group of people in London, let’s talk about another group of people, living in executive flats, the people in the City at the moment. As a loyal Labour man, are you in favour of the proposals to end bankers’ bonuses, to take ten per cent of the value of companies and hand it to workers, and of a so-called Robin Hood or transaction tax? Are all those good things? SK: Well, that’s not a fair description of our policies nationally. But let me describe those things. I think it’s right and proper that companies who operate across borders are taxed properly and pay their fair share. What we’ve got to be careful about is having a tax that just applies in London to companies that are international. And that’s why it’s really important the work that John McDonnell has done over the last two or three years speaking to enlist in and engaging with companies, not just across London but across the country as well. We want everybody, whether you’re a small business person, whether you’re a medium
or a big business, to pay your fair share of tax. That also means, by the way, treating your workers fairly.

AM: Are you hearing any worries in the City at the moment about Labour policies which might result in companies moving out of the UK and into other places if Labour comes to power?

SK: The big concern in London from the businesses I meet – and I meet businesses every day – is a catastrophic no deal Brexit. Brexit in itself is a big concern to businesses. My argument to those businesses is actually the underlying strengths of our city will still be there even if, god forbid, we leave the EU. But they’re really concerned. That’s led to a pause of investment. That’s led to a pause in relation to making big decisions. And that’s why we need to make sure that the British public are given a final say. Do we accept the terms of exit negotiated by this prime minister, with the option of staying in the EU.

AM: I’m going to come to Brexit in just a second. But before I do, John McDonnell says that capitalism is on borrowed time. Do you agree with that?

SK: Well, that’s not words I would use to describe it. What I do think though is the market’s not working. We need to interfere with the market so it works better. I’ll give you one example. Since I’ve become Mayor we’ve more than doubled the numbers of employers who pay the London living wage. A good example of the market not working, so just interfere with the market, working with employers to pay a living wage.

AM: Let’s turn finally them to Brexit. Tom Watson, the deputy leader of the Labour Party says it’s now time for Labour to be unambiguously and unequivocally backing remain. Do you agree with that?

SK: Well, I think we are a remain party. I think what we’ve got to recognise though is that –
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AM: Does that mean in these new circumstances you’re in favour of revoking Article 50?
SK: Well, since December I’ve said what we should do is take away the panic, remove Article 50 to give us time to resolve our negotiations with the European Union, to understand what we want.
AM: Revoke Article 50 means, in effect, cancelling the 2016 referendum.
SK: Well, no, because you can re-serve Article 50. The issue is the mistake made by Theresa May was serving notice to quit before realising the terms of our exit.

AM: Let’s be clear, your policy. So you revoke Article 50, the whole thing is over, as it were, and then you put it back on again. You restart the whole process all over again for years and years and years.
SK: Nobody sensible would serve notice to quit on their accommodation before they’ve found new digs. Nobody would quit a job before they’d found a new job. The mistake made by Theresa May, because of her personal interest and political interest, was serving Article 50 before understanding the terms we were going to negotiate with the European Union, what we want from the European Union. What I’m saying is let’s remove the panic. There is no reason for us to spend the next 45 panicking. Remove Article 50, lets then work out what we want, if need be negotiate again with the EU. The best thing of all, though, give the British public the final say. We now know –
AM: You’re in favour of a referendum before or after we leave the EU?
SK: Well, I think the key thing is, firstly, avoid a no deal Brexit. Once that’s been resolved, let’s have a general election. But there are lots of moving parts.

AM: On your proposal, it would be meaningless really for the Labour Party to come into power and then try to renegotiate
another form of Brexit. If you think that we should stay inside the EU and we should revoke Article 50 there’s no point in a negotiation is there?

SK: Well, look, I think a negotiation with the EU won’t make things more favourable than remaining in the EU. I’m quite clear we’re a remain party. We should give the British public a final say now that we know the terms of exit from the EU. That should be one of the options on the ballot paper, with the other option of staying in the EU.

AM: Because if I was working for Jeremy Corbyn, I would say, ‘hold on a second,’ he is the one senior politician in this country who is trying to bring the country together. He’s trying to straddle this very, very painful divide between leave and remain by offering people a leave option and a remain option in another referendum. But people like you and Tom Watson, who are saying, ‘no, no, let’s go for revoke,’ and so forth are undermining his position.

SK: No, that’s not right. I think it’s right – and Jeremy Corbyn’s deserves huge credit for the movement over the two-three years. Put aside political interest in relation to not having a general election, and working with other parties to avoid a no deal Brexit. And actually I support the position of the party, which is, on a ballot paper to have a credible leave option and a – in my view, the best option – which is to remain in the EU. My view, though, is as a party we should campaign for – well, quite, I’m not what benefits a renegotiation can achieve. What’s clear though is that whether it’s no deal Brexit, whether it’s the deal negotiated by Theresa May, whether it’s an improvement that a Labour government may achieve, that is far less preferable than the option of staying in the EU. And once we’ve got that public vote we should campaign to remain in the EU.
AM: The voters of Barking and Sutton and Hillingdon and other parts of London who voted to leave the EU, you’re offering them nothing at all. You’re cancelling their views.

SK: No. not at all. That’s why I’m saying that there should be a public vote. Now, what the Lib Dems are doing by just revoking Article 50 without giving a public vote are not respecting their views and not allowing them to have a say. I can’t think of anything more democratic than giving the British public a say. ‘Do you accept the terms of exit,’ whether it’s the terms negotiated by Theresa May, the no deal Brexit from Boris Johnson or any other leave option, with the option of staying in the EU. And here in London we know the benefits of being part of the European Union, but also the benefits of being an international pluralistic city.

AM: Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

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