

NICOLA STURGEON

ANDREW MARR SHOW

15th December 2019

NICOLA STURGEON, MSP

First Minister of Scotland

AM: Nicola Sturgeon, welcome. That is the problem. How are you going to make him do something he absolutely says he won't?

NS: Well, first of all can we just focus on the essentials here. I've just won an election in Scotland on the proposition that people should have a choice over our future. The Scottish Conservatives by contrast fought that election on a single issue of opposition to an independence referendum and they lost. They lost vote share, they lost more than half of their seats. In what other kind of democracy would the party that lost the election, which in Scotland is the Conservatives, get to dictate to the party that won the election? Now I accept that the Tories will rage against reality for as long as they can but the fact of the matter is Scotland has chosen a very different kind of future to the one chosen by much of the rest of the UK and they can't stand in the way of the will of the Scottish people. They tried to do that in the 90s over the establishment of a Scottish parliament and they found that they couldn't sustain that position and they will not be able to sustain this position either, because it's not democratic. Fundamentally, democracy has to be honoured and respected.

AM: But I come back to that original problem which is you are currently part of the United Kingdom. The Conservatives have a big majority in the United Kingdom parliament, Boris Johnson has been absolutely crystal clear that when you come with your Section 30 request he is going to say no. He's going to give you to use the Scottish phrase, 'the bums rush.' And actually you have nothing then to do about that. What do you do?

NS: Well look, I'm going to pursue – I'm going to pursue the plan that I won a mandate for. I think that's the democratic thing to do. D'you know I've won, my party won a bigger share of the vote

in Scotland than Boris Johnson won UK wide and yet nobody is suggesting, not even me, that Boris Johnson doesn't have a mandate, certainly in England for his Brexit deal. So you know this is about democracy and I'm going to, I think with the greatest respect to you and to other interviewers, it's the Conservatives that should be under real forensic pressure in interviews to say what their plan B is because their plan A, which in this election was about opposition to an independence referendum, was defeated. It wasn't defeated marginally, it was defeated comprehensively. So I think I've got the right, because I've earned that right in an election to pursue the plan that I put before the Scottish people and got an endorsement and a mandate for.

AM: So to be clear you take a Section 30 request to London, this week?

MS: I'm going to set out this week the detailed democratic case for the transfer of power. I spoke to Boris Johnson on Friday evening and he said –

AM: Was he sympathetic?

NS: - he would listen to that, have discussions about that. Of course he reiterated his opposition to independence, and that I think is the crucial point. Boris Johnson and I will continue to have diametrically opposed views on the substantive question of independence. I don't presume that everybody who voted SNP on Thursday is yet prepared to back independence. But it's not for me to decide that question, it's not for Boris Johnson to decide that question, it's for the people of Scotland to decide that question. On Thursday the Scottish people rejected Boris Johnson and the Tories, we said again –

AM: I understand that, we all understand that.

NS: - no to Brexit and made clear we wanted our future in our own hands.

AM: Right, so in practical terms, apart from setting out the case which we understand and which you said, what else do you do?

NS: I will make that case and I will argue the case for democracy to prevail.

AM: Yeah, but beyond that?

NS: Now you know as you would expect – well look, I will take it step by step and I'm going to – you're asking me right now two days after winning an emphatic victory in an election on the strength of this proposition. You're asking me to concede that Scottish democracy is going to be completely ignored. Now I think the risk for the Conservatives here, although I should be quite relaxed about it, is that the more they try to block the will of the Scottish people the more utter contempt they show for Scottish democracy, the more they're going to increase support for independence, which in a sense is them doing my job for me. So you know the momentum and the mandate is on the side of certainly those of us who believe Scotland should be independent, but it's also on the side of those who might not be decided about independence but agree with that principle that it's for the people of Scotland to make the decision. It's not for Westminster governments to dictate what Scotland's future should be.

AM: But presumably Boris Johnson and his cabinet believe they can simply sit this one out. They can say no to your request and just carry on and my original question seems to me to be still relevant, is what does Scotland do then? Do you have, the plan B so called was discussed in your – and rejected at your party conference, I remember that, but for an advisory or indicative referendum to be held in Scotland anyway, is that a possibility?

NS: Well look, I've said that a referendum has to be legal because it has to be accepted and legitimate if we're to win independence. Now I'll take the steps I have to take as they fall to be taken, but I have a right to say that the plan that was endorsed in the election is the one that should be honoured and you remember, because I think you wrote about it extensively, the period of the late 80s, the early 90s when I was a much younger politician, the Tories then were adamant there would never ever be a Scottish

parliament. They couldn't sustain that position because the will of the Scottish people was too strong and democracy ultimately was honoured. So recent history tells us that this dictatorial attitude of a Conservative government saying that they will determine the future of Scotland, not the people of Scotland, doesn't hold because it can't hold in a democracy. So, if I'm sounding reasonably relaxed about this it's because I know that the momentum and the mandate is on the side of those of us who want Scotland to be able to choose our own future.

AM: But you said you'll take the steps you take when you have to take them. Going back to that period of the Claim of Right there was mass, mass mobilisation, there was a lot of protest and there was a sense that if we're not going to be given it in Scotland we're going to do it for ourselves. And what I'm really wondering is whether there is something similar about to happen in Scotland now. In other words are you going, have you got plans for some kind of civil disobedience or protest, if the Conservatives keep saying no?

NS: These things shouldn't even be in question and I've been very clear, I want a process to be legal, to be constitutional, that's my position and I come back to the point – and I'm not trying to evade the question because you know it really is such a subversion of democracy that you're sitting here – and this is not incidentally it's not intended as a criticism of your interview or the lines of questioning, but it is a subversion of democracy that we're sitting here the Sunday after an election and you're talking to the leader of the party that overwhelmingly won the election and I'm under pressure to say what I'm doing because the mandate I have won is not going to be honoured by the party that got roundly defeated in Scotland. I mean it just is such a perversion and subversion of democracy that it will not hold. And that's the fundamental point that I think people should understand.

AM: In a sense the problem that we have here there is that we're talking about British democracy and Scottish democracy and they're not quite the same thing. You know there's two different systems, at the moment linked -

NS: Well –

AM: - well there are. At moment linked together. Let's finish off by saying again I think Boris Johnson is simply going to sit in Number 10 and say no to you. What is your direct message to him?

NS: Well that won't hold and if he thinks that – and actually I said this to him on Friday night on the telephone, if he thinks saying no is the end of the matter then he's going to find himself completely and utterly wrong. And you know, he cannot – as I was saying yesterday and it's again quite a fundamental point of democracy, you cannot hold Scotland in the union against its will. You cannot sort of just lock us in a cupboard and turn the key and hope that everything goes away. If the union, if the United Kingdom is to continue then it can only be by consent and if Boris Johnson is confident in the case for the union then he should be confident enough to make that case and allow people to decide. Because if it's to continue it can only be by the will and the consent of the people of Scotland. Scotland cannot be imprisoned within the United Kingdom against its will and these are just basic statements of democracy and you know the Tories might rage against the reality of what happened on Thursday for a while, I fully expect that they will, but ultimately they're going to have face up and confront that reality because the will of the Scottish people cannot be ignored. And that's just the simple fact of the matter.

AM: Millions of us will be watching very, very carefully. Nicola Sturgeon, thanks very much for talking to us today.

Ends