ANDREW MARR SHOW

MICHAEL GOVE, MP
ENVIRONMENT SECRETARY

AM: It must feel slightly surreal being Michael Gove. You’re one of the main faces of the Leave campaign, very positive about our economic future, then you stand for the leadership, that goes badly, the winner Theresa May sacks you and then she brings you back and you’re reincarnated as a moderately green Environment Secretary. And now as per this morning the chief salesman for Mrs May’s Brexit compromise. Welcome.

MG: Welcome Andrew. It’s very kind of you to express such generous concern for me. But it’s not about me, it’s not about any individual –

AM: It’s about Brexit.

MG: - it’s about a team making sure that we deliver the referendum mandate. And when you had Sadiq on earlier, I felt it was interesting and troubling that he wants essentially to frustrate the vote that we had two and a half years ago. People voted clearly, 17.4 million people voted to leave the European Union and Sadiq is essentially saying stop, let’s delay that whole process, let’s throw it into chaos. And I think that would be a profound mistake.

AM: And so what we have instead of that in front of the country is the Chequers compromise. Can I ask you, if that goes through – if it happens, if it’s brought back and voted on, is that permanent or is it a temporary solution?

MG: I think it’s the right solution for this country to leave the European Union on the basis of what we’ve negotiated. And I think it’s absolutely right because we would be outside the single market, we would be outside the customs union, we would be
outside the Common Agricultural Policy and outside the Common Fisheries Policy. We’d have an end to free movement.

AM: Okay, you’ve eloquently and fluently refused to answer my question. Is it permanent or is it temporary?

MG: No, I think it’s the right answer. Now the one thing of course –

AM: So permanent?

MG: Well yeah, but there’s one critical thing. A future Prime Minister could always choose to alter the relationship between Britain and the European Union, but the Chequers approach is the right one for now because we’ve got to make sure that we respect that vote and take advantage of the opportunities of being outside the European Union. This week, as Environment Secretary, I had the opportunity to explain in detail how we could enhance our environment and at the same time improve food production outside the European Union on the basis of the deal that the Prime Minister has put forward. And now the responsibility is on the European Union, because we’ve shown flexibility -

AM: I’ll come to them in just a second.

MG: I think we need to take the focus on them.

AM: To give a very concrete example, is the Common Rulebook something that we are going to be governed by in 10 or 15 years time?

MG: Well we’ve said that the Common Rulebook, these existing regulations we’re prepared to accept and they’ve been stable, they haven’t changed over time, but we also have a democratic lock. It is up to the House of Commons in the future to chart this nation’s destiny and to decide what it is that we want to do if EU law changes and critically there’s one other thing. The bulk of our economy, as you know, is services and that will be outside the Common Rulebook. What we do is we have an approach which
allows us to have goods moving freely into the European Union without tariffs and quotas but at the same time we allow the growing part of our economy to be free of EU regulation.

AM: So that’s your real message to fellow Brexiteers, is you may hate the Chequers compromise but don’t worry, we’ll be out in March and then we can do what we like.

MG: Well, my message is we must ensure that we honour what the British people wanted us to do in that referendum vote and that means leaving the European Union. And the proposal that the government have put forward is the only proposal on the table which answers in detail all of the concerns that people have and at the same time critically. It challenges the European Union to say well, what will your response be? And so far we’ve heard from individual European politicians who’ve acknowledged that there has been flexibility on the part of the British government and compromise. Because as I said, two days after –

AM: There certainly has been compromise but can I ask you about the other side as well which is I mean crucial to the Chequers idea is that we take tariffs to them and they do the same for us and Michel Barnier has said over the summer in absolutely unequivocal plain terms no, that is never going to be acceptable to us, it’s off the table completely. So what is plan B?

MG: Well, Michel Barnier is a tough negotiator on behalf of the European Union, but one of the things that we’re all aware of –

AM: Unequivocal.

MG: One of the things we’re all aware of is that we have a group of European leaders meeting in Salzburg. The Prime Minister is going to be talking to them next week and as I say, we have shown flexibility in this process. We expect and hope and anticipate that there will be flexibility and compromise. I’ve compromised. I’ve been quite clear that, you know, some of the things that I argued for in the referendum passionately you know,
as a result of Chequers, I have to qualify one or two of my views. I have to acknowledge the parliamentary arithmetic.

AM: You're a compromiser.

MG: Well I believe that the critical thing is making sure that we leave in good order, with a deal, which safeguards the referendum mandate. And one thing that I am clear about is that if the European Union, and I believe the signs are positive, accepts our proposition then we will be out of the political institutions of the European Union, free to decide for ourselves what our policy will be in huge swathes of the area that the British parliament absolutely wants to diverge from the European Union on.

AM: There's one bit of really good political news for the government from Europe this week. One leader who said: "We would like a fairer Brexit because we love the British and have always cooperated well. You deserve a good deal." Are you pleased to have the support of Viktor Orban of Hungary?

MG: Well, I think the truth is actually that there are a swath of EU leaders who want the best possible relationship with Britain.

AM: Let's stick with that one.

MG: Well, I think one of the things is that I'm not a – what's the word? - It's not for me to rank a league table of EU leaders and to say that one is my favourite or that one I have less time for because I believe in cooperative diplomacy. I believe in generosity of spirit towards our EU partners and I would say that there have been a range of EU leaders all of whom have said that they want to ensure that they have the most positive relationship afterwards. Indeed, Michel Barnier himself said that he wants to have a relationship with the UK which is the best relationship between the EU and any third country. And I know that –
AM: You’re trying to get off Viktor Orban and I can exactly see why. Let’s remind ourselves who he is. He is a very, very authoritarian right wing leader of Hungary. He’s called migrants poison and Muslim invaders. He’s widely regarded as anti-Semitic and for good reasons, he’s made it a criminal offence for lawyers to help asylum seekers and he’s targeted the media, the judiciary and NGOs in a very, very aggressive way. This is the man that your party in the European Parliament has decided to support. Why?

MG: No, that’s not true.
AM; Well it is true.
MG: No it’s not true, Andrew and it’s critically important that we realise this. There was a vote in the European Parliament but it’s a longstanding principle of a number of MEPs from different countries and from different parties not to believe that the European Parliament should interfere in or censure the internal democracy of a particular country. Now you or I – just one second –

AM: Even though he’s doing this kind of thing?

MG: You or I might have particular views about other countries, but the European Parliament and those within it – British MEPs and others, believe that that’s the wrong way of expressing criticism. But there’s another thing as well. My view is that the British are traditionally accused of playing divide and rule and picking off individual countries.

AM: This is a man who is so

MG: I’m not going to play that game and I’m not going to go down the route of - I mean I have views, as I’m sure you do as well.
AM: Okay, what are they? What are they?
MG: No, but I’m not going to be drawn on my views about individual European leaders.
AM: Because you need his support.

MG: No. Because I think that it would be wrong for me at a time when we need solidarity against a number of different threats. You mention anti-Semitism. We need to make sure that our voice is clear, our position on these issues is absolutely you know, clear and resonant and I don’t believe that individual criticisms of the kind that you’re understandably tempting me to make necessarily help us in ensuring that we get both solidarity in the issues that count and the best deal for Britain as we leave the European Union.

AM: The point I’m making in a circuitous way, is that we’ve had a lot of conversations in this country about anti-Semitism in British politics and Jeremy Corbyn has been under a lot of criticism for that. Here you are as a party voting alongside the most prominent anti-Semitic politician, xenophobic politician. Somebody who, as I say, has described migrants as ‘poison’ and that’s been the Conservative Party’s –

MG: No, I think it’s –

AM: You voted with him.

MG: No, no, it’s not the case that we’re actually supported him, it’s the case that the MEPs declined on this occasion, as they have on a number of occasions in the past, and there were people from a variety of different parties and a variety of different countries that declined to do so. It’s very far from endorsing or supporting the position that he takes.

AM: So why does your good friend, long-time friend, Lord Finkelstein, a Conservative peer, describe this vote as ‘very distressing and a shameful thing to have happened?’

MG: Well, I have enormous respect for Danny and I won’t criticise Danny.
AM: Alright let’s turn to somebody else. Do you still regard Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, as not truly independent?

MG: No, I think that he’s doing a very good job.

AM: And you regard him as truly independent?

MG: I regard him not only as truly independent, I regard him as a first rate public servant who’s doing an excellent job. As you know, he came to brief the Cabinet earlier this week and I believe that Mark Carney is an excellent governor.

AM: You’ve changed your mind about him therefore.

MG: Yes. I was critical of him in the past but actually I do think that he’s doing an excellent job.

AM: And so when he talked to the Cabinet, you were sitting there at the time, and he says, of a range of possibilities that might happen as a result of no deal and various other deals and Brexit, we could see house prices in this country falling by 35 per cent. Do you regard that as part of just project fear or a serious warning that you have to think about?

MG: Well, as the governor himself made clear when he was speaking in Ireland the next day, the figures that were quoted and were attributed to him were actually figures that related to a stress test which he’d undertaken in order to see how resilient our banks were. He was very clear when he talked to the Cabinet and he’s been very clear subsequently that the figures that have been attributed to him were not a scenario, not a prediction that he was saying is a consequence of leaving the European Union. But of course we need to be clear, as the head of the WTO has said, you know, leaving the European Union without a deal is certainly not going to be the end of the world. Britain will get through it. There are many, many things that we can do to strengthen our economy. But also it’s not going to be a walk in the park either. That is why we are focused on getting –
AM: Civil disobedience and civil disorder, that came from the police.
MG: Well, I mean, I’ll put that entirely to one side. I think the critical thing is that of course there are challenges in leaving without a deal, and my department are doing everything we can in order to meet the requirements whatever the scenario is. That’s why we’re focused on getting the best possible deal for Britain. And the proposition that the government has put forward allows us to honour that referendum mandate, to ensure that the 27 EU leaders can all feel that Britain is entering a new partnership, and also, critically, the British people will be reassured that we are doing the right thing, honouring the referendum mandate, taking back control in agriculture, in fisheries, over our economy, and critically also ending free movement so that we decide who comes here and on what terms.

AM: Let’s turn to your day job, as it were. We’ve had the joint hottest summer ever, there’s been extreme climate events in America and the in the Arctic, and indeed across most of the continent of Europe. Are we going to hit our carbon emission targets for the 2020s?
MG: I believe that we have to. I believe that it’s critically important that we all take the steps in the –
AM: The Climate Change Commission, or committee, has said that we’re not on target at the moment to meet those targets.
MG: No, no, no. There is a lot more that we need to do. And I think everyone will have been aware that the weather events this summer have reinforced the nature of climate change, and it raises a challenge for us all. But the really important thing, I think, about climate change is not only do we need to make sure that we produce less carbon into our atmosphere, that greenhouse gas emissions drop, we also need to take the steps to deal with that change in our climate. And that means making sure that we have security of water supply. That means making sure that we have the flexibility to support agriculture and to support food production
in new ways. And that’s why the Agriculture Bill that we’ve introduced this week puts such an emphasis both on changing our food production so we support productivity, but also on doing the right thing for the environment. And that means everything from planting more trees, because they help sequester carbon in the atmosphere, to making sure that some of the agricultural methods of the past change in order better to support wildlife.

AM: But you agree that we need to do better when it comes to climate change.
MG: Yes.
AM: I mean, one example is you’ve said that you want to see no more diesel or petrol cars on our roads after 2040. Many other countries have said the same thing, but 2030. Don’t we have to be more ambitious about the target?
MG: Our target is one of the most ambitious in the world. And I think that what we need to do is to make sure that, as the government is doing, that we invest in the new technology. It’s not just making sure that we reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that are stimulating climate change, it’s also a case of the health of our children, Andrew, is affected by some of the matter that comes from those exhausts, and we – as the Prime Minister pointed out this week – are investing in new technology to make sure that Britain is a leader in ultra-low emission vehicles, and that’s not just good for the environment and public health-
AM: We agree about all of that –
MG: It’s also a very, very good industrial position because we’re a leader in the new technology the world wants.

AM: How many badgers do you plan to kill this year?
MG: I personally don’t want to kill any, but it is a very serious issue. You’re of course referring to the need for us to deal with bovine TB. Last year more than 30,000 cattle died as a result of this disease. We need to take the appropriate steps, guided by science, in order to ensure that we can bring that disease down.
And there is evidence that in those areas where targeted culls have taken place, that we have been able to reduce the incidence of the disease. But there is more to do.

AM: This is argued about, the Wildlife Trust, for instance, say that the badger cull, 40,000 I think is the answer to the question, 40,000 are due to be killed, ‘is a dangerous distraction from addressing the main root of TB transmission in cattle, which is between cattle.’ And they say the costs of killing badgers are much higher than the cost of vaccination.

MG: Well, I think that I have enormous respect for the Wildlife Trust. I should say one thing, Professor Charles Godfrey, one of the country’s leading experts in dealing with this disease is reviewing our policy overall. Because we recognise that of course you need to have a balanced approach. And the movement of cattle, and indeed some of the emerging science will allow us to ensure there is a balanced approach. None of us wants to be in the –

AM: We’ve run out of time. I’m so sorry.

MG: Not at all, Andrew.

(ends)