

***PLEASE NOTE "THE ANDREW MARR SHOW" MUST BE
CREDITED IF ANY PART OF THIS TRANSCRIPT IS USED***

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

SIR JOHN MAJOR

NOVEMBER 16th 2014

ANDREW MARR:

Now from Dr John to Sir John. Sir John Major gives very few public speeches these days, but when he does his words carry weight. This week, in Berlin, he's warned Britain's European partners that there's a serious chance the UK will vote to pull out of the EU in a future referendum unless it's given serious concessions on the crucial issue of free movement and migration. Sir John, welcome.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:

Going back to that speech, Angela Merkel has made it very, very clear that, as far as she's concerned, the free movement of people inside the EU is off the agenda. It's absolutely fundamental to the EU and we will not get concessions on that.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

There are four founding freedoms of the European Union and free movement of people is one of them. That's perfectly true. None of the other three have fully been honoured yet and I think in terms of free movement of people is concerned, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding of the British position. We aren't seeking to end free movement, but what has been happening over the last few years has been such a

bulge, such a huge bulge in the amount of migrants coming to the United Kingdom – it's gone up, our population has risen by about 7 per cent in a decade – and at the present rate, the British population would rise in a few decades by 25 per cent while the German population would have fallen. And I think as people begin to see the particular circumstances that we face, I think there'll be a good deal of sympathy for the difficulty. And the European Union has a very pragmatic record of finding a way round difficult corners like this ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) So this ...

JOHN MAJOR: ... and the point I was making in my speech is that we shall need to do so again – on this and perhaps on other issues too.

ANDREW MARR:

So it's not an end to free movement across all EU ...

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

No of course not, of course not.

ANDREW MARR:

... but it might be a moratorium or a block for a while, for a few years, as far as Britain's concerned.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

(over) Andrew, of course not. How many people watching this programme, I wonder, have actually been treated in the National Health Service or helped on the Transport Service by people who are migrants? We wouldn't have a National Health Service without migrants, we wouldn't have a transport system without migrants, so of course not. We're an outward looking nation. We always have been. We're not going to close our doors, and nor should we, either economically or politically. But there is in the midst of that a particular problem of numbers. It's not Poles, it's not Slavs, it's not Italians. It's numbers, numbers, numbers. That is the point at issue.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) I thought you were going to say it's the French. *(laughs)*

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

No, no, no, no. It's ... Absolutely not, certainly not, don't tempt me. It's purely numbers and it may only be relatively short-term. I mean consider, for example, the whole of Southern Europe, the Eurozone of Southern Europe is very close to recession... well is probably in recession and is very close to even more serious economic difficulties ...

ANDREW MARR:

Absolutely.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

... so of course there's an accelerated amount of movement to the United Kingdom. Once they're back in growth, the demand to come here will almost certainly fall. So I see it as a shortish-term problem - maybe not a year, maybe longer - and we need a little help over that period.

ANDREW MARR:

So in the shortish-term term, whatever that means, in the shortish-term what do you think we could get? What's the most that Britain could get if the negotiation is conducted well and aggressively and so forth?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

I'm not going to negotiate on air. I think there are some practical things that could be done that don't infringe the principle but do meet the problem, but I think frankly they're much more likely to be done if they're not aired in public but discussed in private.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you think we need some kind of super ambassador figure to carry out those negotiations alongside the prime minister?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well I think in time there will be someone. I mean there's going to be more ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Might that someone be you?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

I think not. No, no, I think it'll have to be someone who is in the government and who is close to the prime minister in the government. But a great deal of the most important negotiations on these occasions, on this as in previous treaties, will inevitably be done by the prime minister himself. I think that is undoubtedly so because it's done at the very top of government. But I think beyond that, there are 28 nation states. We have to form alliances with many of them on many issues. I mean subsidiarity, for example – the argument that things should only be done at the European level if they can't be done at the national level – the Dutch are likely to be huge allies in that and so are others ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Because you ...

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

(over) ... and we need to form these alliances to make sure we get the most successful negotiation.

ANDREW MARR:

You've been a great proponent of parliament. Do you think this idea of having national parliaments, getting a veto over more European legislation is a runner? Do you think we could form alliances on that?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Oh I think there are lots of countries that will follow us with that. I mean at the moment you have as it were, in footballing parlance, a yellow card. I think if you

could find 12 nations who are opposed to something, saying it's against their national interest, I think pragmatically that should be a red card ...

ANDREW MARR:

A red card.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

... and that should be the end of it because there is a democratic deficit. I am strongly in favour of our membership of the European Union for economic and political reasons, but I don't think it's faultless. There are reforms that need to be made and some of them are to give it more democratic legitimacy, which at the moment frankly it lacks, and the idea of there being a system in which national parliaments can block alien and unwelcome legislation is certainly a route where I think we would have a number of allies across Europe.

ANDREW MARR:

So there's that. But you also think that Angela Merkel can be persuaded to suspend the free movement of people so far as it affects Britain?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

(over) Not just ... It's not just Angela Merkel. It's ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) But she's kind of crucial.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Of course she's hugely important, of course she is – I'm not trying to under... understate that in any way – but it is an agreement we have to have across the European Union. It's not only we who face troubles. Many of the far right parties, many of the anti-social parties who offer nothing but negativity across Europe – in Greece, in Sweden, in many countries including our own – have an antipathy to immigration because immigration is seen by their populations at too high a level as causing difficulties. So it is not just a uniquely British problem. It's uniquely difficult for us because of the numbers and because we, for example, are a fraction of the land

space of say France or Germany.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you think that non-EU immigration to this country is too high?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

We have ancient agreements there. I lived in Brixton at the time, the mass immigration in the 50s, and many of the people who came in then are now icons in our public life. We have a lot of members of parliament who are sons of immigrant families of twenty or thirty years ago and right across the country. But on the subject of numbers, I think I'd wish to look at it carefully, but the numbers argument holds from wherever ...

ANDREW MARR:

They come.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

... the migrants may come.

ANDREW MARR:

Even though the European migrants (according to a recent report) have actually contributed to the treasury ...

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

(over) Yes they have.

ANDREW MARR:

... and others have not?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well the other migrants have certainly contributed to the National Health Service and other services, and indeed many of them were invited in the 1950s and 60s to come here by the then governments precisely for that reason.

ANDREW MARR:

Philip Hammond has said that if you go into this kind of crucial negotiation, you have to make it clear that you would walk away if you fail. Do you agree with him about that?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well I don't think it's a question of saying we would walk away if we fail because I don't anticipate failure. I have negotiated sufficiently with the European Union to know that if you have a good case and you persuade, you are highly likely to get a satisfactory result.

ANDREW MARR:

This is why I wondered if you yourself might come back.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

No, no, no, I think ...

ANDREW MARR:

You've done it before.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Indeed, but there are other people who are part of the government.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

I can think of people who'd do very well.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) I won't press that. Now you said it's 50/50 that we would leave if we didn't get those kind of movements. That sounds to a lot of people ...

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

(over) No I didn't ... That's not quite what I said. I said I thought at the moment it was almost 50/50 that we would leave and there were a number of things that would make it more likely we would leave if we weren't able to negotiate them.

ANDREW MARR:

Right.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

So I think there's a nuance of difference there.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you think there would be a decent future for this country outside the EU as Boris Johnson and many Conservatives have said?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well of course there would be a future ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) A decent future?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

... but it would be a ... Well I'm coming to that. It would be a lesser future. I mean the beliefs that we would be economically free if we left and we can just trade with the European Union as before. We would have to pay for entry to the single market and we would have to accept their regulations. Now I'd like to see ... I wouldn't like to be the British prime minister ten, fifteen years from now who had to stand up in parliament and say in order to continue to trade with the European Union, we have to pass the following regulations into which we have had no input or we can't trade with them. I wouldn't like to do that. I wouldn't like to be ... Hang on, I wouldn't like to be the British prime minister who said we're no longer getting the inward investment we used to; it's now going to Germany and France and Italy. And on a political level, I really wouldn't want to be the prime minister who had to explain that we are sinking to a much lower level of relevance in the world outside the European Union with the ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) So much better in than out?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

... with the doors in the corridors of power being closed to us. On every count, despite its frustrations (of which there are many), despite the reforms we need (which are many), we are far better off in the European Union than outside it. And most important of all, we are far better off for the next generation and the generation after that if we are in.

ANDREW MARR:

So those Conservatives who say we could have a comfortable future outside are wrong?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well I don't know what you mean by "comfortable".

ANDREW MARR:

I don't know what they mean by "comfortable". That's the word that's been used.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well I am saying that Britain has been a great nation in the last three hundred years. Do we really want to sink to a lower level of relevance outside the European Union? Of course we'd survive, of course we would, and how frustrated would we be when our word meant so much less and our economic power was materially decreased.

ANDREW MARR

The Conservatives, as you know, are facing a very important by-election in Strood and Rochester, and some Conservative MPs have said that we must stop U... the Conservative Party must stop treating UKIP as a kind of eccentric fringe or protest party. They have got the ear of the British people on major issues and they have to be taken seriously. How do you regard that view?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well let's look at UKIP for a moment and let's draw a distinction between the leadership and those who have been voting for them. I think many of the people who've been voting for them are doing so out of frustration at the ongoing difficulties of the recession – the belief that they're losing out and falling behind. That will fade away as the economy improves, and it is materially improving. But the policies of UKIP, the direction of UKIP is, it seems to me, profoundly un-British in every way. They are anti- everything. They are anti-politics, they are anti-foreigner, they are anti-immigrant, they are anti-aid. I don't know what they're for, we know what they are against, and that's the negativity of the four-ale bar. That's not the way to get into Parliament; it's not the way to run a country. So they may be elected because people are frustrated, but consid... you mentioned ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) If I can jump in. They're frustrated partly about many of the diktats that have come from the EU and they have got the ear of very many British voters.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

(over) That is the point ... exactly the point of subsidiarity. One of the points I made the other day is that subsidiarity – and let me explain that – that's the concept that things should only be done at the European level if they can't be done at the national level. I thought we had written that into the Maastricht Treaty twenty odd years ago and the commission bypassed it. I made the point the other day we have to resurrect that and nail it down as a matter of European law so it cannot be bypassed. That's a fundamental part of the renegotiation.

ANDREW MARR:

You mentioned the economy just now, Sir John.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well you mentioned Rochester. Let me tell you one other thing about Roch... I won't be a second.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

I feel very strongly about this. I've been watching over the last few days the huge generosity of the British people to Ebola. I've watched with fantastic pride the amount of money that was donated to Children in Need. People even in times of hardship prepared to put their hands in their pockets ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And help.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

... and be generous to other people. What a counterpoint that is to the negativity and sheer nastiness of much of what UKIP stands for.

ANDREW MARR:

Well we'll see what happens in Rochester. But you mentioned the economy just a moment ago. There's some very interesting stuff in the FT and elsewhere about the fragility. We have got a recovery, but it's a fragile recovery, and in particular the difficulty faced by the next government (whoever composes it) of making huge, huge and much more difficult cuts to public spending and/or tax rises. Do you think the next government has a kind of hospital pass coming to it?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Depends what growth we manage to generate. I mean the counterpart to how much reduction you need to make in public expenditure and what happens to taxes is what level of growth we've got. Now there certainly was a hospital pass in 2010.

ANDREW MARR:

Yeah.

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

If you recall, the incoming coalition faced a situation where people were not even sure

their money was safe in their high street banks. We now have over 3 per cent growth, unemployment has dropped by a quarter. But, but – and this is where we still have people concerned and worried – none of the growth in the economy has yet reached wage packets or salary slips. Now surveys suggest it will do next year. Not government surveys, but independent surveys have suggested perhaps 3 per cent growth in salaries – I can't say whether that's right – next year. So you are going to see things going better. What folly, what folly when you come from such a bad position to such a promising position to suddenly think about changing governments.

ANDREW MARR:

Sir John, thank you for now very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS

SOFA CHAT SIR JOHN MAJOR + GUESTS

ANDREW MARR:

Well Sir John is still here. Gerald Scarfe, Catherine Mayer and Fraser Nelson have also joined us. And we've just heard the terrible news that yet another beheading has been taking place in the Middle East – an American, I think – and we've also been talking about ISIS growing much ... much more fast than we'd expected. Sir John, an existential threat of the kind that you didn't face when you were prime minister, do you think?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

I think potentially yes. I mean this is 13th century barbarism, there's no other way to describe it. And the people they are murdering – which makes it doubly worse, triply worse – are people who actually went there to help those in difficulty and in need, and they are being murdered in the most brutal way. It's almost beyond belief.

ANDREW MARR:

Fraser?

FRASER NELSON:

Is this the sort of problem, Sir John, that you think Britain nowadays with the military just cannot realistically do much about?

SIR JOHN MAJOR:

Well I don't think we can do all that much about it alone. But can we contribute to other people to do something about? I think the answer is undoubtedly yes. Though unless we want the old argument that the crusaders have come in to attack, we really need to support other Arabs on the ground and use our power in other ways to help them, support them, surveillance, training, provide weapons and so forth. I think that is a proper role for us.

ENDS