

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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JOHN McDONNELL, MP

SHADOW CHANCELLOR

AM: Mr McDonnell, can I start off by asking about the story about Jim Ratcliffe, Sir Jim Ratcliffe who's quitting this country to go to Monaco. Now whatever you think about him, doesn't this point to a wider issue which is that in a mobile economy it's very very easy for very rich people, and rich companies, to leave the country and take away the tax revenue that you hope to depend on?

JM: No, no, it's a valid issue, but we have to work on the basis that if you want to live in a society like ours, in a country like ours which I – you know I think is the best place to live in in the world, you have to pay your taxes. And it's not asking a lot if you've got a fair taxation system, so that's all we want. So I am really disappointed and I'm amazed. This is a super rich person. We're not talking about someone who's on his uppers or something like that. And for every penny that is avoided in this way in taxation, what does that mean? It means actually the NHS doesn't treat patients as well as they could, it means our children don't get the full investment in their education and it means less safety on our streets. I just appeal to people like this and look, this is a great country to live in, just make your contribution like the rest of us.

AM: Let's move from the individual to the wider picture. You have called the prospect of no deal a national disaster and an economic catastrophe and you know that if that happens it's possible that lots and lots of companies will leave the UK and you will lose a lot of the corporation tax revenue. For instance, on which your plans depend. In those circumstances do you change your plans?

JM: Well, two issues there. One is that it puts even more pressure on us to get a deal that will protect jobs and the economy and I

agree with what Katherine said earlier, it is catastrophic if they're trying no deal. So let's get a deal done. That's the most important thing for me. Secondly, whatever we inherit our plans will cope with whatever challenges we have and it's that John F Kennedy quote, you know. When he got elected President he said the worse thing that happened was that actually the economy he faced was worse than he even complained about during the election campaign. And I'm expecting that. But we'll have the plans in place. In fact it puts even more requirement on our plans to be brought forward early to tackle the problems that we face.

AM: We know that the Chancellor has emergency plans, the so called Kingfisher Plans to slash corporation tax and boost the economy –

JM: That will be a disaster.

AM: - in the immediate aftermath.

JM: That would be a disaster.

AM: Do you have your own version of it, your own plans?

JM: We've laid them out. What we're saying is invest to grow. So we have investment plans, both in terms of what government can do through its government departments, but also through a national investment bank. The same way Germany in many ways did after the Second World War, developing their small medium enterprises. All of that investment will go in it. It means we need that scale of investment to cope with the challenges we'll inherit from the Conservatives.

AM: Emergency budget?

JM: Well, I wouldn't call an emergency budget, I want an early budget. When I met the civil servants before the last General Election I said I wanted a budget within 8 weeks so that we could start implementing our plans rapidly.

AM: It's been reported that in those circumstances Labour would introduce an immediate and undeclared wealth tax.

JM: No, no.

AM: As part of a kind of move to –

JM: No, no, we've been very open about our taxation proposals and we will be all the way through. The element of wealth that we included within our last manifesto was a land value taxation we're exploring. Not on residential properties, but we'll consult on that in the next few months.

AM: So there will be no secrets? It will all be laid out in a manifesto?

JM: What I did in the last manifesto I produced, as you know, the Grey Book which costed that manifesto. Identified the funding sources. In fact we have a debate about it on this programme.

AM: We did, we had a Grey Book ..

JM: That's right, we did. I'll do exactly the same this time round. And what I've been saying to all asset managers, the banks, the industrialists I've been meeting is the way you'll get security from a Labour government is that there will be no tricks up my sleeve, everything we say we're going to do will be openly transparent and we'll stick to that.

AM: Okay. You were talking about avoiding no deal and your main offer has been to the Prime Minister, here is our version of a Brexit deal with a customs union and so forth. She has quite patently said no to that already. Do you accept that?

JM: At this stage, at this stage.

AM: That's a gonner.

JM: No.

AM: You think it will come back?

JM: I think it will come back. We'll see what she brings back. What we've been saying to her very, very clearly and parliament has said this as well, that we need now to have a serious discussion – it must be by the end of this month. We've put our proposals on the table, we're willing to negotiate around those, they're the basic of what we think could secure parliamentary approval, but

she has to start negotiating as well. We've been waiting for two years before that phone was picked up. It's been picked up in the last couple of weeks and we're engaged in that.

AM: But so far I think she's rejected it twice in parliament this week alone.

JM: Yeah.

AM; And one reason might be because it's a rule taking version of Brexit. I mean Jeremy Corbyn said recently in Coventry, he said, "Labour would not countenance a deal that left Britain as a passive recipient of rules decided elsewhere by others. That would mean ending up as mere rule takers." And yet when you look at your current proposals when it comes to the customs union, when it comes to close alignment with the single market, and the rest of it, that is in effect your vision. It is Britain as rule takers.

JM: No it isn't. It's Britain engaged in a negotiation with the European Union in which we can establish not just we're on the single market with close alignment but joint institutions as well. It means on the customs union having a say in future trade deals which reflects the balance and scale of our economic contributions to Europe overall.

AM: On that, what kind of say, because the EU is absolutely clear that it won't give joint discussions.

JM: Well it's interesting because Michel Barnier and others have welcomed our proposals and he's welcomed them, I think, on the basis of negotiations. So that's one of the elements we'll want to negotiate.

AM: But they're not going to reopen the Treaty of Rome to help you are they?

JM: They don't have to. They can use the existing Articles to do that.

AM: And the Austrian Foreign Minister on the show last week said this is cherry picking and more or less dismissed it.

JM: All negotiations are give and take and the issue that we've put – and I've said this on your programme before- The problem with the Prime Minister's negotiations was it never really was based upon mutual interest or mutual respect. It was about banging the table and walking away. That's not what we're about. That's why we want no deal ruled off the table.

AM: Do you want a say in trade deals in the future or a veto?

JM: A say in that we want to elaborate in those discussions that we have with our EU partners exactly what that means. The structure for that and the institutions that we need to establish to enable that to happen. That's part of the negotiation.

AM: Going back and thinking about the Motion passed at the Labour Party Conference, we would expect by now that people like you would be openly calling and campaigning for another referendum. Why is it not happening?

JM: No, let's go through the phasing of all of this. We said we will not - we will reject any proposal that has an impact on jobs and the economy which is deleterious. That's what we've done. We've said we will try and seek a deal that will protect jobs and the economy and that's what we're doing at the moment. We've also said if we can't get that our view is we should have a General Election. We can't get that. Keep on the table the option of going back to the people in a public vote.

AM: I'm getting bored with this table. It's always this table there, it's always on the table and it's now quite close to time to take a decision because the election, unfortunately from your point of view, has slipped away from the table and all the rest of it. We are much closer to no deal.

JM: I'm not giving up on a General Election, but you're right. Now's the time, we really are at the end of the line now and we're

saying to the government you've got to come back with a realistic deal. If it doesn't fly within parliament, yes, the option of going back to the people has got to be there.

AM: By the end of his month we have a Motion going down by two Labour backbenchers calling for a referendum. Will John McDonnell be supporting that Motion?

JM: Well, the one I think you're referring to is Peter Kyle and Phil Wilson. I met Peter and Phil last week. What they're saying is if parliament does agree some form of deal why not have a confirmation referendum after that? Well, we'll look at that, we'll look at that in the debate over the next week.

AM: Because a lot of people will feel that you're running down the clock because ultimately as the Labour leadership you don't really want another referendum.

JM: Well that's not the case because for the last two years we've been saying to the Prime Minister – negotiate with us. Pick up the phone, talk to us and that hasn't happened until the last fortnight.

AM: Clive Lewis who is a close colleague of yours, a comrade, a member of your –

JM: He's one of my team.

AM: He's a member of your team. He says that he fears that 'what we're doing now is we're helping to facilitate a Tory Brexit and the ramifications for our party I think will be severe.'

JM: Well he's right. I think if we were in a situation where we allowed a deal to go through and didn't oppose it which would undermine our economy, be catastrophic for jobs, is exactly right. And that's not what we're doing. We're opposing what the Prime Minister is bringing forward and we're saying we need a deal which will protect jobs and we've laid out our deal which we think could. Now if it can't –

AM; But if you can't get that and the Prime Minister is to say it gently a stubborn person on this. You're probably not going to get it so you're going to have to go for a referendum, aren't you?

JM: Well let me just say this. I don't think the Prime Minister is just stubborn, I think she's floundering and we're in a situation now where parliament is literally taking it out of her hands and saying parliament's got to agree this, so we're part of those negotiations in parliament to see what sort of deal would be acceptable to us and if not we've said option on the table will be to go back to the people.

AM: I quoted you one comrade, here's another comrade. Len McCluskey. He says 'that having another referendum threatens the whole democratic fabric on which we operate. In reality it's not the best option for our nation.'

JM: Well he's said it's not the best option because he's saying that basically you'd only go back to the people in extremis if you can't get a deal agreed through parliament or if that any deal you thought wasn't going to protect jobs and the economy you'd have to go back to the people. And I think that's right.

AM: You've been in this game for a long time. You can hear the creaking of the coming split coming inside the Labour Party. There's endless muttering, endless briefing and of course so far nobody actually does anything. We're getting quite close to the moment when they might well do so.

JM: I don't see why there's a need to. I really don't see why there's a need to because on all the issues that people have raised as the potential for a split we're dealing with. For example they're saying on Brexit, well, we're holding the party together on Brexit. Those that are saying well we'll split if we don't get a people's vote. Well, we've still kept that option on the table and it might come about, why split over that? That's ridiculous.

AM: And then there's all the anti-Semitism stuff.

JM: Yeah there is.

AM: Do you regret slightly the tone that you used with Luciana Berger last week? You appeared to be demanding a loyalty oath from her. And she's a pregnant woman and -

JM: No I certainly didn't. If you listen to that interview very carefully the first thing I said is if anyone's attacking Luciana, if they're putting up no confidence motions on the basis of that, of her raising the issue of anti-Semitism it has to be condemned. That's the first thing I said. And then I saw tweets were saying it's because she was interested in splitting the party. I said well if that is the case all Luciana has to do is say that's not the issue and I don't think it is the issue for Luciana. And I said then, party members then should come together and campaign with her. It wasn't asking for a loyalty oath. I've supported her and I've said very, very clearly that what we've got to do is work together to overcome this and that's why it's almost become a mission for me within my politics now.

AM: Speaking of tweets and loyalty pledges there's a huge number passing around twitter this morning and other social media, I think you've signed this as well. There is now – I think we can see it, there's a tweet going up saying:

'I pledge to work for the
achievement of a Labour
Government under
Whatever leadership
members elect. And I accept
a Labour government is
Infinitely better than any
Other election outcome.'
And people are signing it.

JM: That reflects what I've been saying since I first joined the Labour Party and even when I had my strongest disagreements

with Tony Blair I still said I will always work for the election of a Labour government.

AM: Isn't the timing of this just a little bit provocative, given that you know there are people on the edge?

JM: No, not at all. People wanted reassurance from all of us that we're – well basically we're Labour through and through and I think even some of those names that have been mentioned about thinking about leaving the party, I think they're Labour through and through as well and I don't see any need for anybody to split from the party.

AM: If a dozen or so people did, they're not going to threaten the Labour Party as an organisation but presumably the danger from the perspective of somebody like you is that they stand in enough marginal constituencies to stop you getting into government.

JM: Yeah. It would be like the 1980s, 'cause my constituency in Hayes and Harlington we had a Labour MP join the SDP and we lost the seat to the Conservatives. And it basically installed Mrs Thatcher in power for that decade. That's the last thing I don't think any of the people who have even been mentioned around this split would want that.

AM: Now the other issue that's been talked about a lot this week of course is the anti-Semitism problem. Has Labour got a no tolerance for anti-Semitism policy?

JM: Yes, we have.

AM: The reason I ask that is we've now seen the figures. 146 cases of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, it's got a written warning response. That's 146 examples of tolerance, surely?

JM: What we've said is – and I'll just give this example shall I? Naz Shah was my Parliamentary Private Secretary and she made some statements which were anti-Semitic. She immediately, once it was pointed out to her, to give her her due she immediately recognised it, apologised, went through what was effectively

almost a training exercise, visiting synagogues, meeting with the Jewish community. Now she's held up as a shining example of how you acknowledge where you've done, apologise and then learn from it. That's what we need for a lot of these cases, but where there's - where it's intolerable, where it's repeated and that - I was on this programme I said before not only should we kick them out of the party, my view is they should be life bans as well.

AM: You're not kicking out many people.

JM: We're not fast enough and that's why Jenny Formby released double the staff, brought in a QC that will give us proper legal advice so we don't lose any cases and is speeding through it. And also she's suggesting reforms. She's multiplied the number of committees that are dealing with it, she's also suggested other reforms. We've got to be ruthless about this and the reason I'm saying this is because I want to sort this issue out in our party because I want us to be contributing to tackling it in wider society. I've said this on your programme before. I don't want to live in a society where Jewish graves are daubed and where children going to Jewish schools have to have protection. We've got to tackle that, it's appalling.

AM: Let me ask you about something else that's also important: Shamima Begum. There are reports now that she's had her baby out in the camp. It's a very difficult moral story this, a very complex story. At a kind of human level what is your response to her request to come back to this country?

JM: My view is that and it deals with all these cases as well. We have to judge them on their individual merits. I know she was officially a child when she went off and joined ISIS or supported ISIS etc. What we need to do is recognise that, but also on all these cases we also have to do a risk assessment. And the most important thing is if we are bringing people back we put the protections in place so the rest of society is protected from it.

AM: And President Trump is saying at the moment that we should take back all of the ex-British fighters, put them on trial. That's a very, very big security and financial question for the UK.

JM: It is, it is but we have to make sure we respond to our international duties of bringing war criminals to book. And we'll make that contribution. Now whether that's collectively and it's the Hague or whether it's bringing them back here, whatever, we've got to step up to that responsibility. I'd rather they were under lock and key than they were somewhere else potentially a threat to this country.

Ends