

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 17TH NOVEMBER, 2019

JEREMY CORBYN, MP

Leader, Labour Party

AM: Fresh from the Labour Party's Clause 5 meeting to decide its election manifesto, my last guest this morning is the Labour Party Leader, Jeremy Corbyn.

Can I start with a very simple, very important question. If you become Prime Minister, when you become Prime Minister, do you want this country to leave the EU or not?

JC: We're going to put that choice to the British people and they will make that decision. We'll negotiate within three months a credible, sensible option of leave and put that alongside remain in a referendum.

AM: I'm asking about your view. You'll be Prime Minister, you hope after the election. As Prime Minister do you, Jeremy Corbyn, want us to leave the EU or not?

JC: I want a close relationship with the EU in the future and we will put that decision to the British people and I will abide by that decision. That's the view we've come to in the Labour Party.

AM: You want a close relationship with the EU which implies that we're outside the EU at that point?

JC: A leave option.

AM: Close but outside. Is that what you like personally?

JC: A leave option would mean a trade relationship with Europe and it would mean protection of rights. And obviously that includes that protection of the Good Friday Agreement. That will be put alongside remain in a referendum within six – and my whole strategy has been to try and bring people together on both sides of the argument, 'cause actually there's a great deal that unites them about the inequalities and injustices in this country.

AM: I understand the strategy. There's an awful lot of people watching and they're trying to make up in their minds who they want to be the next Prime Minister of this country. And I'm asking you, as somebody who seeks that job, a very important job, what your own personal view is about leaving the EU or not. It's the biggest single question facing a lot of people in this country and they have a right to know the answer.

JC: It's one of the biggest questions facing the people of this country.

AM: So what is the answer?

JC: The answer is, as I've explained to you, that we will negotiate a credible option of leaving, put that alongside remain and the British people will make their mind up on that basis. And we will discuss this obviously when we've concluded those initial negotiations which will start immediately we take office.

AM: So Jeremy Corbyn can't say I think we should leave the EU or we shouldn't leave the EU? Or I prefer to be in or I prefer to be out?

JC: Jeremy Corbyn can say this. That we have to have a close trading relationship with Europe. We won't crash out into the arms of Donald Trump. We won't be doing sweetheart trade deals with the USA and we won't be wrecking our National Health Service in the process as the Prime Minister is planning to do.

AM: That's a very persuasive way of not answering my question but your plan now is that you win the election and then you go to Brussels for some six months or so –

JC: Three months.

AM: - three months, to negotiate a different Brexit deal and you're going in there negotiating that Brexit deal with your Chancellor, your Home Secretary, your Foreign Secretary, your Brexit Secretary, almost all the key members of your Cabinet saying publicly that whatever you negotiate they would campaign

in a referendum for remain. It's not a very strong army at your back really, is it?

JC: Well you don't know who I'm going to take with me into those negotiations.

AM: You're not going to sack John McDonnell, Diane Abbott, Keir Starmer, Emily Thornberry.

JC: I'm explaining there would obviously be a team of people who would be involved in this and they would be representative of all parts of the UK and of areas that have different views on it, as indeed –

AM: So you bring Brexit voices in?

JC: Can I finish? Thank you. When we had the talks with the UK government over the summer we did have a very wide range of voices meeting the government on this, and I think it's very important that all parts of the country are represented in this and that's what I would seek to do.

AM: So you would bring pro Brexit voices into those negotiations, into the Cabinet to help you do that negotiation?

JC: They'll all be Labour voices that would have fought the election on the basis of the agreement we hope to reach with the European Union and which we'd put to the people of this country, 'cause I do think we've got to settle this and that we settle it by agreeing on a relationship with Europe either in or out.

AM: I'm just trying to imagine being, as it were, the negotiator on the other side of the table in these negotiations and I see Jeremy Corbyn coming to me and I know that Diane Abbott, John McDonnell, Keir Starmer, Emily Thornberry, the leaders of the Labour Party in Scotland and Wales and all the rest of it are clear pro remain voices. And here's the Leader of the party, here's the Prime Minister coming to try to negotiate to leave. And I ask myself how serious is this negotiation?

JC: What they would know and they already know because I've met all the senior negotiators in the European Union already

several times over the past couple of three years that we represent a country where a majority voted to leave, a very substantial minority voted to remain and that those voices have got to be heard at the negotiating table. But, however people voted in the referendum they didn't vote to lose their jobs, they didn't vote for a deregulated society. My point is that all the government, the Prime Minister is offering is actually a deal with the United States which would do immense damage to our National Health Service and indeed other services as well.

AM: All right, so you've got a pro remain party in large part, you negotiate to leave nonetheless, you bring that deal back, does that then go to the House of Commons?

JC: It will go of course to the House of Commons but will also go to a special conference of the Labour Party who will debate the issue at that time, as we agreed at our Brighton conference.

AM: Because if you look at the views of Labour MPs as expressed publicly, again there's lots and lots of Labour MPs who say they are thoroughly pro remain and will vote against any Brexit deal. You've got the Liberal Democrats, you've got the other parties there, you won't get Conservative support, so I just wonder actually whether this deal has got the faintest chance of getting through the House of Commons.

JC: Listen, we haven't had the election yet and we haven't had the negotiations yet. I want to make sure there's a credible offer of leave with these arrangements with the European Union or remain and the future relationship with Europe. And I think it's only right that if we fight the election on a manifesto that includes those options which is a way of bringing people together – which seems to me an adult approach to the whole thing.

AM: So I'm just trying to take it through stage by stage by stage. You get your negotiation, you have the problem of parliament, you have a special party conference and then you have a

referendum in which you're going to put your version of leave which is pro single market – yes?

JC: It's pro trade relationship which obviously would include access to the market, yes.

AM; And it's pro customs union? You negotiate a customs union?

JC: yes, indeed. That is a very important way of protecting the Good Friday Agreement, because one of the many problems with the Prime Minister's approach to this is that it does undermine the principles of the Good Friday Agreement, which of course there's nothing I would want to do would undermine the Good Friday Agreement.

AM: If you negotiate a customs union you can't have an independent trade policy, can you?

JC: You can have aspects of an independent trade policy but clearly there would have to be that relationship. But I think we have to be realistic about where British trade is at the moment and broadly speaking about half of our trade is with the European Union.

AM: We had a very large number of people taking part in the first referendum, the In or Out referendum. Do you have some kind of threshold which would give you legitimacy for another referendum?

JC: I think you have to hold the referendum on the basis that those that wish to take part in it take part in it. I think what I would like to see in any future referendum is a very strict limit on spending on both sides, and also the ability to have – how shall I put it – check on the facts being offered by both sides in that referendum campaign. The problem with the last referendum campaign there wasn't any real examination of that.

AM: But nonetheless, 72% turned out. It was one of the biggest democratic events in our history.

JC: It was indeed.

AM: I'm just wondering, you're going to offer people a choice between a soft - quotes 'soft' Brexit or a Labour version of Brexit or remaining. Now for an awful lot of people in this country that is not a real choice. They don't get the kind of Brexit that they thought they were going to get and therefore they may not vote. You may get a very much lower turnout. Is that still legitimate?

JC: Offering them a referendum is of course legitimate and there's never been a precedent in Britain where we measure an election result on the basis of turnout. There has been a precedent in the 1979 Scottish referendum was on the basis of the proportion of people voting a particular way but there's never been any precedent on voter turnout.

AM: And you wouldn't .. to that?

JC: No, I don't think so. But that would obviously be open for debate but I do think the important thing is to move forward on this so that we actually get to a position of making a decision.

AM: We paid about 11 billion into the EU budget last year. In return for really good access, frictionless good access to their markets they're going to want us to carry on paying in. Would you agree to that?

JC: Well, it depends how much and obviously that would be part of the negotiations, but clearly if you want access to a market there are costs involved, but let's -

AM: So there are costs -

JC: Yes, there would be costs involved but I can't put a figure on that anymore than you could or the EU could at this very moment. But the principle has to be that where we've got car plants in Sunderland, you've got manufacturing plants in the Midlands, you've got steel any many other industries, as well as food processing that rely very heavily on a European market, they've got to maintain that access to markets.

AM: And similarly, if we are going to maintain the same kind of regulatory standards, at least as good as we've got now with the

EU, the EU are going to want the regulation of the European Court of Justice to oversee some of that. Is that acceptable?

JC: There has to be a legal process by which you would determine any disputes, and even the Prime Minister, the government, accept there has to be some judicial process that you can deal with any trade dispute. There are within the World Trade Organisation anyway, it's a principle of all trade agreements there has to be some judicial oversight of them, but there is a question of the timing of that and some of these things can go on for far too long.

AM: And then there is the question of the fourth pillar, free movement of people. Your 2017 manifesto said very clearly, 'free movement of people will end when we leave the European Union.' Will the current manifesto say the same thing?

JC: Well, you'll have to wait until Thursday to see the wording of it. (coughing)

AM: You decided this yesterday, so you know the answer.

JC: Yes, I'm going to come onto that in a moment. The point I'm making is that first of all a lot of European nationals have made their homes in this country and made a massive contribution to our society. A lot of British people live in different parts of the European Union and many of those families have been through unbelievable levels of stress. So they absolutely must have the right to remain and be able to bring their families here as indeed other aspects of family reunion should be available. And so also there are huge economic demands in this country. We have 40,000 nurse vacancies in the NHS, partly because of so many European Union nationals have left. There's a shortage of doctors because so many have left because of uncertainty. We cannot exist in isolation, therefore there has to be migration into Britain in order to maintain our economy and our services. And that will be reflected in the policy which you will see on Thursday.

AM: So in terms of how you do it the Conference Motion, famous Conference Motion said that 'Labour should maintain and extend free movement rights.' What does the extend mean? Where do you want to extend it to?

JC: Well, I think the movers of the motion had in mind the questions of family reunion of people from both the European Union and other parts of the world as well, because what you have is people that wholly legitimately make their homes and their contribution here, but have an artificial income level put on them if they're allowed to bring partners or children into this country and I think that is what is behind that motion.

AM: Do you agree with the motion?

JC: I agree with the principle that there has to be the right of family reunion and there has to be that right of joining a spouse or whatever in this country, but there also has to be a recognition that our economy and our society has been enriched massively by people that have made their homes here. And a Labour government is not going – no Labour government led by me will bring in a hostile environment such as Theresa May brought in (....)

AM: A very very simple, very easy question, will free movement end if we leave the EU?

JC: There will be a great deal of movement.

AM: A great deal of movement. So free movement will not end?

JC: No, you'll have to wait until Thursday. I know you're very impatient

AM: I am. I just want to get you to tell me what's going to happen.

JC: Well you'll know on Thursday.

AM: Overall immigration has been a huge issue around Brexit and different voices in the Labour Party have felt different things. What I'm trying to work out is whether your instinct is for more

free movement of people around the world, including from the EU?

JC: My instinct is to recognise that economies are interdependent around the world. That we all benefit from people moving to living in and working in different societies and we benefit massively from the vast number of overseas students that come here. I don't want to turn my back on that, I don't want us to become an isolated society. I am proud of the diversity of our society in our country and I want that to be a basis of how we live.

AM: Let's turn to another union, the British union. Ian Blackford of the SNP said very clearly just now that he wanted from the Labour Party a commitment for a Scottish independence referendum within the first year of a Labour government. Would you give him that commitment?

JC: No, I can't give him that commitment.

AM: Under any circumstances?

JC: I can't give him that commitment because what I want to do is win an election, what I want to do is start the process of reinvesting in this country, of bringing forward all the proposals that we've got for a national investment bank, regional investment banks in England and investment in Scotland which will get 70 billion of investment. I do not want us to spend the first year on independence referendum.

AM: Initially, you said –

JC: I say – I say gently to the SNP, gently to the SNP they will have the opportunity with a Labour government in Westminster of seeing a fair allocation of resources to Scotland, they will see an investment in Scotland that will help deal with the massive health and social inequality they've got.

AM: What about in the first terms of a Labour government?

JC: Are they going to put into office -

AM: What about the first term of a Labour government?

JC: Look, I'm saying in the early years of that government we would, we would want to do that.

AM: They said we want an election in the first term.

JC: There are Scottish elections in 2021, which obviously I hope Labour will win in Holyrood, but I think up until then certainly not.

AM: So you're pushing this on. I'm asking because no one knows what the outcome of this election is going to be, but it could be that you're the largest party but you haven't got an overall majority and you are depending on the votes of the SNP or some other parties to actually get your measures through.

JC: We're not -

AM: And they're going to require something from you in return and what they demand from you in return is a relatively early crisp clear commitment to a Scottish independence referendum.

JC: We're not doing deals with anybody, we're not forming coalition governments, we will put forward the programme on which we will have been elected which is the one of investment. And my view is that the issue of an independence referendum should not come in the early years of that government. We should be given the chance, the opportunity and the people of Scotland will see the benefits of a Labour government in Westminster that treats the needs of Scotland very seriously.

AM: You may not be able to get your vote through if you don't do a deal with the SNP. We don't know what's going to happen.

JC: The SNP will have a choice. Do they want to put Boris Johnson back in with all the austerity economics that they claim to be against, or are they going to say, well, a Labour government is going to deliver for Scotland?

SM: One of the things coming in in 2021, is Northern Ireland's centenary. Is that something that you welcome, celebrate?

JC: Well, a massive historical moment and I think we can celebrate the progress of the Good Friday Agreement and the Peace Agreement. We can celebrate the growing integration of the

economy of Northern Ireland with the Republic and we can also celebrate the fact that we will maintain an open border between the Republic and Northern Ireland.

AM: Before we even get to this General Election there's going to be a NATO Summit in London, Donald Trump's coming, all the other leaders of NATO are coming. What's your message to them?

JC: That I hope they're able to bring about peace in Syria and Turkey. I hope they're able to put pressure on the Turkish government on its treatment of Kurdish people in Northern Syria and I hope that they will have a developing and serious relationship with Russia in which they question Russia's human rights record and behaviour, but they also build a relationship in order to reduce the tensions that exist on the borders of NATO and Russia.

AM: Going forward –

JC: I do think the NATO Summit is obviously an important occasion but it also can be a grouping that can come together and make some expressions about recognising the causes of the tensions around the world, which is why I start by mentioning Turkey and Kurdish people in Northern Syria.

AM: Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff, told me last week that it was the most successful military alliance in history. Do you agree?

JC: I'm not sure I define it as that. I would define it as a product of an attempt to bring people together during and after the Second World War and that we are obviously members of NATO and our voice will be in NATO there to try to reduce tensions and promote peace.

AM: It was clearly part of that world, as it were. We've moved on. President Macron says it's brain dead now.

JC: Well they're both quite strong statements, if I may say so. Maybe neither are completely right.

AM: Okay, one final thing. Do you think NATO has a strong role going forward for the next ten or 50 years?

JC: I think there has to be some kind of relationship and alliance in order to make sure there aren't conflicts between member states, but the whole point is Turkey is a member state and is now in conflict with many many other – the views of many many others. President Macron takes the view that there has to be a stronger European voice rather than a NATO voice, that's always been his position. I think there has to be a coming together around the world, and that's why I make the point about tensions. But also make the point that the USA is increasingly moving to an Asia Pacific direction in what it is and the tensions that could arise in the Pacific are actually as dangerous and as great as anything on the borders of Western Europe and Russia.

AM: Looking backwards, talking about something we've talked about before which is the Trident defence system. Now you've suggested to me in the past that you might be in favour of the Trident submarines going out but without nuclear weapons in them. Is that still your view?

JC: No. My view is that we have nuclear weapons, that there is a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. There have been many expressions about the world with the aspiration of a nuclear free world by President Obama, by former President Gorbachev and by many others. But also I think we have to look at what are the real threats to security around the world, and what are they? Terrorism, cyber security, climate change, environmental disaster and massive imbalances which are important. So I do think –

AM: The SNP come to you and they say part of the price – they just said this – part of the price of our support is going to be

getting rid of Trident. We don't want Trident in our waters, we don't want this hugely damaging and dangerous defence system in our waters at all, please get rid of it. What do you tell them?

JC: I think the SNP were actually agreeing with me. And indeed in the past they certainly have. That the priority has to be giving realism to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, giving realism to the six-party talks in Korea, giving realism to the whole question of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, in the Middle East or anywhere else.

AM: So the Trident boats stay.

JC: Well, they would be part, obviously if you went into non-proliferation treaty discussions, then clearly every country's nuclear weapons go into that equation. And I do think we have to recognise that, as I said, the real problems in the world are not what was happening during the Cold War, but actually the levels of insecurity brought about by climate disaster and many other things. That's where the real insecurity comes from. And threats to us at the moment are actually cyber-security more than anything else. Look what happened to our NHS two years ago.

AM: There are lots of threats around the world. Would a Labour government carry on selling arms to Saudi Arabia?

JC: We've said quite clearly that we would not sell arms to Saudi Arabia whilst they continue the bombardment of Yemen, and we want to see a ceasefire and a peace process in Yemen. We also want to see an agreement between Saudi Arabia, Iran and across the Middle East to try and bring about general security. Again there are human rights issues involved. I make this point because I think this is pertinent. Human rights issues involved in both Iran and in Saudi Arabia.

AM: Over the last five years or so we've sold about £350 million of arms to Israel. Would a Labour government carry on selling arms to Israel?

JC: At the moment arms are not sold to Israel that can be used for internal actions. There's quite a limited supply on those. And the sales have actually gone down. And indeed, I would bring back into play the House of Commons Committee which is able to oversee arms sales in relation to human rights and the use of them, and I would ask them to make a view on it first.

AM: Now, among the many areas where you're spending huge amounts of money, you now want to give free dentistry to everybody. Can I ask you a very straightforward question?

JC: It's not free dentistry, it's free dental checks to everybody.

AM: Free dental checks.

JC: So you and I can get our teeth checked for free.

AM: Very good.

JC: Which actually saves money in the long run.

AM: In every direction you look you're spending lots and lots of money. Huge nationalisation programmes, lots and lots more money on welfare and so on, and so on. Are there enough very rich people in this country who are going to stay here and pay their taxes to fund all of this?

JC: All these very big corporations that at the moment tend to locate themselves and their head offices and their tax base into low tax regimes will happily carry on trading in other countries that have a higher tax regime. I think there has to be an international tax basis in which they pay a proportion of their tax on the basis of everything they do in that economy. And that will make quite a big difference. I also think that you should look at expenditure as an investment for the future. I mean, you raised the question of dental checks. If you and I don't have a dental check – and maybe you do, maybe you don't, I don't want to know about your teeth actually. I won't ask. But if we don't have a dental check and then somewhere down the line we have a catastrophe, a disaster, massive pain, we go to A&E. We might have to go to hospital. And that is very expensive. So a dental

check, a free dental check, is actually an investment for the future. And also helps people to have some education about oral hygiene.

AM: Lots of people happily use private dental care. Your instincts (talking together)

JC: Andrew, you say lots of people – that's an easy thing to say. There are lots of people who can't afford.

AM: It's true. If you can it's easy. And I know there are lots of people who can't as well. I know.

JC: Lots of people can't afford it.

AM: My question is your instinct in every area seems to be that where there's a choice the state can always do something better than the private sector, whether it's broadband or dentistry or anything else. And I wonder is there any part of the economy which is completely safe from the threat, as they would see it, of nationalisation. I talked to John McDonnell and I asked him about BT and he said, 'no.' And now you're going to nationalise part of BT.

JC: We're not trying to grab hold of the economy, actually.

AM: Are you not?

JC: No, the public sector provisions we're making are actually very, very modest. What we're talking about is water being in public ownership. I don't know anybody that thinks the water companies have behaved sensibly or reasonably or not made huge profits out of doing – delivering a not very good service in many places. We'll bring Royal Mail back into public ownership. Now, Royal Mail, that can pay six million pounds for an executive to come in. So I do think-

AM: We're out of time.

JC: Can I just say this.

AM: We're out of time now.

JC: We want a just, reasonable society where the aspirations of the poorest are met alongside the aspirations of the rest.

AM: In a word, are you going to win this? In a word?

JC: Determined to win it and looking forward to winning it on the 12th December.

AM: Jeremy Corbyn, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

(ends)