AM: Welcome Diane Abbott. Can I just ask you about the Keir Starmer menu as it were for after we leave the EU? He said that we’d have a really close relationship with the single market, a bit like a Norway style, modernised Norway style. Is that fair enough?

DA: The most important thing about our position on Brexit is that the priority for us is jobs and the economy. The priority for Theresa May seems to be holding her Cabinet together. But we – our principles are very –

AM: I’m just looking for specifics.

DA: Yeah – and specifics.

AM: Specifics, the sort of Norway style.

DA: Specifically, we put jobs and the economy first. Specifically, we will not vote for anything which damages jobs and the economy.

AM: What does that mean about our relationship with the single market then long term?

DA: What it means is that we were calling for a transitional period, which the Tories have now adopted – and in

AM: But I’m talking about after this, I’m talking about the end position.
DA: We’re not conducting this negotiation, but we’re calling for a transitional period and obviously during that transitional period we will be having a measure of staying in the single market and staying in the customs union.

AM: What about paying into the single market, the EU, in order to have a very close relationship with the single market which is our biggest market?

DA: We’re not conducting this negotiation.

AM: No, but we’ve had answers from your party already which appear to be very clear and you seem to be rowing back from them now.

DA: No, I’m not rowing back from anything. I’m reminding you what our principles are and we are going into this with principles whereas the government is going into this trying to hold its MPs together.

AM: Well, Keir Starmer said that we may have to make payments in in order to get access to the single market. Do you agree with that or not?

DA: We may have to do so but we need to see how the Tories’ negotiations go.

AM: Okay. When it comes to another phrase that emerged in that interview, not free movement, because free movement is part of the four freedoms of the EU and we’ll be out of the EU, but easy movement we agreed would be the likely Labour position. Do you know what ‘easy movement’ would mean?

DA: Well I think most people agree that we have to get rid of some of the bureaucracy around migration and in fact even the
government is now agreeing because they announced last week that they’re going to introduce a new online system for EU nationals and they’re going to do away with the 85 page forms and I think that’s what we were referencing when we talked about easy movement - less bureaucracy. It’s good for migrants but it’s also good for business.

AM: So less bureaucracy, it would remain very easy. If I was a French citizen of the EU with my Burgundy passport and I want to come to the UK, do I walk through, show my passport and get through or am I going to be questioned, will I have to have a visa, will it be much more difficult for me to come here after Brexit, if Labour are in power – which you might well be?

DA: Well we hope we will be. We’re talking about diminishing the bureaucracy, making it more efficient because that’s better for migrants and it’s better for business and better for the country as a whole. And the bureaucracy is a real problem and that’s what we reference when we talk about easy movement.

AM: But this is not really what I’m asking. What I’m asking is what is the difference between the current system, where we are now when it comes to movement from the EU, the rest of the EU to the UK and vice versa, now and what you would like to see after we leave the EU. I mean you may well be Home Secretary so it’s not an unfair question to ask you.

DA: When we leave the single market freedom of movement will fall. What we will put in its place is fair rules and a reasonable management of migration and part of that will be moving away from the bureaucracy that bedevils the current system.

AM: So it will be relatively easy for EU citizens to come here after Brexit under you?
DA: There will be relatively less bureaucratic then some of the proposals the government is making.

AM: Okay. Very straight forward question, will they need visas?

DA: We will have to see how this negotiation goes.

AM: Surely you must know the answer to these kinds of questions. You could be Home Secretary quite soon and this will be a very, very early decision for you to take.

DA: We are going to have fair rules and reasonable management. That may involve a visa system, but we have to see how these negotiations the government is undertaking go.

AM: Do you think that the number of people coming here from the EU will go down after Brexit - if you’re in power?

DA: Well, I mean you should talk to British business and the health service, because they’re very worried about a collapse in the number of EU migrants coming here. Social care would be in a terrible position. The health service, finance, education, so we will be listening, as the government should be listening, to what business and the public sector says about its needs for labour.

AM: And in all those areas that you’ve listed, do you think we actually need roughly the kind of numbers of people coming here now to carry on to keep the health service running as it should to keep all those businesses running as they have been? Do you think we need those people?

DA: At this point both business and public services like health and education are saying we do indeed need these European migrants that are coming here.
AM: So we could see actually about the same number of people coming here after Brexit as now, because the economy needs it in your view?

DA: It’s my view. It’s the view –

AM: It will be your view if you’re Home Secretary.

DA: No, I’m just trying to point out some reality here and the reality is that business, the CBI, the Institute of Directors, but also health, education and social care they say that they need these European migrants. And we have to listen to them.

AM: So numbers of people coming in much the same, probably, paying in, quite possibly, and being very close to the single market. That was the Keir Starmer message as well. That is why a lot of your original, you know, hardcore anti-EU voters are so upset at the moment. Let me remind you of something, we’re going to look at something for the moment which is a guy on Question Time who comes from a staunch Labour seat in the north and this is what he had to say:

Question Time, BBC One

Thursday 14th December

“Their party is tending towards the single market now which is unrestricted migration and that is what this town overall voted Leave to stop, because it damaged the working class community. And their party’s doing more damage to these communities if we’re going to hear that Keir Starmer keep on about the single market’s on its way back. That’s what we wouldn’t have in these working class traditional communities, and you’re stabbing us in the back.”
AM: Why do you think he feels like that?

DA: You’ve got one clip from Question Time. But I talk to my colleagues and Keir talks to our colleagues in parliament who represent constituencies all over the country -

AM: Do you think he’s unrepresentative?

DA: - and they – What Labour voters are concerned about is the chaos of the Tory negotiations on almost everything that Theresa May promised. She promised that the negotiations around trade would take place in parallel to the primary negotiations. That didn’t happen. She has – she just lost a vote in parliament. What our voters are concerned about is the chaos of the Tory negotiations.

AM: But don’t you think there’s quite a lot of - that was one - absolutely just one clip, but don’t you think there’s quite a lot of people who agree with that guy, who are Labour voters all across non-metropolitan Britain who really want Brexit to happen, but don’t like the idea of being in the single market and your party’s going to have to jump on one side of the fence or the other, eventually?

DA: I think that I and my Labour colleagues talk to more Labour voters than you do, with the greatest of respect.

AM: You’d be surprised.

DA: Yeah. And their concern is that the Tory negotiations are a mess and they’re increasingly concerned about what the prospects are for jobs and the economy and those are the issues that Labour’s going to be fighting on.

AM: How is the campaign going for a second referendum?
DA: The Labour Party doesn’t support a second referendum.

AM: Well you did, you said very clearly that you told your constituents very, very clearly that you wanted a second referendum and that you would try to help the electorate to get – We know that parliament’s going to get a vote now at the end of this process but you have said yourself to your own constituents that you think they should have a vote as well, so that’s why I’m asking.

DA: You’re referencing some Lib Dem stuff. I did say –

AM: I’m not. Here’s the Guardian, November 2016. This is you: “You cannot have access to the single market or be part of the single market without freedom of movement. Those of us who arguing for it” – that’s the single market. And then you go to say: “Lots of perfectly respectable people voted for Brexit” - and then you go on to say: “ending free movement has become a synonym for anti-immigrant racism” and then you go again, “I will argue for the right of the electorate to vote on any deal that is finally agreed.” I will argue for the right of the electorate to vote on any deal that is finally agreed. Is that still true?

DA: It is true that parliament agreed last week that parliament who represent the electorate –

AM: Ah, so it’s a parliamentary vote now, not a referendum?

DA: Well it’s about the electorate and we have a parliamentary system and we did agree last week, against the wishes of the government that parliament will have a final vote on the deal and I think that’s very important. And it will allow MPs to reflect the views of the electorate.
AM: That is not a second referendum? Be absolutely clear. The second referendum from your point of view ain’t gonna happen?

DA: The Labour Party does not support a second referendum and we’ve never supported it and we don’t support it now.

AM: Well you did in that quote, I would suggest.

DA: No. We think the electorate should have a say via their elected representatives.

AM: Ah, all right. Now one other thing that you’ve raised today is your concern about police cuts and police numbers. Do you think the country is actually threatened by the cuts in the police budgets across England in particular?

DA: Well, there are you know police chiefs up and down the country who were concerned about the fact that we’ve lost 20,000 police officers since 2010 and when you look at an issue like terrorism, the recent report by David Anderson on the terrorist incidents this year one of the points he made was actually neighbourhood policing is our front line against terrorism ’cause it’s neighbourhood police who get the information, who are talking to communities and help the fight against terrorism.

AM: Diane Abbott, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

Ends