AM: Welcome, Shami Chakrabarti. Can Brexit be stopped?
SC: Mrs May’s deal is unacceptable. I think we have to –
AM: My question is can Brexit be stopped?
SC: Well, theoretically, but we’re a long way from that moment, because of course 52 per cent of the country voted for Brexit. They certainly didn’t vote for this. What’s important is that parliament does its duty and realises that this deal is the worst kind of bureaucratic fudge that doesn’t deliver for anyone; for those who voted for Brexit, those who voted for Remain, and in particular the jobs and services and the economy of this country.

AM: Shami Chakrabarti, would you like to leave the EU?
SC: I campaigned to remain in the EU. Everybody knows that.
AM: Do you still want to stay in the EU?
SC: I respect the outcome of the referendum, but I don’t respect this bodged deal. I cannot support it and I cannot advise my colleagues to support it. It doesn’t meet Labour’s tests, it doesn’t live up to Theresa May’s own promises, it’s the worst of all worlds. I have no doubt about that.

AM: And you’d prefer to see no deal than vote for this?
SC: No, no, no. We’re not going to have no deal, because we will work – Jeremy Corbyn was very clear on Sophie Ridge’s show on the other channel that if this deal –
AM: He wasn’t clear about how he’s going to stop it, how any of you can. You say you want to. I still don’t understand exactly what you’d do to stop it.
SC: What I believe will happen is that – for the moment we’re asking Theresa May – and by the way, it seems that five of her pizza plotters in her Cabinet are asking her – to go and renegotiate this deal, I suspect in a different direction to that
which I would like to see. But we’re asking Theresa May now, while there’s still time, to go back to the EU and negotiate something more in line with our six tests. If she doesn’t do that and she brings this deal to the House of Commons, then I believe it’s looking like this will be voted down.

AM: So it’s voted down –
SC: If it’s voted down –
AM: But you see, you then put down, for instance, a motion in the House of Commons to say that we don’t want no deal, or you put down a motion to say we want something else. But motions are not, as you know, legally – and this is legislation.
SC: So it’s my view that if Theresa May doesn’t think again now while she’s still got time and this deal is voted down, that is of enormous constitutional significance, and normally in a parliamentary democracy she ought to go to the country. She ought to say, ‘this is my deal, all these terrible blackguards in the House of Commons have gone with the highway and not with my way, back me or sack me.’ She should call a general election.

AM: I’ll come onto that in a moment.
SC: Well no, no, but you asked me what’s going to happen and what I would like to see. I would like to see, if that for any reason is not possible –
AM: It’s not possible is it?
SC: Well I, I feel rather differently about it. I think it’s perfectly possible. She could say back me or sack me, or alternatively, if the shenanigans continue in her own party and there are attempts to replace her, it seems to me completely unacceptable for the Conservatives to crown a second unelected prime minister without a general election.

AM: And all this depends upon Tory MPs, at a time when Labour is ahead in the opinion polls, voting for a general election. And in terms of the two-thirds majority, you need about a hundred Tory
MPs to decide to vote for Christmas. That’s why I think it’s not going to happen.

SC: It depends what they want. I suspect –

AM: They don’t want to lose their seats. Most of them.

SC: Well, perhaps they’re confident. Perhaps they’re confident in their own abilities and perhaps the putative leaders –

AM: It won’t happen.

SC: No, in my –

AM: Okay, I’m going to give you this. I’m going to say you’ve got your election and you win your election, okay? In your manifesto presumably you stick with the six tests at this stage, and you become a party determined to enact Brexit, is that right?

SC: Well, what we are currently trying to achieve is the closest possible relationship with the European Union, a permanent customs union –

AM: While being outside it.

SC: Well, a permanent customs union, a relationship with the single market that protects industry, and service industries in particular, but also allows us to invest, allows state intervention to invest in the regions and nations of this country.

AM: Is this not remarkable close to the transitional implementation agreement that Theresa May has negotiated?

SC: No. Because we would have a say, for example, over future trade deals. And also –

AM: The EU’s said again and again that that is completely impossible. That is only if you are a member of the EU. They’ve said it again and again. Angela Merkel, all of them, have said you can’t have all the privileges unless you’re a member.

SC: We would have a completely different atmosphere in the renegotiations conducted by us. Why? Not least because we want to stay in line with workers’ rights, environmental protections and consumer protections.

AM: A lot of that is in here. A level playing field –

SC: No, it isn’t –
AM: The words, ‘a level playing field.’
SC: But we’re not talking about a level playing field and no regression for now, we’re talking about staying in line with progress in the future. Under this arrangement workers’s rights, consumer, environmental protections would over time decline in Britain.

AM: You wouldn’t be able to strike new trade deals under that circumstance. And again, whatever the atmosphere is, you may think we’re nice, we’re Labour, they’ll be nice to us...
SC: You’re citing this deal to me and I’m telling you I’m not buying it. And I don’t think the House of Commons is buying it, because it’s unacceptable. It’s unacceptable to all sides, to leavers, to remainers.
AM: Have you read it.
SC: Yes, I have actually. I’m sure you have too.
AM: I’ve read an awful lot of it, yeah.
SC: Well, I’ve read it all, thank you.

AM: So you say it’s unacceptable, even though it includes lots of things the Labour Party have said?
SC: It doesn’t. It doesn’t. This is the problem with it, if you’ll forgive me, Andrew, the problem with it is that it’s machine politics. It’s kicking the can down the road. It’s designed to look as if it can please everybody and it can’t. And the problem is that it contains no vision, no clear vision for what Britain is going to be in the future. And if there is any hint, it’s in the fact that there’ll be no regression from workers’ rights as they are now, but there certainly won’t be continued progress in line with the European Union in the future.

AM: Because we’re not members.
SC: Yeah, but we believe in the same values and standards.
AM: I can’t understand why you want to leave the EU.
SC: I don’t want to leave the EU. I campaigned to remain. I’m a democrat.

AM: But you’re going to go to a general election campaign as a member of a party whose manifesto says we are leaving the EU. We are EU-Brexit enablers.

SC: I’m a democrat. I don’t know about you, Andrew, but I’m a democrat.

AM: Don’t try and patronise me. I’m as much a democrat as you are.

SC: I certainly wouldn’t try to patronise you, and I’m sure you would never try and patronise me.

AM: Neither way. Let me read you what Lisa Nandy says, Labour MP. ‘Having a UK-wide customs arrangement would be a really big piece of the jigsaw for Labour, and something that we ought to consider.’ That is what is here. Not forever but for the foreseeable future.

SC: I’m not satisfied with the protections in that document. In particular I’m not satisfied that it protects workers’ rights, environmental and consumer protections.

AM: You’ve spent most of your career being in favour of free speech and human rights and all of that. You’ve got lots of Labour MPs who look at the possibility of no deal and they’re so worried about it that they are contemplating voting with the government and voting for the withdrawal agreement. What do you say to them?

SC: I say that’s not the choice. We can work together. We heard some very big hints, for example, from Nicola Sturgeon a few moments ago. If we vote down this desperately unattractive deal we can work together across parties – and I’ve also done that all of my career, by the way – we can work together across parties to make sure that there is another alternative, which is a jobs-first arrangement, the closest possible partnership with the European Union, that safeguards – yes, business and industry, but also environmental, consumer and worker rights.
AM: Or you can agree it’s a pretty thumping document. Are you really saying you can renegotiate that in a matter of weeks?
SC: Size isn’t everything.
AM: You think you can renegotiate that in time for our leaving the EU?
SC: I believe that if Theresa May acts now and acts in the areas of particular concern there is still time to renegotiate this. The question is, is she going to listen? And of course, there are five members of her own Cabinet, those that are left, who are urging her to renegotiate as well. So I’m not alone in this.

AM: But we’ve also heard Angela Merkel and many more saying it’s too late, it can’t be done.
SC: Well, you know, this is what people say in times of negotiation. The EU has ample form for renegotiating, as with Lisbon, at the last minute. So I’m confident that if there’s real will and if Theresa May listens, if she listens to people on all sides who are unhappy with this terrible deal, that I mean, not least, that locks us into a halfway house in which we have no say. If she listens there’s still time to save this.
(ends)