

ANDREW MARR SHOW, BENN, SOUBRY, RAAB with Andrew

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2019

HILARY BENN, MP

ANNA SOUBRY, MP

DOMINIC RAAB, MP

AM: I'm joined by three absolutely key backbench figures. By the former Brexit Secretary, Dominic Raab, the Labour Chair of the Brexit Select Committee and former Business Minister, Hilary Benn, and Anna Soubry who is an enthusiast for another referendum. Let me ask you all about your positions. Before I do that, Hilary Benn, it's in your office tomorrow that these alleged backbench plotters are gathering in order to seize back control of the commons agenda from the Executive. Can you explain in clear terms what you're about and why?

HB: Well, MPs doing their job, Andrew, are not plotters. They are trying to sort out the mess that the Prime Minister has created. We are facing a national crisis and there are many MPs in the House of Commons whose first priority is to ensure that we do not leave without a deal, and therefore finding ways, when we come to table amendments this week and debate on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, how we stop that if the Prime Minister won't listen to the calls she's having from all quarters in all parties to stop a no deal Brexit. Then MPs have to do the job if the Prime Minister is not capable of doing so. Can I also say, to attack House of Commons clerks and suggest they're part of a conspiracy is a disgrace. Our clerks are resolutely impartial. They act with complete integrity and when MPs go to them and say I'd like to do this, can you advise me on how to do it, that's the advice they give. And we really cannot get into a situation where people are suggesting that the clerks of the House of Commons are doing anything improper, they too are doing their job.

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AM: Anna Soubry, how is that we know what the clerks are thinking do you think?

AS: I don't know, but it is exceptionally concerning because my understanding is that this is a quite proper exchange of emails between Dominic Grieve and a clerk who as Hilary says is doing their job, they always give members of parliament impartial advice, and we need to know on what basis that has been put into the public arena. Remember Dominic is also the Chairman of the Security Committee and if it turns out that his emails have been hacked – and I don't see any other way – it seems inconceivable that it would have been shared. But we really have to stop this narrative. This is not people plotting, as Hilary quite rightly says, this is people doing their job because of a profound failing by government. And if government won't do its job then parliament has to take this back. And if I may say, I think your viewers are fed up with all these half-baked conspiracy theories. They're fed up with Brexit, they're wanting to know what our solutions are and working together is actually a good thing.

AM: Dominic Raab. However a lot of people will read these stories this morning and believe that MPs are trying to stop Brexit by sort of complicated procedural means.

DR: Well I read the stuff in the Sunday Times. I don't know anything really much about it. What I do know is that it is a matter of international law under the Lisbon Treaty and now domestic law. We are set to have two years in negotiations, we've triggered Article 50, and then we leave. So I think it's going to be very difficult as a matter of law and notwithstanding all the differences and shades of opinion on the Remain side to actually subvert what is the default option. My view would be that after the biggest parliamentary defeat in history the Prime Minister should go back, look at the backstop with the EU, make clear we're transitioning to a best in class free trade agreement. For those of us that want a deal, and I do, then that's the best

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opportunity we've got to deliver on. Otherwise we will leave on  
the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. I'm pretty confident about that.

AM: Good, because I want to come onto the detail now and the  
substance. Hilary Benn, first of all. And I'm going to try and avoid  
jargon about Norways and Canadas and pluses and minuses and  
all of that, but you basically want us to leave the EU and then  
have a very close relationship in terms of trade and indeed the  
customs agreement as well?

HB: I think we have to compromise. Because parliament is  
deadlocked and the Prime Minister can't get round that. And I  
favour having a close economic relationship as you described.  
Remaining in a customs union. Well let's start with the customs  
union, because the Prime Minister said come and talk, as you  
reported earlier, her mind appears to be completely closed.

AM: I'm just quoting you.

HB: Well I know you were, but these talks will get nowhere in  
those circumstances. So if the Prime Minister is not prepared to  
move on that basic question, should we remain in a customs union  
which is an essential precondition to keeping an open border in  
Northern Ireland and keeping friction free trade which businesses  
rely on, that is a starting point. But I'm also in favour of  
parliament having the chance to vote on a series of options to see  
if there is a majority that can command support.

AM: The big problem with this is that it retains free movement of  
people, which I assume Dominic you would not regard as a proper  
Brexit.

DR: Well it's not just me. Dominic Grieve – we've been talking  
about him on the Remain side, an article in the Sunday Times  
saying from a democratic point of view it is particularly poor. So  
no I don't think it's a good idea and during the campaign, the  
referendum campaign on both sides Leave and Remain everyone

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said it was the worst of all worlds. But I'll let Hilary make their  
staunch defence.

AS: Well I'm sorry we're talking about the customs union which is  
of course nothing to do with free movement. That's the single  
market. And Hilary's point is can we –

AM: But he wants single market ...

HB: Well in or as close a relationship as we can have.

AS: And think that then there lies the problem and as the know  
and your viewers know that's been the great conundrum because  
you can't choose your four freedoms. And so you're either in the  
single market or you're out.

AM: Can I just ask both of you very quickly, do you think that if  
the Prime Minister said, d'you know, I'm prepared to move on the  
customs union we would then have a deal that could get through  
the House of Commons and be accepted by the EU?

AS: Two problems as I foresee them. First of all I don't think that  
Labour will ever vote for what they will call a Tory Brexit. I think  
that's a simple political reality. The second point is, on the  
customs union, as you know I have made the case for both the  
customs union and the single market for the reasons that Hilary  
identifies, solves the problem of Northern Ireland is the best thing  
for British business. I think that the problem now is is that that  
majority has gone in the House of Commons, I don't think we will  
settle on it, and the customs union by itself won't be the best  
thing for British business without this thing called the Regulatory  
Alignment which is critical. That's why I want a people's vote. I  
want this now to go back to the British people. That amendment  
will be tabled. We now need to get Jeremy Corbyn to support it.

AM: Dominic Raab is sitting there silent. There are too many  
Dominics in this conversation. I'm not being personal but everyone  
seems to be called Dominic, almost everyone.

AS: Apart from the three of us!

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AM: Apart from the three of us. In the wider conversation, nonetheless you have been observing this with a smile on your face I suspect because here we have two versions of people who are against the government's Brexit deal. One wanting a close relationship post Brexit and one wanting another referendum. And unless you two can agree and find common cause you are going to be split in the Commons too and the Commons will not come to an agreement.

HB: Well I think the Commons will come to an agreement but we're not going to leave on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March without a deal.

AS: Exactly right.

HB: I think that is the first thing. Secondly, if the Prime Minister doesn't shift on more than customs union there isn't going to be an agreement and as someone who has not been calling for a second referendum, because I think we have an obligation to try and honour the first, if in the end, Andrew, parliament remains deadlocked then there is no other way, it seems to me of resolving this other than by going back to the people and say what do you think?

AM: I was going to ask all of you where you can compromise but you can compromise by coming towards Anna on a second referendum or another referendum –

HB: If we're deadlocked.

AS: If he's deadlocked.

AM: Can you compromise with him?

AS: with who?

AM: Hilary.

AS: Well you can see the common ground that exists between us.

AM: I know, but you want another referendum under all circumstances.

AS: Yes but I also want a deal on the ballot paper there as well and if it's Mrs May's deal I would vote for Theresa's deal. I know many others would if it's part of a referendum. And equally if we

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had Norway in some form I'd put that on the ballot paper with Remain.

AM: So there is crossover here. Dominic Raab. I suppose if I was sitting in Number 10 I'd be saying this is the problem that people like you who voted down the Prime Minister's deal now have. Hearing them it's perfectly possible that you will lose Brexit completely.

DR: I don't think that's right and by the way it was the biggest parliamentary defeat in history and I think it reflects a lot of the frustration in the public at large. The reality is, as a matter of EU law and we've heard from Guy Verhofstadt this morning, the idea that we're going to delay Article 50 for more than a few weeks is not politically on the table. I actually think the Prime Minister should rule it out. I think what your viewers, when they voted Leave or Remain now want to see some finality. So yes, let's go back to the EU, see if can get those two changes that I mentioned on the backstop. Clear movement, transition to a free trade agreement. If not, if not, let's get this done. Let's respect the referendum, not reverse it and let's move on. Because I think people are mightily tired of the ongoing haggling. And I was smiling because I respect Anna and Hilary. People want this done. That's what written in law, let's get it done.

AM: Let me pick you up on a couple of things you've just said. Clearly the easiest thing for the Prime Minister is she goes back to Brussels in the next few days and says we've got to bin this backstop, we'll have a really big change in the backstop and they agree –

DR: I think there needs to be an exit mechanism and –

AM: Do you think it's plausible that they would give us that?

DR: Yes, I think it is. I mean actually it would have been easier back in July. I had, as you know the conversation with –

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AM: But she couldn't negotiate it then to be fair. You would negotiate it when you were in government. She has now lost her deal by 230 votes, why is it easier for her to negotiate it now?

DR: Not correct. We didn't go into bat. My advice was that we should. There was an opening. The Prime Minister did not take that advice. I think it's later and therefore harder now. You always lose time in negotiation, you use a bit of leverage, but there's still an opportunity because it's focusing minds on the EU side. But that's our best chance of a deal and I think actually it's the best chance of rallying the support. Remember the people voting the deal down overwhelmingly, some remainers, overwhelmingly were Brexiters, they want this delivered and so do the British people.

AM: Just before we leave that, did the Irish government ever say to you that is possible that that kind of deal could be struck, that you could get an exit mechanism?

DR: I met with Simon Coveney and I want to respect the integrity, but it was very clear he wasn't ruling things out. They got ruled out when Leo Varadkar, who's less moderate than Simon Coveney, and for him the real issue is that they've taken this incredibly deeply political view on the backstop which has got nothing to do with the realities of solving and avoiding a return to the hard border, and now we need to make sure there's a ladder for them to climb down.

AS: It's pretty disingenuous actually.

HB: Dealing with the backstop doesn't solve the main problem which is our future. Future economic relationship is completely uncertain and it's because the Prime Minister has resolutely refused to face up to the choices that confront...

AM: One way through this that has been talked about –

As: And she would not compromise in the past when she's had many opportunities. I do think that's incredibly important thing to say.

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DR: The problem here is not that the UK has not compromised, is we haven't taken a robust enough line with the EU and that's what most people want to see happen.

AS: We haven't faced up to the choices. We are in a terrible mess –

DR: I don't think you two have but –

AS: - because of the failure of people – I have to say Dominic like your good self, in government. Look, we've got a Cabinet which is utterly divided. A government –

DR: But it's dominated by Remainers, Anna –

AS: No it is not because of that. It is because of a failure, I'm afraid to say, of leadership, facing up to the realities of Brexit and seeking a compromise from the outset as opposed to at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour –

DR: I'm not sure how a second referendum faces up to the realities of Brexit –

AS: Oh it does, absolutely and it provides real choice.

AM: Excuse me, can I just ask the two Conservatives on that elegant sofa, it's been talked about that we could have another General Election shortly. How could the two of you possibly stand on the same manifesto? Listening to you, you couldn't could you?

AS: We can't and I didn't actually stand on our party's manifesto in 2017. The last thing we want is a General Election. Not just because it hangs out the prospect of a Corbyn, god help us, government, but also it wouldn't solve anything. I think that's the most important thing.

DR: Andrew, from my point of view we're one family in the Conservative Party and we do need to unite. But the truth is that's much more difficult unless we get Brexit done, which is why I think for the Conservative Party and for the public at large we

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need to get it delivered and then we move on and the country moves on.

AS: But we won't move on. Because as Hilary absolutely rightly observes the whole point is we've only got this Withdrawal Agreement. The promised Trade Deal which sets out our future has barely begun, and so the ideal that take this deal or crash out without a deal and the arguing stops is for the birds. It's just the beginning of it.

HB: It's the divisions within the Conservative Party, everyone knows that has got us in this position.

DR: What about in the Labour Party, Hilary?

HB: That has got us into this mess. Jeremy Corbyn offered to talk to the Prime Minister quite some time ago and she refused to take him up on the offer. And if her mind remains closed it's no good pretending you're trying to reach out because she has to shift if we're to see any possibilities of a compromise.

AS: Hilary, your party is appallingly divided and with respect to you and indeed Keir, who I know is sitting here, you do have in Jeremy Corbyn the worst Leader of the Opposition that we've ever had. But to his credit he has taken his party to a position, through your conference of supporting a second referendum, a people's vote. He has now got to deliver it because it's going to go down as an amendment, it will be voted on and Labour have to get behind it.

AM: Let's hear from Hilary. Do you think that Jeremy Corbyn under any circumstances is really going to vote for a second referendum?

HB: Well, the Labour policy is very clear. If in the end all of the alternatives have gone, if we don't have a General Election, if we can't reach an agreement in the House of Commons then all

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options are on the table as Keir, from whom you'll hear in a moment will no doubt say. And in those circumstances the question for everybody is, what other way is there is resolving, of resolving this without going back to the British people?

AM: We've had an elegant and civilised conversation but I think it's fair to say there hasn't been a lot of consensus here. Thank you.

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