ANDREW MARR SHOW
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KEIR STARMER

AM: Sir Keir, welcome. What are you going to do next week?
KS: Well, the first thing I'm going to do is make sure that we get the extension that is required under the Benn Act. We've had this silly approach by the prime minister on that. So that's the first thing.

AM: Can I just stop you on that and ask you about this, because we've had three letters sent, we've had various telephone calls made, are you satisfied that he has answered the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law, and is there any chance of you ending up in court tomorrow on all of this?
KS: He's being childlike. The law is very clear: he should have signed one letter in accordance with the law. He's being childlike. And if – I don't think it'll happen, but if we crash out because of what he's done with the letters in eleven days’ time without a deal, he bears personal responsibility for that. So that’s the first fight –
AM: You're not saying he's going to have to go to court about this and you're not going to take him to court?
KS: I'm sure there'll be court proceedings, but the first thing we're going to do in parliament is deal with that issue. The second thing then is if he brings in a Bill to implement his deal we will fight amendments on that, because his deal is a very, very bad deal and it has within it a trapdoor to no deal at the end of next year. The third –
AM: Okay, I'm going to stop you on those things. We need to go through the things one by one. So the amendments you're going to put down, are those amendments on the substance of the deal that he (inaudible), trying to change the deal? And if so, which ones?
KS: It is essential that we expose this deal for what it is. Because it's a deal that fundamentally changes our economy and our approach. So we need to do that. There are technical –

AM: Exposing a deal is one thing, but that's a political game, as it were. Are you going to try and change the deal, is my question.

KS: We will put down amendments to make sure that the future destination is a close economic relationship with the EU. But there's more than that, Andrew, because there's also–

AM: Sorry, I keep stopping you on this, but the detail is really, really important. So the amendments will say in effect that we stay inside the customs union or alongside the customs union, inside or alongside the single market? What kind of –

KS: We've been arguing for a very long time now for a customs union with the EU and for single market alignment. There are other amendments that are really important because there is a trap door to no deal at the end of 2020 that we need to deal with and close, and we can do that in the legislation. And of course we need an amendment to say that whatever deal gets through it should be subject to a referendum where that deal is put to the public and they're asked, 'do you want to leave on these terms of would you rather remain in the EU?' So next week's going to be busy.

AM: There'll be an amendment next week to any legislation, calling for a second referendum or a so-called people's vote?

KS: Andrew, it's inevitable. It's been down many times when we've got to this stage of the exercise. When that Bill goes down it is inevitable that that amendment will be put down, because a growing number of people now think the only way truly to settle this is to ask people, 'do you want to leave on these terms or would you rather remain?' And it's now – this is much more than a technical question about this deal, because if you – the more you read this deal the more the untruths and half-truths of Boris Johnson are exposed. This is to shatter the economic model that
we operate and take us in a deregulated direction that is
fundamental and will be for generations.

AM: This is a very important moment. Will the Labour front bench
actually be putting down an amendment for a referendum and
then vote for it?
KS: I think it’s more likely that it will come from the back bench,
because almost every victory we’ve had –
AM: Will Labour back it then?
KS: Yes. Almost every victory we’ve had on anything in the last
three years has come from the back benches. That’s how we got
the meaningful vote, that’s how we got any progress in this.

AM: Right. So Labour will be whipped to back a second
referendum vote next week?
KS: Andrew, we’ve already voted, I think three times, as a party,
for a second referendum with a three-line whip behind it. And that
is the clear policy. Whether it’s this deal or any future deal it’s got
to go back so the public can say, ‘do you want to leave on these
terms?’ If so then we do. If not, we remain.

AM: And if you’re successful and that amendment is attached to
the deal, do you then vote for the deal?
KS: Well, we’ll see what that looks like. But it makes sense to say
that by whatever means we get that referendum.

AM: You know what it looks like, you know what the deal is. If
you attach the referendum, again I ask you – and the deal’s there
but with a referendum attached to it in law, do you then back
that?
KS: Well, the spirit of this is very, very clear, and we actually
offered this to Theresa May. We said, ‘we don’t think your deal is
very good, but if it’s up against the safeguard of being able to
remain, then we’ll allow it to proceed in that way.’
AM: So the answer to my question is really yes isn’t it? And if you win on your referendum amendment you will then vote for the deal, it will then go through and you’ll get your referendum?
KS: Well Andrew, your heard me me express the principle thing. We’ll have to look at the particular amendment. We’ll have to look at the votes at the end of it. But what we’re trying to achieve is that this deal in particular, but any deal, is put up against remain in a referendum. And we’re focused on that. And we’ll have to see tactically how we get there, but what we’re trying to achieve I think is very, very clear.

AM: And you would agree that to have a referendum requires quite complicated primary legislation.
KS: Yes.
AM: And that requires the government at some stage being behind it, or are you going to try and put all the detail of that into your amendment so that you get the detail of the amendment inside the legislation next week?
KS: Andrew, I don’t know the answer to that because we’re all working on it. There will be an amendment on a referendum, whether there will be detailed amendments put next week for the whole of the referendum I don’t know. There’s lots of discussions going on. But the principle is very, very clear. I accept the point you put to me, which is if there is to be a referendum it’s going to need detailed legislation.

AM: So the detailed legislation won’t be coming this week, which means you’re reliant on the government, trusting the government to put that legislation in. Things like what is the question and when it happens.
KS: Well, parliament will be in charge of that, because if parliament decides that the choice should be between the deal that Boris Johnson says is so great – if so, let him have the confidence to put it to the public – or remain. If parliament says that’s the choice, then that’s what goes in the legislation.
AM: Now, talking to various experts on all of this, they all say that it takes at least 22 weeks to run a proper, legally safe referendum campaign. That’s between five and six months. That’s a long time. Are you seriously suggesting that we should have, in effect, a government with no majority in the House of Commons, unable perhaps to get its budget through, unable perhaps to get the Queen’s Speech through, for another six months while we have the referendum, or are you expecting a general election before that referendum?

KS: Well, I accept that’s going to be very difficult. I accept that’s probably the timeframe. I think it could be shortened a bit, but probably not much. But this is such a fundamental question that we have to press this point about a referendum. Now, if a general election comes first, as you know, the Labour Party is saying we would seek to improve the deal and secure a better deal, as it were, but still put it back against remain in a referendum. So in a sense whether there’s a general election or not, the position we’ve adopted is: whatever the outcome, whether it’s Boris Johnson’s bad deal or a better one which could be secured, it’s got to go to a referendum up against remain.

AM: So in your guts what do you think, will we be sitting here this time next week having seen Labour backing Boris Johnson’s deal with a referendum amendment attached to it?

KS: Look, Andrew, I don’t know. I don’t know, I really don’t know, because things are moving so fast. What I do know is this: that the more scrutiny there is of Boris Johnson’s deal the more I think people are going to be persuaded that it’s a very bad deal. And one of the reasons I think he’s trying to bounce us through this is because if you look at the detail it exposes his half-truths and untruths.

AM: But people – with respect, people maybe have had enough of the principle and they want to know in practical terms what is
going to happen. And it doesn’t sound to me like you have a full worked-out argument for a second referendum amendment to go through next week, and actually you don’t know exactly what’s going to happen, and exactly, if it does happen, what you’re going to do next.

KS: Well, Andrew, the way these things work is that different amendments are put down. I suspect there’ll be dozens of amendments put down this week. We will work through all of them, we will decide which ones we’re supporting. I don’t know which ones are going to be selected – and there are lots and lots of discussions to be had. That’s how it’s happened for the last three years. This is not unusual, not special about next week.

AM: So, discussions you say. Absolutely critical to this obviously is the DUP.

KS: Yes.

AM: Are you talking to them about this? They indicated they might back a referendum.

KS: I would openly invite the DUP to talk to us, because anybody who wants to improve on the situation, and they do, should be working together. So I say to any MP, any party, but to the DUP in particular, if you want to work with us on this to improve the situation we’re in, our door is open to that discussion.

AM: Now, the letter has been sent to Brussels, and obviously you’re waiting for the response from Brussels. But assuming that you get an extension response from Brussels that ensures that we do now, quotes, ‘crash out’ at the end of this month, presumably at that point you put down a vote of no confidence and we have an election.

KS: Well, when we put that vote down will be a matter for Jeremy Corbyn. But what we’ve said is that once we know that no deal’s off the table because there’s an extension, that is obviously on the table. Exactly when it’s put is a matter for Jeremy Corbyn.
AM: He says we will then be ready with a motion of no confidence. We know the prime minister wants an election. That is presumably when it all happens.

KS: Well, as I say, it’s definitely on the table at that point. We have been waiting to ensure – we haven’t yet got there – that there is an extension, that no deal is off the table. Once we get to that point we’ll have a discussion and decide what we do.

AM: So Jeremy Corbyn says: ‘we’ve said our priority is to prevent a no deal exit,’ which is what you’ve done. ‘And at that point, when that has been achieved, then we will be ready with a motion of no confidence.’ So that seems to me as soon as a message comes back from the EU saying, ‘okay, we’ll grant you the extension,’ at that point Labour has a kind of moral and political duty to put down a motion of no confidence and have an election.

KS: Look, Andrew, I think an election is inevitable, because of the numbers in parliament, because we’ve got to break the impasse. The timing will be a matter for Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the opposition. The conditions are clear, he’s set them out, I’ve set them out, but it’s inevitable that sooner or later this breaks into a general election.

AM: Do you think that the next leader of the Labour Party should be a woman?

KS: I think there’s a very strong case for the next leader to be a woman. What I think is most important is that we build on what we’ve got at the moment and we build on that 2017 manifesto that was so popular in our movement, across the trade union movement.

AM: So you won’t be putting yourself up for it? You’re clearly not a woman.

KS: I’m clearly not a woman, and I don’t think that’s going to change any time soon.
AM: So it sounds to me like you’re not putting yourself up for the next leadership election.
KS: Andrew, I’m not even discussing that. I’m 100 per cent behind Jeremy Corbyn.
AM: You are now.
KS: I am working with Jeremy Corbyn to try to win the next general election. I think it is critical, because my big concern is this: people look at the deal and look at the technicalities, what they’re missing is the big picture, which is that this is going to shatter our economic model, move it to an American-style economy, deregulate it. That’d be terrible for working people, terrible for the standards that we enjoy, and it will take us – once you’ve moved out of – no, just hear me out. Once you’ve moved out of alignment with the EU, once you’ve moved the model we’ve been operating for decades, you are down a slippery slope. I know the government will disavow it and we’ll look back on this moment and say historically our country changed for the worse. That to me is far more important than a hypothetical discussion about who may or may not be leader of the Labour Party in how many years’ time.

AM: So all those things that the prime minister said in the House of Commons yesterday about workers’ rights being enhanced, environmental protections being better after we leave the EU, you simply don’t believe him?
KS: No, we don’t. Of course he would say that, just as he said to the DUP no Conservative prime minister would ever put a border in the Irish Sea. He said that to them. Yesterday he put that before them, which is why they won’t back him. So why would anybody trust him of all people?

AM: And looking at all of this and what’s happened since, you must really think to yourself, ‘we should have accepted the Theresa May offer on workers’ rights and environmental
protections and all the rest of it when we were offered it.’ It was a big mistake to turn that down.

KS: No, of course not. We – in those six weeks of talks we put to Theresa May over and over again that we should have a customs union, single market alignment, and she wouldn’t accept it and she couldn’t deliver it. And even what she offered us when she then put that before parliament, was enough for her own side to take her out by the end of the week.

AM: A woman who has been a Labour Party member for half a century and a Labour MP for 22 years said this week she could not stay in the Labour Party because of its anti-Semitism. How did you feel when you heard about Louise Ellman?

KS: I think it’s a really low moment. A really low moment. And what I want to do is to redouble our efforts to make sure that Louise and others feel that the Labour Party is a party that they can return to. We’ve already done a lot of work on this, we need to do more. But the end destination for me is a Labour Party where those that have left because of this issue feel that they can return. That will be the judgement for me, that’ll be the test of whether we’ve succeeded.

AM: You’re loyal to Jeremy Corbyn and you’ve spoken in his defence just now, but Louise Ellman says that he is a danger not just to the Labour Party but to the entire British Jewish community.

KS: I don’t accept that. I don’t accept that. I do accept that as a Labour Party we have to root out anti-Semitism and we have to demonstrate to people like Louise that this is a party that she can return to.

AM: I don’t want to over-labour this, but here is somebody who has been a Jewish person and has been in the Labour Party for half a century, that is her view. How can you just say that she’s wrong?
KS: I’m not saying that she’s wrong. You put to me a whole cluster of things she thought about Jeremy Corbyn, and I personally don’t find that this personalising takes us very far. We have got an issue with anti-Semitism in the party, we’ve got a problem that there is anti-Semitism. We’ve got a bigger problem that some people don’t acknowledge it. We’re working on that. We’ve got to do that collectively. The test will be whether those that have concerns, as Louise did, feel that they can return to the Labour Party. When they do I will consider we’ve succeeded.

AM: Sir Keir, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.
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