AM: Sir Oliver, do you trust the Prime Minister?
OL: I certainly trust that he intends to get this deal, which is the crucial question, and I’m going to support him in doing so voting for the second reading and right the way through the Bill, because I think his deal is the deal that will get us out in an orderly fashion and I’ve always believed that that’s the one thing that really matters. I said about 18 months in the House of Commons that I’d vote for any deal and this one.

AM: So why did you skewer him yesterday then?
OL: Because yesterday wasn’t about the deal, despite all the hype. Yesterday was about the question, whether the Benn Act will still be effective and whether we’ll get an extension, if for any reason we haven’t got the deal completed by the 31st of October. And that, I felt, and have continued to feel, is very important. We need the safeguard, the insurance policy that if we don’t get this passed by the 31st of October we don’t just crash out of the EU. That was what yesterday was about. Next week is about the deal and the Bill, I’ll vote for the deal, I’ll vote for the Bill.

AM: Isn’t the truth that you never really thought he was trying for a deal or would get a deal, and if he did you never really thought he would get through the House of Commons and when you realised you were wrong about those things you decided it was time to scupper it?
OL: No, other way round. I thought in August that he wasn’t being serious about getting a deal. That was one of the reasons why we put the Benn Act in place. Part of it was just to make sure that if we got to the 31st of October and we hadn’t got a deal we would be safe and not crash out. But part of it was to give an incentive
to get a deal. That I think worked. I think he’s now got his deal and now for those of us for whom was the motivation we need to back that deal, and as I say, I’ve been even willing back to Theresa May’s deal, three times. I’d certainly back this deal.

AM: You use this word safe and you’re clearly worried about the possibility of coming out without a deal. You don’t trust somebody, is it other Conservatives you don’t trust at the last minute to kind of bring the house down and get out without a deal?
OL: It’s not that I don’t trust anybody, it’s that politicians actually – I know it’s very unfashionable - actually do have convictions and beliefs and when they’re faced with particular bits of the Bill there’s too high a risk that a narrow majority at the second reading which we’ll probably get on Tuesday, I hope, could evaporate as we go through. And I’m very concerned to make sure that if it did evaporate at any stage, despite the fact I shall be voting for it all the way through, then we don’t crash out.

AM: So no new traps, no new plans to cause problems for the government next week as far as you’re concerned?
OL: No, I’m absolutely behind the government now as long as they continue with this Bill, continue with the deal, I will support it, I will vote for it as I did for Theresa May three times because I think that’s the right thing for this country. To get out in an orderly fashion.

AM: A guarantee there will be no more Oliver Letwin amendments of any kind next week?
OL: There will be no more Oliver Letwin amendments next week because there don’t need to be. I’m in support of the Bill.

AM: And let me ask you about, as it were, the motivation behind all of this because you were actually named by Number 10 as somebody they accused of ‘colluding with foreign powers,’ was the phrase used?
OL: Yes, most extraordinary.
AM: Were you colluding with any foreign powers?
OL: No, I haven’t colluded with anybody at all. I have colluded with other MPs across party which I know annoys some people but I think is a sensible way to do politics. I’ve colluded with the Lords, because that’s another part of our parliament, and I think that’s what politicians should do. Work together. That’s what I call it, rather colluding.

AM: A specific Lord, Lord Pannick, David Pannick, there’s again allegations that, if I may put it this way, he was kind of pulling your strings, that he was behind what you were doing yesterday and he has said himself that he was helping you draft the legislation.
OL: Yes, we’ve had some of the best lawyers in the land who are in the House of Lords working for us without being paid by anybody I may say, purely pro bono and I’m extremely grateful to them. I hope people would agree that it’s a good idea, that when you’re putting forward legislation it should be proper professional legislation that really first class lawyers have looked at.

AM: So now you’ve got your way as it were, the letter has been sent, albeit crossly by the Prime Minister to Brussels. Are you now convinced and happy that the extension will be granted and therefore the prospect of us leaving the EU without a deal at the end of his month is gone?
OL: Look, we can never tell what the EU will do and we can’t control what the EU will do. We’ve always been clear about that and there’s always a slight risk that they wouldn’t give an extension. My own gut instinct has been all the way along that if we got to the end and we were going to crash out otherwise, and we’d made a request for an extension, very probably the EU would say have an extension.
AM: Are we not still in the same situation as we always were in the sense that if this Bill goes through and we leave the EU and we’re now into the next period of negotiations, at the end of next year, December 31st 2020, we’re again facing the prospect if we haven’t got a trade deal at that point, of leaving without a deal?

OL: Well the situations a bit better than that, because if we get this deal across the line, and with the support of people like me I hope we can, I think we probably will, and we’re exiting on our near to the 31st of October, and we move into the transitional implementation phase where nobody will spot the difference and there’s a proper negotiations of a free trade agreement that I am convinced, I do trust that the Prime Minister is going to try and get a sensible free trade agreement, if that isn’t achieved by 2020 as you say there is a specific provision in Article 50 for that to be extended up to 2022. And I think long before 2022 it should be possible to get a proper..

(AM: He said he won’t .... as Prime Minister).

OL: I know, but he’s said on various occasions he’s not going to do various things that actually he does.

AM: So you don’t trust him?

OL: No, no, I trust his instinct and his motive which is to get the deal which I’m going to back him on and then to get a free trade agreement, which I would also back although I shan’t be in the Houses of Parliament at that time. I’m just saying unfortunately his rhetoric is often that he says he’ll never do something – many politicians do this – and then actually when it comes to it he’s much more compromising and more sensible. So it’s not a question of not trusting him, it’s just a question of observing when he says he’s never going to extend we shouldn’t take that at face value. He doesn’t want to extend. I don’t want to extend, I’d much prefer to see a free trade agreement in place by 2020, but if necessary you’ve got till 2022.
AM: If we ask the question why are Brexiteers so angry with you at the moment and so many of them believe that you’re really against the whole project, you don’t want us to leave the EU, you only have to look at the list of people who backed your amendment yesterday. Every single anti-Brexit MP backed your amendment. It was a kind of coalition of the anti-Brexit forces in parliament, which leads many people to think behind the reasonable and urbane exterior Oliver Letwin is against Brexit and this is part of a plot to stop Brexit happening.

OL: Yes, I know. It’s very sad that people do get to thinking that if you’re in alliance with people who have a different agenda, and I was in alliance with people who had a different agenda. Yes, of course, most of the people voting for these things have been all the way along people who didn’t want Brexit or are passionate about a referendum or whatever it may be. That’s not my view. My view is we need an orderly exit. And if you’re going to achieve that and if the government isn’t willing to do it on its own then you have to ally yourself with some strange people, so to speak, people who have differing views.

AM: .. should not smile at them too broadly in front of cameras.

OL: I know, I know, I shouldn’t ever smile. But the fact is I’m a human being and if somebody is making a joke I laugh, I’m sorry. The truth is that there’s something really important at stake here which is the question, is our country going to try to achieve some compromised solution that gets an orderly exit where yes, okay the people I was working with yesterday are going to be dissatisfied because it’s not remaining and it’s not a referendum, and the people who are on the extreme end of the Brexit spectrum are going to be dissatisfied because it’s not a clean break as they call it and a disorderly exit. But the fact is 80% of people in this country or something I think can live with this deal.

AM: Want a compromise.

OL: Want a compromise. I’ve been seeking a compromise all the way through for 18 months, that’s why I voted for Theresa’s deal, that’s why I’ll vote for this deal. It’s not perfect but it’ll do.
AM: You've been under huge amounts of personal pressure. Not just from media and campaigners but also from Number 10. How intense was it and was there at any moment yesterday where you thought I'm beginning to wobble? I might pull this?

OL: No. I thought we were doing the right thing. This hasn't been very pleasant for me for 18 months or many other people.

AM: So what kind of pressure did they put on you?

OL: Oh I'm not going to go into all the details. But the fact is you know you go into politics, you go to your electorate, they do the honour of electing you, you owe them something. And what you owe them is to try to do the right thing and to continue doing it even if a lot of people are cross with you. That's how politics is.

AM: You went into Number 10 on Friday, into the lion's den at the crucial moment, what happened?

OL: Well, the Prime Minister and I had various conversations and I had some conversations with officials. I'm not going to –

AM: Friendly conversations?

OL: Yes, perfectly actually. I mean the sad truth is, so to speak, that between politicians on the whole relations are perfectly amicable and Boris is a very charming man.

AM: And he was quite emollient in his speech in the House of Commons yesterday, the part of the speech anyway was trying to reach out to the 48%.

OL: Yes, he certainly had a good tone, yes.

AM: But that didn't influence you on the day?

OL: No, because I was trying to achieve a concrete result which is to make sure we had the insurance policy in place so that if anything goes wrong we don't crash out on the 31st of October. It was a very simple proposition and I think a true one. If you think it's true, you think it's in the interest of the country you have to do it.

ENDS