ANDREW MARR:
Now Alistair Darling’s had the weight of saving the union on his shoulders these past months as Leader of Better Together. On Friday morning, he was a very relieved man. Wild celebration isn’t really his style, but after catching up on some sleep, he talked to me at his home in Edinburgh about the strains of leading the campaign, about Scotland’s future and his own. But first, what were his feelings a fortnight ago when for the first time a key opinion poll put the Yes side in the lead?

ALISTAIR DARLING:
I thought I just don’t believe it because it doesn’t square … You know I’ve been involved in election campaigns for over 30 years and you know I know that when you go round the supermarket and people when they move away from you and are rather embarrassed to have you in the same supermarket as they are, you’ve got a problem. But this wasn’t happening. People were coming up and sometimes quietly saying, “I’m on your side.” You know it was a very odd thing. What I tell you that poll did do though is it galvanised our support because when it appeared, far from heads going down, heads went up, and you got people who had said nothing – for whatever reason – they said, “I’m not going to let this happen to my country.” So it actually …
ANDREW MARR:

(over) Time is running out.

ALISTAIR DARLING:

… it’s one of these things, you know – a well-disguised blessing.

ANDREW MARR:

Any thoughts as he goes on Alex Salmond?

ALISTAIR DARLING:

Well, look, he is you know a very formidable politician. I mean he’s brought his party from being a sort of fringe protest movement and he’s got them into government. You know we’ve got our differences. I think in relation to the campaign, you know he’s a divisive politician and it’s just the nature of the beast, if you like. But you know Alex Salmond, he’s got his place in history. I’m sure that’s what he wanted and that’s what he’ll get.

ANDREW MARR:

One and a half million Scots hoped for independence, voted for independence. This morning many of them are still bitterly, bitterly disappointed. What’s your message to them?

ALISTAIR DARLING:

Look I can understand that. You know if you don’t win, your views don’t carry the day. The thing here is that for all of my generation, over the last 40 years or so, the Scottish political discourse has been dominated by the constitution. Now we’ve settled it. We’ve had the referendum that people didn’t think would ever take place. A massive turnout, which you know speaks volumes. But it’s been decided now for a generation and by a generation, I mean many, many years to come. I think the vast majority of people expect all of us to work together for the common good.

ANDREW MARR:

Now you say working together. The three unionist parties made very, very clear pledges in the last days of the campaign that the Scottish Parliament would get new
powers over tax, over welfare and many other things, and it already looks as if that may be beginning to unravel. What would it do for your reputation and for the reputation of the Labour Party in Scotland if those promises were not delivered on?

ALISTAIR DARLING:
Well, look, the agreement reached by the three parties, as far as I’m concerned is non-negotiable. It was promised, it’s got to be delivered, and anyone who welches on that will pay a very heavy price for years to come. It is simply non-negotiable. Now I believe that it will be delivered; the process is already underway. By the end of January next year, you’ll have a bill ready to go and become an act of parliament. Of course there is a separate issue about what further constitutional change comes to the UK, but just be very clear about this: you cannot hold up or delay in any way at all what was promised. The three leaders gave an absolute commitment and I’m confident they’ll deliver on it.

ANDREW MARR:
Because we can see what’s happening already, which is that David Cameron (for reasons of his own, which we can all understand) has sewn together the issues of new powers for the Scottish Parliament and English votes for English laws in effectively an English Parliament. Your party leader, Ed Miliband, says no, no, no, we’re going to have a constitutional convention for England after the next election. That depends on what happens in the next election. And between those two routes, you can see the whole thing just falling down the gutter.

ALISTAIR DARLING:
Well, look, I spoke to David Cameron and Ed Miliband on Friday morning and I’m absolutely clear that we’ve got a commitment. The thing you’ve got to …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Sorry, can I be clear on it. The commitment for the Scottish Parliament is separate from new powers in England and so forth?

ALISTAIR DARLING:
(over) It is, it is. And you know the debate in Scotland is altogether more advanced
and more developed than it is in other parts of the UK because we’ve had a referendum campaign. I quite accept there is alongside that, but separate from it, a bigger issue about what constitutional reform is needed, but what I’m very clear about is the agreement, the commitment, the binding commitments given in relation to Scotland are non-negotiable. Or put it another way: if anyone attempts to get out of that, how will anyone be believed on anything they’ve got to say? It is simply non-negotiable. I’m very, very clear about that.

ANDREW MARR:
Now you’re a politician who’s been working flat out for years. You need a holiday and all the rest of it. But after that, are you going to help ensure that that non-negotiable promise is actually delivered?

ALISTAIR DARLING:
Yeah, of course I will. You know I said during the campaign whatever the result, you know I’m here and I’m not going away. I’ve got a bigger decision to make in the next couple of weeks or so as to whether or not I stand again as an MP, and I’ve got to make that decision fairly quickly. But whatever I do, inside or outside parliament, I’m not a spectator by nature.

ANDREW MARR:
This has been a campaign characterised by some bitterness and some anger on both sides as well. Scotland remains divided. What about the process of healing? What is it that politicians like yourself can start to do to bring people who have been deeply divided together again?

ALISTAIR DARLING:
The language we use is very important – let’s work together. And also there’s a bigger point too. I think what you saw last Thursday wasn’t just about the question of whether we should separate or not. There’s a great deal of disillusionment, frustration, anger amongst the population, of which Scotland picked up the first symptom of it. It’s alive in the rest of the UK as well. There’s a big lesson for all political parties here. We need to start engaging.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) A quiet uprising against politics as usual in the Westminster elite?

ALISTAIR DARLING:
Yeah people want that power back; and if you ignore that, you do so at your peril.

ANDREW MARR:
Alistair Darling, thank you very much indeed.

ALISTAIR DARLING:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS