

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2018. SIR JOHN MAJOR

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY, 2018

SIR JOHN MAJOR

Prime Minister 1990-97

AM: Sir John, for a lot of people this is not really a problem in the British political system generally, it is still a problem inside the Conservative Party.

JM: Well it is a problem inside the Conservative Party, that's entirely true, but it is wider. Had it not been for some Labour anti-Europeans some of the amendments passed in the House of Commons last week would have failed. So it certainly spreads beyond the Conservative Party, even though I agree, it's principally a Conservative Party problem.

AM: Can I put it to you that there are - there's lots of different kinds of Conservatives, but there's two in particular. There's, as it were the more traditional Conservatives who think that they are in politics to preserve jobs and business and national prosperity. And there are those who think the overwhelming duty and the great cause is breaking away from the European behemoth at all costs, at all events, and those are two different kinds of politicians. And my question to you is for how long can they continue to reside inside the same party?

JM: Well I wish I knew the answer to that. I mean there are a large number of - I say large - maybe 30, maybe 40, I don't know precisely, but a considerable number of Conservative MPs who on the subject of Europe are irreconcilable. It is absolutely the most important issue of all. Nothing else matters to the same extent. They were there in the 1990s; many of the same people are there now, but they have been added to by new members who've come in in the interim. And the difficulty we face at the moment is that has boxed the government, and particularly the Prime Minister,

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2018. SIR JOHN MAJOR

into a corner. They are a minority of the House of Commons. A substantial minority of the House of Commons but they're larger than the government's majority. And that means to a substantial extent they have a much greater ability to frustrate policy than any small group really ought to have. And the danger at the moment is that they will frustrate every move that the government seek to make and that by accident, because nothing can be agreed, we will crash out without a deal. And that has a very material effect on everyone in this country. You touched on it earlier. But there's a whole range of things. If we crash out without a deal the people who have least are going to be hurt most. It would be a terrible betrayal of the interests of everyday people who really are not political.

AM: And yet that is where we are heading at the moment unless something changes. Now I know it was, in some respects it was easier for you as Prime Minister because there were fewer rebels inside your party and you could stand and challenge them openly. If Theresa May did that we both know what would happen. What can she do?

JM: Well, I don't think she should do that. I mean it was a limited success when I did it in the 90s. It wasn't a wholly successful. It preserved a position, it dampened things down but it didn't really solve the problem, so I wouldn't advise the Prime Minister to do that. But I do think the point about the way in which people will be affected. I mean if I had my way I would put a sign on every Member of Parliament's desks. People, people, people. Because that is what matters at the end of these negotiations. Now the people who are going to be affected may be represented by Conservative MPs or Labour MPs or Liberal MPs or ScotNats, or whomsoever. And I think the majority of the House of Commons should not let this irreconcilable minority within the Conservative Party determine what happens in these negotiations. Now I was encouraged by what Dominic Raab has said about

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2018. SIR JOHN MAJOR

being pragmatic and trying to persuade those who are not yet persuaded that they need to build on the Chequers compromise. I don't much like the Chequers compromise, it isn't what I would have preferred to see, but it is -

AM: But it's about as much as she could have got from the Conservative Party now.

JM: It is. It is a compromise. Now both the European Union and the UK are going to have to compromise if we get a deal. Nothing unusual about that, it's the very nature of negotiations. You set out your position, the other side sets out theirs and you compromise and you reach a deal. But if every compromise reached by the Cabinet is blocked by this minority of irreconcilable hard line, utterly committed, anti Europeans, anti Europe on all occasions then we will not actually get to negotiations, we will fall out without a deal and it will be catastrophic – damaging for Europe, but catastrophic for us. And not only catastrophic for us, it is the people who have least who will end up being hurt most.

AM: There are various possible ways out of this that people talk about, including a second referendum, a so called 'people's vote.' Now you have said this is not a terrible idea but you haven't yet committed yourself completely to the idea that it's a good idea.

JM: No. It has downsides. I mean frankly a second vote has democratic downsides. It has difficulties. But is it morally justified? I think it is. If you look back at the Leave campaign a great many of the promises they made were fantasy promises. We now know they're not going to be met. It's painfully –

AM: Well, both sides told some whoppers let's be honest.

JM: I don't deny that both sides got it wrong, but it was the Leave side that said, this is going to be the easiest trade deal in history,

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2018. SIR JOHN MAJOR

we can get it in an afternoon. We will easily be able to get trade deals around the world. Many of the things that they said were absolutely pie in the sky and if you look at any possible deal we're going to get and compare it to what people were promised with Brexit, there will be a gaping gap. Now that is a reason why people might want a second referendum. I mean if for example – let me give you an illustration. Would you buy a house without knowing the price? No, you would not. Should we finally decide to leave Europe without knowing the cost of doing so? And by the cost I don't just mean to the government, to the nation, I mean to the lives of individual people in every constituency in the land. Now I think it's arguable that once the cost is known, if it is as damaging as I believe it will be – it may not be, the negotiations may be a success but I have my doubts. If it is as damaging as I believe it to be then you either face the question of letting the public endorse it or not or five years down the road when it is blazingly apparent how much has gone wrong, there will be a huge amount of disillusion. Much greater disillusion than we've yet seen with the British political system. So a referendum isn't an easy option, but it's not one at this stage that I would rule out.

AM: Because you said in terms during the first referendum, this is it. There's only going to be one referendum, it's a once in a lifetime chance, there will be no more referendums. And now you've changed your mind. And that's why some of your critics on the Brexiteer side of the party are so angry with you.

JM: If circumstances change you change your mind. I think that was said by a very wise man.

AM: JM Keynes.

JM: Absolutely, Keynes, and we now know that circumstances have changed. The promises made are not going to be met. And if the promises made are not going to be met, there is a

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2018. SIR JOHN MAJOR

justification for changing your mind on letting the public decide whether the Brexit they're offered after the negotiations is going to be remotely like the Brexit that was promised by the Leave campaign during the referendum. I do not believe it will be remotely like the promises that were made.

AM: Another way of possibly resolving this, and we came very close to it earlier in the week, is another General Election.

JM: Well I think we could stumble into that by accident. If the House of Commons continues to be deadlocked, if the irreconcilables remain unmoveable and the Whips of the other parties decide to take political advantage of the government's voting weakness in the House of Commons, if they decide to do that and put party politics before the national interest, then there is a possibility of the Commons being unable to reach an agreement and a General Election ultimately becoming unavoidable. I would hope not. It would be a very unpleasant General Election if we had it. This campaign, the referendum campaign, and afterwards, frankly, has not been a glorious episode in British Constitutional history. It's been very ugly with many of the things that have been said, particularly if I may say so, about the small number of Remain MPs in the Conservative Party who to my mind have been extraordinarily brave and have been insulted uphill and down dale because they have expressed their concern for what will happen to our country if we go down the Brexit route.

AM: So you know Jacob Rees-Mogg has said that is all just embittered bile from a failed Prime Minister in your terms. I think he said even worse than that, but I won't read the entire quote out.

JM: Well, I don't read very carefully what Mr Rees-Mogg says, but I believe he said something like that. It was very statesman like.

AM: Right, Let's turn to Theresa May herself. As I said at the beginning you have been in this position, you know what it's like sitting in Number 10 trying to find a way forward. Do you think she can survive at this point?

JM: Yes, I do. Yes I do. I do for a range of reasons because a General Election would be catastrophic because a leadership election would be absolutely absurd for the Conservative Party. For the Conservative Party again to decide suddenly they were going to get rid of a Prime Minister –

AM: But she can't afford to lose her Brexit vote in the House of Commons, can she? Losing a big vote in the House of Commons or having her plan turned down by Brussels would leave her with no options really left at all.

JM: Well I think we'll have to wait and see whether people come to their senses by realising what the implications of a leadership election or a General Election might actually be. What is our purpose at this moment? Our purpose at this moment is to engage with the European Union and get the best deal we can. Any deal, any deal is going to be less good than the deal we currently have as a member of the European Union. This is not me as Mr Rees-Mogg put it, as an embittered Remainer speaking, this is what the government said in its own calculations and a no deal Brexit is the worst of all. The North East for example, an area not full of bounding prosperity might lose 16% of its GDP if we crash out without a deal.

AM: Is it not possible that the Brexiteers are right? I mean there's lots of ifs, there's lots of projections, there's lots of crystal ball gazing. It is possible that after no deal we do strike new trade arrangements, we become a slightly different kind of economy, a slightly different kind of county and we find a good future?

JM: Ha! Well it's possible the earth is flat, but not very likely. I mean if you look at the deals they're seeking to do with big economies, the European Union has just done a deal with Japan, another deal that would have been available to us had we remained in the European Union. They want a deal with America, the Brexiteers with America, with China, with India. Well, I think we know an American deal can be done but I don't think it would be especially to our advantage. We would get minor advantages perhaps but lots of downsides, particularly for agriculture, particularly for services. Doing a deal with India, where we really want a deal in their services sector seems to me a very distant prospect indeed at the moment. And a deal with China, I don't think we are particularly on China's radar for a deal at the moment, and when we leave, Andrew, when we leave, we lose over 50 trade deals that we have because we are a member of the European Union and we will have to renegotiate them all. That will take years and years.

AM: One very final quick question on a related but not identical matter. If your Chief Whip was breaking pairing arrangements, what would you do?

JM: I would certainly wish to decide exactly how it had happened and what had happened.

AM: I mean it appears that the Chief Whip has been telling Conservative MPs to break their pairing arrangements because of the tightness of a vote. That sort of smashes all parliamentary conventions and a lot of people think it's just not decent.

JM: I'm not in the Commons, I don't know the Chief Whip, I don't know the details, I'm not going to comment on it. But I think it has to be cleared up and cleared up within the House of

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2018. SIR JOHN MAJOR

Commons. But what that will throw up I really am not in a position to judge. ENDS