ANDREW MARR SHOW
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I/V JOHN MCDONNELL
Shadow Chancellor

AM: Syria. Now the Labour Party has been asking for a proper comprehensive plan involving all sides here. We seem to have that now from the United Nations so is the Labour Party going to be backing strikes in Syria by Britain?

JM: Well, we’ll see what the plan is when the Prime Minister – and we’re expecting that this week and we’ll consider that of course. Let me explain my position, because I think we’ve got to come at this in a very considered way and on the basis of the experience we’ve had so far. This isn’t a war like the Second World War where you fight against an enemy on one terrain, you defeat them, they sign a peace treaty and that’s it. I think ISIL, basically they’re encouraging the UK and US to get involved in a war in the Middle East again, because it plays to their narrative of crusader invasion. And remember, if we did defeat ISIL in some form, they have another army, and that army we’ve seen is located in most of our capital cities. So we have to be clever at the way we address this now and my view on that is that actually on the ground ISIL has to be defeated by the regional powers within the middle east itself and by the people in the middle east, in the same way the Sunni tribes actually defeated al Qaeda in Iraq.

AM: The argument against that that you hear as well is that in the end, so long as they have territory they control, and where they can plan their attacks on the west, you know –

JM: Yes. Yes, of course.

AM: ..we have no security and therefore they have to be defeated in Raqqa, they have to be defeated in Syria.
JM: And that will require troops on the ground and I listened very carefully to the Conservative Chair of the Defence Select Committee yesterday, Julian Lewis, and his view was very, very clear and I share it. If there are going to be troops on the ground they have to come from the region itself. Then we end that narrative, that this is some crusader invasion by the UK or US or others. It’s got to be responded to within the region itself. And I think that’s the most effective long term security that we can get.

AM: So Cameron says that that shows you people are Chamberlain not Churchill.
JM: Oh, we’ve got to get away from that rhetoric. Look, I hope the House of Commons will put aside all this rhetoric about defeating Jihadi in two weeks, that sort of thing. We’ve got to be more sophisticated than that. We’ve got to consider our experience in the middle east and also we’ve got to come to it as a whole House of Commons, put aside party advantage.

AM: Well, Cameron is going to come to the House of Commons with his plan and there is a bit of a confusion at the moment about how Labour MPs are expected to react to that, because like you, your leader was in favour of a free vote, matters of peace and war, conscience and so forth, but he now wants a whip to vote.
DM: Well, he hasn’t said that. What will happen is we will consider this in Shadow Cabinet and then we’ll go to the Parliamentary Labour Party. Most of those MPs as well will be consulting their local constituency parties as they did, and then we’ll come to a considered view. My view has always been that I think parliament should act as parliament, not on a party political basis and we should arrive at a view which is the best interests of the country.
AM: So is Tom Watson right when he says this is a decision on whipping or not whipping, free vote or not free vote that will be taken by the Shadow Cabinet, rather than by the leader?

JM: All of our decisions are taken collectively anyway and Jeremy has always said that. That’s part of our democratic process within the party, but I’m hoping – I just say this – I went through Iraq, Afghanistan, I’ve been there in parliament 18 years now when many wars and decisions have been taken. This is the most serious thing you can do because you’re affecting people’s lives and people could lose their lives. I’m hoping that we can act as one. Put aside party differences and look at the long term interests of the country.

AM: Now you have said in the past, very, very clearly that you regard Tony Blair as a war criminal who should be sent to the Hague for war crimes. Is that still your view?

JM: I was angry about Iraq, what happened and we’ll see what comes out of Chilcott and what decisions are taken as a result of that. I believe we need to learn the mistakes from Iraq and that means we’ve got to have full legality on what we do in the future.

AM: Yes, it’s just you said this only a couple of years ago and I was wondering, perhaps this a cheeky question – whether at the Cenotaph your leader should have given a citizens’ arrest to Tony Blair. They were standing side by side, he could have collared him and said, ‘I arrest you,’ and sent him off to the Hague, but he didn’t.

JM: Andrew, it is a cheeky question and this is a serious matter, so let me just say this to you. In this week we’ll all bare responsibility for the decisions that we take and we all weigh those considerations seriously. Let’s learn the mistakes of the past, but also recognise we’re in a new era as well.
AM: Let's move onto the economy then. I'll be less cheeky about the economy, but you are a socialist politician, you have a socialist view of how a socialised and organised economy should be structured and you made a speech about it this week. However, we live in a world dominated by international capital. By huge movements of capital, multinational companies, in effect an economically borderless world, so my main question is how is it possible to run a socialist economy in a capitalist world, unless you start to put up some barriers around it?

JM: Well, what you do is you incrementally improve the situation, so you introduce a series of reforms that eventually reach a tipping point in which you reach the society that you want to reach. Let me talk about the austerity because you mentioned it before. The situation we're now in, let's be frank about it -- George Osborne's economic plans now are in virtual chaos. This year was meant to be the year when the deficit was eradicated and we're now in a situation where only half of it has been eradicated. Our debt is going to be 1.5 trillion. Last month, as you identified earlier, we borrowed more than for any month in the last six years, so that's in chaos. And what I'm saying to parliament next week is there's got to be an alternative to this, because what George, well, let's take the security issue itself. I'm really worried that the cuts he's introducing, although I'm supporting the increase in the intelligence services, the expenditure, and I welcome that, if he cuts the police services in the way he's planned that undermines our security.

AM: Well, we'll certainly be talking about that with him, I'm sure.

JM: Could you do this for me then, Andrew. When you interview him –

AM: Not for you, I'll do it for the readers, for the listeners, the viewers, all of you people.
JM: On behalf of the viewers, put this question to him. I’m saying to him directly, end the cuts of policing because all the police chiefs are saying you’re putting our county at risk. Put this to him: I will support him if he says straight forwardly that policing cuts will not take place because we’re in the most heightened risk situation in a generation and I will support him on that.

AM: And you won’t tease him about it.
JM: No, I will not. There will be no political game playing on this because this is too important for us.

AM: Two other questions which arose from your speech this week. You said that you had to take on and deal with the monopolies and the oligopolies that dominate the British economy.
JM: Yes.
AM: First of all, who are you talking about? And second, what would you do about them?

JM: Right, let me just tell the story behind this, because George Osborne at the moment – this is what annoys me about the plans. It’s austerity for the rest of us but it’s not austerity for the very rich and the corporations, because he’s cutting their taxes to the lowest level of corporation tax in the whole of Europe, and in our history and what they’re doing is they’re taking that money, they’re not investing, they’re paying out the largest share dividends we’ve ever seen and also they’re hoarding money, so what I’m trying to say –

AM: For people watching, who is the ‘they?’
JM: The largest corporations, the multinationals operating in this country who make their profits in this country, they’re sitting on 400 billion pounds at the moment and they’re not investing. And what I’m saying to them, I want a working relationship with them. We want to use that money to invest in the long term future. In
skills, in infrastructure and new technology. And those companies at the moment are being encouraged by George Osborne to simply take the tax cuts and do nothing.

AM: So it’s the Apples and the Starbucks and the Amazons that you’re talking about really?
JM: Yes, but also it’s saying look, let’s look across the sector, let’s look at the City of London and why they’re investing.

AM: I wanted to ask about the City of London because you have said that in the past this was an iniquitous organisation stretching around the globe that you have to tackle, politicians have to grapple with. But now you want to work with them to create the more organised economy that you want. And I just put it you – these are the same people that you were having a real go at before. These are the iniquitous bankers with their bonuses. By and large leopards don’t change their spots. You’re not going to be able to use them as people to create the kind of economy you want.

JM: I’m hoping they’ve learnt some lessons from the last crisis, because there was public anger at the way we were treated by the banking system.

AM: You need an entire city of spotless leopards.
JM: Well, we need to engage in them constructively, but firmly and what I’m saying to the City of London is that you’ve got to start investing within our economy again now, and also we need better regulation. We’ve got to stop this – use the City of London for tax evasion, tax avoidance. George Osborne has said himself, there’s ten billion pounds worth of illegal tax evasion largely going through the City of London. I want a constructive relationship with them, work with them, but they’ve got to play by the rules.
AM: They’ve got to play by the rules. Thank you very much indeed for coming in this morning. Thank you, John McDonnell.

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