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# **THE ANDREW MARR SHOW**

## **INTERVIEW:**

**ALEX SALMOND, MSP**

**FORMER SNP LEADER**

**MARCH 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015**

- Says that a “vote by vote” arrangement with Labour is more likely than a “confidence and supply” arrangement.
- Says that if the SNP holds the balance of seats in the next Parliament at Westminster then it “holds the power”.
- Says that the direction of Scotland towards independence is “as near inevitable as anything ever is in politics”.

### **ANDREW MARR:**

And now onto another drama. If Alex Salmond got his way, Scotland would become a fully independent country just one year from now. March 24<sup>th</sup> 2016 was the date he’d pencilled in as Independence Day and of course the referendum didn’t turn out as he wanted, but he says that his dream will never die. He is hoping to be among a wave of Scottish Nationalist MPs sweeping into Westminster after the General Election – there to continue the campaign for independence by other means – and Alex Salmond is with me now. Good morning.

### **ALEX SALMOND:**

Good morning.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Good morning to you. In the book you've just published, you say right at the end that everyone deserves a second chance and so do countries. There is a strong hint there that another chance is coming soon.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Yeah every person and every nation is what I say. Yeah I mean I think quite clearly, as you said in your introduction, the story's not finished. The circumstances when that will come about, I think that's quite difficult to put a timescale on, but I think the direction is now as near inevitable as anything can be in politics.

**ANDREW MARR:**

You say in the book that if the Scots vote again for a party at the Scottish Elections who want independence ...

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Yeah.

**ANDREW MARR:**

... that could be the moment when it's "put to the touch", I think is your phrase.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Yeah I mean I think what's happened is we've now established the gold standard of how you have a process for Scotland to become independent. What has to happen is party or parties have to put it in a manifesto for a Scottish Election, they have to win a majority in that proportional parliament to hold a referendum, and then the decision of course lies with the Scottish people. So in a way it'll ensure it's people who determine the timing.

**ANDREW MARR:**

So it's fairly clear it's not this General Election that's going to change things dramatically, though it may change things at Westminster. But that will not of itself

produce another referendum, but the SNP could put a referendum promise into the manifesto for Holyrood next year and that would then be the trigger?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well you're quite right – independence will not be decided at this coming General Election. This election will decide whether Scotland makes progress, whether progressive politics across these islands make progress with SNP victories. As for what's in the manifesto next year, well I can look you straight in the eye and say that's a matter for my successor, Nicola Sturgeon.

**ANDREW MARR:**

And you'll have nothing to do with that, I'm absolutely sure Alex Salmond. Now you're talking about the outcome of the General Election and you've talked in the past about a progressive coalition – not just of the SNP but Plaid Cymru and the Greens as a new force in Westminster politics. Tell us a little bit more about that.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well I think Nicola Sturgeon's outlined this very well. I mean her joint press conferences with the Greens in England and Plaid Cymru for Wales of course – our allies Natalie Bennett and Leanne Wood – and setting out a joint approach to progressive politics. What does progressive politics mean? Well it means moving away from austerity. It means not spending £100 billion on the next generation of nuclear weapons and the River Clyde. It means having a different approach to politics and economics than the conventional parties at Westminster.

**ANDREW MARR:**

So you say a different approach, you say moving away from austerity. Do you think the deficit – that great big lump of debt sitting in the middle of British public life – is a problem or not?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well of course it's a problem. The question is how do you deal with it? Do you deal with it sensibly or do you do slash and burn like the Conservatives and the Labour Party have signed up to? It's interesting when Nicola Sturgeon outlined the half a per cent real term increase in departmental budgets over the next financial term, it was the

National Institute of Economic and Social Research who described that platform as “fiscally sustainable”. Even the Financial Times last week actually suggested a move away from austerity. You know we’ve come to a pretty pass when the Financial Times is more left wing than the Labour opposition.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Well I want to just sort of drill down on what that means. So you’re against big public spending cuts under all circumstances as a way of dealing with the deficit?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

We’re saying that the freedom for manoeuvre of having a half a per cent real term increase in departmental public spending over the next term, fiscal term – that will allow both the debt as a percentage of the overall gross domestic product and indeed the budget deficit to come down to a sustainable level, but it’ll avoid swingeing cuts to public sector budgets and of course a re-emphasis of the situation we’ve had over the last five years where the poorest 10 per cent in the population have borne the brunt of the Chancellor’s austerity.

**ANDREW MARR:**

But you can’t deal with the deficit by spending more unless you raise revenue more, which means raising taxes more. So what I’m asking you is whether you think that the deficit should be mainly dealt with by tax raising on people who can afford it at the top?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

No the deficit’s dealt with by extending the period of fiscal consolidation. That’s what ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

So it just goes on for longer? You kick it further into the long grass?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Yes, but the deficit’s still falling as a percentage of GDP and indeed the stock of debt is falling and that’s perfectly sustainable. That will give you by the end of the term a 2

per cent budget deficit. I mean the average for the UK over the last 60 years is about 3.4 per cent, so it's a perfectly sustainable position.

**ANDREW MARR:**

You can extend it without raising taxes and without the public spending cuts the main parties have committed themselves to?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Correct, that's the proposal that's been put forward. That's the one the National Institute describe as "fiscally sustainable".

**ANDREW MARR:**

And this is the kind of thing that you would be taking along to Ed Balls and the Labour leadership when you talk about any possible post-election deal?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

That's right.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Now who does that? Is that you or is that Nicola Sturgeon, or both?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well Nicola Sturgeon's leader of the party. I mean she's in charge of ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* But you'll be leader of the Westminster MPs?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

No, no, Angus Robertson's leader of the group at Westminster. But I mean the SNP has a collective approach to these things, but I mean the person who calls the ultimate shots is Nicola Sturgeon.

**ANDREW MARR:**

So when you talk to the Labour Party, you'll be saying we want a different economic

strategy from you and we want much tougher commitments on Scottish home rule?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Yes we want ... basically we want the delivery, Andrew, of what was promised – the pledge, the vow that was made to Scotland in the desperate days when the three Westminster leaders suspended Prime Minister’s Questions, rushed up to Scotland because they thought they were losing the vote, and they said home rule, devo to the max, near federalism is what the language was. We want the delivery of what Scotland was promised. We want the manifestation this year of what was promised last year.

**ANDREW MARR:**

From your book it’s clear you just don’t trust the treasury. You think if there isn’t a new deal, the treasury will simply draw back all the commitments that have been made so far – bit by bit?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

I think we’re in a extraordinary situation where Sir Nicholas Macpherson, the Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, is about to – I suspect – come in for trenchant criticism from the House of Commons, his own committees, in terms of the famous letter he sent, published, ruling out a currency union between an independent Scotland and Westminster. I mean unprecedented behaviour. I think when you have somebody who’s prepared to enter the political arena as a civil servant in that fashion, then you’re in a situation where not only a longstanding mistrust of the Westminster Treasury but a mistrust of the personnel who are involved is very evident. Hence it’s very important ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

It’s getting quite personal, all of this, isn’t it?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well very important to have that block of ... that tartan block occupying the green benches of the House of Commons.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Coming back to the possible trigger for either a new referendum or some other way of Scotland and the rest of the UK separating politically, we have of course the possibility – we had Nigel Farage in – of an in/out referendum on the EU possibly this year, possibly next year. Now if that happened and England voted to leave the EU but Scotland voted to stay in, would in your view that be the trigger for separation?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well we're going to be against having that referendum. And I thought Nicola Sturgeon outlined a very ingenious mechanism that you can avoid this happening, and that is to accept there should be a triple lock – that each of the component (and remember what David Cameron said) an equal partnership and nations within these islands would have to vote by a majority to leave the EU for it to take effect. So if there were to be a referendum, which we oppose, then that's the proposal ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* But if there is a referendum, it'll be the Conservatives and UKIP calling the shots on that?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well, if you pardon me, I think if you look – and I mean I take nothing for granted – but I think if we take a glance at any poll, then I think the Scottish National Party will be calling substantially more shots than UKIP in the next Parliament.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Okay, well in those circumstances let's talk about how the SNP could work with Labour or not work with Labour.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Sure.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Ed Balls is clearly very against doing a deal with you – partly because of what you said on his economic plan, I guess. It has been ...

**ALEX SALMOND:**

*(over)* Well that's his fault for having a Tory economic plan, not my fault.

**ANDREW MARR:**

No I wasn't saying it was your fault, but what I was saying is that it's perfectly possible – and this was suggested by a columnist in Scotland a little while ago, that the Labour Party could just tell you where to go, could treat you very roughly because the SNP could not put the Tories into power and, therefore, Labour could simply say well do your worst, we dare you to vote us down. However many MPs you've got, we dare you to vote us down. We will do what we want. We want to keep Trident, we want to keep our £30 billion austerity plan and so forth. Do your worst.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

I can see that as a great rallying call to Labour supporters across the country saying we want to spend £100 billion on nuclear weapons and go ahead with Tory austerity cuts. I can see mass revolution breaking out in constituency Labour parties that run the length of these islands.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* But they don't have to talk to you, do they?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well can I ... But Nicola Sturgeon's outlined this very well. We won't do a deal with the Tories – informal, formal, under any circumstances – but other options are available. The Labour Party have ruled out a coalition but haven't ruled out a confidence and supply arrangement where you have a set programme for a set number of ?

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Is that what you think will happen?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well no, I think it's more likely to have a vote by vote arrangement. Now I've got some form on this. I mean I led a minority government for four years. In fact I'm the

only person, as far as I know, in these islands who's done that. So I had to deal with the Labour Party for example in the Scottish Parliament to get support to abolish prescription charges, I had to deal with the Liberal Democrats to get support to abolish tuition fees on students in Scotland, I had to get support from the Conservatives to do something about the burden of business rates, and I got quite progressive support from the Greens on a range of issues. So I was in the position where I had to negotiate on a vote by vote basis.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* As they would, as they would?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

As they will. Because, Andrew, if you hold the balance, then you hold the power.

**ANDREW MARR:**

You hold the power. So the big issues – for instance the Budget – so Ed Balls' budget would have to be negotiated with the SNP if a Labour government was going to sustain itself?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Yes, I mean any minority government has to negotiate in order to win a majority for its proposal. That's patently obvious and to deny that is to deny reality. When I faced that reality in the Scottish Parliament, I couldn't say well I wish it was different. You had to get down and do your best for the people under these circumstances. And if the SNP are in these circumstances, it'll be very good for Scotland certainly but I think for progressive politics across these islands.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Okay but if I'm Ed Balls and I say no, I was elec...

**ALEX SALMOND:**

*(over)* Oh Andrew, I wouldn't wish that on you.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Nonetheless, indulge me for a second. I'm Ed Balls, I've got my budget, and I say I'm going to stick by it. Alex Salmond, you and your SNP MPs are not going to vote down my budget, you're not going to go into the division lobbies with the Conservatives under any circumstances. I am safe to do what I want.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Right, okay, so I propose an amendment to your budget. Let's say, for example, I say look instead of this very, very slow fast rail coming up from London, I think we should start it from Edinburgh/Glasgow to Newcastle and I put that down as a budget amendment, it would have substantial support in the North of England, from the other parties and would carry the House of Commons. What does Mr Balls do then?

**ANDREW MARR:**

Well it would be very interesting to see because I mean what a lot of people are worried about is a period where every single vote in the House of Commons is unpredictable, is debated, is mattered, and you get the impression at least of a relatively weak government.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well I did four years as a minority government and at the end of four years the people of Scotland decided to give the SNP an overall majority, but that does indicate there was pretty substantial satisfaction with the four years of minority government. You know this is commonplace elsewhere in the world. I mean there's a great mistake in believing that Westminster is the norm.

**ANDREW MARR**

Okay.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

It's not. Westminster is abnormal. Believe me, Andrew.

**ANDREW MARR:**

I'm no longer Ed Balls. I'm now a swithering middle English voter ...

**ALEX SALMOND:**

*(over)* I'm trying to catch up with you.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* ... watching this discussion and saying are there any circumstances in which the SNP are going to raise taxes on me?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well there's the top rate tax. I mean we've voted against its reduction in the House of Commons and we would do that again because we think as long as we have a situation of great pressure on families, then you should look after the poorest sections of society, not after the richer sections of society. That's a belief we have. But listen, many, many people in England have that belief as well.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* But I was talking about new taxes, extra taxes.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

No we don't have any proposals in that direction.

**ANDREW MARR:**

So the SNP won't come down in tax to me as my swithering English voter?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

No we set out the anti-austerity plan that Nicola Sturgeon put forward to extend the period of fiscal consolidation to allow real spending increases as opposed to swingeing cuts. That seems to me a sensible proposal. And most polls ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* So vote SNP or vote Labour and you'll get a left of centre government compared to the current Labour leadership?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well I think hopefully that decisive block of SNP MPs will move the Labour Party in

a different direction and I think many people south of the border would like to see that as well.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Are you concerned by some kind of south of the border backlash by people who say why should the Scots with their own parliament now be telling us what to do in this way?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Well I tell you what. I think there's lots of people, certainly lots of people in Scotland – I mean the SNP membership has just reached 100,000 in Scotland this weekend – but I think people across these islands are pretty fed up with the duopoly at Westminster and I think they might like to see politics a bit more interesting ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Or opened up.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

*(over)* ... where the parties have to work for their votes and you have to justify things on a vote by vote basis to the people. I think lots of people would find that a much more exciting and productive system of politics.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Now you yourself are not perhaps the most popular politician amongst the Westminster group. Paddy Ashdown gave a withering review of your new book ...

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Very rude.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Very rude indeed. He said it was the longest ... I don't think I can say what he said.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

No you can't say it.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Self-abuse I think is the word that we're talking.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

*(over)* I mean can I just apologise on Lord Ashdown's behalf for the bad language of the Liberal Democrats.

**ANDREW MARR:**

That's very touching, but were you stunned by some of the reviews of that book?

**ALEX SALMOND:**

No, I was commenting that there was – and this is actually arithmetically correct – there were more people at my book signing in Union Street in Aberdeen than there was at the entire Liberal Democrat conference. Not the highest standard, you might argue, but nonetheless true.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Alright for now, Alex Salmond, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

**ALEX SALMOND:**

Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**