

JEREMY CORBYN

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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JEREMY CORBYN, MP

Leader, Labour Party

AM: The Leader of the Labour Party, a man who believes he may be your Prime Minister really very soon, Jeremy Corbyn. Just before we came on air I asked him what should happen next after the Salzburg Summit.

JC: The Prime Minister should report to parliament on what has happened, what her statement really means and we should then measure her proposals for the relationship with the EU against the six tests that the Labour Party has put down. And we will then challenge the government on the need for a trade relationship with Europe which protects the freedom of movement for the Irish border. A customs union with Europe and also protection of all the conditions that are so important such as workers' rights and environmental protections.

AM: Are we close to a General Election do you think?

JC: Well, we could be, because this government doesn't seem very strong. It is looking in two directions at the same time. On the one hand a trade deal with the USA, on the other hand some kind of relationship with Europe and we could well be looking towards a General Election and do you know what? We're ready for it.

AM: How do you get to that General Election which clearly you want because you have to persuade Tory MPs to vote for something which could lead to Jeremy Corbyn becoming Prime Minister which may not be very likely.

JC: Well I don't think there's many Tory MPs want a Labour government. But, there's many Tory MPs that are very, very angry

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at the way their government is performing and might feel that it is the right time for the country to make a decision on the future. And so we will be putting our case to parliament and we'll see what happens after that. But we're absolutely ready for it. Listen, people voted in two ways in the referendum, obviously, but nobody voted to lose their job. Nobody voted to see factories close. Nobody voted to see trade ending with Europe.

AM: So we could – we're on uncharted waters, we could very well have an election. You could be Prime Minister really quite soon, possibly even before Christmas and in those circumstances it'll be Jeremy Corbyn leading the negotiations with the rest of the EU. Time is running out. Time is now very, very short and there are two really big problems. So you've said just now you don't want a border in Ireland or between Ireland the rest of the UK, how do you resolve that?

JC: Well, you have to resolve it by - as I said, the trade agreement with Europe but also with a customs union with Europe so that there would not be – there would be then tariff free trade and obviously no trade border. Because you know the area as well I do, it's ridiculous –

AM: The EU have been absolutely crystal clear that a customs union does not resolve the Irish border question.

JC: Well, I think we can reach an agreement that would ensure there is a freedom of trade across the Irish border and across the Irish Sea, but that means there has to be –

AM: We've no evidence of that ...

JC: There has to be a trade agreement with Europe in order to achieve that and that's the case that Keir Starmer and I have put and we will continue to put and we'll continue to negotiate if we're in government on that point. At the moment we can only make our views known and obviously hold our government to account.

AM: But it doesn't sound as if you have a new or different idea about how to resolve the Irish border question, which is what this is all breaking down over.

JC: Europe is very clear, the EU, is very clear that they do not want to see an unravelling of the Belfast Agreement or the whole Irish Peace Process and they see the imposition of a border as part of that unravelling, and they're right about that. I think we can get an agreement which will ensure you do not have that hard financial border.

AM: But we have to take that on trust. Let me ask about the trade side, because the other thing the EU hate is this notion of cherry picking. And looking at what you propose, you propose cherry picking just as much as Theresa May does. You want all the benefits of the single market and free trade and all the rest of it, but you don't want to accept some of the limitations, notably the State Aid Rules, the Procurement Rules and you want to be able to set new trade deals around the world. That is exactly what the Tories want and that is exactly why these proposals are breaking down.

JC: There's quite a big difference between us and what Liam Fox is trying to do. He wants to do a trade deal with the United States and with lots of other countries, all of which involve the reduction of environmental and other standards, all of which involve deregulation. Ours is the exact opposite. We want stronger regulation on workers' rights -

AM: - but you also want to cherry pick.

JC: - at both ends of it, and we want to have obviously a say in how we deal with trade arrangements in the future. But ours is not undermining, quite the opposite. Ours is actually strengthening consumer and workers' environmental rights.

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AM: If the price for getting a good trade agreement which preserved British jobs was some kind of checks on the Irish Sea, would you accept that?

JC: I think it would be very hard to see how you should have checks on the Irish Sea, because that in effect brings back the question of the Irish border.

AM: I still don't understand what your ideas are for resolving the impasse we're now in.

JC: An agreement with Europe which gives us trade and gives us a customs arrangement with the European Union to prevent that –

AM: That's what Theresa May is saying as well and she got into these two troubles. The Irish border and cherry picking and you're in the same position.

JC: No, not at all. She's looking two ways at the same time. Liam Fox is going off trying to do sweetheart deals with one country or another, all of which involve, as I said, undermining and deregulation. Ours is not undermining and deregulation. We want stronger regulation at both ends of any trade agreement.

AM: And what you also want, as a movement and as a party, is a second referendum. Or the so called 'people's vote.' 87% of your own supporters and your own members want that now. They're all coming to this conference asking for it. There's lots of signs that if you say 'd'you know what, I've looked at this and in the new circumstances that we're in today I can see the case for a second referendum,' that would be your route to Number 10.

JC: We're having a debate at our Conference and we'll come to a conclusion on that. Our preference is that we will demand our six tests against the government and our preference would be for a General Election and we can then negotiate our future

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relationships with Europe. But let's see what comes out of Conference. We're a democratic party, we're very big. It's the biggest conference we've ever had.

AM: And given that, do you feel bound by what the Conference decides as the Leader?

JC: Obviously. I'm there elected as a Leader of this party, elected as the Leader in order to bring great democracy to this party and that's exactly what I've been doing for the past three years.

AM: And will this party get a chance this week to vote on the issue of a second referendum, clearly?

JC: There will be a clear vote in Conference. I don't know what's going to come out of all the compositing meetings that are going on.

AM: And if, as a result of that clear vote, the Conference says yes, we want a second referendum, will Jeremy Corbyn deliver that?

JC: Let's see what comes out of Conference and then obviously I'm bound by the democracy of our party.

AM: If there was another referendum now with one option being broadly speaking stay in the EU and the other being broadly speaking leave the EU, how would you vote?

JC: Well that's conjecture to what the question would be.

AM: But I've just given you the question. In or out?

JC: That's a conjecture, we don't know what it will be. In the referendum I wanted to remain and reform the EU. 40% of Labour voters voted to leave. 60% voted to remain. But do you

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know what? None of them voted to lose their job, none of them voted to have lower food standards. They all wanted a better economic performance for this country. The cry of many areas that voted leave was they're fed up with the way they're being treated by governments in this country.

AM: You've discussed no deal a couple of times now. In the real world Theresa May is going to carry on negotiating. At some point is autumn she's probably going to bring some kind of deal back to the House of Commons. It's probably not going to meet your six tests, but in those circumstances, now we know what no deal might look like, would you really vote it down and plunge us towards no deal?

JC: We would vote it down if it didn't meet our tests in order to send the government, if it's still in office, straight back to the negotiating table and if there's a General Election and we're in office we would go straight to the negotiating table. Because we want to protect jobs and industries in this country, we want to ensure there is a good effective trade relationship with Europe in the future.

AM: Jeremy Corbyn, are you an anti-Semite?

JC: No. Absolutely not. I've spent my whole life opposing racism in any form and I will die fighting racism in any form.

AM: It's extraordinary that I even have to ask the question. Who in your view gets to decide what is anti-Semitic?

JC: We have adopted the IHRA definition and the Jewish community have a definition of what anti-Semitism is and that's been included in our Labour Party processes. And I think anyone that's suffering racism is in a position to define it. Be it Islamophobia, anti-Semitism or far right racism.

AM: In plain terms when it comes to anti-Semitism it's Jewish people who have the first right to call out anti-Semitism. So how did you feel when one of your MPs, a Jewish MP, Margaret Hodge, looked you in the eye and called you a racist and anti-Semite?

JC: I completely and utterly reject the idea that any kind of racist or any kind of –

AM: How did you feel?

JC: The matter with Margaret Hodge is closed.

AM: One of the reasons she may have thought – there's a series of events over the summer and this your opportunity now to kind of, as it were, explain what happened and explain to people why what happened happened. The first thing that many people will remember is this mural, now notorious mural on an east London wall. What did you first think when you saw that?

JC: Well, I was worried about the idea of murals being taken down and my thoughts were about that and I was kind of worried at that the idea that somebody who put a mural up should be taken down and I sort of asked some questions about that and actually the mural was taken down and I was perhaps too hasty in my judgement on that. But it has been taken down and I'm glad it has.

AM: I would just have thought it would take about one second to look at that and say that is an anti-Semitic trope there. The Holocaust Education Trust said, 'this mural was blatantly anti-Semitic using images commonly found in anti-Semitic propaganda. It is impossible not to notice.'

JC: It also has other symbols in it as well, doesn't it on freemasonry and so on.

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AM: do you not think it strange that you didn't immediately think that's dodgy?

JC: I was concerned about the idea of taking down public murals and I'm pleased it say it was taken down.

AM: And do you now find it anti-Semitic?

JC: I think it should never have been put up.

AM: That was a case of, as it were, you didn't perhaps look closely enough at something. Let me remind you of something that somebody very close to you actually said recently and that has also caused a lot of offence to Jewish people in this country.

CORBYN: Recorded in 2013

'The other evening we had a meeting in parliament in which Manuel made an incredibly powerful and passionate and effective speech about the history of Palestine, the rights of the Palestinian people. This was dutifully recorded by the thankfully silent Zionists who were in the audience on that occasion and then came up and berated him afterwards for what he had said. They clearly have two problems. One is they don't want to study history and secondly, having lived in this country for a very long time, and probably all their lives, they don't understand English irony either.'

AM: A strange thing to say.

JC: Well, I was at a meeting in the House of Commons and the two people I referred to had been incredibly disruptive, indeed the police wanted to throw them out of the meeting. I didn't. I said they should remain in the meeting. They had been disruptive at a number of meeting. At the later meeting when Manuel spoke they were quiet, but they came up and were really, really strong on him afterwards and he was quite upset by it. I know Manuel

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Hassassian quite well. And I was speaking in his defence. Manuel of course is the Palestinian Ambassador of this country.

AM: But why did you say, 'English irony?'

JC: Well, because of the way that Manuel, whose first language is not English has an incredible command of English and made a number of ironic remarks towards them during the interchange that I had with them. This did happen some years ago, by the way.

AM: And you also said that these people who might have been in this country for a very long time. What's relevant about that?

JC: That Manuel had come recently to this country and fully understands English humour and irony and the use of language. They were both British born people who clearly obviously had been here all their lives.

AM: But we've just agreed that the people who can identify anti-Semitism best are Jewish people. Many Jewish people thought that was anti-Semitic.

JC: They were very, very abusive to Manuel. Very abusive. And I was upset on his behalf from what he'd – he'd spoken obviously at the meeting but also the way he was treated by them at the end of it. And so I felt I should say something in his support. And I did.

AM: Given what Jewish comrades, Jewish members of the Labour Party have said about this, do you now accept that what you said was anti-Semitic?

JC: Well, it was not intended to be anti-Semitic in any way and I have no intention and have absolutely opposition in every way to

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anti-Semitism though I can see where it leads to. I can see where it leads to now in Poland, in Hungary, in Central Europe, I can see where it led to in the past. We have to oppose racism in any form and I do.

AM: Because Luciana Berger, one of your own MPs said, it was inexcusable that comment. And said it didn't make her feel welcome in her own party.

JC: She is of course a Member of Parliament, a very effective Member of Parliament and very good campaigner on mental health rights and our party has members of all faiths and none and it is an open welcoming and safe place for them.

AM: Had you known four years ago when you were invited to Tunisia for a commemoration service that among those being honoured and remembered there were members of Black September, responsible for one of the most horrific terrorists attacks at the Munich Olympics, would you have gone?

JC: I went to the cemetery to commemorate the civilians and children that has been killed when the Israeli bombing took place of the PLO headquarters, as it when was, 'cause it moved there after Sabra Shatila and I thought it was right to take part in what is a very solemn commemoration, but it wasn't in any way commemorating Black September and I'm not even sure – at that time was not even sure who was in the cemetery beyond those that had been killed in the raid, and indeed that was my thought.

AM: You did in the Morning Star that among those who were being commemorated were people who'd been killed by Mossad agents in Paris in 1991.

JC: That was later.

AM: Who are indeed the Black September people. I ask you again, had you known that Black September were there would you have gone?

JC: I didn't know they were there at the time and so obviously –

AM: But if you had known?

JC: Well, I'm not a supporter of Black September of course and I do think that we should always commemorate those that have been killed by bombing raids and that's what I was doing.

AM: Let's turn to the wider politics of this. Do you think that the State of Israel is a racist endeavour?

JC: No. I think the establishment of the State of Israel was an agreement with the United Nations that the State of Israel should be established and its borders were defined and I think it is right that people should discuss the history of the establishment of the State of Israel. Our policy as a party, our strategy as a party is two state solution, but that does also of course mean that Israel should end the siege of Gaza and end the settlement policy in which there are now well over half a million people settled on Palestinian land.

AM: One of the reasons I'm asking that is the EU put a motion to the NEC which said that it should not be regarded as anti-Semitic to describe Israel or the circumstances around its foundation as 'racist' because of the discriminatory impact. I just put it to you that that is what you really think.

JC: I think it's right that people should be able to discuss the establishment of the state of Israel that recognise the existence of the state of Israel and not prevent that kind of debate. So what we did at the National Executive was agreed on the definition, but also made is absolutely clear there can and should always be a debate. Because the only way we're going to bring peace in the Middle East is when people talk to each other, and when there is an end to the settlement policy and a withdrawal of the occupation.

AM: This has been an absolutely awful summer for you and for the party about this. I'm sure that you have not enjoyed any moment of it at all. But a lot of Jewish people watching have become more and more concerned about the atmosphere at the top of the party. You may remember I spoke to Rabbi Sacks who was the leader of the Jewish community in Britain for twenty years, and here is what he said at the end of that interview.

SACKS: There is danger that Jeremy Corbyn may one day be Prime Minister. He is the leader of Her Majesty's opposition. And I'm afraid that until he expresses clear remorse for what he's said and for what his party has done to its Jewish sympathisers as well as its Jewish MPs, then he is as great a danger as Enoch Powell was.

AM: Well, leaving aside the Enoch Powell comparison –

JC: Well, I think – hang on, I think the Enoch Powell comment should be included. I do find that actually quite hurtful and quite offensive. I grew up in the west midlands, I remember what Enoch Powell was doing. I was in Jamaica when he made his speech and I saw the effects of it on relations there. And I just think I say to Rabbi Sacks, with all due respect that is beyond excessive. Let's park that one. I want to live –

AM: There are lots of Jewish people around the country really worried about you.

JC: I want to live in a society where all faiths are respected. I want to live in a society where we are free of racism in any form. That means that all communities must be able to live in safety, including all Jewish communities. There are Jewish people in every part of this country who make an incredible contribution. There are Jewish people who founded this party.

AM: For obvious reasons you're talking to me at the moment, Jeremy Corbyn. There's an awful lot of Jewish people who just desperately want you to express personal remorse for what's

happened, and maybe you could look at the camera and apologise to them.

JC: I'll simply say this: I am an anti-racist and will die an anti-racist. Anti-Semitism is a scourge in any society. I will oppose it all my life and I will continue to oppose it all my life. Under my leadership in this party we've been more specific about the definition, we've set up much better processes for dealing with instances in the party and we're improving them even further to make sure that any complaints are dealt with quickly. The party must be and is a safe and welcoming place for all communities.

AM: Let me say one thing to you, as it were, personally about this. I have talked to Jewish people that have been long-term, perhaps all their lives, supporters of the Labour Party, and some of them are thinking about leaving this country if you become Prime Minister.

JC: Well, I say to them stay in this country. Let's work together in this country. We need a better health service, we need to deal with the housing crisis, we need better quality employment, we need a better sense of community. That sense of community in a Jewish community, and many other communities, is one that we can all learn lessons from. All learn lessons for the kind of society we're trying to create. I want to lead our party into an election to win it in order to improve community relations and to improve the life chances for so many people in our society.

AM: You mentioned housing just now. At a time when so many people can't afford to have their own home and their own house, do you think it's immoral to have a second home?

JC: Well, people do have second homes, particularly business-related second homes in central London. Our proposal is that we would increase the tax on them in order to give money to be spent on new housing across the whole country.

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AM: And all these communities around the country where people who've lived there for generations can't afford to get a house and people move in and they buy houses, is something wrong about that?

JC: Well, there is a problem about that, and in the west country, for example, St Ives council undertook a referendum on no more second homes or holiday let type homes because of the damage it does to communities. And so I can see that in rural areas there is a tourist need for some, but the problem is that a village made up of largely second homes becomes a dead village in the winter and you then lose all the services and facilities that you need. And so I just think that should be concentrating on the housing needs of those that are living in terribly overcrowded conditions and children under-achieving in school because of the overcrowding.

AM: There's been a lot of work going on on Labour's new economic offer to the country and suggestions that the next manifesto is going to be more radical than the one before. And among the suggestions in terms of the productivity crisis that we have in this country is that we should move to a four-day week. Are you at all attracted by that?

JC: I think we have to look at ways in which technology can be used for the benefit of all people. I think that is important. But I also think that we want to encourage companies, and this is one of our proposals, to recognise the skills that are there in the workforce who may be able to manage the companies as well or better than they are at the present time. Hence our proposal for workers on boards of companies with 250 staff and more.

AM: Are you enjoying being leader of the opposition?

JC: Yes. Love every moment.

AM: If, contrary to your hopes, we don't have a general election until 2022, will you still be leader of the Labour Party then?

JC: I'm carrying on as leader of the Labour Party because I want us to win an election, of course. We have a lot of council elections

to win. But it's also about how we do politics, how we change politics and how the party becomes much more rooted and embedded in communities and community campaigning. And I think that is something that's successfully working with our party and our movement. I'm very happy doing it.

AM: But there's all the people out there chanting that dreadful Jeremy Corbyn song.. awful. Desperate for you to carry on. They're really looking to you as the person to change this country dramatically, and they would like to hear from you that you are going to be the Labour leader in 2022 and lead Labour into –

JC: We're a democratic party and I'm very happy leading it, very proud to lead it, and I want to lead it into a general election and bring in a Labour government that will give us a national education service, a care service that works, decent conditions at work, and above all an education system that gives hope and opportunity to all young people. No more this sort of disregarding and under-achieving 14 year old. They're part of our society just as much as anybody else.

AM: We're here in Liverpool. Famously the militant city back in '83 and that period. Dawn Butler, one of your colleagues, has warmly praised the Liverpool militant Labour council of that period for breaking the law rather than breaking the poor. Do you agree with her?

JC: I think what she was doing was expressing support for the determination of the people of Liverpool; the politics and legalities of the whole thing have moved on. Indeed, what we need is proper funding of local government. That is at the heart of what the problems are with local government. Liverpool is a wonderful city, but it has a massive funding problem. It has a funding problem to deal with social care, with housing, as do all of our great cities. This government needs to wake up. You can't use local government as the conveyor belt for austerity.

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AM: But how would you regard local authorities now which broke the law in order to make their political point?

JC: Well, I understand it. I absolutely understand it. Look, I represent an inner city area, Islington, as you know, and we were very angry in the 1980s at the way in which our council expenditure were cut, and I'm very angry now when I see local authorities trying their best to deliver good quality services and the whole time the government is either cutting – is cutting the central government grant and saying that they can keep some of their rate income, but of course that's not fair across the country. The rate income in Guildford is a lot higher than the rate income in Pendle.

AM: Last question. John McDonnell says the next Labour leader, the next Labour leader, should be a woman. Do you agree?

JC: We haven't had a woman leader so maybe a woman leader would be a good idea. But I'm not planning to create a vacancy at any time soon.

AM: Jeremy Corbyn, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

JC: Thank you.

(ends)