AM: First of all congratulations on your election, is it something of a come down to be doing a Select Committee now?

HB: Well first of all, good morning, Andrew. I’m honoured to have been chosen by members of parliament to chair this Select Committee. Look, I think everybody recognises that the task of leaving the European Union, because that’s what we are now going to do following the referendum result, is the most complex task that we face as a country, certainly in peacetime and the Select Committee will play an important part in scrutinising the means by which that happens and the decisions that the government takes.

AM: Well it’s a very interesting thing that nobody from the government is saying very much about exactly how it’s going to happen, so will you be able to fill that gap? In other words will you have David Davis and Liam Fox and maybe Boris Johnson and so forth in front of your Committee explaining what they’re up to?

HB: Well I’m sure the Committee, when it is established, ’cause we’ve got to get the rest of the members will want to hear from all of those ministers and many other people, because what’s the immediate task? To work out what Britain’s negotiating objectives are going to be as we undertake the process of leaving the European Union. Now the government says, well we’re not going to give you a running commentary and we don’t want micro management. Nobody’s asking for a running commentary, but I think it is right and proper that parliament should first of all have a chance to express a view about what our negotiating objectives are going to be.
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AM: So you will be cross questioning David Davis in public about what his negotiating objectives are?

HB: I think it’s essential that that is shared with parliament, apart from anything else, when they are first delivered to Europe we’ll all find out about them. The European parliament has an arrangement which means that it has information shared with it. It cannot be that the British parliament gets anything that is less.

AM: You see Priti Patel who was here last week, the Cabinet Minister, said you can’t do this because it’s like playing poker and asking me to put my cards on the table, and that’s essentially what she’s saying is what do you want to do, if this Committee works, is unpatriotic. You have to allow the government to do their business in private, in secret to get the best they can out of the negotiation.

HB: Look, I think we all want the best possible deal for the United Kingdom out of this negotiation. And nobody’s asking the government to reveal the whole of their negotiating hand or what their tactics are or what their red lines, their full back position. But there’s some very, very basic questions: for example, the biggest challenge we face at the moment and some of the newspaper headlines today demonstrate that, is uncertainty about what the future holds. Now what is going to be our future trading relationship with the European Union? What objective is the government going to set for that negotiation?

AM: And we need to know this before they trigger Article 50?

HB: Well the triggering of Article 50 is I think a separate matter because the government argues we have a mandate from the British people and since we are going to leave the European Union you do need to trigger Article 50 in order to start that process. But
I think we should separate that out from parliament taking a view on what the negotiating objectives should be.

AM: Let me come back to that and ask you again about the Committee, because you talked about talking to other people. So for instance the car manufacturing industry has specific concerns. Universities have got particular concerns of their own, other groups of people, the construction industry wants to know how many electricians and plumbers they’re going to be able to bring in and will work visas be part of the deal? Will those kind of people be up in front of your Committee saying explicitly what they would like to see out of our negotiation?

HB: Well one of the complex tasks that having this Select Committee is going to involve is working with the other Select Committees in parliament that have already started talking to those different industries and sectors. So one of the things I think the Committee will want to do is to draw on some of the evidence that those other Select Committees have already taken and then look at what else we need to see, who else we need to talk to. Because we don’t want duplication, we want the most effective way of doing our job. I’m sure that’s what the Committee will want.

AM: This period of silence, one way or another, is now going to end because your Committee’s going to be talking to ministers, different committees will be talking to different sectors and we’ll be able to piece together quite quickly a fairly good idea of what Britain wants out of Brexit. How we want to negotiate.

HB: Well that is going to depend on the government and what the government is prepared to say. I would expect the Select Committee will want to get answers from ministers because we have to manage the uncertainty, deal with the risk, also make the most of the opportunities. We need to work out how we’re going
to balance free movement and controls on free movement with the greatest possible access to the single market. And thirdly, there are whole areas of cooperation: defence, security, foreign policy where I think everybody recognises in the United Kingdom and in the what will be the European Union once we’ve left that it is in our joint interests to continue to find ways of cooperating because there are big challenges in the world out there.

AM: We mentioned Article 50. Is it your understanding that before Article 50 is triggered the government will have laid out its position before the House of Commons and there will be a vote?

HB: Well I would hope very much that the government would lay out its negotiating position, but I think it’s not a vote on Article 50, it’s a vote on – I think parliament would seek to have a vote on the negotiating plan, ’cause they’re two different things.

AM: So you think there will be a parliamentary vote on the negotiating plan?

HB: I think parliament will want to express a view about the government’s negotiating plan that has been set up, but that is not –
AM: Before Article 50 is triggered?
HB: - but that is not the same as having a vote on Article 50. This is really important.

AM: No, I do understand that.
HB: I know, but it is very important because there are those who’ve said ‘ah, well what parliament might try and do is to in some way undermine or reverse the referendum decision’. That is not I’m sure what parliament will wish to do. It’s certainly not what I want to do as the Chair of the new Select Committee because although I campaigned for Remain I accept the decision of the referendum and we are going to be leaving the European
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Union. The question is: what kind of new relationship, Andrew, we’re going to have and that is about the negotiating objectives and it’s not about the triggering of Article 50.

AM: So my next question is clearly, ahead of the triggering of Article 50 the government comes and says, here are our negotiating objectives, this is what we want to do and parliament looks at that and for whatever reason says no we don’t like the look of that at all and that is voted down. What happens then? General Election?

HB: Well, look, it depends. The government might need to come back and say all right, we’ve had a think about it and we’re going to change this or do that –

AM: So we could be heading for an early election at that point?

HB: No, no – well that’s in the hands of the Prime Minister and not in the hands of me or the Select Committee. But it seems to me perfectly reasonable that the government should share with parliament, because it’s going to share it with Europe, it’s going to share it with the European parliament, the government should share with the British parliament what its negotiating objectives are because there are a lot of very practical questions, as well as free movement, as well as future trading relationships. Are we going to remain part of Europol or the European Arrest Warrant, cooperation and so on. And I would make one other point, Andrew, I think it is going to be very important for the government to indicate that if it is not possible within the two years provided for by Article 50 to negotiate both our withdrawal agreement and a new trading relationship, market access, including for services, 80% of our economy, a million jobs in financial services, that it should tell the House of Commons that it will seek a transitional arrangement with the European Union. Because I think that would help.
AM: It might have to go on for longer than two years?

HB: Well, the withdrawal process maybe only the two years because as you know 27 other member states have to agree to prolong it, but I think the importance of a transitional arrangement is it would offer some confidence to business, and that’s very important, pending the government finally being able to negotiate a new arrangement with the rest of the European Union on trade and market access.

AM: This is clearly a very big and important job, but can I put it to you, given where Labour is in the polls and given Jeremy Corbyn’s victory in his second leadership election, that people like you really ought to be serving in the shadow cabinet and doing your utmost to assure the best possible outcome for the Labour Party at the next election?

HB: Well, as well as being the Chair of the Select Committee I shall certainly be doing that. I’ll be working as hard as I’ve always done to encourage people to vote Labour and to seek to have a Labour victory at the next election. But I made the decision that this is a particularly important task that we’ve got and this is the way in which I’ve decided I’m going to play my part and parliament decided that I should do so by voting me into the job.

AM: Final question: it’s probably quite a terse answer I suspect. Can Jeremy Corbyn be a good Prime Minister?

HB: Well I hope that we’re going to win the next election, but look, we’ve got a big task on our hands. Jeremy is Leader and I congratulated him on his victory, the party now wants to come together and hold the government to account. But the challenge for every single one of us in Labour is to win the people’s trust and confidence and we’ve got a lot of work to do to do that.
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