AM: (following Nicola Sturgeon) She was on the march, were you?
KS: I wasn’t on the march, but it was a significant march.

AM: Why not?
KS: I’ll come to that. The numbers on the march were huge. It was a very powerful message, and I think it probably – although the numbers themselves were high, I think it represents an even bigger number of people who are anxious about the situation and the position the prime minister’s got us into.

AM: You sound pleased that it was a big march. It would have been a slightly bigger march if Keir Starmer had been on it as well.
KS: Well, it was big. It was a significant, powerful message. I don’t think anybody can doubt my commitment to the Labour Party policy that we adopted at conference on a public vote. But Andrew, as you know, my job over the last two years has been to build the case for Labour in parliament and work with all MPs, those that are persuaded about a second referendum, those who are not. I’m talking to them about that.

AM: This huge million-strong march, what was more important than that?
KS: The most important thing is to win the argument in parliament, and that’s been my absolute focus. But I think it was a great – well, I’m talking to colleagues across the Labour Party, across parliament, and as I said, I don’t think anybody can doubt my commitment to the public vote element of the conference policy we adopted in September. So I salute the fact that the march was as big as it was and the clear message that it is sending.
AM: The leader of the Labour Party wasn’t on it, the deputy leader of the Labour Party was on it, however. And here’s what he said. He said he had a message for Theresa May, that he would help her get her deal over the line, ‘but I can only vote for a deal if you let the people vote on it too.’ In other words, I will support your deal but it must go back to a referendum. Is that party policy?

KS: Well, what the party has said is there must be a public vote, and we said we’d either put down an amendment ourselves or support an amendment – and that needs to be between a credible leave option and remain. When we spelt this out on the front bench about eight weeks ago, we said what we mean by that is a deal or proposition that’s got the confidence of parliament. So if a deal goes through, if the prime minister’s deal, if she tries it a third time, goes through, it ought to be subject to a lock or a check, which is it’s got to be confirmed by the public. And I think, given the position we’re in, that’s the least that we now ought to go with.

AM: Under all circumstances, whether it’s a Labour deal or the prime minister’s deal or some other deal, it must go back for a referendum?

KS: Well, the only deal there is on the table at the moment is the prime minister’s deal. We may get to another deal, but it’s still going to be put through by this prime minister, in this in extraordinary times, and so the proposition as it were that any deal that this prime minister is going to get through parliament ought to be subject to a public vote is one that we support. And that’s why we said we’ll either lay our own amendment or we’ll support amendments to that end.

AM: There will be another referendum on Europe under Labour, yes or no?
KS: Well, that’s – we’ve said that we’re supporting a public vote. I mean, the position we’re in a the moment, we’re in opposition, so we’re saying that –
AM: For any deal?
KS: Well, we’ll see what emerges from the process, but it’s got to be a deal, Andrew, that the EU will say they’re prepared to sign up to. It’s got to be something that has got through in parliament. And at the moment that means it’s going to a deal that this prime minister is getting through, and that’s likely to be a damaging deal.

AM: Can you guarantee that there’ll be another referendum on a deal if Labour come into power?
KS: Well, that’s a question, Andrew, for the manifesto.
AM: No, is the short answer. Yes?
KS: No, no, no. It’s a question for the manifesto, and every time you ask about the manifesto I say we’re working through it. But let me be as clear as I can. We’ve had a manifesto commitment last time in 2017 setting out the sort of deal we’d negotiate. We then supplemented that by our conference policy that said that in the event of an impasse we’d have a public vote. I would expect our manifesto to build on those commitments both in relation to the type of deal and a public vote.

AM: Okay. Now, a lot of people on that March support revoking Article 50. You just heard Nicola Sturgeon say she supports revoking Article 50. In extremis, at the end of this process, if you’re faced by no deal would you vote for revoking Article 50?
KS: Well, Andrew, we’re not at that point.
AM: I know, I’m asking, but you might well be.
KS: What Labour is focused on, we’ve been saying this for months, is that we need to break the impasse, break the deadlock and we need to get on and see if there’s a majority for some other proposition, and that’s why tomorrow we are hoping to win
an amendment that allows parliament to start down that process. So the focus is to find a way through this.

AM: So you won’t answer on revoking Article 50. Let’s talk about next week, because that is when the House of Commons tries to take back control from the executive. And there’s going to be probably a series of so-called indicative votes.
KS: Yes.
AM: It looks as if the likeliest option for a cross-party consensus or a majority is on what’s called a softer Brexit, involving the customs union and the single market. But that will only happen if you and the Labour Party are prepared to compromise your vision with Conservatives and others across the Commons. Are you?
KS: Well, Andrew, the first thing is obviously to, as it were, take control. It is incredible the prime minister's lost control of her party for the meaningful vote process of the negotiations, and tomorrow may lose control of parliament. And that’s a very serious constitutional position. We then move on later in the week, possibly Wednesday, to start some sort of indicative process, is there a majority for something else? Jeremy Corbyn’s already started the process of talking to others across the House and we can see where the arguments are. Our position, the two things that we’ve been pressing hard are, firstly a close economic relationship – that’s a customs union plus single market alignment – and the case for a public vote. They were the two options we set out in our January amendment. So we’ll press the case for that. We’ll see where the majority is, if there is a majority.

AM: The question is will you compromise to get a deal?
KS: Andrew, the question that needs answering tomorrow is this: if the prime minister is going to allow this process to happen, is she prepared to accept the outcome? In other words, we’ll go into this –
AM: With respect, that’s a question for her, not for you. The question for you is will you compromise to get a deal through the House of Commons?
KS: We will go into this arguing the case that we’ve been making for months about a close economic relationship and a public vote. We’ll see where the majority is. We’re doing this in good faith. That’s why we’re already having these discussions. But I do come back to this, because this is my biggest fear about the process – Andrew, please let me make this point – my biggest fear about this is if the prime minister is going to let a process begin but she won’t own the outcome, she will collapse it if we find a majority, and I think she may well then try a vote on her meaningful vote again. And that’s the worst – that would make a bad situation even worse. So the critical question is, is this a serious exercise? We want it to be. We’re going in good faith and we’re already having those discussions.

AM: And what you fear, to be clear about it, is that you get some kind of soft Brexit agreed in the House of Commons – or whatever it is, or Labour’s deal, whatever it is – and then at the end of that process, once that’s been agreed, she brings her meaningful vote back yet again and force majeure gets it through and sticks with that?
KS: The fear is that we start down the road of trying to find where there’s a majority, the road we should have gone down two years ago. I think there’s an appetite for that. I think there’s a yearning for that in parliament. I think it’s across the House. There’s the substantive issue of what the deal should look like. Then there’s the process of a deal, which is should any deal be wrapped in a confirmation vote? We’d look at that. But the point is, if we are to do that and get to a conclusion of that exercise, the prime minister then has to own the outcome, because otherwise we’re going down a road which she is using really to frustrate the process.
AM: Absolutely right. But it is also very possible that in all of this there are endless votes and there is a majority for nothing. So if the Labour Party deal is not voted through, if the Labour version falls in the House of Commons, do you vote for something else?
KS: Well, we’re having that discussion. We’re intensely talking to people across the House about other options that they’ve got. We’ll get to that when we get to that. We’re not going to go into this process doing anything other than arguing for the two –
AM: Everyone talks about compromise and when it comes to them, they say, ‘oh, I’m not going to compromise, everybody else must compromise and come to me.’ I’m asking you, will you compromise on your red lines to get a deal, yes or no?
KS: We’re going into this in good faith. We will argue the case that we have been making. This is the beginning of the exercise, not the end of the exercise. But we’re the ones having the cross-party talks. We’ve been talking to people from all different parties. Now, Jeremy Corbyn’s had a whole host of meetings to that end. So in a sense we are leading on this initiative to find a way through the deadlock, but we must have the assurance that the prime minister isn’t going to use it just to frustrate the process and then to say, ‘hah, here’s my deal yet again, you’ve rejected it twice, try it once more.’

AM: And given that this is now a parliamentary process, or may be tomorrow, do you allow your MPs free votes on this?
KS: Well, Andrew, we haven’t made a decision on that. But what I’d say is this: I think where we’ve got a policy position on something, then I think the expectation would be that that would be whipped. But that’s a matter that Jeremy and the Chief Whips will have to discuss. But I think where we’ve got clear policy, the expectation would be a whip.

AM: Another matter that is not for you, but nonetheless very important in the public papers today is the future of the prime minister herself. If she was moved to one side and you were
dealing with David Lidington, would that make it easier for you to get the kind of compromise you want?
KS: Well, Andrew, the difficulty I’ve got with that, and I’ve got no problem dealing with David Lidington or indeed the prime minister. The difficulty I’ve got is that it’s the numbers that are the problem. In other words the divide, particularly on the government side – and you’ll say well, you would say that wouldn’t you in opposition? But it’s blindingly obvious that the government and the Conservative Party is deeply split and my issue about the leadership is whoever is leading this Conservative Party at this time is going to be faced with a very divided party that’s equally split whoever’s leading it. And that’s the problem, that fundamental divide on their side.
(ends)