AM: Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland’s First minister and the SNP leader came down to London yesterday to join the march for another Brexit referendum. Before she got started I asked her whether, like many of the other marchers, she wanted parliament to revoke Article 50, cancelling Brexit entirely.

NS: I would like to see Article 50 revoked. That is preferable to crashing out of the EU with no deal, and of course Scotland voted to remain in the first place, so it would be honouring the wishes of the majority of people in Scotland. But of course you know we’ve been arguing for some time now that it should go back to the people. The government has failed, absolutely failed to deliver on the results of the 2016 referendum. They have no credible way forward now and when parliament and government fails then it seems to me the only sensible thing to do is put the people back in charge.

AM: That will be one of the options probably put before parliament this week. You have said, time and time again that Scotland wants to stay inside the single market and the customs union and it may well be that there is a majority for some form of so called ‘soft Brexit.’ Customs union, single market, inside the House of Commons. Will the SNP’s 35 MPs be part of that new consensus?
NS: Well that’s not our first preference. Our first preference is to remain and the best way of achieving that is to have another referendum or to revoke Article 50. At the moment I think it’s fair to say that the option of remaining is not off the table and it’s not beyond the bounds of possibility by any stretch of imagination, so as long as our first preference remains an option, that’s what the SNP will back.
AM: You have said, again and again that a no deal Brexit would be disastrous for Scotland and your government calculated it would cost perhaps a hundred thousand Scottish jobs. Now the safest, surest way of stopping that happening would be for the SNP to hold their noses and vote for the Prime Minister’s deal.

NS: Well, all of our analysis says the Prime Minister’s deal would cost Scottish jobs and reduce the size of the Scottish economy.

AM: But not as much.

MS: Well look, I don’t think it is acceptable or certainly desirable for any of us to be in a position of having to choose disaster instead of catastrophe, and that’s what that choice of the Prime Minister’s deal and no deal would represent. And the Prime Minister’s deal, just to recap, takes us out of the EU, takes us out of the single market, takes us out of the customs union and gives no clarity about the future relationship.

AM: Honouring the result of the 2016 referendum.

Ms: Well, with respect not honouring the result of the 2016 referendum in the country that I’m First Minister of which is Scotland.

AM: Do you think that Theresa May herself is now part of the problem?

NS: Yes.

AM: If you were in her Cabinet would you be telling her to go now?

NS: I would be telling her to go. I think she’s been part of the problem for some considerable time. I think if we were in any normal period in British politics she would be long gone, but the conventional rules are not applying. I suppose the one caveat to that is I think she is effectively out of power now and perhaps debating her position is becoming more and more incidental by the day. What’s important now I think is that the House of Commons seizes control and it must do that next week.
ANDREW MARR SHOW, 24TH MARCH, 2019 – NICOLA STURGEON

AM: Nevertheless, she has negotiated the only deal that’s on offer. The only deal on the table and a lot of people in the EU look at what’s going on in British politics and say that people like you are playing party politics and the thing you should be doing is voting for her deal and avoiding no deal.

NS: Well that’s not the impression I get of what people in the EU think of Scotland or the Scottish government. I know what they think of the UK government just now and it’s probably not repeatable. But Theresa May negotiated the only deal she was able to negotiate because of the red lines she imposed.

AM: Mark Rutte, the Dutch Prime Minister said: “It’s not Theresa May’s mistake that we are where we are, it’s because too many people have so far played party politics on this issue. My hope is that the UK parliament will next week do the sensible thing and vote yes to the deal.”

NS: Of course. Look, I understand that position from the EU. They negotiated in good faith with Theresa May. It’s not their fault that she imposed all of these red lines constraining herself from the word go. It’s not their fault that she triggered Article 50 before she had a clue what she wanted to do. So I don’t blame European leaders for just wanting to see this done. But, you know, I have to look at what’s in the best interests of Scotland. I also care about what’s in the best interest of the UK, and Theresa May’s deal is not in the best interests of people across the UK. Neither is no deal, so let’s over the next few weeks, in this opportunity that has been afforded to us, try to find a better way forward.

AM: The Scottish government’s been given £92 million by the British government for no deal preparations. In this financial year how much of that has gone to Scottish councils?

NS: We give Scottish councils a global settlement. We just passed our budget in February.

AM: There’s nothing in the budget suggesting you’ve given the money for this.
NS: Andrew, I can say with absolute certainty as First Minister that if there is a no deal Brexit 92 million will not come close to being able to deal with what we are dealing with. So we’re working on our Resilience Committee COSLA, the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities is represented as is the Scottish Police Service.

AM: But have you passed that money down to Scottish local authorities?
NS: This is not how we - we give local authorities a global budget, so all of the resources we have, wherever it comes from in terms of the UK government we allocate that to priorities and we’re working very closely with Scottish local authorities so they collectively, jointly in partnership we’re planning for no deal.

AM: Is no deal the moment when another Scottish independence referendum becomes absolutely inevitable?
NS: I think another Scottish independence referendum is going to happen. Nothing in this life is absolutely inevitable, but I think it’s as inevitable as it’s possible to be. Before I set forward a path forward for Scotland I think it’s reasonable for me to know what the starting point of that journey is going to be in the context in which we are going to be embarking on it. And you know, we need to know and hopefully we will know this over the next few days and the next three weeks. Is the UK leaving the EU? Is it leaving with a deal? Is it leaving with no deal? Or is it not leaving at all perhaps looking at another referendum? But the experience of the last what, almost three years now, Scotland’s vote ignored, the voice of the Scottish parliament ignored, all of the consequences that fall from Brexit completely out with our control. That really does make the case for independence very, very powerfully.

AM: It now does look inevitable that any Scottish independence referendum would happen after we’ve left the EU and therefore
Scottish voters will be saying, outside the EU, but also outside the British market, which is quite a big ask.

NS: Scotland shouldn’t have to choose between the UK market, which is important, it’s important to Scotland, it’s important to the rest of the UK to continue to trade in the Scottish market. We shouldn’t have to choose between that and the European single market which of course is eight times bigger than the UK market. I want Scotland to continue to trade in both. We have a major drive just now to grow our exports to Europe, we’re setting up new investment hubs in capitals across Europe, I want to see us continue to do that as well as remaining open to people from Europe to come to Scotland.

AM: And given where we are now would an independent Scotland apply to re-join the EU?
NS: I would want to see an independent Scotland re-join the EU. One of the big ironies which we’ve spoken about before is in the independence referendum those who were against Scottish independence said you can’t have independence ‘cause you’ll get thrown out of the European Union. What an irony that not too much further on we’re facing being taken out against our will.

Ends