THE ANDREW MARR SHOW
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TRANSCRIPT OF NICK CLEGG INTERVIEW

AM: Nick Clegg is clear, he is determined that we have to stop Brexit and he’s even written a book to explain how. Nick Clegg, a lot of people will say: ‘Come on, this is a democratic conference we’re at, people are here to be listened to, the British people made their views very, very plain in the Brexit referendum, and it is simply wrong for politicians to try to overturn that vote’. NC: I’ll actually start with a quote from David Davis, your previous interviewee, once said. And it was brilliant; he said, ‘a democracy that can’t change its mind ceases to be a democracy’. And a key point will come in about a year’s time when MPs will be presented by Theresa May and David Davis with whatever threadbare deal they put forward, and at that point they need to make a very, very simple choice: is what their constituents are being presented with at that time consistent with what their constituents were promised by Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and so on? That not only the 350 million quid for the NHS every week, but a cornucopia of trade deals, exactly the same benefits outside the single market as in. And at that point - my view, and I’ve explained this in the book – at that point MPs, in my view, don’t just have a choice but have a duty to say to the Government, ‘I’m sorry, this doesn’t measure up in any shape or form to what people were promised.’ And where people don’t get what they were promised in a democracy, voters are entitled to change their mind.

AM: Alright. But if we never leave, if that original decision isn’t actually acted on, the country says we want to leave the EU, and if that never happens how can people ever know what would happen if we did leave? In other words, you’re refusing to allow people – refusing to allow the country to do the one thing that people asked you do?
NC: No, because people were asked to vote for Brexit, and while I don’t agree with them I totally understand why millions of people voted for Brexit, because they were promised a utopia. Complete control over their borders, total independence from European judges, in two years a whole bunch of new trade deals. We now know already that my view is it’ll become very obvious by next October, but none of that, and I stress none of that, would have been delivered. And at that point, going back to your issue about democracy and accountability to the people, given that people will have been sold Brexit on a totally false prospectus, surely – to coin a phrase – it is the right of the people, via their MPs, to take back control of this process, end this tedious psychodrama of the Conservative Party, and indeed the constipated ambivalence of the Labour Party, and say, ‘hang on a minute, this is not what you told us would happen, therefore we want our MPs to say stop.’ At that point, of course, you’d reopen the whole issue about the association between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

AM: I want to come to detail of this because, because assuming your view, I still don’t understand at all how you can possibly stop Brexit. It’s going to happen, it’s going to happen in March 2019. We will be out.

NC: Not at all. If MPs say in October of next year, 2018 – so several months before we legally leave, and they say, ‘look, we don’t think that the deal that the government has come up with in any way measures up to what our constituents were promised,’ at that point yes, of course, there’ll be turbulence, there’ll be crisis in Westminster.

AM: So first of all you have to have a vote. On the deal itself.

NC: Correct.

AM: And at that point MPs have to vote the deal down.

NC: Yeah, and I think they will.

AM: They’re not there yet.
NC: No, they’re not, of course not. And by the way, they’re reasonably there yet, so I can write a book as a sort of advance guard of the argument. They’re not there yet because quite reasonably a lot of MPs, either those who voted for Remain or voted for Brexit, either those who have Brexit-voting or Remain-supporting constituencies, want to give the government the time to come up with something. And at that point, in October, for the first time since the referendum, they will be able to compare what their constituents get to what they were promised.

AM: So, your plan depends upon two things: first of all the economy going further south. We’ve seen Moody’s downrating the British economy already this week on the basis of Brexit. But more bad news like that, and then MPs frankly panicking about the nature of the deal that David Davis will negotiate.

NC: I think the damage to the economy is self-evident. I actually think there’s a more profound and political and democratic principle. If you are told you’re going to get this great panacea of goodies by Brexiteers and none of them are delivered, then surely MPs are duty bound to say, ‘I’m sorry, you haven’t done what you told my constituents they would get, therefore we need to revisit it.’ The second big element is what’s happening in the European Union. In the rest of the European Union, Europe is moving towards a system of what is in effect sort of concentric circles. I don’t believe the United Kingdom can return to the status quo ante to the 22nd June 2016. I do think we can re-dock ourselves in an outer orbit of membership within a reformed European Union.

AM: For any of this to work the EU has to come back in terms and explicitly and say to the British people and the British state, ‘we have changed, we are going to be a different kind of EU, please stay.’ Is there any possibility of that? At the moment Juncker and Co, are going for deeper integration on this.

NC: Juncker’s views are not widely shared across the European Union. Look, I’ve spoken to many leaders across the European
Union and I would say two things: firstly, if they felt there was a chance to reassociate the United Kingdom into the family of nations of the European Union, then of course they would in effect stop the clock on the legal –

AM: Can you do that?

NC: Yes, of course you can. I actually am the only British, or ex-British politician now who actually negotiated EU trade agreements. We constantly stopped the clock. I can’t think of a single major negotiation which I’ve been involved in over the last twenty years where it didn’t slip beyond its original deadline. So of course you can push the pause button, and crucially you can then design a new European Union where there’s a place for the United Kingdom in an outer orbit in it.

AM: We’re running out of time, but can I ask you do you accept that at the end of this process it’s not enough for MPs to vote and keep us in the EU, there has to be another national choice, there has to be another – there would have to be another national referendum?

NC: Yes, of course, and the last vote was an absolute – it was a very, very sort of photo finish, there was only 650.000 votes in it. And how can I put this politely? Actuarily I suspect that the high point of the Brexit vote has already passed. Crucially, young people who have to live with the consequences of that referendum vote and these botched negotiations overwhelmingly want something different. And by the way, the –

AM: Let’s be clear about this. Are you saying Brexit voters are dying off?

NC: Well, I’m saying if you look at the demography, the oldest voters voted for Brexit in the largest numbers, the youngest voters did the opposite. And the youngest voters are now flocking to Jeremy Corbyn, and the question I hope you will ask Jeremy Corbyn in a few moments’ time is simply this: he wants to become Prime Minister of this country principally to end austerity. You
cannot end austerity if you don’t end Brexit. Ending austerity and proceeding with Brexit are incompatible with each other, because it means – and all the objective assessments show this – it means you have less money to spend on the public services than he’d want to.

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