

ANDREW MARR SHOW

25TH MARCH 2017

TOM WATSON

AM: Can I start by asking you about the sacking of Owen Smith? Was that not an absolute slap across the face for lots and lots of anti-Brexit Labour members, supporters and MPs who have been looking to the Labour Party to get them that extra referendum, been looking to the Labour Party to save them from what they see as a hard Brexit engineered by the Conservatives, and you are now saying no further?

TW: Well, I hope they don't feel that way. You know, I was disappointed to see Owen go. He did a very good job as Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary. He was very experienced and was speaking out about his concern for the Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement.

AM: And he was saying something that he's been saying consistently all the way through from the leadership election onwards. He's never changed his position on this.

TW: Yes, but you know, he does know how collective responsibility works, Andrew. And you know, when you join the Shadow Cabinet you may have your own personal views but you're there representing the collective view of the Labour Party, and you know, if I'm being honest I don't think Jeremy really did have a choice but to ask him to stand down. And I think he was probably right on that.

AM: So can you explain to us the difference between this situation and Diane Abbott, who was also calling for a second referendum, and indeed Keir Starmer in his local paper in 2016 was saying we might have to have a second referendum?

TM: There's a tangible difference between a letter that goes to a constituent that was clumsily worded, which was the case with Diane Abbott, and doing an interview in the Guardian where you

take a contrary view to that that's been agreed by the Shadow Cabinet.

AM: Keir Starmer was in the Camden New Journal, you can say it in the Camden New Journal but you can't say it in the Guardian?

TW: Well, to be honest, Andrew, I'm not a reader of the Camden New Journal. My paper is the Sandwell Express and Star, which is a very good regional paper. So I'm not aware what Keir said there. But of course people do sort of make mistakes in these letters, but when you're a Shadow Cabinet member you're bound by collective responsibility.

AM: You are bound by collective responsibility.

TW: And I think for Owen, who had left the Shadow Cabinet to run against Jeremy and then was invited back, I think he understood that he was obligated to try and hold that position.

AM: So his obligation above all is to stick with the Labour Party policy. Let me read you this: 'unless the final settlement proves to be acceptable, then the option of retaining EU membership should be retained. The final settlement should therefore be subject to approval through parliament and potentially through a general election or a referendum.' That is Labour Party policy, voted through at the Labour Party conference, and that is what Owen Smith was saying.

TW: Well, look, we've never called for a second referendum. We didn't call for it in our manifesto. We've been very clear that we campaigned for a meaningful vote in parliament.

AM: That is the policy which went through the Labour Party conference.

TW: Well, of course, in a dynamic situation the Shadow Cabinet takes a collective situation. Of course the Labour Party conference is our sovereign body, but it meets once a year. And actually when you're doing a complex negotiation like Brexit you have to

rely on your Shadow Cabinet to take a position. We did do that. In fact, we have a Brexit subcommittee that explores all of these issues line by line in the negotiations. They take a long time to get a position. And I think Owen probably knew what the position was and sadly, I think Jeremy had no choice but to ask him to stand down.

AM: Well, you say that. I would suggest that he was sticking with the Labour Party policy as it's been expressed by Conference, and he was sacked for doing that. Can I ask you what the policy is now? Is a second referendum, as far as the Labour Party's concerned, completely now off the table? You always say we never called for it. That's a slightly different thing. I'm saying is it off the agenda?

TW: What we want is a meaningful vote. Now, how we, in the course of this – you know, you should always try and keep your options open in a negotiation, particularly one that could have such –

AM: Ah, so the option is still there?

TW: Well, I think it is highly, highly, highly unlikely that we will be calling for a second referendum. What we want is a meaningful vote, and what we want is to apply pressure to the government to get them to change their negotiating position, and I think we've been moderately successful in that. I think we've convinced them that we need a transitional arrangements that would mean we would stay within the customs union and the single market for that time. I think we are winning the argument that we need some form of a customs union, and I'm absolutely certain that at some point Theresa May will come back to the country and say that Labour were in the right position on this and she'll find some form of custom arrangements that look similar to ours.

AM: Do you think we are heading now more towards a Norwegian style relationship with the EU after we leave than a Canadian one?

TW: I think we need to find our own unique arrangements in the deal, and I think we need to make sure that British interests are reflected in that. So we always argue, and I'm sorry, I probably bore you to death when I say it, that we need a jobs first Brexit, that we need to protect the right of businesses to trade across Europe and protect those jobs, particularly in manufacturing in areas like mine in West Bromwich.

AM: Some people suggest that the Owen Smith sacking was an attempt to deflect public attention. Can I ask you to look at this? What is your reaction when you see that image?

TW: My reaction is that is a horrible anti-Semitic mural that was rightly taken down.

AM: And how long did it take you to glance at that and to make that judgement?

TW: Well, look, you're showing it me on a 32-inch screen on national television and I've seen it about a hundred times on social media. Very different to seeing it on Facebook when you're on the move.

AM: Because your leader, who apparently glanced at it, didn't look at it properly and suggested to the guy who written in that it shouldn't be taken down. He said, I quote, 'some of the older, white Jewish folk in the local community had an issue with me portraying their beloved #Rothschild or #Warburg as the demons they are.' And he said it was being whitewashed and taken down, and Jeremy Corbyn said, 'why? You're in good company, Rockefeller destroyed Diego Rivera's mural because it includes a picture of Lenin.' Which seems a remarkable thing to say. You've only to glance at that to see what it's about. It's Third Reich propaganda anti-Semitism.

TW: Well, look, that is why Jeremy has expressed deep regret and apologised for that, and has actually said that it's right that the mural was taken down.

AM: And yet, you know, it's taken years for some of your colleagues to get him to respond to this. Luciana Berger, who's a Jewish Labour MP, has been trying to get a response out of Jeremy Corbyn for a long, long time and she's still very, very upset that he has not completely, fully apologised for this.

TW: Well, I'm very, very sorry that people feel hurt by this, and that's why I think it's right that Jeremy has expressed regret for it. He said that he didn't see the mural, he was talking about free expression, and I think you know, now that he has seen the mural he's right to say that it was right not just to be removed but that he expresses deep regret for the offence caused by the mural.

AM: He regrets not looking more closely at it. Can I suggest to you that if this was a mural attacking black people or any other ethnic group then nobody in the Labour Party would have the slightest hesitation about condemning it.

TW: Well, nobody in the Labour Party should have the slightest hesitation in condemning this mural. It's anti-Semitic, it's horrible, and I want Jewish members as well as every other member of the Labour Party to feel welcome in our party. I think it's time we said that enough is enough on these anti-Semitic stories, and we are taking measures to do that. You know, we've increased our staff that do these investigations. We've had the Chakrabarti Report. We worked with our affiliated organisation, the Jewish Labour Movement, to redefine anti-Semitism at our conference last year. I understand the concern out there.

AM: Do you agree with Chris Williamson that what's going on is the weaponising of anti-Semitism?

TW: No. No, I don't agree with that at all. But what I do think is we've got to work harder to stamp out anti-Semitism, and that requires our own internal procedures to be faster in the way they operate and deeper. But all I can say –

AM: These allegations carry on. Every few weeks there's another anti-Semitic row involving the Labour Party. It seems to be something that you can't shrug off or slough off. Is this not the moment for you and for Jeremy Corbyn to go and meet the Chief Rabbi and talk it through and explain your position and start to try and get this behind you? Because if it goes on till the election you're in dead trouble with Jewish voters.

TW: Well, I'm very honoured to have already met the Chief Rabbi and discussed this. I've spoken at our Labour Friends of Israel lunch, I talk to the Jewish community regularly. I talk to colleagues who are concerned about this.

AM: What about Jeremy Corbyn?

TW: So let me say it's time we stamped out anti-Semitism and we're doing so. We've increased our resources to investigate these individual cases. But you know, we're a member-led party, we need to make sure that we investigate these things thoroughly to make sure justice is done.

AM: Do you think it's acceptable to say that we're right to pay people to be repatriated from this country?

TW: No, I don't agree with voluntary repatriation, but it was a discussion that was had in the country many, many years ago. In fact, there were probably people in parliament now who have held those views.

AM: It was a discussion which Max Mosley took part in in the Guardian on 3rd March and said it was 'perfectly legitimate to offer immigrants financial inducements to go home.'

TW: That was in the context of a leaflet that was 50 years old.

AM: But that was him talking about now.

TW: Well, Andrew, I don't believe that Max Mosley ascribes to those views that were – holds those views that were ascribed to him. And if I did think he was racist or a fascist then I wouldn't have given him the time of day.

AM: And he wouldn't have given you half a million pounds during this.

TW: He gave an unsolicited donation to help research and campaign efforts in my team. Because he admired the work I did on dealing with the criminal journalists who, if I may say so, are a great contrast to the courageous journalist of Carole Cadwalladr, who you've already had on the show. And he gave that because he saw the work I did on that. But let's work out what's going on here, Andrew. He became the subject of national media attention for over a week because of the work that he's done in calling for the national newspapers that don't believe in proper self-regulation to be reformed.

AM: I'm not naive about this, but nonetheless that very, very offensive leaflet, which he signed the bottom of in 1961, accused coloured immigrations coming into this country, in the words of the time, of spreading VD and leprosy. It could not have been more disgusting. And he's somebody who has not yet said, 'this is all appalling, I have totally different views.' Is he still a friend of yours?

TW: Yes, he is a friend of mine, and he does have totally different views. Look, he's had a very unusual life. He's the son –

AM: His father was a fascist leader.

TW: Yes, his father was a fascist leader. You can't decide who your father is, Andrew. But you can have redemption, and I believe in redemption in our society and I believe that Max Mosley, 50 years on from that leaflet, is a very different person. Let me just –

AM: Tom Watson, you know that you should give that money back, don't you?

TW: The money has been invested in research and campaigning, and I am not going to resile from my respect for Max Mosley's campaign on media reform just because the Daily Mail want me to, because they want to put pressure on politicians – let me answer your question.

AM: Half a million pounds.

TW: Let me answer your question. What is going on here is he is the subject of Daily Mail attention and News International attention because the Leveson proposals were quietly dropped by the government in two weeks – two weeks ago. Which I think is a disgrace, to end a national public inquiry halfway through when we have a hundred civil cases in the courts alleging criminal wrongdoing at the Sun newspaper, when we have a whistleblower from the Sunday Times, who has come forward and said that he targeted, by data theft, the private financial records of many former Cabinet members, when there is no remedy to that because a government minister has caved in to that pressure and dropped the Leveson Inquiry. I'm not going to throw Max Mosley out to the wolves because he is courageous enough to come through family tragedy and campaign for change. There are very few of us out there.

AM: Okay, before I finish I should say that that quote I read out from the artist about his mural was not the one that Jeremy Corbyn saw, he just saw the image. Very, very quickly at the end of this, you've seen all the Cambridge Analytica stuff, do you think that the Vote Leave campaign was in some sense illegitimate or corrupt because of it?

TW: Well, I think the story of the whistleblower in today's newspapers is very significant, and what I think needs to happen is Theresa May needs to make sure the Electoral Commission has the resources to fully investigate the allegations made that there was criminal collusion. Because let's remember, the people that led these campaigns are now senior Cabinet members, and I think we need to make sure that they were not aware of what was going on, and that's why I think the resources are needed, and if needs be the police should be resourced to investigate as well.
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