ANDREW MARR SHOW
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PETER WHITTLE

AM: After his bruising defeat in the Stoke by-election UKIP’s leader Paul Nuttall said he wasn’t going anywhere, which is at the very least ambiguous. He’s not around to tell us what he means but his Deputy Peter Whittle is here. Very nice to have you here, it would be even nicer to have Paul Nuttall. Do you know what’s happened to him?

PW: Well he had a trip booked, as you might imagine, straight after the by-election and he wanted to break it but we insisted, particularly after what he’d been through, we insisted that he go. So I’m afraid you’ve got the B team.

AM: But if you had a – it’s very nice to have you here – but if he had a trip booked then presumably he assumed he wasn’t going to win the by-election. He might have been the new MP.

PW: No, no, he had a trip booked, as quite often happens after by-elections but given the gruelling time that he’d been through and a particularly personal attack obviously we wanted him to rest up.

AM: He had an absolutely miserable four weeks. He’s been called the Purple Pinocchio, he’s been much mocked for a kind of Walter Mitty fantasy life and so forth. Lots of very personal attacks about his house and everything else. Is he in the mood to stay on as UKIP leader?

PW: Oh, there’s no question about that, Andrew.

AM: Really?
PW: Absolutely no question. Paul was elected with the biggest mandate last year and without question he has united the party. Let’s face it we had a bit of a rough time last year.

AM: And I think you’ve still got a rough time.

PW: No, no, no. The difference is of course it’s disappointing that we didn’t win in Stoke but we are more united than ever, everything is more in place than ever and there’s a real sense of renewed purpose.

AM: Well let me pick you up on those, if I might. You say you’re more united than ever. We have today Nigel Farage and Arron Banks saying that the party is being run worse than a stall in a market, that you’re in terrible trouble. Arron Banks saying, to you and to Paul Nuttall, “make me Chairman and let me sort out this party or I am off with my money”. What’s your message to him?

PW: Well what I would say is first of all we’ve got a great young dynamic Chairman in Paul Oakden, that’s for sure.

AM: So you don’t want Arron Banks as your Chairman?
PW: It will be a very interesting conversation to have, you know. I’ve always been very, very grateful for –

AM: His money.

PW: - Arron’s contributions.

AM: His money. His money, let’s be honest.

PW: No he’s supported us, obviously he’s not the only one who supports us. I mean we exist as a party – you know if Arron were to take his money away there are other people. Obviously I wouldn’t want that to happen but the fact is as well is that, you
know these sorts of interventions are griss to the mill. They happen all the time with our party, it’s part of politics. So I think the difference is, is that with us is that people tend to see a kind of do or die situation in virtually every controversy.

AM: Well, this time round they saw it with some reason because Paul Nuttall, UKIP generally had said to us again and again, we are going to replace Labour in The Midlands and The North of England. We’re going to sweep them aside, just you watch. ‘I want to replace Labour and make UKIP the patriotic people party of working people,’ said Paul Nuttall. And then Nigel Farage, let me read you this, Nigel Farage before the by-election said: ‘I don’t think anybody for one moment can underplay just how important and absolutely fundamental that by-election is for the future of UKIP. It matters and it matters hugely.’ And the truth is your chances of replacing Labour are now zero.

PW: No, no that’s not true at all.

AM: You have been fundamentally destroyed in a key seat that you should have won.

PW: No, no, look. If there was one mistake we made it was that maybe Paul shouldn’t have run so early. I accept that maybe. Maybe that was – because he’s only been leader for 12 week, but I think that the –

AM: Explain to us why that was a mistake.

PW: Well because people hadn’t got to know him well enough I think.

AM: Was he too inexperienced for that kind of role?
PW: No, not too inexperienced but I think that the overriding points you make is that without question UKIP has an appeal for working class – patriotic working class people. We didn’t win this time, there are many by-elections coming up. Remember, when we talk about replacing Labour about 120 years ago there was one Labour MP, Kerr Hardy. He remained just one MP for quite a long time.

AM: It did take 120 years to get where they got...

PW: No, no no, it took about a generation and the fact is that we – This week, Andrew, I have to make this point for all the people who constantly are saying that this is the end for UKIP. We were 15% in the polls. Now when we had the General Election and we got four million votes that was about 12%. We’ve increased. I admit what is difficult is translating that support with this kind of parliamentary system we have into MPs, that is a challenge. That is a challenge but we will meet it.

AM: The problem is that is the system we have and that’s the system we’re going to have for the foreseeable future.

PW: Absolutely, absolutely, so we will keep going on.

AM: So another 25 years before you see a UKIP MP?

PW: No, no no, absolutely not, look, the point is behind much of the analysis that there is in the papers today and all the rest of it, is obviously on the part of some people in the media a desire to see UKIP go. I’m not whinging about that, but if I had a –

AM: I’m sorry to jump in on this, but it’s just that you, as a party, raised people’s expectations, you said, ‘we are going to replace Labour just you watch’. This seat, Stoke Central is Brexit central.
It is our great chance. We are bringing our party leader in to fight this. We’re pouring in resources and you got thumped.

PW: No, no. Look we were second, our vote went slightly up. Not by enough. I fully accept that. If you were down there or if you had been there you would have seen how we still set the agenda. The Labour Party gave our leaflets covered in the St George cross saying we will control migration. That was the Labour Party, right. We are still making the agenda and we are making it nationally.

AM: Except that the wider problem for UKIP is surely that it’s hard to see, as Tim Montgomery was saying, what you’re actually for.

PW: I heard that.

AM: Because after all Theresa May had picked up the immigration issue and control over immigration made that central to the way that she is dealing with Brexit. The Labour Party has waivered through Article 50 because they want the will of the people to be heard. It’s very hard for UKIP to say to people you’re being betrayed or the establishment’s against you.

PW: It’s not hard at all because the fact is Brexit hasn’t really happened yet. You say that Theresa May –

AM: But we’re heading there, aren’t we?

PW: Ah, no, that’s a huge assumption. You’re saying that Theresa May is saying these sort of things that are bringing people on and giving the Tories support. She was Home Secretary, very harsh on migration. She’s made very harsh speeches, harsher than you’d ever see at a UKIP conference, but at the same time she presided over huge increases – historically unprecedented increases in migration.
AM: Absolutely, but she said after the vote we are going to take back control over immigration and she has put that central in terms of the way she is negotiating effectively.

PW: She has not said a thing, Andrew. She has not said a thing.

AM: She talks about immigration quite a lot.

PW: She talks about it a hell of a lot. We are the party people know exactly where we stand on migration. Migration is still the biggest issue, it hasn’t gone away. They know that we want a point start system but I would add one thing as well which is different. We want a point star system like Australia but at the same time we want as well an aptitude test we want an attitudes test to make sure that people coming here accept our values. These are huge issues for people that the Tories don’t talk about and Labour certainly doesn’t talk about.

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