THE ANDREW MARR SHOW, SHAMI CHAKRABARTI

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW, 26TH MAY, 2019

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AM: Isn’t the truth that you could, as the Labour Party, have done some kind of deal with Theresa May, if you’d really wanted to? And as the Labour Party you chose not to. Which means that that whole area of kind of a compromise so called soft Brexit is now completely off the table and the country has a binary choice of an election, which you want to get, or if you don’t get an election being taken straight towards no deal.

SC: Well, I’d want an election for a whole number of reasons, not just to do with Brexit. 14 million people in poverty, according to the UN, would be a very good reasons for a General Election. And also I have to say that I don’t think the Conservatives can have their second unelected prime minister, Mrs May having lost David Cameron’s small majority and having had no personal mandate. And I don’t think we can have one of these hard Brexiteers come in after a coronation. The Tory party membership, I think, I haven’t seen very recent numbers, the Tory party membership is probably the equivalent of about two parliamentary constituencies. That is not enough to give a mandate to a prime minister or a vision for this country in my view. So yes, I want a General Election but you’re also quite right that we need to deal with this terrible issue of Brexit that has riven this country for the last three years. Mrs May did not unify the country as she promised to do. She can’t even unify her party.

AM: If you don’t get the General Election and the Conservative Party may well listen to your kind advice and choose not to give an election anyway, if you don’t get an election how do you stop a no deal Brexit?

SC: Well by any means necessary. Working –
AM: There’s are any means that are available at the moment.
SC: Well, my colleague, John McDonnell, just this morning has been reaching out to leaders of other parties across the United Kingdom.
AM: But you haven’t got a majority in the Commons.
SC: Well we’ve got to try – we’ve got to break this deadlock. We’ve got to try and break this deadlock and that you know, is perhaps more votes, testing the opinion of the House of Commons in particular and then quite possibly a confirmatory vote.

AM: So let me take you back to what Dominic Raab said because on the law, as I understand it, he was right. The law says that we leave the EU at the end of October unless the law is changed. So a confirmatory vote, or a general assertion by the House of Commons is not enough to change the law. And if you get a Conservative Leader who wants to take us out with no deal in those circumstances I put it to you again, there is nothing, as the Labour Party, you can do to stop it.
SC: Well we can try and trigger a vote of no confidence and hope that some sensible, moderate Conservatives who realise what a catastrophe no deal would be for the economy – and that’s people’s jobs and services, and frankly, for our national security and the important collaboration that we have with the European partners. And we would hope that in those circumstances moderate Conservatives would help break the deadlock and support us in a vote of no confidence.

AM: It’s a very big ask.
SC: It is.
AM: To ask Conservatives to tear apart their own government.
SC: Of course. I do appreciate that, but I do think there are people of good will in the Conservative Party –

AM: Who might do that.
SC: - including people that I’ve worked with in the past who realise what a catastrophe no deal would be for the people of this country.

AM: You’ve mentioned that and the possibility of a new Conservative Leader of any kind. Do you put down a vote of no confidence in any new Conservative Leader immediately they take office?

SC: I think that it’s time for a General Election. This new Leader should seek a mandate from the people. Yes, I think that would be a very good idea.

AM: But assuming they don’t you put down a vote of no confidence immediately, do you?

SC: I think that would be a very good idea, because I think – I don’t think we can have a second unelected Conservative Prime Minister. It has not been working for this country and we’ve got 14 million people in poverty in one of the wealthiest countries on earth and it’s completely unacceptable and the people of this country are entitled to have the opportunity of an alternative vision.

AM: It’s a real double or quits moment for the Labour Party. If you get the General Election you want then hooray for you. If you don’t, then we are on a process leading towards no deal. Let me read you what the Institute for Government, a neutral body says: “It looks like a near impossible task for MPs to stop a prime minister who is determined to leave the EU without a deal. Parliamentary procedure offers no route and the only apparent way of blocking no deal, a vote of no confidence, would be a massive gamble for Tory MPs.” That’s just plain right, isn’t it?

SC: Absolutely. But I think that gamble or no gamble there are enough decent, moderate Conservatives who know what a catastrophe a no deal Brexit would be. And I would hope that in those circumstances - they’ve already voted against a no deal on a number of occasions in the past. I heard Justine Greening for
example earlier today repeating that. I think there would be a significant minority of Conservative MPs who would put the country first in that scenario.

AM: But this is all in the hands now of Conservative MPs. Your colleague, Stephen Kinnock has said that he thinks that what’s happened moves us one step closer to no deal. He says, “I think the Conservative Party” he’s talking about “will elect a hard Brexiteer and they will allow the country to crash out of the EU on the 31st of October without a deal.” And that is what the country is now facing.

SC: Well we will do everything we can to prevent that happening. We will work with anybody and everybody we can across politics, across the House of Commons to prevent that happening. Because I’m afraid that what I just heard from Dominic Raab was terrifying to me. And it will be terrifying to a lot of your viewers at home.

AM: Well let’s turn to the Labour Party itself, because I keep emphasising we don’t know the results of the European elections but it is perfectly possible that it will not be a good night for the Labour Party.

SC: I think it’s very likely that it won’t be a great night for the Labour Party. I have no doubt –

AM: And that would be because long term Labour voters looking at your policy and feeling that you are on the fence when it comes to a second referendum have moved to other parties.

SC: No, I completely understand the frustration of the membership, of people who were passionate and are passionate about their internationalism and about wanting to stay in the European Union. However, we had this enormous challenge of trying to carry those feelings but also to listen to too many people in this country who felt left behind for too many years and -
AM: And who feel that the political class has not given them what they voted for?

SC: Yes, exactly. So this was the dilemma.

AM: So that was the dilemma, I understand that, but your Deputy Leader, Tom Watson, has said today. He said, that you’ve got to find some backbone as a party. “Labour voters and members saw our position in this election for what it was. A deliberate and ultimately self defeating attempt to triangulate between different groups. For our party’s sake, but most of all for Britain’s sake, Labour needs to find some backbone on Brexit, find our voice and do it fast.” And he means by that, as you know, another referendum. Do you agree with him?

SC: Well look, I think that Tom Watson is, as a Deputy Leader voicing the considerable frustrations of the membership. And now is a time for us as a party not just to reach out to other parties but to reach in to our membership, our affiliates and everybody in the Labour movement. And I think Tom is right to voice that. And I just want to be clear about this, because I campaigned to remain, I was a passionate remainser but I also am a democrat and I wanted to listen to the 52% as well as the group that I was a member of. However, a confirmatory vote or a second referendum now or in the future would be a means of breaking the deadlock in our country. Not a means of stealing – not a means of stealing Brexit from those who voted for it. And I think that it it’s been

AM: So you back it. You’d like to see it?

SC: - it’s been part of our policy since Party Conference last Autumn and, you know, it’s past midnight now so I think that means of breaking the deadlock in our country become more and more important by the day.

AM: I spoke to Jeremy Corbyn last week –

SC: Happy birthday, Jeremy.

AM: He’s 70 today. And he said that free movement would be on the table in Brexit negotiations. You said something similar. Can I ask you to be absolutely clear. The line in your 2017 Manifesto,
and I think we can bring it up now, which said that free movement would end. Will end when you leave the EU. That is no longer the case.

SC: What that referred to was free movement under the terms of the Treaty, you know, so that wasn’t ruling out negotiating over movement of people.

AM: So here is the real question. How would the regime negotiated by Shami Chakrabarti and Jeremy Corbyn in government after we’ve left the EU, in terms of the movement of EU people into the UK and British people freely into Europe, how would that differ from what we’ve got now?

SC: We’re just more welcoming of movement of people.

AM: So there will be more free - it would be freer even than it is now?

SC: Oh sorry than it is now. I think that unlike the Conservative Party we – we’re just not an anti-immigration party. We would not have presided over the Windrush scandal for example. We are a pro movement party. Now of course movement has to work for everyone and it has to be accompanied by things like lifting the minimum wage and making sure that people feel that this is working for them and not just working for some people in some parts of the country. But we are not anti immigration and so we can enter these negotiations with our European partners with much more enthusiasm for aspects of the European Union.

AM: Do you understand why when quite a lot of Labour voters hear something like that, they have migrated to the Brexit Party? Because they thought they were ending free movement and that’s what they voted for and they feel you’re not giving it to them.

SC: Well no, ending free movement under the current terms of the Treaty because you’re leaving the European Union, but they know that we need people to work in the NHS. We need our young people to be able to go and live and work and holiday in Europe. So I don’t believe that even many of the people voting for the
Brexit Party want to baton down the hatches and have fortress Britain. I really don’t believe that. When you explain to them these our European neighbours and we want to be able to come and go. Not completely freely, but we want that movement that’s so important to our economy and to the kind of people we are to continue.

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