INTERVIEW:

PETER ROBINSON, FIRST MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND AND LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY

MARCH 29TH 2015
ANDREW MARR

Now, the SNP are not of course the only Kingmakers in the next parliament, the Democratic Unionist Party are also weighting up the price of their support. One of their MPs, Ian Paisley Jr., came up with the figure of a billion pounds. When I spoke to DUP leader Peter Robinson earlier on, I began by asking whether that generous figure was available to both the Labour AND the Conservative parties after May the 7th.

PETER ROBINSON

Yes, we have worked very closely with both the Labour party and the conservative party over the past number of years and we have been able to work with them for the benefit of Northern Ireland and, I hope, the United Kingdom as a whole. So I suppose we are one of those parties who has not determined that we will only speak to one party or the other, we are open to speak to whichever party. I suppose in the first instance, constitutionally, we would want to go to the party that has one the most seats, but we wouldn’t be averse to speaking to the party that comes in second place.

ANDREW MARR

Very interesting. Now budgets are stretched very tight in Northern Ireland at the moment, and you have in your own speech, talked about the DUP being able to bring home the bacon, in terms of extra spending. Ian Paisley Jr. has talked about a billion pounds being the price of DUP support to either of the big parties.

PETER ROBINSON

After an election, we will sit down with any potential government of the United Kingdom, and we will see to what extent they can help us deliver our plan for Northern Ireland and how we can help in pushing forward their plans for the United Kingdom as a whole. So it’s not as vulgar as saying “here’s and amount of money and we want it”.

ANDREW MARR

Nonetheless, everyone watching will understand that there is a potential auction here, as it were, between the parties. Are you genuinely equally open to Mr Cameron and Mr Miliband, particularly if Mr Miliband is looking towards the Scottish Nationalists, who want to break up the UK?

PETER ROBINSON

Well, we certainly don’t believe it will be sensible to allow a lever on government by those who are separatists and want to break up the United Kingdom. But in terms of our willingness to talk to the Labour Party as well as the Conservative Party, of course we are. We are not so bloated by our importance to believe that we are going to form a government after this election. We recognise and have some sense of the scale of the contribution that we can make, and therefore we recognise that whichever party is to be in government in the United Kingdom, they will have their own policies to pursue. So, we will want to see how
closely our policies and our vision for the future aligns with theirs, and to what extent they are willing to help us in Northern Ireland make Northern Ireland a better place to live in.

ANDREW MARR

But, to be clear, it is very hard to see the DUP in some kind of loose arrangement involving the SNP as well.

PETER ROBINSON

Well I am not sure that any of the two major parties are going to have a coalition with either the SNP or the DUP. We are not asking for that. All we are saying is here is our vision, here is our plan, we’re prepared to support the party that is prepared to deliver as much of this plan as is possible.

ANDREW MARR

Now you have come to this new arrangement with the UUP. Is the split, the historic split in Unionism, finally healing?

PETER ROBINSON

Well, I am delighted to see that there is greater cooperation, it is certainly something that the ordinary unionist on the ground has been craving to see. We have managed to get an electoral pack in four key areas, and I think that we have to remember that in 3 of those 4 areas Sinn Féin is the main target. Sinn Féin, if they were to win those seats, would not attend the House of Commons, would not represent the people that are in that constituency in the House of Commons. Far better that we have Unionists being returned who will speak up for Northern Ireland, who can contribute to ensuring that the Northern Ireland Plan is going to be enacted.

ANDREW MARR

But the fourth of those people being targeted is of course Alliance Party, with support from both communities, and there has been some criticism that this agreement is in effect a sectarian pact.

PETER ROBINSON

Yes, I always remark how peculiar it is that if Nationalists and Republicans have an electoral pact that’s quite democratic, but when Unionists comes together it’s somehow sectarian. There isn’t anything sectarian about Unionism. There is nothing sectarian about wanting to maintain Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. Naomi Long and her party have now and in the past registered themselves as Others rather than claiming to be Unionists when they came to the Assembly in Northern Ireland. I want a Unionist voice at Westminster, and I am glad that my Ulster Unionist colleagues want that as well.

ANDREW MARR

Peter Robinson, thank you very much indeed for joining us.
PETER ROBINSON

Thank you.