

Transcript of BBC2, Newsnight, 16 July 2019, Interview with Rod Liddle and Tom Baldwin (Upheld ECU Complaint)

EMILY MAITLIS: We've still not left the European Union, the question's one that seems to pervade, for better or worse, everything our politics is currently about. Some will see it as betrayal. Some as respite. Rod Liddle, who voted for Brexit, says he predicted on the evening of the referendum result that we would not leave. He blames what he calls 'the establishment.' Tom Baldwin is a leading figure on the People's Vote campaign, former adviser to Ed Miliband, and believes we'd be better off taking the mess we're in back to the people. Welcome both. I wonder about the timing of your book Rod, you've called it *The Great Betrayal* when . . . we're about to leave . . .

ROD LIDDLE *Author: 'The Great Betrayal'*: Ah!

EM: We're three months away from leaving, probably with the hardest Brexit that anyone imagined?

RL: I know that that fear lurks in all Remainer hearts, but I don't think that that's what's going to happen. The book's called *The Great Betrayal* because we were meant to have left on March 29. We didn't. Three years almost, for the government to try to do what the people had asked them politely in that referendum that they might do and it hadn't worked. And the same . . . the same dynamic is there right now.

EM: Yeah. So . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) Erm . . .

EM: So when you say it hadn't worked. What is this great betrayal? We had a prime minister who, God knows, tried for three years to deliver Brexit, we've got an incoming PM who's promised a fixed date, you know, and a hard exit . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) Yes, but what's he said, but what's he said? It's the same narrative as before. So this idea of 'no deal', which was brought up by . . . which was brought up by Theresa May when she went to Brussels and when she went to negotiate with Tusk and . . . and . . . and Europe, it was a paper tiger. And it was a paper tiger because all the time, back home, Philip Hammond would be saying, 'There is no possibility of a 'no deal'. There is no possibility.' What do we have now? We have Boris Johnson saying . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) There was . . .

RL: . . . 'Solid date, October, or (*words unclear*)

EM: It was Philip Hammond, and not all the people in the REG (*sic, means ERG*) all the Brexiteers who didn't vote for it . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) But, but . . .

EM: . . . who stopped Brexit happening, why don't you recognise that?

RL: (*speaking over*) Possibly, possibly, I do. It's in the book. Possibly. But just to go back to that other point about Boris. You know, Boris has said very firm: 'We leave. We have to.'

And has, has raised the prospect of 'no deal'. And then, at other times, has said there is a million to one chance that we will leave with 'no deal'. In other words it's a paper tiger again.

EM: Tom Baldwin.

TOM BALDWIN *Director of Communications, People's Vote Campaign*: Well look, I mean, I think a lot of people do feel betrayed by the last three years on Brexit. I think Remainers and Leavers feel betrayed by what's happening on Brexit, because what's being offered now, whether it's a revival of Theresa May's deals or lipstick on that pig, or an accidental slide into 'no deal', which I think is a real prospect. It's both are a million miles away from what was promised in 2016, the thing that you voted for. On that basis you've got a kind of mis-selling scandal here. You've got something which is not being delivered which was promised. You've got Parliament divided, they can't decide on what form of Brexit to go ahead with. You've got the country divided. And the solution is to actually be, in this democratic crisis, it's more democracy not less.

RL: *(laughs, words unclear)*

TB: Put it back to the people and let the people decide.

RL: Well, of course, the latest opinion poll from YouGov suggested that 57 per cent of the population want to leave in some form or another. I mean, which is a . . .

TB: *(speaking over)* That's interesting, no, that's interesting . . .

RL: . . . which is a . . . which is a *(fragments of words, unclear)*

TB: *(speaking over)* No, it's interesting this, you know, you can, you can, you can slice and *(fragments of words, unclear)* slice and dice this in different ways. *(fragments of words, or words unclear due to speaking over)*

RL: *(speaking over)* But that's . . . that is what the polls said, Tom, I mean.

TB: *(speaking over, fragments of words, or words unclear)* you quote, you quote polls in your book as well, as showing that there is now a Remain majority. Now, I mean, if you're so confident about this, let's put it back the people *(words unclear due to speaking over)*

RL: *(speaking over)* No, because it's morally the wrong thing to do. The people voted. I mean, I, I, you know, I don't think this is about what . . . what you call it? What's . . . what's the . . . what's the phrase you give to the People's Vote these days? Of course, it's a *People's Vote* because the people who voted . . .

TB: *(speaking over)* I use 'People's Vote.' I use 'People's Vote.'

RL: . . . first time will . . . yeah.

TB: No, no, there was a People's Vote last time as well, but the people have been let down. You know, you call it 'A Great Betrayal' . . .

RL: *(speaking over)* Well, they've been let down.

TB: . . . people have been betrayed here by the politicians. Let the people decide this and sort this mess out.

RL: But Brexit . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) Because, quite clearly, the politicians can't.

RL: Brexit hasn't been the problem. Brexit hasn't been the problem. The in—

TB: (*speaking over*) What sort of Brexit do you want?

RL: Brexit . . . hang on a minute.

TB: What sort of Brexit do you want?

RL: Brexit hasn't been the problem. The ineptitude of the politicians and also the deliberate betrayal by some of those politicians, including quite a lot on the Remainer side, that has been the problem. There's been no inherent problem with Brexit. Now, I would leave with 'no deal'. I would prefer to leave with 'no deal' than to leave with the deal which the ERG has voted for while . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) But, but, but, but hold on . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) Isn't the truth . . . but actually, there's complete unity here, because you're delighted that we haven't Brexited yet, and you're delighted that you can get angry about it, because that's your currency, you can get everyone up in arms . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) But that's what he does, he's a columnist, he's a . . . he's a columnist . . .

RL: (*speaking over, words unclear*) fatuous, isn't it. I mean . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) That's what you do.

RL: (*speaking over*) I'm, I'm sitting . . . my . . . my point is that I'm angry because we haven't left.

TB: Now, now, look, Rod . . .

RL: And I'm representing the . . . the people, trying to represent the people and that's why I've written the book . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) Look, Rod . . .

RL: 'You're angry that they haven't left' – to say that I'm pleased because I'm a columnist . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) You're not just angry that we haven't left . . .

RL: . . . that has written a book about it is absurd . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) you say that the Remainer argument was that all Leavers were basically racists and xenophobes, you're trying to . . .

RL: Pardon? Sorry, I said . . .

EM: (*laughter in voice*) You pretty much say that the Remainer argument is that all Leavers . . .

RL: No, I don't say . . .

EM: . . . are basically racists and xenophobes.

RL: No, I say that that was one of the . . . that was one of the big tropes of the elec— . . . of the referendum campaign – didn't work very well, obviously, telling your . . . telling the people you want to vote for you that they're thick, racist, uneducated and, even worse than any of those things, *old*, didn't play very well. But it has helped some of the MPs to assuage . . . to assuage their fears of going against the public vote . . .

EM: Oh, come on.

RL: . . . by saying, 'Well, they . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) That's the language you use . . .

RL: . . . they, they were wrong.'

EM: would you describe yourself as a racist? Because many see you that way.

RL: Well no, obviously not, but I am used to going on BBC programmes and being accused of such things.

EM: Yeah.

RL: When (*laughter in voice*) there isn't (*fragment of word, or word unclear*)

EM: (*speaking over*) When all you do is write about suicide bombers . . .

RL: . . . there's nothing about racism in it . . .

EM: . . . blowing themselves up in Tower Hamlets or . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) What's that got to do with this?

EM: . . . a black Labour MP, Kate Osamor, saying she only got the job because of her skin colour . . .

RL: Do you *have* to at every possible juncture, show the BBC's grotesque bias?

TB: (*speaking over, fragment of word, or word unclear*) But these are your words, Rod.

RL: Do you have to?

EM: These are your words.

TB: *(speaking over)* These are your words, you wrote them.

EM: And *(fragment of word, or word unclear due to speaking over)*

RL: *(speaking over)* Sorry, have you worked this out between you?

TB: No, no, it's just what a lot of people think about you.

RL: *(speaking over)* It's just coincidence?

TB: *(speaking over)* It's just what a lot of people think about you.

EM: *(speaking over)* You're writing . . .

RL: *(speaking over)* It's just coincidence.

EM: You're writing about what this . . .

RL: *(speaking over)* Just coincidence?

EM: . . . great betrayal it is, that all Brexiteers are portrayed as racist and then you come up with . . .

RL: *(speaking over)* Well, they are portrayed as racist.

EM: . . . things saying, 'Postal voters in Peterborough thought they were ticking a box to choose a tarka dal or a brinjal bhaji. I suppose this last comment will be considered a racist . . .' It is consistent casual racism . . .

RL: *(interrupting)* That's not casual racism at all.

EM: *(speaking over)* Week after week from you.

RL: *(speaking over)* It's not casual racism whatsoever.

EM: *(speaking over)* That's what you trade in.

RL: *(speaking over)* It's not.

EM: What is it then?

RL: It's nothing to do with racism.

EM: Why do you say, 'I suppose this last comment . . .'

RL: *(speaking over)* It's about voter fraud . . . it's about voter fraud in Peterborough, which happened particularly amongst the Pakistani community. And it was organised by a man called Tariq Mahmood, who was sent to prison for doing exactly that. So get a grip, Emily.

EM: Why is it . . . go on, Tom. Why is it then . . .

TB: Well look, (*fragment of word, unclear*) Rod . . . Rod . . . to sort of defend Rod for a sec, he's a paid polemicist, right? He's paid a lot of money by Rupert Murdoch and the Barclay brothers to be a sort of scourge of what he calls 'the establishment.' The trouble is, you are, you are the establishment . . .

RL: Okay, (*words unclear due to speaking over*)

TB: When you . . . when you, when you wrote, as Emily points out, that you wanted an Islamic fundamentalist to blow himself up in Tower Hamlets because it would be a decent distance from the rest . . . where the rest of us live.

RL: Yes, it wasn't an entirely . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) Who was, who was the, who was, who was the 'us' . . . ?

RL: (*speaking over*) It wasn't an entirely, it wasn't . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) Who was the 'us'? Was that the people?

RL: (*fragment of word, or word unclear*)

TB: Was it white people, was it rich people?

RL: (*speaking over*) It wasn't an entirely serious point, as you well know, as you would have known if you'd actually read it.

EM: (*speaking over*) So what is it, comedy?

TB: (*speaking over*) So why did you write it?

EM: (*speaking over*) Is it comedy?

TB: There's comedy sometimes, yes. Do you . . . do you not know comedy, do you not understand it?

EM: I just wonder, when it's so consistent, when it's week after week, the bile that you spew up has to be who you are.

RL: (*speaking over*) What bile? What bile?

EM: This kind of stuff.

RL: It's not bile.

EM: (*speaking over*) Well why would you mention black MPs, female Labour MPs . . .

RL: (*words unclear, speaking under*)

EM: . . . one week and Tower Hamlets the next week and the people who are chick—ticking a box to choose a tarka dal?

RL: (*speaking over*) See, this is . . . this is a real problem, and you cannot but help it: that there are 17.4 million people out there who are distressed at this . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) So this is about them?

TB: (*speaking over*) And they're not all like you, Rod . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) This is about them, no?

TB: (*speaking over*) They're not all like you. I respect a lot of them.

RL: (*speaking over*) They're distressed . . . they're distressed at the betrayal. And one of the things they're most distressed about is the way the BBC has behaved in the last two and a half years . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) You write this in your book, you say that . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) it is, in the BBC . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) everyone has been portrayed as xenophobic and racist, I'm simply using your language . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) And you're doing it again!

EM: I know!

RL: Yes, you're doing it again, yes.

TB: (*speaking over*) You do walk into it a bit though, don't you?

RL: No, I don't walk into anything. I speak what I think is the truth and what I think people like to hear as well.

EM: (*speaking over*) Tom, your argument that we have to go back to the People's Vote is exactly the noise that left us all in this ridiculous position. You don't accept democracy and we've had democracy, we've had the vote?

TB: Look, when you're in a democratic crisis like this, when MPs can't decide what to do, when the country is divided, I . . . you know, I'm not . . . I'm not a huge fan of referendums. I spent 2015, the general election, opposing David Cameron's reckless decision to have a referendum. I'm not jumping up and . . . with joy at the idea of another one. But I do think this is the only way to solve this crisis. It's the only legitimate way to solve this crisis.

EM: But you always thought that, didn't you?

TB: (*speaking over*) Because I think anything imposing . . . no . . .

EM: (*speaking over*) You always thought that?

TB: . . . actually, I didn't, I didn't. I, I only started working for the People's Vote campaign last year . . . I, and it . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) Let me (*word unclear*) on the People's Vote (*fragment of word, or word unclear*) . . . the only people who are in favour of the People's Vote campaign, I mean, come on Tom, with a very, very few exceptions are people who voted to Remain, I mean, you know . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) And, and what I want to get is more and more people, like you Rod, who believe that there's been a great betrayal. And I want people to recognise now that, you know, whether you voted Leave or Remain, the only way to sort out this gigantic mess is to put it back to the people, trust the people, be a Democrat, rather than hide behind the establishment . . .

RL: (*speaking over, fragments of words*)

TB: . . . and the big proprietors of the newspapers that you work.

RL: (*laughter in voice*) The, the democracy . . . the democracy has spoken but you won't listen to it. And you wouldn't listen to it a second time either, and if . . . you wouldn't listen to it a third time. And, of course, the next vote, of course, wouldn't be quite as simple as that, it would be between May's deal, it would be Boris's deal, another deal or leave or stay. And you know that it wouldn't be . . . you know that it would be gerrymandered so that the people . . .

TB: (*speaking over*) I don't know it would be gerrymandered . . .

RL: . . . who voted would lose their . . .

TB: . . . because I actually do trust our democratic systems. I don't think Peterborough was a system of voting fraud. I don't think Peterborough . . .

RL: (*speaking over*) You *don't* think there was voting fraud in Peterborough?

TB: (*speaking over*) I, I don't think it was people who 'didn't speak English', as you put it, who thought they were vote— . . . ticking a box for Bombay aloo.

RL: But that's exactly what happened. In other places around the country, in Birmingham . . .

TB: They thought they were ordering a curry?

EM: There was literally no proof of that.

RL: No, there was not, because that was a joke. Do you not get jokes?

EM: Okay on that . . . final thought (*laughs*) we will end it, thank you both very much for coming in.

RL: Oh no we won't.



