

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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ANGELA RAYNER

AM: Can I ask you first of all about access to education, is it true that fewer working class kids are getting into university education as a result of the tuition fees?

AR: Well, you know, Andrew, I don't believe that that's the case actually, but I do believe that many working class and part time and older mature students are actually leaving university. And there's three things that the coalition government helped with the Conservatives that they've done that had led to the disastrous situation that we're in today. Of course, you mentioned the hike in tuition fees. But there was the removal of the maintenance grants, there was the increase in the percentage of the loans. They've's changed it so they could use the base rate of the Bank of England and they upped the amount of percentage that people paid. That I believe actually directly impacted. And of course the thresholds of income, which has meant that more students will pay back more from the beginning as well.

AM: All of those things may be true, but nevertheless the Labour policy is predicated on something that Jeremy Corbyn said. He said, 'fewer working class young people are applying to university.' That is not true is it?

AR: Well, what's happening actually is more working class people are coming out of university and they're leaving with a considerable amount of debt.

AM: Many more are going in, many more are going in.

AR: Five times more are actually coming out of university and not being able to finish their degrees, and I think that is a direct impact of some of the government changes, like I say, on maintenance grants.

AM: I want to come onto that but again, one more time, very straightforwardly, is it true that fewer working class young people are applying to university?

AR: Well, what's fantastic, and I think it's been publicised –

AM: It's not true is it?

AR: The last Labour government did a huge amount to encourage aspirations, get more working class people into university, and of course we've got record levels of people applying for university.

AM: Sure. We have one small problem here, which is I'm reading you out something that Jeremy Corbyn said which isn't true. And I'm asking you if it's true and you're giving me answers to other things.

AR: Well, no, I'm clarifying that I believe more students are going into university.

AM: So the answer..

AR: But there's record levels of students that are actually having to leave university before the finish their qualifications, and I think that's because of the government's policies. They've done away with maintenance grants, they've increased the percentage rates of loans, which you talked about earlier in the programme, and they've lowered the threshold for incomes so that people are paying more early on.

AM: Okay. Because it's not a marginal point at all: 73 per cent more people from working class backgrounds have gone to university since the tuition fees policy was introduced. It's gone up enormously.

AR: And the amount of people that are actually having to leave university before they've even got their qualifications has gone up enormously as well. And part time students and mature students as well. Over 50 per cent are having to leave college courses, their university courses, before they've completed them. And that I think is directly as a result of the current policies of this government.

AM: I'm not defending the current policy, I'm just suggesting that, for instance, 22 per cent of children who were eligible for free school meals now go to university. Before this policy it was three per cent or four per cent. It's a huge increase. And yes, some people fall out at the other end and get into financial trouble, but many, many more people are going in the first place.

AR: Well, it's great that many are going, and actually one of the things that's happening as well, Andrew, is many people are leaving university and unfortunately are having to go to jobs where they're not able to utilise their degrees as well, and I think that's a real scandal. And that's why we've had a policy of looking at Effe as well, and further education colleges and technical education, because I think it's about lifelong learning for everybody, not just about that particular area.

AM: Absolutely. So my point to you is you're spending at the moment, as a party you want to spend, about £11 billion ending this tuition fee policy. Much of that money will go to relatively affluent middle class and upper middle class families and children. Would it not be better to spend that kind of money on getting rid of – replacing some of the tax breaks that have been taken away by the Tories, working class children's tax breaks and so forth and spending it at the bottom end of society because the Fabian society say you would actually make poorer families worse off compared to better off families?

AR: Well, it's 9.5 billion, the amount that we'll take for the Student Loans Committee to reverse the tuition fees. But I think – and then of course the maintenance grants, which are for the most disadvantaged students. I think that's really progressive. But I make no apologies for actually a huge amount of our manifesto was about our national education service and we talked about Early Years, we talked about Sure Start Centres, which was the last Labour government that introduced them. We've lost a tremendous amount of our Early Years Centres under the coalition

and the Conservatives. So we talked about a whole package, a range from the early years, cradle till grave, a national education service which was about making sure that everyone has access to education, because we know, Andrew, that that's how you make social progression, that's how you influence people to get on in life.

AM: Absolutely right. But right at the end of the campaign, I think seven days before polling, Jeremy Corbyn said that he wanted to think about wiping out the current student debt, which is a vast amount of money.

AR: It is.

AM: And he said that you are now going to be working on that policy. Now, that's not funded at the moment. Have you been working on that policy, do you have any numbers about how much that's going to cost?

AR: Well, Andrew, it's a big abacus that I'm working on with that. It is a huge amount, it's 100 billion which they estimate currently, which will increase.

AM: 100 billion!

AR: It's a huge amount of money. But of course we also know that a third of that is never repaid.

AM: We you surprised to be handed that abacus right at the last minute?

AR: Well, I like a challenge, Andrew. But you know, we've got to start dealing with this debt crisis that we're foisting on our young people. It's not acceptable. They're leaving university with £57,000 worth of debt. It's completely unsustainable and we've got to start tackling that. There's three things I call on the government to do that they can do immediately. They can reverse the maintenance grants abolishing, that will help the most disadvantaged students, they can stop and reduce the percentage rate that students have to pay on their loans, and they can ensure that the amount they'll be paying, the income threshold goes up

in line with average earnings. They're three things that the Conservatives can do before September that will help students out.

AM: Aren't you just simply spraying around huge, huge spending promises too recklessly. I mean, another £100 billion on tuition fees right at the last moment. That's some sofa you have to find.

AR: Well, like you said, Jeremy said that that's an ambition, it's something that he'd like to do. It's something that we will not announce we're doing unless we can afford to do that.

AM: Alright, can I turn to recent events. You were at the Durham Miners' Gala, there's a picture of you with Jeremy Corbyn there, I think, doing a selfie. And they were chanting your name and you're now a big part of the current Labour leadership group. Can I ask you what you feel about the fact that so many of your colleagues were disinvited to that event? They were told they hadn't been supportive enough to Jeremy Corbyn and they were not going to be given hospitality by the Durham miners.

AR: Well, I don't like anything in the Labour family that disenfranchises any part of our movement, because of course we are a big movement and we're all the better for it. And do you know, at the moment we should be concentrating on making sure we're ready for the next general election, because that manifesto, Andrew, I believe was the best manifesto Labour had done since the 1945 Labour manifesto. And I think it offers hope. And if we're divided and we're fighting each other we're not going to be able to implement that.

AM: Because I notice after the Luciana Berger row one thing was very obvious – not much was obvious about it – one thing that was obvious was the almost complete silence from colleagues coming out to speak in her support. Can you say something in her support, because you're not sounding like a terribly comradely party at the moment.

AR: Oh, no, we are, and you know, Luciana, I've worked with Luciana on campaigns for mental health because, you know, I personally have been affected by that with my mum since I was about the age of ten. So I know how it affects families, and Luciana has done a tremendous amount of work. She's an absolute valued member of the team and I'm – you know anyone that talks of deselection any of my colleagues, quite frankly they need to think about actually who are the real enemy here. Who are making the problems for our communities at the moment, who have made those disastrous policies that are hurting the people that need us the most? And it doesn't help them if we're fighting each other.

AM: I don't talk about deselection. What about those people who say we're actually too broad a church in the Labour Party, we ought to be a narrower church?

AR: I love the church that I'm in in the Labour Party, Andrew. It's my religion. I've been born and raised in the Labour movement and I'll continue to be happy that it's as vibrant and as democratic as it is.

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