

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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**JEREMY CORBYN, MP**

AM: Welcome Mr Corbyn.

Morning.

AM: On the World at One today Len McCluskey has given an interview and he's asked about your future and he says: 'the issue of whether Jeremy will be successful, how long that will take, we'll have to wait and see. I would be talking in terms of allowing Jeremy two or three years.' Now do you feel you're a man kind of on probation to that extent?

JC: I've been elected leader of the party, it's a great honour and it's a great responsibility. I'm doing my best –

AM: But you don't...

JC: Woah, you're going too fast. I'm doing my best to try to ensure we change the terms of debate in Britain about the kind of society we want to live in. The grotesque levels of inequality we face, the housing crisis that affects almost every family in this country. Those are the issues that I'm campaigning very strongly on. Party membership has grown up, party activity has increased – all that's surely good for democracy.

AM; Very good for democracy but there is a perception that the people you're really interested in are party members, first and foremost. Is that fair?

JC: No, it's not fair at all. I spend a great deal of time travelling all over Britain addressing meetings, talking to people, campaigning with them and I wish to reach out to everybody because the health crisis affects everybody, the housing crisis, as I said, affects everybody, the grotesque levels of inequality must be something

that is a moral case that Britain has to do differently and do better.

AM: And if you are going to deal with the inequality and so forth you have to win power. Now there are perhaps 2 million people who voted Conservative at the last election that you have to win over. Deborah Mattinson has said 80 percent of the votes you need to win are people who voted Conservative last time. Do you wake up in the morning thinking about those kind of people with their mortgages and their pensions and so forth who are not your natural supporters, don't go to meetings, are not members of the Labour Party and so forth, do you really have a connection with those people?

JC: Deborah is right about that, about winning people over, so I think we win people over by saying we wish to extend and protect the NHS, not privatise it, not atomise its services. We wish to address the housing crisis so that there is proper council housing available for those who need it. There is affordable places to buy for younger people who cannot get into social housing at all, and there is going to be proper regulation of the private rented sector. So we say all of that. But we also say to the millions of young people who didn't register and didn't vote in the last election, there is a future for you. There is a future for you in proper access to university and college education, decent training opportunities for high skilled jobs in manufacturing industries, so we gradually rebalance our economy, not with such a focus on the service sector but a greater focus on what we're good at in Britain which is inventing and developing new and high technology stuff and particularly green energy sources. We can do so much better in Britain.

AM: And yet an awful lot of what you've just said was said by Ed Miliband in the run up to the election, he was sitting in this chair saying the kind of thing and he got hammered, the Labour Party

got hammered in that election. You lost 26 seats between 2010 and 2015, that's an awful lot of seats. And the real question is whether you are prepared to reach out far enough to start to win those people back and whether you're prepared in any way to compromise on your deeply held beliefs to do that?

JC: We reach out to everybody, because inequality affects us all. Poverty affects us all. Poverty and low wages are such a waste of opportunity and a waste of economic development opportunities, and so there is a message for everybody here. .. in which the Conservative take is – ah?

AM: Why haven't they heard it before?

JC: Well, people hear lots of things all the time. We have some time to put this over before the next General Election but clearly there are electoral tests coming up in May, which we're looking forward to. And I think we have to reach out to people and we're doing that.

AM: Are you going to gain some seats in May do you think, because so far on local elections you haven't done very well as a party. Outside London you've been falling back all over the place. In Scotland you're still way back.

JC: We did win the Oldham by-election, we are obviously contesting elections all over the country, we do have the Mayoral elections in many parts of Britain, including London obviously, but many other cities as well. There's going to be –

AM: But outside London you are going backwards.

JC: Well, you say we're going backwards but the evidence on the ground is that our party is working very hard, we are gaining support and we are having a lot of innovative local councils. Opinion polls are very fascinating but they're not actually an electoral test in itself.

AM: Non-opinion polls, you fell back an average in the midlands of 10% in by-elections up till now, since you took over, east midlands down 5.6%, Scotland down 8%, west country no change admittedly, west midlands down 10.6% and so on. So there's an awful lot of evidence on the ground that you are not reaching to those people you need to find.

JC: Council by-elections are a bit of an indicator but they're not the whole story because there's all kinds of local factors involved, but don't misunderstand it, we are campaigning very hard on the issues particularly of housing and particularly of health and particularly of fairness and equality in Britain which is what my speech to the Fabian Society was all about yesterday. About rebranding – not rebranding – taking our society forward to look at the grotesque levels of executive pay in Britain compared to the six million people living below the living wage.

AM: Coming directly to that speech you had a proposal which was that companies which didn't pay the living wage shouldn't be able to pay dividends. Now I simply don't understand this policy because I thought you, as a party leadership, were committed to bringing in the living wage at £10 an hour. That's what John McDonnell told the Labour Party Conference.

JC: Yes, we are committed to bring that in. The living wage that George Osborne is proposing is less than the living wage. The living wage now would be over £8.60 an hour in the UK, higher in London.

AM: So you'll bring in a proper living wage?

JC: We'll bring in a proper living wage. But in the interim –

AM: So this will start hitting companies –

JC: in the interim we're saying to companies that if you're able to pay out dividends – these are listed companies – then you should first of all check your wage bill. You should check how many people you're employing either directly or through contractual arrangements who are being paid less than the Living Wage. Because the Wages Inspectorate shows that yes we have laws on wages but there's an awful lot of evasion going on and I think we need to crack down on that evasion.

AM: But you can't ban companies from paying dividends until you're in power and once you're in power you'll be introducing a living wage which will be a legal obligation so I just don't see the point of this policy, if I may say so.

JC: Well it might take some time to bring that in but we'll do it as quickly as we can.

AM: So it's a short term interim policy?

JC: Of course, of course.

AM: Let's move onto another thing you were talking about in the same speech. The differentials between people at the top of companies and people at the bottom of companies, and you said that they should be brought down so, proposals have been around for a long time, what are they about now in Britain and how far down do you think the ratio should be?

JC: Well the average pay of a chief executive of a FTSE company is looking at sort of four to five million pounds a year. The average pay of the workers in all those companies is far less. The High Pay Centre, that studies these things, indicates just how much executive pay has gone up and how much relatively the pay of the rest of the people in all those corporations has gone down as proportion. We have the greatest level, except the USA, of income inequality in Britain. Is that something to be proud of? No.

AM: So the ratio I think is about 87 to 1 at the moment.

JC: It's a bit more than that actually.

AM; The question is where do you think it should be, that kind of ratio?

JC: Well, I don't have a absolute figure in mind. I think it should be a lot less than that. I think we should study this thing. I think we should take more evidence on it and I think we should consult on it. The whole process of the policy making that I'm encouraging the Labour Party to undertake is obviously participation of party members and affiliates and supporters, but also the wider public. A lot of people have got a lot of ideas about things, let's bring those in. And so we promote the debate about the kind of society we want to live in. I mean go outside here, the levels of inequality in Britain are so obvious. People sleeping on the streets while people are driving past in very expensive cars. It's not right.

AM: And is part of that a wealth tax? I mean, you do need to do something about this, you know, rather than debate about it.

JC: Well it's also about tax collection, it's also about tax evasion. And so it isn't just the headline of saying 'a wealth tax', it's actually much more about saying to the very wealthy, 'you have a responsibility to pay tax as well', including those big companies that manage to offshore their head offices, offshore their processing systems so that they end up paying tax in a lower tax regime that they should pay in the UK.

AM; And it's presumably about groups of workers getting better pay deals themselves. Now, again at the Labour Party Conference, John McDonnell said that the Labour Party position has now changed and that you are automatically in favour of strikes, automatically in favour of workers on strike, you will give them automatic support, all strikes. Is that your view too?

JC: Well I don't think John McDonnell said exactly that. What he said was – I can't remember the exact words and I'm sure you're about to quote them.

AM: I am. 'The view now is straight forward and I tell you this. If there is industrial action taking place then we should automatically now – automatically - come alongside our brothers and sisters in the trade unions and support them.'

JC: Well it's John saying his instinctive position which is instinctively like a lot of people that...

AM: Is that your's too...

JC: ...we should be supporting those people that are trying to defend their position or in some cases improve their position. But that's why we're supporting the junior doctors in their wholly reasonable campaign at the present time. It's why we're supporting the nurses in trying to protect their bursaries, so we all get a better health service in the future. The two things go together.

AM: The question is all strikes. Has there ever been a strike you didn't support?

JC: I'm sure there has been.

AM: But you can't remember now. Alright, when it comes to the junior doctors, for instance, that would be a lot more effective perhaps if other groups of workers who agree with the junior doctors and see this as protecting their NHS were able to go on strike as well in support of them. Would you repeal the Conservative legislation which forbids sympathy action?

JC: First of all, the junior doctors would be far better served if we had a Health Secretary who was prepared to get involved, meet them and look for a solution. There's no junior doctors' dispute in Scotland, there's no junior doctors' dispute in Wales because both the Scottish and Welsh governments have come to reasonable agreements. Why can't Jeremy Hunt do the same?

AM: My question, with respect, was about sympathy action and whether you would remove that legislation.

JC: Sympathy action is legal in most other countries and I think it should also be legal here. But remember this –

AM: (*Over*) So you would repeal those Tory laws?

JC: - nobody willingly – yes of course – nobody willingly goes on strike, they go on strike as an ultimate weapon. The number of strikes is actually very small. It's an ultimate weapon that is used. Anyone who goes on strike is making an enormous sacrifice. They don't get paid, they suffer a great deal as a result of it. So let's look at the causes of people being upset rather than the symptoms.

AM: So you'd allow sympathy action. What about the closed shop being outlawed? Would you get rid of that too?

JC: No, the closed shop – the closed shop, I believe, it's not a closed shop, I'd leave it as it is.

AM: Leave it as it is. What about things like flying pickets?

JC: Well, flying pickets are a term that was first used in 1972, I think, or thereabouts, and it was merely people moving around and showing support during a very difficult industrial dispute. I think we have to look at the question not of what trade unions are forced to do ultimately but the causes of the problems in the first place. Give you an example: who would have thought the BMA for the first time in 40 years would be taking industrial action? That's a demonstration of how far out of touch this government has become and its Health Secretary has become in particular.

AM: So you'd be in favour of secondary picketing and sympathy strikes and so forth. Some people say this is the problem with Jeremy Corbyn, you think back to the '70s, you think back to the late '70s in particular when the country was on the edge of chaos and a lot of people thought the trade unions in those days simply had too much power. Do you agree with that or not?

JC: What we were doing in the 1970s was trying to campaign for a minimum wage. I was in the National Union of Public Employees

at the time. What we're looking forward to is a 21<sup>st</sup> century – are we going to go down the road of the continuing grotesque levels of inequality within our society or are we going to regenerate ourselves as a high-tech efficient manufacturing economy with good quality public services, with properly paid public service workers, and a higher tax income because of the higher wages and the higher levels of investment in the manufacturing industry, which actually makes the whole society better off? What is holding us back are the levels of inequality, the high levels of executive pay compared to workers' pay and the lack of investment in public services.

AM: And you've said that some of the money that's going into the trident programme now you would want to divert into new green technologies and so forth to soak up the employment –

JC: (cough) We're consulting on Trident at the moment. Emily Thornberry has drawn up a very interesting document to consider this and that is out for consultation as of Friday. We're discussing that. But the point I've made, always made, is that I recognise that if there's to be a change in the Trident programme – and I personally would want there to be a change in it – then the first priority has to be to protect those jobs, redirect investment into those yards and factories and companies that would be making material and systems to go with Trident so that their jobs are protected and there's further investment in them. That's the first priority.

AM: Because Len McCluskie, again, said yesterday in fact at the Scottish TUC that –

JC: It was the Scottish Unite conference.

AM: Scottish Unite conference, I beg your pardon. Said that the policy of getting rid of Trident would, quotes, 'devastate Barrow-in-Furness, devastate communities, devastate jobs,' and he was wholly against it.

JC: I've had that discussion with Len McCluskie, I've had that discussion with numbers of other people, we're continuing to have those discussions. Other countries do things differently. We have amazing skills and amazing technology available in this country. Obviously my instinct is that we should use it differently, my instinct is that greater security in the world is not achieved by nuclear weapons, it's achieved by addressing the causes of insecurity. And there are many people in the military who would agree with me on that. There are many people –

AM: Many people in the Labour Party, as you know, who don't.

JC: It's a debate within the party. It's not a secret.

AM: Not a secret. You gave an interview to the Independent on Sunday today in which you said a very interesting thing, you said that actually Trident or not Trident wasn't necessarily a binary decision, an either/or decision. What did you mean by that?

JC: Well, we don't know what proposal the government is going to make when the issue comes up to parliament, whenever it comes up. That's not in my hands. There may well be a discussion on considering it further, because the government is in arguments about the cost of the whole programme. Many in the military are very worried about the focus of so much expenditure on nuclear weapons when they actually are looking at more conventional issues and a more conventional role for the armed forces. And of course issues of insecurity around the world.

AM: Well, you say it's not binary. Is there an implication there that Jeremy Corbyn might support a reduction in Britain's nuclear deterrent without going the whole hog to complete ending it straight away?

JC: You shouldn't read too much into one sentence of an interview. What I'm saying is we don't know what the proposal is the government's going to put. My views on nuclear weapons are very, very well known and I want to see a nuclear-free world, I want to see us playing a full role in the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, I want to see a return to the ABM treaty, the ballistic

missile treaty by Russia and the United States. I want to see a de-escalation in nuclear potentials around the world. And that surely is something we can all sign up to.

AM: I sometimes wonder whether this whole Trident debate in the Labour Party is a nonsense, because we know, and you've said, that you would never press the button, and if you were a Labour Party prime minister therefore there wouldn't be a nuclear deterrent, because it depends upon the Russians or the Iranians or whoever thinking that you might use it, and indeed you won't. There's no deterrent there anyway.

JC: The real issue is are we going to play our part in the nuclear non-proliferation treaty? The British government in May missed a huge opportunity there in many ways. I want to play a full part in the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which requires the five declared nuclear weapons states not to further develop their nuclear capability, and the – what is it? – 187 other countries that have signed it not to develop nuclear weapons. It's actually been, by and large, a very successful treaty.

AM: But if we have these four huge submarines packed with nuclear weapons circling the globe and a prime minister who has said, 'I will never, ever use them,' then it's not really a deterrent anyway, it's a nonsense.

JC: They don't actually have nuclear warheads on them.

AM: Sure. So we can have Trident submarines without nuclear warheads, could we?

JC: If we use a nuclear weapon, anybody uses a nuclear weapon, it is catastrophic for the whole globe. Everybody knows it's catastrophic. I don't believe David Cameron would use it either.

AM: So you think the deterrent doesn't really exist as a deterrent any more?

JC: I think that the nuclear weapons system is something of the Cold War generation. I don't believe that in the insecurities of today nuclear weapons are a solution to that. Look at the problems in the Middle East, elsewhere, look at the disaster of

9/11 in New York in 2001. Were nuclear weapons any help in any of those? No, they were not. We have achieved a fantastic step forward with Iran, that surely is the way forward. Diplomacy comes first.

AM: I have one final question on this then I'll move on, which is you suggested just now one answer might be to keep the Trident submarines but without nuclear weapons on board, is that what you're saying?

JC: There are options there. The paper that Emily Thornberry has put forward is a very interesting one, deserves a very good study of it and read of it, and I hope there will be a serious, mature response to what is a very serious and hopefully mature debate about the nature of security and insecurity, the nature of the way in which we protect ourselves against insecurity and we bring about a more secure world as a result.

AM: Very interesting. Moving to another part of the insecure world that we've been talking about, Syria. The city of Madaya has been encircled, on one side by Assad's troops and on the other side by Hezbollah, and as a result of that people have been starving to death in that city. Now, you have had talks with Hezbollah, you said they were friends in the sense of having talks and dialogue with them, have you any routes back to them? Can you persuade them to stop that siege? Because what they're doing is a war crime.

JC: Well, absolutely. What I would say to them, and to everybody else involved in the conflict in Syria is listen to the very wise words of Ban Ki Moon three days ago when he said to use food as a weapon of war is a war crime. I hope they're hearing this. It is a war crime and anyone who commits a war crime is going to face the consequences of that at some point in the future through the international court.

AM: That's your message to Hezbollah?

JC: That's my message to Hezbollah, to the Syrian government, to any opposition group, to Isil or anybody else, use food as a weapon of war, you're committing a war crime.

AM: Back at the time of the IRA in full flood as it were, the government said, 'no talking to terrorists,' 'no talking to terrorists'. People like you who suggest talking to terrorists are themselves like terrorists. We now know of course they were talking to the IRA from very early stages, and the same in other parts of the world. Now, obviously Isis can't be part of the Vienna talks at the moment, but do you think there should be a back channel, should we be talking to Isis at this point already, making some kind of contact with them?

JC: The British government maintained a channel to the IRA all through the Troubles.

AM: I don't doubt it.

JC: I don't condemn them for that. I don't condemn them for keeping a back channel to Taliban. I think you have to look at the sources of Isis's funding, you have to look at the relationship with Turkey, with Saudi Arabia, with Iran and many other countries of the world.

AM: My question is should we be talking to Isis?

JC: There has to be some routes through somewhere, because remember a lot of the commanders in Isil, particularly in Iraq but to some extent in Syria, are actually former officers in the Iraqi army, because we made many catastrophic mistakes, one of which was to destroy the whole Iraqi state structure after 2003.

AM: Absolutely. So we could have a dialogue with these people?

JC: No, I'm – dialogue is perhaps the wrong word to use. I think there has to be some understanding of where their strong points are, where their weak points are and how we can challenge their ideology.

AM: But some kind of ... negotiation.

JC: And so I believe that the neighbouring governments in the region are in touch. Look at the way in which there's been some

degree at times of prisoner exchange, or hostage exchange, things like that. Look, we've got to bring about a political solution in Syria, that's something I've been calling for all along. So Vienna has made a lot of progress. It's got to go a lot further and a lot faster, there's got to be peace. But war crimes have got to be addressed.

AM: Another political solution being discussed at the moment, we've got a new President of Argentina who has said he wants to have negotiations about sovereignty and so forth over the Falklands or Malvinas and so forth. Now, you have said in the past that you think such negotiations should take place and there should be a role for the islanders. My question is should the islanders have a veto over any talks?

JC: I think there has to be a discussion about how you can bring about some reasonable accommodation with Argentina. It seems to me ridiculous that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we'd be getting into some enormous conflict with Argentina about the islands just off it. Yes, of course the islanders have an enormous say in this, let's bring about some sensible dialogue. It happened before, I'm sure it can happen again.

AM: An enormous say but not a veto perhaps?

JC: Veto? They've got the right to stay where they are, they've got a right to decide on their own future, and that will be part of it. Let's have that discussion and let's not set agendas in advance.

AM: What did you think about the original war? You weren't, I think, in parliament at the time when the task force was sent.

JC: I thought that the original war was a problem for both countries, in the sense that Galtieri was a deeply unpopular dictator in Argentina. I thought that President Terry of Peru was trying to make enormous progress by bringing about a UN resolution to it. And then we had the disaster of the sinking of the *Belgrano* and the whole situation got worse as a result of that.

Surely in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can do better than go to war on these things.

AM: Two bald men fighting over a comb, I think they said at the time.

JC: Well, I wouldn't dream of talking about bald men. It would be impolite.

AM: Certainly in front of me. For now, thank you very much indeed.

(ends)