ANDREW MARR:
Well the dispute between Michael Gove and Theresa May over how to tackle extremism was the most serious cabinet row to break out in public since this government took office. Mr Gove joins me now. We’re not going to talk about that straightaway. I want to turn to the actual subject itself of extremism. Before we get to that, however, I must ask you about the big story of the day: this extraordinary allegation that 114 files detailing historic sex abuse have gone missing somewhere in the Home Office. There’ll be great, great public concern and unease about what’s happened at the top of politics.

MICHAEL GOVE:
Understandable concern and the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have been clear that we need to get to the bottom of this. And that is why they’ve instructed the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, the independent civil servant, to get an independent lawyer to look at the handling of these individual cases. It’s also been the case that my department and Jeremy Hunt’s department have also been looking both at some of the historic examples of child abuse and the need to improve child protection, and at the moment we’re reviewing within the Department for Education
exactly what we can do in order to keep children safe now. I think it’s important both that we analyse what has happened in the past when a different culture prevailed, but also it’s really important that we ensure that those who are keeping children safe now, teachers and social workers, are supported.

**ANDREW MARR:**
But given the suspicion, the sort of toxic idea that politicians have been hiding this stuff up for a long time, there’s going to have to be a public inquiry, isn’t there, to put people’s minds at rest?

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
Well I think what will put people’s minds at rest is making sure that we investigate properly what happened in the past. I think it’s also important to draw a distinction between …

**ANDREW MARR:**
_(over)_ I must press you. With a public inquiry, so we can actually hear the evidence and watch people being questioned?

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
I think the most important thing that we need to do is to make sure the work that we do is proportionate and focused and that we look at those allegations which cause real and genuine concern. We also need to accept as well that if people do have specific concerns about individuals or about practices, they should bring them to the police. I think the most important thing that we need to do is to ensure that the due process of law pursues those who may be guilty of individual crimes …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Indeed.

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
… and we also learn lessons about what may or may not have gone wrong in the past. But it’s also important, I think, to emphasise that many of the allegations that are being made are historic and that what we do now …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) I understand that.

MICHAEL GOVE:
… in order to keep children safer is immeasurably better and stronger than was the case when, you know twenty or thirty years ago.

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry without getting into a boring tit-for-tat …

MICHAEL GOVE:
Sure.

ANDREW MARR:
… public inquiry – yes or no?

MICHAEL GOVE:
No.

ANDREW MARR:
No. Right, okay, let’s move on then to the Islamist issue. When you read all this stuff about Birmingham schools, how much do you know has gone wrong in some of these schools and how much of this is kind of media speculation and overhyped because a lot of the people from the schools blame the media and blame the politicians and say it’s not nearly as bad as we’re told?

MICHAEL GOVE:
Yes. Well I think that we all have to be careful and wait because again, just as in the area that we’ve been discussing, there’s a lot of speculation in the media about what may or may not have gone on in individual schools and more broadly within Birmingham and other cities. We’ve asked Peter Clarke, who’s one of our most senior police officers, retired police officers, to investigate some of these allegations. We know already from what Ofsted said about what was happening in schools; that there
were unacceptable practices with individuals who clearly had a conservative religious agenda, who were intimidating very good teachers and head teachers and forcing them either to comply with that agenda or to leave. Now there are broader questions about the extent to which these activities were coordinated and the extent to which those responsible for these activities may have had a broader agenda. Peter is looking into that and we have to wait to see what he concludes.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And about whether Birmingham Council knew about all of this ten years ago.

MICHAEL GOVE:
That’s true. There are questions for the local authority and of course for my department, the Department for Education, about what was known and what was done, and it’s important that we give Peter Clarke the room and the space to do that. There was some criticism right at the beginning of this process when I appointed Peter. People felt that it was somehow … you know in some respects too dramatic and authoritarian a step, but the view that I took was if you have a police officer of unimpeachable integrity to conduct these investigations, if people at the end of this process are cleared, given a clean bill of health, then that’s the most effective way of ensuring that public confidence can be restored.

ANDREW MARR:
Well this goes to the very, very heart of the dilemma …

MICHAEL GOVE:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… what is pre-terrorism, as it were? What is taking people on the path to Jihad and violence here at home? And what is acceptable, if unconventional, highly conservative religious thinking?

MICHAEL GOVE:
Yes that’s true.
ANRREW MARR:
Can a police officer distinguish between those two things, do you think?

MICHAEL GOVE:
I think, I think a police officer can. I think the Prime Minister has been clear as well about how to draw that distinction.

ANRREW MARR:
And should we draw the distinction? I mean in other words if a school is teaching that infidels are to be despised, that Western women are slags, that women should give their men free sexual favours under all circumstances inside marriage and must always be covered, facially covered when they’re going around town, is that the kind of acceptable message to be going out in any British school?

MICHAEL GOVE:
That’s totally unacceptable, absolutely unacceptable. But I think it’s important to draw …

ANRREW MARR:
(over) Sorry. Because that could be said by somebody who was a highly conservative Wahabi or Deobandi Muslim but had no interest in terrorism.

MICHAEL GOVE:
It is absolutely true that we need to draw a distinction between deep religious faith, the conservative expression of that deep religious faith, and extremism. And in the book that I wrote six years ago and in the way in which the government’s operated, the Coalition Government’s operated since then, we do draw that distinction. It’s important, first of all, to say that schools, all schools should prepare children for life in modern Britain. So it’s perfectly possible, and indeed legitimate, for someone to hold deeply religiously conservative views and for us to respect their freedom to do so in a modern society, but to think that that person might be inappropriate as the proprietor of a school or certainly it would be wrong for that individual to disseminate those views in the classroom. But it’s also possible that that individual with those
views, while we might think that they would be the wrong person to be a teacher or a head teacher, could hold those views and not be someone who is going to lead anyone on a path to terror. And I think it’s also important to recognise that when we’re talking about this, it’s really critical we recognise that Islam is a great faith which brings spiritual nourishment to millions. It inspires daily acts of generosity on the parts of so many of our fellow citizens. Islamism is a perversion of Islam in the same way as Communism was a perversion of Socialism and Fascism is a perversion of Nationalism …

ANDREW MARR:
Indeed.

MICHAEL GOVE:
… and we need to be precise and forensic in identifying it.

ANDREW MARR:
But in your book Celsius 7/7, you say that some of these highly conservative views are a bit like the kind of nationalist views which produced the Brownshirts. You’re making the parallel. It’s only a parallel, but you do make a parallel between these conservative views and Jihadi views.

MICHAEL GOVE:
Well I think there’s a difference between someone who has religiously conservative views and then someone who wants to see those views imposed on others whether by coercion or by other means, and that’s the important distinction to draw. When we talk about Islamism, that particular form of extremism, the Prime Minister was very clear in the speech that he gave at the Munich Security Conference in 2011 that there are thinkers – people like the Founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna …

ANDREW MARR:
Qutb.
MICHAEL GOVE:
… Sayyid Qutb, Maududi, the founder of the Jamaati Movement in South Asia – who take traditional Islamic doctrines and twist them into a political message which they seek to impose. And I think that we have to draw that distinction very fairly because unless we draw that distinction and look at those who are trying to promote the ideology and deal with them by countering it, by saying that we believe in an open, modern, liberal democracy in which it’s perfectly legitimate to have private beliefs, but by no means should you attempt to impose those beliefs on others. And critically we believe that if you’re going to make a success - as I believe we are making a success of a multi-ethnic, multicultural society - we do so by an attachment to basic British values, and that means respect for others’ beliefs, a belief in the rule of the law, an understanding of liberty and respect for our parliamentary institutions.

ANDREW MARR:
And the slight paradox that we have to stamp down the message of tolerance, which is an odd one. But you say in the same book …

MICHAEL GOVE:
(over) This is the key insight that Karl Popper, one of the great liberal thinkers, put forward; that in order to safeguard tolerance, we occasionally have to be intolerant of those who wish to impose their intolerance on us. If liberalism is to survive – and I believe very strongly that liberalism is you know the way in which we should approach these issues, liberal values are our best protector – we need to be robust.

ANDREW MARR:
So this is what you call “draining the swamp” and we have to root out people who hold those views from our schools and elsewhere in our society?

MICHAEL GOVE:
We need to challenge these views and we need to make sure that people who have views which are inimical to liberal values and wish to use institutions to push an agenda which is inimical to liberal values are not in the position where they can use public money or the public square in order to push their views.
ANDREW MARR:
But they are at the moment, aren’t they?

MICHAEL GOVE:
Well one of the things that I’m very, very anxious to do is to make sure that we can deal with this problem wherever it arises, and one of the things that in every area of public policy I believe is important is look for the evidence and follow the evidence. We know that in the past that there have been people in this country – preachers of hate and others – who’ve attempted, as we heard from the earlier piece of audio, who’ve attempted and succeeded to poison young minds, so we need to be vigilant.

ANDREW MARR:
How worried are you now about the situation with people returning from what is now the Caliphate? In the book you wrote, you said it would be an absolute global disaster if Iraq fell to insurrectionists. It more or less now has. We have this Caliphate. We have huge numbers of people coming back, we’re told, from there with extreme views. How concerned are you?

MICHAEL GOVE:
I’m concerned and the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary are concerned. I think it’s important to stress that I don’t think anyone – and no Home Secretary has been as vigilant in dealing with the Caliphate as Theresa May – and Theresa has pointed out in the Cabinet and in the House of Commons that it’s now the case that this region poses a greater threat to our security than other regions which have posed a threat in the past like the Horn of Africa and the Afghanistan Pakistan border area. And we need to be absolutely clear that it is inappropriate for people, whatever they feel about the tragedy that’s going on there, to travel to that region because they’re entering a incubation zone which is incredibly dangerous. Theresa’s been clear about that. And it’s also the case helpfully that a number of progressive and moderate Islamic figures have made that clear during the course of this week. And I think that is very welcome, and it’s a feature actually of what’s happened since the Prime Minister showed leadership in 2011, that more and more moderate and progressive figures who speak for the majority of British Muslims have been so clear about this.
ANDREW MARR:
In your view, do we need new laws?

MICHAEL GOVE:
I think you always need to keep the laws under review, but I think it’s more important that we use the laws that we have and the institutions that we have energetically.

ANDREW MARR:
And what changes are we going to see in classrooms as a result of your involvement and concern?

MICHAEL GOVE:
Well one of the things that I think has been debated is the need to ensure that all schools follow the British values that I talked about earlier. Another thing …

ANDREW MARR:
Civics lessons?

MICHAEL GOVE:
Well we already have citizenship, but I think it’s also important that we make sure that those who run schools and manage schools understand their responsibility to prepare people for life in modern 21st century Britain. There’s one other thing as well, which is critically important, and that is we know that sometimes activities in schools which all of us would deprecate can sometimes take place; and then when the inspector comes to call, if the inspector gives notice then those activities can be covered up. So no notice inspections are critical. And Sir Michael Wilshaw as Chief Inspector has been very clear that we will guarantee not just a stronger set of tools to deal with you know some of these issues, but we will also be better at ensuring high quality teaching and good discipline if we have no notice inspections.

ANDREW MARR:
You have spoken about this being a huge culture war between the West and intolerance. Has your government been fighting it well?
MICHAEL GOVE:
Yes, I think … Yes, I think that it’s striking that in the past there was an attempt to say that the only way in which we could deal with this problem is if we dealt with extremism when it became violent, and we waited too late. And I think the Prime Minister …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But we’ve still got lots of pop-up madrasas and meetings of all kinds going up around the country from Cardiff to Birmingham to London …

MICHAEL GOVE:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… and a lot of people say you know the rhetoric is good but nothing much has actually happened.

MICHAEL GOVE:
Well I can assure you an enormous amount has changed as a result of the leadership the Prime Minister has shown and the work that the extremism taskforce has done. And it’s the case that Theresa May has been more vigorous, for example, in stopping hate preachers coming into this country than any predecessor holding that office.

ANDREW MARR:
You’re being very nice to Theresa May this morning.

MICHAEL GOVE:
Well I think that’s because she’s done a very good job in this area and I think that some of the things that have been written about this issue in the past are very, very far from the reality. I think it’s also the case that if we look at the way in which the Prime Minister has sought to focus particularly on dealing with everything from supplementary schools, like madrasas, to the radicalisation that occurs in prison, I don’t think there’s been anyone in No. 10 who’s gripped this issue with the authority
he has.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Alright, let’s return to education.

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
Yes.

**ANDREW MARR**
I don’t know if you heard Tristram Hunt …

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
*(over)* I did.

**ANDREW MARR:**
… replying to your letter.

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
Yes.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Were you happy with that reply?

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
I wasn’t entirely. I mean I think there were three things that came out of the interview with Tristram. The first is that he’s lukewarm on free schools and we know that free schools are outperforming other schools at the moment.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Well but he’s right to say there are lots of problems with individual free schools. He listed some of them.

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
*(over)* No, there are one or two problems with individual free schools. There are lots
of problems with underperforming schools in this country that Tristram and I both want to tackle, but free schools are outperforming other schools. They’re twice as likely to be outstanding as schools which are inspected under our new tougher Ofsted framework. So he’s opposed to that. The thing that really worried me though was that he was not clear about the need for teachers to be in the classroom and not striking this Thursday.

ANDREW MARR:
No, I spotted that.

MICHAEL GOVE:
We need an unambiguous and clear consensus. And the thing that I would say to teachers everywhere is that it’s our responsibility to put children first, and that is why I think that no teacher should be on strike and Tristram should be … I mean you know his heart’s in the right place, but he should be …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You disagree about that, but it’s very interesting … sorry.

MICHAEL GOVE:
(over) backing teachers who want to work against those who want to go on strike.

ANDREW MARR:
You disagree about that clearly, but what about … I mean he’s talking now about the Singaporean …

MICHAEL GOVE:
Oh yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… and super teachers or master teachers. Do you approve of that? I mean he’s beginning to sound a bit like Gove Lite.

MICHAEL GOVE:
Yeah.

**ANDREW MARR:**
He’ll be charging across the studio and attacking me for saying that, but it did sound like that a little bit.

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
I felt this glow of warmth like a tutor (*Marr laughs*) who sees a student at last, when the penny drops, accepting what he’s been arguing for for the last four or five years. So the one thing I was encouraged by was that Tristram was singing from that hymn sheet. I hope … I hope in the next year or so that Tristram will accept that all our changes are right and not just most of them.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay. I doubt it. On that cheerfully condescending note, we’ll finish the conversation. Thank you very much indeed.

**MICHAEL GOVE:**
Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**