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THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

DAVID CAMERON, MP

PRIME MINISTER

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ANDREW MARR:

So there was an example of the kind of conundrum that arrives on the real Prime Minister's desk almost every week. Once Lord Leveson reports, David Cameron's going to have to decide. Aside from the Jubilee and the Olympics, it has been a very tough year for the country. Mr Cameron has told us that by now the pain of austerity would have produced some kind of economic reward, but it hasn't. Debts going up and there's no sign of growth. Meanwhile, noises off from the Health Secretary, as we were hearing, from the Chief Whip, Boris Johnson talking about almost everything can't have helped him. This week, my next guest really has to catch the country's attention and, in the words of one Tory MP, bring some sunshine back. Prime Minister, welcome.

DAVID CAMERON:

Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:

Since we've just had Hugh Grant, I should probably start by asking you about that. You told him that if what Leveson suggested was "not bonkers", you would implement it. Is that still the case?

DAVID CAMERON:

Absolutely. And you know we've got to rewind and remember why this thing was set up in the first place. I mean if you read the evidence of the Dowler Family or the McCann Family, the parents of Madeleine McCann, about what they went through, it is truly shocking and we do need to deal with the situation. The status quo is not acceptable and that's why Leveson was set up. But I do think we've got to wait for Lord Justice Leveson ...

ANDREW MARR:

Well of course.

DAVID CAMERON:

... to produce his report, and then that can be properly looked at. But I'm very clear we must deal with this situation. We've got to have a regulatory system that works for, particularly, I think as Hugh Grant said, that works for ordinary people who get caught up in this world and be treated very, very badly.

ANDREW MARR:

And to be crystal clear, if Lord Leveson suggests something that requires a statute, requires a new piece of law, that will happen?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well we must for what Lord Justice Leveson says. I don't want to try and prejudge it. There's no point asking an eminent judge ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Yeah, but you said if it wasn't ... if it wasn't bonkers, we'll do it. And assuming it's very unlikely to see Lord Leveson coming up with something that's bonkers, but if it's therefore something that needs to go through parliament, you will stand by that pledge?

DAVID CAMERON:

We've got to wait till he produces his report. And I think this is about setting up a massive inquiry, asking someone to do the detailed work.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And then ignoring it.

DAVID CAMERON:

I thought your debate just now actually sort of brought out some of the arguments I'm sure Lord Leveson is having with his panel and with himself. How do you get this balance right? We don't want heavy-handed state intervention. We've got to have a free press. They've got to be free to uncover wrongdoing, to follow the evidence, to do the job in our democracy they need to do. But, on the other hand, it's quite clear people have been abused, people's families and lives have been torn up by press intrusion. The status quo is not an option. Let's let him do his work. I fully intend - and I think that this goes right across the parties - we all want to put in place a sensible, regulatory system. We're hoping that Lord Justice Leveson is going to crack this problem for us, but we must let him do his work first.

ANDREW MARR:

Since we're just talking about the media, do you have any thoughts about the Jimmy Saville story and the way the BBC has handled that?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I think it's truly shocking, the allegations that we're reading, and they need to be properly looked into, probably investigated, and it seems to me it's very important that the organisation, the BBC does that itself. But also if there are questions that should be pursued by the police and other organisations, then everyone has to ask themselves the question is there new evidence that needs to be looked at, are there new things as an organisation we should look at and examine? But from what I've read - and that's just as a, you know, consumer of the media as it were - truly shocking things ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Have happened.

DAVID CAMERON:

... have been said.

ANDREW MARR:

Let's turn to by far the most important issue here and generally, which is the economy. It has been, as I said at the beginning, flat on its back; debt has been increasing. Do you see, as the former Prime Minister Sir John Major said on this show a little while ago, do you think there are signs of growth out there? Do you think the darkest hour has passed, or not?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well, first of all, these are tough times for our country, there's no doubt about it, and this government has come in and had to make difficult and tough decisions. And those decisions have meant that the deficit we inherited - one of the biggest anywhere in the world, bigger than Greece's - we have cut by a quarter in two years. I'm not an economic forecaster, so I can't tell you exactly what's happening in terms of the day to day growth as it were, but what I think is happening which is important is our economy is rebalancing. What we inherited was an economy that was too reliant on debt, too reliant on government spending, too reliant on immigration and great housing and banking booms and didn't have enough jobs in the private sector. Now what we've seen in the last two years is a million net new jobs in the private sector, companies like Jaguar Land Rover here in the West Midlands expanding. The truth is in Britain today, we are now making more things, we're exporting more things. We're seeing sectors like aerospace, life sciences, things where Britain has a natural advantage and great industries and great science and talent expanding.

ANDREW MARR:

So let's ...

DAVID CAMERON:

Last year, 2000... Just one more point. Last year, 2011, more businesses were set up than any recent year in our history. Now this rebalancing is taking place and that is the best long-term hope for the British economy because there is a global race going on right now and some countries are going to make it and some aren't. And I'm determined Britain is going to make it, and that's what this conference is going to be about all this week.

ANDREW MARR:

We've had three quarters of recession in a row when plenty of other countries are growing, however slowly. We have a terrible unemployment situation still. And because of all of that, government debt is actually going up. The very thing that you said that you were going to come into power to get down is going in the opposite direction. So when are you going to get on top of debt?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well we have cut the deficit by one quarter in two years. We inherited a budget deficit at around 11 per cent. It is down to 8 per cent. It is still ...

ANDREW MARR:

But I'm talking about debt.

DAVID CAMERON:

No, we're talking about ... The deficit is the annual overdraft and we have cut that by a quarter in just two years. The figures for this year, it's too early to say where they will end up. Clearly it's a very challenging situation. You only have to switch on your television set and look what's happening in the Eurozone. We've got many countries going into quite a deep recession. These are very difficult times. But I think the key thing is that the economy is rebalancing. We've seen a million net new jobs, we're seeing businesses being created, and the government is absolutely determined to stick to its plan. There is no point ...

ANDREW MARR:

Okay, okay ...

DAVID CAMERON:

You know the alternative ... What I thought was so interesting about last week with Labour is you know nothing to say about the deficit or debt. This is the central question of British politics: how are we going to get out of debt and deficit and how are we going to get growth?

ANDREW MARR:

Well let me pursue you on that one in that case. Nick Clegg at his party conference said that whoever came into power in 2015 was going to have to introduce another tranche of austerity - more squeezes, more cuts because of the size of the problem. Is he right?

DAVID CAMERON:

Yes he is right. And actually it happens before that because we have to find £16 billion of spending reductions by the year ... for the year 2015/16 which of course starts ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) A lot of Conservatives ...

DAVID CAMERON:

(over) Hang on, hang on, this is important. It starts you know before the General Election and we need to do that. Now I want us to be the party that absolutely levels with the British public and talks very plainly and straightly about what needs to be done because the fact is we have to find those spending reductions and if we want to avoid cuts in things like hospitals and schools and the services that we all rely on, we have to look at things like the welfare budget where we're still spending as a county £80 billion on working age welfare.

ANDREW MARR:

So you ...

DAVID CAMERON:

That's not the pensions, not the disability benefits, but working age welfare.

ANDREW MARR:

You need another squeeze on welfare and it needs to start before the General Election?

DAVID CAMERON:

Of course. We are looking today at what we can do to make sure that welfare is actually helping people into work. When we came in, there were some families who were getting £40,000, £50,000, £60,000 of housing benefit per family. Now we've stopped that, we've stopped that in the teeth of opposition from the Labour Party.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

DAVID CAMERON:

We've capped welfare but we need to go further. And let me just say this.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) But I just ... The "we" there is a coalition government "we" ...

DAVID CAMERON:

Yes.

ANDREW MARR:

... and Nick Clegg has also said that he is not going to allow a squeeze on welfare and more austerity of that kind unless people at the top pay more.

DAVID CAMERON:

I was coming onto that. I think it's very important as we make these changes that not only do we recognise if you don't deal with things like pay and welfare and pensions, you always will have to cut department spending, and that hits health and education, the schools and the hospitals we rely on. That's point one. Point two is you've got to make sure as you do this, you are fair and seen to be fair, and under this government ...

ANDREW MARR:

You should start at the top and work down?

DAVID CAMERON:

Under this government, we have always done that. You know the top 10 per cent in this country have paid ten times more towards reducing the deficit than the bottom 10 per cent in every budget. Take the last budget.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Okay, well you know I don't want ... If you don't mind, I don't want to look back. I want to look forward because Nick Clegg, when I said to him are you really suggesting that a Conservative led coalition can bring forward new measures to further tax the people at the top, he said yes. And I said are you going to persuade George Osborne and David Cameron and he said yes.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well we ...

ANDREW MARR:

I put that to you. Are you going to bring forward new measures of any kind - a wealth tax, a mansion tax, some kind of increase in council bands perhaps - that hit wealthier taxpayers?

DAVID CAMERON:

We will make sure that the rich pay their fair share ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) How?

DAVID CAMERON:

... that the burden is properly shared. I'll come onto that. Just take the last budget because it is instructive - because, yes, we cut that top rate of tax because it was completely uncompetitive in Europe, but we raised four times as much from the richest people in our country by things like putting an extra stamp duty on very expensive houses, by pursuing tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, by capping the number of reliefs that people have. So on ...

ANDREW MARR:

Is there more to come?

DAVID CAMERON:

We are going to take further action to make sure that the richest people in our country pay a fair share towards deficit reduction. We've done that ...

ANDREW MARR:

What's it going to be?

DAVID CAMERON:

Hang on, hang on a second. You wouldn't expect me to sit here and announce George Osborne's budget in advance.

ANDREW MARR:

Well give us an indication then.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I can tell you ... Let me tell you one thing it won't be. I don't actually believe we should be a country where if you work hard, you save, you buy yourself a house, you try and pay down the mortgage, you save and invest into that house - I don't want to be a country that comes after you every year with a massive, great tax, and so that is not going to happen. But we will ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) By that, you mean a mansion tax or a property tax?

DAVID CAMERON:

Yeah. But we have put extra taxes when people buy very expensive properties. Now I'm not going to announce the measures here on your programme - I know that is sad for you - but we will always be fair and seen to be fair. And let me just give you one other figure because I think it is quite important.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Without asking ... without asking for the measures, I just want to reverse one more time. People who are the wealthiest, who have got as they say the broadest shoulders, will pay more tax under this government and it will happen before the next General Election - yes or no?

DAVID CAMERON:

Yes and it's happening already.

ANDREW MARR:

Right.

DAVID CAMERON:

But this is a really important point. The richest 10 per cent in our country are not only paying more in income tax. They are paying a greater percentage of the total income tax take than they ever did under Labour. And I think that's a very important point to make. That top rate of tax had to go because it was higher than France, higher than Germany, higher than Italy. You cannot run an enterprise economy, a free market economy where you want investment, you want jobs, you want growth if you've got a top rate of tax that's completely uncompetitive and, by the way, raising virtually no money. So yes we cut that top rate of tax, but we are a government that believes in being fair and we'll always make sure that the broadest backs bear the hard...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And we're presumably not going to see it go down further to 40p, as some of your backbenchers would like?

DAVID CAMERON:

Tax rates are a matter for the Chancellor and his Budget, as the famous saying goes ...

ANDREW MARR:

Alright, okay.

DAVID CAMERON:

... but we've made our step there and you can see very clearly what we ...

ANDREW MARR:

Okay, well let's move to the other end of the scale and what you were saying about welfare because a lot of people at this conference, a lot of Conservatives feel that the government hasn't done nearly enough to look at what the state does and shrink what the state does in a more radical way than you've done so far. And some of the things that people are talking about are ending universal benefit, so people who are actually pretty well off perhaps should not get all the kind of kickbacks from the state that they get at the moment whether it be help with child welfare or whatever it might be, but there should be an end to universalism and a new look, a new look at the welfare state.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well we're going to have to look at all of these issues obviously. But again you can judge the government by what it's done. I think we have been fair. We've actually said to better off people we're going to have to take away your child benefit - very unpopular but necessary to make sure these things are fair. We've looked at tax credits, which when we got in members of parliament were getting tax credits. They went right up the income scale. We've stopped that. But we've also looked at things like housing benefit where the bills were just going up and up and up, and we've controlled that. So further steps need to be taken and I think we do need to look at the choices we make in this country. I mean if you take young people. You know you leave school, you go to college, you work hard, you get a job. You don't have any chance of having housing benefit, you're probably living at home with mum and dad, often into your thirties. If you take a different path - don't go to college, sign on, get housing benefit, get a flat - and then of course if you take a job, you probably lose the housing benefit and the flat. So I think we want to look at the signals we send in welfare and I think we should recognise the welfare cap we took in place, put in place, showing that no family should be better off on welfare than in work. That was an extremely powerful and sensible and very popular actually thing to do. So of course there's much more work to be done, but let me be absolutely clear. The promise I made at the last election to Britain's pensioners when I said we are not going to take

away your winter fuel allowance, your free television licence, your free bus pass - that promise stands.

ANDREW MARR:

It doesn't sound like you're going to do very much about the welfare budget then.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well we've done a huge amount. I mean, look, people have been saying ...

ANDREW MARR:

No, looking forward.

DAVID CAMERON:

Hang on, well judge us already by what we've done. People said for years you cannot cap welfare. We've capped welfare. People said for years, you can't reform public sector pensions. We've cut their long-term costs in half. This is a radical government that recognises Britain is in a global race and the countries that succeed will be the ones that deal with their bloated welfare systems, that make their pensions affordable ...

ANDREW MARR:

Okay.

DAVID CAMERON:

... that reform their education and their schools. We're doing all of those things. But there's something actually much more vital - I just want to make this point - which is the countries that succeed will be the ones that realise you've got to unlock the aspirations of all of the people in your country, the people who want to work hard and get on, who want that first home, that first flat, that first job ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Yuh, okay, what are you going go ...

DAVID CAMERON:

... that first training. Those are the people that we are working for.

ANDREW MARR:

What are you going to do for the hard pressed middle?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well the hard pressed middle include many of those people. You know people at the moment, first time buyers, if you don't have the Bank of Mum and Dad, you're probably in your thirties. You've having to save for years ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Rail fares.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well today we've announced that we are going to cap the increase in rail fares at one per cent over RPI, so a big step forward for hard pressed commuters. And we're going to freeze the council tax for a third year in a row because I think that is the tax that really gets so many people. You've worked hard, you've paid your income tax, you've paid your national insurance, you've got your take home pay and then there's this massive bill from the council. We've capped it three years in a row and I think that's very, very good for hardworking people.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay, let's turn to Europe. I think a lot of people at this conference are very confused as to whether you really do want a referendum on Britain's future in Europe or you fundamentally don't want one.

DAVID CAMERON:

It's very simple what I want, which is Europe is changing. The single currency is integrating rapidly. I think this presents a great opportunity for Britain to get the sort of deal we've always wanted in Europe. Let's have ... To be at the heart of a free trading open market Europe, but we don't want this endless political integration. So I think the opportunity will open up over time to get a new settlement. And when we get that new settlement, after the next election we should have new consent for that

settlement. And I've said that could either take place through a referendum or possibly (if it was close to one) at a General Election. But a new settlement, new consent. That's what you'll get from a Conservative government.

ANDREW MARR:

And that new settlement, I'm interested in how much it will rewrite where we are at the moment. Theresa May, for instance, is saying this morning that she would like to see the whole question of inter-Europe migration. People who are part of the EU looked at again; not simply people who are abusing the system, but actually the freedom to travel and work across Europe. She thinks that needs to be put back into the pot. Do you agree?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I agree, yes. That's why we're having this thing called the Balance of Competences Review, and I think you've got to go through all of the things that we have in our relationship with Europe and work out what is good for Britain - work out where we could do better and work out what we want to change. And I think by all means, look at that. Look, I believe in the single market, I believe in free movement. But you know two weeks ago, I visited two factories in a week, and I asked the question how many people do you employ from other EU countries, what's the balance. In one, it was 60 per cent; in the other it was 50 per cent. Now, heaven's above, we have got so many unemployed people in our country that we want to train and educate and give apprentices to and get back into work. We've got to do better on welfare reform and I think it is right ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) I know, but on the immigration question, can you really reopen something as fundamental as the free movement to people across the EU?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I think it's absolutely right to look at this balance of competences, to go through every topic and see what is in Britain's interest. But we're not going to wait for that ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) What about the EU budget? What about the EU budget?

DAVID CAMERON:

(over) ... we're not going to wait for that and we've already capped immigration from outside the EU on economic grounds. That's very important.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) It's inside the EU the problem ...

DAVID CAMERON:

(over) We're shutting down the bogus colleges that Labour allowed to go on for year after year where people weren't coming to study; they were just coming to work. So we've taken action. This is a very radical government acting on all the things that people care about.

ANDREW MARR:

What about the EU budget?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well a classic example of where we should probably start to draw new lines. When you've got a single currency with a single bank behind it and more transfers between those countries, there will come a time, I believe, where you're going to need to have two European budgets - one for the single currency because they're going to have to support each other much more; and perhaps a wider budget for everybody else. Now I don't think we'll achieve that this time, but it's an indicator of the way Europe's going and we should be welcoming of this.

ANDREW MARR:

Before that happens, the European budget is set to rise quite considerably. Will you stop that happening? Would you use a British veto to prevent that?

DAVID CAMERON:

If necessary, yes. You know last year, we achieved ...

ANDREW MARR:

What does “if necessary” mean?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well let me explain. Last year ... There are annual budgets for the EU.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

DAVID CAMERON:

Last year, we actually achieved something, which was a real terms freeze, and I'm pleased with that. We got the Germans and the French and the Dutch and others to come together and say, look, we cannot go on pouring money into the European Union when we're cutting our own budgets at home. Now the next thing we have is a multi-year framework for the European budget that takes us from 2014 for five years or for seven years into the future. Now that is something all of the European countries have to agree on and my approach is very simple. If we cannot get a deal that has proper control of that budget, if they put forward ideas for massive increases, I won't say yes to it.

ANDREW MARR:

You said “proper control” and “massive”. What I'm wondering is whether you would veto any increase in that budget?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I'm not going to lay out my negotiating strategy in front of you, Andrew ...

ANDREW MARR:

Alright.

DAVID CAMERON:

... but let me be clear. People in Europe know I mean what I say. I sat round that table - 27 countries, 26 of them signing up to a treaty - and I said this is not in Britain's

interest. I don't care how much pressure you put on. I'm not signing. We're not having it. They know I'm capable of saying no ...

ANDREW MARR:

Right.

DAVID CAMERON:

...and if I don't get a good deal, I'll say no again.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay, that's as clear as we're going to get on that one, I'm sure. Let me just return to the referendum question. From what you said ...

DAVID CAMERON:

Yuh.

ANDREW MARR:

... there is going to be a new settlement; and when there is a new settlement, in due course we will take that new settlement to the people. That doesn't sound like you're in favour of a yes or no in or out referendum either now or in the future.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I think the trouble with a straight yes or no as we stand today is, frankly, I'm not happy with the status quo, so I don't want to have to say yes to the status quo. But I also don't think it would be right to leave right now because we would be basically coming out of the single market which our businesses badly need to keep those markets open. So if you're not happy with ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) So if you want that kind of yes or no, vote UKIP?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well no, I think that UKIP is a complete waste of time obviously. But the fact is I think most people in our country don't actually want to leave the European Union or

just accept how it is at the moment. They want to change it. I want to change it. A Conservative only government after the next election can go and change it, can have that renegotiation, particularly as you see Europe opening up in all the ways that I've explained.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay. Let me ask you about Afghanistan. It's been a long time since the House of Commons had a proper debate about the war in Afghanistan. The toll in terms of dead, wounded, psychologically scarred British soldiers coming back has been terrible, and it was always sold to this country as worthwhile because we were training up an Afghan national army and police who would soon, within a couple of years from now, be completely ready to take over that country. Instead these people are killing our people. I put it to you that the strategy has failed and it would be honest now to accept that.

DAVID CAMERON:

I think about this more than anything. I feel you know deeply responsible for the young men and women that we send out there, the danger that we put them in, and we have lost many, many people and the level of loss is extremely upsetting and heartbreaking not just for the families but I know for the whole country. But, look, I think we have to be clear about what is actually happening. We are training up Afghan army soldiers, Afghan police. They are increasingly capable. I was out in ... (*Marr tries to interject*) Hang on, I was out in one of the three areas in Helmand that we control and sat down with the colonel in his base with his map and he showed me patrol base after patrol base that on previous tours were occupied by British soldiers, now occupied by Afghan soldiers. Now all of the so-called, the green on blue, the awful attacks there have been are absolutely hideous; we need to do everything we can to stop that. But I think the plain truth is we are actually on track to deliver an Afghan army and police that are capable of doing the job that we are doing now. We're not going to leave behind some perfect country with some perfect government, but I think we can leave behind an Afghanistan that is strong enough to stop it once again becoming a haven of terror. And if you think about it, you pare it down ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) And do you have in your mind ... Sorry, do you have in your mind a hard, final date for the exit of British troops?

DAVID CAMERON:

Yes, absolutely. By the end of 2014, there will ...

ANDREW MARR:

And you're sticking to that?

DAVID CAMERON:

Absolutely. And we're going to ... a key question now is how between where we are now - 2012, 9,000 soldiers - and where we need to be at the end of the 2014, what is the pace of handing over to the Afghan Army? And that is being discussed.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Because a lot of ...

DAVID CAMERON:

I'm sure we can come up with a sensible set of steps to see those numbers reduced, particularly ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Because a lot of people say this is the problem. If you're the Taliban, if you're the bad guys, you know you only have to hang on until 2014 and then you can come back again, and it is impossible actually to win this kind of war to a deadline.

DAVID CAMERON:

I would actually put the argument completely the other way round. The thing the Taliban would most like is for us to say we're going to be there forever. That is their recruiting sergeant. The fact is ...

ANDREW MARR:

Okay.

DAVID CAMERON:

... you know we don't want to be in Afghanistan forever. The Afghan people don't want foreign troops.

ANDREW MARR:

Alright.

DAVID CAMERON:

What they want is a handover to an army that's capable.

ANDREW MARR:

Okay, let's talk a little bit about some more local issues. There's been a huge sort of flurry of fascination at Boris, how long he's going to be here. He's not going to be listening to your speech. That seems most disappointing. You've had this fantastic sort of summit over a pint in some pub. How do you regard him? I mean you know he's a man of enormous talent, but also he's got flaws. Give us the David Cameron view of Boris and whether he's a future Prime Minister.

DAVID CAMERON:

I think he's a fantastic London Mayor, first of all - I think he does an excellent job - and I think also he's an enormous credit to the Conservative Party. I mean I've got the opposite of tall poppy syndrome: I like having other people in the Conservative Party who are popular, who get out there, who talk our message and explain our vision and our values, and Boris is fantastic at that. He's one of the politicians people warm to and I think it's great that we have in our party figures like that.

ANDREW MARR:

Would you like him one day back in government?

DAVID CAMERON:

I think there's ... I've said to Boris you know once you've done your job as London Mayor, don't think that your job in politics is over. There's nothing wrong with ...

ANDREW MARR:

(laughs) I don't think that would have occurred to him for a second.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well you ask him. But anyway, I think he's got a huge amount to offer, a huge amount to give ...

ANDREW MARR:

Yeah.

DAVID CAMERON:

... and I encourage him to do that. I think it's great that the greatest city in the world has got such a good man.

ANDREW MARR:

Let me ask you about Jeremy Hunt who's raised the question of a radical cut in the time limit for abortion.

DAVID CAMERON:

(over) Well to be fair to him, he hasn't actually raised the issue. He was asked a question because he previously voted for a 12 week limit, and he said he stuck with that view.

ANDREW MARR:

Right.

DAVID CAMERON:

This is an issue.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) My question ...

DAVID CAMERON:

(over) Yes, sorry, ask the question first. Sorry, I got a bit lively.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) My question to you is would you welcome a fresh vote in the House of Commons on this issue? You've made it clear that would be a free vote. Do you think it's time for the House of Commons to debate this again?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well, look, first of all the government hasn't got any plans to bring forward any legislation or bill.

ANDREW MARR:

I understand that.

DAVID CAMERON:

Parliament does vote from time to time about these issues. It does tend to vote once a parliament or so. We now have under this government the ability of parliament to decide what it wants to vote for.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

DAVID CAMERON:

We have whole days given over. My own view is that a modest reduction from the 24 weeks, I think would be right and I would vote for that, but you know not ... I voted against 12 weeks.

ANDREW MARR:

Right.

DAVID CAMERON:

But let me be clear because I think it's very important. It's a vote of conscience issue ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) It's not a party approach, we understand.

DAVID CAMERON:

... and the Health Secretary is quite entitled to have his own opinion, but it's not the government's approach.

ANDREW MARR:

I understand that. Last week Ed Miliband by common consent did well in terms of his party speech and so on. Now you've got lots of criticisms, but what would you say to those people who say Labour can't win under Ed Miliband? That's not true, is it?

DAVID CAMERON:

I've never ... Look I'm on my I think fourth leader of the Labour Party. I've never taken any of them for granted and never would. What I would say is in fact the central question of British politics right now is how do we get out of the difficult straits we're in, how do we deal with the debt and deficit, how do we get the economy growing, how do we back aspiration amongst all our people? The Conservatives are absolutely talking that language and taking that action, and I didn't hear anything from Labour about any of those issues. So as far as I'm concerned you know it's not the speech that matters, it's what you're going to do, and this week, here in Birmingham, you're going to hear in huge detail how we get behind people who want to get on, want to make something of their lives because that's what it's about.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) I'm sure everybody will be watching and listening with great interest.

DAVID CAMERON:

I hope so.

ANDREW MARR:

Prime Minister, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

INTERVIEW ENDS

