AM: Chris Wylie is the man who blew the whistle after working for the company of all of this, Cambridge Analytica. He also claims he’s helped set up AIQ, a Canadian company which provided services for the official Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum and he’s with me now. Welcome, Chris Wylie.

Can I start by asking a very simple question ‘cause to a lot of people this sounds slightly scary. Harvesting data. It sounds like harvesting your organs or whatever. If you are a Facebook user and you’re worried about what’s happened can you explain what they should be worried about and whether indeed they should therefore delete their accounts?

CW: So, Facebook – if think about what it is that you’re putting on Facebook you are in a way creating - you’re curating your identity on line, so you’re creating sort of a digital clone of yourself online.

AM: You’re putting lots of information out there.
CW: Lots of information about yourself, some of which you may or may not want other people to know and what data harvesting is where an application or some kind of piece of technology will go and pull all of the information about you and store it in a database, sometimes without you even knowing.

AM: But most people are kind of grown up. They understand that they are getting in effect something for nothing. It was created by Mark Zuckerberg to put people in touch with each other. It’s a tool. And therefore if they put their data out there somebody may well use it for something. In a sense it’s a Faustian pact. If
you put all your data on a free service somebody is going to do something with it eventually.

CW: Sure, but the law in this country and in many countries around the world requires something called consent. So if you put something out on Facebook or any other social platform, that doesn’t give anybody the right to just use it without asking. And so what we’ve seen with the Cambridge Analytica story is that people’s data has been taken, misappropriated without their permission and knowledge. And that’s really important.

AM: Misappropriated how?

CW: There was a Facebook application that had permissions to pull people’s data, but not only their data using the app but all of their friends. So if you knew someone who used one of the apps that Cambridge Analytica funded, your data would have been taken but you wouldn’t have known about it. And the reason that’s a problem is because if you don’t know how your data is being used you don’t know necessarily what information is being presented to you and you don’t necessarily know that the veracity –

AM: Why you’re being asked this.

CW: Yeah, why?

AM: This all really hangs on the suggestion that using this data helps political organisations win elections and change power structures and I guess a lot of people will suspect that is very hard to do. If people know about the films I go to see, the kind of films I like, my friends and so on, it doesn’t necessarily mean that a political party knows how to change my vote.

CW: But it does.

AM: How, why?

CW: Because you have to remember that when you’re building an algorithm the algorithm isn’t just looking at that you like this particular film or that particular film, it’s looking at relationships
between people who like these types of films or this types of music or use these words and different psychological constructs that we know are related to that. So actually what you can do with algorithms is understand more deeper, you know – what makes you tick and what kind of information is going to make you behave in a particular way. So it’s not just that we’re pulling movies, it’s that we can understand more deeply who you are.

AM: I ask this because some of the people involved in doing this are sceptical about it themselves. Aleksandr Kogan, who was the academic at the heart of all of this, he says it’s selling magic and actually –

CW: But he has a vested interest in downplaying its utility because he was deeply involved in the misappropriation of 87 million Facebook records.

AM: Mark Zuckerberg says that his big mistake was allowing the bad guys to use his app, to use his data in the first place –

CW: Sure.

AM: And by the bad guys, I’m paraphrasing him, I’m afraid he means people like you. You were very involved in data harvesting for a long time and you were selling this service indeed to Dominic Cummings of Vote Leave, or trying to.

CW: Well let me be clear. I wasn’t – when I had meetings with Dominic Cummings I wasn’t offering anything illegal. So let just clear that.

AM: I’m not suggesting it’s illegal but it’s the same kind of business.

CW: There’s a big difference between using data with people’s consent and presenting information in a targeted way where people know what kind of information they’re receiving and can
make a judgement on that. And pulling data without consent and presenting information where it is unclear –

AM: So consent is crucial?

CW: - whether it is true or not and this really gets to the crux of what fake news is. Because if people are being targeted online without their consent or knowledge with information that isn’t necessarily true, they’re going to behave or vote in a particular way that had they known the facts they wouldn’t necessarily have done.

AM: They might have done. I see, okay.

CW: That’s the crux of manipulation.

AM: Let’s turn to the political crux of the story which is quite complicated. If you don’t mind walk through it bit by bit. So this Canadian company, AIQ, Aggregate IQ did work for Vote Leave. Nobody dissent from that and Dominic Cummings had the famous on their website, ‘We couldn’t have done it without you.’ But they were doing something that’s completely legal. I mean they were – this is using the internet to target adverts and that is legal and there’s no suggestion that I know of that either side was doing anything wrong at that point.

CW: Well, let’s actually be clear. So Aggregate IQ was set up to support Cambridge Analytica. Aggregate IQ –

AM: That’s what I’m coming to, yes.

CW: Aggregate IQ built the rip on platform which was the platform that Cambridge Analytica used to target people using misappropriated Facebook data. So first of all let’s be clear about that.

AM: The crucial question, certainly –

CW: Secondly, let’s also be clear about you know the question of legality of what AIQ was doing and what Vote Leave was doing in setting up a bunch of these funding schemes and putting – funnelling money into different campaign entities, you know
there's a serious question about whether or not that money was legally allowed to be sent to that campaign.

AM: Fair point, but that’s being investigated by the Electoral Commission at the moment. I’m focusing for the moment on the crucial question of the links between AIQ and Cambridge Analytica. AIQ said in a statement: ‘AIQ has never been and is not part of Cambridge Analytica or SCL,’ – that’s the parent company. ‘AIQ has never entered into a contract with Cambridge Analytica. Chris Wylie has never been employed by AIQ. AIQ has never managed, nor did we have access to, any Facebook data or database allegedly obtained improperly by Cambridge Analytica.’

CW: So, when you look at the evidence that I presented to the DCMS Committee at parliament which some of it is now published, in the public domain so people can look at it. There are emails and contracts where – that show that Aggregate IQ not only built the rip on platform which is the same platform that Cambridge Analytica used to target people using misappropriated Facebook data, but there’s also emails showing that they had access to the servers. That they had access to the data. And this is why Facebook has now banned Aggregate IQ.

AM: So why did the Observer publish a correction or an apology basically taking the AIQ version of this?

CW: You’ll have to ask them. That was their call and I think it was a mistake because actually when you look at the facts and the evidence, when you look at the contracts, when you look at the signed contracts between Aggregate IQ and the parent company, SCL, the parent of Cambridge Analytica, signed contracts, right. When you look at server diagrams. When you look at emails that show that they had access to this data, when you actually look at the projects that they were doing they built this infrastructure.
AM: Chris Wylie, this is now an argument obviously between you and AIQ and it’s going to have to be resolved by the Select Committee itself.

CW: Sure.

AM: We should say that of all these – I mean I think 80 million Facebook accounts might have been used in this way, Mark Zuckerberg now says –

CW: 87.

AM: 87 million, of which about one million only could be British, it’s quite a jump to say that of that one million, you know, large numbers of people changed their minds in the referendum and therefore that the referendum is corrupt or has been corrupted.

CW: So, so we have to parse out two issues. So first of all one of things that we have to look at is that was one million British records in 2014. So what that shows is that they were misappropriated British Facebook records in 2014, which leads me to argue that actually this should be further investigated ‘cause that’s quite a serious matter. Secondly, when we’re talking about corruption in the referendum you also have to look at the fact that Vote Leave spent 40% of their budget on AIQ, the same company that was involved in this entire Cambridge Analytica scheme, and that they used AIQ as a funding vehicle with lots of different campaigns.

AM: As I say, that’s being done by the Electoral Commission. Can I just ask you –

CW: But it’s a key point.

AM: I know.

CW: That is the crux of –

AM: We have to let the Electoral Commission look at that.

CW: But actually the point that I’m making – the point that I’m making is that actually this is far more serious than just the Electoral Commission. You have to understand that we have a hard day –
AM: Well it’s now with the Select Committee.
CW: If you let me explain.
AM: Okay, we’re running out of time.
CW: Great but this is the actual crux of what I’m saying.
AM: Okay.
CW: So if you look at the fact that you had several other campaigns that were receiving money from Vote Leave and that those campaigns then also used Aggregate IQ, there is something in this country called Anti Coordination Rules in electoral loss.
AM: So it breaks the law in your view.
CW: You cannot spend money on other campaigns and coordinate with them and the question that I’m raising is were these other campaigns that Vote Leave was putting money into coordinating with Vote Leave, using AIQ?

AM: They say not. They say not.
CW: They say no, but when you actually look at the three binders of evidence, when you look at the three binders of evidence that I’ve sent both to the Committee and to the Electoral Commission right, there are emails, there are documents, there are screen shots that show that there was a deep relationship between -

AM: People watching can’t see all this kind of stuff. I want to ask you one final question, quickly, which is if the Select Committee, big if, if the Select Committee says Chris Wylie is right about that, these connections are proved, what follows from that? Are you really suggesting the referendum should be re-run somehow? We should you know forget 2016 and do it all over again?

CW: So, what I’m saying, and I say this as somebody who supported Leave, I’m saying this as a Eurosceptic myself, but this is a fundamental change to the Constitutional settlements of Britain. The foundational law of Britain. And what I’m saying is that if we can’t go back from Brexit, if this is a one-time decision, we need absolute clarity that the decision made by the British
people was made fairly and compliant with the law. And so if that means that we have to go back to the British people and ask for a clarification I think the British people should have a say and make sure that what we’re doing is with the consent of people. That’s what I’m saying.

AM: We’re out of time.

CW: I want a democratic mandate for Brexit. That’s what I’m saying.

Ends