

*PLEASE NOTE "THE ANDREW MARR SHOW" MUST BE
CREDITED IF ANY PART OF THIS TRANSCRIPT IS USED*

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW
INTERVIEW:
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER MP
SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY
MAY 6th 2012

ANDREW MARR:

And now back to our own elections. Labour may have picked up more than 800 council seats and talk of replacing Ed Miliband as Leader before the next election may be suddenly going a bit quiet, but a share of the vote of 38 per cent is less than David Cameron enjoyed two years before the last General Election and that wasn't enough to give him a majority at Westminster, so what must Labour now do to try to capitalise on this undoubted boost? Douglas Alexander is Shadow Foreign Secretary and one of Ed Miliband's key strategists. So clearly a good result for Labour and some important results in Scotland which we'll come onto in a moment. And yet you know again and again we've had mid-term local election results under Labour, under the Conservatives in the past, which haven't followed through to General Elections, so what's the strategy for what happens next?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Well let's try and understand what we saw this week. I mean of course we saw real progress for Labour not just in the South of England but in the North of Scotland, but we have to accept that this was actually a damning verdict on the Conservatives as much as it was a judgement on the progress that Labour has made. This is a government that promised that they had a plan to get the economy moving, and now

we've seen a double dip recession, rising unemployment, flat-lining growth, a plan that just has failed. And at the same time they said we're all in this together, they said they would be a fair government, but delivered a budget that started the omni shambles that saw a tax cut for millionaires and left millions paying more.

ANDREW MARR:

So people may not be happy with this government, but they're not wildly enthusiastic about Labour either; a very small turnout across a lot of the country. So I say again if this is the beginning, if this gives you if you like a new base, a new place to start from, what has to happen next from your party?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Well I think it's a fair summation, it's a start. And the first remarks that Ed Miliband offered after this result, I think showed humility. It said we have started to win the trust of the people at the same time as the Conservative government is losing the trust of the people, and in some ways I think the response of both parties is as important as the result in terms of what it tells us as to where politics is going. I see George Osborne, your next guest this morning, apologised for the spin of the Budget. Frankly he should be apologising for the substance of the Budget.

ANDREW MARR:

And yet he and his colleagues are still ahead of Labour when it comes to the opinion polling on economic competence, which must worry you?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Yes and just two years ago, we had our worst result in sixty years as the Labour party - 29 per cent. So we've moved from 29 per cent to 38 per cent. But we are the first to recognise that actually what the country wants is not just the anger that they feel at the Conservatives ...

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

... but the sense that Labour is a genuine alternative ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) So what's ...

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

... and that's the work that we're continuing.

ANDREW MARR:

So what does this mean in practice, in practical terms for Ed Miliband's leadership? What happens next?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Well I think what happens next is we build on the progress that's been made. We take forward the policy review, which means we have to generate answers to the questions that we were hearing on the doorsteps: how do you deliver an economy that works for working people, how do you deliver rising living standards, how does Britain pay its way in the world in this post-financial crisis era? Now in all of those areas, I think we have been making progress, but I fully accept there's more that needs to be done.

ANDREW MARR:

That is still, if I may say, that is an abstract response if you like to a question about hard policies. I mean people will want to hear clear, new examples.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

(over) Well let me give you some examples of hard policies. What we're going to hear, I fear, next week in the Queen's speech is just more of the same. I think the government is confusing stubbornness with strength. What we would be doing instead is saying let's take some practical steps to make sure that people's burdens are eased in this time of economic hardship. Why can't the government bring forward legislation in relation to train fares? Why can't the government bring forward legislation in relation to providing youth jobs for young people? There are very practical policies that Ed, Ed Balls and others have set out that I think could and should be being delivered next week.

ANDREW MARR:

Now in Scotland, you held Glasgow against what had looked like a strong SNP challenge, and yet if you look at the opinion polling there is still from your point of view worryingly high support for independence growing and Alex Salmond saying after the elections now onto the referendum, push that agenda further forward. How concerned are you?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

(over) Well with respect, Andrew, that is rubbish. Let's start ... First of all, support for independence is broadly around 30 to 40 per cent ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Quite high, that's quite high.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

(over) ... and it's been, as you know, as high - as well as I know - it's been there really since Winnie Ewing's election in 1968. About a third of the Scottish people want independence. What did we learn last week? Not just that we held Glasgow, which is the story down here, but actually we're now the largest party in Dumfries in the South of Scotland, Aberdeen in the North of Scotland. We're the largest party in the capital of Scotland, Edinburgh. We won councils like Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire. Listen, we lost an election very badly in Scotland last year, but that doesn't mean that Alex Salmond owns Scotland. And I think one of the reasons that he didn't get the results he was expecting was there are millions of us across Scotland who just don't buy the argument that the way to meet the challenge that Scotland faces are to make the English foreigners.

ANDREW MARR:

One final thought. If Francois Hollande wins in Paris tonight, what does that do to the mood of politics across Europe, do you think, and in Britain?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

We'll have to wait for the results, but I think already the campaign has shown that there is a yearning not just in France but right across Europe for an approach that isn't simply austerity alone. That's why even Mario Draghi of the ECB is now arguing for

growth measures to balance the austerity measures that we've seen. I hope that's a lesson that George Osborne will respond to when he speaks to you in a few moments.

ANDREW MARR:

Well we'll find out. Douglas Alexander, for now thank you very much indeed.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS