THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

ED MILIBAND, MP
LABOUR LEADER

JANUARY 11th 2015

**Headlines:**

- Mr Miliband said that the best response to the attacks in Paris was to "support strong communities here at home", to "be vigilant and properly fund our security services” and to "engage abroad" in order to prevent problems being imported into the UK from trouble-spots around the world.

- Labour leader announced that he will try to compel energy companies to cut prices in response to the fall in oil prices.

- He rejected claims from Chancellor George Osborne that he is planning a £15 billion "tax bombshell".

- Mr Miliband rejected proposals from Labour backbencher Frank Field for a "serious" increase in national insurance to pay for improvements to the NHS.

- Said he does not want a coalition deal with the Scottish National Party following the general election but refuses to rule out a deal.

- Suggested that broadcasters should "empty-chair" David Cameron if he refuses to take part in televised leaders' debates ahead of the May 7 general election
**Full transcript:**

**ANDREW MARR:**
I’m joined now by the Labour Leader Ed Miliband. Mr Miliband, you could be prime minister relatively soon depending on how the polls pan out. How would you deal with this jihadi threat? Do you think that the security services need more money and more resources to do their job?

**ED MILIBAND:**
Well I think we should always be looking at what measures are necessary to keep our citizens safe, Andrew, and I think all of us have been shocked and appalled by the events in France, by the murderous terrorism that this represents. I think we’ve been inspired by the response of the French people and indeed by the response of people across faiths, across communities in this country. And I think there are events that bring you up short, and this is one of them, when party differences suddenly look less important and what is important is maintaining and upholding that first duty of government, which is keeping our country safe. I think what we’ve got to do is three things. First of all, it’s about strong communities here at home because I think the best way of this terrorism being prevented is indeed people not being if you like infiltrated into this murderous ideology. Secondly, we’ve got to be vigilant. That means properly funding our security services. And, thirdly, of course it means engaging abroad because a lot of these problems are being imported into countries like France and the UK.

**ANDREW MARR:**
What about fourthly, which is a very controversial point, which is whether we need more surveillance powers to track some of these people? Because there are allegedly, according to one paper, 150 known dangerous Jihadis at loose in Britain. It’s very, very expensive to track them and it’s much cheaper if you can follow everything they’re saying and doing. That has civil liberties implications though.

**ED MILIBAND:**
Well you know when we have events like the murder of Lee Rigby – and there was a
very comprehensive report done on that and that suggests that there was internet conversation going on about the murder of a British soldier – I think it’s right to take a step back and look at this. But I think if you like we’ve got to look at both areas. We’ve got to look at do our intelligence services have the tools that they need, but equally do we have the proper oversight to guarantee the liberties of free citizens? Because, after all, one of the things we want to protect most of all here …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* That’s what we’re supposed to defend.

**ED MILIBAND:**

… is our freedoms. We’re defending our freedoms, so we should defend our freedoms also making sure that actually the security services have what’s necessary to make sure that we counter that threat and defend that freedom.

**ANDREW MARR:**

But if you were prime minister, you would be open to the possibility of more surveillance powers and open to the possibility of more funds for the security services?

**ED MILIBAND:**

Well I think we’ve got to be cautious and considered in these areas. We’ve we insisted when some emergency legislation was passed last summer that there was a proper review done by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism, David Anderson. Let’s take a considered look at this. Let’s take a considered look at what is necessary for the country to keep us safe and maintain our liberties. And again on the issue of the security services, we should always be looking at making sure they’ve got proper resources being deployed properly to actually counter the threat we face.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Now in the mood of cross-party harmony that we’re discussing here, you are going to be voting as the Labour Party for the government’s legislation on the deficit reduction programme. I’m right about that – in the House of Commons – yes?
ED MILIBAND:
We are, yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
And that implies a fiscal tightening either in tax cuts or in cuts in public spending of around £30 billion?

ED MILIBAND:
Well hang on a minute. Let’s talk about this vote and let’s talk about our approach. George Osborne used to say he wanted to balance the overall budget. We’ve always said what matters is to ensure that we match day to day spending with revenues. That’s been our approach – balancing the current budget. Now we think the way we do that …

ANDREW MARR:
Well they’re connected of course because you’ve also got all the debt payments building up in the future.

ED MILIBAND:
Yeah, but look the government has a very different plan from us. George Osborne is doing a gimmick next week in a vote. We’ve got a very …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Which you’re taking part in.

ED MILIBAND:
Well we’ve got a very clear plan, we’ve got a very clear plan. We’ve got a plan to balance the current budget and get the national debt falling during the course of the next parliament, as soon as possible within the next parliament. And the way we’ll do that …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And that requires a £30 billion fiscal tightening.
ED MILIBAND:
Well I don’t accept that. Let me ex…

ANDREW MARR:
Why not?

ED MILIBAND:
Well let me explain why. Because there’s three things that we need to do, Andrew. There’s common sense spending reductions and that’s important. And …

ANDREW MARR:
Just explain to me why you don’t accept that figure …

ED MILIBAND:
(over) Well because …

ANDREW MARR:
… because I was told everybody agrees that that is the basic figure we’re talking about.

ED MILIBAND:
No because I’m going to … I’m going to explain. We’ve got common sense spending reductions. And we’ve set some of those out, but we’ve said for the first time as a party that in departments outside the protected areas departmental spending will be falling. We’ve got tax changes that we’ve announced, including restoring the 50p tax rate. But crucially – and this is the difference between us and the government – you’ve also got to run your economy properly: higher wages, higher skills; not a low wage, low skill economy. Now why has George Osborne missed his deficit targets? Not because he hasn’t made the cuts. He has made the cuts, but what’s happened is he hasn’t got the revenue in. So there’s a huge difference between us. And by the way, Andrew, just there’s a hu… There is a vote next week on Tuesday, but there’s a huge difference between us and the Conservatives. They want to go back to 1930s levels of public spending. They don’t just want to balance the books; they want to go a lot further. So there are huge differences. There’s a gim…
ANDREW MARR:  
(over) I’m asking about your plans, not his.

ED MILIBAND:  
There’s a gimmick next week from George Osborne, but frankly … frankly which is just another political game by George Osborne. We have a …

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) Which you’re taking part in!

ED MILIBAND:  
… but we have a clear plan to get the deficit down, to balance the books in the next parliament.

ANDREW MARR:  
So you don’t think there needs to be a £30 billion fiscal tightening? That’s not going to have to happen?

ED MILIBAND:  
Well I’m not going to pluck figures out of the air. My plan is clear.

ANDREW MARR:  
It’s just all the official bodies – the OBR and everybody – that is the figure they settled on.

ED MILIBAND:  
No my plan is clear, which is that we’ve got a current budget deficit which is running at about £60 billion at the moment, that we’ve said during the course of the parliament that that will be eliminated down to zero. That’s a clear plan from …

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) Which requires cuts or tax rises or both.
ED MILIBAND:
Well indeed, indeed, and we’ve annou… You know I think it’s really important to say this. Most Labour leaders go into elections saying we’re going to raise spending. “I’ve got great news”, they say, “we’re going to raise spending in every area.” I’m a Labour leader who’s going into an election saying, outside a small number of protected areas, departmental spending will be falling year on year until we balance the budget. I’ve also announced tax changes at the top of our society: a mansion tax on the most expensive homes, restoring the 50p tax rate. But crucially if we just try and cut our way to getting rid of this deficit, it won’t work.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I’d like … I’d like to come to both sides of that – the spending and the tax raises. First of all, the taxes that you have announced so far, you’re absolutely right, but the monies from that go straight into different kinds of spending. For instance, the mansion tax is going to be spent on the NHS and so forth, so that doesn’t as itself deal with the deficit. In terms of dealing with the deficit – that really big, knotty problem – what proportion, roughly speaking, is going to be dealt with by tax rises and what proportion, very, very roughly speaking, by spending cuts?

ED MILIBAND:
Well I don’t think you can …

ANDREW MARR:
You used to say 50/50.

ED MILIBAND:
… I don’t think you can pluck a figure out of the air and I’ll tell you why. Because what we’ve learnt over the course of this parliament is that the government’s made the cuts, they’ve raised some taxes, and they’ve spectacularly failed on their deficit plan.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You’re talking about the government again. I’m talking about …
ED MILIBAND:
(over) No, no, I’m talking about our plans.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) … I’m talking about another possible five years of a Labour government.

ED MILIBAND:
I’m talking about our plans for the next parliament because the crucial factor in this is do we raise the rate of economic growth and more particularly do we raise wages and skills? You see people used to say Ed Miliband’s talking about the cost of living crisis. That’s nothing to do with the deficit. It’s absolutely to do with the deficit because because this government hasn’t tackled the cost of living crisis, because we haven’t seen the higher wages, higher skills we need in our economy, we haven’t had the tax revenues in, we haven’t paid off the deficit. So we have a clear plan, which is the spending reductions I’ve talked about, the tax rises we’ve announced, but crucially running our economy in a different way.

ANDREW MARR:
You’re going to have to raise more taxes or make cuts that you haven’t talked about if you’re going to balance the books in the way that you have suggested. Are you going to cut welfare bills?

ED MILIBAND:
Well we have announced changes to welfare – so, for example, taking the winter fuel allowance away from the richest pensioners …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s tiny compared with the overall …

ED MILIBAND:
(over) … child benefit one per cent. The best way we can cut the welfare bill – let me tell you, give you an example. Raising the minimum wage – raising the minimum wage to £8 an hour, as we’ve committed to, more than average earnings during the course of the next parliament - that will cut the bills of social security …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) It will also cost you money because the government then has to pay these higher ta… salaries.

ED MILIBAND:
But actually, Andrew, it will save money - hundreds of millions of pounds saved on the welfare bill. Because at the moment we’re shelling out money in terms of propping up employers not the min…paying higher wages. By raising the minimum wage, we can actually drive down the welfare bills. That's just one of the ways in which we can keep welfare bills down and reduce the deficit.

ANDREW MARR:
But you won’t give us any idea this morning about the huge cuts that you will need in the welfare bill to deal with the deficit, actually where they will come?

ED MILIBAND:
Well I think I couldn’t have been clearer about it.

ANDREW MARR:
No, you could.

ED MILIBAND:
Getting young people … This government thinks that the way that you actually, the way you tack…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Can you stop talking about this government? I do need to talk about you.

ED MILIBAND:
(over) Well no, I’m trying to … I’m drawing the contrasts in approach. They’ve said … Look let's take housing benefit as an example. They said look if we just … if we change all the housing benefit rules, this will actually cut the housing benefit bill. The housing benefit bill’s going up. Why? We’ve got a low wage economy, we’re not building homes in this country.
ANDREW MARR:
Alright.

ED MILIBAND:
Let’s build homes, let’s get our young people back to work, let’s tackle low pay, let’s have a plan for working people because that’s right for the country and right for getting the deficit down.

ANDREW MARR:
Would you bring the cap over welfare spending down?

ED MILIBAND:
Well we’ve said we will have a cap on welfare spending, yes, and we were actually the first people to say …

ANDREW MARR
(over) Will you bring it down from the £26,000 per …

ED MILIBAND:
(over) Well, look, on the housing benefit issue …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yeah it’s the total per household I’m talking about.

ED MILIBAND:
Well on the overall welfare cap what we’ve said is that we do want to see a cap. It’s got to be done in the right way because the problem about the way the government has done it is it’s tended to actually drive up bills, not drive them down.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. So will you bring it down from £26,000 – yes or no?

ED MILIBAND:
Well what we’ve said very clearly is that we want a cap overall on the welfare …
ANDREW MARR:
Yes or no?

ED MILIBAND:
… on the welfare budget, and we’re going to look at how we do it exactly in the right way because unless you …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But down from £26,000 – yes or no? It’s a very straightforward question.

ED MILIBAND:
(over) Well, look, we’re open to … we’re open to that. But let me just …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So it will come down?

ED MILIBAND:
No but let me explain, Andrew, because unless you do it in the right way … Because housing costs, for example, vary area by area, and what we’ve said is we want an independent look at this, so that actually we get a cap that works, not a cap that doesn’t work.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, let’s turn to another area which is your big success (a lot of people thought) last time round, a bit over a year ago, was over energy prices where you said you were going to freeze energy prices for a period. There was a huge kerfuffle about it, a lot of row, but the public liked it. Now George Osborne points out that the energy price, the oil barrel price has gone down from $110 to below 50. It’s a huge, huge fall and he says therefore it’s not necessary; all we need to do is to get the energy companies to pass on those savings to ordinary drivers and families. And he’s right about that, isn’t he?

ED MILIBAND:
Well we do want to see those reductions in wholesale costs passed on to consumers.
There’s always been two parts to our approach to energy and let me explain. First of all, the freeze on bills till 2017 to ensure that prices can only fall and not rise. And, secondly, giving the regulator the power to cut prices when those wholesale reductions aren’t passed on in retail prices. Now I want to make a proposal today, which is we’re going to bring before the House of Commons a vote in parliament to say the government should bring forward fast track legislation to ensure that we give the regulator that power. We’ve seen wholesale costs go down 20 per cent in gas prices over the last year and no reduction in bills. I want that …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) So this would oblige energy companies to pass that saving on?

**ED MILIBAND:**
Absolutely, it would give the regulator the power to cut prices to bring immediate relief. Now it’s time for the government to put their money where their mouth is. We’ve got a zombie parliament which isn’t actually doing anything, isn’t actually passing much legislation. Let’s in the last three months of this parliament do something that will actually make a difference. Let’s reduce energy bills for consumers – we can do that – as well as having our freeze to guarantee that bills won’t rise. I think it’s really important.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And this is coming into the House of Commons this coming week?

**ED MILIBAND:**
We’re going to have a vote this week on this measure. We want the government to support us, we want the Liberal Democrats to support us. And it’s time for the government … Look the government has been making noises over the last week to say that actually they’re concerned about the price reductions not being passed on. Well let’s see them actually put their money where their mouth is and say they’re going to support us on this.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Is this a kind of emblem of what an Ed Miliband government would feel like? In other
words, you haven’t got the money to spend (as you’ve said yourself) in a traditional Labour way. You can’t come in and change society by spending money and, therefore, you regulate companies more than you would have done in the past?

ED MILIBAND:
Well I think it’s right to have the right level of regulation. And when un…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Of course it is.

ED MILIBAND:
… when unfair … when people are being charged unfair prices, as they are in the energy sector, we should act. That’s one part of it. There’s properly rewarding hard work in this country like raising the minimum wage, dealing with zero hours contracts. But I do want to say this, Andrew, because we’re also proposing today a new Living Standards Index and …

ANDREW MARR:
There’s a big row about this already because apparently the relevant bodies have looked at this and said we’re doing this already, and in fact the way that inflation is measured, CPR is measured is quite a good way and if we change that again it might be tougher on ordinary families, not easier.

ED MILIBAND:
No, let me make my overall point here because I think this is important. At the moment we have the growth figures, the GDP figures that come out. And lots of people look at those figures and the other economic figures that are produced and think well that doesn’t seem to accord with what’s happening in my life. At the moment people think well there’s a recovery that’s working for a few at the top of our society, but not for them. It’s very odd that we can measure all kinds of things in our economy. The only thing we don’t measure is the thing that matters most and by which I will judge my government: the living standards of working people. So what we’ve done today is write to Andrew Dilnot, the Head of the Statistics Authority, and say let’s see if we can get a better measure of living standards. The current measures
exclude certain people like the self-employed, there’s argument about what level of prices they should be based on.

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* So another look at it. Alright.

**ED MILIBAND:**
Let’s have a proper measure of living standards because that’s how I’m going to judge my government: the level of success of working people in our country.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Did you use the word ‘weaponise’ about the National Health Service?

**ED MILIBAND:**
What I’ve said is that I want a fight for the NHS.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Did you use the word ‘weaponise’ though?

**ED MILIBAND:**
Well, look, I don’t recall exactly what I said, but we are in a fight for the National …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* So it’s possible that you did?

**ED MILIBAND:**
… we’re in a fight for the National Health Service and I make absolutely no apologies for the fact that I’m really concerned about what’s happening to our National Health Service in this country.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Sure but that word, which clearly infuriated the prime minister – ‘weaponise’ – does seem to a lot of people rather a cynical word to use about the NHS?
ED MILIBAND:
Well I think what’s infuriated the Prime Min...

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* Can I just ask, did you use it?

ED MILIBAND:
Well I don’t recall exactly what I said, but what I’m clear about is that we’re in a fight for the NHS.

ANDREW MARR:
Right, now …

ED MILIBAND:
And I think that’s really important. Look the prime minister went into the last General Election and he said he could be trusted with the National Health Service. He said he could be trusted with the NHS. He’s betrayed that trust with people. We’ve seen an NHS where we’ve had tents erected in hospital car parks this week, we see ambulances …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* We can all see what’s happening in the NHS and I want to come onto exactly what you’re going to do about it. But just before we leave this point, you know the prime minister called this a cynical and disgusting word. Do you disown the word ‘weaponise’?

ED MILIBAND:
What I don’t disown or what I …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* Do you disown the word?

ED MILIBAND:
No what I absolutely … what I absolutely stand by is that we’re in a fight for the
future …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) That’s an answer to a different question, if I may say so.

ED MILIBAND:

I know, but we’re in a fight for the future of the National Health Service. Honestly, I don’t think this is about the words we use.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Well it is partly.

ED MILIBAND:

This is about how we’re going to change this country, so we have an NHS that properly works for people again and it isn’t going backwards as it is under this government.

ANDREW MARR:

Now we know about your extra spending in the NHS and where that’s coming from and you’ve been very clear about that. But looking at the scale of the crisis in the papers and elsewhere at the moment, a lot of people think this is a bigger job than even that money would resolve; that there’s a huge, growing, slow motion crisis in the NHS - as we grow older the drugs and the treatments become more expensive and we have to think about the NHS in a new way. Frank Field last week suggested taking it out of politics and using a rise in national insurance as a kind of one-off big change in the way it’s funded. Are you attracted by that approach at all?

ED MILIBAND:

Well Frank has suggested a tax rise on ordinary families. I don’t support that because there’s a cost of living crisis. I’m going to judge my government by what we achieve on living standards. I’ve said we’re going to raise taxes on the richest in our society with a mansion tax, clamping down on tax avoidance, money from the tobacco companies. Two and a half billion pounds raised. And you’re right, Andrew – the NHS is going to have to change. And it’s about hiring more doctors, nurses, midwives
and care workers, but it’s also about the services outside hospital – so GP access, for example, the problems with GP access. Let’s change that. Let’s hire more doctors, so we relieve some of the pressures on A&E. Let’s keep elderly people in their homes for longer – 5,000 more home care workers. So I think you’re right – it is about transformation of the NHS, not simply standing still to solve this crisis.

ANDREW MARR:
And when Jim Murphy says that he wants the money from the mansion tax in the south and in London to go to pay for an extra 13,000 nurses in Scotland, do you agree with that?

ED MILIBAND:
I think it’s 1,000 nurses that he said.

ANDREW MARR:
A thousand nurses, I beg your pardon.

ED MILIBAND:
But look, what Jim is doing – and I think this is right – is he’s saying when we have the knock-on effects of spending …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay.

ED MILIBAND:
… raised across the UK in Scotland, use it for the National Health Service, and I think that’s the right thing to do. And you know I do think this is important. We’re a united kingdom. We care about each other across the whole of the United Kingdom.

ANDREW MARR:
That’s the price.

ED MILIBAND:
So, for example, we’re raising money from a bank bonus tax in London. That will
help put young, unemployed people back to work in Newcastle. I think that’s the right thing to do when most of the banks are in London.

ANDREW MARR:
Right okay.

ED MILIBAND:
So I think that’s part of our unity as a country and part of us caring about each other.

ANDREW MARR:
Let me move onto another area. The Conservatives are on the attack on another area which is strike law. They want to effectively ban strikes in the public sector unless you hit some kind of target of number of people voting. Now without looking at 40 per cent or 20 per cent or anything else, do you accept there is some merit in the idea of before a strike actually happens a certain proportion of those eligible to vote have actually voted?

ED MILIBAND:
Well I don’t like this proposal no, and let me explain …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So no proportion?

ED MILIBAND:
(over) … let me explain why. Look I really sympathise with people when they face disruption as a result of industrial action. The answer to that is good industrial relations. And frankly this is a political game from the Conservatives. I mean, as I understand it, the proposal they’ve put forward would have meant only 16 MPs out of 650 at the last General Election would have met this 40 per cent threshold. Now what we actually need is a government that isn’t waging poor on the public sector, isn’t engaged in the kind of you know shouting from the …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well that’s why I took out the 40 per cent from my question …
ED MILIBAND:  
(over) … shouting from the rooftops.

ANDREW MARR:  
… because I was wondering whether the notion that a very, very small number of people can vote and for instance disrupt the entire tube system is one that you’re happy with?

ED MILIBAND:  
No I’m not happy when disruption happens. I’m not happy about it at all. But what I’m saying to you is the answer, in my view, when we have some of the toughest laws in the world is not new legislation; it’s a proper approach to industrial relations. So actually people sitting round the table to solve the problems whether it’s in transport or elsewhere that are being faced. I think part of the issue is that so many people in the public sector feel this government has just picked a fight with them all the way along. It’s not simply about the decisions. It’s the way those decisions have been made, the way … that confrontational attitude. I think this is more of the same, frankly.

ANDREW MARR:  
Looking at the polls – and they’re not all over the place – but what they do show is that the two main parties are slugging it out, but neither of you are anywhere near the position where you could actually form an overall majority government. That may change, but it’s equally possible that after the next election there will be two social democratic parties with large numbers of MPs in the House of Commons. You’re one and the Scottish National Party. Is there any kind of deal, agreement, arrangement that you would make with the SNP …

ED MILIBAND:  
I’m not about deals. I’m not about deals and coalitions. I’ve got one …

ANDREW MARR:  
No deals with the SNP?
ED MILIBAND:
I’m about one objective, one objective.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) It’s to win an overall majority, I’m sure.

ED MILIBAND:
(over) I want to put for… put forward … Good answer. I’m putting forward …

ANDREW MARR:
(laughs) But I’m suggesting that you might not make it.

ED MILIBAND:
Well I don’t accept that. Look I’m going to put forward a manifesto before the British people and I’m going to say to the British people this is a plan to put working people first. Not a plan for the privileged few, as this government has – a plan to put working people first, to raise people’s living standards. I want a majority Labour government in order to put that into practice. And I think that …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. So for all those people watching, saying I just want to know are there any circumstances in which this man would do a deal with Alex Salmond or Nicola Sturgeon to gain power, you can reassure them that that would not happen?

ED MILIBAND:
I’m not about deals and coalitions. I’m about …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) It’s a slightly weasel word, if I may say so.

ED MILIBAND:
No it isn’t, no it isn’t. It’s a very … Look I’m making a very, very clear statement, which is I’ve got an old-fashioned view on this, which is that a majority government is what we need, is what this country needs – a majority Labour government –
because we have a manifesto …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But you might be in the position of not being able to do that.

ED MILIBAND:
But I don’t accept that. I think this is our election to win. And I think the right thing to do is to spend these four months talking about these huge issues that our country faces, talking about how we’re going to change people’s wages, improve people’s wages so hard work is rewarded again, give opportunity to our young people to restore the NHS.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Sure, but you’ve moved right away from what I was asking about. It’s whether you would do, under any circumstances, a deal with the SNP?

ED MILIBAND:
I’m not about deals, I’m not about … I’m just not about deals. That’s not what I …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) When you say “I’m not about it”, does that mean you wouldn’t do one or I don’t want to talk about it?

ED MILIBAND:
Well, look, it’s a very clear statement of principle from me that my focus in the coming months is going to be on winning that election …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay, alright.

ED MILIBAND:
… winning a majority government.
ANDREW MARR:
One other election related question, if I may, which is that there’s a big row going on at the moment you know about television debates and it does seem that David Cameron doesn’t particularly want to get involved in this.

ED MILIBAND:
In the debates, I think it’s fair to say, yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
There is an argument that he should be empty chaired and there should be some such solution. What is your view?

ED MILIBAND:
Well, look, I think it’s pretty disreputable that David Cameron went into the 2010 election saying these debates were the most important thing that we could possibly have, people shouldn’t make feeble excuses to get out of them, and he’s doing precisely that. He’s running scared from these debates. I want these debates to happen. I think they should happen with David Cameron or without David Cameron. Now in the end that’s a matter for the broadcasters, but I don’t think any one political leader should be able to stop these debates happening, should be able to veto these debates, block these debates. I want them to happen …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So you would take part in a debate if there was no prime minister on the other side of the studio?

ED MILIBAND:
Absolutely. If an empty chair represents David Cameron in these debates, so be it. I think these debates need to happen. They’re owned by the British people, not owned by David Cameron or by anybody else. I think they should happen and I think frankly the prime minister should stop ducking and weaving and trying to avoid these debates.

ANDREW MARR:
Ed Miliband, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.
ED MILIBAND:
Thank you.

ENDS