ANDREW MARR: When George Entwistle announced his resignation last night outside this very building, he was standing beside the man who had so recently appointed him. As Chairman of the BBC Trust, Lord Patten, the former Conservative Cabinet Minister and last Governor of Hong Kong, is now the last man standing right at the top of the corporation. As he acknowledged last night, there are plenty of questions for him as well. Despite his sadness, did he tell George Entwistle to go and is the management structure of the BBC, indeed the way the entire BBC is run, simply not good enough? Lord Patten, welcome. Did he go or was he pushed?

LORD PATTEN: No he went, extremely honourably. I didn’t try to argue him out of it because I think he’d made his mind up and I think it was the right decision.

ANDREW MARR: But he came to you and said, “I’ve decided to go”?

LORD PATTEN:
We had … we had several conversations yesterday. He’s Editor in Chief of a great news organisation and I think he felt he should take responsibility for the awful journalism which disfigured that Newsnight programme. And one of the ironies is that he was a brilliantly successful editor of Newsnight himself for some time, which I guess is one of the reasons why Jeremy Paxman said some gracious and properly gracious things about him …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes.

**LORD PATTEN:**
… but now he’s been destroyed by these two programmes.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And destroyed particularly perhaps by his interview with John Humphrys on the Today programme. I don’t know if you heard that, but everyone that I’ve spoken to who heard it thought that this was a sort of catastrophic car crash radio interview.

**LORD PATTEN:**
Well you don’t go on an interview with John Humphrys and expect the bowling to be slow, full tosses, and you know that’s why he’s such a great journalist.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yeah, yeah.

**LORD PATTEN:**
And throughout this, the BBC in the way we’ve covered ourselves has held onto the fact that, above all, we’re a news organisation and our credibility depends on telling the truth about ourselves and about others however horrible it may be.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And the specific problem for which he went was lack of curiosity, that sense that he didn’t know about this terrible mistake until too late?
LORD PATTEN:
That was …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Till very late.

LORD PATTEN:
… that was part of it. I think he was … One of the tragedies is that he wanted to do all the right things in terms of the management of the BBC - perhaps we can come to that in a moment - and what undermined him were exactly those failing which he wanted to address. From the beginning, unfortunately, in dealing with a crisis, he was at least implicated in the first crisis because he’d been Director of Vision when that original Newsnight programme had gone out, so it made it very difficult for him to tackle the whole thing. He’s a … he’s a very, very good man - cerebral, decent, honourable, brave - and I’m afraid this would have overwhelmed a lot of people with those sort of skills.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah. I can remember vividly the Hutton crisis in the BBC …

LORD PATTEN:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… which was the only thing that’s been remotely comparable, and at that moment we lost both the Director General and indeed the Chairman. And you know there are papers gunning at you as well. Do you feel that your position is under question or do you think that there has to be somebody left on the poop deck?

LORD PATTEN:
It’s bound to be under question from Rupert Murdoch’s newspapers, let’s be clear about that. What happened with Hutton, which took out a chairman and a director general, is that the government then reorganised the management - the governance of the BBC to use that awful word - so as to separate the trust, the regulator, from the
executive, so that there would no longer be a position in which the chairman had, as it were, some executive responsibility for the editorial content of the BBC, and that’s the position that I and we have been in. But I don’t want to hide behind what my job is supposed to be in saying that I think that I now have to make sure that in the interests of the licence fee payer and the audience that the BBC has a grip, that we get ourselves back onto the road. We’ve got these two big inquiries - Nick Pollard’s inquiry, the ex-Head of Sky, and Dame Janet’s inquiry in the longer term. We’ve also got a report which we’re looking at today about the last Newsnight programme. And I think my job is to make sure that we learn the lessons from those inquiries, that we restore confidence and trust in the BBC. If I don’t do that, then I’m sure people will let me know.

ANDREW MARR:
So you’re going to stay on. You accept that George Entwistle was perhaps too silent for too long, but you don’t feel you’ve been in that position?

LORD PATTEN:
No, I don’t - though I do think that because of what’s happened, I’ll probably have to be a bit more vocal. I don’t believe that this is a job in which I should grandstand. Nor do I believe that it’s a job in which I should try to take editorial decisions. That would get us into all sorts of difficulties of political interference.

ANDREW MARR:
There is a general perception in the words of one of Newsnight’s presenters that the programme is “toast”.

LORD PATTEN:
I think that’s a rather quick judgement to come to. Let me make this point, rather obviously. At the heart of our journalism in the BBC is good, investigative, uncompromising investigative journalism, and Newsnight has been part of that tradition with Panorama and others. We certainly want to hold onto that, but we want to make sure that it doesn’t make the sort of mistakes which have been made by Newsnight, particularly the last one, though we have still to listen to Pollard on the earlier decision; and I heard what Jonathan Dimbleby said earlier on that, which I
thought was pretty fair comment. What we want to make sure is that Newsnight and other programmes are properly managed. One of the …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well they’re clearly not. I mean it is incomprehensible …

LORD PATTEN:
(over) Totally, totally.

ANDREW MARR:
… the photograph was never shown.

LORD PATTEN:
Totally. It’s obviously been complicated by the fact that several senior managerial figures were recused from responsibility because it was thought to touch on the fact that they were implicated in the Savile story.

ANDREW MARR:
Was anybody really in charge?

LORD PATTEN:
Well, that is a question I asked. I didn’t … When I heard that the programme was being made (because the tweet was brought to my attention on that Friday and mentioned Conservative politicians) I couldn’t have then phoned them up and said, “What’s all this about Conservative politicians?” That would have been regarded as grotesque interference. I did subsequently ask whether the programme was being properly edited, whether it was being managed, and I was assured that it was. Well we know from what George was saying yesterday that apparently decisions about the programme went up through every damned layer of BBC management, bureaucracy, legal checks and still emerged.

ANDREW MARR:
And so a lot of people believe that that entire management structure is going to have to go.
LORD PATTEN:
Well what is absolutely true is that when George said that we had to get away from
the silos in the BBC, get away from the in-fighting, be much more self-critical,
devolve decisions far more - both for money and for editorial decisions - he was
absolutely spot on, and the tragedy is that two weeks after he set himself to start doing
those things, he was overwhelmed by a crisis which was partly caused by some of
those things. But if you’re saying does the BBC need a thorough structural radical
overhaul, then absolutely it does and that’s what we will have to do.

ANDREW MARR:
And far fewer managers, perhaps? I mean I was invited to go and talk to something
called the senior management group. I think there were more than a hundred people
there, so senior they could spend two days talking to each other.

LORD PATTEN:
One of the jokes I made - it wasn’t actually all that funny - when I came to the BBC
and was asked to speak to the senior management group was there were more senior
leaders in the BBC than there were in the Chinese Communist Party. So we do have
to devolve decision making as much as possible, but with devolved decision making
comes people’s preparedness to take responsibility. And one of the things which I
note is that those who have responsible positions in journalism, in editorial are very
reluctant to accept that they’re therefore part of management, but they are.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah. Shoddy journalism, “unacceptable and shoddy journalism” was your phrase. To
cure that, do you think people need to be brought in actually from outside the
corporation to oversee the journalism?

LORD PATTEN:
That may be one of the outcomes. What we have to do, first of all, is to get a grip
immediately. And I’ll be talking to Tim Davie, who’s a very good man who’s going
to be Acting Director General, today about how he can best handle things over the
next few weeks. And then with the trust, our one really big executive job is to choose
a Director General of the BBC, and we will have to look at that as soon as possible; and make sure that whoever is Director General of the BBC has the team around him which can make the job doable. Because I think it was Max Hastings pointed out earlier that this is a spectacularly big job in terms of scale and sweep and you do need to have a really good …

ANDREW MARR: Team of people around you.

LORD PATTEN: … team of people around you.

ANDREW MARR: But when it comes to you know the overall structures, we are looking at something which will make the BBC look and feel very, very different in the future. This is going to have to be a crisis out of which a different organisation emerges.

LORD PATTEN: Yes that’s true. And it’s not only because of this crisis; it’s also because of what is happening digitally. We demonstrated during the Olympics that the BBC is a great engineering organisation as well as a very good creative organisation. But that has all sorts of implications for the way people will be looking at television programmes and so on in the future, so we have to adjust to that. We have to adjust to a world in which fewer people are reading newspapers and getting their news in other ways.

ANDREW MARR: Meanwhile, you have a multiple crisis because you have to find a new Director General. At the same time, there seems to be very little management in the news structure and an organisation visibly sort of turning on itself. How quickly can you get a new DG? You can’t wait for very long. There needs to be somebody in charge quite quickly.

LORD PATTEN: Yes there does and we’ll be turning our attention to that today. But we’ll also be
working with Tim Davie to make sure that he can have the right support in getting the BBC on track straightaway.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes. And do you have to go through the same pretty cumbersome process …

LORD PATTEN:
(over) No.

ANDREW MARR:
You don’t?

LORD PATTEN:
No.

ANDREW MARR:
You can do it quickly?

LORD PATTEN:
(over) No … Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
Marvellous. When it comes to the way news is handled inside the BBC, we’ve had, as you said, lots of different programmes, lots of different sides. It has been argued, not least during the paper review, that there needs to be really a much stronger head of news who is not necessarily the DG; that this job is so big that you need somebody whose full-time 24 hour a day attention is on the quality of the journalism, watching all the stories coming in, asking the right questions down on the floor.

LORD PATTEN:
Yeah, I think there’s a case for that. I don’t want to pre-judge, but I think there is a strong argument for that. I don’t think you would ever want a situation in which there wasn’t one person who was the boss, primus inter pares, but I do think you need to look at the relationship between the Director General of the organisation, editorial and
creative, and I think that any … anybody but an archangel needs strong support in those areas.

ANDREW MARR:
Absolutely. If this carried on going wrong from now on, then the very future of the BBC …

LORD PATTEN:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… could be in contention, couldn’t it?

LORD PATTEN:
Look, the BBC … You’ve only got to watch television in America or France or Italy to know how good the BBC is and has been - hugely, hugely respected around the world - and the basis for the licence fee, the basis for the BBC’s position in this country is the trust that people have in it. Look at any poll and people believe much more strongly that they’re getting it straight from the BBC than from any other news organisation. But we have to earn that.

ANDREW MARR:
But if the BBC loses that, it’s over, the whole thing is over.

LORD PATTEN:
If the BBC loses that, it is over. There are one or two newspapers, Mr Murdoch’s papers, who would love that. But I think the great British public doesn’t want to see that happen. The great British public wants us to restore confidence in the BBC’s quality.

ANDREW MARR:
George Entwistle went last night looking pretty shattered. Given the gravity and the length of this crisis, are there things that you look back on, thinking I wish I’d done that better, I wish I’d done this differently?
LORD PATTEN:
Well I might have some views about whether or not the way the role of the trust has been carved out maybe constrains one too much in relation to programmes, but that’s the situation as it is and I’m not going to try to change that now because I think that there are more important things that matter. I would have still, given what I knew then, have chosen with my eleven colleagues in the trust George Entwistle who was our unanimous choice. We thought he was a terrific, creative leader for the BBC and I’m just sorry - it’s one of the tragedies of life - I’m sorry that he was overwhelmed by this wretched crisis.

ANDREW MARR:
And many people, not just in the newspaper world but in the House of Commons too, are looking forward with some glee to a smaller, diminished, neutered BBC at the end of all of this.

LORD PATTEN:
Yes, there are some people who are in that position. I think they’re fairly cagey about the way they talk about it. I think if the role of the BBC was to become, I don’t know, an issue in a General Election, you’d find most of the people who were talking about it would be in favour of the BBC continuing to play such a really important part in our national life. Look, just put this horrendous crisis on one side for a moment. The BBC has been one of the most respected national institutions. It’s one of the things which helps to define and reflect Britishness and we shouldn’t lose sight of that.

ANDREW MARR:
One of the dangers in all of this - and we saw it to a certain extent after Hutton - is that having got one thing so appalling badly wrong, the entire institution becomes completely risk averse and stops trying to do other stories and everything is referred up, nothing actually happens, and managers decide the safest thing to do is to block everything.

LORD PATTEN:
Yeah, when I became 18 months ago or so Chairman of the BBC Trust, people were
saying that the place was hidebound, that there were too many regulations on this or that because of Ross/Brand.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

LORD PATTEN:
Well …

ANDREW MARR:
But …

LORD PATTEN:
… now there will be some people who say well we should put all that back again. We mustn’t do that. We must have the self-confidence to go on being prepared to investigate, to explore, but we have to make sure that what we say is correct.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah. And who’s going to rally the troops? There are a lot of very, very upset, angry and worried troops around at the moment.

LORD PATTEN:
There are a lot because overwhelmingly the people who work for the BBC haven’t been in any way responsible for this ghastly mess and they now feel slightly tainted by what has happened. So it is important to rally them, to encourage them to go on making great radio and television programmes, and that’s something we’ll be talking to Tim Davie about today.

ANDREW MARR:
And despite the appalling things that have happened, you think that Newsnight can survive?

LORD PATTEN:
I think it would be very sad if we were to give up that evening slot which has done a
lot of terrific investigative journalism over the years - not least when George was the editor - but we’ve obviously got to consider how at the moment it’s managed and whether its people have got a grip on its content.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And very briefly, if you will, how quickly do you think you can put a new Director General, permanent Director General in place?

**LORD PATTEN:**
Well I think it’s got to be a few weeks rather than a lot of months.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Chris Patten, Lord Patten, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

**LORD PATTEN:**
*(over)* Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**