AM: I’m joined by the UKIP Leader Gerard Batten. Mr Batten, welcome. In your local election part of your website you talk about your priorities there, and you list them as being dealing with Brexit, ending mass immigration, getting rid of the licence fee and so on. None of these seem to be things that actually affect local councillors.

GB: When people elect a local council they’re electing a local council to represent their local interests, and we make that plain, and that will on what are the priorities in the locality where those councillors are elected. So there’ll be different priorities in different places and the local councillors will be dealing with those. But it’s also an opportunity to register a vote on national issues, and we’ve registered those national issues with the voters and say if you don’t like what’s going on today – and top of that list is Brexit. Send the message to Westminster by voting UKIP.

AM: Well, we’ll see what happens, but last time in the local elections you had a big, as it were, national message. It didn’t work very well for you, you had a very, very poor local elections.

GB: Well, when I took over in February there was no local election plan. I inherited nothing. We still managed to get 534 candidates in the field, and it wasn’t a good result for us, I’m the first to admit. But now we’ve almost trebled the number of councillors. UKIP is in a different place from where it was 12-13 months ago, so we’re hoping for a much better result.

AM: After the local elections we have the European elections. Again, last time round, 2014, UKIP had a very, very strong result. You got 24 MEPs. How many of them have you got left now?

GB: We’ve got seven. Quite a lot actually left before I became leader, I think it’s fair to point out they didn’t all leave because I
became leader. We’re going into elections with a fresh slate. I think there are only three of us left now that are going to go into those elections again for UKIP. We’ve got new candidates. And of course I think that this is going to – in these elections really I think you have two choices. The Remainers, if I may say so, have got a clear choice, which is the Liberal Democrats, because if they vote Labour or Tory they don’t really know what they’re voting for because those parties are riven. And you have a clear choice if you want to leave, which is UKIP, because we have a very clear, simple policy, which is unilateral, unconditional withdrawal.

AM: You have a clear simple policy, but there are two parties touting that policy now. There’s your own party and there’s Nigel Farage’s new Brexit Party. Let’s hear why Nigel Farage left your party and what he thinks of you.

FARAGE (ARCHIVE)
They have decided to go down a route there seems to be a complete obsession, not just with Islam, but it would appear with all its adherents. They’ve attracted a fairly, shall I say, loutish fringe. And I don’t think that middle England, decent people, want to vote for a political party that is linked to extremism, violence, criminal records and thuggery.

AM: How do you respond to that?
GB: Nigel’s known me for 27 years, he knows exactly where I stand on things, just as I know where he stands on things. He knows that that’s a smear. This is a device that he’s now using to try and discredit UKIP, his former party, and to enhance the chances of his own new party. Now, many, many thousands of people who are in UKIP and supported Nigel are still there, so he’s talking about those people who’ve supported him. We’ve had approximately 11,000 new members come in during my period of office, so we’ve gone up from about 17,000 to about 29, almost 30,000 now. And what I’m getting back from local branches and
activists are these are ordinary decent people who support what we stand for and want to help us in what we’re doing. What he’s saying, Andrew, is a complete smear.

AM: What he says is that in policy terms there’s not much that divides you, but it’s about people. And the reason he’s saying that is because – I’m going to give you an example of Carl Bejamin, who’s one of your leading MEP candidates, and he’s a very, very controversial figure online and all the rest of it. He emailed, texted a Labour MP saying he wouldn’t even rape her. The kind of person that you’re making an MEP.

GB: I think was satire, and he was actually trying to draw other people –

AM: It’s not good satire.

GB: He’s a free speech – he’s a classical liberal actually, Carl Benjamiin, if ever you would have him on an interview him. He’s precisely the kind of person that Nigel would have liked in the party when he was leader, because he can open up access to us on social media. So all kinds of people that we now want to reach out to.

AM: Let’s just pause on this. He tweets to a Labour MP, ‘I wouldn’t even rape you.’ How is that satire?

GB: Well, I don’t know the exact context of that and I certainly don’t condone any remarks like that, but he is – he is not a bad person as he’s –

AM: He sounds like it. Any other party would have kicked him out, and you’ve made him your MEP candidate.

GB: He is a proponent of free speech. That was in the context that he said it was satire against the people he was saying it about. It wasn’t actually making a literal statement.

AM: Alright, let’s turn to Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who likes to call himself Tommy Robinson.

GB: I wondered how long it would take you.
AM: We’ll see how long it’s taken. You’ve appointed him as an adviser. What are his qualifications? He’s not allowed to join UKIP. What are his qualifications for UKIP Leader’s Adviser.

GB: I’m glad that you’ve made that point, that he’s not a member of UKIP. I have lots of people who advise me. Some of who are not members of UKIP. I asked him to advise me on prison conditions and the grooming gang issue. He certainly knows about –

AM: Why?

GB: Well, because it was something that he – the grooming gang issue is a particular one that we were interested in. Unfortunately he hasn’t been able to do a lot of work because he’s had quite a lot of pressures on him personally lately. But what he wanted to do and what he’s been prevented from doing over the last year is actually looking at not the offences themselves and who was responsible, but who covered it up. And I think this is a very important story that he was going to help us with.

AM: He is seen by many people as a figure of the far right and a dangerous man. Nigel Farage says, ‘I believe Tommy Robinson is entirely unsuitable to be involved in any political party. His entourage includes violent criminals and ex-BNP members.

GB: This is coming from a man, Nigel Farage, who employed an ex-member of the National Front for several years, now he takes the view that that gentleman is no longer associated with that, therefore it’s okay for him to actually be a member and be employed by UKIP. And I take the view that Tommy Robinson is not far right. If you had him on an interview with him yourself and asked him for his views you would find out that he doesn’t have far right views, and he’s somebody that can give me some information and research that would be useful to me. And if he ever becomes a member of UKIP that will subject to a vote of all the UKIP membership.
AM: Well, he’s clearly not here to answer for himself. Let me ask about your views. Do you hate Islam?
GB: I do not like the ideology, the literalist interpretation of Islam, certainly I don’t like it.

AM: You’ve called it a death cult.
GB: That’s right.
AM: There are millions of Muslims living in this country, completely law-abiding decent fellow citizens, and you appear to be smearing their religion as a death cult.
GB: The ideology itself is kill infidels wherever you find them, make war on infidels, strike terror into the hearts of infidels.

AM: You could pick bits of the bible or of lots of old texts and turn them into a –
GB: How many people do you know that live their life by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament? I don’t know anybody.

AM: There’s quite a few in America.
GB: Well, we’re not in America, we’re here. And I know lots of people in this country who do take a literal interpretation of Islam, and I think that’s the worrying thing. The people who are nominally Muslims, and I know plenty of them, and we’ve actually got a Muslim on our candidate list in the European elections, they are not a problem because they do not propose the literalist, fundamentalist interpretation of the religion.

AM: But if I was a Muslim British subject, which I’m not, I would think about things like you calling for a ban on mosques, which you’ve done as well.
GB: What I’ve said in the past –
AM: This is a man who doesn’t like my religion.
GB: What I have said in the past is that we that we should not allow planning permission for a mosque until they allow planning permission in Islamic countries for churches and Hindu temples
and other forms of religion. For example, in Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries they don’t allow that. Why don’t they allow it? They don’t allow it because it says they mustn’t in the Koran. And why should we tolerate people who do something in our country which they don’t tolerate other people to do in theirs?

AM: So I think the charge against you is that you have taken what was quite a party with lots of different views in it but everybody agreeing that we want to be outside the EU, a wide-ranging party, and you’ve turned it into a party which seems to be obsessed by a small number of issues. And that’s why Caroline Jones, former UKIP Leader in Wales, for instance, has said, ‘the party’s changed beyond all recognition. I felt UKIP was become more like the BNP,’ – under your leadership.

GB: Well, that just isn’t true. The one thing that does unite our party of course is that we all want to leave the European Union. There are lots of people in it with different views. We do have people with a Conservative Party background, Labour Party background or were never part of a political party before background. We have a full manifesto of policies which you can get from our website, and we are a democratic party, we always have been a democratic, non-racist party. That’s always been in our constitution, that’s exactly the way we’re going to keep it, but it’s very odd in this day and age where you get called far right when what you’ve spent the last 25 years trying to do is to return government to our country by our own democratically elected parliament, under our own government, under our own constitution and laws, and yet you get called names for doing that. It’s a funny old world.

AM: Thank you very much indeed for talking to us.

ENDS