THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

ANDY BURNHAM, MP

LABOUR LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE

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ANDREW MARR:
And UKIP isn’t the only party in some turmoil, as you may have noticed. Labour is
taking a long, hard look at itself after its defeat. The contest to succeed Ed Miliband is
now getting underway with a new leader to be chosen in September. Among the four
candidates currently in the running is Andy Burnham, the Shadow Health Secretary,
and he’s here with me now. Welcome to you …

ANDY BURNHAM:
Thank you. Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
Are you the continuity candidate?

ANDY BURNHAM:
No, I’m the change candidate because we’ve got to reach out to those voters who had
doubts about us on immigration and on economic competence. If we’re going to
rebuild that trust, we need to have an honest assessment of the record of the last
Labour government on the economy and I want to do that. You know if we look at our
first term in government …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) Can I pick you up on change …

ANDY BURNHAM:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… because there are two directions that are being advocated at the moment? There’s Peter Mandelson and people like him saying let’s essentially move back to New Labour, and there are people like Len McCluskey saying no, no, no, we have to move further to the left. Which one are you with?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well both approaches are wrong. We’ve got to bring people back together and I’m attracting support …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That leaves you with steady as she sinks, doesn’t it?

ANDY BURNHAM:
… I’m attracting support from all parts of the party. But I just want to kind of come back to this issue of economic competence because we are not going to put ourselves in a position to win next time unless we deal directly with this. Now in the first term of our government in 1997 to 2001, we ran more surpluses than the Tories did in 18 years. In our second term, we began to invest in schools and hospitals. Now that was the right thing to do because they were in a dreadful state. But – here’s the point – that spending didn’t cau…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) The but is what we’re all waiting for. (laughs)

ANDY BURNHAM:
… that spending didn’t cause the crash, but we allowed the deficit to get too high in the middle part of the last decade. So when …
ANDREW MARR: 
(over) Why would none of you say that in the election?

ANDY BURNHAM: 
(over) … so when the crash happened …

ANDREW MARR: 
Sorry.

ANDY BURNHAM: 
… when the crash happened, we weren’t in a strong enough position.

ANDREW MARR: 
Now you were actually writing the cheques. You were Secretary to the Treasury … Chief Secretary to the Treasury during part of the period of all of this period, so it was partly your decision to spend that money as well. Why did people not apologise for that during the election campaign, at the time when it might have made some difference?

ANDY BURNHAM: 
Well I was talking about the period 2004/5/6. I came in as Chief Secretary in 2007 - let me answer this point – and I conducted a spending review, the last spending review of the last Labour government, where we had decided to grow public spending below overall growth in the economy because we were beginning to see that this was a looming issue and we had to deal with the deficit and bring it down.

ANDREW MARR: 
Too little too late perhaps?

ANDY BURNHAM: 
Well let’s remember things about what was said about that spending review. David Cameron and George Osborne at the time called that spending review “tough”. That’s what they said. So I think much of this kind of criticism of Labour is a triumph of spin over the facts. I mean it suited their purposes to rebrand everything that happened in
that era. The last Labour government was not profligate. The last Labour government was adopting a careful approach, but we did let the deficit get too large.

ANDREW MARR:
You didn’t fix the roof while the sun was shining, and the reason perhaps that spin (if that’s what it was) worked is that people out there still think that your instincts as a party are always to borrow more and spend more and borrow more and spend more. At the time, did you think you had abolished boom and bust?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well I just want to kind of deal with what you’re saying about the impressions of Labour. We do have to deal with that, Andrew, you are absolutely right, if we are to win in 2020. And coming into this contest, I want to deal head on with these issues, to put the Labour Party in a position to win. We need to make a break …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So how can you do that?

ANDY BURNHAM:
… a break with the past. We need to establish economic competence. And we need a fiscally responsible approach, but an approach that’s also pro-business. We need to rebuild our relationship with the business community. So Rachel Reeves, who is backing my campaign – one of the best brains in the Labour Party, a former Bank of England economist – will lead work in this area for me about reestablishing our reputation on the economy, having a pro-business approach so that we go into that next election with a very strong policy.

ANDREW MARR:
Do you agree with Liz Kendall, one of your rivals, who said that if you don’t get this right now, Labour could never be in power again?

ANDY BURNHAM:
I think she’s right to say the situation is serious, as is Jon Cruddas who’s said something similar today. And I don’t accept that this is ground zero for the Labour
ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

ANDY BURNHAM:
You know I have said that I believe we have lost our emotional connection with millions of people out there. It is partly about the economy, but it is also about immigration and we need to face up to this too. So that is why I’m saying …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And you are now calling for an early referendum. Now that is a very different policy than Labour had during the election campaign. Did you think back during the election campaign there should have been a referendum and weren’t saying so or have you changed your mind since?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well I’ve been watching how public opinion has been changing and I began to see that you know there was clearly an appetite for a referendum. So this is why I am the change candidate in this election. I’ve said very clearly and quickly that we need to bring forward that referendum because the worst of all worlds, Andrew, is a proclaimed period of uncertainty and argument that would be the worst of all worlds for business.

ANDREW MARR:
I get that, but you’ve also said this morning that David Cameron has to come back, go and negotiate in the EU - where presumably you will be as it were backing him if you’re Labour Leader – and bring back a very tough deal, cutting the number of people coming into this country and claiming benefits; in fact banning people from claiming any kind of benefits when they come into this country for the first two years. If he doesn’t get that deal, would you then contemplate voting against our membership of the EU?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well I am a strong pro-European and I want to make the pro-European case …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So whatever happens, whatever deal David Cameron gets …

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) I’ll come to your point, but I want to make the pro-European case in this referendum. It’s clear to me that the British interest is in staying in the European Union, but I am warning that we will only be able to win that argument if we have a credible package of reforms on immigration. The public are asking for this. If we don’t deliver it, if David Cameron does not deliver it, then we will be sleepwalking to exit from the European Union and I don’t want to see that.

ANDREW MARR:
If David Cameron does not deliver it, what does Andy Burnham then say and do at the time of the referendum?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well I’m going to hold him to account because he has made promises …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But you can hardly … sorry.

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) … he has made promises, Andrew, as part of the election campaign, and I will hold him to account for those promises that he has made. I am clear that we should support free movement. People should be free to work across the European Union but not free to claim, and that is the change that we need to make in policy if we are to keep public confidence of the European Union but also …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But very, very briefly, if …

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) … have an immigration policy people support.
ANDREW MARR:
If he doesn’t get that deal you say is essential, will you say we should be in the EU or out of the EU – given that you said it’s essential?

ANDY BURNHAM:
I find it hard to imagine the circumstances in which I would advocate a no vote, but my worry is …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Alright, okay, let’s …

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) … David Cameron might bring us to the referendum …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) … let’s move on.

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) … in a weak position and we might be then at risk of exiting.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s move on. You are Len McCluskey’s candidate. Are you comfortable with that?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well I don’t think people have noticed the change in the rules that we’ve had. The union bosses won’t decide this leadership election. Ordinary Labour Party members, trade unionists, one member one vote – that is part of Ed Miliband’s legacy.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay. Is it right … is it right, however, that the union bosses, the unions can pay the subscription for the individual members for them, so they’re not actually paying anything at all, and then put Andy Burnham’s face on the literature …

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) Well they won’t be a… no they won’t be able to do that because that’s another part of the change. There won’t be … It’s all done …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So no … because that happened with Ed Miliband?

ANDY BURNHAM:
… it’s all to be done independently. And this is a big change and this is to Ed’s great credit that he made this change. So this won’t be union bosses deciding. This will be school dinner ladies, this will be healthcare assistants. And I’m proud of that. I am proud of Labour’s link with the trade unions and it’s great that we have a party funded in that way. The cleanest money in politics rather than funded by hedge funds or private health as the Tories are.

ANDREW MARR:
But you would want Andy Burnham’s name to go out on union literature to those members?

ANDY BURNHAM:
It’s for the unions to decide how they engage in this campaign, but I am saying …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) What’s been said about you is that you are as it were playing all sides; that you’re learning towards the unions on some issues and you’re leaning towards the modernisers on some issues – perhaps an inevitable thing when you’re trying to become Leader of the Labour Party. Nonetheless, I have to press you again: are you happy to be the union candidate?

ANDY BURNHAM:
I’m the unifying candidate. I am bringing all parts of the Labour Movement together. That’s why … that’s why I …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So you don’t think the Labour Party should break its links with the unions?
ANDY BURNHAM:
Certainly not. I’m proud of those links. I am proud that ordinary working people will be taking part in this contest. People complain, don’t they, about the lack of engagement in politics. I believe the trade union link gives ordinary working people a bigger say, a bigger sense of engagement in politics, and that’s something to be celebrated.

ANDREW MARR
Jim Murphy in a very now celebrated speech against Len McCluskey said that he and the rest of the union leadership were the kind of people who would back the wrong horse in a one-horse race. Now I know you’re a footballing guy, but are you that nag?

ANDY BURNHAM:
No, certainly not. I’m putting forward a strong case as the unifying candidate. I don’t know who the trade unions will support. And by the way, I’ve got huge respect for Jim – he’s given his all to the Labour Party – but in Scotland, we do now need a clean break. We need a process of listening and learning and rebuilding. And …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Do you think … Sorry, can I just …

ANDY BURNHAM:
(over) … I believe in this contest, I’m the person best placed …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) … on that, do you think the Scottish Labour Party should now be separated in some way from the rest of the Labour Party and have its own headquarters and run its own affairs entirely separate from the Labour Party in London?

ANDY BURNHAM:
There is a case for that and I will look at that. But I want to say one thing about Scotland. We’ve had an election here that’s left – a General Election – that’s left the country more divided and fragmented, and we have a Prime Minister that has stoked
the separatist cause in his own interest. You know this used to be the Tory and Unionist Party. They’re now just playing to English Nationalism. If anyone out there is concerned about the break-up of the UK, they will need a strong Labour Party going forward. And I am the person who can speak to all parts of the UK …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You want to reach out …

ANDY BURNHAM:

(over) … Scotland and Wales too.

ANDREW MARR:

Would you reach out so far as to say that the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party should start to think about coming together?

ANDY BURNHAM:

No, I don’t believe that’s … You know the Liberal Democrats I think have found themselves in this position because of their closeness to the Conservative Party. I want to lead a strong united Labour Movement …

ANDREW MARR:

Alright.

ANDY BURNHAM:

… address our weaknesses and put us in a position now where we can win again in 2020.

ANDREW MARR:

Now through our conversation has been the ghostly spectral presence of Len McCluskey all around us. We’re going to talk about ghosts and spectres in a moment, but he’s been around there. I have to ask you, have you spoken to him since announcing your candidacy?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Yeah I’ve spoken to Len but I’ve spoken …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) How often and how recently?

ANDY BURNHAM:
… many people. I’ve spoken to business leaders, I’ve spoken to party members. I am speaking to everybody to build a strong united campaign. And may I just say …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) What did he tell you?

ANDY BURNHAM:
I am … I am building support from all parts of the Labour Party. Charlie Falconer, a close friend of Tony Blair, is backing my campaign, and I think that should show you that I am bringing some reach here …

ANDREW MARR:
Alright.

ANDY BURNHAM:
… and bringing people back together to support the united position going forward.

ANDREW MARR:
What did Len McCluskey tell you?

ANDY BURNHAM:
We spoke about the devastating defeat. Every Labour member around the country is devastated. We all are. We all thought Ed Miliband did a great job in helping us come out of government into opposition. We are recovering from that defeat, but we now need to move forward.

ANDREW MARR:
I’d love to talk more to you, including about free schools in a little while, but for now
thank you very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS