ANDREW MARR:
Now the political marriage in Downing Street has seemed a little bit prickly this week with the Prime Minister musing wistfully about the clarity of single party government, while his deputy, Nick Clegg, insists that compromise in politics, as in life, can be good for everybody. Are there real differences, especially on the economy, which would make it difficult for them to work together? Well Nick Clegg is with me now. Good morning.

NICK CLEGG:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s start with the economy because you have this new plan in the papers today to raise the income tax threshold and what you call a Lib Dem “workers’ tax bonus”. Has this been agreed with the Prime Minister?

NICK CLEGG:
Well it’s certainly no secret because of course I’ve been going on about this for years and years and years. I insisted that this was our number one priority as a party before
the last General Election, I insisted it went into the Coalition Agreement, and thankfully we’re delivering this huge income tax cut for over 20 million basic rate taxpayers next April when finally the allowance, the amount of money you can earn before paying income tax, goes up to £10,000. My view now - having achieved that great figure, that great threshold of £10,000 - is that we need to go further because as the recovery, as Mark Carney said this week, is finally taking hold, I think it’s very important that as many people as possible feel that they’re benefiting from it. And that’s why I call it if you like a workers’ bonus …

ANDREW MARR:
I see.

NICK CLEGG:
… because I think if we can raise it by a further £500 - it’s worth me just dwelling on what that means - that would be an extra £100 in everybody’s pockets. It also would take an additional half a million people out of paying any income tax altogether.

ANDREW MARR:
Elegantly and charmingly, you haven’t quite answered my question, which was have you agreed this with the Prime Minister himself?

NICK CLEGG:
No, it’s not agreed yet. It is something that I would like to see us deliver as a coalition government in the next budget. I’ve had to argue very strongly for each step of the increase in the allowance. As you know, the Conservatives before the election felt that this was not an affordable policy. I’ve insisted all along that it is affordable because I think it’s a fair thing to do. It puts more money back in the pockets of so many millions of people.

ANDREW MARR:
So we will see it in the Autumn Statement coming?

NICK CLEGG:
Not in the Autumn Statement. I think the Autumn Statement is more about, in many
respects, delivering many of the commitments we’ve made over the last few months - for instance delivering free school meals to all young children in primary school. But I think the Budget next year is an important moment, but of course I need to persuade my Conservative coalition partners. That’s normal in a coalition government. In the past they’ve had, the Conservatives have tended to have a different set of tax priorities - first inheritance tax cuts for very rich people, then a tax cut in the upper rate of income tax, and now of course the marriage tax break. I’ve always been very consistent for a very, very long period of time, so therefore it’s absolutely no surprise that I think the absolute number one tax priority should be continued to give tax cuts to millions of people who are working hard, seeking to make ends meet.

ANDREW MARR:
Things do sound just a little prickly. Moving ahead and we’ve of course got the George Osborne promise that in the next parliament, as the paying down of the debt carries on, he wants to build up a surplus and that, therefore, austerity’s going to be here for a long time. The Prime Minister has said the same thing. Is that the next big argument between you?

NICK CLEGG:
What I would urge both the Conservative and the Labour parties bluntly on long-term fiscal policy is it’s just too important for our country to have parties lurching to the right or the left on this. You appear to have this view from the right now that …

ANDREW MARR:
Including the Prime Minister.

NICK CLEGG:
… well that taxes should never go up and that in a sense you should be shrinking the state to an ever sort of smaller size in a slightly ideological way - I’m not ideological about the size of the state - in the same way I think the left are making a mistake in thinking that you can simply repeat all the mistakes of the past and borrow and spend more and more and more and bloating the state. I don’t think we should be ideological about this. We should strike …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) Ideological is your code for Conservative Party most of the time.

NICK CLEGG:
Well actually no, I think there’s an ideology on both right and left. There’s an ideology on the right …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

NICK CLEGG:
… which says cut, cut, cut remorselessly; there’s an ideology on the left which says bloat, bloat, bloat remorselessly. What I think … What we’ve done actually in this coalition government …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But you’re not in favour of an ever shrinking state in the next parliament and that is, therefore, going to be an argument that you have with the Conservative Party?

NICK CLEGG:
I want to see an efficient state. I don’t want to see the state any … I’m an old-fashioned liberal. I don’t want to see the state any bigger than it needs to be and I certainly believe in a more decentralised state. But if I can just say, we can strike the right balance in the years to come whoever’s in power in the next parliament and beyond in bringing down the debt burden as a proportion of the country’s wealth - the burden that otherwise would simply rest heavily on the shoulders of our children and our grandchildren - but also funding decent public services in a way which millions of people depend upon.

ANDREW MARR:
And this remains a very difficult balance to achieve, so I come back …

NICK CLEGG:
Well we’ve struck the right balance in the coalition.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) … I come back to your new idea about the tax threshold, another very expensive policy. How are you going to pay for that?

NICK CLEGG:

It would cost about a billion pounds. Look if I was Prime Minister and there was a Liberal Democrat government, I would ask people at the very top, perhaps through a small levy in a mansion tax, to raise much or all of that money …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Or income tax. No one talks about income tax anymore and yet that’s the easiest and quickest way to raise money. Is that taboo as far as you’re concerned?

NICK CLEGG:

Well income …

ANDREW MARR:

I’m talking about people at the top.

NICK CLEGG:

Well this is an income tax change, of course.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

NICK CLEGG:

This is the biggest change in the income tax system that we’ve seen in a generation in order to provide extra money, extra income through an income tax cut to over 20 million basic rate taxpayers. But there’s a lot we can do on tax avoidance. I believe, but the Conservatives don’t agree with this, we can ask the super wealthy to pay a little bit extra - not to go after them in a recriminatory way, but to ask them to make an extra contribution. That’s the way I would fund this fair tax cut. But obviously in a
coalition where the Conservatives have said they don’t want to ask the very wealthy …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* You have to find other ways - yes, okay.

**NICK CLEGGE:**
We’ll find other ways. We will find other ways, I hope. Of course that’s something where we discuss these things between the two coalition parties.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And so you don’t feel … You’ve been accused by one Conservative MP of “ambushing” the Prime Minister on this while he’s outside the country.

**NICK CLEGGE:**
*(over)* Oh no, no, they’re well aware of … No, no, they’re well aware of this.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay.

**NICK CLEGGE:**
I was talking to George Osborne and David Cameron about this some time ago, of course.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Let me just widen the argument, if I may. Your own office has I think seventeen parameters to measure social mobility in this country and they all show that social mobility is getting worse, not better.

**NICK CLEGGE:**
Not all of them actually.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Well most of them. There’s a piece in the FT, which clearly came from your office,
which suggests that overall the situation is very, very grim indeed on social mobility and the Prime Minister no less agrees with you.

NICK CLEGG:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
So my question is: what are you going to do about it?

NICK CLEGG:
Well I think …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And let’s not talk about what’s happened in the past.

NICK CLEGG:
Sure.

ANDREW MARR:
The position at the moment is that you’ve failed.

NICK CLEGG:
No, no, no, it’s a perfectly fair challenge …

ANDREW MARR:
Yuh.

NICK CLEGG:
… but I hope you’ll also agree it is fair to point out that you can’t reverse such a long-term trend in social immobility overnight. I don’t believe it can be done in one parliament. My strongly held view is that the evidence shows and Alan Milburn - who I appointed to act as a sort of independent challenger to government, not only this government but future governments because I’m so keen to see us maintain the right
emphasis on this over several parliaments because that’s the only way we’re going to deal with this - he says one of the most important things - and I agree with him - is to start early. If you help children from the most deprived backgrounds before they even hang up their coat at the first day at primary school, that has a bigger effect on their subsequent chances to do well in education, to go to college …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But what about breaking down some of the barriers at university level in the judiciary, in the police …

NICK CLEGG:
Yes.

ANDREW MARR:
… getting people from poorer backgrounds further up the tree?

NICK CLEGG:
Yes, there’s something we can do on that. But can I just … I know you want to move on. Actually in my view, the best thing we can do as a country is more of what we’re already doing, which is providing more support to two year olds from the most deprived incomes which we’re starting …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Look what you’ve done to Sure Start, which was the last government’s attempt to do this kind of thing. Sure Start has started to wither all round the country.

NICK CLEGG:
No, that’s not actually the case. The money is there to maintain the Sure Start Centre network. What we’re doing - and no government has ever done this before, we’ve introduced this as of two months ago - is that for the 20 per cent lowest income families in this country, for the first time ever, their two year old toddlers will get 15 hours pre-school support. Their three and four year olds will, for the first time again ever for all families, receive 15 hours of free school support. And the report you
allude to shows that the pupil premium, which is something that I’ve championed in government - £2.5 billion of extra money into schools - I first wrote about this a decade ago - is making a difference and it is closing the so-called attainment gap.

ANDREW MARR:

So there isn’t a raft of new measures, now proposals for us to look at before the election to improve social mobility beyond what you’ve just said?

NICK CLEGG:

Well no, there are a number of things. But this is a journey, so you talk about the professions. I think it is important we challenge all the professions and politics and media and the judiciary …

ANDREW MARR:

Yes, absolutely.

NICK CLEGG:

… to do more to throw open their doors. I would like to see greater meritocracy in the way in which internships are awarded, for instance.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

NICK CLEGG:

It should be about what you know, not who you know. And thankfully our very controversial university funding changes have, despite all the predictions to the contrary, have actually seen an increase to the highest level ever of disadvantaged youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university. We’ve got to put all these things together. But my plea would be that if we want to crack this as a country, subsequent governments and parliaments …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Have to do the same thing.
NICK CLEGG: 
(over) … must keep up the momentum.

ANDREW MARR: 
Okay. Let’s jump to yet another subject - one that’s home for you, as it were, which is the Roma controversy on the streets of Sheffield.

NICK CLEGG: 
Yeah, yeah.

ANDREW MARR: 
Now there’s been criticism of David Blunkett’s intervention, but clearly there are problems on the streets. Shouldn’t you be doing more to encourage Roma families and other families when they come into this country to learn about how people live - putting out the dustbins, dealing with waste, dealing with sort of how they treat their children in the streets - those kind of things, basic stuff?

NICK CLEGG: 
Yes of course, but that is best done of course by the communities themselves with the work, with the assistance of course of local authorities and indeed local politicians. But my simple view is this - that we cannot you know go back to the bad old days where one community or another is vilified across the country. But equally when communities live side-by-side in a particular part of the country, as is the case in Page Hall in Sheffield, you know what might seem like uncontroversial and rather sort of ordinary behaviour to one community might be very unsettling to another …

ANDREW MARR: 
Yes.

NICK CLEGG: 
… and they have a duty to understand what the impact of their actions is on other people.
It’s the effect of multiculturalism, but …

**NICK CLEGG:**
*(over)* Well it’s also … it’s an old-fashioned idea of civility where people are sensitive to the effects of their actions.

**ANDREW MARR:**
I want to distinguish between Roma and Romania and Bulgaria …

**NICK CLEGG:**
Indeed.

**ANDREW MARR:**
… but there’s a huge new migration wave just about to happen at the end of this year. There have been calls in the House of Commons for special new emergency legislation to stop it and the Labour politician, Frank Field, has said that something needs to be done to stop this; and there’s something approaching hysteria in parts of the Conservative family about this. Can’t you do anything at all?

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well I think it’s very important to remember that the lifting of the restrictions which hitherto have stopped Romanian and Bulgarian individuals from coming into this country to work, which we’re lifting, we’re lifting at the same time as all other countries in the European Union. And there are many other countries in the European Union, particularly in the south of Europe, where there are large settled Bulgarian and Romanian … *(Marr tries to interject)* Can I explain why that’s important?

**ANDREW MARR:**
Well I do understand what you’re saying, but every time this kind of issue comes up politicians say it’s alright, not that many people are going to come, and every single time they’ve been wrong.

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well I didn’t say that, which of course is what the Labour Government said last time.
ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

NICK CLEGG:
But why I think it’s so different to last time is that the Labour Government lifted those restrictions, in a way that Jack Straw and others now say is a mistake, and they did it with I think only Sweden and Ireland. In other words, the only countries which a number of citizens from Central and Eastern Europe could go to were Britain and a couple of other smaller economies.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And as far as you’re concerned …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) So it is different this time. I don’t know …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Free movement of people remains essential to our membership of the EU and you’re not going to put up any new barriers?

NICK CLEGG:
I think many … hundreds of thousands of British people benefit by going to live and work abroad elsewhere in the European Union. This is a two-way thing. I understand the concerns. We’re very vigilant about this, we’re not making wild predictions one way or another about what’s going to happen, but I do want to point out that it’s quite different, the circumstances are quite different to last time.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay. Do you approve of what the Prime Minister has done in the Grangemouth dispute, setting up a new inquiry under a QC to look at misbehaviour by the trade unions even though many people see this as a provocation, an anti-trade union bashing move ahead of the election?
NICK CLEGG:
This is a short independent inquiry looking at irresponsible behaviour of both trade unions and businesses. I’m a huge supporter of the way in which responsible trade unions and responsible businesses have actually maintained strikingly good … strikingly - if that’s not a pun - strikingly good industrial relations …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Unstrikingly, yes.

NICK CLEGG:
… during recent years, but there are some irresponsible trade unions which appear to have … and something clearly untoward happened in Grangemouth. And there are some irresponsible business practices, unacceptable ones such as blacklisting, and this inquiry, run independently of government, will look at it in the round.

ANDREW MARR:
I’m hopping from subject to subject.

NICK CLEGG:
Sure.

ANDREW MARR:
One last one. Age of consent to be moved to 15 says the guy in charge of public health. That’s what we should do. What’s your reaction?

NICK CLEGG:
I’m not in favour of that. The age of consent has been in British law for generations in order to protect children. Now I think this health expert is right in saying there’s a problem; we have far too high levels of teenage pregnancy. I’m worried, like everybody’s worried, about the sort of sexualisation of the culture and the information that so many young people are bombarded with at the moment. That’s why I do want to see action. For instance, I’m constantly urging Michael Gove in the Department for Education to update and modernise sex education in schools which hasn’t kept up with the internet age.
ANDREW MARR:
And what …

NICK CLEGG:
But do I think simply a blanket reduction in the age of consent is the answer to this difficult dilemma - no. So yes there’s a problem, yes we need a debate, yes we need to update sex education …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But this isn’t the answer.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) … but this is not the answer.

ANDREW MARR:
What about putting certificates onto a lot of the pop videos - the Miley Cyrus type stuff there’s been a lot of controversy about again in today’s papers? These have become more like pornography than entertainment.

NICK CLEGG:
I think part of the problem of course is I think you’d only be able to apply that to videos that you buy, and of course so many videos …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Are downloaded.

NICK CLEGG:
… now are downloaded directly. That’s why I think we really need to do more to make sure that in the classroom young kids are equipped with the knowledge they need to deal with an internet age that their parents and certainly their grandparents certainly weren’t confronting.

ANDREW MARR:
Nick Clegg, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

INTERVIEW ENDS