ANDREW MARR:
Now then, one of the political events of the past week was that the Green Party, as I said, overtook the Lib Dems as the third most popular party for paid up members in the country. But what do they actually stand for? Do you know? Their leader, Natalie Bennett, joins me now. Welcome Natalie Bennett.

NATALIE BENNETT:
Great to be here.

ANDREW MARR:
And you’ve just told me this… only the first female leader of a political party to succeed another female leader.

NATALIE BENNETT:
Exactly, that’s right. Caroline Lucas was our first elected leader.

ANDREW MARR:
And I can call you leader these days?
NATALIE BENNETT:
You can.

ANDREW MARR:
Marvellous. Now then, in terms of your main policies, one that jumps out to a lot of people is that you are actually in favour of a referendum on the EU. I mean to that extent, you’re alongside UKIP. Probably no other circumstances, but you are. Explain to me why you’re in favour of the referendum.

NATALIE BENNETT:
Very simply, we believe in democracy. We trust the voters. You have to be in your late fifties to have had a chance previously to vote. But what we would be doing in that referendum, if it goes forward, we would be campaigning to remain in the EU, but we very much want to reform the EU. And if you think of sort of shorthand what we mean by reform, I mean 180 degrees opposite to what Mr Cameron means by reform. So we want an EU that works for communities for people, decision making made locally, not centralised on Brussels and not privileging multinational companies, and definitely …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So an EU without Brussels as it were?

NATALIE BENNETT:
Well making decisions at the right level. And we’re definitely opposed to the proposed EU-US free trade deal known as TTIP. That could be absolutely disastrous for our democracy and for our quality of standards of workers’ rights, environmental standards and many other things.

ANDREW MARR:
Now a radical shift in the EU in that direction might seem to a lot of people completely impossible. Presumably you look at Syriza in Greece and you look at other anti-austerity parties doing quite well in Spain and Italy and so forth, and you see the beginnings of a new European confederation of left Green parties coming?
NATALIE BENNETT:
Exactly. It’s a question of who gets elected to the parliament, and we want to see the parliament have more power, be more democratic. But you know that whole anti-austerity agenda that we’re very simply saying that the poor, the disadvantaged, the young cannot be continued to be made to pay for the errors and fraud of the bankers. And you know austerity has failed even in its own terms. It’s the wrong direction. We need to invest in the future.

ANDREW MARR:
Unlike UKIP, however, you believe that immigration is not really much of a problem for this country?

NATALIE BENNETT:
Well what we recognise is that we should accept the rights of people who should be able to be here to be here, and we’re not doing that at the moment, we’re not treating refugees properly. Britons aren’t able to live in their own country with spouses or partners. And you know what we have to do is when people say to me on the doorstep, “I’m concerned about immigration” and I say, “You know what are you really concerned about?” they usually say three things: “Low wages, housing, expensive housing, my children can’t get a council house” or crowded schools and hospitals.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

NATALIE BENNETT:
All of those things are caused by failed government policies. They’re not caused by immigration.

ANDREW MARR:
But surely, given what’s going on in the Middle East, given what’s going on in Africa, there are almost endless numbers of people who would like to come here; and if your policies are for effectively an open door, that would greatly increase immigration into this country with possibly serious social effects?
NATALIE BENNETT:
Let me clarify. What I said was people who should have a right to be here should be here. We’re not talking about open door. But you know if people arrive on our doorstep as refugees, we should be accepting them. We should be - The Syrian refugees - we’ve refused to join the UN programme that would help the most vulnerable refugees. Germany has taken 20,000 of the most vulnerable refugees out of Syria. We’ve taken … The last figure I saw was 90 under our own special programme. We are a wealthy country. We have a responsibility to be reasonable and we have …

ANDREW MARR:
But you actually in a sense, you don’t mind us getting a bit poorer. You’ve said that growth should not be the be all and end all and actually if the economy shrinks that’s not necessarily a bad thing. So if we’re going to be poorer, what should we be spending less money on ourselves? What would that feel like?

NATALIE BENNETT:
Well one of the easiest things of course is Trident nuclear weapons replacement – 100 billion over its lifetime. You know there’s lots of things we need to invest in. We need to spend money on warm, comfortable, affordable… to heat homes for everybody. We need to not spend 15 billion on roads, but spend that on public transport instead.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

NATALIE BENNETT:
We should not build extra runways in the South East.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. We might have (if the polls are right) a very, very evenly balanced range of parties, which you may have a few MPs but yet be quite important in forming another government. And, therefore, it’s interesting to know whether Trident, getting rid of Trident would be an absolute red line for you. Would you deal with any party that was
going to keep Trident nuclear submarines?

NATALIE BENNETT:
Well at the moment we’re not talking red lines. What we’re saying is that’s our policy. You know we join with the SNP and Plaid to get together and say we’re here. People who vote for us know they’re voting anti-Trident, they’re voting anti-austerity. You know we’ve got Greens around the country - 43,000 Green members of England and Wales as of this morning. That’s double where we were two months ago. People are getting the chance to hear our message and they’re liking it.

ANDREW MARR:
So a little bit like Mr Clegg and tuition fees last time round. You can say you’re against Trident, but actually come the time you might be inside a government which is keeping Trident.

NATALIE BENNETT:
No, we have very clearly said we’re not looking towards a coalition; we’re looking towards confidence and supply. So what that would mean, we would be able to vote …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Vote by vote?

NATALIE BENNETT:
(over) … vote by vote. So we can vote against Trident and we would vote against Trident.

ANDREW MARR:
One other really big issue of course is your economic policy. You want to give a kind of citizen’s income (I think you call it) of £80 a week to everybody in the country regardless of whether they’re in prison, whether they’re asylum seekers or anything. Now this has been costed at £240 billion a year, which seems an extraordinary amount of money. How are you possibly going to raise the money for that?
NATALIE BENNETT:
Well, first of all, in terms of what we need to do broadly across the economy, we need to make rich individuals and particularly multinational companies pay their taxes. Under this government corporate tax take is down 14 per cent. And in terms of the citizen’s income, it’s worth saying that what that would do is as soon as you’re earning any sort of reasonable amount of money, the tax system takes that back; but what the universal citizen’s income offers is a sense of security. No-one …

ANDREW MARR:
A guaranteed lower floor.

NATALIE BENNETT:
… no-one needs to live in fear. No-one needs to think I’ve just been sanctioned, I cannot put food on the table, I’m going to lose my house next week. We have to get away from that insecurity and fear that’s so permeating our society.

ANDREW MARR:
But finally, to make all that happen you do need to raise income taxes on the better off, don’t you?

NATALIE BENNETT:
Well we’ve already announced the wealth tax for people who are worth more than £3 million – a tax of 1 to 2 per cent. That would raise about a quarter to half of the cost to the NHS. And that’s a recognition of the fact that you know wealthy people get their wealth from society. If you’re a company, you have workers, you have customers. They should pay back fairly for the wealth that they’re gaining.

ANDREW MARR:
Now if you’re able to take part in a TV debate, those are the kind of points you’ll be making. We’re going to come back to that later in the programme, but for now, Natalie Bennett, thank you very much indeed.

ENDS