

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 19TH JUNE, 2016

I/V JEREMY CORBYN

09:23

AM: Good morning, Mr Corbyn, before we start you obviously knew Jo as a colleague. Any particular memories of her as a person?

JC: Very passionate, very committed. Before she became an MP worked for Oxfam and anti-slavery and became elected for Batley and Spen, an area that she grew up in and clearly loved very much. And I was there on Friday for – a vigil and to lay wreaths at the Priestley statue in the centre of the town and to write memories in the condolence book in the church. And what struck me was the unity of the crowd. All ethnic groups, everybody there together, totally shocked and in grief at what happened, because many have said to me, this was a murder of her, but it was also an attack on democracy and an attack on the right of somebody to be elected to represent you and to go about their business. And I think we should also think for a moment of the two people that intervened to try and help her, one of whom is still in hospital, a retired miner who tried to protect her. He'll be out soon, we hope, and we've lost a great talent, we've lost somebody with vision who spoke up in parliament for human rights, spoke up for peace in Syria and so many other places.

AM: It's interesting what you say about the community because people talk a lot of the time about MPs and the political class being distanced from their community and she was somebody who was clearly absolutely rooted in that place. People felt that she was very much one of theirs.

JC: The whole point of democracy and involvement is that when you elect somebody to a council, a union executive, anything else,

Member of Parliament, if you're to do your job you cannot leave the area or the people or the place that put you there. So if we move our MPs into some sort of hermetically sealed container where they're shipped from place to place to opine on everything then we lose everything. I mean I love my constituency –

AM: This is the big dilemma, isn't it now?

JC: Indeed. I love my constituency, I love my community and what I love is just walking about chatting to people, many of whom I've known for many years, because that way you pick up the reality of legislation, the reality, in our case, of austerity and the poverty that goes with it, and that you're better informed to do your job. If you're in some kind of security bubble, you very rapidly lose all of that and we have to defend that and we have to defend people against this kind of appalling attack that took place. It is not the first time, other MPs have been assaulted.

AM: Stephen Timms was attacked.

JC: Stephen Timms was assaulted, George Galloway was assaulted, a number of others were assaulted and there have been political attacks. Mohammed Salim was killed in Birmingham not so long and Ian Gow was killed in 1990.

AM: Were you aware of a growing worry about the possibility of physical attacks? Chris Bryant, the Shadow Leader of the House has said that he thought eventually somebody was going to be killed.

JC; Chris and I have talked about this and others have and the levels of security that MPs need and want. Obviously there is a degree of vulnerability. If you have an open office and an open advice bureau, which is what we all want to do because you want to see everybody, however complicated or difficult their problems

or lives are, you don't want to be cut off from them but at the same time you need security of some sort to protect people. But it's not just for MPs, it's for everybody, because MPs just protecting themselves is of course essential and important, as tragically the death of Jo showed. But everybody else needs to be protected against any kind of attack, whatever the appalling motive might be behind that attack.

AM: It was interesting seeing after this dreadful attack you and the Prime Minister standing shoulder to shoulder at that memorial service and putting wreaths and putting messages down there. There has been a suggestion when the Commons regroups again tomorrow to give tributes to Jo Cox that the party should break up and sit on each other's benches, that the whole place should mingle. Are you attracted by that?

JC: I received that suggestion last night actually and we're thinking about that and have a talk tomorrow, but tomorrow is going to be a dignified occasion, it's not going to be a time for lots of long speeches.

AM: It would say quite a lot, wouldn't it, about all MPs standing together?

JC: Indeed. An MP has died. It's an attack on all of us. In her memory we have to create a more tolerant society. In her memory we have to reach out.

AM: Do you think that the recent political atmosphere, the Referendum or anything else has contributed to a more anti politics, anti MP mood in any way at all?

JC: Well I do. I think that MPs are perceived to be cut off. In reality most are not. Decision making is seen to be cut off and the lives of so many people, whether they face housing problems,

they face insecurity at work, they face falling living standards, they face problems where their children can't get any housing, all those issues do make people feel well, hang on, what's the political system ever doing for me, what's it doing for us? And so we then go on a sort of race to the bottom, reducing working conditions, making life more difficult for people, I think it creates a sense of anger and insecurity. And what's the answer to that? Is the answer to that to kick out or is the answer to that to unite together and do something different?

AM: Well one of the things that's going on clearly is if we vote to leave the EU, part of the story behind that will be lots and lots of traditional Labour voters as it were not listening to you or to the party leadership on immigration and going in a UKIP direction on immigration. Do you accept that in some sense the party has lost the ear of a lot of your traditional white working class constituents?

JC: I think we've had several years of endless newspaper headlines blaming everything on migration without ever being prepared to look at the reality of the exploitation of people in this country and across Europe. The Mike Ashley story, Sports Direct at Shirebrook Colliery, Dennis Skinner made an absolutely brilliant point in parliament the other day. He said when he worked there when it was a pit there were people from all over Europe working there together as miners. Same pay, same conditions, same housing, same Union. Now there are several hundred people working on zero hours contracts who've been shipped from elsewhere. The answer to that isn't to blame them, the answer is yes, at one level to blame Mike Ashley, but at the other level to blame the lack of regulation of working conditions both here and in other parts of Europe. So the posting of Workers' Directive, which protect against that is actually very important.

AM: Do you think that immigration is not an issue therefore, or shouldn't be an issue, it's some kind of false consciousness, because there are a lot of people really, really worried about the effects on school places, on housing, on public services and on wage compression?

JC: The reality is more than two million British people live in Europe. Quite a lot of people from the European Union, mainly from Poland, have made their homes in Britain. Are working, paying taxes and all that. The issues surely have to be to improve working conditions, improve protections all across Europe and look at those that are making a great deal of money out of this exploitation. So I mentioned the posting of Workers' Directives, this is also about protecting local wages and conditions. So if everybody coming in had to be paid the relevant local rate things would be different and I suspect the number of people coming would probably be reduced as a result.

AM: And do you think worries about immigration would then evaporate under those circumstances?

JC: I think they would reduce. I also think there has to be the reintroduction of the Migrant Impact Fund which Gordon Brown as Prime Minister introduced in I think 2008, which was a special payment that would go to local authorities where there had been big changes. In the same way in the 1960s the then Labour government introduced a Commonwealth Immigration Fund for the same purpose.

AM: Some of those communities which feel they have been very badly adversely affected by the sheer number of people coming in would get extra help for more schools, more hospital places and so forth?

JC: Absolutely. So you don't blame people. You actually end up – it brings people together to achieve a better society for all and recognise that we have a lot of young people studying, working in Europe, we have a lot of young Europeans working and studying here, people move around. That actually is quite good all round. It gives people a wider experience and actually helps to generate scientific research as well as employment opportunities across the whole continent.

AM: Is there any kind of upper limit to immigration coming into this country?

JC: I don't think you can have one while you have a free movement of labour and I think the free movement of labour means that you have to balance the economy so you have to improve living standards and conditions. And so that means the European Union's appalling treatment of Greece, particularly the European Central Bank as well as the European Union, that is a problem. So if you actually deliberately lower living standards and increase poverty in certain countries in south east or eastern Europe then you're bound to have a flow of people looking for somewhere else to go. Surely the issue is an anti-austerity, a growth package all across Europe rather than this.

AM: So you could call yourself unequivocally a pro immigration politician. Brendan Cox whose wife was killed, has said that politicians – I don't know whether he includes you or not – but politicians at the top have been far too feeble in making the case for immigration, they have allowed the argument to be made by the far right and they have whipped up this atmosphere.

JC: I spoke to Brendan last night. We were talking about this whole issue, that the far right have been allowed to grasp the agenda. And Farage for example puts up that appalling poster which has a picture of a lot of desperate people fleeing from war

saying, they're coming to threaten us. Hello, I think Rowan Williams called it absolutely right this morning when he said we have to play our part in dealing with the refugee crisis, all of us. It's a humanitarian crisis.

AM: But there are lots and lots and lots of people around this country who do feel that immigration is for them a problem, they see their communities changing very, very quickly and they feel their identity is challenged and they feel their kids are not getting school places and so forth. They are not racists. They're not far right people. They're just people really worried about immigration and they feel that people like you are not really listening to them.

JC: I'm not calling them racists. What I'm saying is it's a failure of our government to properly fund local authorities. It's a failure of our government to provide housing for people. It's a failure of our government for the first time in 20 years, 30 years maybe, attacking school budgets. It's that that is the problem and they should turn their anger against this government and the austerity that's been put forward by Cameron and Osborne over the past six years.

AM: Your Deputy, Tom Watson, has said there has to be an end to the free movement of people, there have to be limits put to migration, do you agree with him? You clearly don't.

JC: Tom and I had a chat about this. What we're both agreed on, all of us are agreed on is there has to be a greater equality of working conditions. There has to be the preventing of undercutting, there has to be an end to the idea of the race to the bottom in working conditions. At the end of the day workers working alongside each other should be treated the same and paid the same and have the same rights. They don't at the moment.

AM: There are people watching this now, Mr Corbyn, who will say okay, here's somebody who's in favour of uncontrolled, unlimited immigration, that terrifies me. That scares me. Those people have no choice now but to vote to leave the EU.

JC: There is no uncontrolled immigration. It is actually

AM: Well there is from the EU.

JC: There's free movement of people across the EU which goes both ways. I pointed out more than two million British people are living in Europe, it goes both ways. There is controlled immigration from outside Europe and there has been certainly ever since the 1960s in quite severe form. I represent a very mixed constituency where there are great problems of getting family reunion and there are not equal rights for people coming in from Europe. They don't get benefits immediately; they don't get access to housing immediately, all those kind of things. It's not totally uncontrolled.

AM: But in terms of EU migration there is no way of a British government controlling that and therefore people who are worried about that should vote for Brexit, because that is the only answer to this.

JC: It's the very principle of a single market across Europe is the free movement of people. If you have the free movement of capital you should also have the free movement of people. What I do think is we should turn our issues on austerity on this country and indeed the generality of austerity across a lot of Europe. We should also turn our anger quite a lot on the tax havens and the tax avoidance which is only latterly begun to be dealt with by the European Union and Britain has a big role to play in this because we actually have as Crown dependent territories quite a lot of tax havens.

AM: This will disappoint some Labour voters watching this programme, people who might come to your constituents and say, 'Mr Corbyn, I'm really, really worried about the sheer number of people coming in here, I'm sorry, I know you don't agree with me but it worries me a lot.' Those people, those are the people who are now moving towards the leave side of the argument. And if we leave as a country it will be partly because lots and lots of Labour voters outside the metropolis and outside Scotland and the rest of England vote Leave.

JC: If we leave as a country exactly the same arguments are going to be made. About housing, about jobs, about social security, all those issues are going to be exactly the same on Friday as they are on Thursday. The only thing is it's going to be slightly more difficult or very much more difficult because the trade arrangements with Europe are now quite deeply embedded, very large number of jobs in Britain do depend on exports to Europe. Now I'm not a catastrophist, but I do say people should think very, very carefully about the direction in which we're going. If we want to have good conditions and good social security for all of us that means it has to be thought of in this country but also across Europe as a whole. And also let's not turn our back on the humanitarian crisis as existing around Europe. I urge people to think quite carefully on the very wise words of Rowan Williams this morning.

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