ANDREW MARR:
Now I was very struck by something you said this week about the Labour party and yourselves. You said there were parts of the country where the Liberal Democrats could win but Labour couldn’t, and presumably vice versa. And it seemed that you were tip toeing towards the idea of some more general agreement with the Labour department depending on I suppose who leads it.

TIM FARRON:
Well I think that there’s no doubt whatsoever, as you said in the opening piece there, that the need for a Liberal party and for the Liberal Democrats to survive and thrive has never been greater. I think the threat to this country from David Cameron taking barely a third of the vote and yet exercising power in such appalling ways, attack on freedom of information; we may talk about Syria, the rather worrying developments there, the selling of housing association properties. So there’s a real need for a liberal party, and the Liberal Democrats are the only party who can be that. But I’ve never been a tribalist (Sic.), I’ve always taken the view that we should work with others. Whether they be on the progressive wing or other parts
of politics, to try and make sure that we achieve what we want. And I see a real power grab from the Tories as they allow their big donors to buy elections effectively, because they’ve unreconstructed party funding systems, and indeed you can see the boundary changes and other ways in which David Cameron is, I think either accidentally but more likely cynically, pushing Scotland further and further from the Union, perhaps to entrench Tory power in England and Wales. Now that’s terrifying to any Democrat, it’s terrifying to me, and I think we should work with other parties to try to make sure that’s prevented.

ANDREW MARR:
Over the years, under different leaders, going way back to Paddy Ashdown and beyond, we used this odd word ‘equidistant’ endlessly about the Liberal Democrats, you had to be exactly the same distance away from the Conservatives as you were from the Labour Party. It sounds to me from what you’re saying that equidistance is now dead.

TIM FARRON:
No Andrew, that’s not what I’m saying. I think for example, one of the reasons why it’s right for us to say that in any future balanced parliament you don’t rule in or rule out any partner that -

ANDREW MARR:
But you sound appalled by the Conservatives?

TIM FARRON:
What’s that sorry I can’t hear very well –

ANDREW MARR:
I’m sorry, you sound appalled by the Conservatives at the moment. They are not people that you would like to get in bed with again very quickly. Given what they did to you last time I’m not surprised.

TIM FARRON:
I think the point I’m making is that we are the Liberal Democrats, ok. We are an independent party. And our growth would be stunted if we were just to become an adjunct of another party. So I am absolutely clear that we will also fight the Labour Party on their authoritarian
support for things like, I mean I suspect that they are with Jack Straw’s involvement, going to be involved in the watering down of the Freedom of Information Act. They look to be very, very, I would say sitting on the fence on the issue of Syria and ISIS which worries me hugely at this moment and likewise on the selling off of housing association properties. These are things that the Liberal Democrats will be able to take a lead on and only the Liberal Democrats, that’s why I mean there are I would say millions of people in this country who count themselves liberals in their heart and my job is to convince them to become Liberal Democrats, to sign up to vote for us and join this fight back.

ANDREW MARR:
So all that said, if it’s the case that you can only win in parts of the country and Labour can’t and vice versa, that sounds to me as if you are tip toeing towards a more general agreement by which eventually you might not stand against each other in particularly sensitive parts of the country. Is that possible?

TIM FARRON:
No, not at all. Sorry Andrew that would be a good story wouldn’t it –

ANDREW MARR:
- It would be a great story, go on!

TIM FARRON:
Yes I apologise for spoiling that for you. I think in the end we have a terrible electoral system which I think it’s on the record we are hugely opposed to and want to reform, so that everybody’s vote counts. I think it’s an outrage that twenty-five percent of the people in this country voted for parties that got ten seats between them.

ANDREW MARR:
We had a referendum and the country voted against electoral reform, not that long ago.

TIM FARRON:
Sure. Indeed. But twenty five percent of people voted UKIP, Green, or Liberal Democrat and got ten MPs between them. But given we have the electoral system that we do then people will look at places like the west country, like Cumbria, like Northumberland, North
Yorkshire, many of the suburbs of greater Manchester, Birmingham, and London, and see the Liberal Democrats as the main opponents there to the Conservatives. And certainly in those areas what I am saying is progressives should come and support the Liberal Democrats. And you know what you should go one further than just lending your vote, you should enthusiastically back us because Britain desperately needs a liberal party, that liberal movement is under threat –

ANDREW MARR:
Alright you’ve said that –

TIM FARRON:
As I’ve said before, we are essential but not inevitable, our survival is not inevitable, please come and join us and make that survival more than inevitable.

ANDREW MARR:
You also said this week I think talking to the Guardian that you found the prospects for civil liberties in Scotland under the SNP quite terrifying. That’s an extraordinary thing to say. How do you justify that?

TIM FARRON:
Well I mean look, as far as I’m, I’m a Cumbrian and I would normally spend my weekends in Cumbria. Actually more than the weekend to be honest. And I’m down in the west country at the moment. But I am very close to Scotland. We share, I hope this isn’t a foul word, but we share an ITV region with Scotland where I am. And we get a very great sense of what’s going on in Scotland at the moment, I have lots of family who are Scottish. It’s important that we, south of the border, have an understanding of what nationalism is. First of all, I think it’s absolutely right to pay tribute to what has been a very exciting movement with the SNP and their success in the election. And it’s important not to be ungracious towards them.

ANDREW MARR:
So what’s terrifying?

TIM FARRON:
However, it’s important to note what nationalists are doing in government. They have a
single, central politicised police force where police on the streets of the highlands, and there aren’t many streets in the highlands, are automatically now tooled up. We have an ID database system which is very similar to the one that Tony Blair tried to introduce. In Edinburgh they’re setting forth with plans to have facial recognition software on CCTV, so there’s a real sense of almost Orwellian Big Brother authoritarianism up there. And that makes me understand by the way that there is no room for the Labour party in Scotland. You might think that’s a peculiar thing to say but what are the SNP? They are Centre Left and authoritarian. In other words, just like the Labour Party. So in Scotland there is no room for Labour, bags of room for a liberal party, and I hope we’re going to fill that space.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Now you have been very outspoken, some would say brave about declaring your Christian faith and how important it is to you. Do you think that there is a kind of liberal sneering approach to Christians? Do you think Christians get put down in the media at the moment?

TIM FARRON:
No. I mean I’m here as the leader of the Liberal Democrats and I’m not a religious leader. My faith is my own. When asked about it I’m upfront about it. I’m somebody who -

ANDREW MARR:
You’ve said it’s important about you and therefore it must be important to the way you lead the party. And some people are worried about your real commitment to for instance, gay rights and gay marriage. I know you voted for that, but you voted against the law which would have cracked down on businesses discriminating against gay people and I don’t quite understand why you did that.

TIM FARRON:
No I mean let me be crystal clear. I am a liberal and I absolutely support equality. I absolutely support equality. And I’m passionate about LGBT plus rights for example. And as the leader of a liberal party, that is something that will be at the top of my agenda throughout the time that I am leader of our party –

ANDREW MARR:
Ok so why did you vote against that law?

TIM FARRON:
Not just defending the law on equal marriage but also saying there are areas where it needs to be extended. One area of concern that many liberals had, and I was one of those, was that for example transgender people don’t have the same access to equal marriage as others because of what’s known as the spousal vetoes. And that area of liberty, freedom –

ANDREW MARR:
I’m sorry, I understand all that. But my question was different. My question was why did you vote against the Equality Bill?

TIM FARRON:
Oh gosh, we’re going back a few years now. Essentially it was about protection of individual liberties.

ANDREW MARR:
Explain that.

TIM FARRON:
We as a party put down an amendment to that motion back in two thousand and seven or eight, against a Blair set of policies. And our amendment was defeated and then Liberal Democrat MPs, basically some of us decided to support regulations and some of us decided not to.

ANDREW MARR:
So what was your point of principle?

TIM FARRON:
But I am absolutely in favour of equal access under law for all people, whatever their sexuality.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright Tim Farron for now, thank you very much indeed for joining us.