INTERVIEW WITH:
ED MILIBAND, LEADER, LABOUR PARTY

ANDREW MARR: The Leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband is with me now. Welcome.

ED MILIBAND: Great to be here.

ANDREW MARR: Thank you. I think this morning, your Party is going to be debating the union link. By the time of the next election, will that automatic voting power of the big union bosses have gone?

ED MILIBAND: Well, let me start by saying what the conference is about. It’s about how we tackle the cost of living crisis that we face in our country and in order to do that, we’ve also got to change the kind of party we are. I want a party that hears the voices of individual working people, people who work from call centres to construction sites, in our party now, they’re affiliated, linked to our party, but I don’t think we hear their voices properly enough. So the changes I’m talking about are really big changes that will make that happen.

ANDREW MARR: I come back to the question, which is, will the voting power of the union bosses have gone by the time of the next election?

ED MILIBAND: Look, one of the issues we’ve been looking at in our review, is how we address the consequences of the big change I’m talking about, which is where our focus is. I think Tony Blair described the changes as a revolutionary transformational change. (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: (both together) ... I’m wondering whether it is or not.

ED MILIBAND: ... which is he wishes that he had done. That’s where our focus is. A huge change in our party which says the individuals, who are currently affiliated, on block to the party, we’re saying to them, look we’re going to ask you to make an active choice to be part of our party, so you can have a voice in our party. Now, (interjection) ...

ANDREW MARR: But for most people ...

ED MILIBAND: ... (both together) ... major change.
ANDREW MARR: The really big question is, does Andrew Marr, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Broadcasters, put his hand up and say, I’ve got five million votes here, does that carry on?

ED MILIBAND: I think the really big question for people watching this programme Andrew is how we deal with their living standards crisis. And is Labour going to be a Party that deals with that and that’s the changes I’m talking about. You see the changes to our Party will make that happen and of course, those issues about the way our conference works and all of that, will of course be looked at, as part of our review and then … (?) … just started and that’s what we’re doing.

ANDREW MARR: So at this stage, we don’t know the answer to what I was asking but it is, you said only I think three months ago, after Falkirk, it’s the end of the old politics, we have to change to a new politics. It seems to me that you’re not absolutely clear how that’s going to happen yet.

ED MILIBAND: Oh, I’m absolutely clear how that’s going to happen but it’s going to be … (interjection) ….

ANDREW MARR: (both together) … do I lose my massive vote?

ED MILIBAND: It’s going to be happening by linking to those individual working people, those individual members of trade unions. I think that is the big issue for our party. Look for politics generally, the question is, do we hear the voices of ordinary people. This isn’t the only reform I want in our politics. I want to say to MPs for example, that you shouldn’t be having second jobs, paid jobs, accountable to the shareholders of a big company, rather than accountable to the public. It’s how do we change the politics of Britain. That’s what I’m focused on and changing our party is a big part of that and we’re embarking on these big changes.

ANDREW MARR: One last question about changing the Party. This happened at Falkirk, you said this was disgraceful and it was a really shameful period. Clearly, the information you had about Falkirk was wrong. Len Cluskey says that he’s vindicated. Do you not owe him and his candidate there an apology?

ED MILIBAND: No, I don’t think anybody can be proud of what happened in Falkirk. The candidate around whom there was controversy has withdrawn, we closed down the scheme around which the issues were raised and we’re on this big reform of our party. So I think anybody looking at our response …. (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: (both together) …. We don’t know quite how big a reform it’s going to be.

ED MILIBAND: Anybody looking at our response to Falkirk would say, Look, this is a party that has recognised some issues but it needs to move on, it needs to change the way it works and that’s what we’re doing.

ANDREW MARR: Now you’re always criticised for not having enough policies. Yesterday you announced a policy on immigration which would allow, as I understand it, big companies, bigger companies who need specialised workers from
abroad, from India, often computer people, to bring them in, as long as they create an apprenticeship for each job that they bring in. Is that right?

ED MILIBAND: Well, let me set out what we’re going to do. In our first year in office, we will legislate for an immigration bill which has secure control of our borders, cracks down on exploitation, of workers coming in, undercutting workers already here and says to big companies that bringing people from outside the EU, that they can do that within a cap, but they’ve got to train the next generation. I think that’s the right approach. Why is it so important? It’s about making our economy really work for working people in our country and training up our people, that is the way to tackle the standards of living issues that so many families are facing in this country. So it’s part of the focus of our conference of how we change our economy.

ANDREW MARR: Would your policy cut immigration?

ED MILIBAND: I do want to get low skill immigration down and therefore overall immigration down yes. And I think that’s important.... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: Are you concerned about the number of Romanians and Bulgarians who will be coming in very soon?

ED MILIBAND: Well, obviously there are always issues about that. But that’s going to be happening. But let me make this point about how we get low skill migration down. Look, one of the issues we’ve got as a country is that too often, governments of both parties have turned a blind eye to the fact that the minimum wage is not being observed, recruitment agencies are only hiring from abroad. All of those practices that we all know go on – you know, I think there are two prosecutions since 2010 for failing to pay the minimum wage, but we’re going to change that. At the moment the maximum fine for not paying the minimum wage? Five thousand pounds. If you engage in fly tipping, it’s fifty thousand pounds. What kind of set of priorities is that? We’re going to change that in this country. We’re going to crack down on those kind of practices by employers which frankly many, many good employers abhor just as much as you and I.

ANDREW MARR: You used a slightly strange word about the minimum wage originally, you said you were going to strengthen it. That seems to mean enforcement. Are you also going to raise the minimum wage?

ED MILIBAND: Well it starts with enforcement, that’s important but I think we also have to look at this issues as we face the issue that in this country, thirty eight out of thirty nine months that David Cameron has been Prime Minister, prices have risen faster than wages. That’s the issue that we’re facing. And the national minimum wage is a great achievement of the last Labour government. I do want to strengthen it. But I want to do it in the right way and I want to do it in a one nation way which says, business and working people looking at these issues together, that’s why we’re looking at two sets of issues. One about the value of the minimum wage.

ANDREW MARR: Will that go up under Labour, to be clear.
ED MILIBAND: The value of the minimum wage which has been falling back over time and the second issue is whether there is a case in certain sectors, like finance for example, for having a higher minimum wage. Now why do I say that? Because the minimum wage ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: (both together)

ED MILIBAND: ... must be set, well indeed. Because the minimum wage must be set at a level where it’s not going to cost jobs. That’s really important and so that’s what we’ve got to look at but let me make this point. It’s really important that we do this in a way that.... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: Going back to my original question if I may. Will the minimum wage, the basic minimum wage go up under Labour.

ED MILIBAND: Well that’s something we’re going to look at but I ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: You’re not going to, you don’t even say that, that’s extraordinary, given that it’s fallen back under this government because of the lack of inflation proofing. But you can’t say that will be ended under New Labour?

ED MILIBAND: I want to see, I want a one nation Labour. I want to see (interjection) I want to see the minimum wage go up over time. (interjection) I want to see the minimum wage go up over time but I think it’s really important, if I was coming on this programme and saying, I’m going to just pluck out of the air, a figure of how much the minimum would go up, then you’d say, well is that really responsible? Look, we’re going to be a Party and a government that makes this economy work in a different way, but we’re going to do it in the right way, in a responsible way, learning lessons about how you do these things.

ANDREW MARR: During the paper review, we were talking about the Sunday Times splash on the twenty seven billion pound black hole that the Treasury says, not politicians, the Treasury says that you have at the moment. One way to start to deal with that would be to look at raising taxes more. Rachel Reeves has said that people earning around £60,000 are not considered by one nation Labour to be rich people. Is that true? Are they, as it were, safe from tax increases?

ED MILIBAND: Well let me first deal with the nonsense story that you mentioned. Let me be clear. We’ve said in 2015/16 that Labour won’t be borrowing more for day to day spending. We’ve been absolutely clear about that. The next Labour government is going to be facing different circumstances from the last. Ed Balls and I have both said that times are going to be tough and frankly, I think Treasury ministers – are you worrying about the cost of living crisis facing families, ....

BOTH TOGETHER

ED MILIBAND: ... not making up things about the Labour party ....

BOTH TOGETHER

ANDREW MARR: Are you going to keep the cap on public sector wages going up?
ED MILIBAND: That’s got to be looked at. We’re conducting, as any opposition would do, a review of all of the items of government spending. All of the hundreds of billions of pounds of government spending because it’s really important that anything we come forward with is properly costed. You know, we made this promise on the bedroom tax at the beginning of our conference. Absolutely clearly costed, closing the tax loop holes that this government has allowed because they stand up for the privileged few so we can create an economy that really works for working people in this country. So, and this is the point about the difference a one nation Labour government would make Andrew, it’s not about borrowing more money for day to day spending. What it is about is making different choices on behalf of the British people and I think that’s what’s coming through at this conference. Different priorities, different choices. A Prime Minister who will wake up every morning, not thinking about those at the top, but thinking how do we help ordinary families in this country.

ANDREW MARR: So that’s pretty generalised, I’m just pressing for a few of the specifics. As I say about tax, for instance. Rachel Reeves has also said a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, people ought to be making more of a contribution, which presumably means higher taxes. Do you have a clear view yet on a top rate of income tax for people who by most standards, have paid a lot of money?

ED MILIBAND: Look we'll set out our tax plans at the election. We’ve said for example, that on the issue of a tax on homes above two million pounds, we think that’s something we want to do, to bring in a new ten pence starting rate of income tax.

ANDREW MARR: Is that a tax on the total value of the house or a bit above, of the value that’s above two million?

ED MILIBAND: Well we’re looking at exactly how that’s done but the principle is very, very clear on this. Which is that we do want a fairer tax system and we want to have different choices and the different choices that a Labour government would make.

ANDREW MARR: I’m interested in income tax because the mansion tax, so called, doesn’t raise a huge amount of money but income tax does raise a huge amount of money and you could put in a new rate of income tax for as it were the very rich, the very highly paid.

ED MILIBAND: Well we certainly, our position to the millionaires tax cut, the tax cut this government brought in is very, very clear. But as any responsible opposition will do, we’ll set out our tax plans at the election. You know, this is my approach and this is Ed Balls’ approach is to say, everything must be costed, everything must be clearly funded because that’s what people expect from us, but the priorities for the country are so different. This government allows peoples wages to be falling back, peoples living standards to be falling and then they’re expecting congratulations for what a great recovery it is.

ANDREW MARR: Are you personally minded to have a higher rate of income tax or not?
ED MILIBAND: We’ll set out our plans at the election. (overlaps)

ANDREW MARR: It's just that, I mean you’ve got this policy review which was likened by one of your colleagues to a pregnant panda. It was very large but you’re not quite sure that’s going to come out. I’m searching for little baby pandas, and I think we’ve got one little baby panda ... (interjection)

ED MILIBAND: I think they’ve got quite a lot of them actually. We’ve talked about the bedroom tax and how we’re going to change that. We’ve talked about strengthening the minimum wage, we’ve talked about child care from 08.00 in the morning, till six pm at night, (overlaps) ... Giving our schools ...

BOTH TOGETHER

ED MILIBAND: ... immigration. I think we’re talking about the bread and butter issues that the British people face. You see here’s the big issue in politics today and I think it’s really important to make this point. I’ll talk about it in my speech on Tuesday. For generations in this country, when the economy grew, the majority of people got better off. Now that vital ink between the growing wealth of the country and people's family finances has been broken and the question is, for the British people. Is there a party that’s going to tackle that. Is there a party that’s going to tackle that.

ANDREW MARR: Can you deal with that.

BOTH TOGETHER

ED MILIBAND: Well I can tell you how we’ll deal with it.

BOTH TOGETHER

ANDREW MARR: ... means minimum wage. It means the cap on public sector spending and it means tax and you can’t give me answers on any of those.

ED MILIBAND: I’ll tell you how we'll deal with them. You’re absolutely right that it’s about how we deal with it. It’s about creating higher paid jobs in this country, which is why our policy on apprenticeships, for as many as a hundred thousand more apprenticeships is so important. It’s about fairer decisions on tax. I’ve given you an example on the bedroom tax. And it’s also about cracking down on some of those vested interests the train companies and others who are actually taking people for a ride under this government. It’s a clear way of tackling that number one issue that the British people face.

ANDREW MARR: Can I go to another huge issue I think for a lot of people which is Europe because there’s been two arguments about a referendum. One, some people in your party say, you should declare for an ‘in’ ‘out’ European Referendum, that’s the way to scupper UKIP and it creates a huge number of problems for the Tories who can then no longer say, you’re going to have to vote Tory for a referendum. And then there’s others who say that’s dangerous because if you held a referendum you might lose it. Which side do you incline on that.
ED MILIBAND: We've got a very clear view about this which is we think it's wrong now to commit to an 'in' 'out' referendum in four years time. And why do I say that, because the issue for the British people is about jobs, living standards and all of those issues. So that's the position we take.

ANDREW MARR: And you're going to stick to that, you're not going to come pro-referendum before the election.

ED MILIBAND: Well, as I say, we set out a very, very clear position on this. But you know, we'll set out our position at the election.

ANDREW MARR: Okay, let's move to yet another policy issue which is education. Are you in favour of the expansion of free schools.

ED MILIBAND: No, we're not in favour of the expansion of free schools. We wouldn't be building more free schools.

ANDREW MARR: Would you close ones that are operating.

ED MILIBAND: No, I think if there are good schools operating, then that should be allowed to carry on and obviously we'll make a judgement about that. But let me go to the bigger issue about free schools in this country, which I think is really important to say, which is that is it driving up educational standards? Actually, what you've got is unqualified teachers in the classroom and that I think is a problem. You've got free schools being built in areas where there are too many, where there are already enough school places, when you've got a massive primary school .... (interjection) ....

BOTH TOGETHER

ANDREW MARR: You've got the example of I think it's Birmingham, where you've got a free school, which is an Islamic free school, where all the women involved, Islamic or not, have to wear Niqab or Hijab and where the girls are being segregated inside the classroom. Do you think it's right that public money is being given to schools behaving like that.

ED MILIBAND: Well I don't know the particular case that that's about. Obviously, I'm not going to comment on that, that was out of the blue .... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: What about the general issue of the Niqab which has been all over the press and still is.

ED MILIBAND: I think the issue of tolerance, us being tolerant about people dressing the way they want to in terms of their religious or cultural symbols is an important part of Britain, whatever religion they are. Obviously, if there are issues in public services, they should be looked at.

ANDREW MARR: Now, I mentioned right at the start of the programme, all the Damian McBride stuff and the McPoison business. Was that a horrible shock to you
when you opened the papers or was there a sense of weary acknowledgement remembering what went on.

ED MILIBAND: I think it’s a reminder that we must have no factions and no briefing in the Labour Party. (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: ... (both together) ... spin doctors now, look at this stuff, no more of this ever again.

ED MILIBAND: Day one, when I became leader I said that. Look, that’s the way I run the Labour Party. I think one thing people will say, you know you get different people’s advice as a leader.

ANDREW MARR: You do, yeah.

ED MILIBAND: And as you may have noticed, but I think, you know, whoever, whatever views people have about that, I think people appreciate the way I’ve run this party, is on the basis of a unified party, not a disunited party.

ANDREW MARR: Sure.

ED MILIBAND: And a party that doesn’t engage in all of those practices of the past.

ANDREW MARR: When that disgraceful business was going on and presumably you think it’s disgraceful and shameful too, the way that the spinning was being conducted. Did you know about it.

ED MILIBAND: Well I went to the Leveson Enquiry – was asked about this actually. I said that it’s a matter of public record, I was concerned about the activities of Damian McBride, indeed I complained to Gordon Brown about it.

ANDREW MARR: What did you know that he was doing when you complained.

ED MILIBAND: I was worried that there were indications that he was briefing against colleagues and I didn’t think that was the way politics should be practised and I think most people ... (interjection)

BOTH TOGETHER

ANDREW MARR: ... know this about the briefing or seen the leaks.

ED MILIBAND: ... was more, you know what it’s like in politics. People tell you that these things are going on and you have enough suspicion that they are, so that was something I made clear to Gordon. I thought it was damaging, deep to the Labour Party.

BOTH TOGETHER

ANDREW MARR: Did you go to Gordon Brown and say, get rid of this guy.

ED MILIBAND: I did yes.
ANDREW MARR: You do, you .... (both together)

ED MILLIBAND:  And if I may say so, look, this is about the way I run our party. Learning the lessons of the past. Whether it’s on the way we do our politics, whether it’s on spending, whether it’s on attitudes we take to foreign policy, learning the lessons of Iraq, on all of those issues, I think what we’ve done over the last three years is we’ve listened, we’ve learnt and now we’re ready to lead.

ANDREW MARR: Ed Balls, when he was asked about this said, yes, it was a terrible period. I was too macho, we were all to macho, we became much too aggressive. Do you feel the same way.

ED MILIBAND: I’m not sure I’ve been accused of being macho.

BOTH TOGETHER

ED MILIBAND: ... that’s a first Andrew. I’ll take that away. Look, I think there are definitely lessons to be learnt about the past. I think I’ve said that.

ANDREW MARR: Let’s turn to the present however because you have had terrible opinion poll ratings both as a party and individually, yourself. There’s another poll in the Sunday Times, I don’t want to rub it in too much but you know, are you a strong leader of your Party? No. 52%, 62% of voters say weak. Has Miliband made it clear what he stands for? 67% no. Is he up to the job of Prime Minister? 63%, No. These are shocking polling figures. Is there any level you recognise, that you have a problem breaking through.

ED MILIBAND: Look, I didn’t come in to this job because it was going to be an easy life. I came in to this job because it was an important thing to do.

ANDREW MARR: So ... (both together) ... about you that people out there have not yet got. How are they going to get it.

ED MILIBAND: Look, you know, I think I’ll let other people judge that because how have I ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: (overlaps) Trouble with that is that they’re judging it rather unfavourably from your point of view.

ED MILIBAND: No, the judgement will be made on General Election day, 2015, that’s when the judgement will be made. But here’s the way I’ve run my leadership of this party. I’ve looked at the issues the British face. I started three years ago at this conference, at our conference, talking about the squeezed middle, the squeeze on living standards. I’ve talked about how we need to change our economy and how we do ... (interjection)

BOTH TOGETHER

ED MILIBAND: ... and all of it adds up to this central point which is who is best placed to tackle the living standards crisis the country faces. So that’s our focus
Andrew ... (interjection)  Let me finish this point. Polls go up and down, one this that goes up and up is the cost of living for ordinary families and I think that’s where their focus is and that’s where my focus is.

ANDREW MARR:  If I was being really cruel I would say your polls go down and down and down, they don’t go up and down.

ED MILIBAND: Well, that, that, that’s, I don’t think that’s quite right but look, here you go.

ANDREW MARR: The real question is, what’s going wrong because I mean you’ve laid out all the messages you’ve described, you know you’ve sat back and been thoughtful about it and yet somehow it’s not yet connecting with the public, so what is going wrong? Is it simply a media conspiracy. What is it.

ED MILIBAND: I don’t think it’s about conspiracies. Look, I think it’s about a party that lost office three years ago. We’re trying to do something unprecedented, which is to be a one term opposition. That’s tough. I didn’t take it on because I thought it would be an easy fight, I thought it would be a tough fight. I believe it’s a fight we can win and I’m up for that fight because I think that the stakes are so high at this election. The stakes are so high for young people who want a job. The stakes are so high for people whose living standards are being squeezed. The stakes are so high for people who think this – that Britain, you know this isn’t good enough for Britain. We can do a lot better.

ANDREW MARR: So what has to change to make that break-through, do you think.

ED MILIBAND: We will spend the next twenty months until the General Election talking about the central issues that the British people face. We’ll show we’ll be a Party that stands up for them and not the privileged few. We’ll show how we create an economy that works for working people and we’ll show how Labour has changed. And Labour has learnt lessons from its past, like on immigration, where we’ve changed. What I’m talking about today, you wouldn’t have got that from previous Labour leaders. It’s a Labour Party that’s changed, it’s a Labour Party that’s moving on.

ANDREW MARR: The policy that you announced today, let’s be clear, would actually increase immigration slightly. The bigger question is whether you’d be able to cut immigration.

ED MILIBAND: No, no, that’s wrong. We wouldn’t increase immigration because ... (interjection) ....

ANDREW MARR: ... it’s about letting in people who are highly qualified.

ED MILIBAND: No, it’s about ... (interjection)

ANDREW MARR: And having apprenticeships to balance that, is it.

ED MILIBAND: No, sorry. Let’s be clear about this. It’s about saying that the existing arrangements for people coming in who are highly qualified. The only
change we’ll make to those arrangements is saying in addition, those companies that bring people in from outside the European Union, also have to train up a local worker.

ANDREW MARR: So it’s … (interjection)

BOTH TOGETHER

ANDREW MARR: … duty, not a new … (interjection)

ED MILIBAND: That’s the difference that we’re making and it’s the right thing to do. It’s what businesses around the country say to me. We can’t win as a country if we’re just on a race to the bottom in skills. And you know, bringing in a skilled workforce is no substitute for building a skilled workforce here in Britain.

ANDREW MARR: Okay, going back to the central question, which is can you pay for it all. Is there nothing you can say more specifically about for instance tax or how you’re going to keep spending down. Because you know, you promised to raise living standards. A lot of the people whose living standards you promised to raise work in the public sector, which is going to raise bills for the public sector.

ED MILIBAND: Well I’ve been very specific. I’ve been very specific about how a Labour government, we’re facing tough times, we won’t borrow more for day to day spending in 2015/16. Really important commitment that we’ve made as a tough commitment and we will make different choices. And what you’ll be seeing from the Labour Party this week is different choices in pursuit of a government that will stand up for ordinary families in this country and tackle the number one issue they face on the cost of living crisis.

ANDREW MARR: This has been an extraordinary interview in certain respects, I’ve called you macho. I haven’t yet asked you about your brother, but I did see you with your family on the beach. That’s not the kind of thing you wanted to do originally was it, to bring your family along … (interjection)

ED MILIBAND: I love having my family here. It’s one of the great things. I mean it’s great spending time with you Andrew but it’s even nicer to spend time with .... (interjection)

BOTH TOGETHER

ED MILIBAND: It’s much nicer to spend time with them. It’s a great support and a great thing for me to have them here.

ANDREW MARR: We’ll talk more after the news. Ed Miliband thanks very much for joining us and over to Nagga for the news headlines.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH ED MILIBAND