ANDREW MARR SHOW, 25TH MARCH, 2018

CAROLINE LUCAS
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AM: What is your hard evidence that there is a connection between the Cambridge Analytica and the Facebook story on the one hand and the Brexit campaign on the other?

CL: Well let me say first of all that I think that what these revelations demonstrate is that there is something rotten at the heart of our democracy and that we need to be overhauling our rules that govern elections; election funding –

AM: Is there really something rotten at the heart of our democracy because I still struggle to see. I mean I can see that data was harvested from naive people who didn’t understand what Facebook was doing and some of it was used by a company claiming to be brilliant, mainly in America and not here. I can’t really see the absolutely clear connection with the Brexit campaign.

CL: Well the links with Vote Leave I think are reasonably clear in terms of the allegations that have been made and yes, for sure we need to have more of an investigation and that’s what I’m calling for. What I want to see is a real investigation into exactly who knew what. You know the ministers associated with the Vote Leave campaign, what did they know about the money that was going to BeLeave, what was the relationship between Vote Leave and BeLeave and then in turn what was the relationship between BeLeave and of course then Aggregate IQ based in Canada. Now this is a really complex network but big, big questions need to be asked and it goes much wider than just the referendum.
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AM: I feel as an observer to this I don’t know who to believe. Everybody is calling everybody else a liar or a charlatan or worse and I assume you’re in the same situation. Neither of us really know what happened.

CL: So we need an inquiry, Andrew.

AM: So we need an inquiry. But we can’t at this stage jump ahead and say therefore that the referendum was illegitimate can we?

CL: I’m not saying that actually. What I am saying is that I think that it calls into question the fact –

AM: The legitimacy of the – I mean your own press release says: ‘this scandal calls into question the legitimacy of the EU referendum.’

CL: I think it adds further questions as to how that referendum was run. What I want to do is not re-run that referendum, what I want to do is to add weight to the argument that we should have a people’s vote on the final deal. I think this is just simply one more piece of argument because I’ve long argued about –

AM: You’re not saying at this point that this referendum was improperly handled or that the outcome was in any sense dubious or dodgy?

CL: I’m saying that there are questions to be answered and I think as you’ve just admitted neither of us actually know the full picture.

AN: Who should conduct the inquiry then ‘Cause the Electoral Commissioner are conducting inquiries of their own at the moment?

CL: Well I think what this whole saga demonstrates really is that the Electoral Commission simply doesn’t have the resource, it doesn’t have the power, it’s been looking at this for over a year
and nothing’s happened. When it comes to data regulation and that’s in the hands of the Information Commissioner, her powers are so feeble that she had to wait for a week to get her people inside the offices of Cambridge Analytica by which time presumably they will have pressed a few delete buttons. So the whole system – that’s why I come back to my original point which is that the whole system needs to be overhauled. We’ve basically got a set of analogue rules trying to deal with the digital age. That’s not working.

AM: And in this digital age can we at least agree that we are both surrounded by a thicket of question marks and that therefore the Green Party press release saying that this calls into question the legitimacy of the referendum is wrong?

CL: I think calls into question is an entirely fair description of that. It calls into question we need to answer those questions.

AM: Yet another question mark. Can I ask you about the second referendum question therefore which you raised yourself?

CL: Can I really challenge you on that? It is not a second referendum. It is a first vote on the final deal. The vote that was had in 2016. No, this is a really important distinction because people will make it sound as if what we’re trying to do is re-run – AM: There was one referendum. That was the first one, and then there’s another one and that’s the second one.

CL: The first one was about whether or not we will depart from the EU. It was not about the destination. What we want is the opportunity for the people to look at the fine print when they see that final deal, because there has been so much that has happened between the referendum of 2016 and where we are now in 2018. So many things were promised and have not come to pass. The 350 million for the NHS and so on.
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AM: I understand all of that. In tactical terms, practical terms, you need a large number of MPs to vote for that proposition in the House of Commons. Were you not therefore pretty disillusioned or depressed when you saw that Jeremy Corbyn sacked Owen Smith, his Northern Ireland Spokesman for speaking out in favour of what I’m still gonna call, another referendum or a second referendum or a referendum hashtag 2?

CL: A people’s poll, Andrew. People’s poll is the phrase. I was disappointed. I think that Brexit is something that goes wider and bigger than party politics. This is absolutely about the future of our country and frankly, when there are so many deep, deep, deep concerns about the way in which Brexit is going, not just the economic concerns but where every single impact assessment the government has done shows us being worse off. It is quite extraordinary to see a government proudly leading us down a road that they admit is going to make us poorer. Add into that concerns about the NHS. The fact that the number of nurses coming into the NHS is down by 90%. Add into that, even more serious in my view, is the situation in Ireland. There’s ideological obsession with leaving the customs union and what that might mean in terms of a hard border in Ireland, so I wish the Labour Party had gone further. I’m glad they’ve got as far as saying yes, we should remain in A or B customs union.

AM: It seems to me this far and no further though, doesn’t it?

CL: It does, and that I think is an absolute - It’s letting down young people in particular, it is a dereliction of their responsibilities as official opposition. They have the opportunity here to save this country from a massive impoverishment and they’re not doing it.
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AM: And yet when you look at the Corbynite Labour Party on the one hand and the Green Party on the other it’s clear that somebody is doing something right and it’s not you guys. Your membership has plunged since 2015 when Jeremy Corbyn became Labour leader and the number of people voting for you has more than halved. And that coincides with Corbyn’s takeover of the Labour Party. So it appears that a lot of the kind of more radical, environmentally minded people who were attracted to the Green Party are turning instead to the Labour Party.

CL: Well look, we have a rotten electoral system. You’re surprised to hear me say that. In 2015 we had a million people voting Green and if we’d have a proportional electoral system that could have delivered us about 20 MPs. Of course it’s no secret that Jeremy Corbyn followed where the Green Party led when it came to some of those social policies and as a result he did very well at that last election. I can’t deny that. But our membership are still massively higher than it was in the run up to 2015 and can I –

AM: Hold on a second. It was 63,000 in 2015 and it is 39,000 now. That’s a massive fall.

CL: What I mean is – no that is a massive drop but we had the Green surge running up to 2015, so what I’m saying is if you take a year before 2015 we were on about 12,000. So up at about 40,000 we are still way above where we were. But can I just say on environment, because although, yes Jeremy Corbyn has famously followed us when it comes to things like bringing rail back into public ownership and some of our social policies, where he hasn’t is on the environment and I just want to say a word about this.

AM: Can I ask you about Sheffield, which is a Labour controlled council where they are demolishing almost all the old trees in the city and that is causing a huge local story and a lot of local upset.
CL: It is a massive story. We’re seeing 6,000 mature, beautiful trees being cut down for no better reason than it’s cheaper to do so under the PFI contract that the Labour councillors have set up and it’s our councillor, the Green councillor, Alison Teal, who has been taking peaceful direct action to protect those trees. The way that her Labour colleagues responded to that was to try to get her having a custodial sentence when she was tried. Now thankfully she was acquitted. But the idea that Labour councillors are trying to persecute someone who has the courage to protect these trees from an entirely commercially driven set of proposals to cut them down, and they are being cut down, I think really shows their true colours I’m afraid.

AM: Let me suggest that you have one other little nightmare going on which is that a Conservative Environment Secretary, Michael Gove when it comes to plastics and animal welfare and cruelty to animals and lots of other issues, lots of issues around health, the health of the countryside and hedgerows, is actually saying things which are attracting the Green vote. George Monbiot, who is about as near as you get to a green guru in the mainstream media has said he can’t believe it. Day after day, week after week a Conservative Environment Secretary saying the kind of things he’s always wanted an Environment Secretary to say.

CL: Well, I think the crucial -

AM: Go Michael Gove, you’re gonna say.

CL: The crucial word that you’ve repeated several times is Gove is saying lots of things and Gove is certainly saying lots of things and to that extent that’s welcome. He’s learnt some of the language. But if you look at the detail – look at that 25 year environment plan. The top line of that was basically saying we will try to get rid of single use plastics by 2042. By a quarter of a century’s time. So there are no real targets. There’s no real sense that this is change from the Michael Gove who not long ago was trying to
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take climate out of the curriculum, we need to see far more ambitious action on the environment because that was the point I was hoping to talk about which was that we are facing a sixth mass extinction. We are over fishing, we are cutting down too many trees, the environmental crisis is getting worse and that is why the Green Party is needed more than ever.

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