AM: We know what your position is overall because you have retweeted #endausteritynow. But I’d like to examine a little bit about what that means. This week we had a high court ruling that it was unlawful and discriminatory to have a welfare cap on single parents, single families with children under the age of two. The Conservatives are going to appeal against that ruling. Labour’s position presumably is you just get rid of that cap.

DA: Absolutely. Well, we would get rid of the – we would make sure we were upholding the ruling from the court decision on Thursday. Can I just mention – I mean that, for people who don’t know, was a judgement that said that it was completely discriminatory, it was having a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of children. We already know we have four million children living in poverty. This is just adding to it. Our position is that it needs to change.

AM: Can I ask you about the overall household cap? At the moment there is an absolute limit to the amount of money you can get from welfare per household. £20,000 outside London, £23,000 inside London. Would you remove that cap?

DA: We recognise that for some people listening to this that might seem an awful lot of money, but the reality is what I’ve just said: the implications for people in the poorest circumstances, the implications around child poverty which affects children not just while they’re young but for the rest of their lives. It affects how their brains develop and everything.

AM: So the answer is yes, that cap would go?
DA: We would be looking to see how we do that.

AM: Right, because how much would that cost, to remove that cap, do you know?

DA: We haven’t costed it yet but we know that, for example, the court ruling is about 50 million. So it’s not an astronomical figure. And we need to make sure – when we talk about ending austerity, Andrew, this is about making it fair. It’s not right that four million children, three quarters of whom are living in working families, are subject to poverty.

AM: A lot of people watching are expecting you to want to end it now. I mean, as soon as possible, not at some point in the future.

DA: And we’re looking at the range of measures that we have. So for example, in terms of what we said about raising the national living wage, a very, very important component, about making sure that we have a regulated private sector rent system, making sure that housing is affordable, that all contributes to it.

AM: Now, those things were in the manifesto. The few things that we’ve talked about today weren’t in the manifesto. Can I ask about something else that wasn’t in the manifesto and there’s some confusion about, which is your attitude to freezing benefits overall. At the moment there is going to be a freeze on benefits until 2020, would Labour end that freeze?

DA: What we have said is that we would reverse a number of measures. So for example, the cut around ESA, work-related activity for disabled people, around personal independence payments that the government very wrongly, in my view, introduced new regulations – if I may just finish this point – introduced new regulations that were going to actually penalise
people with chronic mental health conditions. And we thought that this was absolutely wrong.

AM: But the overall freeze you won’t end?

DA: The overall freeze – no, we didn’t cost that in the manifesto but what we –

AM: And you don’t intend to end it?

DA: What we did say, because there are a whole range of measures and the freeze is one aspect of the 2016 Welfare Reform and Work Act. So for example, around the cuts to work allowances, which makes the universal credit programme absolutely not fit for purpose, it’s not going to make work pay, it isn’t making work pay. We have a situation where people are not receiving any money for six weeks, possibly longer.

AM: So it’s not really end austerity now is it, it’s end austerity in due course when we can afford it?

DA: No, look –

AM: Slightly longer hashtag.

DA: Look at the whole range of things that we’ve said that we’re going to do, and it is costed in the plan, there’s about two billion pounds that we have set by for transforming universal credit. I mentioned just one thing around the long hello, the 62 days before people actually get a payment. There are also issues around they’re getting two payments in one month but not in another. They have to reapply for using – it goes on and on, so it’s a, you know, there are a whole range of ways, plus what I mentioned about the living wage as well.
AM: Jeremy Corbyn has said that after the election result you have a mandate to end austerity. And he’s also said that you want to get rid of this Conservative government as soon as possible. I’m just wondering how you propose to do that. Are you going to be putting down motions in the House of Commons attacking Conservative austerity plans and trying to get the House of Commons to vote them down?

DA: As we have done on a number of measures over the last years.

AM: The numbers are very different now.

DA: Absolutely true, so that court ruling on Thursday, we in committee put amendments to actually change that, the government ignored that, so this is the third ruling that they are seeking to overturn, where they have been – where court judgements have said this is not right, this is having a detrimental effect. And it’s about choices, Andrew, it’s about is it right that seven and a half million working people are living in poverty? Four million children, disabled people, pensioners, and at the same time we have the excesses that we’ve seen –

AM: You mentioned poverty. Jeremy Corbyn has just said that he wants to see 16 and 17 year olds being paid the full Labour-proposed living wage, that’s £10 an hour. Do you agree with that?

DA: Yes, I do.

AM: Do you not think it would cause job losses?

DA: If you’re doing the job whether you’re 16 or whether you’re 30 or older, if you’re doing the same job why should you not be paid the same rate? It’s discriminatory.
AM: But if you’re a small business that’s a very big new cost, because they’re paying four pounds and five pence an hour now to such people and they’re being asked to pay ten pounds an hour. And the Federation of Small Businesses says that would instantly mean people going bankrupt, it would mean job losses and it would be bad for the economy.

DA: And what we are looking to do is, with the other measures, for example, in our small business manifesto, was making sure that that is compensated. We recognise that small businesses are the bedrock of the economy, that we grow as a result of their efforts. So for example, around my campaign that I’ve had for five years around late payment, £26 billion still owed to small businesses, not being paid on time, which is more of an impact – is going to have more of an impact on them, and we would outlaw this.

AM: Alright, one last issue if I may. There’s been a big row this week about the position of European citizens living inside the UK, of the EU governments that they don’t like Theresa May’s ‘bold and generous offer’ that they can stay. Can you explain to us what is the difference between what Labour is offering these people and what the Conservatives are offering?

DA: Well, of course we haven’t seen the detail. It is a little bit, well frustrating, should I say? But we’ve heard little bits that have been leaked or through the announcement, through the dinner, and yet we haven’t had the detail. That’ll be tomorrow. What we’re concerned about, it’s watering down of existing rights of EU citizens, and that is – we do not support that. And why has that taken more than a year? This should have happened straight away, over a year ago now. We need to make sure that EU citizens that have been resident here for five years have the same rights that they do now.
(ends)