

***PLEASE NOTE “THE ANDREW MARR SHOW” MUST BE
CREDITED IF ANY PART OF THIS TRANSCRIPT IS USED***

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

JEREMY CORBYN, MP

LABOUR LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE

JULY 26th 2015

ANDREW MARR:

And the Labour Party seems to have gone to war with itself over the choice of its next leader. The surprise success in the race of the left winger Jeremy Corbyn is causing major jitters in the other camps and this morning’s papers suggest all sorts of non-Labour people are flocking to back him. The Communist Party says that it’s about “transforming Labour from a bourgeois workers’ party that serves capitalism into a workers’ party that serves the working class to the cause of socialism.” Mr Corbyn’s with me. Good morning. Would you agree with that quote? Is that what the campaign is really about?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well it’s a rather, it’s a rather ... What it’s about is converting the Labour Party into a much more of a social movement. And an awful lot of people have joined the party since the election. We’ve now got 250,000 members, probably 50,000 signed up as supporters. They all want to do something. They want to change society.

ANDREW MARR:

So do you think the party today has been too much of a bourgeois party?

JEREMY CORBYN:

It's been too close to big business, it's been too close to economic orthodoxy. It's been incapable of offering Labour voters and the majority of the electorate a real alternative and that was the fundamental problem in the last General Election.

ANDREW MARR:

Let's talk a little bit about what kind of changes we might see from a Corbyn Labour Party. I think you've said that the top rate of tax might not go up as high as 70p, but how far should it go up?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well I think we should keep the 50 pence rate, but I think it's more important to look at spending on the basis of tax income by not reducing corporation tax. Indeed I would increase it slightly to pay for student fees. But also closing down the massive numbers of tax loopholes, tax havens and tax evasion by a lot of companies – companies that claim to be trading in Britain but in reality place their headquarters in Switzerland and pay Swiss corporation tax, for example.

ANDREW MARR:

What about ...

JEREMY CORBYN:

There's a lot of areas to do things, so it's not all about income tax.

ANDREW MARR:

What about some kind of wealth tax?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well a wealth tax on massive incomes that are made, sort of windfall tax – as was done by Labour in 1997 – is a very ... is a prospect worth doing, but the reality is it's not just about taxing; it's also about increasing the economy, therefore you increase tax income. So one of my suggestions is a national investment bank which would improve infrastructure and at the same time improve investment in manufacturing industry - particularly small-scale and medium range manufacturing industry. We've

missed a trick in Britain. We're good at inventing things, bad at developing things.

ANDREW MARR:

Let's look at the macro picture, if we may, for a moment. One and a half trillion pounds of national debt still, 80 per cent of GDP and so forth. Despite all the austerity, we still have a massive, massive debt problem. Is that not a real serious problem overhanging all of politics in this country, something you can't just walk away from?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well the austerity process makes it worse because it lowers income, lowers wages, lowers income tax, increases demand on welfare because of the levels of poverty in Britain, and so it actually is a cycle of decline. Surely it's better to invest in an economy, to grow income and grow prosperity?

ANDREW MARR:

Sure, but to do what you want to do, you either have to sharply raise taxes to blunt the edge of what is now called austerity or else you have to raise borrowing, and it still seems to a lot of people that raising borrowing just at the moment is too big a risk.

JEREMY CORBYN:

You're looking at £50 billion of uncollected tax. You're looking at massive evasion of tax. You're looking at an awful lot of strange money that comes in, particularly to London and the South East, that's invested in land banking and empty luxury homes. I think there are some areas there where we could bring in a lot of money through taxation income. But the issue has to be what kind of society we want to live in and what the role of government is in achieving that.

ANDREW MARR:

What about the role of the state because in our lifetimes, as it were, the state in Britain has moved back massively from what it used to do and big sections of the economy has just pulled back entirely through privatisation. Do you think the time is right for nationalisation both of the railways but also of other things too?

JEREMY CORBYN:

The role of the state, of government, of the community is surely to provide people with some security in their lives, to provide them with a decent health service free at the point of use, provide them with a welfare state that stops people falling into destitution. We are not doing that, we're making it worse. But also where there are natural ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) What about natural utilities, what about ...

JEREMY CORBYN:

(over) ... where there are natural monopolies like Royal Mail, like the railways, it seems to me counterintuitive that we spend a great deal of money on investing in railway infrastructure, billions, and we then hand it over to train operating companies to run it. I think it is much better if we bring the railway system as a whole into public ownership. It's not some extreme position. It's supported on opinion polls by 60 to 70 per cent of the electorate.

ANDREW MARR:

Does the same not automatically and logically apply to, for instance, the power industry?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well I think the idea that you can run a fair market in the energy supply system is a little odd. Your house and my house have one feeder cable going in for our electricity, one gas pipe going in for our gas supply, one telephone line for our telephone system. There's no competition there. There is a creation of a false market. I would be much happier if we had a regulated publicly run service delivering energy supplies.

ANDREW MARR:

So renationalise energy, gas, water ...

JEREMY CORBYN:

(over) Well you can call it renationalise ...

ANDREW MARR:

Well ...

JEREMY CORBYN:

... you can call it public ownership, you can call it a more ... a better form of control of those industries, but at the moment there's a great deal of money being made out of all of us by gas and electricity companies who are benefitting from the infrastructure investment that you and I as taxpayers have put in over the past fifty years.

ANDREW MARR:

So public ownership of the big, big monopolies would still be a Jeremy Corbyn position?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Yes, yes – of those, yes.

ANDREW MARR:

Which reminds me slightly of the old days of Tony Benn, the alternative economic strategy and all of that. If I'd asked Tony Benn what his politics were and asked him about Marx, I think what he would have said is Marx was right about a lot of economics and wrong on the politics and his politics came from the English radical tradition, the Levellers and so forth. Is that by and large where you come from too?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Where ... Well Marx obviously analysed what was happening in a quite brilliant way and the philosophy around Marx is absolutely fascinating. Does it all apply now? Well obviously philosophy applies at all times. Do we then take that as a way in which we ensure that people have reasonable security in their lives through public ownership of the major monopolies, then I think that is a fair point to look at. It's not unpopular with the public. We're after all subsidising the railway system to a massive degree. The nuclear power industry expects us to pay for their clean-up costs when they decommission nuclear power stations. The water industry are constantly sniping around wanting support for new infrastructure projects. If we're investing in infrastructure, then we the public should get the benefit of it.

ANDREW MARR:

Do you regard yourself as a Marxist?

JEREMY CORBYN:

(sighs) That's a very interesting question actually.

ANDREW MARR:

Thank you.

JEREMY CORBYN:

I haven't thought about that for a long time. I haven't really read as much of Marx as I should have done. I've read quite a bit, but not that much, and I think Marx's transition of history and the analysis of how you go from feudalism to capitalism and move onto a different stage is fascinating. So we all owe something to him. Probably inside you, even you do. You think you do?

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Well I remember Francis Wheen said we should regard Marx as a great Victorian novelist, a great observer of the scene, and I think I would probably go along with that.

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well he was an observer rather than a doer, although towards the end of his life his family got quite involved in doing things. But he was essentially a fascinating figure who observed a great deal and from whom we can learn a great deal.

ANDREW MARR:

The politics of revolutionary parties, however, were catastrophic weren't they?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well I'm not talking about the Labour Party being a revolutionary party.

ANDREW MARR:

Yet.

JEREMY CORBYN:

It certainly isn't and what we're doing here is putting forward a view that the Labour Party has to offer a credible alternative that is true to the roots of the Labour Party. The roots of the Labour Party are essentially democratic, essentially socialist, essentially community. What we were offering for the past five, ten years has been essentially austerity lite, essentially cuts. Look if Labour had won in May – and I wish we had won in May –

ANDREW MARR:

Yeah.

JEREMY CORBYN:

... we'd now be making cuts in local government expenditure and that would intensify the adult social care crisis. That isn't right.

ANDREW MARR:

There is a very sort of fundamental critique of your position by all the other candidates and by a lot of commentators, which simply says hold on a minute, Ed Miliband was in relative terms to the left on the party and he was overwhelmingly rejected across England. The Labour Party was seen as a welfarist party, not as a party for people who earned money, not as a party for small business people or entrepreneurs, and therefore the proposition by Jeremy Corbyn that to win in England you have to move further to the left is bonkers.

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well it's a rather unfortunate use of words actually. I think people should engage in a serious debate rather than those kind of words, but let's leave that on one side. I'm suggesting that we invest a great deal more in manufacturing industry, in high-tech industry, in developing those medium sized enterprises which can produce that. I'm also suggesting that in the last election 34 per cent of the electorate didn't vote; that whilst we did put on votes in England, we obviously lost in Scotland and didn't do terribly well in Wales, but there were also a lot of people that ended up voting for UKIP because they couldn't see anything being offered by the major parties. I think it's a counsel of despair what they were doing. If we were offering to end austerity, to

improve the life chances of young people particularly – because students are leaving university with massive debt and underemployment –

ANDREW MARR:

Yeah.

JEREMY CORBYN:

... if we were offering hope to people, that would be something. What's interesting about these debates in this campaign is the numbers of young people that have got involved, excited by politics.

ANDREW MARR:

Sure, on your campaign in particular. What seems to have happened in the election is that the electorate in Scotland moved to the left, the electorate in England moved to the right. Isn't the logic, therefore, that the Labour Party cannot really retain a unity across Scotland and England; the case, as Tristram Hunt was making on that chair not that long ago, for an English Labour Party is now quite strong?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well the Labour Party in Scotland was way out of touch with the general ambit of a lot of Scottish public opinion on Trident, on austerity, on housing, on welfare issues. And I think Labour in Scotland is going to grow again. It'll rediscover essentially what its roots are. What the structure of the party is in the future, that's up to a lot of party members and a lot of debate to decide. I don't think leaders should lay down everything, lay down policies and structures. I think the job of a leader is actually to basically form some views, develop some opinions, and encourage the growth of ideas and democracy. We've got 250,000 members. They've all got ideas.

ANDREW MARR:

Are you preparing yourself now mentally and internally to become leader of the Labour Party?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well I'm preparing myself for another month of debates and hustings and meetings

and so on. We just finished the 20th hustings yesterday. Yes of course I'm thinking ahead of what happens after September 12th. I don't know ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Do you think you're going to win?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Making no predictions. I've no idea what the result's going to be. But I do know this campaign has been absolutely fascinating. It's mobilised and excited and enthused a lot of young people. What's there not to like about young people turning up, being excited and involved in politics?

ANDREW MARR:

You have been a very eloquent and persistent rebel all your life. As leader of the Labour Party you're going to face a bloodbath, aren't you?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Well there are one or two people in the Parliamentary ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) More than one or two, surely?

JEREMY CORBYN:

... Labour Party who were slightly reluctant to put their signature beside my nomination to become the candidate for leader. I'm grateful to them for doing it actually, I really am, because they've ensured there is a democratic debate in the party. Listen ...

ANDREW MARR:

But you're ... Sorry, you're in this for real?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Of course ...

ANDREW MARR:

You want to be leader, to want to be prime minister?

JEREMY CORBYN:

Of course.

ANDREW MARR

You're not going to stand down or ...?

JEREMY CORBYN:

No, no, of course we're in this for real. But I would say this. It's the first time the leader of the party's been elected on a one person one vote outside of any parliamentary control except for the gatekeeping of the entry to the election itself. Surely that is something we should be pleased about and MPs being ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) A worryingly democratic moment, Jeremy Corbyn.

JEREMY CORBYN:

Oooh! And frighteningly democratic. Is that what you're telling me?

ANDREW MARR:

On the other hand, you do have this extraordinary position. We do know that there are as it were entryists to the party who are voting for you on the right because they have said so openly - they're paid their £3 fee to vote for you to support you because they think it's going to destroy the Labour Party- and on the left: people from the old militant tendency, from the Communist Party, coming in from that side. Are you not worried about the number of people who are not real Labour Party folk to their boots who are coming to support your campaign?

JEREMY CORBYN:

I've said all along, from the very beginning, I only want people to register as Labour supporters if they are genuinely Labour supporters and they intend to stay for the longer cause. Personally I'd prefer it if all those supporters became party members

and maybe we rejigged the membership fee in order to make sure we got a larger membership because surely the idea of joining a party just to vote in a leadership election is a bit limited.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Cynical.

JEREMY CORBYN:

We should go a bit further than that. If people that ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) So you reject as it were entryism to support your campaign?

JEREMY CORBYN:

The entryism that I see is lots of young people who were hitherto not very excited by politics coming in for the first time and saying yeah we can have a discussion, we can talk about our debts and our housing problems.

ANDREW MARR:

Very briefly on Europe. The left wing anti-austerity party Syriza got absolutely clobbered by German bankers and the German financial system. What's your view of Europe now – in or out?

JEREMY CORBYN:

It's not that simple. What I'd say is this. The way that Greece has been treated is creating a humanitarian crisis. All that bailout to Greece has actually gone back to the banks, it hasn't gone to the Greek people. Europe is negotiating transatlantic trade and investment partnership which if it goes through will be devastating for us. I think us, Labour, should be now saying we want workers' protection across Europe, we want a European social chapter, we want opposition to TTIP as part of the negotiations rather ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) That is not the Europe that's on offer in any kind of referendum coming soon.

JEREMY CORBYN:

(over) No, no. Rather than giving Cameron a free hand to do whatever he wants and then say we're going to support him, I think we've got to be part of the pressure.

ANDREW MARR:

Alright, Jeremy Corbyn, thank you very much indeed for coming in to talk to us.

INTERVIEW ENDS