ANDREW MARR SHOW, ANDREW GWYNNE, MP

ANDREW MAR SHOW, 28TH APRIL, 2019

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SHADOW LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECRETARY

MH: The Shadow Community Secretary and the man responsible for Labour’s election strategy across the country is Andrew Gwynne and he’s in our Salford studio, good morning.

AG: Good Morning.

You have been making announcements over the last few days pledging more money under Labour for things like bus services and social care and talking about what you say is a crisis in local government. How much of the £16 billion a year that’s been lost from local government services are you prepared to put back in?

AG: Well look, we’ve been very clear that over the past 9 years local government has borne the biggest brunt of the cuts faced by the public sector and we need to start rebuilding our communities, rebuilding our public services. We set out in the 2017 General Election how we would start to fund that. We identified £8 billion additional money for social care and this year there would have been £1.5 billion extra for general local government services. So we’ve been very clear.

MH: That’s less than 10% isn’t it of what’s been lost.
AG: But we have to start rebuilding those services and that’s why for example the social care announcement this week was really quite important because we identified the £2.8 billion that was needed to bring back care packages for around 160,000 older and vulnerable adults.
MH: And indeed it is very important, but I just want to get your sense of how far you’re prepared to go in addressing this crisis in local government funding? You are prepared to let the bulk of it
remain for the moment, because you’re prepared to only reverse about 10% of the cuts.

AG: Well, that’s not the case because what we are talking about are very sizeable amounts of money going back into the system.

MH: Okay, give me a total percentage then. Of the £16 billion of cuts a year that there have been since 2010, how much are you prepared to reverse?

AG: But Mishal, we are starting from the starting point of today and what we are saying is, look, in the Local Government Finance Settlement that was announced by this government in January they stripped out another £1.3 billion of Revenue Support Grant, taking money from some of the poorest communities in England and redistributing it to some of the wealthiest communities in the country. That’s wrong. That’s why Labour opposed those cuts and we will start to rebuild these services. That’s the absolutely crucial message.

MH: Starting to rebuild it still means that under Labour the bulk of the crisis in local government funding continues.

AG: Well no, because actually the crisis in local government funding is predicated by the crisis in social care. Because it is the fact that social care, both adults and children’s services are taking councils towards that tipping point. We’ve seen that in Northamptonshire. That by addressing the crisis in social care – and remember this government has promised a Social Care Green Paper on five occasions and has failed to publish that. We have now said we’ve made this our priority. We would put £2.8 billion back into social care this year that would enable 160,000 extra care packages for elderly and vulnerable people, including 50,000 people with dementia. That is absolutely important to securing the sustainability of council services going forwards. And I’m really proud of that announcement.
MH: And let’s talk about the European elections. On Brexit we just heard Jo Swinson say that a vote for Labour would be a vote for Brexit. Is she right?
AG: Well look, these European elections are about ensuring we have good representation in the European institutions whilst we are a member of those European institutions and all the opinion polls are showing that it’s pretty much going to be a two horse race. And if you want progressive politics, if you want politicians that want to rebuild our country and put our country’s interests first, then we have to elect Labour Euro MPs because all the opinion polls show Mishal it’s now a race between the Labour Party and Nigel Farage.

MH: What if you want a public vote on any Brexit deal? Will that be in the election leaflets that are currently being printed?
AG: Well of course our Manifesto is going to be agreed by the Labour National Executive Committee on Tuesday. I expect the Labour National Executive Committee will endorse Labour’s policy that came out of the conference, and you know, at the end of the day that’s domestic policy. It is for parliament to decide whether or not a Brexit deal should be put to a confirmatory public vote.

MH: Okay, ‘cause understandably a lot of people within your party where the bulk of the membership is remain minded is very concerned that an early version of the European elections leaflet somehow failed to mention another public vote at all. How did that happen?
AG: Well, there’s lots of literature that has been published and promoted for the European elections. Pretty central policy argument isn’t it, to leave out?
AG: This wasn’t a particularly detailed leaflet. The detailed leaflet will be produced and the free post leaflet will be produced after the Labour National Executive have agreed the Manifesto, and I think you’ll find that all of this is a bit of froth and we –
MH: So that was a mistake. That omission was a mistake?
AG: - and we will go into those European elections offering a progressive vision of how we rebuild our country and how we secure our future economic prosperity going forwards.

MH: You yourself in one of the votes in parliament on having another referendum, you ended up defying the whip and abstaining. Why was that?
AG: Well I was concerned that the amendment only related to a Brexit deal being passed by parliament and of course at that immediate stage it looked as though were heading towards a no deal. And I think that in accordance with Labour policy, we absolutely have to ensure that not only was that option left on the table to prevent a bad Tory Brexit deal, which I fear Mrs May’s deal is, but also to prevent the catastrophe of a no deal.

MH: So now, at this moment, are you in favour of having a confirmatory vote on any Brexit deal?
AG: Well, of course we’ve got to have a Brexit deal and we are in negotiations, we are in discussions with the government. We entered those on the understanding that the government –
MH: But you personally, because it’s quite a simple question for many people. They’d say yes, whatever kind of Brexit deal it is we want a public vote on it. Are you in favour of that?
AG: Well look, I want to ensure that we avoid a bad Tory Brexit or a no deal scenario. In those circumstances yes I think that wasn’t on the ballot paper in 2016, we should then perhaps ask the people is this actually what you want, a confirmatory vote. Do you support what the government proposition is? But let’s see what comes out of these talks, because you know, I hope that the government can move on some of these red lines, so that we can get a more sensible approach towards Brexit going forwards because what really worries me is that there is absolutely no indication so far that the government is willing to move those red lines. Something that Theresa May said she would do as a precondition for entering into cross party talks with Labour.
MH: In parliament this week you’re going to be pushing for the UK to declare a climate emergency. In those circumstances is it ever justifiable to dig a new coalmine?

AG: Well, I think that firstly it’s great that we are talking about the climate emergency and I think it’s important that we force a vote on this in parliament next week because, you know, moving slowly on climate change is not good enough. We’ve got to redouble our efforts. I think we need to be looking at sustainable forms of energy that aren’t reliant on carbon fuels –

MH: You know why I’m asking, it’s because

AG: I do know why you’re asking.

MH: - because there’s a Labour led council in Cumbria which has just given approval for the digging of a new coalmine. Are they wrong to have done that?

AG: But of course they are bound by the planning rules, the planning laws as they apply today and part of what Labour’s package will be will be about making sure that our laws and our rules are fit for purpose for the future. That they are future proof. That they are environmentalised. And so we need to make sure that our planning policies give local councils the legal backup to make those decisions.

MH: Should they rethink? The idea of digging for new coal is something that Greta Thunberg, who Jeremy Corbyn was very taken with when he met her this week, she says it’s beyond absurd.

AG: Well of course there are technologies to capture the carbon and of course –

MH: They don’t really exist at the moment, do they? It’s the dirtiest fossil fuel.

AG: But of course what we need to make sure is that there is proper investment in those green technologies going forward. So now I think that yes, dirty forms of energy, it’s a retrograde strep.
We need to be investing many billions of pounds in clean energy in sustainable energy going forwards and that’s part of the Green Jobs transformation. Again a very exciting programme for renewal of our country’s technology, infrastructure and our skills base is something that Labour is really keen on pushing forwards. Not just now but for the future in the General Election.

MH: Just finally, Mr Gwynne, on Jeremy Corbyn’s decision not to go to the state banquet for President Trump. At the point that he attended the state banquet for President Xi, he must have had problems with China’s human rights record. There was a broad and sustained defence of Human Rights Watch that was underway at the time that banquet took place, why could he not do now what he did then?

AG: And of course when he met President Xi he raised with him directly the issues of those human rights abuses in China and he was absolutely right to do so. Look, I think that President Trump is more than welcome to come to the United Kingdom to commemorate those Second World War commemoration that he will be here for, but whether it’s appropriate to roll out the red carpet with all the pomp and ceremony, given his attitudes towards women, towards people of different races and religions, I think that Jeremy was right to make the decision that he has.

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