AM: Are you thinking again in the Green Party about security issues after Manchester?

CL: Well, I think we’re always considering and reconsidering in the light of evidence as it comes forward. And certainly one of the concerns I think – one of the concerns, I was going to say was that apparently people were reporting concerns about Salman Abedi well before the Manchester atrocity. And so certainly one of the questions is why weren’t resources put into following that up at the time? So certainly there are questions that need to be answered. But I think certainly also it’s clear that the blame for what happened in Manchester is solely with the perpetrator himself. It was an absolutely appalling atrocity. It happened in a context and it’s right for us to reconsider all aspects of that context right through from levels of policing through to the kind of debate that the Labour Party and Jeremy started this week.

AM: And presumably the internet as well. I mean, you say in your manifesto that ‘we think the internet should be free of state and corporate surveillance with our rights and freedoms protected.’ In these circumstances and knowing that Jihadi groups and extremist groups use encrypted messaging on the internet and also use the internet to promote their hate-filled messages, do you really think that’s a sensible policy?

CL: Well, our policy is about opposing the mass industrial-scale surveillance of emails. Now, let me explain what I mean but that, because there are plenty of people who you would see as being on the side of the argument that are absolutely wanting to make sure that we crack down on this as hard as possible who would say that the bigger you make the haystack in which you’re looking for the needle the harder it is to find it. So having all of that extra
surveillance doesn’t work. It’s targeted surveillance that really makes the difference, and that’s what we’re certainly in favour of.

AM: So it’s very hard to understand, are you saying that you don’t want the police to have extra powers of surveillance or you do want the police to have extra powers?
CL: We opposed the snoopers charter on the grounds that there was evidence that suggested that it wasn’t going to be effective. So it wasn’t on a kind of a, you know, only a civil liberties line, although that’s important. It was also about how effective is it if you’re increasing the number of people you’re putting under surveillance, if your mass trawling? Because do you know what? You know, people like myself are on the domestic extremist list. People like peaceful environmentalists are on that list. How does that help if the police resources are being spent looking after people like myself or my colleague Jenny Jones rather than people that really pose a serious risk? And that’s what we’re saying.

AM: Do you think that ending end-to-end encryption is wrong?
CL: Do I think that ending end-to-end encryption is wrong? No.

AM: So you would like to see this end-to-end encryption – very, very controversial, I’ll be talking to the Home Secretary about it later on – you’d like to see that ended?
CL: I want to take advice from the security services about what they think needs to keep us safe. That is the bottom line for the Green Party.

AM: Alright. One thing we do know is that Abedi’s friends and family contacted the state, did exactly what they were supposed to do through the Prevent mechanism.
CL: Exactly.
AM: You have called Prevent, this attempt to involve the community more, which is some respects has worked ‘xenophobic’. Why was it xenophobic?
CL: Because many in the Muslim community believe it’s been an attack on their group in particular. We absolutely want there to be a mechanism whereby people can come to the state with concerns, but when it is perceived by the Muslim community itself as being a toxic Big Brother brand, then we need to look at it again. And that is what the Mayor of Manchester is saying, that is what many people, the Foreign Affairs Committee and others, have said. We need to review Prevent to make sure that it is seen as something that is broad and inclusive and absolutely bottom-up, not top-down to Big Brother.

AM: Let me put it to you that this is knee-jerk liberalism, and one of the very few Muslim MPs in the last parliament, Khalid Mahmood, said this: he said, ‘by and large the majority of the Muslim community have no real issue with Prevent. What we see is small groups of so-called activists who continue to condemn Prevent but provide no alternative.’ He’s talking really about people like you.

CL: Listen, my position on Prevent is guided by the Muslim community that I speak to in my own constituency and who I speak to elsewhere. It’s about what is the most effective way of keeping people safe. And when you have a programme that has lost credibility in vast areas of the Muslim society then I think it means we should look at it again. It doesn’t mean scrapping it and not replacing it, but it does certainly mean making sure we have a mechanism that has the confidence of the communities, so that we can make sure that we do our very best to keep people safe.

(ends)