ANDREW MARR:
Now listening to that interview is Alan Johnson, former Labour cabinet minister, who
is spearheading Labour’s pro-European campaign. Welcome to you.

ALAN JOHNSON:
Hi Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
One of the things that happened this week, Alan, was it became clear that the prime
minister was not going to be able to negotiate any kind of hard new terms before the
referendum. He’s going to have to come back with in effect a promissory note saying
this is what they have told me we will get if we vote to stay in. That’s not a very good
basis for a Yes vote campaign, is it?

ALAN JOHNSON:
Well I think what’s happening with the prime minister is a kind of sideshow that
relates to the Conservative Party more than it does to our national interest. So there’s
only one person who wants a Yes vote more than me and that’s the prime minister,
but he has this problem with his party. And I think the main issue here is he is dealing
with reform as if it’s an event, whereas it’s a process, it’s a continuous process. And I, as someone who’s negotiated most of my adult life, this is not the way to actually negotiate. You know the hand on the …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But if I was an uncommitted voter, I’d be watching all of this and saying so what I’m being offered by the government is the promise of reform – reform on tick as it were – and that’s not enough for me to say yes.

ALAN JOHNSON:
That’s the problem of the protest that the prime minister is going through. But I hope … I mean I am like I think most of the British people. I’m not a zealot about Europe. I have a quiet, probably understated view that being in Europe is in our best interests for the future – for our standard of living, for our quality of life, for our future, particularly for young people. So I think most British people when they focus on the arguments here, it won’t be about this soap opera of what the prime minister is doing in Europe. It’ll be about a much longer term issue – about do we want to be in isolation or do we want to be on the field playing the game.

ANDREW MARR:
In the Scottish referendum Labour and the Conservatives stood shoulder to shoulder and the result was Labour was slaughtered in Scotland. Is that a lesson you have learned for the European campaign? Are you going to be keeping your distance from David Cameron in this regard?

ALAN JOHNSON:
Well I don’t think there is a very clear analogy between what happened in Scotland and what happened in the rest of the country. But we will have a Labour campaign. I’m heading up the Labour campaign. We’re going to be out there in communities talking about what this means for young people, talking about our vision for Europe, talking about the reforms we want to make to Europe as well – how Europe can be … can be better. As for sharing platforms, I think people who come from different political persuasions but have the same ideals shouldn’t be afraid to share platforms exactly as they did in 75. That doesn’t mean we’re going to have … you know we’re
just going to join in with the umbrella group. We’re going to have our own …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* You’re not going to be the chorus at the back?

**ALAN JOHNSON:**

No we’re going to have our distinctive Labour campaign.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Now you’ve been chosen as the face because you’re a popular guy out in the country. Do you have any qualms, any personal embarrassment about not taking on the leadership question when you could given the catastrophe that’s happened to your party since?

**ALAN JOHNSON:**

No I don’t.

**ANDREW MARR:**

I mean we know you personally didn’t want to do it and we understand all of that, but nonetheless isn’t there a moment when you should have stepped up for the sake of the party?

**ALAN JOHNSON:**

No because if you step up for the sake of the party and you don’t want to do that job, you’re going to do it badly. And I am not someone who thinks Ed Miliband did things badly. We lost the election. Ed put his finger on a number of really important issues that we shouldn’t just ditch because we lost the election: the issue of inequality, the issue about how the government is tackling the deficit. The latest growth figures are 0.3 per cent incidentally. If it wasn’t for the reduction in oil prices, we’d be back in recession. This is not a great triumph. One of the frustrations for me is we didn’t make those arguments enough and we didn’t do enough to defend our record when we were in government.
ANDREW MARR:
Nonetheless you were slaughtered at the polls and some people would say what needs to happen now is a different kind of Labour Party – much more pro-business. I know you’re an old trade union guy yourself, but with much looser links (if any) to the trade unions.

ALAN JOHNSON:
Not so much of the old, by the way. Yeah – yeah, yeah, I’m a trade union guy.

ANDREW MARR:
Veteran. Is veteran alright?

ALAN JOHNSON:
Yeah veteran’s okay.

ANDREW MARR:
So where do you think the party needs to go?

ALAN JOHNSON:
Oh goodness. Look if I had the kind of blueprint in my pocket, then you know I’d be talking to all and sundry about it. I think two things concern me. We don’t ditch our past. Our record in government was good. We weren’t perfect, there isn’t such a thing as a perfect government, but you know we shouldn’t just ditch all that because it’s still very recent history and we did a lot of great things. Secondly, I think whilst we’re having all this analysis of why we lost – and we did lose badly – whilst we’re doing that, we have to be an effective opposition.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

ALAN JOHNSON:
We have to be there on July 8th because I think that the way that Osborne is tackling and the government is tackling the deficit, he’s making the same mistake all over again – trying to eradicate the deficit in three years. It didn’t work last time and it
won’t work this time …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

ALAN JOHNSON:
… and there’ll be an awful lot of pain as a result.

ANDREW MARR:
We are sitting in the middle of a security crisis and I’ll be talking to Theresa May about that. As a former home secretary, what is the most important piece of policy advice you’d give her now?

ALAN JOHNSON:
Well I think it’s the policy advice I’ve been talking about for the last five, six years. We have to give the security services the tools to do the job. And because new technology is moving on, this issue about the Communications Data Bill …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* The so-called Snoopers’ Charter we’re talking about.

ALAN JOHNSON:
The so-called Snoopers’ Charter, which you know diminishes this issue.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

ALAN JOHNSON:
Theresa has had this very effective report from David Anderson and you know I hope now that … They blamed coalition before for not moving ahead with this. Well that’s not an excuse anymore and …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* So press on with it.
ALAN JOHNSON:
… we have to move ahead and press on with that as quickly as possible.

ANDREW MARR:
Alan Johnson, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

INTERVIEW ENDS