ANDREW MARR SHOW
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ANDREW GWYNNE

AM: Andrew Gwynne is leading the Labour campaign for the local elections as Shadow Community Secretary. He’s well known for a spectacular bust-up with Boris Johnson, but he was also at Mr Corbyn’s side during this week’s meeting with Jewish leaders, and he joins me now. Why did that meeting go so badly?
AG: Well, I’m not sure it did go badly, Andrew. I think it was the start of a dialogue with the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council. They put forward in a frank and fair way to the Labour Party their views and what they would like to see, and Jeremy Corbyn listened and took on board a number of those issues and assurances were given that by the time we next meet, because this is the start of the dialogue, sufficient progress will be made on a number of those issues.

AM: Okay. Well, the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council said, ‘our meeting with Jeremy Corbyn was a disappointing missed opportunity. He failed to agree any of the concrete actions we raised.’ And Gillian Merron, Chief Executive of the Board of Deputies, said, ‘the meeting did not go as well as hoped. The leader’s team delivered a lot of warm words but little in the way of actions.’ Can we go through some of the things that they wanted out of this meeting?
AG: Absolutely.
AM: So, for instance, would you personally share a platform with somebody who’d been expelled from the Labour Party for anti-Semitism?
AG: No, and it’s been made very clear by Jeremy Corbyn that nobody should be sharing a platform with anybody who has been found guilty of anti-Semitism, that is absolutely clear. Anybody who is expelled from the Labour Party, we should not be sharing platforms with these people. Very clear.
AM: They wanted you to write this into your rule book. Why did you not do that?

AG: Well, of course it’s very clear already. You should not, as a Labour Party member, share a platform with anybody who has been expelled from the Labour Party.

AM: The second thing that they asked for is that you should adopt the internationally agreed definition of anti-Semitism. Now, you’ve adopted the headline agreement but not lots of the examples that were given after that headline. And again, why not?

AG: Well, one of the action points that was agreed was that we want to go further. We’ve written into the rules the international definition, but in terms of examples we don’t actually think that those examples go far enough. So, for example, in the Chakrabarti report she highlights the use of the term ‘Zio’ and that isn’t something that, for example, is included in the examples. We want to work with the Board of Deputies –

AM: So you want to go further, you’re saying.

AG: We absolutely do. We want to work with the Board of Deputies and with the Jewish Leadership Council to write into Labour Party rules a much broader definition of anti-Semitism that goes beyond that, including terms like ‘Zio’, which quite frankly are abhorrent and insulting.

AM: That’s really interesting. Can I ask you about some of the examples that they give that they wanted you to include and they say you haven’t? Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel. ‘You are Jewish, you’re responsible for what’s going on in Palestine.’ That kind of thing.

AG: Well, let me make it absolutely clear, Andrew, I spoke in the anti-Semitism debate in the House of Commons. I opened for the Labour Party front bench. I made it absolutely clear that in a democracy it is right to criticise any government of any nation, just as we would criticise the British government and the actions of the British government, it is right where appropriate to be able
to criticise the actions of the Israeli government. Criticising the Israeli government is acceptable in a democracy.

AM: Absolutely but that doesn't mean –

AG: Criticising the people of Israel or Jewish people across the world is not. That is the fine line, and it is absolutely clear, that fine line between democracy and anti-Semitism.

AM: I mean, it's slightly odd because you're sounding very firm on all of these issues, very clear. But the Board of Deputies got the impression in this meeting that you weren't going to accept these internationally agreed examples, and they've been agreed by about 130 British Councils, by the Scottish parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the CPS, the police, and yet not by the Labour Party.

AG: Well, by the time of the next meeting – we're meeting again in July, after the National Executive Committee meeting in July – I hope that we will be able to meet again and go through the progress that has been made. Because many of the asks that were put forward it was agreed to take away. For example, to expedite some of the historic cases, particularly the high profile cases, and hopefully by July we will be able to show the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council that real progress has been made. Because let's be clear, we have to make progress on this. We've not done nearly enough quickly enough, and that is recognised across the Labour Party. It’s recognised by our new General Secretary, Jennie Formby. We are determined, not just to call out anti-Semitism but to root out anti-Semitism. It has no place in the Labour Party.

AM: So in that case, why did you not accept the need for an independent ombudsman, as you were asked?

AG: Well, this gets a little bit tricky, because you will know that there are changes to data protection rules that are affecting all organisations, and that does mean that we aren't able to share with third parties details of our party members. But we are employing a general council to be able to expedite these cases, to
offer the transparency that’s needed. And I hope that by the time we next meet we will have made sufficient progress in making sure that anti-Semitism, those complaints of anti-Semitism, aren’t just called out, they’re rooted out of our party.

AM: Do you think that the issue of anti-Semitism is being used by Labour MPs to attack Jeremy Corbyn?
AG: No. And Jeremy’s made that very clear, that the notion that these are smears against the Labour Party, he does not accept that. It is perfectly valid for -

AM: You think Len McCluskey is wrong about that?
AG: Well, Jeremy Corbyn has said that he doesn’t agree with Len McCluskey on this. It is perfectly acceptable for Labour MPs to call out anti-Semitism in our party and in our movement, and it is incumbent on our party and our movement to then act and root it out.

AM: ‘MPs such as Chris Lesley, Neil Coyle, John Woodcock, Wes Streeting, Ian Austin and others have become a dismal chorus whose every dirge makes winning a Labour government more difficult,’ says Len McCluskey. Is what he says more damaging to the Labour Party or the dismal chorus, which is it?
AG: It’s neither. I think what we’ve got to do, we’ve got to acknowledge that there is an issue of anti-Semitism on the Left of British politics. It’s not just something that affects the Right of British politics. There is an element in the Left. It is a small element. We have to root it out. It has no place in the Labour movement, in the Labour Party, end of.

AM: You couldn’t be clearer about that. You’re in charge of the local election campaign, are you concerned that this issue is doing damage to Labour on the ground?
AG: Well, I hope not because I think we’ve got a positive message. We’ve got a message that after eight years of Tory austerity that has really hurt our councils, really hurt our public
services, that the local populations that go to the polls next Thursday have an opportunity to make their voice heard, to tell Theresa May’s government that we’ve had enough of these cuts to public services. Cuts have consequences, Andrew.

AM: Okay, and on election night where are you looking for in terms of a good result? Are you expecting a really good result in London? What about the big metropolitan areas, where should we all be looking at?

AG: Well, we’re predicting that because these were high water mark years when the seats were last fought in 2014, that it’s probably going to be difficult to get anything like as close –

AM: You’re downplaying expectations, Andrew Gwynne.

AG: Well, let’s be realistic here. We’ve never, ever held the City of Westminster. We last held Wandsworth in 1978.

AM: So if you take those it’d be a great night for you?

AG: Well, if we took those it would be a spectacular night. I’m confident that we will have a good night. I don’t think it will be anything like some of the opinion polls would suggest, because we are already defending about 80 per cent of the seats in some of those metropolitan boroughs and London boroughs. We’re already at a high water mark. But the message is, if you want progressive politics, if you want to send the government a message, you have to vote Labour on the 3rd May.

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