

ANDREW MARR SHOW, 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2016

TONY BLAIR

AM: I spoke to him a little earlier this morning and I began by asking him about the big story of the day, whether the current level of EU migration is sustainable.

TB: I think people's concerns about immigration are completely understandable. Indeed, this is a world-wide phenomenon. So it's not just a big issue here, it's a big issue in the rest of Europe, it's a big issue in America, and I understand why people think the levels are too high, but the fact is, one, the biggest problem we have is non-EU migration, and secondly, the reason why the Leave people have now really focused on immigration day after day after day is because they've lost comprehensively the debate on the economy and what is now clear – and I don't think they can really dispute – is that if we did vote to leave the economic aftershock would be severe and directly measurable in jobs and living standards and business confidence.

AM: Coming back to immigration however, those people who are worried about it may be right and it may be that actually this country cannot absorb this level of immigration from the rest of the EU indefinitely. There was nearly 200 thousand people from the EU last year, close to the record high.

TB: Yes, but I also think we've got to understand what we're really saying here. Are we saying that we should leave the European Union and then put out the people who have come in from Europe to the UK?

AM: No, they get to stay anyway because of the Luxembourg compromise.

TB: Right, but then if you look at how Britain functions going forward, I mean some of these people play an absolutely fundamental part in services like the National Health Service, and even if we were to stop all EU immigration you've still got the other issues to do with immigration. So I don't discount it as an issue, it's a really important issue, but it doesn't – it's not going to go away as an issue if we leave the European Union.

AM: But it's a really important issue that while we're inside the EU we can do nothing about. We have uncontrolled immigration from the EU so long as we remain in the EU. That is a fact, is it not?

TB: Well, you've got the free movement of people within the EU, but by the way, it also applies to British people going out and working in the rest of Europe.

AM: So it's uncontrolled in both directions and we have big net migration and my point is that inside the EU we can do nothing about this.

TB: Inside the European Union we have to accept that there's going to be free movement of people. But by the way, even outside of the European Union if we want access back into the single market, a country like Norway has had to renegotiate free movement of people. So actually levels of migration are higher in Norway and higher in Switzerland. So you know, when you look at this rationally, yes, immigration's a big issue, it's not going to be solved by leaving the European Union, in fact in some ways, as David Blunkett's just been pointing out, we will lose the ability to cooperate with other European countries in dealing with immigration from outside Europe.

AM: But we have hundreds of thousands of people coming here now, if Turkey joins, and you're a big enthusiast for Turkey joining, that's another huge number of people. People look ahead

and say this is going to go on and on and on. Is there any limit, in your mind, for immigration into this country from the rest of the EU?

TB: Wow on Europe, and Turkey. Okay, so Turkey, there is no possibility of Turkey joining in the near future. If Turkey ever does meet the Accession terms, then it's a vote that we have a veto on in Britain. So, you know, to raise Turkey in this context is again to demonstrate why - what they want to do is to raise the general fear of migration because when you look at the particular facts their case just doesn't stack up.

AM: We're always told that things are not going to happen and then they do. You yourself said that it was in Turkey's interests in its future to join the EU and you're a big advocate for that, as was David Cameron and we can therefore assume that in due course Turkey will join the EU.

TB: No, you can't assume that because they've got to meet the conditions. However, yes, I certainly have been an advocate and always will be an advocate for us to apply to Turkey the same rules that we apply to everyone else, but the reality is there is no possibility of Turkey joining in the short term and the people who are running the Leave campaign they know that perfectly well.

AM: But in the medium term, I mean this is a vote, this Referendum in a few weeks time, this is a vote for a very, very long time in the future. In the medium term, Turkey, and maybe other countries will join. What I'm saying to you is that the level of immigration from the rest of the EU into this country is more or less limitless.

TB: Well, it's not limitless because obviously it only applies to those countries in the European Union. If people make this decision on June 23<sup>rd</sup> on the basis of Turkey, I mean it really

would be making it on the basis of a hypothesis that if it ever does happen it's not going to happen for a very long period of time and the circumstances will be quite different.

AM: In communities up and down the country with very, very overcrowded A&E departments, with primary schools in crisis because there's too many people with no housing for a lot of people, people feel that there are already too many people coming into this country. And if we vote to Remain that is just going to carry on. Is there any kind of limit on this?

TB: If we vote to Leave, these problems will still remain. And in the end, for example, you take the National Health Service –

AM: - people coming in as a right from the EU, that won't be there.

TB: No, but – well you then have to renegotiate all of the trading arrangements that Britain has, but this is a really important point, Andrew, because if you renegotiate those trading arrangements, and remember half our trade goes into the European Union, so it's essential for us to do that. Number one, that is that going to be a long agonising process and it's going to cast a pool of uncertainty over the British economy for many years. But secondly, if we want access back into the single market we will be renegotiating many of those things.

AM: If. I mean a lot of the people on the other side of the argument say that's not what we'll go for. We'll go for World Trade Organisation rules and so forth, so it's not certain.

TB: No, no, Andrew, when they say they will go for the World Trade Organisation rather than the EU, that is when anyone who knows about these things knows they have lost the argument completely. The idea that we would put our economic future into

renegotiating our trading arrangements with the rest of the world through the WTO, - the WTO is an organisation that has one of the hardest tasks in the world. They have for years been trying to get a global trade round together, unsuccessfully. The notion that it's some simple manoeuvre to put our trading relationships through the hands of the WTO, this is - to anybody who understands these things it doesn't bear thinking of. And they must know that when they're saying these things.

AM: It sounds like for you immigration at any level is a price worth paying for economic growth.

TB: No, no. Look, by the way I fought the last election, I fought in 2005 on immigration. Some of the most difficult pieces of legislation I put through the House of Commons were around asylum and cutting down the numbers of asylum seekers. I'm completely sensitive to the issue of immigration, and you have to be in politics today. What I'm completely opposed to is their answer to it, which is to get out of Europe. One, because it doesn't deal with the non-EU immigration, and two, because actually it doesn't even really deal with the EU immigration.

AM: But the EU immigration is uncontrolled in a literal sense. Nobody can control that. My question is, sorry going back, so 185 thousand this year. If it was half a million next year, a million the year after, if it just carries on growing what's your message. You can do nothing about this?

TB: No, my message is very simple. There is a problem of migration and there is a problem of migration generally. If you actually break down the figures on EU migration, then many of these people come in on short term contracts and then will go back out again. It's many of these people work in vital public services for us, and we also get the benefit. The reason we can

travel around Europe without restrictions is because of the free movement of people.

AM: Many people don't travel around Europe because they can't afford to. Priti Patel has said today that the Prime Minister is frankly too rich and out of touch, living a luxury lifestyle with those communities who feel most hard pressed by immigration and I'm sure she would include you as well in that.

TB: I'm sure she would, but you know, the idea that the people who are supporting the Leave campaign are all people living in diminished economic circumstances, come on. I mean we know the people who are bank rolling the Leave campaign and are supporting them heavily in the newspapers and elsewhere. These people are not exactly your ordinary person. So the argument about elites or not elites, this is a debate where people – this is probably the most important decision we're going to make since World War Two by the way. I mean this is a vitally important question for the country. The fact is that these people, as I say, are focusing on immigration because on the economy it is now clear that we are going to suffer a deep aftershock if we leave the European Union. And when you get – I think the Economist newspaper has got a poll of economists and 88% said that leaving would be a disaster – no but hang on, 88% of economists. I can't think of any issue where 88% of economists have ever agreed. So this is the thing we've got to work out and we've got to understand, this is a question about whether we leave Europe, not whether we join Europe, right. If we were in a situation where we weren't in the European Union, that's one debate. We have over four decades got these interlocking economic relationships. You break that up – I mean how can anyone argue that you're not going to have a problem afterwards economically and you measure that? These people say they care about people's living standards and those who are the poorest members of our society, I mean those are the people who are going to suffer.

AM: Well those feel, many of those people feel very strongly about immigration and do feel that it's too high and listen to people like you and feel no reassurance at all because you can't tell them anything that's going to change if we stay in.

TB: I can tell them lots of things can change in the way that we handle the immigration question.

AM: Really?

TB: Yes, lots of things can change in how we handle the immigration question. But no, it's true, if you're part of Europe there's the free movement of people and it works both ways.

AM: So when David Cameron said at the last election that he was going to get immigration down to the tens of thousands that must have been nonsense, mustn't it?

TB: No, because the majority of immigration into this country is non-EU.

AM: But if you can't deal with the numbers coming in from the EU you can't say tens of thousands, can you?

TB: But what you can do is do, as he has negotiated with the EU an arrangement on benefits and so on. And by the way, all the evidences again that these people who come in from EU, they contribute far more in taxes than they take in benefits.

AM: Now some people will say this is Tony Blair speaking. This is the same Tony Blair who told us it was against our national interest not to join the Euro. Wow, he was wrong about that.

TB: By the way, we never put the issue to the British people on the Euro.

AM: It was Gordon Brown.

TB: No, because the economic case was not clear and unambiguous. And when these people say, which they often do, you guys said all this about the Euro. I went back and checked, now we didn't. We said unless there's a clear case economically for joining the Euro we won't put it before you and we didn't.

AM: But you wanted us to join, didn't you?

TB: No, I wanted us – politically I think it's important that Britain's at the heart of Europe. Economically if you can't make the case for joining the single currency you shouldn't do it and economically we couldn't.

AM: But all those people who've said this is a politically-driven and eventually catastrophic system have been proved right. When you look what's happened across the south of Europe, Greece, Italy and Spain, this has been an absolute disaster of a policy, and my point is that people like you were in favour of it.

TB: But we were never in favour of Britain joining the euro, because in the end, as I say, the economics didn't stack up. Politically I always said it was very important to position ourselves as if in principle you're in favour but the economics has to be right.

AM: But you said a betrayal of our national interest not to join?

TB: I didn't say that. I didn't say that. I was always very, very clear that we should not join unless the economics were right. So when these people say, 'oh they said all of this about joining the

single currency,' no we didn't. The case for leaving Europe is a completely different case, because even if you disagree with the euro, you surely don't disagree with Britain being part of the single market, because the single market – which by the way was a British achievement under Margaret Thatcher – the single market is essential for British jobs and British industry.

AM: Can you say now, looking at what's happened to the eurozone, that Britain should never join?

TB: Well, there's no reason for us to take a position for the next hundred years, but there's no remote possibility of Britain joining the euro in the foreseeable future.

AM: No remote possibility. Right. In a few weeks time we vote to leave the EU. What is then the future for Britain five or ten years out?

TB: If we vote to leave, we will suffer an immediate shock to our economy. We will create years of uncertainty, because we will then have to renegotiate all the complicated trading arrangements we have with the rest of Europe. And that isn't some hypothetical risk, it is something that you can and will see directly in people's jobs, in people's living standards, and in businesses' ability to work with confidence. So it's an enormous economic problem, and I don't think anyone can really dispute that. The question is, is that pain worth the gain? And what it's very difficult to see is what is that gain that these people say is so important?

AM: Now, I know you can't talk about the Chilcot Inquiry and all of that, but after the kind of ghastly episode of the Iraq war are you seriously in favour of us going into Syria to confront Isis in Syria on the ground?

TB: I'm in favour of confronting Isis in Syria on the ground. We don't need to do it with our own troops, with our own boots on the ground and we haven't. Although what the Americans have been doing recently in the support that they've been giving has had a huge impact on this fight against Isis. And let's be clear, this is a global problem today. Okay, it's not just Isis in Syria, you've got Isis in Libya. You've got Boko Haram in Nigera, you've got Al-Shabaab in Somalia, you've got the groups out in the Philippines and Thailand. It's a global problem.

AM: At the core of this problem we've got Isis, so-called Islamic state in Syria and Iraq, moving into a hideous vacuum created by the Iraq war, created by the civil war, and therefore ultimately created by a decision that you took.

TB: If you take the countries on the critical list today, okay, which would be Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, in only one of those cases have you got a government that is capable of fighting terrorism and is, that is recognised as internationally legitimate, including by both Saudi Arabia and Iran, and its Prime Minister turns up at the White House, and that's Iraq. So I understand all the issues, and we'll debate them when we get to Chilcot, but you know, this idea that all of this comes from the decision to remove Saddam –

AM: We could debate that.

TB: You've got to go back into this and look at the roots of it.

AM: The big problem that people still think is that you planned and thought you were going to war but didn't tell us.

TB: Well, Chilcot will deal with all of these things.

AM: And will you accept Chilcot's verdict on this as a fair assessment after all this time and all this effort?

TB: Well, it's hard to say that when I haven't seen it.

AM: Have you not seen it?

TB: Well, of course you don't see the report until it comes out. So let's wait for that point. But I think when you go back and you look at what was said I don't think anyone can seriously dispute that I was making it very clear what my position was. By the way, the thing that will be important when it does happen is that we have then a full debate. I look forward to participating in that. Make no mistake about that, it is really important we do debate these issues.

AM: Okay, bring it on?

TB: Because we've got huge problems, not just, I mean, if you want to focus this on – all over the Middle East, all over the world, and let's debate about what is the right policy to deal with these issues.

AM: I hope very much I can persuade you to come back and sit in that chair and we talk about it all in great length when the Chilcot report comes out.

TB: I'm sure you can.

AM: You've said this week that you thought it would be a terrible risk for the British people to elect an extreme government, and you seemed to be talking about Jeremy Corbyn. Do you think that Jeremy Corbyn is a risk and do you want to see him as Prime Minister?

TB: I wasn't talking about Jeremy Corbyn, by the way. I was talking about the general populism that there is in the world today, and –

AM: The words Jeremy Corbyn had been in the question, therefore they were associated.

TB: Right, which is the way it goes. But what I was talking about, this is a whole other interview, but is these insurgent movements of left and right that I think are driven by a great deal of anger and populism that is able to ride that anger, but they don't really provide answers to the problems we're facing.

AM: Well, let me ask you about Jeremy Corbyn directly. I know that there's a bit of history here, but nonetheless here is somebody who's honestly trying to create a new economic policy for new times, who is trying to address that anger, who is trying to think of new Labour policies – well, not New Labour, but new, comma, Labour policies for the NHS and education and so forth. Shouldn't you just get behind him and not be disloyal?

TB: I'm not being disloyal. I mean, let's wait and see what those policies are. And you know, I'm not – I don't disrespect him as a person or his views at all, but –

AM: Could you imagine telling people to vote Labour if Jeremy Corbyn is still party leader?

TB: I'll always tell people to vote Labour because I'm Labour. So that's just the way I am. But you know, in the end what is important, particularly in today's world, which is so uncertain and unpredictable, is I understand how these movements are moving politics in an extraordinary way today, and you can see this across the Atlantic, you can see it here, you can see it around the rest of Europe, personally I would like to see the centre – and by that I mean the centre left and the centre right get its grip back and its traction back on the political scene, because I honestly do believe that a lot of the solutions to the problems we face today are less about ideology and far more to do with practicality and

understanding modernity and the way that the modern world works.

AM: Very last question, I promise. Many of your friends, people who were close to you and have supported you all the way through feel that you have become just too rich and too disconnected over the last few years, and in the words of someone, you have 'trashed the brand.' What do you say to them?

TB: What I say to that is if you're reading stuff in the press about what I do nowadays don't read it or believe it. Go and look at my website and you'll see what I actually do. I spend 80 per cent of my time on unpaid work. I've just literally spent weeks in the Middle East on the Middle East peace process there. I have two foundations, I employ around about 200 people, I have to raise the money and make the money for all of them. What we actually do is very good and exciting work around the world, but you won't read a bit of it here. So if you want to know what I do, go and read the facts.

AM: Tony Blair, thank you very much.

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