ANDREW MARR:  
Now then, Labour’s popularity among voters appears to have taken a dip according to some recent polls, so here is the question: is this because of a post-Budget Tory bounce or because people simply aren’t hearing Ed Miliband’s message or don’t like it? Douglas Alexander, Labour’s Election-Coordinator, is the man whose mission it is to ensure that Labour gets the vote out and gets back into Downing Street at next year’s General Election. Welcome Mr Alexander.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:  
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:  
Before we turn to the polls, what about this business of getting rid of student fees? We are very close to the level at which £9,000 student fees is no longer worth collecting.
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well this seems to be another Con-Dem policy that’s simply not working. The rate of default emerged this week and, as you’ve said, it’s very high. Ed Miliband’s gone on the record in the past in saying this is a policy that we are looking at. I expect it is a policy that we will address in our manifesto and I hope that we’re able to offer a better solution to the students of this country and to the finances of this country than that which we’ve seen from the Conservatives.

ANDREW MARR:
So as the rate of default goes up from 45 towards 48 per cent, it’s possible that Labour will simply get rid of this fee?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, as I say, we’re dealing with this as part of our policy review process. I expect it’s an issue that we will address in our manifesto. But it’s very clear that even on the Government’s own evidence, this is not a policy that’s working.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay. Can I turn to the polls? I know nobody wants to talk about the polls - the polls never mean anything, nobody ever looks at the polls or reads them - but they are pretty dire at the moment and a lot of people in the party are getting quite worried. What do you need to do differently from what you’ve been doing in the past? Time is beginning to run out.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, okay, let’s start with the polls. We’ve got two different polls this morning, one of which suggests that we’ve got a seven point lead. So frankly the polls will move around, but the fact is that in terms of the last couple of weeks some of the headlines have changed. What hasn’t changed are either the economics or the politics. In terms of the economics, we saw a Budget which didn’t address the fundamental truth of the economy, that millions of people watching this programme are facing a cost of living crisis. And in terms of the politics, listen we’ve always known that this is going to be a tough contest and a tight election, but I certainly believe not just this is a bad government that deserves to lose, but that this is an election that Labour can win.
ANDREW MARR:
You mentioned the cost of living crisis again there and I watched Ed Miliband speak to the Welsh Labour Party conference yesterday and he was again talking mainly about that. And yet the economists say that this crisis is ending; that you know average wages are rising, inflation is coming down, the two things are going to cross over, and that by the time of the next election the cost of living crisis is not going to be the number one issue.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
But Andrew, cost of living is not running out of steam. This is a Conservative Government that’s running out of time. We know that at the time of the election, for the first time in decades we’re going to have a government that has delivered lower living standards for millions of British families - £1600 worse off at the end of the Parliament than at the beginning of the Parliament. That’s why I think it is critical that we continue to set out our thinking, as we did on energy prices. Let’s just remember where we were in September. We had energy bosses, like the one you’ve just heard, saying that a price freeze was impossible, with the Conservatives saying it was ridiculous. What have we seen this week? We’ve seen one of the Big Six confirming that there’s going to be a price freeze …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… which you’ve just heard about. We’ve also heard from Ofgem saying that actually a resetting of the energy market is necessary. That would not have happened but for the leadership that Ed Miliband and the Labour Party has shown.

ANDREW MARR:
So why aren’t things better? I mean the polls do remain pretty dire for you. You are not in a position where you’re going to win the election at the moment, and yet you’ve had this long, long recession, you’ve had what you regard as a ridiculous government stuffed with old Etonians and people seem to be still level pegging
between you and them. In fact you’re only just now back at the same level as you were in 2010.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, first of all, we took a very bad beating in 2010. Let’s be honest about that.

ANDREW MARR:
And you’re back at that level.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Since then, let’s look at what’s actually happened in terms of votes. We’ve won more than 2,000 new council seats across the country, we’ve won 60 councils back to Labour. And also what can we look ahead to the next year? We’ve got the Conservatives in a death struggle with UKIP on the right of politics. We’ve got the Liberal Democrats wandering around trying to re-find their base. There is a genuine opportunity in the next year for Labour with a credible, radical manifesto to dominate the centre ground of British politics; not just potentially be the largest party, but I believe actually to secure the Labour majority that can transform the country.

ANDREW MARR:
So you’re content with how things are going?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Oh I’m certainly not content. I’m ambitious. I’m ambitious to change the circumstances and the lives of people in communities across the country who are suffering that cost of living crisis just now. We’re in politics not just to change governments, but to change lives. And when you look at what’s happening in terms of youth and long-term unemployment, poverty pay across the country, the country needs a Labour Government and that’s what we are focused on.

ANDREW MARR:
But there are no new messages coming from Labour at this point?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, listen, we’ve already had clear policies in relation to not just energy prices but banking skills. You’re going to see a lot more of that. In the coming weeks, we’ll be unveiling our Growth Commission, undertaken by Andrew Adonis. We’ll set out our thinking at the time of the conference and deliver a manifesto that I think addresses the needs of the country, and that’s why I think that we can offer that with confidence but certainly no complacency.

ANDREW MARR:
We read about a lot of arguments inside the team drawing up the manifesto between the radicals and those who are less radical. Where are you on that spectrum?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well I don’t think it’s a great headline for the newspapers saying ‘Labour team united and working for a victory’, so I think we can dismiss some of the headlines. Listen, I think one of the insights of this generation of Labour leaders is that it’s a totally false choice to be credible or radical. If you’re not credible, then people won’t trust you with the governance of the country. If you’re not radical, people just say oh well listen you’re all the same. That’s why I believe that we will offer credible and radical policies. That’s what we’ve done on energy prices and that’s what we’ll continue to do.

ANDREW MARR:
You brought in Obama’s great election-winning guru and I remember being told by lots of people at the time this is the guy who’s really going to change things on the ground, and you fired him again. Why?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
First of all, we haven’t. And, secondly, only on Monday we appointed our hundredth community organiser across our key seats in the country. The difference between …

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry, so this guy remains working for the party, does he?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Yeah he’s going to be involved in the General Election campaign – yes, absolutely.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* He’s not going to return to America?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
The work that he started is being taken forward. We’ve got a hundred organisers across the country. We didn’t even have a hundred organisers in 1997 when we won our historic victory. The difference is the Labour Party’s membership is growing. We’re up against a party that even in its key seats, the Conservatives, now has halved its membership since David Cameron became Leader – less than 100,000 members, average age 69 and rising. The Conservative Party are a party in retreat and Labour actually is advancing in those critical marginal seats where we’re actually going to see the outcome of this coming General Election.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Well let me ask you about an election or a choice which is coming much earlier than that, which is the Scottish Referendum campaign. Your Liberal Democrat colleague, your colleague Mr Carmichael said in the papers that he’s worried that the Better Together or No campaign are losing this argument. And it seems to a lot of us that what’s going on, it’s a bit like Vietnam politics: the No campaign are kind of bombing from a huge height Unionist policies and down in the ground in the jungle the SNP are fighting a guerilla campaign and they are winning.

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**

Well I was on the streets of Paisley yesterday and our message to the people of Scotland is very clear. That we can as Scots have the best of both worlds – more decisions that matter taken in Scotland at the same time as having the strength, stability and security of the United Kingdom behind us – and I continue to believe that that’s going to be a winning message in September.

**ANDREW MARR:**

You’re not worried by the closing of the polls, the SNP are doing much better than they were?
**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**  
Listen, I’m not complacent about the referendum - of course it’s going to be a tough and tight contest there as well – but the reality is the SNP have given up trying to educe evidence. They’re simply appealing to emotion. I believe the right way for the Better Together campaign to win – this is exactly what we’re doing – is not just to offer evidence but to offer emotion. I passionately believe in Scotland’s possibilities for the future, I passionately believe that we are stronger together and we would be weaker apart.

**ANDREW MARR:**  
Okay. Now you’re also Shadow Foreign Secretary, so let’s jump a long way away to the Ukraine. Are you concerned about the massing of Russian troops on the border? Do you think we’re about to see another big escalation in the problem?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**  
Yes, I am very concerned about that. I think this is probably the biggest security challenge that Europe has faced certainly in the last twenty years. My approach to foreign policy is pretty straightforward: if the Government's getting it wrong, I'll criticise them; if the Government’s getting it right, I'll support them. We have taken a bipartisan approach on this. I think the Government is taking the right steps and trying to work with other members of the European Union – with our friends and allies in the United States – to alter the calculus of risk and judgment that Putin makes. We need to stop him moving into Eastern Ukraine. He needs to realise that there would be costs and consequences if we were to see that very regrettable action.

**ANDREW MARR:**  
Does that mean a bit of sabre-rattling is necessary at this point?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**  
No, listen, I think it’s important that NATO allies are confirmed in the security guarantees that have been given to them, but equally I think there needs to be deft and frankly difficult diplomacy in the days and weeks ahead to make sure that there is a
alteration of course by the Russians.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Douglas Alexander, thank you very much for joining me this morning.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS