

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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LIAM FOX

AM: Good morning to you, Liam Fox. That letter which your side has sent to the Prime Minister is a statement of fact isn't it? You cannot – no government inside the EU can guarantee that immigration falls to tens of thousands.

LF: No Conservative MP who was elected at the last election can fulfil our pledge to the British people on immigration.

AM: Including you of course.

LF: Including me. If we stay in the European Union. And I think that one of the points that people have failed to grasp is I'm quite sure the Prime Minister wanted to be able to get restrictions on free movement to be able to meet that target, but it wasn't on offer. There is no reformed EU. It is a fantasy.

AM: So is this ignorance or is this deceit?

LF: I think the Prime Minister wanted to get that change. We all wanted it. But it's now totally clear to us that if we stay in the European Union with free movement – and we saw 184,000 net EU migrants coming to the UK last year – that will not be a pledge that we can meet. It is impossible when you're planning public services to be able to deal with those sort of numbers and have school places predicted, NHS, housing, they are all huge issues for real people. I mean, Downing Street said today that this was a distraction. It's not a distraction, it's a huge issue for many people who are facing the implications of this immigration in their real lives.

AM: But you're saying, surely are you not, therefore, that your party went into the election on a manifesto that was not true?

LF: No, it was entirely possible to get that, but only, in my view, if we left the European Union. I remember coming on your programme and saying actually the renegotiation was not going to achieve what we wanted, because it was clear that our European partners were not going to change course. They're not changing course on anything. They're still producing the European army plans. Everything suggests ever-close union is still on the cards. So our choice as a country is between getting control and taking our own destiny into our own hands, or ever-closer union, ending up in what is likely to be much closer to a single European state. That's not the future that I want for my country.

AM: Ferocious stuff in the papers today, blue on blue and all the rest of it. Can it all be put back together again after the referendum? Do you think the Prime Minister should carry on after the referendum? Do you think he should lead any negotiation with the rest of the EU if we vote to leave?

LF: If we vote to leave, my personal view is that the best thing would be for the Prime Minister to stay on. We will have to have a government position before we enter into negotiations under article 50. We need a period of stability, and whatever our views have been during the referendum we need to put to bed all those personal views and understand that stability for the country is the most important element.

AM: But 50 of your colleagues have put their names down for a challenge after this vote, haven't they?

LF: Well, they may or may not have. I mean, I've heard these stories on and off for 24 years. Whether it's true or not, I don't know, but it would not be wise, in my view. If we decide to leave and there will be a period of uncertainty about what the government's negotiating position would be, we don't want to add political instability to that.

AM: So you say to Andrew, Richard and others, just stop it?

LF: Well, my view is let's stick to the issues. There are very, very big issues at stake for our country in this referendum. Let's not turn it into an internal Conservative Party debating society. I want to leave the European Union because I want control of our own law-making. Sovereignty for me is key. I want control of our own money that we're handing over at the moment to Brussels. And I want control over our own borders. They're much more important to me than what happens inside the Conservative Party.

AM: And so forget all this stuff about coups and getting against Cameron and so on, drop that is your message to colleagues? Concentrate on the issues.

LF: Concentrate on the very big issues that are affecting Britain and our future. Because what people have to ask themselves, if we weren't in the European Union already would you choose to join it on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June? And if you wouldn't choose to join don't choose to stay, because you're joining it for the next generation.

AM: Can I ask you to give two cheers for migrants, and in particular the European migrants who come in here? These are overwhelmingly hard-working people who are helping, you know, keep up our public services. You see them in hospitals and you see them in the private sector in hotels and restaurants and stuff, and in the agriculture section, up and down the country, very often doing jobs that British people no longer want to do for that money.

LF: I don't have a problem with migration. I have a problem with uncontrolled migration. I would actually like us to have overall control of migration on a points system like the Australians. But we can't have that because we are committed to total free

movement. And it's that uncontrolled element, the fact we can't control the impact on public services, which is a very real problem. Not something that Goldman Sachs and those who are funding the Remain campaign ever have to worry about because they probably don't use them. But a lot of ordinary hard-working people in this country face problems as a result of the fact that we have this huge increase in our population driving our housing policy, NHS demand and school places. They are real problems. So I don't have a problem with migration, I have a problem with uncontrolled –

AM: You think it's simply too high.

LF: I have a problem with un- I want us to control that number. We may decide that we want that number.

AM: Well, I was going to ask you, after Brexit, if that happens, we would still be taking migrants from the rest of the EU but we would be deciding how many and who they were. Is that your view?

LF: What I want is a decent and humane immigration policy that actually determines what we need in this country, and we match that with the supply of labour that may come from overseas. And not just the EU, but countries outside the EU, Canada, Australia, other countries, who are actually being discriminated against because of this EU migration policy.

AM: And at that point do you think you can bring it down to tens of thousands?

LF: I think it's possible to do it. You have to take some pretty tough decisions. But we have – we are an economy that is doing very well, we're acting as a magnet for migration. When the living wage comes in, if we still have open borders in terms of migration, that will be a much bigger number, given the

continuing failure of the Eurozone and what it's doing to young people's futures across the continent.

AM: Nonetheless, we have needed immigration into this country. Your colleague Sarah Wollaston, who's on your side in this debate, nonetheless says that if you go into the NHS and you meet a European immigrant they're much likelier to be looking after you, healing you, than they are to be a patient.

LF: I don't have a problem – as I said, I don't have a problem with migration. I have a problem with uncontrolled migration and the pressure that that puts not only on public services, but the downward pressure on wages. The Bank of England have said that for every ten per cent increase in the migrant population there's a two per cent reduction in wages. It's very hard to see how you get a high wage economy but at the same time have open borders and uncontrolled migration.

AM: Priti Patel has said today that the Prime Minister is simply too rich to get this message, he doesn't understand what life is like for too many people in this country. Do you agree with her?

LF: No, I don't agree with that. And I think that the Prime Minister entirely understands that. But I think that he has committed us to membership of the European Union on terms that I simply cannot accept. I'm sure that he would like to have had a restriction on the numbers coming into Britain, but our European partners will not wear it. And this idea that we can influence them to changing some of those core elements of ever-closer union, it's simply a fantasy. I have a problem with ever-closer union because the logical end point is union. That is not what I want for this country.

AM: And you're quite worried about the Gibraltar situation at the moment as well, aren't you?

LF: Well, I think the one thing that you never do in any campaign is to play with security. And the sovereignty of the people of Gibraltar has always been guaranteed by the United Kingdom. To pretend in any way, shape or form that that policy would change, whether we're in or outside the European Union, is inexcusable.

AM: And sorry who has done that?

LF: The Remain campaign have suggested that Gibraltar's sovereignty might be at stake. That is absolutely, as I say, inexcusable. And the only way we can deal with that is for the Prime Minister to say the sovereignty of Gibraltar will not be a question that we will tolerate inside or outside the European – their security is guaranteed by the United Kingdom.

AM: And you think we need that statement now?

LF: I think we need that clarity. Because I think even the vaguest inference that we might hand over the sovereignty of Gibraltar to Spain if we're not inside the European Union is completely unacceptable. I think there are limits to what you can and cannot say in any campaign. That goes way beyond acceptable limits.

AM: And this requires a personal intervention by the Prime Minister to get that clarity?

LF: I think he's the only person with the authority to make the government's position clear and unequivocal, that Gibraltar is protected by the United Kingdom and will continue to be protected whether we're in the European Union or out. We need a clear statement.

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