

Transcript of BBC1, Opposition Parties Election Debate, 16th April 2015, 8pm

DAVID DIMBLEBY: Tonight five party leaders, each battling for a slice of power, at the General Election, now just three weeks away. Good evening, and welcome to the magnificent Central Hall, Westminster, in London for the third in a sequence of television election events, this one featuring five opposition party leaders. The leader of the Labour party, Ed Miliband, the leader of Plaid Cymru, Leanne Wood. Of the Green Party, Natalie Bennett. The leader of the Scottish National Party, Nicola Sturgeon and the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage. *(applause)* So tonight the five leaders are to debate questions on a range of topics, as they try to persuade you that they deserve your vote. The questions are coming from the audience here and from among thousands of e-mails and tweets which have been sent during the week. If you want to join the debate, you can of course do so on Twitter, using the hash tag #BBCdebate. When we have finished here, at half past nine, we are going to have live reaction from Emily Maitlis.

EMILY MAITLIS: I'm in the Spin Room where politicians and journalists are gathered to watch the debate. I'll be back at 9.30 with John Piennaar and we'll be gauging the reaction from some of the parties that took part and from some who didn't. Join me after the debate.

DD: And so of course there are rules for these debates that have been carefully worked out by the broadcasters, we are not free for our audience to cross question them, or for me to do it too much. The actual pattern here is that five leaders who haven't been told the questions in advance, that's very important, will each be given a minute to answer each question, before there's ten minutes or so for debate between them. And then we begin as the other debate began with opening remarks from the leaders. They have one minute each. We have a host of stop watches here to time it, but they have one minute each and we start with Leanne Wood.

LEANNE WOOD: People across the UK are looking for an alternative to the grey, stale politics as usual. And people are seeing through the austerity myth. They told us that slashing services would deliver a recovery for all, it has not. Plaid Cymru has a vision for a post-austerity society. Our MPs will work with progressives from other parties to deliver prosperity, investment and job creation, public services and strong communities. Cuts are a choice. Austerity and the old politics are not inevitable. Plaid Cymru will not apologise for speaking up for Wales at every opportunity. And we will work for a new politics, co-operating with others for the good of all.

DD: Thank you, Leanne. Nigel Farage?

NIGEL FARAGE: This General Election has become farcical. Every morning billions of pounds are being offered, showered around like confetti, they are trying to bribe you with borrowed money. Now, UKIP has come up with a fully-costed, verified plan that shows we can cut the taxes of working people in this country to bring about real economic prosperity. And we do it by cutting the bloated overseas foreign aid budget, our contributions to the European Union. Let's take back control of our country, take back control of our borders, put in place an Australian-style points system to control immigration and take on the big corporate giants who have driven down salaries and made life so difficult for our 5 million small businesses. It's only UKIP that is prepared to talk straight. I'm not frightened of upsetting the very politically correct-class who are afraid to touch difficult issues. No, we'll tell it as it is. And I have a feeling that I'm the person here saying what a lot of you at home are really thinking.

DD: Ed Miliband.

ED MILIBAND: We need to change our country. For five years we've seen bills rising faster than wages. We've seen an NHS going backwards, and we've seen young people fearing they'll have a worse life than their parents. Now, David Cameron has chosen not to come tonight, he's chosen not to defend his record. I believe that Britain can do so much better. And not a penny of our plan is paid for from extra borrowing. So we'll have more doctors and nurses in our NHS, paid for by a mansion tax on properties worth over £2 million. We'll clamp down on tax avoidance and we'll freeze your energy bills till 2017. These and other ideas will help working families. But I'm going to reject ideas that you will hear tonight that will hurt working families. Like taking Britain out of the European Union or breaking up our United Kingdom. If I'm Prime Minister, I will always put working families first, because that's the way we succeed as a country.

DD: Thank you very much. Nicola Sturgeon.

NICOLA STURGEON: To those watching in Scotland, my promise is this: If you vote SNP, we will make your voice heard, the SNP will always stand up for Scotland's best interests. My promise to everyone is that the SNP will work constructively to deliver progressive change for ordinary people right across the UK. For as long as Scotland remains part of the Westminster system, we have a shared interest in making it work better for the many, not the few. Now the truth is that no one party looks likely to win an outright majority at this election. That means we will need to build bridges between our different parties if we are to deliver real change. The SNP will work with people of like mind to bring about an alternative to austerity, protection for the NHS, a higher minimum wage, more jobs. A vote for the SNP is a vote to make Scotland's voice heard but ours will also be a voice for new, better, progressive politics at Westminster for everyone.

DD: Thank you very much. Now to Natalie Bennett. .

NATALIE BENNETT: There has been a powerful opposition in Parliament in the last five years. Her name was Caroline Lucas. Caroline is leading the way in restoring the NHS and our railways and fighting against fracking. You can elect a strong group of Green MPs like Caroline with a vision for a humane, sustainable Britain. Don't believe the advocates of spiteful austerity, this is the world's sixth richest country. We can give our young a properly funded education. We can provide free health and social care for our elderly. We can and must make sure that everyone has food on the table and a stable home to live in. The Green Party are the real challengers. Offering a million new jobs, combatting climate change and restoring vital community services. That is why the voters are turning to us. Challenge the establishment: Vote Green.

DD: Thank you very much. Well, those are the formal opening statements. Now we come to something less predictable. The questions from our audience, which our panel here, of course, do not know. The first question tonight comes from Charlotte Dennis. Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE DENNIS: As someone about to enter the job market, do you think it's fair to increase Government spending like so many of you plan to do, when my generation will be left to pay off the debt?

DD: Right you have the question, and you have a minute each to start with, before we debate it. Nicola Sturgeon would you start?

NS: Well, I believe it's really important to get the deficit and the debt down. But I also believe that economic policy is not an end in itself, it's a means to allow people to live healthier, happier and more prosperous lives. And if that policy, the policy of austerity is driving more people into poverty, including more children, if it is undermining our public services and if it is actually holding back economic growth, then I think it's time to change that policy. That's why the SNP is proposing an alternative. Modest spending increases in the next Parliament that would still see the debt and the deficit reduced every year. Yes, it would take a couple of years longer to eliminate the deficit but I think that is a price worth paying for enabling us to invest in infrastructure, in innovation, in skills, in the things that allow us to get our economy growing. To invest in our public services like the National Health Service and to have real action to lift people out of poverty. That's why I am proud to argue that alternative in this election.

DD: Ed Miliband?

EM: Charlotte, you're right, we've got to live within our means as a country. And that's why under my plan we'll cut the deficit every year and we'll balance the books. But we'll do it a different way from David Cameron. And I reject his plan to double spending cuts next year. Because I think for you and so many people in this audience that rely on our NHS, that would be a disaster. So here's our plan. Our plan is to have fair taxes to reverse David Cameron's tax cut for millionaires which has given every millionaire in Britain £43,000 a year. It's to clamp down on that tax avoidance and raise £7.5 billion a year. It's to protect education and health but outside some key areas like that, to see spending fall. And it's also about something else: because by raising living standards of working people in this country we can get more tax revenues in and we can get the deficit down. It's a fair plan, it's a better plan, a better plan from David Cameron's carrying on as he is.

DD: Natalie, your turn.

NB: Well, Charlotte, I'm greatly concerned about the debt that your generation faces, at that debt for about the 50% who go to university is tuition fee debt, which we want to reduce to zero and pay off the student loans. Students are leaving with £44,000 worth of debt on average, 73% of them will never pay it off. And of course, you're going out into a workplace where one in five workers is on less than the living wage, people aren't paid enough money to live on, they're indeed stacking up the debts just to meet their basic costs. The cost of housing is enormous. And that's why we do want to deal with the debt and the deficit. And we reduce it to about 1% of GDP from 5% of GDP in our manifesto now. But if we invest some of that money in building a social home, a home that you may be able to live in, and a genuinely affordable rent, if we invest that in renewable energy, in providing warm, comfortable, affordable to heat homes, then you are better off, we've invested in your future and your entire generation's future.

DD: Nigel Farage.

NF: Charlotte you're quite right. And what nobody wants to talk about, and it's a great shame that David Cameron is not here, is, in the last five years our national debt has doubled from £850 billion to £1.5 trillion. The interest repayments on that are already bigger than our current level of defence spending, and that's with interest rates at rock bottom, on the floor. So you are right, it's not fair, because we are burdening future generations. All I can say is, listening to the promises I have heard from the people here tonight and the other two who went somewhere else this evening is that they are going to drive us into greater debt. Frankly, bankruptcy for your generation. UKIP is the only party to come up with a credible plan. By cutting our foreign aid budget, by cutting our EU contributions, by stopping white elephant projects like HS2 and by recalculating the Barnett formula so that less money goes over Hadrian's Wall to Scotland we can save £32 billion a year. (*slight noise from audience*). If you ally that to tax cuts and growth, UKIP is the only party with a plan to get this debt down. (*applause from audience and one cheer*)

DD: Leanne Wood.

LQ: Plaid Cymru does want to tackle the deficit, but not at any cost and not according to artificial deadlines. We want to invest in the future generation and we want to invest in job creation. Our welfare state was hard-fought for. And remember, that investment was put in to building that welfare in the 1940s when there was no money in the coffers, when the country's debt was massive. But that time delivered public services for all. And remember it also delivered a generation in the 1950s that were told that they had never had it so good. So continuing on the path of austerity will deliver a very uncertain future for the next generations, investing in job creation and public services now will offer a much better future. (*applause*)

DD: Thank you. Well, erm Ed Miliband, Nigel Farage says he's the only one of the five of you who plans to get rid of £1.5 trillion debt and £46 billion a year of interest payments is he right?

EM: No. And his sums don't add up. But what I'd say to Charlotte and the audience here and indeed at home is you've got to make a judgment about two things in this debate, balance and fairness. Look, I think there's some people on the stage who will say that there don't have to be cuts at all. There'll be some people like Nigel who wants to follow David Cameron's extreme plan to double the cuts next year, which I think is a disaster for the public services and then this question of fairness. Nigel actually wants to cut the top rate of income tax even further for the highest earners in our country, another £43,000 tax cut. Now, I just have a different view about the way a country succeeds. I think that this idea that you just help the rich and the powerful, and the wealth will trickle down to everyone else is not the answer. You put working people should go first. So, think about these two things as you cast your vote and make your decision: balance and fairness. I believe ours is a balanced plan and a fair plan. (*applause*)

DD: Your sums... Your sums don't add up?

NF: Well, our sums do add up, and very interestingly, Ed, we're the first political party in the history of this country to have had our manifesto promises independently verified by an economic think tank. You obviously haven't read the manifesto, you should. We haven't proposed tax cuts for the rich, this is not the right time to do that, now is the time to take the low-paid on minimum wage out of tax, now is the time to help the squeezed middle to give people incentives to go to work, to make the gap between being at work and being on benefits bigger. And I have to say, this talk of austerity from you and all the others, please, please, please can we

remember, this year we are borrowing £90 billion more, our the national debt is £1.5 trillion, we have a real problem here. And I haven't heard from you, Ed, a single cut that you would make, not one.

EM: That's wrong, Nigel.

NF: Tell me.

EM: Well I'll tell you.

NF: (*words unclear, 'Tell me how you'll balance the books?' ?*)

EM: We've said that for pensioners with incomes over 42,000 we'll take away the winter fuel allowance, that's a difficult decision.

NF: Yeah.

EM: We've shown how we can save hundreds of millions of pounds in local government, in policing as well. But I just want to take issue . . .

NF: (*speaking over*) That's peanuts!

EM: I want to take issue, I want to take issue . . .

DD: Let me bring one or two of the others in . . .

EM: Let me just say this David about the spending cuts, because I really want the audience to understand this, because Nigel hasn't denied that he wants to double spending cuts next year. Now, he's got these fantasy figures that somehow getting out of Europe is going to save all this money when it's a disaster for jobs in our country. The reality is that for the NHS and education, Nigel, your plans are dangerous, they are like David Cameron's plans and they are dangerous for our core public services which Charlotte and many others rely on.

DD: Alright, Nicola Sturgeon You agree with what Ed Miliband says?

NS: Well, I want to get rid of the Tories on May 7, and I think it's a disgrace that David Cameron is not here to defend his record (*loud applause*) But I want to see . . . I want to see the Tories replaced with something better. When Ed talks about cuts outside the protected areas that's jargon, let me tell you what that means, that means cuts to social care, to social security, to local government services, to defence. Ed's is in the position that he's so (*word unclear*) to austerity, so scared to be bold he's not even doing the right thing by the NHS, he's not promising the money the National Health Service needs. I think it's time not for a pretend alternative to austerity, it's time for a real alternative to austerity. That's what I'm offering. And if Labour won't be bold enough on its own I think people should vote for parties that will hold Labour to account and make them bolder. (*applause*)

DD: Natalie Bennett, you were nodding in agreement while she was talking.

NB: Exactly right. Let's think about one group of people, there are 800,000 people over the age of 65 in Britain at the moment who need social care who aren't getting it. Those are people who need help getting out of bed in the morning, people who need help to feed themselves, who need help bathing, need help to live a basically decent, civilised life. They are not getting that help. And what the Green party is saying is we have to provide that help and at the same time ensure that the NHS provides the services we need. We want to create 400,000 new jobs in social care in the NHS. Those are jobs, I don't know what your plans are in life, Charlotte, but perhaps one of those jobs might be yours. And those are jobs that ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are being looked after, are being cared for, and of course the people who get those jobs will also be paying tax and National Insurance and have some money to spend in their local communities. (*applause*)

DD: Leanne Wood.

LW: Government spending shouldn't just be thought about as expenditure, it should also be thought about as investment, investment in the future. Now austerity has delivered, we've paid a high price for austerity, 31% of children in Wales are in poverty. [to Ed Miliband] 29% in your constituency of children are in poverty. Thousands of people are on food banks, 30% of people where I live, young people, are out of work. My view is that Labour are letting the Tories off the hook, by committing to the Tories' spending plans. So, if you were Prime Minister, Ed, I wonder if you could tell us, would you be prepared to hold an emergency budget to reverse those Tory spending cuts that are causing so much pain to so many people in so many of our communities? (*applause*)

EM: Well, you've given me a real opportunity, Leanne. Let me tell you what is going to be in Labour's first budget. We're going to have a mansion tax on properties above £2 million to fund our National Health Service, something David Cameron would never do. We're going to abolish the bedroom tax, we're going to have a bank bonus tax to put our young people, right across every part of the United Kingdom back to work. And I do say to some people on the stage tonight, let's not pretend there is no difference between me and David Cameron, you know, Nicola, there is a huge difference between me and David Cameron . . .

NS: (*words unclear*)

EM: just the three things that we've mentioned and so many other things beside.

NS: (*words unclear*)

EM: And look, the real danger in this country is of a re-elected David Cameron who doubles spending cuts, falling living standards and a threat to our National Health Service, and that's the big choice on offer at this election.

DD: Nicola's saying you should be bolder. Nicola's saying you should be bolder.

NS: I don't say . . . I don't say there's no difference between Ed Miliband and David Cameron.

EM: Well that's good.

NS: I say there is not a big enough difference between Ed Miliband and David Cameron (*applause*) that's the thing. Now, Charlotte . . . Charlotte's question was rightly about the next generation. You know, we have experts saying that if we continue with austerity cuts by 2020 there are going to be 1 million more children across the UK living in poverty. That would be a betrayal of the next generation. What I'm proposing is responsible, modest spending increases that still gets the deficit down because yes, that is important, but doesn't do it by heaping more and more pain onto the backs of the people who can least afford it. And I want to say to Ed, we share a desire to see the back of the Tories but surely we don't want to replace the Tories with Tory Lite, we need to replace the Tories with something better. (*loud applause*)

DD: Ed Miliband, Ed Miliband, hold on a moment . . . Let me bring in Nigel Farage and then I'll come back too you.

NF: I've offered cuts of £32 billion a year that will not affect our public services, Ed has offered peanuts and as for the rest, Charlotte, back to your question, you're going to be paying for this lot for a very long time to come.

EM: I want to respond directly to Nicola Sturgeon. Nicola, the other thing you're not telling people tonight is with your plan for fiscal autonomy, you are planning £7.6 billion worth of cuts in Scotland. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says it, and what is that based on? It's based on your principal desire for your drive towards independence. You haven't given up the desire towards independence. Now, I don't want to break up the country, I want to run the country in a different way. I think the problem in our country is not that we are one United Kingdom, it's that we're run for the richest and most powerful and we should be run for working families and my plan does it, but it's a responsible plan, Nicola, it's not a plan that denies we need to get the deficit down, it's not a plan that denies to Charlotte that we need to balance the books, or people at home, and people at home know we have to live within our means. And you can come along on the stage tonight and deny the need for difficult decisions

NS: *(speaking over, words unclear)*

EM: . . . and then £7.6 billion worth of cuts in Scotland, but I don't think it's going to convince anyone.

DD: Natalie, and then I'll come to you. *(Nicola Sturgeon carries on speaking)*

NS: You quote the IFS at me, the IFS said about you that people who vote Labour they don't know what they are voting for, now we know you voted with the Tories for £30 billion of cuts, you say that's not your plan but there will be cuts. Tell us tonight, because people have a right to know, what is the scale of the cuts, how much cuts are you talking about and where is the axe going to fall, it's a simple question. Give us an answer.

EM: I'll explain that outside protected areas, health, education . . .

NS: How many billions?

EM: . . . and international development spending is going to fall.

NS: By how much?

EM: I ask people at home to be the judge, and that depends on raising living standards, the economic growth we get in our country as one part of the plan, but I ask people at home to make this judgement, you can have someone on the stage who is denying the need for spending cuts or any difficult decisions but then is planning these big cuts. Or you can have my plan, or you can have David Cameron's plan, which is to double the cuts next year, bigger cuts in the next three years than in the last five which, as I say, would be deeply damaging for our public services.

DD: Alright . . . I think we should move on in a moment, but Natalie Bennett.

NB: Well Ed, I just want to say to you, just look at some of your promises and some of the things you have made clear, you want to cap child benefit for two years. By contrast the Green party wants to lift it to £40 per child per year. You, in a classic kind of Labour halfway house, cut university tuition fees by a third, which is better than what we've got now but it's just a very modest improvement. You also haven't not committed to what extra money you're going to put into the NHS, the NHS that we are being told this morning so desperately needs that extra money. And the other thing you are not focusing on is making big multinational companies pay their way. And that's what we desperately need to do at the moment. Rich individuals. That's why the Green party wants a top rate of tax of 60p for earnings over £150,000. We need to rebalance this society, you're just holding things at the same kind of level. *(applause)*

DD: We have to move on, but just a last word from Leanne Wood.

LW: Well, I would agree with you that the Tories are damaging so that's why I would ask you to work with us, with us to bring an end to further Tory cuts and another Tory government. *(applause)*

DD: I'm sorry, Ed, we've got to keep moving because we have five questions to come, so let's go on. I'm sure you'll have plenty of chance to have your say as we go along. Our next question comes from Fiona Sword, please.

FIONA SWORD: As a working single parent of three children who privately rents my home, I'd like to know each leader's thoughts on the lack of affordable social housing throughout Britain and how their party means to tackle this housing crisis.

DD: Right, and just a reminder, of course, housing *(applause)* housing, while very high on people's list of worries, is a devolved issue in Scotland and to Wales. So, you've had the question, thoughts on the lack of affordable social housing, and what you plan to do to tackle it, Ed Miliband?

EM: Well Fiona, who asked the question, in England under this government we are building fewer homes than at any time since the 1920s. That's got to change. Because I meet so many people around this country who

say they just can't afford to get on the housing ladder, they can't afford to rent, and it is a massive, massive problem, so we've got to have more social housing, we got to have more private housing to buy, we've got to reform the way the private rental market works in housing as well. And that is what our plan does, a plan to build 200,000 homes per year by 2020, to make housing the top priority for new capital investment, and to do something that hasn't been done in this country for a very long time, to stand up to the large developers who are actually stopping housing being built. So we'll give councils 'use it or lose it' powers to say either let developers build on the land or councils can buy that land off them and actually make sure that housing is built. So it is a plan to build homes for people right across England.

DD: Leanne Wood.

LW: Plaid Cymru would oppose the Tories' plans to extend the right to buy because we believe there should be more social housing and not less. And tackling rising homelessness will not be addressed by allowing more people to become private homeowners. There does need to be investment in housing. And the Prime Minister's announcement suggests there is an additional £5 billion to be spent on housing. We would like councils to build more council housing, and for the profits to be reinvested back in that housing for more people. We would also like to see rent caps in order to make housing for rent more affordable for people in all communities. And we'd like to double the council tax on holiday homes. *(smattering of applause)*

DD: Nigel Farage.

NF: Well, like all markets housing is about demand and supply. One of the big problems we've got is we have to build a new house every seven minutes in this country just to cope with current levels of migration. So, a rapidly rising population *(murmurs from audience)* has put massive, massive pressure on house building in Britain. Reducing immigration helps but it doesn't solve the problem. There is a chronic lack of housing. What Ukip proposes is a brownfield building boom, let's establish a brownfield register, let's help people with decontamination grants to build on that land, let's offer incentives such as no stamp duty on properties that are built on brownfield sites. By doing those things, by using empty government buildings, and there are plenty of them, we could produce 200,000 new affordable homes in this country every single year. But it's something we are going to have to start doing very quickly. And we should make sure that all new social housing is for UK nationals only. *(murmurs for audience and light smattering of applause)*

DD: Natalie Bennett.

NB: Well, Fiona, I'm going to come back to your situation and your struggle, because it's the struggle of so many people in Britain. The fact is private landlords last year got £9.3 billion from housing benefit, and 38% of people living in private rental accommodation, that rent is being paid in part or full by housing benefit. We've got a huge problem that houses have become primarily financial assets and only secondarily places for people to live. That's why the Green party wants to build 500,000 homes for social rent, genuinely affordable homes over the course of this Parliament, maybe one of them could be yours. We also want to put a cap on private landlords raising the rent, five year security of tenure, a cap that your rent goes up by no more than inflation. We really need to turn this around and turn homes into somewhere that are secure and affordable that you're not six months and you are thrown out and you have to look for a new place and have a whole huge new deposit to play. *(applause)*

DD: Nicola Sturgeon.

NS: Well, Fiona, I think housing is possibly one of the biggest issues in this election campaign. In Scotland we have a target of 30,000 affordable houses by 2016, we are on track to meet that. We are also considering rent caps to help people in the private rented sector. But I think we need to go much, much further, SNP MPs in the House of Commons would vote for a target of 100,000 affordable homes a year across the UK. But we also need to make sure if we are building new homes for rent we protect them for people who need to rent. I think the Tory idea to extend the right to buy to housing association properties is one of the worst ideas I've ever heard *(loud applause)* in Scotland . . . in Scotland we've abolished the right to buy, not because we are against home ownership, we help people into home ownership through help to buy and shared equity, but because it is a policy that has had its day. We need to build more houses for rent and then we need to protect them for those who can't buy and need to rent. *(applause)*

DD: Thank you. So, listening to you in Scotland and Wales, this idea of people in Housing Association accommodation being able to buy, that won't happen if there's a Tory government returned that does it for England, is that right Leanne Wood? We suspended the right to buy when Plaid Cymru was in government in the National Assembly for Wales we passed legislation to enable local authorities to suspend the right to buy in areas of high housing pressure because of the point that Nicola just outlined. We need to protect the numbers of housing available for social rent. So, certainly if Plaid Cymru was in government in the National Assembly for Wales we would not go ahead with this policy. It is one of the worst policies that you can think of, if you are thinking of reducing homelessness. This will increase levels of homelessness, and that's just not on. *(applause)*

DD: Ed Miliband.

EM: Well *(word unclear)* we supported the right to buy but the problem with the Conservative plan is that they have absolutely no idea where the £4 billion that they are supposed to be paying for it from is coming from, and that means that we're going to lead to fewer houses available for rent in our country. That's why the plan doesn't work. And look, any plan based on the right to buy has got to mean that there are going to be more houses, not less. That has got to be a fundamental principle, given the problems we face. Look, the answer is we need to invest in housing in the future, that's why I say that we make capital investment the priority for the future.

DD: But you are not in principle opposed to housing association tenants . . .

EM: *(speaking over)* We're not in principle opposed to right to buy but, as I say, I don't think the Tory plan works because there's no money for it and all that is going to mean is that the social housing stock is watered down and even fewer homes to rent.

DD: And what about the suggestion that came of capping rents in line with inflation?

EM: Well, let me deal with that directly. Because I think we're going to do something which should have been done a long time ago, probably by governments of both parties. Which is to say that we'll have three-year tenancies, not one-year tenancies in the private rented sector because so many young people, so many families are facing dreadful insecurity and within those three years we will cap the rents, because I think it makes sense that people can have some stability when it comes to private rented housing. One other thing, we will also ban letting agents from charging tenants fees. Because, at the moment, letting agents charge fees to tenants and to landlords. It is not fair. And lots and lots of people lose out in our country as a result.

DD: Nigel Farage?

NF: There just seems to be a total lack of comprehension on this panel, and indeed amongst this audience, which is a remarkable audience, even by, even by the left-wing standards of the BBC. I mean, this lot is pretty left-wing . . .

DD: Hang on, hang on a second. Hang on a second, Nigel let me just say one thing, this is an audience that has been carefully chosen not by the BBC, not by the BBC, by an independent polling organisation to represent the balance between all parties. *(applause and cheering)*

NF: Very good. Very good.

DD: Anyway, carry on.

NF: I think it's very interesting . . .

EM: It's never a great idea to attack the audience in my idea *(sic)*.

NF: The real audience is sitting at home, actually. *(disquiet from audience)*

DD: Let him have his say.

NF: No. No. That's fine.

DD: Go on.

NF: Remarkable. We are talking about a market, folks. I know none of you have ever worked in business but we're talking about a market. And markets are about demand and supply. I just wonder, I'm curious, can I get any recognition from any of you, that the demand side of this equation is that a rapidly rising population due to open-door immigration, started by Ed Miliband's Labour Party in the late 1990s, has directly contributed towards the housing crisis? Is there any flicker of recognition from any of you? Please? One of you, have a go, please.

NS: We have a housing shortage across this country. You know what, Nigel Farage, it's not caused by immigrants. In your world every problem is caused by immigrants. (*applause from audience*) We need to... We need to build more houses. We have a situation where certainly the Tory plans, or Ed's are maybe different but the Tory plans are to spend a fraction building new houses of what is spent on Housing Benefit. It the shortage of houses that drives up rent. We have to build more houses, substantially more houses, and then we need to protect them for the people who can't buy their own home and who need to rent. Now, you know, Nigel, you're obviously on a . . . setting out to win friends and influence people tonight, but if we can get away (*laughter*) but if we get away in this debate from the idea that every problem in this country is caused by immigrants, you know, immigrants from the European Union into this country make a net contribution to our country, so if you can maybe just put the bogeyman to one side and actually debate these issues for real and in substance (*loud applause*)

DD: Sorry, can I just alert you all to the fact, you don't know the questions that are coming, I do. And there is a question coming on immigration, so let's perhaps not go into too much depth on that for the moment.

NF: It's just astonishing, if you cannot accept . . .

NS: You are yes (*laughter*)

NF: . . . if you are not worldly enough to accept that there is a demand/supply side to this equation I am very, very sorry.

DD: Natalie Bennet...

NS (*continuing*) I accept demand and supply, I simply don't accept that all of the demand bit is down to immigrants.

NF: When the population goes up . . .

DD: Hang on you two.

NF: When the population goes up, there is more demand there is more demand for houses. It's not difficult, really. (*Shout from audience, inaudible*)

DD: Natalie Bennet.

NB: I am going to leave the immigration debate till later. I look forward to that one. But I'm going to take up your beloved market, Nigel. You are blaming immigration. But we have a market-led housing policy over the past decade or more that hasn't delivered homes, that's why we actually need to build homes for social rent, build council homes, that's the kind of solution we need to actually get genuinely affordable homes. Allowing private landlords to keep stacking up enormous profits. They have actually made 1,400% profit for private landlords since 1996. That's far more than you get from investing in new business investing in productive parts of our economy. The whole way our housing market has work has utterly skewed our economy. We have to change that away, we need to get back to those houses as homes, not financial assets.

DD: Alright, and so . . . (*applause*) the contention is it happened under Labour as much as under the Tories?

EM: Well, I think that Nigel Farage said something very revealing . . .

DD: Can you just pick up on what Natalie Bennet said about this happening since (*word unclear, '96'?*)

EM: We did not build enough home, the last Labour government didn't build enough homes, but I think Nigel said something very revealing. Because he basically said what Mrs Thatcher used to say, you can't buck the market. Well, the problem about the market in housing, Nigel, is it doesn't work. It's not working, it's not working because large developers have a strangle hold on the market, and I'm going to do something about it, and you're not. It's not working because we are not building enough homes in our country. And therefore, yeah, you're right, it is an issue of demand and supply. There's not enough supply in our country. And that's what we have to do. And the reality is, we haven't done it for a generation, and under the next Labour Government we'll get to grips with it, because it is one of the biggest priorities our country faces and we are letting down our young people and we are letting down our families.

DD: This stranglehold. Nigel Farage, this stranglehold of the big developers, do you agree with him?

NF: I don't disagree with that for one moment, which is why I want a brownfield revolution. But Ed, if you have net migration into Britain running at 300,000 a year, that's 300,000 more people that need somewhere to live. The point that I'm making, is that, I mean, our plans would be with the brownfield revolution for 200,000 home as year but even that isn't enough unless we cap the demand side of this equation.

EM: Okay let me respond to that. Can I respond? There's two things I would say to you back, Nigel, the first thing is that your plan in relation to migration, I believe we have do need to try and get net migration down but your plan, this is your plan, it is to get out of the European Union. Now, that's your way of doing it. Now, that is a disaster for our country. That is a disaster for jobs, that is a disaster for our economy, so I'm not going to go along with your plan. The second thing is this: we can do more for local people when it comes to housing. Take this issue of planning permission - planning permission is granted locally, and then local people find themselves locked out by buy to let landlords from out of the area. I say give councils the powers to set aside homes for local people in an area. Planning permission is more likely to be granted and local people can get homes to live in.

DD: Leanne Wood. Would you like to round this off?

LW: High housing costs are a result of a shortage of social housing. And that has come about partly as a result of Margaret Thatcher's right to buy policy. Not enough housing has been built. And the problem is exacerbated when more people are out of work, because then more people require social housing. And on the question of immigration, when we have more immigrants paying into the tax pot, if they were to be removed out of the system, then there would be even less money in the tax pot to build more houses, so I don't accept the argument that immigration is part of the problem. I think in some ways it can be a part of the solution. (*applause*)

DD: As I said, we will . . . without letting you into our secret, we may be coming to that. But that's two down and three to go. Let's have our third question, from Anaia Shanane, please.

ANAIA SHANANE: With increasing instability in the world stage can we really give up Trident and allow defence spending to fall below 2% of GDP?

DD: Increasing instability on the world stage, can we really give up Trident and allow defence spending to fall below 2% of GDP? And, Nigel Farage, it's your turn by lot to answer this one first.

NF: I have to say, the answer is clearly no, we can't afford to, I do agree with you. If we look at North Africa, we look at the Middle East, we look at huge tensions in neighbouring Russia, the world is in a very dangerous place, perhaps a more dangerous place than it been at any point since the fall of the Warsaw Pact. It is astonishing that we saw the last government run down defence spending. Nobody thought that Conservative Prime Minister would run the British Army down to a size of 82,000 and they still won't commit to 2%, in fact, from what I can see almost nobody is prepared to commit to 2%. I think we should commit to 2%, I think we need to go back to 2010 manning levels and Trident, expensive, though it is, I'm afraid, is a necessary thing to have in the modern world. I would also like to see us spend just a little bit more money looking after our ex-

servicemen and women who have come home from repeated conflicts and not been looked after properly. *(applause)*

DD: OK. 2% of course is the membership of NATO, is the target you are meant to hit. Natalie Bennet?

NB: Well, I think we are in a dangerously unstable world. But Trident nuclear weapons don't make me feel any safer. I do not *(word unclear)* any circumstance in which anyone is even seriously thinking about using those hideous weapons of mass destruction. We've followed a lot on international policy in recent years. We have followed America into Iraq and Afghanistan, disastrously for our forces and for the state of those countries and the state of that whole region. How about we take a lead and say we will rid Britain of these hideous weapons of mass destruction *(some applause)* Weapons that surely everybody thinks we can never use. Instead, let's focus on increasing, and here I go in entirely the opposite direction to Nigel Farage as on so many other things, increasing aid, increasing diplomatic efforts, and making this a safer, secure world, tackling hunger and supporting democracy. That is how we get safer. *(applause)*

DD: Leanne Wood.

LW: It makes no sense to spend £100 billion, when we have so much social need. We must recognise the role that we have played in the past, the decisions our governments have made in making the world a much less safe place. Now, Plaid Cymru was strongly opposed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we've tried hard to hold the former Labour government to account for the decisions that it's made. But we are adamant that our communities can't be made safer just by pursuing defence. A strong diplomatic presence is required too in order to promote justice and human rights. We can't justify spending £100 billion on a new generation of weapons of mass destruction in the form of Trident, and so we should pursue a policy instead of reversing our role in the world to be a haven for human rights and a beacon for conflict and resolution and peace. *(applause)*

DD: Nicola Sturgeon.

NS: National security is of paramount importance it's one of the most important responsibilities of any politician and any government. But I think we need to make sure that the country is defended appropriately. We have seen savage cuts to conventional defence forces in recent years. A 30% drop in MoD employment, at the same time as our forces have been fighting on the front line in Iraq and Afghanistan. Britain is an island nation and yet doesn't have a single maritime patrol aircraft, and at the same time Westminster parties plan to spend £100 billion on new nuclear weapons, think those priorities are plain wrong. To those who say we need Trident to make a save, there are 190 or so out of the 200 countries in the world that don't have nuclear weapons. So I think it's time to invest in strong conventional forces, not in nuclear weapons. And if it comes to a choice of how to spend £100 billion, I choose childcare, health, and education over new Trident weapons any day of the week. *(applause)*

DD: Alright. Ed Miliband?

EM: The first duty of any Prime Minister is to keep our country safe and that's why I'm going to keep our independent nuclear deterrent. Let me explain why. I think we live in an uncertain and unstable world. We only have to look at the actions of Russia in regards to Ukraine over the last year or so to know that we can't predict the threats we face 10, 20, 30, 40 years ahead. That's why it's right we keep our nuclear deterrent. But there's so much more we need to do to keep our country safe. Look, we need to work with our allies in the European Union, in my view, we need to work with the United States, but I think we need to work not *for* our allies. And I think it's very, very important we learn the lessons of the 2003 Iraq war. Because, Britain's national interest will often coincide with America's national interest but not always. And you need a Prime Minister who's willing to say no when it's appropriate and that's what I will do. *(light applause)*

DD: Thank you very much, well those are the opening statements. Nigel Farage, do you find yourself in a measure of agreement with Ed Miliband on this, Trident and the 2% of GDP?

NF: I do, I do, but all that slightly worried me is that Ed thought perhaps we should use the EU for defence. Now, it's absolutely clear that Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, said they are building a European army. And we've got a bit of a choice to make here, you know, we've been with Nato, we've been

with that group of countries since the late 1940s, the EU clearly is in a position to attempt to usurp it. I just wonder, Ed, would you sign us up to a European army?

EM: No, no.

NF: Because that is where EU defence is going. And I think it's important . . .

EM: No.

NF: I think it's important that we do not . . . well, but are we going to have a choice on this?

EM: No. I think no is the answer. *(laughter and applause)*

NF: So are you saying . . . so are you saying that if 27 countries push ahead and form a European army you as Prime Minister will keep us out of it?

EM: There is not going to be a European army. But let me, let me explain . . .

NF: There is going to be a European army.

EM: No there isn't. Let me explain...

NF: Hang on, no hang on Ed, last year I was on with Nick Clegg, he said my talk of the European army was a dangerous fantasy. We now have the bosses of the European Union, including the French President, saying they want to build a European army. You can shake your head all you like but actually this is happening. And if it did come to a European army would that be enough for you to give people a referendum?

EM: I'm not going to have a European army, but let me explain - I think I've said that a number of times – er, look, let me explain the point about Europe, because Nigel raises it. Think about the problems that we have in the world, think about the issue of Russia where we need sanctions to remain in place and if necessary to be stepped up. It's Europe and America working together. Think about the battle against Isis. Isis is a disgusting, evil organisation and we must give them no quarter and defeat them at home and abroad. But we've got to do it by cooperating across borders. And this is this fundamental point for us as a country. Look, we can't, we've got to learn the lessons of the past. We can't have Britain thinking it can solve the problems of the world on its own with the United States, that is the lesson of the 2003 Iraq war, but at the same time we can't withdraw from the world because otherwise those problems will visit us at home. *(applause)*

LW: Do you really think the problems caused by Isis, do you really think the problems caused by Isis can be resolved with nuclear weapons?

EM: No.

LW: If you were the Prime Minister . . .

EM: No.

LW: . . . would press the button if you have the opportunity?

EM: No. No. It's not about Isis. But, let me just say Leanne, because I think it is an important point, you know, we are currently taking military action against Isis, right? I'm going to continue that as Prime Minister and I think it's right we continue that as Prime Minister *(sic)*.

LW: *(words unclear, something like 'nuclear bomb against them?')*

EM: No, of course not.

LW: The question was about Trident.

EM: Well, you raised the issue about Isis, or rather I raised it and you talked about it. It is really important this, because look, we have a battle going on against this organisation that wants to create an Islamic state across Iraq and across Syria and it is right to use military action against them, as part of a coalition. This was the point about the Iraq war, you see in 2013 David Cameron came to me, and Nick Clegg, and they said that they wanted to bomb Syria and they hadn't thought through the consequences, it wasn't a last resort so I said no, and as a result the British Parliament said no and then President Obama decided not to go ahead with that action. So it's right to be judicious about these things. Military action, a last resort, but in the case of Isis I will continue it.

DD: Alright. Nicola Sturgeon, can I come to you? Am I right in thinking SNP used to be rather wary about Nato and you now believe that we should be in Nato is that right?

NS: If Scotland was an independent country, we believe we should be a member of Nato.

DD: Sorry, can you say it again?

NS: If Scotland had become an independent country, we didn't vote for that last year, our policy was that Scotland would have been a member of Nato. 25 of the 28 member states of Nato don't have nuclear weapons. Ed and I don't agree on Trident, although I think some of his members agree with me on Trident. But can I say, I thought the Tory attack on Ed last week was absolutely disgraceful. This is a Tory government that sent P45s to soldiers while they were serving on the front line. But, this is an issue about priority. You know, Ed's right when he says we live in a dangerous world and Leanne is absolutely right to say that Trident will not defend us against Isis. I take the view that the world we live in is not made safer by us renewing our nuclear weapons. If we want other countries to give up their nuclear weapons, surely we should lead by example. We should then make sure we have strong conventional defences so that we can protect ourselves in a dangerous world and make sure we're investing the £100 billion in things that build a better future for our children. *(applause)*

DD: And Natalie Bennett, I take it what you have just heard is not music to the Green Party's ears?

NB: We support the current planned levels of spending on our military over the term of the next Parliament up to 2020. There are important roles for our military in self-defence and an important role in UN peacekeeping. Instead of being the world's policeman with America as we have done over recent decades we should be taking our part in terms of UN peacekeeping around the world. But I particularly want to focus on the point about Isis and that region. Because what's really important is regional countries are feeding Isis, money is coming through them through countries in the region. What we need is strong diplomatic efforts to put pressure on that region, and we also need to stop pumping our own arms into that region, particularly countries like Saudi Arabia, which are huge human rights abuses, hugely fuelling conflict in the region, and that needs to stop. *(applause)*

DD: Leanne Wood, are you in agreement?

LW: I would agree with a lot of what was said there.

DD: Where would you disagree since we are in a debate rather than a . . . *(laughter from audience)*

LW: Well, I would disagree mainly with my friend on the far right there. *(Referring to Nigel Farage's positioning on the podium, but also a comment on his politics; laughter from audience and cheers)* We already . . . we already spend 6% of our budget on defence. I think that that proportion can be spent more wisely. I don't see the sense in spending £100 billion on renewing the Trident, replacing the Trident nuclear missile system. But I do think that there is a strong argument for making sure that the troops that we do have serving abroad are properly equipped, and that they are looked after when they come home. Because, far too many of them end up on the streets as homeless, or in prison, as a result of not having proper after-care. Plaid Cymru has worked very hard in ensuring a strong deal for veterans through the work of my colleague Elvin Clwyd in Westminster.

DD: And you'd back the 2% of GDP?

LW: No, we think that's an arbitrary sum.

DD: Nato fixed, Nato decision.

LW: Yes and even the Prime Minister has said he's not prepared to commit that level of expenditure. The expenditure on defence is 6%. And what is allocated can be spent better than it is.

DD: Alright, Nigel Farage.

NF: I didn't quite get the 6% bit but, no, surely 2% isn't very much. We should think of it rather like paying the premium on our home insurance. You know, we very much hope there isn't going to be a fire next year but if there is we better be insured. And I very much doubt, with our defences where there are at the moment, that we would be capable of defending ourselves and certainly, if one of our dependent territories such as the Falklands were to face a problem again, we do not have at the moment the military capability to do anything about it. To ask for just 2% of our total spend to be on defence I don't think is asking very for much.

DD: Alright, thank you very much, I think we'll move on to another question. This one comes from Leon Matthew please, Leon Matthew.

LEON MATTHEW: Immigration has put public services at great risk. What are your plans to deal with this?

DD: Immigration has put public services at great risk, what are your plans to deal with this? Natalie Bennett?

NB: Well, I'm afraid Leon, I entirely disagree with the premise of your question. What has put our public services at risk is austerity, failure to invest and privatisation, particularly of our NHS. *(applause)* Now, I am an immigrant, I've chosen to become a British citizen to make my life in Britain. I came as a visitor, I loved the British way of life, I love the traditions and the culture and I decided to stay and make this my home. I went into politics because I want to improve that, I want to protect it, and I want to make sure the vulnerable and our natural environment are protected. Now, I live in Somerstown in central London, a very diverse community. There are migrants there, some of them are cleaners, some of them are doctors, some of them are grandmas. They are all contributing to the British way of life, to the British life in their own way. Now, there's someone here on this platform who wants to utterly demonise those migrants, and you know who I mean. I want to celebrate the contribution of migrants to Britain and I believe we should all be doing that. *(applause)*

DD: Nicola Sturgeon.

NS: We need strong controls on immigration, of course we do, and we need to make sure that people don't get away with abusing the system that the rest of us pay for. Yes, there are parts of the UK where housing and public services are under real strain, but I think the answer to that is to build more houses and invest in our public services, not to scapegoat immigrants. I fear the debate at Westminster on immigration is driven far too much by Nigel Farage and Ukip. I think it's important that we do remember some key facts. EU immigrants to our country do make a net contribution to our public finances. A majority, a clear majority of migrants work and pay taxes and a majority of those who don't work are students. And of course, hundreds of thousands of people go from this country to other countries all of the time to live and settle there. How would we feel if they were spoken about the way we sometimes allow migrants here to be spoken about? So let's have the debate, let's not duck the issues, but make it civilised and not have it driven by the intolerance of Nigel Farage and his colleagues. *(applause)*

DD: Ed Miliband.

EM: Leon, I've changed Labour's approach on immigration because I think the starting point has got to be that people's concerns are not based on prejudice, people's concerns are real and we have to address them. That's why we've said that if people come here they won't get benefits for the first two years, because I think people should contribute before they claim. And it's why we've also said that we will deal with something that has not been properly dealt with at all under David Cameron's government, which is migrant labour being abused, exploited, to drive down people's wages. When I talk to people around the country it's one of the biggest sources of concern and anxiety for them, because they say, 'my wages are being driven downwards, you've got migrant labour being brought in and paid less than the minimum wage and nobody is doing anything about it', it's time to act, act on the rogue employers, it's time to act on the gang masters, it's time to act on the rogue

landlords and it's time to have fairness because I'm going to counter exploitation wherever I find it because we are going to protect the working people of this country. *(applause)*

DD: Nigel Farage.

NF: When you lose an argument in politics you tend to resort to abusing your opponent and we've seen quite a bit of this towards Ukip recently. The fact is, Leon, you're right, a massive increase in our population means we've got to find another quarter of a million primary school places by 2020, it means we have fewer GPs per capita than any other country in Europe. We were in no position to cope with this massive rise in our population. What to do about it? Well, we have to be honest and we have to say that if you are EU members you cannot do anything about the numbers coming to Britain. My plan would be to have a trade relationship with the EU, to be good neighbours with the EU, but not to be a member of political union, to take back control of our borders and to put in place an Australian-style points system so we can choose the quantity and type of people that come to our country. We would no longer discriminate against people from India in favour of eastern Europe. It would be a fair and ethical policy and it would work.

DD: Leanne Wood.

LW: So you abuse immigrants and those with HIV and then complain that Ukip is being abused? *(applause)* Now, there is a risk to public services, but I don't believe that that comes from immigration. I believe that that has come about as a result of cuts. So the answer to that is to end austerity. There are scarce resources. There aren't enough to go around. Now, our public services, especially the NHS, would collapse if we were to end immigration tomorrow. Now, there are real issues in terms of the driving down of wages, and that has to be addressed. And the way to address that is to raise the minimum wage to the living wage, and to strengthen trade unions. We should be looking at repealing the trade union legislation that Margaret Thatcher brought in. Because, if you have stronger trade unions then you have a stronger defence of our public services and against the exploitation of workers.

DD: Thank you very much. Well let's try and argue about some of the points that Leon Matthew put forward. Natalie Bennet, he said, remember, 'immigration has put public services at great risk' and I wonder, do you agree with that? And Nigel Farage said he would like to see an Australian system of immigration control. You said earlier you came from Australia, I wonder what do you think of that?

NB: Well, what I think is that we need to first of all celebrate the free movement of people in the EU. As Nicola says, that's a huge potential opportunity for people of Britain to move around the EU just as we benefit from people from the EU coming here. In the terms of the rest of the world, what we need for the non-EU immigrants, is a fair, humane and controlled system. What we have at the moment is controlled but it is neither fair nor humane. And if we look at the way we're treating refugees in this country, a quarter of the appeals against asylum refusal are successful. These are people who are refugees, we're not treating fairly. We need a different kind of system, a fairer, humane system that acknowledges that lots of British people cannot live in their own country with a non-EU spousal partner because of unfair and unreasonable immigration rules, we need to be fair and reasonable. And I just want to pick up on the NHS point, Nigel says he's worried about the effects of immigrants on the NHS, one in four doctors is foreign-born. *(applause)* 40% of NHS staff are foreign-born.

DD: Alright. Nicola Sturgeon, you said in your opening statement that you wanted strong controls, I think those were your words on immigration, what kind of controls would you . . . ?

NS: I think every country has to ensure that its border is properly regulated and monitored. That we don't have people coming into the country who have no right to be here. So I think everybody accepts strong and effective immigration controls but we have to make sure that we have immigration that is right for our economic needs. When you pander to Ukip, you often make the wrong choices. One of the changes that the Tories made after they were elected in 2010, I hope that Ed will reverse if he becomes the Prime Minister, is to take away the post-study work visa. That means that students coming from overseas, who we help to educate, whereas previously they could stay here for a couple of years to give something back to our economy, they now can't do that. So we deprive ourselves of their economic contribution and we are hurting our universities into the bargain. Now, I know people's concerns, I represent a constituency in Glasgow with high levels of Eastern European immigration, I know the pressures on housing and public services, I know the exploitation that many immigrants

face, but the answer to that is to crack down on the bad landlords and the gangmasters, it is to build more houses and invest in our public services. We are a nation of emigrants as well as immigrants, and we should treat immigrants the way we would want emigrants from our country to be treated wherever they go to settle.

DD: Just going back to your remark (*applause*) . . . when you said . . . when you said you wanted strong controls, do you want fewer immigrants or are you happy with the level as it is?

NS: I don't think this putting a cap . . . we should encourage immigration that is right for our needs. We should look at, you know, Natalie and Leanne are right to point out the way in which people who come here from overseas contribute to our National Health Service, we shouldn't be ideological about this. We should be pragmatic and practical about it. What does our economy need? That is what should drive decisions on immigration. I fear, increasingly it is Nigel Farage, who's wrongly driving the decisions that some of the Westminster politicians are making.

DD: Nigel Farage?

NF: I mean, the fact that there are some very good foreign doctors and nurses that work in this country is not the point. It does make me, of course, ask the question, why are we not training more of our own nurses but it isn't the point, the point is that health tourism to this country costs us a very great deal of money. People in government have to make tough choices. If the choice is to that we increasingly say to people, particularly older people, 'we cannot treat you for breast cancer, we cannot treat you for prostate cancer, we don't have the money,' whilst at the same time, we allow people to fly into Britain with no link to this country, and contributed nothing to this system but we are prepared to give them the drugs for being HIV positive. You then get yourself to a situation where you ask yourself a sane question: Is the job of the National Health Service to look after people here, or is it to be an international health service? And I can assure you, whatever you may think on this panel, the vast majority of British people want this to be a National Health Service.

EM: Here's the problem I have with you, Nigel, is you want to exploit people's fears rather than to address them. And that is the problem with what you say on so many of these issues. (*applause*) You want to end all of the racial equality laws, apparently.

NF: No, no, no, no.

EM: One of your MEPs made a disgusting slur on one of Nicola Sturgeon's ministers, Hamza Yousaf, and called him Abu Hamza. Every time, Nigel, you cross the line. And look, I'm the son of immigrants. And I recognised the Labour party needed to change. And we have to do a lot of hard thinking about this. I don't think we should dismiss people's concerns as prejudice. But with for the unit of our country, the diversity of our country which is a strength, we've got to handle these issues in an appropriate, sensible and balanced, not exploitative way. And I'm afraid Nigel, I think you felt that test.

DD: Can we come, can we just come back again to the first part, that public services are being put at great risk. I don't know how many of you would accept that . . . part of the question.

NF: I do, yes, I do.

DD: I know you do. What about you, Leanne Wood?

LW: Well, I would add this: we've got a doctors shortage in Wales, we've got fewer doctors per head of the population in Wales than almost every other country in the EU, and this is due in part to a tightening of the immigration rules under the previous Labour government which saw fewer doctors coming to Wales from the Indian subcontinent. And that caused problems in A&E and in paediatrics departments. And as a result, the Labour government in Wales are centralising hospital services, moving services away from people. So this debate has caused real problems for our health service in Wales. Now, if you were a foreign doctor, would you want to come to the UK into the climate, the anti-immigration climate, that we have here? Of course we have to train more doctors but it takes an awful long time to train a doctor, and we have problems in the Welsh NHS now.

EM: David, I want to . . .

DD: Yes, yes, Nigel Farage, I'll bring you in afterwards.

NF: I just wonder, Ed . . .

DD: Hold on, let me just bring Ed in and then you.

EM: Of course there are pressures on the public social services. There are pressures on public services. Immigration is one of the pressures on the public services. But the reason why our National Health Service is failing is because of David Cameron's government. Look, we've seen five years of the NHS going backwards. We've seen five years of a top-down reorganisation that nobody wanted and nobody voted for (*shout from audience, inaudible*) and people's experience in A&E, people's experience in waiting longer for operations, that can be turned around.

DD: A shout from behind me that Labour started that? (*another shout from audience*) Our audience isn't meant (*words unclear*) I'm just passing it on to you.

EM: To the lady that said it, I'm proud of our record on the NHS. When we took over in '97, people were waiting 18 months, they were waiting 18 months, then it was 18 weeks. And now we've seen the NHS going backwards and backwards under David Cameron. And I really fear for the NHS with his extreme spending plans, that is why we have got a plan to turn it around, we've got a funded plan.

NS: (*words unclear*) money the NHS needs.

LW: Labour are running the NHS in Wales. It's not good you know.

EM: And the argument you have made, Leanne, and the argument you've made Leanne is that David Cameron has cut the Welsh budget so much that that has led to cuts in Wales. And, the truth is that the NHS is struggling in Scotland because Nicola hasn't met her A&E targets for five and a half years, it's got challenges in Wales it's got challenges across the country.

LW: Cuts are part of the problem, then the whole problem.

EM: The answer is: have a proper funding plan for our National Health Service.

DD: Let's not get diverted into a debate on the NHS, which has took up a lot of time in the first debate, but Nigel Farage, do you want come in on this.

NF: I just want to say, I think that Ed is trying to defend a record that wasn't all that good really was it? You were the guys who brought the big private equity boys in to the National Health Service and privatised a large chunk of it. You were the people who saw the massive growth of MRSA, you were the people that saw, presided over the Mid-Staffs Hospital but my question few, if you become Prime Minister will you run a *National* Health Service or will you continue it to be an *international* health service? And that is what voters want to know. (*applause*)

EM: I'll answer you, I'll answer you directly. There are rules in place, and they've got to be enforced. So that when people come here from other countries, we collect the money from them. But Nigel, the thing, the thing you've got to answer is this, because people at home need to know this: you don't want the National Health Service, you want a private insurance system of healthcare. You have said it on the record. You've said . . .

NB: Just to come in on something that you . . . Ed Miliband . . .

EM: That's your real agenda, and you'll support David Cameron with his plan.

DD: Hold on.

NB: Ed Miliband . . .

NF: You cannot conduct this debate . . .

DD: Nigel, can you pause for a moment? We are not debating the NHS, alright?

NF: Well I'd like to answer him on that.

DD: Well, you can have one brief answer, then we must move on.

NF: Stop lying. UKIP believes in the National Health Service, free at the point of delivery. It was you that privatised a large chunk . . .

(words unclear, a number of speakers speak at once)

NF: You are lying, you lying... There are millions of people, you are lying to millions of people, you keep on doing it.

(shout from audience unclear)

DD: You have made the point. Alright *(words unclear due to speaking over)*

EM: I think Natalie wanted to come in David?

DD: I thought you wanted to come in.

EM: I did . . .

DD: Natalie, briefly.

NB: I think it was probably my turn. I do want to say, something to you Ed, that you are on the record about – you're comfortable with a 5% private profit for private companies operating in the NHS. We should be 0% profit from the NHS.

DD: This is the last point, please because as I said, we're not meant to be debating this, or we *(words unclear due to speaking over)*

EM: Nigel, Nigel, this is what you said. "I think we are going to have to move to an insurance-based system, I think we are going to have to move to an insurance-based system . . .

NF: *(word unclear, 'not'?)* an American system.

EM: . . . of healthcare. "I would feel more comfortable that my money would return value, if we weren't spending £100 billion on central government." Nigel that is your position, and the problem is that David Cameron has a plan . . .

NF: It isn't my position Ed, you know . . . *(words unclear, Miliband and Farage speaking simultaneously)*

DD: I am going to stop this now. I know you all have cancer than the NHS, and you have given them, and you'll have other chances to give them, it's not part of the debate tonight. Much as you may have expected it. It did not come as one of the questions that we have chosen. But we have chosen a question which I want you to address next, and this is our last one of the debate, and it's from Michael Kenworthy, please.

MICHAEL KENWORTHY: What kind of a deal would you be prepared to enter into in the event of a hung Parliament?

DD: What kind of a deal would you be prepared to enter into in the event of a hung Parliament? (*applause*) And before I ask for the first statement, I should state the obvious, Ed Miliband, which is, of course, you are aiming for an overall majority. So, save us that bit.

EM: (*laughter in voice*) Oh go on, go on . . .

DD: And answer the question.

EM: Oh go on, let me just explain briefly (*words unclear*) full majority. Look, I think this is important. You know, we've put a manifesto before the British people. You get to decide in three weeks' time which is the government of this country. I think frankly, this coalition government has become an excuse for broken promises. Nick Clegg broke his promises on tuition fees, David Cameron broke his promise on VAT. Now what I want is a majority government to implement my manifesto, to run this country again for working people, not for the richest and most powerful. To raise the minimum wage to £8 an hour, to ban those exploitative zero-hours contracts to have a mansion tax for the NHS, clamp down on tax avoidance, and have doctors and more nurses. And look, you know, on this question of what happens after the election, I've got an old fashioned view, let the people decide on May 7th but I want a majority Labour government as I think it is the best thing for the country. (*some applause, shouting from the audience*)

DD: Nigel Farage?

NF: I think that the most important constitutional question this country faces is whether it is an independent self-governing nation or not. And it's interesting to note that even the Nationalists believe in being members of the EU, therefore they don't actually believe in true independence, we can't be an independent state and be part of the European Union. My view is, we should be outside of that. My view is we should govern ourselves, my view is we should be self-confident and reach out to the world. So, for me, for me if UKIP is in a position of influence in the next Parliament, we would want the British people to have a full, free and fair referendum so that they decide whether we have a trade deal with the EU or continued membership of the European Union. And it's a mystery to me that the Labour Party, which used to be the party that actually believed that the EU would be bad for Britain now won't even give the British people a referendum. I'm astonished by that. But that's what I believe is the most important thing that UKIP in Parliament could fight for. (*shout from audience, inaudible, and a smattering of applause*)

DD: Nicola Sturgeon.

NS: Well, the most important deal I want to do on the 7th of May is with the Scottish people so that we can make Scotland's in voice heard loudly and clearly in Westminster. I then want to see the back of the Tories. I will never, ever do a deal with the Tories. Let me make that crystal clear. (*applause*) The polls though, show that Ed isn't strong enough to get rid of the Tories on his own. So I will work with Labour, with Leanne with Natalie, so that together we can get rid of the Tories. But what I would say to Ed is, I want Ed to replace the Tories with something different and something better, something more progressive, because progressive change is what the country is crying out for. So that's my offer to Ed Miliband. If he is prepared to be better than the Tories, then I'm prepared to work with him to allow him to replace the Tories, which I think is what many people want to see. (*applause*)

DD: Leanne Wood. Well, Plaid Cymru wants to end austerity, we want to rebalance power and wealth throughout these islands, we want to invest in job creation, we want to end Trident renewal, introduce a living wage, end zero-hours contracts but most importantly we want to bring an end to this Tory Government with its ideological driven cuts. And we can work together as progressives here on this stage, can work together in order to achieve that. We can have strong public services, we can have a strong economy with a future for our young people and we can also get a strong deal for Wales. There is no longer any need for us to continue with a third-rate devolution settlement. Like Nicola, I will not prop up a Conservative government, but I will also not prop up a Labour government hell-bent on implementing Tory policies. We can have an alternative. (*applause*)

DD: Natalie Bennet. First of all, to be very clear, also, we would do nothing to prop up a Tory government in any way at all. (*applause*) But what voters are increasingly doing is looking towards voting Green. In the last election in 2010 about one in 100 people voted Green. The polls are showing that at least one in 20, and maybe

many more will vote for the kind of policies we are putting forward for the fair economy, for a publicly owned and run NHS in which the profit motive has no place, and for tackling the pressing issue of climate change that yet again we have not heard any other person mention on this panel tonight. A strong group of Green MPs can build on the brilliant work of Caroline Lucas. We are prepared to work with Ed on a vote by vote basis, but as Leanne and Nicola have said, what we need is a much stronger alternative to the Tories, and sadly that is not what Labour is offering.

DD: So, Ed Miliband, you've heard the offer that came from Nicola Sturgeon, she'll support you, her offer, she said, if you pursued more progressive policies. What is your reply to her?

EM: I have fundamental disagreements with you, Nicola, because in the last couple of weeks you have revealed that you haven't ruled out having a second referendum on independence in the next five years. Now, look, we're just very different, we've got very different views. I mean, I respect your views that you want to break up the country, but that's not my view. I think that would be a disaster for the working people of Britain. So, we have profound differences between us, David, that's why I'm not going to have a coalition with the SNP, because I'm never going to put at risk the unity of our United Kingdom, and why? Because I care too much about the working people of our country and I think it would be a disaster for us to start competing against each other, driving down wages, dismantling the basic state pension which is a foundation of security in retirement, and dismantling our country, so it is a no, I'm afraid.

NS: I don't know what Ed Miliband is talking about. The question of independence was for the referendum last year, this election is about getting rid of the Tories. And Ed, whatever differences you have with me, surely they are as nothing to the differences both of us have with the Tories. This is about how we deliver better politics for people not just in Scotland but right across the UK. This election is an opportunity to seize an alternative to austerity, to protect our public services, to create more and better jobs, to have a higher minimum wage and protect our National Health Service. Ed's going into this election not promising the money that the National Health Service needs. What I'm saying is I can help Labour be bolder, to deliver the change that we really need.

EM: David, David . . .

NS: That's what this election is about. For me it's about making Scotland's voice heard, but secondly it's about delivering real change, not pretend change but real change for people right across this country. Don't turn your back on that, Ed, and let David Cameron back into Downing Street. *(applause)*

EM: Oh no Nicola, look, here's the situation. You have a very odd approach because you claim you want a Labour government but you are saying anyone but Labour. In England you're saying vote Green, in Wales you're saying vote Plaid Cymru and of course in Scotland you're saying vote SNP. And you know that for every one less Labour MP the likelihood is that we will end up with David Cameron and Nick Clegg, not on the stage tonight, perhaps with a bit of Nigel thrown in, and the truth is you want to gamble on getting rid of a Tory government, I can guarantee that we get rid of a Tory government if you vote Labour in this election.

NS: *(speaking over)* . The reality is if on the 8th of May there are more anti-Tory MPs in the House of Commons than there are Tory MPs then if we work together we can lock David Cameron out of Downing Street. So tell me tonight, is it the case you would rather see David Cameron go back into Downing Street than work with the SNP? Surely that cannot be your position Ed? *(applause and loud cheering)*

EM: No, the difference is, Nicola, I have fought the Tories all my life, unlike the SNP which presaged a Tory government in 1979, unlike your leader Alex Salmond who said to vote Lib Dem in 2010 and we ended up with a LibDem-Tory coalition and unlike you at this election . . .

NS: *(speaking over)* I was 9 years old in 1979, this is 2015.

EM: You've fought Labour all your life Nicola, I just don't buy it.

NS: We have a chance to kick David Cameron out of Downing Street, don't turn your back on it, people will never forgive you. *(applause and cheering)*

DD: I think our viewers will have an impression of what you both think of that issue. But Nigel Farage, what about you and the Tories who they are trying to keep out, all four of them?

NF: Well, as an observer it would be impossible, I think, for Ed Miliband to be Prime Minister without Nicola Sturgeon's 35-40 MPs and that is something I think very deeply concerning to a lot of English voters, they are very, very worried about the Scottish tail wagging the English dog. I'm not sure, I'm not sure that's what we're *(laughter and disquiet from audience)* going to finish up with. Well, that's the reality, Scotland is 10% of the House of Commons chamber, but may well, in coalition, with Ed Miliband, lead to a situation where we continue with the Barnett Formula, because Ed has promised to keep that. So I think English voters are worried worried about that. My view, David, for Ukip is this: I would happily say to you that Ukip could have worked with a Labour Party that believed in the British people having a say on the greatest constitutional question of the day. They've turned their backs on it. The Tory government . . .

DD: Sorry, you would have supported Labour if they offered a referendum on . . . ?

NF: If they had offered a referendum we could have done business but they've turned their backs on the British people.

DD: That is the only issue for you, none of the social issues, not the NHS, not education?

NF: *(speaking over, words unclear)* The only issue, the only issue, the only issue is: do we have an our own country and control our own borders. And Mr Cameron, having repeatedly refused a referendum now says he'll have one, our job will be to have an honest one, not a stitch up.

DD: Okay, let's hear from the Greens and Plaid Cymru. Leanne Wood.

LW: A hung parliament provides Wales with a golden opportunity to end our decades-long funding disadvantage. Now, I asked you in the last debate whether or not you would be prepared to commit to making sure that Wales has parity with Scotland in terms of funding, which would enable us to practically end austerity by delivering an additional £1.2 billion into the Welsh economy. Instead of ploughing ahead with 2.2% cuts to the Welsh budget, will you now agree that Wales deserves parity with Scotland, and if not can you justify why not?

EM: I'm not going to make a false promise to you, Leanne on the stage tonight, because it's not responsible that is the reason. We have a deficit we have to get down. We do want to see fair funding for Wales. And we've said that, but you know, look, it does go to the big issue in the election, which is can you believe the promises that are made and aren't people just going to promise you the earth? Now, you've got different people on the stage tonight who want to make the case for different parts of the United Kingdom, I want to stand up for working people in every part of the United Kingdom and I think it would be damaged, frankly, by trying to break up our country.

DD: Alright. Natalie Bennett.

NB: I think we've just heard again a phrase that we've heard a lot from Ed this evening, 'the working people of this country.' I wonder, Ed, what your views are on the words Rachel Reeves, your Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, who said 'I don't want to represent people on benefits, I don't want to represent the unemployed.' Well, personally, as the Green Party we want to represent the most vulnerable in this country, the disabled people, the unemployed, the people who've really suffered under this and your previous governments, the people in poverty. Now, I think the people out there who think that we should be standing up for the disabled, for the Independent Living Fund, for getting rid of the horrendous Work Capability Assessment that your previous government brought in, the dreadful Atos, the privatisation, people who are against that, if you vote Green you are expressing your distaste for that approach to life and saying we have to protect our most vulnerable.

DD: Okay, I'm afraid that question has to be rhetorical because we've come to the end of this part of the debate on the questions which we have had, the arguments that have been going on. Now, in a moment we get closing statements, rather formal ending to the programme, with formal statements from the five leaders.

Moves on to discussing registering to vote, as there are only four days left to do it.

DD: Now we turn to the leaders' closing statements. One minute each, again, on the clock and Nicola Sturgeon kicks off.

NS: I'm going into this election with a very clear message, none of us can afford more austerity, our NHS, our children, our economy can't afford the billions of pounds of additional cuts planned by Labour, the Liberals and the Tories, and none of us can afford the ?£100 billion they plan to spend on new nuclear weapons. Their priorities are wrong and it would be ordinary people across the UK who pay the price, unless you choose differently. We have seen tonight that Labour alone will not be bold enough to deliver the real progressive change that people need. A big team of SNP MPs can force the pace of progressive change. We offer an alternative. Real investment in the NHS, housing, child care and jobs. To voters in Scotland I ask you to vote SNP to make Scotland's voice heard, and to voters elsewhere I pledge that hurs will be a voice to deliver real change for you, too. *(applause)*

DD: Leanne Wood.

LW: Plaid Cymru does not accept that this is as good as it gets. At this election we can change course. Tonight, we've heard the leader of the opposition refuse to reverse Tory spending cuts. Opposition that promises more of the same is no opposition at all. You have an alternative. In Wales Plaid Cymru offers a vision to rebalance power and wealth throughout these islands, away from the powerful few. Now is exactly the time to invest in our people, public services, a living wage, an NHS fit for the 21st-century. All nations equal in terms of resources and self-government. If you like what Plaid Cymru has to say then vote for us. Vote for Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales. Thank you. *(applause)*

DD: Natalie Bennett.

NB: We don't have to take any more of this. The Tories' heavy austerity has cut deep into the lives of those who can least afford it. Labour isn't challenging austerity, just offering us a slightly lighter version of the same failed recipe. What does that leave? The Lib Dems. Many people voted Lib Dem in 2010 to keep the Tories out. They won't be doing that again. Tactical voting has given us the kind of politics that we have now. Instead, I urge you to vote for what you believe in, for our future and for future generations to come. If you agreed with me tonight vote Green, don't listen to the people who tell you that you'll have to settle for a pale imitation. If you want real change you have to vote for it. It's time to vote for hope. It's time to be bold, vote Green. *(applause)*

DD: Ed Miliband.

EM: You've heard tonight from five different parties, but there is one fundamental choice at this election. Do we carry on with the Conservative plan that says we should put the richest and most powerful first in our country, or do we choose a different idea? I believe it's time to put working families first again in our country, putting your living standards first, having more doctors and nurses in our National Health Service, having a future for our young people, all underpinned by cutting the deficit every year and balancing the books. Now, David Cameron refused to come and debate tonight. But I've got a message for him: David, if you think this election is about leadership then debate me one-on-one. I believe my ideas, my vision for the country, is better for the working families of Britain. If you disagree then prove it, debate me and let the people decide. *(applause)*

DD: Nigel Farage.

NF: I believe the gap between our career professional political classes and ordinary people has never been wider, and that's been exemplified this evening. They basically aren't very different at all and they're not prepared to stand up and fight for ordinary folk in this country by confronting the tough issues. I am and I'm unafraid to say what I think. Whether you agree with everything I say or not, know that when I say it I do so because I believe it, I'm patriotic, I believe in this country and I believe in the people of this country and I believe we would be so much better if we governed ourselves, controlled our borders and gave ordinary workers a chance against the takeover of the giant corporate companies who have now basically taken over our political parties. I will fight for the little man, for the little woman, I will fight for this country this is the chance for the most radical political change we have seen for decades. Vote Ukip if you want things to change. *(applause)*

DD: Thank you. And that about wraps up this debate. It doesn't wrap up a very political evening on the other hand because in a moment Emily Maitlis will have live reaction from the Election Debate Spin Room.