

# **In conversation with Chris Murray, Scottish Labour Candidate for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh**

## **THE STUDENT**

I'm not a reader of the Telegraph myself, but I thought it was an interesting map and I've seen it all over social media this morning.

## **CHRIS MURRAY**

There's an element of it where I do think we've lost the run of ourselves a little bit. That's not realistic, Rishi Sunak is not going to lose his seat. There's an element of where this happened in 2016, you were probably quite young when this happened. But in 2016 do you remember when there were these maps and the whole continental US was blue and I was like oh my god she [Hilary Clinton] is going to crush it. But that isn't what happened. So I know, bucket loads of salt in that, but it is good [Referring to current polling information].

## **THE STUDENT**

So, you've got a very interesting career with a range of experience in NGOs, government offices, like the foreign office, what inspired you to run as a parliamentary candidate in Edinburgh East & Musselburgh?

## **CHRIS MURRAY**

I've done a lot of work with very vulnerable people over my career, I've been, certainly in the last 5 years, working with victims of trafficking. Throughout the whole 14 years of the Tories, I've just seen things get worse and worse and harder and harder.

And on the one hand with extremely vulnerable people who really rely on society and the state to help them, but also quite middle class people struggling, especially with the financial, cost of living crisis for a couple of years.

I think we have got to put an argument to people that things can be better than that. I do think things can be better than this. I was really so frustrated that we hadn't articulated that. In this election, I just wanted to make sure people in Edinburgh had a proper alternative to the Tories.

## **THE STUDENT**

You touched on the cost of living crisis. It's an acute issue. What are Labour going to do to ensure people are protected, especially as we've seen such a massive increase in the number of people using foodbanks?

## **CHRIS MURRAY**

Yeah, so first of all, this use of foodbanks in a city as rich as Edinburgh is a scandal. And also, I've visited some foodbanks, the number of people who are going to a foodbank from work, they leave their work in the NHS or something. This is not people who've been unemployed for, you know, months.

## **THE STUDENT**

I don't know if they are such a thing in Edinburgh , but in London, we've got warm banks?

## **CHRIS MURRAY**

Yes , we did warm banks in libraries. Its really bad. I think what labour is offering here is not just warm words or aspirations , but a concrete plan we can implement .

So , first of all, there was such economic chaos from the Tories , especially in the Liz Truss period , that stability itself will change. And that will give businesses the confidence and ability to plan.

When I speak to businesses , what they say is not so much , we definitely want low taxes. They're like , we just want to know what's coming so we can plan for that, and they've not had that ability for a long time. So stability is one thing.

And that would be things like end exploitative contracts, ending fire and re-hire. A whole set of really tangible things that will give people a much better grip on their cost of living.

The cost of living crisis is also a cost of businesses crisis and it's really affecting people. There's two big drivers of it in Edinburgh , it's housing costs and energy bills. We need to get that down by accelerating the transition to net zero. That's our whole GB energy plan.

Our GB energy plan will get bills down and keep that a public energy company. We already have a public energy company , but they're just owned by the French government and the Dutch government.

So, we need to accelerate the transition to Net Zero, it's staring us in the face.

## **THE STUDENT**

Student housing here [in Edinburgh] is a big issue too, coming from someone who's not from a affluent background. I think its really important to look at how people are being put of coming here [to University in Edinburgh] because they're aware of how much it costs to live here. Even student accommodation, it's costing ten , eleven grand [thousand/year]

## **CHRIS MURRAY**

It is huge. There's a couple of things that I think are important. First of all, it's driven by things we cant control, Edinburgh's a popular destination physically right? There's a lot of people that move from the West coast to the East Coast.

People are moving here [To Edinburgh] because it's a great place to live, right? It's a good problem to have but its also adding to demand.

We have also been constricting the supply , we haven't been building enough houses , we've not been repurposing enough houses , we've not been insulating enough

houses so the cost of running them is loads. Our housing stock is [particularly] poor , especially at the affordable end of the market.

There's things like the Airbnb issue which have affected the supply of housing in the city . So there's like challenges going on . But for the last ten years we've had complete consensus on the problem and consensus on the drivers of the problem , but there's only been warm words and meaningless strategies that have actually delivered nothing. The system that works really well for the scottish government and for banks and developers does not work well for the people who need the houses.

And I will tell you , that when you go door knocking around Edinburgh and Musselburgh you see that there are real , real issues in the quality of houses.

### **THE STUDENT**

In terms of building houses , where would you look at that? What's the plan for housing in Edinburgh? Because there is developments out in Edinburgh park etc , but how do you deal with the issue of people not wanting to live that far out of the city?

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

So, I think there's a couple of challenges in Edinburgh right? The first is that we don't have any kind of coherent strategy , so it's really up to the suppliers and what that means is they can create very fast bang for their buck by throwing up really cheap student accommodation because it doesn't have the same regulations and charging students through the nose [for it].

There's an issue around developers building a lot of two and three bedroom family homes on the outskirts of Edinburgh , Midlothian and Musselburgh – those kind of places. We don't have a coherent strategy around our housing needs? And how do we ensure the market provides that?

There's also an issue around our planning system , this is completely devolved to the scottish government [references how long it takes to get planning permission in Scotland compared to England and how it takes longer in scotland comparative to England] . It takes so long and only certain companies can afford to go through that whole process , which means by the time you've gone through the whole process , they [developers] won't remember [the consultation] say, 65 weeks later You know, it really tilts the system , so there's a whole set of planning regulations we will want to , you know [I'm assuming put into place , sentence finishes here though] .

An [in] England , because obviously it's devolved , the UK parties put a lot of stuff in planning in their manifesto for other parts of the UK and you know, in Scotland Anas [Anwar] was really clear that planning is something we [Scottish Labour] want to look at. But a big part of that is fundamentally a demand and supply issue.

Nobody has gripped this , no party is actually trying to actually address the causes of this and there's an element of where you can talk and talk and talk and soundbite all you want but until you actually do something the politics just keeps getting worse.

And that's to say nothing of the huge environmental challenges and accessibility issues , transport links and retrofitting and all of that stuff.

### **THE STUDENT**

I have , kind of , no doubts that you've seen the front pages – we touched on it. It's putting the Tories at their worst election outcome in modern history. What's the mood like on the campaign trail , what do you think going out and door knocking , what's at the forefront of people's minds right now?

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

So I think , first of all there is a sense of difficulty , because a lot of people have been really struggling . As I say even middle class families are really struggling with the cost of living , people are just keeping their heads above water.

Loads of people are on waiting lists , students saying what sort of job am I going to get? , People are worried about climate change , there's a real sense of worry.

And there's a sense of almost disillusionment, because people have been promised a lot of solutions to stuff that just hasn't been delivered.

Whether that is Brexit , or independence or whatever the Tories keep saying . There's a sense of we're asking for stuff and it doesn't happen and that [can] have negative side effects.

But there's also a new optimism. This feels different to any election I've ever been involved with , because firstly , getting the Tories out is really within grasp and getting some actual , real substantive change that people believe in and can see coming.

I knocked on the door of someone the other day, and they said I don't want one of your leaflets , I thought oh they must not like the labour party , but they said 'don't waste it on me , my vote is guaranteed.'

This is new , that's exciting , people are stopping me on the bus and in the streets , they're really keen for labour to get in.

### **THE STUDENT**

I've been talking to some of my friends , a lot of students actually . They don't feel they really matter in Edinburgh , like they just come and go. I've been telling people its really important to vote here , because it [Edinburgh East and Musselburgh] is a marginal seat and the vote matters here.

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

To address that point . Firstly it's actually really important that students are going out to vote. For one this is a key battleground constituency, actually very rarely in the History of Edinburgh University , which is very long , has it been a key battleground and the students vote could be decisive.

This is a seat we need to win to be in government and this seat will be decided marginally and this seat will be critical , you literally have the future of the country in your hands and is not something that has been felt for a long time.

But secondly , the point about students who are living here for a few years , and I do feel that they should [vote]. And there are always students in Edinburgh , and loads of Edinburgh Students end up staying here because they get sucked into such a fantastic city.

But secondly its important the student voice is heard because you need us to govern this city in your interest , there will always be students here , they are such an important part of the community . I want [Students] to be a part of the back bone of the city's culture and also as a capital city , these are places people move through but they still matter. Everybody vote matters , if we only left it to the suburbs , whose lived there for 20 years , you would have a very different outlook.

### **THE STUDENT**

I will say, I've seen you on your campaign a lot more , you're more of a recognisable figure , you're out and about a lot which is very nice. I haven't seen that , almost at all , in the two years I've lived here.

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

There's two elements to that so we really want to win and we are really trying as hard as we can , and so I've spoken to tens of thousands of people in this campaign and we've delivered a lot of information online because we really want to show people we are hungry. And we know we have their interest at heart and we've got answers to challenges .

But also , that disillusionment in politics , Politicians have failed to listen to them [citizens]. And no like , it doesn't have to be like that. I want people to tell me why they disagree , I want people to ask me these questions , I'm trying to combat that anti trust in politics

### **THE STUDENT**

Its quite refreshing actually , Because as someone who does study politics , it can make you a bit disillusioned by everything we're seeing in America , the European election results and then you've got reform. That's a whole different conversation though.

So we've got scotland which has been a bit of a battleground for Labour and an important place for labour nationally. For the first time since 2014 , we've seen Labour overtake the SNP in the polls \* . Why do you think there's been such a marked move away from the SNP and how are labour planning to win the disillusioned voters. (at time of recording YouGov had Labour with 32 of 59 seats.)

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

Why do I think Scottish Labour have overtaken the SNP, if we have? So, I think there's three factors driving that. First of all, people can see through the lack of delivery, I mean, wherever you are. There are significant challenges facing Scotland and the SNP haven't addressed them. I don't want to be someone that bad-mouths other parties, but you can see the NHS deeply struggling, 40% of knee replacements in Scotland are done privately because they have been waiting so long.

People can see it's just not working, the housing challenge in Edinburgh. The other part of it is the Scottish Labour Party, we got crushed in the last couple of elections in Scotland, right? And that was not anyone else's fault but our own. So we took a long hard look at ourselves. We asked, what are we getting wrong? What do we need to look at, how do we become the party people can put their trust in? We made a lot of changes, we changed our leadership, communication with people, we didn't change our values but we did adapt our policies to meet the challenges of 2024 and I think the public are recognising that, they recognise we've changed.

I think as well, there is an element that the priorities of the public have changed, the cost of living crisis, coming out of the pandemic, the NHS, students coming out of University saying what jobs are they going to get? The climate crisis and things like that. People are looking for answers on stuff like that, the policy challenges.

### **THE STUDENT**

So, you've talked a little bit about the climate crisis, Labour and their net zero policy, scrapping climate policies. It's been a little bit contentious amongst younger groups. What's the kind of view on climate, climate policies up here [in Scotland].

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

First of all, one of the reasons I'm standing in parliament is I think climate is the most important issue that faces us as a species and we are way behind on dealing with it. We aren't behind on saying we're going to deal with it, we are behind on delivering dealing with it.

I do think there's a couple of things right, the policies Labour are proposing in this election have the potential to be genuinely transformative, to make a significant impact. GB energy headquarters in Scotland, would drive down bills and accelerate the transition to net zero.

The only way you're going to sell the public on the transition to net zero, is if it brings their bills down. We have to accept that and work in that direction. We have got a plan to do that. We also want to do that, not by raising taxes on working people, but by a windfall tax on oil and gas, they make billions and should be part of the transition.

We just buy all these windmills from overseas, we should be building it. I want graduates from Edinburgh Universities to be staying here [and working] in the green technology world, developing these jobs of the future. We've got everything set up to be world leading in this, we just need to get our act together.

So our controversy about the climate stuff is around the £28 billion . When we made that pledge , it was before Liz Truss. And in the interim , the cost of government borrowing went up four times , we have to be honest about the state of public finances . We would rather under promise and over deliver , as long as we actually get stuff moving. There's no point in setting unrealistic expectations on climate.

Yesterday , scotland missed its climate target , its emissions targets. We cannot keep doing this , we had to revise , to reflect the economic reality.

For one , spending the money we've allocated is really hard . I'd like to see it in social entrepreneurship , community wealth building – things that would really grow the local economy too. Retrofitting and things. So, spending the money is really tough , this is an opportunity to spend it wisely.

It's great being a candidate in Edinburgh East and Musselburgh because when I go door knocking , people ask how far and how fast are we going to go on climate . I want to be an MP for this constituency where people are pushing their MP to go far on this.

I want to be an outspoken person on this [climate] in labour. I need the support of people in this constituency to vote for me to be able to do that because this isnt a one term ambition for labour. This is the defining challenge of our generation and we need to be pushing all of the time on this and I would say to people in this constituency , if you care about climate , support me and I will push as far and as fast as I can on this issue.

### **THE STUDENT**

Just one last thing , you touched on the importance of getting student votes. At Edinburgh University we're seeing a big turnout in regards to divestment from Israel in regard to gaza. There's a lot of disappointment in the labour party for how long it took for them to call for a ceasefire in gaza , whats your take on the situation and what do you think is the best way forward for healing relations with students who have turned away from labour on this issue .

### **CHRIS MURRAY**

I absolutely understand it. It's a really emotive topic and as someone who used to work with children and has visited the refugee camps in Ramallah (West Bank) its so distressing watching the images coming out of gaza.

There absolutely needs to be a ceasefire now , Immediate and lasting . That is labour's position , I would hope labour would get into government and strain every diplomatic avenue to get a lasting ceasefire , to push full humanitarian access and stop escalation in the region . The role of Iran , the role of Lebanon to potential for a conflict in the region is big and the people who would suffer most are the poorest and children. We must do all we can to stop . I just think its so critical

### **THE STUDENT**

That's everything I've got for questions. Is there anything you would like to add?

## **CHRIS MURRAY**

I do think this is a really important election for students , because when you think about , you're generation through the pandemic , you gave up so much. You missed exams , nights out with your friends , big moments in your lives , not because you were the most at risk group , but to protect other people .

I think the last time a generation gave up so much was in the war , we honour them every year , I don't think the huge sacrifices that young people made are , in terms of mental health , missed opportunities' , have been in any way repaid or recognised and I would want as an MP , to recognise that , I think some of our policies need to address things like this. Like climate , housing , you need to be graduating with opportunities' and jobs and the ability to travel and develop skills.

I think the current government , both governments , offerings are really weak , and after everything you gave up in the pandemic that's not good enough. I really want to be a voice for young people.