

Transcript of Ed Miliband Q & A

(TC: 00:00:00)

HW: My name is Hannah Weisfeld, and I'm the social action and campaigns coordinator for the Jewish Community Centre for London, and I chair the Jewish Social Action Forum. The Jewish Social Action Forum is made-up of twenty organisations that span the spectrum of the Jewish community. Whether we represent synagogue movements, communal or social justice organizations, collectively we're committed to raising awareness of global issues. The spirit and ethics of Jewish tradition has much to say about the world around us. Whether that's about our obligation to the less fortunate in society, investing in the world for future generations, or the importance of embarking on a difficult task ahead, even if it will not be us that completes it. This is why we believe that the Jewish community has an important voice in the climate change movement and one that should be heard. It is predicted that in the year 2100, the world's temperature will have increased by at least 4 degrees but possibly even 9. We will not live to see this world, but our children and grandchildren will. It will be a world where island states disappear as a result of flooding, where three billion people go hungry because of changes in weather patterns and where the struggle over resources will create a more fragile world than the one in which we already live.

I'm delighted that so many of you have joined us for the launch of our climate change campaign. You can see our logo behind me. When you sit here representing the Synagogue movement, which I know some of you do, a communal organization or just yourselves, the urgent and pressing need to address climate change is something that will affect each and every one of us and our future generations. We're living in a unique time where we do have a chance to make a difference and to change the course of human history and when you arrived today you were given a postcard. I also have one here. On it is the address of our campaign. It's very simple: Big Green Jewish. It would be great if you could fill in this postcard and when you leave, give it to the people who are going to collect them at the door, because this is the gateway to our campaign and we very much want all of you to be part of it.

So when you go home, if you can go online: BigGreenJewish.org, see how you can get involved in our climate change campaign, see how you can involve your family, friends and your communities. I know you haven't come here to hear me so I'm going to stop. I'm really honored that we have Ed Miliband here today. Ed is the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and in a few weeks time will be in Copenhagen to negotiate a new international climate change deal. Certainly all eyes are going to be turned towards Denmark for those two weeks. So, no pressure, but we're looking for a good deal (laughter). We're also joined by journalist Jonathan Freedland, who has very kindly agreed to field your questions to the minister once he's given his address. So I'd like you to join me in welcoming both of them (clapping.)

EM: Thanks very much. Hannah, thank you very much. Let me start by saying that the fault of keeping you waiting is all mine, I'm afraid. I did this a few weeks ago in Russia, but that was a much better excuse because I'd just found a long lost cousin, an 87 year old long lost cousin and I kept 300 people waiting at the British embassy. I'm afraid my excuse this time was voting in the House of Commons which is not nearly as good an excuse. Don't ask me what I was voting on because I'm not sure (laughter). It was something good I promise you. So, I really apologise for having kept you waiting, and I will keep my opening brief because the conversation with Jonathan and the chance to have questions is the most important part obviously, apart from the film. Thank you to the Jewish Social Action Forum for organising this event. I know of the fantastic work that they do in the Jewish community, and I want to thank Hannah and all her colleagues for putting on this event. I think they deserve a round of applause (clapping) for having organized this. I would also like to congratulate the Big Green Jewish website. Now, I came in and just upstairs I said, 'I'm very excited about this website.' The first person I met said, 'Yes, it was launched by your bother three years ago,' which is a familiar feeling for me in politics (laughter) that David Miliband gets there first. Anyway, I'm very pleased to be re-launching it tonight.

Let me say three very brief things before the conversation. First of all everyone knows the importance of Copenhagen. I think it is genuinely a make or break moment. I think there is a lot of pessimism around. I think that is undue pessimism. I think it is a very difficult thing to do. Why is it such a difficult thing to do? Because we are trying to do what the world has never done before, which is turn around the inexorable rise in carbon emissions. That is my test of the Copenhagen summit. Does it produce commitments from developed countries, developing countries, which can show that carbon emissions will be falling not rising by about 20:20? Which is what the science says is the absolute minimum necessary for us to do. And does it provide the necessary finance) for developing countries, particularly people who are today facing the terrible effects of climate change? I think there is a lot of pessimism around but the truth is that the deadline has focused minds as we know deadlines do.

A year ago, if we'd been sitting here, we wouldn't have had a US cap and trade bill on climate change, which had gone through the House of Representatives which has happened. The Chinese president went to the UN in September and announced a change in Chinese domestic climate change policy. India has come on board, Japan has announced increased targets, Europe has done its bit. There is a lot more to do, and a lot more ambition that we need, even in the next few weeks but I think my first message in a way is, 'Don't succumb to the sense of defeatism.' I think this is still doable. It is tough, it is not at all a done thing and it might well not work, but I still think there's a chance and the chance is very important. I hope you'll all join me on the demonstration or march, I think it's December 6th.

Audience: 5th!

EM: 5th! (Laughter). You can join me on the 6th as well! (Laughter). December 5th, which is a very important popular mobilisation. The second point I just want to make

very briefly and I think it will hopefully speak to this audience. We talk a lot about the dangers of climate change and we're right to do so but someone made a very good point to me. They said, when I was talking about the dangers of climate change, 'Martin Luther King didn't say, 'I have a nightmare' he said 'I have a dream'.' I think it is very important in the arguments that we make about this issue that we say, 'Actually, this is part of-, in tackling climate change, we can create a fairer world. A world that is better for people in terms of our economy, a world that is better for people in terms of our energy security and frankly a world that is better because we preserve so many wonderful and beautiful things in the world that would otherwise be destroyed by climate change. I think talking about it as a positive as well as an avoidance of a negative, seems to me to be very important. That's my second point. Thirdly, it's about leadership from politicians, but it's also about you. Because in the end, and this is not just true in the next few weeks but it's true going forward, and people in this audience know this far better than I do; political change happens not just because political leaders want it to happen, but because people make it happen.

Therefore, thank you very much for coming tonight because it's important to show your support on this issue and I hope you'll enjoy the film, but also in a sense I would urge you to stay engaged and active on this issue. The truth is we don't just need a good deal in Copenhagen, we need to do something pretty extraordinary actually, which is to create a consensus across the world on this issue which is sustained. Because the truth is, every country has to be involved in it, every political party has to be involved in it and it has to be sustained over a very long period. That is very tough on a political issue. The truth is what's going to make that happen is people. So, you're engagement and your mobilization on this is very important.

JF: Thank you, thanks very much. We are going to open it up to questions almost right away. I'm just going to slip in one of my own and then we'll take as many as we can. You counseled all of us against defeatism. The Japanese government, I think this week said, 'It's 99% certain that there will not be a legally binding treaty coming out of Copenhagen.' That prospect has gone, and that now people are talking about framework etc and more talks and all that. Taking on board what you said about deadlines and concentrating minds, does it mean in a way that this moment has gone (talking over each other 08.37).

EM: I think it's good that you asked this, because this has been reported a lot. We may not get a legal treaty in Copenhagen, but frankly, here is for me the most important thing. I think a framework would be unacceptable, I think a framework wouldn't be good enough. If you get President Obama, Prime Minister Brown, Prime Minister Singh, all the political leaders of the world coming to Copenhagen and saying, 'Here is what we commit to on cutting carbon emissions. Here is what we commit to on finance. Now the lawyers can be locked in a room for three months to turn it into a legal treaty but these are binding commitments that we take as political leaders.' That's a big moment. I mean, people are saying it will be the biggest moment since 1945 in terms of what an international agreement can achieve. So that's why I don't succumb to defeatism because a legal treaty is absolutely necessary as part of this. Absolutely necessary, because if it's

not turned into a legal treaty, it won't have the force that it needs. But if the leaders can sign up to something ambitious in Copenhagen and agree to a very clear timetable to making that a legal treaty, I think that will be pretty good.

JF: Excellent. A moment of panic where people are thinking about lawyers being locked in a room, a lot of them worrying about that (laughter). Let's go to questions as soon we can. There's going to be issues about getting microphones to you so I may take them in clusters. (TC: 00:10:00)

Jess Gold, I'm a board member of Friends of the Earth. On domestic energy issues, if aviation expands other sectors are going to have to reduce their emissions more radically and more expensively and we're going to feel this in our fuel bills. With your department predicting a growth in those experiencing fuel poverty, is it right that we're all going to suffer painful increases in our fuel bills in order to ensure the continuity of predominately leisure flying for the wealthier of our society? Or is time that we froze aviation expansion?

My name is Danny Stone, I'm a former RSPB operative (inaudible 11.28) (laughter). My question is slightly specific but I was interested to read that the informal working group on interim finance for reducing emissions from deforestation has recommended that 25 billion, I think it's Euros, be spent on protecting our rainforests. Given we're tightening the purse strings, how much are we going to be able to put in?

EM: Good question.

Rabbi Jeremy Gordon from New London Synagogue. For the last two days there have been front page stories of a spelling mistake and it means there haven't been any front page stories about the ecology and the environment. How do you feel about this continual slew of these kinds of issues and how can you bring ecological issues more to the forefront.

JF: Okay, so did you get a note of all of those?

EM: Yes. Thanks. So Jeremy let me start with your question. The way I would put this is that politics is only worthwhile if it's about the big issues. If it's about issues that aren't the big issues then it isn't worthwhile. Part of our task in a way is to convince people that this is not only an urgent issue but one which can be tackled. I think there is a problem about environmental fatigue, if I can put it that way. I sense-, this is why I said this thing about the nightmare. I think a sense of, there are just more and more dire warnings and it sounds more and more ghastly and it's more and more awful and it's more and more impossible to do anything about. Now, I think the warnings of the scientists are important but I think a couple of things are also important. One, I actually think remaking the case for the science is important. I actually think, in a sense, taking people's skepticism seriously and engaging with it is important. I think if you assume that the battle is won on

the science then I think it's not going to convince people. You know, you can't just say, 'It's settled.' You've got to engage with it and that's something I've learned.

JF: So does that mean it's wrong to talk about climate change deniers? That word is used as if it's an absolute fact and you're a denier.

EM: Well I probably use that word myself. I think it's wrong to deny, but when ordinary people ask you, skeptically say, 'You know, is it really the case? Because I've heard this, that and the other.' I think just simply saying, 'The science is settled,' isn't good enough. You have to engage with people. You have to engage and overcome people's skepticism. Secondly, you've got to present the positive vision. I don't think the environmental movement, or frankly politicians, have been good enough at presenting the positive vision out of this. I don't think people will subscribe to something which is, simply, 'There is going to be a terrible disaster in-, well for you and your family it will be in twenty or thirty years time, for others it may be now, and you should come with us now on that.' I don't think that's enough to persuade people if I'm completely honest. I think it's enough to persuade some people and I think it's an important moral argument but I think we also have to integrate it into a wider vision of society to people. What you do about the trivialization of the media and politics is a longer conversation. I don't have an easy answer, but I think if you talk about big issues it's one way through it.

The forests questions, the ex-RSPB operative (laughter). Yes, forests are very important and it's going to cost a lot of money and it's absolutely necessary. It's necessary for the people who rely on the forests, frankly. They are going to be providing an environment service to the world if we reduce deforestation. We are going to have to find money to make it happen and including-, we actually were chairing the interim working group that you were talking about and we're going to have to find substantial sums for deforestation. Actually in the UN negotiations which have, in general been pretty, not very good, let's put it that way, forests is one area where they've actually made progress. The text is down to eight pages, I'm reliably informed, which, believe me, in the UN negotiations is pretty good going since the rest of it is 200 pages with 1,100 square brackets. Aviation-,

JF: Aviation, I want to remind everyone that you're in a government that approved the third runway at Heathrow. I want that in front of everyone's mind as you answer.

EM: Thank you Jonathan.

EM: Thank you, that's nice of you, I'll do this again with you some time (laughter). Look, you ask one of the most important questions. Here is how I think about this. We can't have unconstrained aviation expansion. I agree with that.

Why build runway three then?

EM: Someone asked about runway three. That's why we said, 'Only 50% of the slots go ahead,' and we said, we're the first country in the world-, we just have to get this in some context. We're the only country in the world that has said we will have a specific

commitment on aviation, which is to get aviation emissions, by 2050, which is the date of our 80% target, back to current levels. Now why, you might say, 'Well, why don't you cut aviation emissions by 80%?' Here is why I don't think that's the right policy. That would mean going back to 1974 levels of flying. Now, my analysis of the world and it goes back to this issue of persuasion also, is that the world is getting closer together not further apart. People are emigrating, people are migrating. People of my generation and younger are traveling in a way their parents could never have dreamed of. Frankly, that is part of the standard of living and the quality of life people like. Now, I think flying is going to have to become more expensive, domestic flying, significantly more expensive. It's going to have to make its contribution to cutting emissions but I don't think it's wrong, and our independent advisors at the climate change committee have said this. I don't think it's wrong to cut by more in some areas, like the power sector and the energy sector, than in others. So, that's the way I think about it and frankly I also think about my own constituency, where an airport was built ten years ago-, or my area. An airport was built ten years ago and frankly people are able to enjoy experiences in Doncaster that many people in this room and my family took for granted for decades. I think that is part of social justice I'm afraid.

JF: Okay, there are lots of hands up. I'm going to ask you all to be as brief as you can, and also you in your answers as brief as you can.

EM: Sorry (laughter).

JF: No, no, they're all fascinating but I want to cram as many in as we can, people are already talking to us about time. So let's go to the lady who's got the microphone there.

Hello, Ruth, resident of Chiswick and cyclist. Just on flying, there is no reason for anyone to have to fly to Liverpool, to any of these internal flights, whatsoever.

EM: I agree with this.

Or fly to Paris!

You're making no attempt to stop that. You talk about the fact that people are panicked about this whole thing. We can start very simply by insisting on a charge on plastic bags, we can start by insisting that there are congestion charges instead of referendums like you had in Manchester, which was thrown out. You could start by people going by tube more, bus more, everything else. It's very simple for people to deal with it on a local, small level, which will make them feel that they're doing something positive.

A couple of weeks ago at The Faith Regen, the Muslim inspired climate change meeting, I passed over to you a copy of The Earth Charter, because it is such a visionary document about the possibility of really working together on a global basis. I wonder if you've yet had a chance to properly, to have a look at it.

EM: I'm really glad you asked that question (laughter).

JF: The question every politician hates is, 'Have you actually read it?!' Yes you go next.

Given that RBS is now 84% owned by the taxpayer, how can the government justify Royal Bank of Scotland's continued investment in Canadian Tar Sands, which is the dirtiest form of oil extraction and uses a third of its yield in its production (clapping).

JF: Very good and why don't you go next. The gentleman there, belt it out as loud as you can.

Your government just spent 200 billion pounds down the drain for the economy and is busy rebuilding the banks and rebuilding the economy as it was before. Why didn't we take advantage of this crisis and actually build a green economy?

JF: Okay. I'll try and get three more in if we can do them briefly. The lady there, yes.

We're struggling like mad to get the carbon emissions (TC: 00:20:00) reduced in Copenhagen. Has Copenhagen considered the possibility of the carbon sequestration, which is a much more important long-term vision? Also, is there any reason why we can't enforce the use of carbon sequestration in petrol, which is a technology that we already have. We simply need to put the money into it.

JF: Very good. We'll call it a (inaudible 20.27) we're going to try and rattle through these.

EM: Yes. I'm going to be very quick. Ruth I agree with you about domestic flying, it needs to become more expensive but I'm afraid it's too easy a way out of a bigger problem. It's 7% or 8% of total flying in Britain. So domestic flying is not the solution to the whole problem of aviation. I think it goes much, much bigger than that, as I've tried to explain. The Earth Charter, I'm sorry I haven't yet read it but I will, I promise.

JF: Points for honesty.

EM: Thanks. On RBS, I was just a thing with RBS yesterday or the day before, announcing a massive investment that they're making in renewables, supported with the government, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. So we are trying to get banks like RBS to do a lot more in terms of a green economy. I think it is important to say that. There is a wider issue about Canadian Tar Sands. I'm not going to get into that today, I'm sorry. The 200 billion on the banks, I think it's wrong to say that that money has been wasted. It wasn't for the banks that we did it, it was for the people in this room, because the people in this room, I mean, I'm sorry to say this but the people in this room have savings and houses and their kids lives bound up with money in the banks. You know, it wasn't to save the bankers. It was to save the people in this room. As for investing in the

green economy, you're right and as a climate change minister, I always want to do more of it. We've done some of it, I think there is further to go.

That takes me to the question about carbon capture and storage carbon sequestration. You're right, it is very, very important. Actually, what I think is encouraging in this, is that China, which two years ago was saying, 'We're not particularly interested in this issue, are now saying, 'We want CCS, we want carbon capture and storage, because we've realise coal is a problem.' That is in a sense the way the debate is changing and we are determined to pioneer it here.

JF: Okay. When you said the bank bail-out was for the people in this room, just to clarify, that doesn't mean we've got a story in the JC saying, 'Bank bail-out was for the Jewish community' (laughter), it was metaphorical.

EM: That's an important correction to make.

JF: These things can get distorted. The Secretary of State is very keen to take as many questions as he can.

EM: One more round.

JF: One more round, yes.

Naomi, Kilburn housing co-op resident. We're hearing a lot about international issues and that's great but I live in a mixed tenure housing estate and they will not allow recycling on my estate. I don't understand why it is that it's so difficult to make simple, obvious, things happen on a local level.

JF: Okay. Last one there, you've got a microphone and you're holding your hand up.

It's estimated that about 150 billion a year is going to be required by 2020 to cover the cost of developing countries to deal with climate change and the low carbon development pathway. The big money question that's going to come up at Copenhagen is, somebody's going to have to pay for that and how far is the British government-,

EM: Good question.

Prepared to commit itself.

EM: Okay, good.

JF: I think this is going to be our last one, I'm so sorry to disappoint people.

I work for a youth movement and there are a lot of people in this room who work or volunteer for youth movements, who aren't part of 200 million pound projects,

they're part of small projects. How are you, and Copenhagen going to support small £200, £100 individual projects?

EM: What's your name?

Oliver.

EM: What would you say Oliver? What should we do?

I don't know (laughter).

EM: Well what would help you?

I mean we're driven by ideology and those things we do. We're not driven by money and we're putting in where we can. We're trying to be socially responsible. I only know from what I do personally, I don't know what the government-

EM: I think your friend has an answer, what would you say?

I was just wondering if you were going to fund projects from-, with putting money into bigger companies, maybe they could be directed responsibly to (inaudible 24.40) charity organisations within that.

EM: Is this an environmental charity?

No. We're not an environmental charity (laughter).

JF: They're a small group who do green things.

Oh I see, okay.

JF: They're Small Green Jewish!

EM: Naomi, on your question about recycling, I don't have an immediate answer but I think the general point you make about its importance and pushing it forward is something that I appreciate. I actually would suggest-, if I was your local MP I would take it up in a big way and say, 'This is ridiculous and the council has to do it.' I mean, they should be doing it. I think if you want to send me an email and get me to contact whoever your MP is, let me know.

The 150 billion question, I'm pleased that the gentleman asked that question. Look, this is the hardest thing in this whole business for many people in developed countries. The truth is that we are responsible for the problem. The emissions in the atmosphere, 30% of them 1850 to 2000 come from Europe, 30% from the US, very small amounts from developing countries. So we're responsible for the problem and it is the people who can least afford, who've done least to cause the problem who are going to pay the biggest

price and the earliest price for it. That is the social justice imperative as to why we have to produce the funding. The Prime Minister's put forward a plan for 100 billion dollars a year by 2020. So it's not quite your 150 billion but it's on the way. Europe has broadly speaking endorsed that plan. Now we need America and other countries to endorse that plan. It is absolutely necessary as part of a Copenhagen deal, in my view. The other reason is, we won't get developing countries to make their contribution to keeping their emissions down if we don't do it.

A final point on youth volunteering. I wish I'd come with my cheque book but I haven't (laughter). I think in a sense you make a very important point in this and I want to, sort of, generalise it. The government needs to do its bit to help you but goes back to the point that I ended my opening remarks on. We're not going to solve this problem with government on its own. We absolutely need people. One of the most inspiring things in the green movement is the Transition Towns Movement. Now, I actually disagree with some of the things the Transition Towns Movement say.

JF: Perhaps explain what that is.

EM: The Transition Towns Movement are people who've got together in different areas and said, 'We want to become a transition town and we want to essentially cut our own carbon emissions in our own areas.' Now I disagree with some of what they say. What is inspiring about them and in a way, the Jewish community knows this very well. It's not just what they are doing for greenery and for the environment, but the way in which the Transition Towns Movement have brought people together in new and very unexpected ways. So in a sense, I think that you're the right question to end on because I think the role of people in this and if I may say so, the role of young people, is absolutely essential in this. There are these great T-Shirts. 'How old will you be in 2050?' Actually that's very relevant because it's young people who are going to face this for longest and worst and in a sense who will bear the brunt of this. So your involvement, your enthusiasm on this is absolutely crucial if we're not just going to get a good deal at Copenhagen but as I say, build and sustain the kind of consensus we need here and around the world.

JF: Thank you. Unfortunately we are out of time for questions. It just remains to say, if you have got those postcards do hand them in, the volunteers are around the place. Do stay in your seats to watch this extraordinary film, 'Age of Stupid.' Which I know you've seen and endorse. Are you going to say something about why people should listen to the film?

EM: Yes, I will.

JF: Well let's do it now then because otherwise-, (laughter).

EM: You'll have heard all about it. I think it is a very challenging and very stark reminder of what we are talking about. I should also say that the person who made the film was rescued by Boris Johnson recently but she says that it hasn't necessarily meant that she's changed her views about politics (laughter).

JF: Very, very good. So the very last thing on my list and I'm sure you're going to want to join me was to all together thank the Secretary of State (clapping).