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PARTY ELECTION BROADCAST BY THE SDP/LIBERAL ALLIANCE PARTY

SPEAKER: Anne Sopher interviewed by Julia Neuburger

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IN CUE: Hello, I'm Julia Neuburger, and here in the studio with me is Anne Sopher, an Alliance spokesman on education. Well Anne, I know that lots of people are keen to know more about Alliance policies and what the Alliance really means to achieve, so I'm going to ask you about how the Alliance would improve education in Britain today. First, what are the Alliance's basic objectives in education?

SOPHER Well we need to raise standards. Everybody agrees with that, and we also need to make sure that more people get a chance of more education and opportunities throughout their lives and it's in both of these that the education system just hasn't succeeded in the last few years, and particularly after eight years of cuts from the Tories.

NEUBURGER When you talk about widening access and raising standards, what do you actually mean? What do you want to do?

SOPHER Well I think we need a country in which everybody feels that there's more for them to learn, that they are capable of learning it, and they know where to

go to get what they want to learn. In many other countries there's far more people in the community, adults, children, young people, constantly going back to school, back to college to learn more. Now that's the sort of atmosphere and the sort of opportunities we need to create.

NEUBURGER And we haven't got that?

SOPHER No. Very little. There are more people in this country who leave school at sixteen, never get any more education or training in their lives, than there are in any other advanced industrial country. We can't go on like that for the sake of the country, and it's not fair on the individuals either.

NEUBURGER And when you talk about raising standards, what do you mean?

SOPHER I mean that every child is probably capable of doing better than they are at the moment. Now all of us are capable of doing better than we are, and what we need to do is to raise teachers' sights to ask every school, every teacher to set targets for how they can improve what the children are learning, year by year. I think schools can be judged on the sort of progress their children are making. It's got to be done on a school-by-school basis.

NEUBURGER Why are the teachers so demoralised?

SOPHER Well they're demoralised because of course they've been having years and years and years, under the last Conservative Governments of cuts. They've also had this terrible wrangle over their pay, which has gone on far longer than it need have done, and both of those combined has made them feel that they don't really know whether the job's

worthwhile. And that's a devastating thing to happen to anybody.

NEUBURGER It's an awful thing to happen. How would the Alliance actually deal with that?

SOPHER We would accept the principle that teachers should be paid comparably with people doing a professional job across the board. We would also restore their negotiating rights. Now at the moment they're extremely aggrieved because Mr. Baker has said "You are not going to be able to negotiate any more. I'm going to say exactly what your conditions of work are". Now it's perfectly true that in the past, the teacher's unions - who've got a lot to answer for - have made an absolute mess of those negotiating procedures, and they've certainly got to be tightened up and we've got to put a time limit on them, and we've got to make some way of getting effective arbitration. Teachers, like all groups of workers, of course should have negotiating rights and it's very insulting and indeed mischievous of the Government to have taken them away.

NEYBURGER So do you think the Conservatives are very much to blame for what's going on in the schools at the moment?

SOPHER The Conservatives certainly are to blame, but I wouldn't exempt the Labour Party from blame either. What the Labour Party say about education policy is fine, but if you look at very many of the Labour Education Authorities, their schools are actually in greater chaos, than schools elsewhere, and this is because it's the old, old problem with the Labour Party. They are so tied in with the

unions that they daren't act as employers. They won't put the pupils and their parents first. They will tend always to listen to the unions and what they are being told by them, and the result of that is that they have allowed teachers to get away with appalling disruption in some of the Labour Authorities, which is well beyond what the national industrial action has been about, and that means that in large parts of London and many other Labour authorities, children are being sent home every day. Even now when the teachers are already on the new pay levels, still this industrial action is going on and children are being sent home every day.

NEUBURGER Anne Sopher, I know you would say that the time has come for an Alliance Government, but sadly, our time has now come to an end. Thank you for putting the Alliance policies for education so clearly. Our future obviously depends on that so much.

SOPHER Thank you Julia, we certainly believe, and this is what we hear on the doorstep, that our educational policies are what the country needs, and one of the many reasons why people should vote for the Alliance on June 11th.

THAT WAS A PARTY ELECTION BROADCAST BY THE SDP/LIBERAL ALLIANCE.