

EMILY THORNBERRY, MP

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SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY

ET: I think in many ways we're quite old fashioned and we think that if you're a politician in charge of a department and a department does its job as badly as the Home Office has clearly been doing, then you should resign. That's the way it always used to be. And how much worse can it get? So people have died. People have lost their jobs, they have lost their futures and people working in the National Health Service all their lives, suddenly they lose their jobs, they're not entitled to even go to the National Health Service. I mean it could not be worse and yet the Home Secretary thinks 'I can apologise and it will be all right'. Well it won't be.

NR: Amber Rudd must quit?

ET: I really think she should quit.

NR: Now is that because you're saying, as Jeremy Corbyn did yesterday, that this was deliberate policy by ministers? And in which case, what is the evidence it was deliberate?

ET: Okay. So the evidence is... it comes in layers. The first one is that they decided that they had to cut back on immigration to tens of thousands. That's what they said. Now clearly they can't control and they couldn't control EU migration, so what they had to do was for everybody that wasn't an EU migrant they had to make it as difficult as possible for them to be able to come into the country or to stay in the country. So that was deliberate. They then talked about having a hostile environment and that culture is really important. You instil that into the Home Office and you can make all the difference in terms of what the officials think that

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their job is. You send 'go home' vans around the place. This was a deliberate policy to make life difficult and then the icing on the cake was that when they passed the new legislation which was the legislation where landlords and employers had to check to see whether someone was an illegal immigrant they consciously took out of the legislation protection for Commonwealth citizens.

NR: But when you say deliberate, are you suggesting that ministers wanted people in the so called Windrush generation, people who came here as kids from the Caribbean they wanted to send them home. Is that what you claim?

EM: No. I'm not saying that.

NR: So in that sense it wasn't deliberate.

EM: No, no, no. No, what was deliberate was the hostile environment, what was deliberate was we need to make life hard for migrants.

NR: Who first used that phrase?

EM: We are going deliberately for illegal migrants but if caught up in the wash, legal migrants suffer, actually we're quite reckless about that and we don't really care.

NR: But you see twice you've used the phrase 'hostile environment,' it's been used all week. Who first used it?

EM: Alan Johnson first used it in a speech, but I think –

NR: First used by Labour in government. I'll quote it to you if you like. Was used by the UK Border Agency in February, 2010. "We are making the UK a hostile environment for those that break our rules." Under Labour.

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EM: Yes. And so it's right that we should have rules and it's right that they should be enforced and that it should be done fairly and it should be done fast and it should be firm. I have no problem with that.

NR: Do you have a problem with the words that were used by the Labour Party in government?

ET: But to lift that phrasing, and to embed it as much as it was and to strengthen it, and to make it so much sharper and nastier, that was the difference. And as I say –

NR: But you're talking about tone, aren't you? Are you saying that you don't want to see checks when people arrive in hospital for treatment that might cost tens of thousands of pounds, you don't want to see whether they're in fact illegal immigrants, are you saying you don't want to see checks when people rent a house or get a job, even if they're taking that house and that job from someone who's legally here? And all of that.

ET: No I don't have a problem with checks being made, as I said earlier, but the step up that was made under Theresa May was to say we need to get migration down to tens of thousands and we have to be hostile. And the lead that is taken by the Home Secretary and by other ministers in their department will make all the difference because there's lots of discretion that is exercised – but I mean this is an important point. So for example I wrote to the Home Secretary some three or four years before about a guy who'd lived here for decades and I said, look, suddenly he's not allowed to work, this is ridiculous. He's obviously British and they wouldn't exercise their discretion and we had to go to court. And that was somebody who was from the Commonwealth.

NR: We've just established that the words hostile environment was established under the Labour government.

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ET: The words are used but the culture was not, you know.

NR: When the new measures were brought in and you say it was brought in with the wrong ..the Shadow Home Secretary, Labour's spokesman at the time, Yvette Cooper said, 'they seem sensible enough in principle.'

ET: Yes.

NR: You abstained when there was a vote on those changes.

ET: Yes.

NR: So you could have been wise after the effect.

ET: No, no, no, no, because there were – as I say they didn't consult on - it's taking out of the section. They took this protection out which is a protection for Commonwealth citizens. They took that out. And if they hadn't and you know if you look at – look at I think it was an impact assessment which I've frankly been shown recently, that shows they knew, they knew that if they took out that protection there would be an impact on the Windrush generation. So you know, they knew that they were putting them at risk.

NR: Do you think ministers are racists or that they've implemented a racist policy?

ET: I don't like to – I don't like to bandy around these things. I would rather just stick to the evidence. The evidence was that they –

NR: But Jeremy Corbyn quoted someone as saying this is racist and you normally quote people 'cause you agree with them. He said, "there's something rotten at the heart of government."

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ET: Well I think it is.

NR: I think it incumbent on you to be clear or not. Are you saying...

ET: I'm happy to say that there is something rotten at the heart of government. I think that the idea of cutting back immigration to tens of thousands when you know you have no control over one of the major drivers and so therefore you need to be enforcing rules and being fundamentally unfair on those from outside the European Union, that is wrong and that is rotten.

NR: Is it racist?

ET: It's unfair.

NR: When I described what went wrong, a failure of leadership, even after being warned, a failure to grip it, failure to do enough to tackle it. That doesn't remind you of anything in the Labour Party?

ET: Not particularly.

NR: That is precisely what people say is true of Jeremy Corbyn and anti-Semitism.

ET: And I think that we are. I think that Jenni Formby is a breath of fresh air. She's been in post I think for two weeks and has done an enormous amount during that time. And more importantly when you talk to her she's done a lot of reading on the subject, she's listened to a lot of people and she has it as her number one priority.

NR: A former Chief Rabbi said this week that, "I see too many good people doing nothing and I am ashamed." When you listen

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to your colleagues describe the anti-Semitic abuse that they faced from people in the Labour Party are you ashamed?

ET: Of course I am, I'm sickened by it. I'm fed up with it. I'm fed up with hearing about it. I'm fed up with hearing this dreadful stuff. I'm fed up with meeting people on the street as well. I mean I think that you know this whole issue has been raised and people feel that it's fine to come up and talk to you in the most appalling terms quite frankly. I spoke to somebody last weekend and I was really shocked to suddenly see the way in which the conversation turned and she thought that she was supportive of Labour and she thought she was supportive of me. And I had to make it clear that actually that was not acceptable. And yeah, I mean it's terrible. It's terrible and we will sort this out.

NR: The big thing in parliament this week is going to be Brexit. A big vote on the customs union or 'a' customs union. Do you think there is now a majority in parliament that this is where the policy will end up?

ET: I think anybody who's looked into this issue over the last year or so has seen that it is quite clear that there is no other place that we can go than to remain in a customs union with the European Union. Nothing else makes sense. Nobody has been able to find an alternative in terms of the Irish border, but also you know if we leave the European Union, we leave the customs union and we don't have anything to replace it with, we suddenly when we leave are going to have to make not just new deals with countries across the world for free trade, but also all the other ones that Europe had made until that point. I mean we're not – it's just not possible. There is a time when you have to say let's be pragmatic about this, this isn't going to work, this is the only way forward.

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NR: Now your colleague, Shadow Home Secretary – Shadow Chancellor, I'm sorry, John McDonnell said something intriguing this week. Said that you still haven't ruled out a second referendum. Is your message to people who want another vote – Patrick Stewart was in that chair last week – is your message, look, if you shift the public Labour is willing to shift as well?

ET: Our position is that there has been a referendum and we do as instructed. And so although we can –

NR: Forgive me, you've said that but he said something different. John McDonnell said we're open for it.

ET: Yeah, but I have to begin with that and I have to begin by making that clear. And what comes from that logically is clearly that if the public – if public opinion changed and 90% of the public or 85% of the public were suddenly in favour of remaining in the European Union then equally the argument goes both ways.

NR: So shift the public and Labour are ready to shift?

ET: We're democrats, we're democrats and we do as we're told. Now at the moment it is quite clear that the public want us to leave and we will do it and they can trust us and we will leave the European Union but we will do it in a sensible way.

NR: One last question. You are on Question Time just a few days ago and you were jeered by quite a large part of the audience when you said that the reason the weapons inspectors had not got into Syria, particularly into that town of Douma was because of red tape. That was the Russian explanation. Do you regret using it?

ET: What I was trying to explain was that there is a certain amount of red tape that people – that the OPCW needs to go

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through, so what happened is when they arrive in a country there then has to be a forward group that goes and looks at whether or not it's safe in an area for the OPCW to go over. So the OPCW have to wait for them and then there was a lot of tooting and froing about whether or not it was sufficiently safe for them to move in and so that was the red tape that I was talking about. I was talking about red tape and safety and that was the reason that there had been a delay.

NR: Let me put it to you why I think people jeered. There are people who believe that Labour always gives the Kremlin the benefit of the doubt.

ET: Right.

NR: Do you worry about that?

ET: Well, we don't, so I don't. I mean I –

NR: You understand that there are people who think whether it's on the evidence –

ET: Well there are people who think that Jeremy Corbyn's a Czech spy. I mean come on, you know.

NR: No, no no, hold on. This is about people on your own side sometimes who say is there evidence of chemical weapons? Jeremy Corbyn says there isn't, or he's not sure. Should the inspectors go in? He says and you say, well it's red tape that's stopping them. So again and again people sometimes, standing up on your own benches in the House of Commons say, you give Russia the benefit of the doubt.

ET: I think what we're trying to do is we're trying to say, particularly in relation to Syria and this chemical attack, that we

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need to have evidence that will be accepted internationally, whatever we may think personally. And I think personally that Assad used chemical weapons against his people and I think that he did that recently and I want him to be prosecuted. But that cannot happen unless we get evidence which is – which the international community will accept. I want us to have a case that stacks up because I want action.

Ends