ANDREW MARR:
And now to the Labour Party. What message should Labour take from the recent European and local elections? Some in the party see UKIP’s success as a big threat and are urging Ed Miliband to send out a tougher message still on immigration. Others are warning him not to become a pale imitation of Nigel Farage. Well the Shadow Home Secretary says that Labour should be ready to talk more about immigration, which is great because that’s exactly what we’re going to do. Yvette Cooper joins me now. Before we get onto immigration, however, I must ask you about the current front page row between Theresa May and Michael Gove. Is this a resigning matter for Theresa May now, do you think?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think it is very serious what’s happened. I think there are three unresolved issues as a result of what’s been a very chaotic government over something so important. There’s the concerns in the schools in Birmingham and how you make sure that children get a balanced education, which Michael Gove has not been addressing. There’s problems in the communities and the Prevent Strategy, which is about preventing extremism, having gaps because of the departments not working together. And there’s also the issue …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) I want to get into the communities and schools in a moment, but first of all just in terms of the position of the two ministers involved and they’ve been leaking against each other. I mean you know from your own experience in government that this is not an entirely unique thing to happen.

YVETTE COOPER:
No, but I’ve never seen it on something so important that has implications for national security before. And you’re right, this row - we’ve seen the Education Secretary apologise, the Special Advisor to the Home Secretary resign, but we’ve so far heard nothing from the Home Secretary even though it looks pretty clear that she has breached the ministerial code by writing and then authorising the publication of this letter. Well the Prime Minister’s responsible for enforcing the ministerial code. He needs to act and to make sure that that happens, at the same time as making sure they also address these more important issues about what’s happening in schools and communities.

ANDREW MARR:
So that being so, what should Theresa May do now?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think Theresa May needs to come out publicly and answer what she did to publish this letter. The ministerial code says that ministerial correspondence and cabinet committees shouldn’t be published, it should be private.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And you shouldn’t leak that kind of stuff.

YVETTE COOPER:
Exactly. And they didn’t just leak it. They published it on the Home Office website, you know, and it was up there for many days. She presumably must have authorised that. Well why has she not apologised? Why has she not recognised that? So I think there are those questions to answer, but we also have to make sure the more important issues in terms of the schools and communities are addressed.
ANDREW MARR:
And do you think there is a real problem in some schools with Islamist propaganda being foisted on very young children – all this talk about white women being prostitutes that we read about, girls made to sit at the back of classrooms, that kind of thing? Is this a real description of what’s going on in schools now?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well we need to wait for the Ofsted reports, which we understand are due. I think the concern is, and the allegations that have been made, are about children not getting a balanced education, not having a balanced curriculum about whether there’s been discrimination and so on. And I think the problem is that Michael Gove’s reforms with the Academies programme and so on have made it harder to have the kind of local oversight that you need to prevent problems arising and to make sure the curriculum is balanced. And it is a problem that he didn’t investigate this earlier, but that also he’s made it harder for local authorities to take a grip on this as well.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So local authorities in many cases also have Islamists inside them in these areas and so forth. It’s not necessarily the case that handing it to the local authority would solve the problem. Do you need to have some kind of centralised attack on the so-called “draining the swamp” issue – getting rid of extremism getting into our schools?

YVETTE COOPER:
I think you need a broad strategy to prevent extremism. This is becoming particularly significant now around Syria and the Syrian conflict with young people going over to Syria, potentially becoming radicalised and then returning, and there’s a lot of concerns about that. I think the problem …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) More widespread than Birmingham, do you think?

YVETTE COOPER:
I think the problem more widely around communities, this is really important, and what
you’ve got at the moment is gaps in the working communities to prevent extremism because what Theresa May has done is retreat very much to a police based approach. And the police work is really important, particularly when there’s a concern that somebody’s getting involved in violent extremism, but you’ve got also got to work closely with communities – support communities that want to take a lead in tackling extremism, as many of them do - and that work seems to have stopped altogether. There was about £17 million being spent to support that. That’s been cut down to £1 million. That is a gap and the department are not resolving that because they’re too busy fighting with each other.

ANDREW MARR:
Let’s turn to Labour and immigration. You took quite a whacking from UKIP and there’s lots of areas around the country where Labour is fighting UKIP quite hard. Do you think the party needs to think again and come up with new messages on the free movement of people inside the European Union?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think first of all we did increase the number of councillors. We won three hundred more councillors. In the local elections, that’s important.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yes but we’ve got limited time and we’re looking forward.

YVETTE COOPER:
You’re raising the issue about UKIP, and clearly UKIP I think have been playing on people’s fears and exploiting people’s fears. People do have legitimate concerns about immigration. That’s why we’ve said that reforms are needed on immigration, on things like stronger border controls, on things like you know the impact of immigration on jobs and wages …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

YVETTE COOPER:
... which is I think the concern that people have most seriously, at the same time as recognising immigration over many years has brought great benefits for Britain …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

YVETTE COOPER:
… and is important for our future too.

ANDREW MARR:
These are policies that you announced in the past before you got damaged by UKIP. What I’m really asking is have you got any more to say, any new policies to announce since that defeat?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well what we’ve found is that talking about immigration rather than shouting about immigration does help, and talking about the policies that we want to bring in that the Government hasn’t introduce and could introduce in an Immigration Bill, for example, to stop dodgy employers and firms exploiting immigration to undercut local wages and jobs – getting rid of the zero hours contracts being exploited, stopping agencies only being recruited from abroad.

ANDREW MARR:
If those were the answers, you’d have done much better, but they’re clearly not getting through.

YVETTE COOPER:
Well but then …

ANDREW MARR:
Hazel Blears, Rachel Reeves have said you are failing old-fashioned local communities, the people that the Labour Party was founded to protect, because of widespread and unlimited migration inside the European Union. My question is are you prepared to do anything to tackle the issue of unlimited migration inside the EU?
YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think two things. First of all, what Rachel and Hazel and others have all said is exactly the same as what Ed Miliband’s been saying, which is there are a lot of working people who are feeling left behind, who are feeling you know deep concerns.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) All I’m asking is what you’re going to do about it.

YVETTE COOPER:
In terms of the issue around Europe, I do think there are reforms that should be made to the free movement of labour. It’s what we’ve been arguing for for some time – for example stronger transitional controls for new countries arriving - but also changes to the rules around benefits, changes to the rules around people who have committed crimes. You shouldn’t have free movement for criminals and so on. And this issue about … I know you said, you know we talked before about the impact of employers and dodgy employers …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.

YVETTE COOPER:
… but don’t underestimate the importance of this because nobody is addressing this and UKIP’s policies would make it worse by making it easier for employers to undercut local wages and jobs. If that’s not dealt with, you will see growing concern and UKIP will continue to exploit it. We can’t imitate UKIP. We’ve got to take them on.

ANDREW MARR:
Shadow Home Secretary, we are out of time. Thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

INTERVIEW ENDS