SUSANNA REID:
Now we won’t forget the moment a Labour Leader labelled a voter a “bigot” for expressing concerns about immigration. Three years on, we hear a Shadow Cabinet Minister, tipped as a potential Labour Leader one day, saying immigration was too high under Labour and it’s time for stricter controls. Is the party finally grasping a nettle or entering an arms race of rhetoric, as they describe it, that fuel prejudice against the Romanians and Bulgarians due to arrive next year? Well that Shadow Cabinet Minister is Yvette Cooper, the Shadow Home Secretary. Welcome.

YVETTE COOPER:
Good morning, Susanna.

SUSANNA REID:
And before we start talking about the people who are arriving, let’s talk about the people that we don’t seem to be able to send away. Abu Qatada back in custody. The government wants him out. They are bound though by human rights legislation. Should he just be put on a plane and sent back to Jordan?
YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think we all want Abu Qatada to be sent back to Jordan to stand fair trial there. That’s you know what I think everybody thinks is the right thing to do. I think my big concern about what Theresa May’s doing at the moment - I mean we know we had the shambles where they got the date wrong in the Home Office and you know there have been a series of difficulties - is that they decided not to appeal against the European Court judgement about twelve months ago when they had the chance. I did urge Theresa May to appeal against that judgement. I think that would have been the right way forward. She said she wasn’t going to do that and we’ll see how that plays out this week. But I am concerned that they did have the chance to make their arguments in the European Court and didn’t do so.

SUSANNA REID:
Is it time then to look again at our involvement with the European Court and with the European Convention?

YVETTE COOPER:
No, I think the reforms that are needed at the European Court, it has been taking far too long and you know doesn’t I think work as effectively as it should. But you know if you look … I mean some of the things that have gone wrong in Britain, for example Ibrahim Magag who was just able to walk away - he was a counter ter… was a terror suspect, was able to just hail a black cab and disappear - that didn’t happen because of the Human Rights Act or the European Court. It happened because Theresa May weakened the counter-terror legislation.

SUSANNA REID: Yes, but there are a number of terrorists that we can’t deport. There are a number of criminals who argue that the Human Rights Act and Human rights legislation means that they should get what would be considered an easy ride. Theresa May yesterday said that a future Tory government would tear up the Human Rights Act and prevent those abuses happening. Is that something a Labour government would consider?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well again I think I would say you know what is it, which human right is it that they now want to abolish? Is it the right to life, is it the right to freedom of speech, is it the right to be free from torture?

SUSANNA REID:
(over) Well about the right to a family life and the one that stops us sending people back because perhaps they have a partner and a child who maybe they don’t even see, but that is stopping us deporting them?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well, interestingly, the number of foreign criminals being deported has dropped by 15 per cent since the election. I think that is a problem. I think that where people have committed crimes actually we should be able to deport them back to their home country. But the reason that that has dropped is not because of the Human Rights Act and …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) But the Human Rights stops that happening.

YVETTE COOPER:
No, it’s interesting. The reason that it’s dropped is the Human Rights Act hasn’t changed - you’ve had a drop of 15 per cent. Actually what’s happened is there’s been growing problems with the bureaucracy and delays in the Home Office, there is a problem with the Borders Agency not getting its act together. That’s what the Inspectorate has said. Now we said we would support clarification in the law. We actually said it should be done through primary legislation instead of the secondary legislation that the Home Secretary said in order to clarify and to make sure that it is properly …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) And there is a promise of primary legislation on that …

YVETTE COOPER:
Yeah. And we’ll wait and see what they’re going to actually do.
SUSANNA REID:
... and you would support that?

YVETTE COOPER:
We said we would support the principle, but we’ll see what the legislation actually does because the system has to work fair and it has to be interpreted in the right way. But I think that this is being used as something to hide behind by the government when they are actually failing. We’re seeing fewer foreign criminals deported, we’re seeing more people arriving at our borders and not being turned away even though they fail the basic tests, and then disappearing at the border …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) I want to …

YVETTE COOPER:
… absconding at the border and not being caught.

SUSANNA REID:
... I just want to push you on Abu Qatada though. There’s going to be a hearing this week. Do you think finally he will be got rid of?

YVETTE COOPER:
I really hope so because Theresa May actually told us - I think it was about February/March last year, about twelve months ago - that the course of action that she was taking would mean that he could swiftly be put on a plane. Well clearly that hasn’t happened. I hope they will do so this week, but again I am worried that she chose not to appeal against the European Court judgement twelve months ago. I’m worried that that will mean things will be more difficult, but we will wait and see what happens. I hope that we will be able to deport him.

SUSANNA REID:
Let’s talk about immigration. You have admitted that Labour got the scale and pace wrong on immigration and I’m sure the government would say part of the problem
with trying to deport people is because so many people arrived under the Labour government. What was it that you got wrong?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well we said there are a couple of things that we got wrong. We should have had the transitional controls in place for Eastern Europe when accession took place. We also … I think we should have brought in the points based system earlier on. That didn’t come in until very late. I think we also should have talked about it …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) But that doesn’t affect … that doesn’t affect EU immigration, does it, and from 1st January Romanians and Bulgarians will be able to come unimpeded into the UK. Are they going to be welcome?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think there are a series of things that we should learn from the lessons of what happened before. I think most people who come to this country make a huge contribution. They work hard. You know we’ve seen everything from supporting our NHS to winning Nobel Prizes or even Olympic gold medals for Britain.

SUSANNA REID:
So we welcome them with open arms?

YVETTE COOPER:
So I think it’s important … we’ve got to recognise immigration is important to Britain, but that’s why it’s also important to have it controlled and managed. And the lessons that we should learn …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) But how do you control the immigration from these EU countries?

YVETTE COOPER:
A series of lessons we should learn. I think, first of all, it’s right to have full transitional controls; does make a difference. Secondly, you’ve also …
SUSANNA REID:
(over) But full transitional controls are irrelevant now.

YVETTE COOPER:
Well …

SUSANNA REID:
Those borders are open and there is free movement throughout the EU.

YVETTE COOPER:
But it’s right to have those, it’s right to have those in place. We didn’t have those before. And it does make a difference because it also …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) But that is literally shutting the door after the horse has bolted, hasn’t it, because …

YVETTE COOPER:
Well let me finish the point.

SUSANNA REID:
… because the Bulgarians and Romanians will be able to come on 1st January. There are no controls anymore amongst EU countries.

YVETTE COOPER:
Well let me finish the point. I think the first thing is it is right to have those transitional controls because they do mean that people are then going to other countries as well as to Britain as well. The second thing is you have to deal with the problem, the real impact of immigration, and that’s what I think the government is just failing to do completely. The real problem has been people coming, being paid you know often less than a minimum wage, migrant workers who are being exploited, and also undercutting local workers as well. Now that is bad for employers who are playing by the rules, it’s bad for the migrant workers who are being exploited. It’s also bad for everyone else.
SUSANNA REID:
(over) Okay, well … but voters

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) Things like the minimum wage, it’s really important. There have been no prosecutions for the last two years for failing to breach the minimum wage …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) Okay, but there is legislation in place to enforce that and voters might say …

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) But it’s not happened.

SUSANNA REID:
But Yvette Cooper.. But voters might say, especially those turning to UKIP, that the problem was that migration, immigration just became too high under a Labour government. This government, no matter how you count the figures, this government has seen a drop in net migration by a third. I know you’re going to say because there are Britons also leaving the country. But how do you … When people come, how do you deal with the pressure that that then puts on services and on benefits?

YVETTE COOPER:
It is important to know … You said that net migration has fallen. Two thirds of the drop in net migration is either more Brits leaving or fewer Brits coming home …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) But if there are fewer people …

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) … so there is a big problem there.

SUSANNA REID:
(over) … but if there are fewer people …
YVETTE COOPER:
(over) But we’ve said …

SUSANNA REID:
(over) … that lessens the pressure on services, but there is still a problem of the pressure on services. How do you deal with what Iain Duncan Smith has called “benefits, tourism and the crisis they’re in”?

YVETTE COOPER:
You’re making a whole series of points. Let me just try and cover as many of those as I can before you interrupt me again. Look the pace of migration we did say was too fast. That’s why we supported stronger controls. You’ve also got to look at the impact when people are here, whether that’s in the labour market or more widely. Now I mean I think that Iain Duncan Smith hasn’t actually set forward any practical proposals. Again most people who come want to work and do so. The system does need to be fair and seen to be fair, which is why we’ve set out two practical proposals around child tax credit and child benefit should not be being paid to children who are not in the country.

SUSANNA REID:
And how do you stop that happening?

YVETTE COOPER:
That needs to be sorted out at the European level. There’s a particular European directive that we should be arguing to change. It’s not built into treaties; it’s built into a particular European directive that we should be arguing to change.

SUSANNA REID:
(over) Can it be done unilaterally?

YVETTE COOPER:
No it can’t and so you’ve got to build up the alliances to do it. But we think there are other changes that you could make even within Britain that would clarify the system, make it fairer and make sure that people who are coming want to contribute to this
country and are contributing to this country. That’s what we will support.

**SUSANNA REID:**

(over) But you can’t restrict the benefits? That without working at a European level, there is nothing that you could do if you were in government to restrict the benefits?

**YVETTE COOPER:**

Yes we’ve said that you could make some changes for example to jobseeker’s allowance to make it clear that people when they come don’t claim it straightaway. They actually have to contribute, they have to be here for some time making a commitment to this country.

**SUSANNA REID:**

How long?

**YVETTE COOPER:**

Well that would be a matter for lawyers to advise on how long you could do within the existing framework and how much you would need to change at European level. But we’ve had clear advice you could make some changes. But it’s important to say that this is part of recognising most people who come to Britain do want to contribute to this country and are doing so. It’s about making sure the system is seen to be fair.

**SUSANNA REID:**

We’ve talked about benefits. Let’s talk about the Archbishop of Canterbury concerned about welfare uprating and the cap on that. You’ve chosen to politicise Mother’s Day by making it about “mummy tax”. What is the difference between a cap and a tax? It’s slightly dishonest to call it a tax, isn’t it, this cap in benefits rising?

**YVETTE COOPER:**

Well what’s happening to mothers - this is to new mums who are going to see their maternity pay cut. That is their pay taken away from them. That sounds pretty much like a tax to me. They’re going to lose £180 as a result of what the government’s doing. I think it’s pretty simple on Mother’s Day to say the government should help mums, not millionaires. They’re cutting taxes for millionaires and yet they’re taking
away money from new mums at a time when they really want to be able to stay home with their newborns.

**SUSANNA REID:**
Would a future government lift that one per cent cap on benefits?

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well we’ve said we’ll look at what the situation is at the time of the election and set out our proposals then, but right now we would stop the one per cent cap. That’s what we’d do. That’s what we’ve voted for and that’s what we’re urging the government to do. In the run-up to the budget, you know they should actually take decisions in the interests of the vast majority of working people. You know instead of the bedroom tax, which is going to put hundreds of thousands of people into homelessness, they actually should be thinking about a mansion tax instead. They’ve got to get their priorities right.

**SUSANNA REID:**
The Archbishop of Canterbury is so concerned about it, he’s written or signed a letter on it. What’s your response to that?

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well he’s absolutely right to. It is horrible what is happening to a lot of families. I’ve talked to some very desperate parents over the last few weeks, really worried that they’re going to lose their homes, worried that they are being forced to go to food banks in order to put food on the table to feed their children. And the government is just turning its back on all of this and at the same time they are giving hundreds of thousands of pounds to the richest people in the country, in the same week. It is just immoral what they are doing.

**SUSANNA REID:**
But would you link it again to inflation - benefits rises linked to inflation?

**YVETTE COOPER:**
We’ve said that they shouldn’t be going ahead with this, they shouldn’t do the one per
cent cap. They should just have the benefits go forward linked to inflation this year and that would be the sensible thing to do, and you could do it by paying for it by restricting pensions tax relief on the very highest earners. That would be a fair way to help everybody.

SUSANNA REID:
Yvette Cooper, thank you very much indeed.

YVETTE COOPER:
Thank you.

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