JAMES LANDALE:
Now after the economy, it is immigration that is worrying voters most. That at least is what the opinion polls suggest and the surge in support for UKIP appears to confirm. The Government has set out its latest plans in the Queen’s Speech: landlords will have to check the immigration status of their tenants; there’ll be another clampdown on so-called health tourism; and more pressure on the courts to deport foreign criminals. But will any of this make a difference? I’m joined now by the Shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper. Welcome.

YVETTE COOPER:
Good morning.

JAMES LANDALE:
Before we get into the detail, can we just look at some of the principles? Do you believe that immigration is too high?
YVETTE COOPER:
Well we said that the pace of immigration was too fast, so it is right to bring the level down and that’s why we’ve actually supported some of the measures that the Government has introduced - for example greater restrictions on people who are coming here, with high qualifications but actually were coming to do lower skilled jobs. So yes there are things like that you should do because I think you know we recognise there were things that we did, for example, around not having transitional controls on Eastern European migration, which we should have done.

JAMES LANDALE:
But when you say the pace of immigration was too high, does that mean you think immigration was too high under Labour and it’s too high now?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well, as I said, we do think that the level should come down. That’s why we’re supporting some of these measures that the Government’s introduced.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) Okay.

YVETTE COOPER:
But I think you’ve also got to look at what kind of immigration …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) You don’t seem to use, you never seem to use the phrase immigration is too high.

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) Well actually I just did, actually I just did.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) Is immigration too high?

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) You know I just did and I talked actually because you had the problem, for example, of not having transitional controls for Eastern Europe. But you’ve also got to look at what kind of immigration that you have. So I think, for example, illegal immigration has been a growing problem - there should be much stronger action to deal with that, and the Government’s not doing that - but at the same time what the Government is doing is putting off legitimate university students who bring billions of pounds into this economy. So you’ve got to look at the kind of immigration as well as the level as well as the pace.

JAMES LANDALE:
If you think immigration must come down, by how much should it come down?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think there is a problem with the approach the Government’s taking because they’ve said they’ve set this target for net migration, which in practice includes a lot of British citizens. So, for example, the way in which net migration has fallen over the last few years, two thirds of it is actually British citizens. For example, it’s fewer people coming into … fewer Brits coming back home and also more Brits leaving. I think that’s a problem.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) I mean that is a disputed statistic because there’s a lot of evidence from the …

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) Well no, it’s not actually.

JAMES LANDALE:
Well the ONS has put out some figures which suggest that actually it’s the student numbers that are making a greater impact. Now …

YVETTE COOPER:
(over) Oh certainly there is a big issue about students. That’s absolutely right.

JAMES LANDALE:
But my point is this.

**YVETTE COOPER:**
*(over)* The British figures are not disputed.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
If you object to the Government’s use of net migration, choose your own measure and tell us how much you think immigration should reduce.

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well I actually think you’ve got to look at a whole series of different things. So we’ve said, for example, low-skilled migration should come down. We’ve also said actually we shouldn’t be targeting universities.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
*(over)* Yes, but how much? What sort of numbers are we talking about?

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well I think the Government’s attempted to set a target, but actually what it’s done has proved irresponsible because instead what they’ve ended up doing is ignoring illegal immigration because it’s not included. Now, look, you would want to get illegal immigration down as close to zero as possible. I mean that should be a, you know, long-term objective because illegal immigration is something nobody wants to see. I mean that’s why we’ve said you want different target … you know you want different action in order to tackle illegal immigration. But you’ve also got to look at the impact of immigration in the labour market and so on, and you’ve got to recognise that actually we’ve benefited in Britain for over very many generations from people who’ve come to this country, contributed, built great businesses, worked in the National Health Service, won Olympic gold medals. And so immigration’s got to be controlled, it’s got to be managed, but you’ve also got to recognise its importance for Britain’s future.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Okay, you say you support some of the measures that the Government has proposed
in the Queen’s Speech. Can we just go through some of them to see what you think? For example, do you believe that the Government’s right to say that new migrants should not have total access to the NHS before they’ve spent some time here paying taxes?

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well we don’t know actually what they are saying. I mean the problem with the Government’s Queen …

**JAMES LANDALE:**
(over) No, but support the principle.

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well no actually we don’t know what the Government is planning to do at all at the moment because you’re right that they made a big fanfare, they announced a lot of things, they ramped up the rhetoric a lot, but we’ve actually had no practical specific measures and instead we’re being told that actually the Immigration Bill won’t be published for around four months. Now you know I don’t think it’s actually very responsible to simply ramp up rhetoric and not have practical measures.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
(over) But what do you think about the principle?

**YVETTE COOPER:**
(over) We’ve set a whole series of practical measures that I think you should introduce.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
But you can …

**YVETTE COOPER:**
I think on something like the NHS, there are already requirements, legal requirements on hospitals, for example, to recover costs for people who shouldn’t be entitled to free NHS care. But the Government, all they’ve told us they would do on the NHS is do an
audit of the extent of the problem. Well why didn’t they do that before they said what they’re actually going to do about it? And of course what you don’t want is to have people arriving in A&E and suddenly being asked for their papers …

JAMES LANDALE:
Yes.

YVETTE COOPER:
… in the same way that you know people can be asked for their credit card if they’re in America or other countries.

JAMES LANDALE:
Let’s look at something then that the Government was specific about. They said landlords should check the immigration status of their tenants. Do you support that, yes or no?

YVETTE COOPER:
Well I think again there is much more you could do around private landlords. I think there are problems. For example, you have private landlords who may have overcrowded housing with you know foreign workers in that then actually becomes used to help undercut the minimum wage and things like that. So I think there is a genuine problem here, but again the Government hasn’t told us how they would do this. So we’ve called for a statutory register of private landlords. That would allow you to do all kinds of things and look at some of those standards issues and so on. But if you don’t have that, how will this actually be enforced? The Government doesn’t actually know who the private landlords are in this country, so how are they going to ask them to set particular tests for tenants? I think there’s no practical detail about how the Government would actually make this work, and I think that is a problem.

JAMES LANDALE:
Do you now believe that Abu Qatada will return to Jordan? Do you think there’s a process now underway?

YVETTE COOPER:
I really hope so because I think this has gone on far too long. I think it’s been a really unfortunate saga. I think you know the process, the legal process has gone on too long. And so I wish that Abu Qatada had made his statement some years earlier. That he says he will return voluntarily, but you know we’ll wait to see that this isn’t just another legal threat.

**JAMES LANDALE:**

*(over)* Are you confident he’ll go?

**YVETTE COOPER:**

We’ll wait to see that this isn’t just a legal ploy. I do hope that he goes. We want him to face fair trial in Jordan for the serious crimes you know against which he’s been accused.

**JAMES LANDALE:**

This weekend Ed Miliband said it would be wrong to offer people an in/out referendum on Europe. Why should people not have a say?

**YVETTE COOPER:**

Well we’ve said the most important thing right now - and it is what actually people are saying to us on the doorstep, it’s what people are saying in the polls - the most important thing is to get the economy going. You’ve got to get growth, you’ve got to get businesses growing, you’ve got to get investment. And I think the problem …

**JAMES LANDALE:**

*(over)* But people want a say.

**YVETTE COOPER:**

Well the problem with what the Government’s proposed, which is you know announcing a referendum for about four or five years’ time, is you suddenly have huge uncertainty for businesses at a time when you should get that economy growing. I don’t think you should do things that put that at stake. And instead what we’ve got is this kind of frenzy that is going on in the Tory Party about a vote this week. You know utterly incomprehensible you could have government ministers potentially
voting against their own Queen’s Speech. You know you need cool, calm heads and statesmanlike behaviour at a time like this. I don’t think that is what David Cameron is showing.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Is there anybody in your party saying well, look, why not call for a referendum? It might divide the Government, divide the Conservatives, and it means you guys can go out and argue your case for membership of the European Union.

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Well, look, there is legislation in place that provides for referendums you know depending on what happens in future, but I think the priority now, we’re very clear the priority now has got to be getting people into jobs. Let’s have a guaranteed job for young people rather than just leaving them to languish you know on unemployment benefit and not get them into work. Let’s build a hundred thousand houses. You know let’s do things like repeal these really damaging regulations on privatisation of the NHS. There are really practical things the Government could do in this Queen’s Speech. They’re turning their back on all of it and just fighting each other.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Yvette Cooper, thanks very much indeed for joining us this morning.

**YVETTE COOPER:**
Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**