AM: There seems to be some doubt in people’s minds, even now, about Labour’s real attitude to Brexit. Can I ask you some very simple questions? First of all: do you think that we should be a member of the single market after Brexit?

AT: I think we need to have the widest possible access to the single market after we leave the European Union.

AM: And do you accept, given that everything that the European leaders have been saying, and people here as well, that that means we could not have control over immigration?

EM: I think that’s subject to negotiation and I think that we need to be reasonable about it and we need to think quite carefully about what the trade-off is. Our priority is the economy and we need to make sure that whatever decisions are made we don’t make ourselves poorer and we don’t take away anybody’s jobs.

AM: Because I mean you say that there should be a negotiation, but for a lot of people there seems to be a very little gap between being inside the single market and accepting free movement of people and being outside. Your colleague Diana Abbott has said: ‘you cannot have access to the single market or be part of the single market without freedom of movement.’ I think a lot of people would agree with that. And she goes on: ‘it’s time people started acknowledging that. Those of us who are arguing for the least harmful Brexit have to be clear to people that there is no deal to be done on freedom of movement and to imperil our economic interests,’ as you were saying, ‘as a country, because anti-immigrant feeling could scarcely be responsible.’ Do you agree with that?
ET: Yeah, I agree with a lot of that, yeah, absolutely.

AM: So in the end if we’re not part of the single market, if we are going to be part of the single market, if we’re going to have access to the single market we are going to have to concede control over freedom of movement. We can’t have both things.

ET: I think that David Cameron missed a fantastic opportunity to look at reforming one of the pillars of the European Union before the General Election, before we had the referendum. He went off and was going to fix the European Union and yet the Europeans saw him coming, they saw that he wasn’t acting on behalf of the whole of Britain and he got nothing, you know. And that seemed to me to be a golden opportunity that was wasted. I think that we have common cause with other people across Europe in terms of exactly what freedom of movement of workers means and I think there’s more work that could be done if it was done in an atmosphere of good faith. But quite frankly, the way in which Boris Johnson is behaving at the moment he’s undermining any good faith there could possibly be with our European friends and neighbours.

AM: I’m still slightly confused. The kind of access that you want to the single market, and lots of businesses agree with you, comes at the price of conceding the free movement of people. Do you accept that? Because that’s what Diana Abbott’s saying and she’s right.

ET: Yes. I think that what we need to do is to look at what freedom of movement of workers means and how it is defined and how it is applied. And I think there is quite a lot of room for manoeuvre in there. I think that David Cameron tried to do it but was simply not in the right place –
AM: Give us examples of where we could get to then.

ET: So for example we could look at what is the definition of a worker, at what stage you need to be looking for work, how long you can be in the country without being able to find work –

AM: But people would still be allowed to come in here?

ET: Well, yes, people would still be able to come in here and then there would be the question of in what circumstances could they find work, you know, in what areas of the country might they be able to find there, there are a whole range of options that are available and all subject to negotiation. But we are so far away from that. You know the government has absolutely no plan at all at the moment.

AM: I’m trying to work out where Labour would like to be as it were, post Brexit. So you’re not going to stop it happening, you’re going to allow Article 50 to be triggered, indeed you’ll get a vote for Article 50 to be triggered and then after that you’ll try to get maximum access to European markets and that might mean very large numbers of European workers still being able to come and work here in exchange for access to those markets? Is that right?

ET: Our first priority is the economy. The first priority of any government should be the safety and security of its people. The second priority of any government should be the economy because if the economy does badly it is people who are only just managing who will suffer and we have to bear that in mind when making decisions about the future of our country for the sake of our kids and for our grandchildren. That is our abiding principle. Now how that works out is subject to negotiation. And at this stage it seems to us that the government ought to be confident enough to be able to come to us and say these are the main principles on which we are going to be negotiating.
AM: With respect you sound as vague as they do at the moment. We want our cake and eat it. We want access to the single market and we want some kind of control over immigration. What about the Customs Union for instance?

ET: No. It is about time we stopped talking about believing in cake, having our cake and eating our cake. We have to look at the options and we have to know that it is a trade off and that we need to be able to have a proper debate within the British public as to what the options are. We need to have a long-term relationship with Europe and we need to be honest about what that means. Now, do I think that too many people at the moment come into this country? I think that yes, I think they do and I think they do because I think that we have a skills shortage. We are not training enough people in this country. Why is it that we are dependent?

AM: So less immigration under a Labour government is what you’re saying.

ET: Well it’s because we need to address the skills gap and if we address the skills gap we won’t have the same need for more people coming in. Do we have employers who take advantage of sucking people in from other countries and undercutting wages and undercutting conditions? Yes, we do. And we need to be able to control that as well. And it seems to me that if we were to address those problems properly – if employers were finally actually training some of our youngsters so they did have the skills –

AM: I get it. Can I ask you about one other thing that’s come up this week which is both John Major and Tony Blair said that, if things are bad economically as they may be as some of the official reports, the OBR is suggesting, then there should be a second
referendum so people can have a second chance. Do you agree with that or not?

AT: I think that we need to take this in stages and at the moment we cannot even have a debate as to how it is that we’re going to leave the European Union because the government claim they’re keeping their cards to their chest but we know they don’t have any cards and they don’t even know what game they’re playing. And it is about time they came out of their darkened room and they told us in what way we’re going to leave the European Union and what our continuing relationship is likely to be so that we can debate it. And so Theresa May can go to Europe and say I’m representing the whole of Britain. They need to act on behalf of a hundred percent and not on behalf of an extreme five percent of the 52 percent.

AM: But if you don’t like what they say when they finally come and tell us, if you don’t like the vision they have, what then happens? Can you stop them in parliament, do you try to stop them in parliament in some way? Do you think there should be a second referendum as a break, what then happens so that you can get your way and they don’t get their way?

AT: I think this needs to be taken step by step but they will not take the first step which is – they have had five months now, five months. You know David Cameron specifically told the civil service not to look at a plan B, they now have had five months to work out what their plan is going to be and they come with nothing. That is the starting point. Let us start with what it is the government wants to negotiate and then we can have a reaction from the public and a proper debate and then we can decide how we want to proceed. But until they actually lay down their basic negotiating position we cannot even begin this debate.
EMILY THORBERRY

AM: Your leader and your friend Jeremy Corbyn said of Fidel Castro that he was a great fighter for social justice and a huge historical figure, and a lot of people thought he failed to address the dark side of the Castro regime. All those killings, the abuse of gay people and the torture and so forth. What is your view?

AT: I think that Castro was a hugely divisive figure and I think that it’s quite difficult to get beyond the human rights abuses, but my own experience – I went to Cuba in the early 1990s when there was great economic difficulties in that country and I found a country that was egalitarian, with a fantastic health service, I had my baby with me and you had to go off and see the doctor and we were really struck by it.

AM: It came at a heck of a price.

AT: It came at a price but it was - in my view it was a brave island that stood against a regime that for 50 years would not trade with it and would not let other countries trade with it too. And not only did they stand firm and strong, they also exported their values across South America and into Africa, producing doctors and nurses and teachers.

AM: Sounds like we’re giving him a bit of an easy pass for the camps -

AT: No I’m not.
AM: - the torture. I mean this came at a huge price. If it was Pinochet people on the left would say he was a monster, he was terrible, he should be got rid of. But because he wore a red star on his fatigues and so forth you seem to be quite gentle on him.

AT: Yeah and if you look at some of the right wing press that were supporting Pinochet they’re the ones who come out and accuse Castro of all the things that they do. Let me just put this to you.
How can it be that a little island like Cuba can have not only sufficient doctors and nurses to be able to look after the people of Cuba but they can also export them across South America and into Africa to give more doctors to fight the Ebola crisis than the Americans and that little tiny country could do that and we can’t?

AM: But how can you set that alongside for instance machine gunning people in boats, including children, when they were trying to leave the country? I mean how do you make this kind – it’s very hard to make a kind of equals sign or an equivalent sign between the dark side and the bright side of Cuba. There is a bright side but there’s a very, very dark side as well.

T: I acknowledge that. I acknowledge that. But all I’m saying is that from my experience, my experience was visiting a country that was - at the time they didn’t have enough petrol to be able to drive cars, they were going around on bicycles on the May Day parade, but nevertheless there were not people starving and they still had an excellent health and education service. I’m not saying any more than that, but it was an enormous achievement for a little Caribbean island.

AM: Final thought, very quickly, you heard Stephen Dorrell there talking about the crisis in social care. Do you agree with him and with Paul Mason that we’re going to see a crisis that’s going to run out through the rest of this year and do you think the Chancellor should be back in the House of Commons putting more money into social care?

AT: Absolutely. Absolutely. I was in Warwickshire yesterday and people are desperately worried about what is going to happen. You know what will happen with their elderly relatives? Will they be got up at breakfast time or will they be got up at lunchtime? What will happen with people going into hospital in crisis and not being able to come out again? You know for every pound we
spend on social care we save two, three, four, five on the National Health Service.

ENDS