Am: With me now in Glasgow is the Labour Party’s Shadow Energy and Business Secretary and former Leader, Ed Miliband, who is negotiating on Copenhagen. Ed Miliband, you may have heard Alok Sharma repeatedly refuse to say that he thought we could limit global warming to 1.5 degrees in Glasgow. What do you think, do you think it can be done here?

EM: Well look, it’s a deeply worrying situation. I think it’s really important to set out for your viewers what the task is. The tasks is to halve global emissions this decade in order to keep 1.5 degrees alive. That’s what the scientists tell us will give us a fighting chance of keeping 1.5 degrees alive. Now at the moment the UN says we’re not going to halve global emissions this decade, we’re just going to cut them by 7%. That’s the gap. That’s the huge gap we have and that produces the 2.7 degrees of warming. We’ve got to push really hard at this summit. This has got to be a real negotiation. Not people coming along with their prepared announcements, but saying this is where we are, this is where the science that Tina Stege was saying, it is existential for countries around the world, we’ve got to push much much harder at this summit.

AM: So if it’s existential do you think that climate change should be at the heart of every Labour Party policy now?

ED: It should be, but let me just say about the negotiations, ‘cause I want to say what needs to happen at these negotiations. First of all we’ve got to put pressure on every big emitter. Boris Johnson was congratulating Australia this week on its heroic, as he put it, 2050 commitment. Now commitments for three decades hence are fine but we need commitments this decade and Australia’s commitment will take us to a 4 degree world. So first of all the
government’s got to put proper pressure on the big emitters. No free passes at this summit, whether it’s China or Australia or anyone else. Secondly, I want to go back to something you talked about with Alok in the interview around this hundred billion dollars. I was part of that promise at Copenhagen along with Gordon Brown.

AM: The countries are simply not getting the money.
EM: I mean it is shameful this hundred billion has not yet been delivered. Now this matters morally, but it also matters for this summit for the following reason, Andrew, which is we can only put pressure on the biggest emitters if we have an alliance of developing and vulnerable countries, like the Marshall Islands, and developed countries that want action. That’s the pincer movement we need and that’s why – and us cutting overseas aid frankly is reprehensible because it’s taking us away from that. So we’ve got to - part of this summit is about delivering on that hundred billion, on vaccinating the world, because it’s shameful that the developing world only 1% of people are vaccinated, and then to put pressure on the biggest emitters.

AM: Let’s talk about Labour Party policy. You’ve been very critical of the government for halving air passenger duty as they did in the Budget. Would you reinstate that tax?
EM: We’ll set that out in the manifesto.
AM: I’m looking for leadership. You say you have to be specific – give me some leadership.
EM: There’s no question about our position this. We’re completely against it and let me say why. Because we had a Budget which was supposed to be days before COP26 where the Chancellor had a chance to set out investment plans to retrofit and insulate we hope and he -
AM: It’s a very simple question. Would you repeal it or not?
EM: Well, we’re against it and we’ll set out our promise in the Manifesto. You get a clear sense of where I’m going.
AM: Okay, all right. I can see where you’re going but you haven’t really told me yet. Let me ask you about flying more generally. I imagine that you like me like most people came here by train. The UK is not a very very big country. Do you think we have to get rid of internal domestic flights more or less completely?
EM: I mean not completely but as much as we possibly can which is why the domestic air passenger duty decision was the wrong decision. But here’s the thing, Andrew, and this is my approach on the climate crisis and how we tackle it.

AM: What about flying from Manchester to London, Birmingham to London?
EM: Let me just finish the point if I can. Got to give people alternatives. You see the really regrettable thing about Rishi Sunak’s Budget he could have been investing in public transport, he could have been investing in train services, in bus services and that’s the key. And you know, fairness and giving people alternatives is an absolutely key part of making this transition happen and this government’s not making the investments we need means that we don’t give people those alternatives.

AM: Okay, but there are alternative, London to Manchester. Will you stop people flying from London to Manchester and back again?
EM: Well I don’t know about stopping people, but you need to give people the right alternatives and you need to have the right levels of taxation on these things.

AM: It doesn’t sound that radical at the moment. Let me ask you about something else which is –
EM: I think it is radical, honestly, no no honestly. Let me say it is.
AM: But radical is clear answers.
EM: Let me say why it’s radical, because we have made a commitment to invest £28 billion extra each and every year to 2030, Rachel Reeves made that commitment. That is an incredibly - that compares to about two and a half billion from government. Now
why does this investment matter? Because it’s saying to people we are going to make this transition happen and we’re going to make it happen fairly. So we’re going to retrofit and insulate every home in the country below proper standards.

AM: We’ve moved well away from flights. Let me ask you about – no I’m sorry, let me ask you about something else. You’ve made many points and you’ll make many more but let me talk about meat because the Committee on Climate Change, the government Chief Scientists and many others have said, we have all got to stop eating so much meat, particularly beef.

EM: We do need to cut down.

AM: Cut down and carbon producing and there should be a tax on food and they mean particularly meat which produces a lot of carbon. Is that something that Labour backs or not?

EM: No, I’m sceptical about meat tax and let me explain why I’m sceptical about a meat tax. It goes to this fairness point. The British people want us to tackle this problem right across the population they care about this, but they’re asking this question. Is this transition going to be fair? And there’s a big divide you see between us and the government, because when I make my point about our investment pledge it’s so that when people have to change their boiler for a heat pump it doesn’t leave them out of pocket. When we’re saying to people transition to electric cars, we’re not just saying it’s for the rich, we’re saying we’re going to give support to people on lower and middle incomes to make that transition. When the steel industry said, how are we going to make this transition we’re going to make it possible. So fairness –

AM: We’ve jumped from meat to steel quite quickly.

EM: No, no we haven’t Andrew. This is about fairness being an absolutely golden thread, a red thread if you like – a red thread from Red Ed, that goes through our policy, because it’s the only way we make this transition fairly.
AM: Well let’s move to another big challenge facing all politicians probably which is that Bulb, 1.7 million customers, the energy company looks like it’s on the edge. Would Labour nationalise it?

EM: I think we – there’s two options in relation to the energy companies that are in trouble. One is to get their customers taken on by other companies, which is what’s been happening, and secondly, as a last resort to say we should have a special administration regime where it’s held in the public sector. I think we’ll look at both of those options.

AM: So that’s not nationalisation is it?

EM: Well it would be actually in the short term. It would be in the short term and then they’d go back into the market place. And I think what we’ve got to do is the test on this is do you get value for money for bill payers and tax payers and that is the key thing.

AM: Can I just clear something up. Did you think that Keir Starmer was in favour of nationalising the energy companies or not?

EM: I thought Keir Starmer and I know this to continue to be true, believes in a role for common ownership in relation to energy. There is a role for common ownership in relation to energy but there’s lots of different aspects to common ownership in energy. Let me just finish the point. There’s supply, there’s generation, there’s distribution and there’s the grid. And what we’re going to do, the energy market clearly isn’t working. We’re going to take a step back and look at what the right way of modelling our energy system in the future is. So there’s a role for common ownership but we’ll set out at the election what it is exactly.

AM: So back in September you said to News Night, we’re in favour of common ownership

EM: Common ownership and I’m repeating that Andrew.

AM: and just wait for Keir Starmer. Now Keir Starmer, during the Leadership campaign when he was asked whether the electricity companies should be nationalised put his hand up and then he told
me he was against nationalising energy companies. What’s changed?

EM: To defend Keir Starmer on this and to be clear about the position, I’ve just said to you Andrew, there’s many different aspects to the energy system. So there are natural monopolies in the energy system, like the Grid and the transmission system. That needs to be looked at. There’s generation, there’s supply. So there’s lots of different aspects. It’s absolutely consistent what he’s saying which is there’s a role for common ownership and we’ll set out exactly what it is at the time of the election and it will be based on how do we make this transition swiftly? How do we do it in a way that’s fair and how do we get value for money for tax payers and bill payers?

Ends