



Prospect

Immigration under Labour

Edited by Tim Finch and David Goodhart



A collection of essays featuring:

- Rob Ford
- Will Somerville
- Ed Owen
- Barbara Roche
- Sarah Spencer
- Claude Moraes
- John Denham
- Don Flynn
- Matt Cavanagh
- Phil Woolas
- Arten Llazari
- Greg Thomson
- Jon Cruddas
- Shमित Saggat

About ippr

The Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) is the UK's leading progressive think tank, producing cutting-edge research and innovative policy ideas for a just, democratic and sustainable world.

Since 1988, we have been at the forefront of progressive debate and policymaking in the UK. Through our independent research and analysis we define new agendas for change and provide practical solutions to challenges across the full range of public policy issues.

With offices in both London and Newcastle, we ensure our outlook is as broad-based as possible, while our international work extends our partnerships and influence beyond the UK, giving us a truly world-class reputation for high-quality research.

ippr, 13–14 Buckingham Street, London WC2N 6DF
+44 (0)20 7470 6100 • info@ippr.org • www.ippr.org
Registered charity no. 800065

This collection first published in November 2010. © 2010
The contents and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors only.

About Prospect

Prospect was founded in 1995. It now has a circulation of more than 30,000 and is Britain's fastest growing current affairs magazine.

Prospect, 2 Bloomsbury Place, London WC1A 2QA
+44 (0)20 7255 1281 • www.prospect-magazine.co.uk

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to record special thanks to the public services union UNISON for supporting the publication of these contributions to the immigration debate. They also wish to thank Nick Pearce, ippr Director, and Sarah Mulley, ippr Associate Director, for their expertise and advice in putting this collection of essays together, and Mark Ballinger at ippr for editing and production.

Contents

	Introduction	
	Tim Finch and David Goodhart.....	3
1.	Immigration and the 2010 General Election: More than meets the eye	
	Rob Ford & Will Somerville	10
2.	Reactive, defensive and weak	
	Ed Owen	15
3.	Making the best of immense challenges	
	Barbara Roche	17
4.	Economic gain, political cost	
	Sarah Spencer.....	19
5.	Fighting new battles on old territory	
	Claude Moraes.....	21
6.	Fairness, entitlement and common obligation	
	John Denham	24
7.	Where was the new radical cosmopolitanism?	
	Don Flynn.....	27
8.	Numbers matter	
	Matt Cavanagh.....	30
9.	Untying the gag	
	Phil Woolas.....	34
10.	How tough is too tough?	
	Arten Llazari.....	36
11.	Fair treatment for all workers	
	Greg Thomson	38
12.	A clear and present peril	
	Jon Cruddas.....	40
13.	Immigration as performance politics	
	Shamit Saggat	42

Introduction

Tim Finch is head of migration and director of communications at ippr. David Goodhart was the founding editor of Prospect magazine and is now its Editor-at-Large.

In its famous five pledges, first made before the 1997 general election and updated in 2001, New Labour told the British people how it wanted to change the UK. The focus was on education, health, crime, youth unemployment and sound economic management. By 2005, a sixth pledge was added, in a new policy area: ‘Your country’s borders protected.’ It represented a belated recognition among the party hierarchy of an issue that had loomed large over Labour’s years in government: immigration.

This collection of essays, which draws together contributions from people who worked on immigration during the Blair–Brown years — both inside and outside government — sets out to answer why the issue caused such problems for Labour. In the main, it is a set of reflections on a historical period. But the authors also seek to draw lessons for the future. The focus of the essays is the New Labour era, so it is inevitable that many of those lessons are aimed directly at the Labour Party under the new leadership of Ed Miliband. However, we hope that other politicians, including those now in positions of power in the Coalition government, will also find the booklet insightful.

A fateful issue

While there are differing views over the extent to which high immigration has helped or harmed the UK — indeed the authors of this introduction diverge somewhat on the question — it undoubtedly dogged Labour’s time in office and at least contributed to its defeat in 2010. That it is not to say that Labour’s handling of immigration was the decisive issue in that defeat, as Rob Ford and Will Somerville show in their election analysis which opens this collection. Many contributors make reference to the now-infamous Gillian Duffy moment, which was probably the single most memorable incident of the 2010 campaign. That encounter was also emblematic of Labour’s troubled handling of immigration and sadly typical of Gordon Brown’s maladroit touch as leader. Yet

it had no more direct impact on the overall result than the Prescott punch in 2001. Labour even won the Rochdale seat, where Mrs Duffy lived. Moreover, immigration was actually a bigger issue in 2005, and featured prominently in 2001 too, but as Claude Moraes suggests, the issue then seemed to exist in its own ‘microclimate’. Also, in those elections the economy was strong and getting stronger — by 2010, it was a very different story.

As the collected essays make clear, to conclude because immigration was not on its own the key to Labour’s decline and defeat that its importance has been exaggerated, is to miss the point profoundly. For a start, immigration numbers during the Labour years are, by any standard, extraordinary. More than 7 million people immigrated to the UK during Labour’s tenure and, although returning British nationals make up a sizeable chunk of that number and many foreign immigrants have subsequently left, some 2.5 million foreign-born people have been added to the population since 1997, with around 1.5 million becoming British citizens, mainly from developing countries. The foreign-born workforce has increased from around 2 million to more than 3.5 million.¹

At the same time, the immigrant population has become more diverse and more dispersed. Before 1997, immigration originated mainly from the countries of the Commonwealth — old and new — and was concentrated in London, the South East and urban centres in the Midlands and the North. Since 1997, the various waves of immigration — through asylum, economic migration and EU expansion — have seen large numbers of people arrive from various parts of Africa (and not just Anglophone countries), from the Far and Middle East, from Latin America, from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Many places in Britain previously almost untouched by immigration, such as rural counties and market towns, now host significant migrant communities. One of our contributors, Arten Llazari, an Albanian by birth, works in Wolverhampton, a city in which the long-established communities from the Indian subcontinent

and the Caribbean have been joined by new communities of Iraqi and Somali refugees, as well as economic migrants from Poland and Romania. London, and in a smaller way, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Glasgow, have become super-diverse global cities. Over the last six years of Labour rule, the UK's Polish population alone increased by some half a million – a population equivalent to the size of Britain's fifth-biggest city, Sheffield. In short, it is no exaggeration to say that immigration under New Labour has changed the face of the country.

No conspiracy

There was no conspiracy to bring about this huge social change. New Labour did not deliberately set out to turn the UK into a huge multi-racial melting pot and so prevent the Conservatives from ever winning power again, as implied by former Number 10 adviser Andrew Neather in an article seized upon by right-wing commentators. Indeed, as Ed Owen describes, far from having a grand plan to transform Britain, New Labour didn't have a plan at all.

Tony Blair's overriding concern in the run-up to the 1997 election was that the Conservatives should not be able to paint New Labour as 'soft' on immigration. So instead of setting his team to do the hard strategic thinking and detailed policy work (as they did in other areas) his only order was that the issue be 'neutralised'. This was to prove a costly mistake.

For Labour surfed into power just as a perfect immigration storm started to rip. Two of its most significant elements were related to a sustained economic boom in an era of rapid globalization. But in each case, policy decisions or management failures were contributory factors.

One of the major elements was that a greatly lowered cost of transit brought the rich countries of Western Europe within easy reach for many hundreds of millions of people, which was one of the reasons why asylum numbers spiked in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The other was that the booming British economy meant that there were plenty of jobs for the migrants who could get here. (They were also attracted by the pull of the English language, by the existence of established migrant networks – particularly in London – and by the lack of strict internal monitoring and enforcement compared to other countries.) In these conditions, maintaining the policy of the previous 20 years of so-called 'zero migration' would have been difficult for any government, whatever its intentions.

Nevertheless, Labour did make some deliberate decisions which opened the door wider than it would otherwise

have been. These included the liberalisation of work permits, partly as a counterbalance to a crackdown on asylum; a large increase in foreign students, to help pay for the rapid expansion of higher education; and the opening up of our labour market to the new EU states of Eastern and Central Europe in 2004 (seven years before most other EU countries). Other important decisions included scrapping the 'primary purpose rule', which made bringing in spouses easier, and the introduction of the Human Rights Act, which made deportation a more drawn-out and sometimes difficult process.

Labour did make some deliberate decisions which opened the door wider than it would otherwise have been

The effect of these policy decisions was compounded by a chaotic immigration system. The department Labour inherited from the Tories was underfunded, understaffed, undervalued and inadequate to the task. Barbara Roche tells us that there were only 50 asylum caseworkers when she became the Immigration Minister in 1999. Despite radical and controversial toughening-up of its procedures since, the UK's asylum system is still dealing with the legacy of those years – and it was only really in Labour's third term that proper management and control of immigration was fully in place.

So there are explanations and excuses for Labour's early struggles with immigration. And yet most of what it would face could and should have been predicted by a political machine which was famed for its preparedness for power. Why then did Labour find itself on the back foot right from the start?

Unresolved dissonance

The lack of a coherent policy programme and managerial systems to deal with immigration was not the only problem. More fundamental, as many of our contributors make clear, was that New Labour – top to bottom – was torn on the issue. Many at the top of the party were influenced by the metropolitan cultural liberalism and internationalism which saw immigration as an inherently good thing. Many activists also shared this view. But most Labour voters did not.

One of this introduction's authors has written elsewhere of how Labour suffered throughout its time in power

from ‘cognitive dissonance’ – a syndrome in which two conflicting views held at the same time lead to severe tension – over immigration.² In the early years, it could be argued that Labour was in fact struggling with *three* competing views. First, the party leadership was determined not to appear soft on immigration for electoral reasons, hence the populist language, especially on asylum, from David Blunkett among others. Second, it wanted to create a modern, multicultural Britain with a dynamic open economy. And third – despite New Labour’s determination, even relish, to shed outdated shibboleths of the left – there was still a lingering belief that tightly controlling immigration was somehow tinged with racism. As Ed Owen points out, many in the New Labour hierarchy were children of the ‘60s and ‘70s, when the struggles for racial equality were at their height. They were of a post-war generation that relished diversity and of a metropolitan-minded class that had reaped its benefits. By contrast, a strong line on immigration control was associated with hate figures like Enoch Powell, Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit. And as centre-left and centre-right began to converge in many other policy areas, being pro-immigrant and pro-immigration became even more important to the centre-left world view. In light of these conflicting perspectives, it is perhaps no surprise that Barbara Roche admits in her essay that she was ‘appalled’ to be appointed Immigration Minister.

The preferred tactic in the early years was to say as little as possible about immigration. But with asylum claims topping 100,000 annually this stance was unsustainable. The press at the time was talking of little else and, as Ed Owen reveals, there were even concerns in Number 10 that asylum could lose the 2001 election for Labour, as fanciful as that sounds now. Even after the 2001 victory, asylum absorbed a lot of attention – including at Number 10 – with a major focus on the Sangatte refugee centre in Calais. A great deal of government effort was put into getting it closed and shutting down the Channel Tunnel route into the UK. Arten Llazari and Sarah Spencer argue here that some of the policy – and certainly the rhetoric – that New Labour adopted to deal with this issue set a tone for speaking about immigration which alienated sections of progressive support, including among migrant communities themselves. Sarah Spencer writes that Labour ‘crossed a line that some will not easily forgive or forget.’

However, in the bigger scheme of things, it was not on asylum that Labour most badly misjudged the mood.

The ‘open door’

Perhaps in an attempt to ‘triangulate’ the issue, Labour combined its crackdown on asylum with the decision to come out loud and proud for the benefits of legal

economic migration. Barbara Roche made a speech in 2000 in which this position was articulated for the first time. It is no coincidence that she was a former Treasury and Trade Minister – as Matt Cavanagh and Ed Owen make clear, the economic case for high immigration was strongly argued from within both those departments, with back-up from the Foreign Office (traditionally pro-immigration for diplomatic reasons) and the Department of Education and Employment (keen on foreign students). In addition, then Home Secretary David Blunkett was concerned that the clear demand for migrant labour should be met through legal, not illegal, immigration. Barbara Roche points out that she also argued for a points-based system (PBS) in her pro-immigration speech, which would have allowed for greater visible ‘selectivity’ in the system – something that Shamit Saggarr argues is one of the most important ways of winning public support for economic migration. But if the PBS was on the drawing board in 2000, it didn’t come into effect until 2008.

The preferred tactic in the early years was to say as little as possible about immigration

In the early to mid-2000s, Labour’s relatively open approach to economic migration was seen as a key plank of sustaining the boom. The opinion polls might have shown that public opposition to high immigration was growing, but the 2001 general election was won easily and the economic evidence for migration’s benign effects, at least on the average voter, was strong. ippr was among those making the case at that time, and it remains a compelling one. However, it tends to ignore the fact that, even before the crash of 2007–08, the dynamic, flexible, neo-liberal economic model, of which high immigration was a key component, was never much loved, either by Labour’s core support or by the ‘squeezed middle’, who felt they did not gain much from the boom years. The fact that there is a marked coincidence between the net migration number and the number of new jobs created during the boom years has come to symbolise this sense of grievance. ippr research on public attitudes suggests the mood can be summed up in a somewhat crude articulation: ‘All those years of growth, yet who benefitted? Bankers, bosses and immigrants.’

It remains the case that immigrants as individuals are generally respected by the British public (certainly more than bosses and bankers). This can be seen in popular images

such as the Polish plumber and the Pakistani corner shop owner, who tend to be admired, if sometimes grudgingly, for hard work and enterprise. But it is a mistake to assume that this public sentiment translates into a relaxed attitude to high immigration itself. Yet the 'Treasury view' – that migration as an economic good trumps all other considerations – remained in the ascendant well into Labour's second term and led directly to the decision to open the door to A8 migrants in 2004 without imposing the transitional restrictions that most of other 'old' European countries opted for. The result was that more than a million Eastern Europeans (mainly Poles) flowed into the UK in a four year period – the largest peacetime migration in our history. That the country absorbed such a huge movement with remarkably little fuss (and certainly no serious unrest) was a sign of the economic times and a tribute to both British hosts and Polish migrants.

It is entirely possible to favour immigration controls, even quite strict ones, and not be in the slightest bit racist – core Labour voters were way ahead of the elites in understanding that

Even so, it was a political mistake. An obvious issue was that the official forecast, based on the assumption that other large countries like France and Germany were going to open up at the same time, put arrival numbers at up to 20,000 annually until 2010 – in fact, the real number turned out to be 20 times that figure. This error has led to a deep distrust among the public of all official migration statistics, which constitutes a serious and ongoing issue in itself. But the broader point is that the A8 migration surge added to the public's sense that New Labour was wedded to high immigration and deaf to its disquiet.

Listening to local concerns

Many of our contributors, particularly the government insiders, concede that ministers were over-reliant on high-level data and meta-analysis, on 'elite' arguments and world views, and didn't take sufficient account of how unevenly immigration's costs and benefits were spread. Put crudely, the further down the social scale you go, the more likely it is that an immigrant will be an unwelcome competitor. The most obvious areas where

this pressure is evident are in public services and housing. The latter has been a particularly explosive issue, with immigration only compounding the problems caused by Labour's failure to address adequately the supply of social and affordable housing. However, the sense that immigration has a negative impact on employment rates and pay levels has grown too. (The evidence on labour market impacts is complicated, but it is probable that in some sectors at the lower end of the labour market wages were held down by immigration.)³

Beyond the economic and social impacts, the large scale and rapid pace of immigration into some areas meant that people in places used to a high degree of homogeneity suddenly found that their communities looked and sounded different. It wasn't usually a case of 'the first burkha spotted on the village green' but rather of a new Polish food section in the local Tesco – nonetheless, both the policy of dispersing asylum-seekers outside the South East and the fact that many East Europeans were employed by agencies which delivered them to factories and farms all over the country meant that many more British people found that they had migrant neighbours. Some people welcomed this of course, but many did not – even if the incomers were white, Christian and European.

As John Denham says, high migration seemed to threaten a sense of cohesion based on 'shared experience, shared obligation to one another and shared values'. Don Flynn argues in this volume that Labour could have made a better case for the mutual benefits of migration if it hadn't had such a 'gloomy pessimism' about white working class attitudes. However, the more widely held view among our contributors is that New Labour should have done a better job of taking account of the popular demand for stronger control and management of migration flows and done so earlier than it did, and that greater focus needed to be put on integrating migrants into their new home communities and on providing the funds to allow services, such as schools, to adapt to the needs of new migrant communities. As Jon Cruddas argues, Labour's fear that immigration was a proxy for race meant that it failed to see until it was too late that in reality immigration came to be a proxy for pretty much everything else. Indeed, Labour's apparent unwillingness to tackle immigration despite overwhelming public demand became one of the strongest symbols of the wider distrust of politics and politicians.

The very fact that both the New Labour establishment and the left were so outraged by Michael Howard's slogan in the 2005 election – 'It's not racist to impose limits on immigration', albeit alongside the more insidious 'Are you thinking what we're thinking' – shows how far some sections of the party were disconnected from

their own base. It is of course entirely possible to favour immigration controls, even quite strict ones, and not be in the slightest bit racist – core Labour voters were way ahead of the elites in understanding that.

Getting a grip too late

While the Treasury orthodoxy on the benefits of high immigration prevailed, Labour was also damaged by ongoing difficulties in the immigration department. As mentioned above, Labour inherited a chaotic system, but it is worth recalling that by the time the immigration department was condemned by John Reid as ‘unfit for purpose’ Labour was into its third term and ninth year of government, with its fourth home secretary and sixth immigration minister. If, as Shamit Saggar argues persuasively, voters judge parties on their managerial performance as much as anything, this was a damaging state of affairs. And it was voters who thought Labour had mismanaged immigration who were most likely to desert Labour in 2010, as Rob Ford and Will Somerville show. The only Labour immigration minister who left the job for a promotion into the cabinet was Liam Byrne, widely regarded as the most managerially effective of the lot.

So, we come to the Brown government, and the belated introduction of the PBS, which limits non-EU immigration to high-value, high-skill or skill-shortage migrants; ‘earned citizenship’, which requires migrants seeking settlement to show they are making a contribution to the UK; phases in certain benefits; and the continued strengthening of border security, with measures such as overseas border posts, stronger visa regimes, high-tech detection equipment at ports and airports, and the introduction of biometric identification techniques. (The one area that remained relatively unreformed was the flow of students.) Then, in 2009, there was a Cabinet decision – which Matt Cavanagh tells us was a split one – that Labour needed to really start talking about immigration: to admit past mistakes, to acknowledge people’s fears and to try to build a long-overdue mainstream position around the notion of managed migration. Phil Woolas, as he explains in his essay, was a particularly strong advocate of ‘untying the gag’ that he felt Labour had imposed on itself.

Part of this ‘de-gagging’ strategy resulted from a growing panic that Labour’s base was deserting the party for the BNP. That this didn’t happen, despite alarms along the way (particularly at the 2009 European and local elections) is both a relief and a reaffirmation. British tolerance and an appreciation of diversity are still strong – and British Social Attitudes survey data suggest levels of self-confessed racism are continuing to drop (although,

interestingly, people worry that high immigration is increasing prejudice in others). But there is no room for complacency. We should not forget that around a million people voted for the BNP in 2009, and the example of the Netherlands shows how a national self-image of liberalism, multiculturalism and tolerance can collapse very quickly if public disquiet about immigration is not addressed. Jon Cruddas makes the point that Labour and other activists (migrant and non-migrant) mobilised very successfully at the constituency level to see off BNP threats at the 2010 general and local elections, and that this presents a model for how Labour can rebuild through community activism.

Labour needed to really start talking about immigration and to build a long-overdue mainstream position around the notion of managed migration

And rebuild is precisely what Labour has to do. By the end of its time in office, the policy architecture for control and management of immigration was largely in place, the UK Border Agency was a much more effective department and a mainstream narrative was beginning to be developed. But in defeat, immigration was inevitably one of the ‘that’s why we lost’ issues. Early in the Labour leadership campaign it threatened to flare up as an issue likely to dominate, define or even decide the outcome. That didn’t happen, but it was recognised that immigration was an important component of wider concerns over economic insecurity, labour market regulation, the lack of affordable housing, and the decline of a sense of community and national identity.

Looking to the future

ippr has been in the vanguard of calls for building a strong mainstream position on migration to replace the polarised debate of the last decade. The basis for a new consensus on migration is now surely pretty clear. One of the authors of this introduction has written that Labour should become the party that is pro-immigrant, but anti mass immigration,⁴ arguing that this would more accurately represent the interests of Labour’s lost voters among poorer whites and ethnic minority citizens. Less controversially, ‘pro-migration, but less of it’, as Matt Cavanagh suggests, is perhaps the key message that most on the centre-left could now accept. But how can this outcome be achieved?

As a number of contributors have noted, the Coalition – failing to see that Labour had left them a reasonably well-functioning immigration system – may have made a policy mistake in saddling itself with the immigration cap. The electorate clearly want lower immigration, but the apparatus of border security, of identity and visa management, and of selectivity and regulation through the PBS that Labour left in place should have allowed the Coalition to achieve that outcome. Indeed, between 2004 and 2009 the annual flow of incoming workers from outside the EU fell from 110,000 to 55,000.

Moreover, by promising net migration levels in the tens of thousands – when it was still at 190,000 in 2009 – the Coalition, which is also split on the issue, will further increase public cynicism when it either fails to reach this goal or moves the goalposts to make it look as if it has.

The British economy has become addicted to high immigration, and any attempt to cut back sharply would cause considerable damage

A high proportion of immigration cannot be controlled without contravening international treaties. For example, EU (and other European Economic Area) flows account for a third of long-term immigration and refugee flows some 5 per cent. (Another 15 per cent of immigrants are returning British nationals). Family formation and reunion could be subject to more restriction, but would be unpopular with settled migrant communities and may run into legal challenges. There is scope to bear down further on abuse of immigration processes, especially through bogus colleges and sham marriages – and the Coalition has already announced plans to do so. Improvements in the mechanisms to return migrants who have no right to be in the UK are also needed. But, in the end, the only real way to reduce immigration substantially is through radical reform of the UK labour market (and to a lesser extent the higher education sector) to make it less migrant-dependent. This is not an issue of immigration policy, but of economic policy.

For the truth is that the British economy has become addicted to high immigration, and any attempt to cut back sharply on numbers, without compensatory economic reforms, would cause considerable damage to the prospects for recovery and growth. This strikes at both

the top and bottom of the labour market. At the bottom end, poor education and training levels and a welfare state which, while not generous, at least makes a life without work possible, mean that hundreds of thousands of working-age Britons remain workless – partly because they are unattractive to employers and partly because they are repelled by the low rewards on offer. Bright and motivated migrants (most notably East Europeans) have eagerly filled the gap.

In the longer term, a combination of better education and training, plus welfare reforms and higher wages to ‘make work pay’, could help to deal with this problem. Also, as Greg Thomson points out in his essay, improved conditions in the workplace would benefit British workers and migrant workers alike. But these are the sort of changes that can take a generation. In the meantime, many employers will prefer migrants, who have a strong work ethic and who are mobile and flexible. And in sectors such as construction, which seem to suffer from persistent skill shortages among domestic workers, a cultural revolution would be required to refocus the workforce on British labour.

This is an issue in the public sector as much as in the private. In the expanding field of social care, for example – which is characterised by low pay and long hours – about two-thirds of the workforce in the London area are foreign-born. At a time of public sector retrenchment, wages are not going to rise significantly enough to attract domestic workers; indeed, if anything, the opposite will happen, as squeezed local authority budgets push down wages even further among small, mainly private sector, care providers.

At the higher end of the labour market too, big companies have become accustomed to taking their pick of global talent, often as part of intra-company transfers. The intense lobbying against the government’s imposition of a temporary limit on high-skilled work permits, introduced as consultations on a permanent cap take place, shows just how integral immigration has become to the business models of many UK-based firms.

In opposing the cap, Labour is positioned closer to business than is the Coalition, but there are dangers in siding too eagerly with this lobby. In the era of globalisation, big business, with British firms in the vanguard, has made a virtue of floating free of country. The UK economy cannot close itself off from the global labour market, but our big firms need also to act as good national corporate citizens. The challenge is for government and business to work together to make it easier for British companies that need, say, a specialist engineer to find that person among the domestic

workforce. Achieving this may place extra costs on business, which it will resent and resist, but one key challenge for those who want to see an economy less dependent on migration is to find ways of convincing big businesses that they are not just profit-maximising machines, but are also embedded in nation states and owe something to those states and their people.

The state's role in this shift could be to provide incentives to employers to hire locally at all levels of the labour market, through regional or sector-based training and wage subsidies, or through tax rebates. Such measures might mean somewhat lower growth rates, a price some people might regard as worth paying for lower immigration. However, the more optimistic long-term goal is clearly to adjust to a lower-immigration economy *without* paying that price.

Realistically, this adjustment will take time and, in the meantime, it is likely that immigration levels will remain high, at least by historical standards. This calls for a greater focus on how to make immigration more acceptable to a sceptical public. John Denham and Jon Cruddas argue in different ways that new migrants need to knit more closely with the more established communities in which they now live, and that while migrant rights are important, these need to fit alongside host community entitlements. Sarah Spencer rightly points out that, under Labour, there existed a 'policy vacuum' on migrant integration which the 'earned citizenship' agenda, with its greater emphasis on how migrants are contributors to our economy and society, only partially addressed.

It is surely possible to construct an approach to immigration which is neither 'open door' nor 'fortress UK', to manage and indeed limit migration in the national interest while being a welcoming place for migrants, and to build a new patriotism which embraces diversity

A key lesson to be learnt, as several contributors make clear, is that tough talk and promises of crackdowns are no substitute for managerial competence in handling and absorbing migrant flows. Within a well functioning and trusted system it should be possible to develop a strong and positive narrative around immigration. Lower numbers make this easier, but being able to show that immigration is controlled in the interests of existing citizens is the most important element in winning public support.

Barbara Roche argues in her essay that Britain is a 'nation of immigrants'. We have our doubts about this. Immigration is certainly not a central strand of our national story in the same way that it is for the United States, Canada or Australia. However, it is true that immigration is a bigger part of British life now than it has ever been and, as Phil Woolas argues, we need to shed our 'old world' attitudes to immigration. To achieve this will involve not just new policy ideas but also, and more importantly, the development of a convincing and reassuring narrative capable of commanding mainstream support. A particular issue for Labour is to find a way of recognising the concerns of people from all social classes who feel particularly strongly that the collective bonds of national identity and local community have been weakened by high immigration. At the same time, the UK must retain its historic openness and its ability to compete in the global marketplace.⁵ In the end, it is surely possible to construct an approach to immigration in the 21st century with broad appeal which is neither 'open door' nor 'fortress UK', to manage and indeed limit migration in the national interest while being a welcoming place for migrants, and to build a new patriotism which embraces diversity.

Notes

- 1 See latest long-term migration estimates at www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/mig0810.pdf
- 2 See www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/09/labour-leadership-immigration-angst
- 3 See Howard Reed and Maria Lattore: *The Economic Impacts of Migration on the UK Labour Market* available at www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=649
- 4 See <http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2010/05/18/labour-must-become-the-anti-immigration-party-david-goodhart/>
- 5 See Gavin Kelly and Nick Pearce in *Prospect* magazine, at www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/09/wanted-an-old-new-left/

1.

Immigration and the 2010 General Election: More than meets the eye

Rob Ford and Will Somerville show that the available evidence suggests it is wrong to say that Labour lost power because of its record on immigration

Rob Ford is a Hallsworth research fellow at the Institute for Social Change at Manchester University. Will Somerville is a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute in Washington DC.

The 2010 general election was enthralling political theatre but has been surpassed by its consequences: coalition government, almost unprecedented public spending cuts and a long, ultimately divisive Labour leadership election.

All of this has crowded out much of the usual election post-mortem and we have been left with rather hazy, even lazy, explanations as to what happened and why. The role of immigration has been particularly misunderstood.

How immigration played

Immigration was indisputably one of the major themes of the general election: it was the only issue to surface in all three televised debates and roiled beneath the surface of all the national campaigns. All the campaign teams identified it as a constant issue arising on the doorstep.

Above all, immigration was at the centre of one of the election's defining moments – when Gordon Brown described Gillian Duffy as a 'bigoted woman' in a private conversation caught by the media. A series of mea culpas followed, with a distraught Brown further embarrassed by pictures of him, head in hands, in a BBC radio studio, listening to a playback of his remarks.

'Bigotgate' dominated coverage of the campaign for several days, and our analysis of the British Electoral Study shows that it was the event recalled by most voters. Voters saw it as a crystallising moment – but what

exactly did it signify? Did immigration actually make a difference to the result?

The impact of immigration on the election results has been assigned a great deal of importance. A dominant narrative has emerged to the effect that immigration cost all the major parties: immigration lost Labour working class voters; Liberal Democrats were hurt by their policy position on amnesty for illegal immigrants (so explaining their below-par electoral performance); while some Conservatives have argued that a stronger line on immigration would have taken them over the threshold to an outright majority.

The implications of this narrative are seemingly obvious: political parties should push a stronger, even punitive, policy prescription of control and tough measures, and doing so will move votes. Where does this explanation of how immigration played in the election come from? Is it true?

This narrative of Labour's defeat hinges on the loss of 'C2s', and the loss of C2s caused by worries over immigration.¹ C2s – or, in the description of Mosaic (the political database used to highlight voting blocs) 'Industrial Heritage'² – did indeed desert Labour: with support dropping by more than 20 per cent in a single electoral cycle. Byrne and others have correlated this to concerns over immigration and welfare reform, particularly with the implication that C2 wages have been squeezed since 2005.³

After the general election, such views resonated with the Labour leadership candidates. Ed Miliband suggested on the Andrew Marr Show that the benefits of immigration were unevenly distributed. David Miliband said that the Points Based System (PBS) should have been introduced earlier. Ed Balls went furthest, questioning whether the Labour government had been tough enough on immigration and promising tougher rules to protect the working class, including rethinking the relationship with the European Union.

This is not a universal consensus. For example Sunder Katwala, general secretary of the Fabian Society, has questioned the ‘depressing consensus’ and called attention back to the economic insecurity faced by lower income and semi-skilled groups. Some new Labour MPs, such as Lisa Nandy and Chuka Umunna, have produced a similar analysis, arguing that the roots of insecurity lie elsewhere, and especially in housing.

The Labour Party is not alone in agonising over the role of immigration. Was the softness of the Liberal Democrat vote due to their immigration policies? The Conservatives thought they were vulnerable, bringing up immigration unbidden in the debates and following it up with local electoral strategies that highlighted the issue. Liberal Democrat activists referred to being ‘beaten up’ on the issue locally, especially on their policy supporting an earned amnesty for illegal immigrants. Several commentators have explicitly linked the Liberal Democrat bust (after the Clegg boom) to the amnesty.

Finally, many on the Conservative right have suggested that tougher immigration rhetoric would have won the election outright. Tim Montgomerie, editor of the ConservativeHome website, produced an influential analysis of the campaign which made clear that the Conservatives should have pushed harder on immigration, noting that when they did (for example, elevating the issue in a direct mail operation orchestrated by Lord Ashcroft and Stephen Gilbert in the key marginal seats) it was successful but too late to change the dynamic. Other evidence comes from instant polling in the debates. The BBC ‘worm’ showed voters responding in extraordinary numbers to David Cameron’s simple assertions that immigration had been too high and that he would cut the numbers and ‘grip’ the issue.

Looking at the evidence

The idea that immigration played a critical and negative role for Labour in the general election is now well established. However, our analysis of the evidence suggests such a view simply does not stack up, or at least it stacks up in a very different way. Data recently released

by the 2010 British Election Study (BES) provides a valuable resource to empirically test such propositions.

Looking at the ‘most important issue’ data, it is clear that this was an election dominated by the economy. Nearly half of all voters volunteered economic concerns as the top priority facing the country, while another eight per cent named the related issues of unemployment and consumer debt.

Immigration was clearly an issue concerning the electorate, gaining the second-most mentions at 14 per cent among voters, but it ran a very distant second to all-encompassing economic concerns. Importantly, immigration was also considerably less salient than in 2005, when a quarter of voters named it as their most important issue.

By 2010, public service issues such as the NHS, education and pensions – the Labour Party’s traditional strengths – had almost completely disappeared from the political agenda. Less than two per cent of voters named one of these as their top priority, compared with more than one in three in 2001.

Table 1:
Most important issue, 2010 general election

	All voters	2005 Labour voters
Most important issue		
The economy	47.0	47.5
Immigration	14.3	14.1
Crime	5.2	6.3
Unemployment	5.1	6.2
Consumer debt	3.0	2.7
Ratings of Labour performance		
The economy	-29.8	24.7
Immigration	-58.1	-30.3
NHS	-6.2	41.3
Education	-15.1	33.9
Taxation	-26.2	21.8
Afghanistan	-44.0	-7.4

Source: 2010 British Election Study

Ratings of the Labour government’s performance suggest the party was vulnerable on immigration. The scores show the net ratings, with negative ratings of performance subtracted from positive ratings. Immigration stands out as the issue with the most negative ratings among the overall electorate, finishing at -58. This is, however, an improvement on the abysmal -65 the party recorded on the issue in the 2005 BES.

However, it is the negative rating on immigration among Labour’s 2005 supporters that would most worry Labour politicians. Labour’s 2005 voters held positive views about every area of policy except Afghanistan, where they were mildly negative (–7.4), and immigration. On immigration, Labour voters were very critical of their party’s record in government, with negative ratings outnumbering positive ones by 30 percentage points.

Immigration therefore looks like an issue that may have moved some votes in 2010, although it was not as important to voters as it was in 2005 and far less important in 2010 than the economy.

The white working class vote

Was this vulnerability concentrated among core working class Labour supporters, as some commentators have suggested?

We define the anti-immigration vote in three ways: those who prioritise immigration as the most important problem facing the nation; those who rate Labour’s performance on immigration as ‘very bad’; and those who when offered a range of eight emotions to describe their feelings about immigration – four positive and four negative – choose three or four negative words.⁴

On all of these definitions we found the same pattern: concerns about immigration were most prevalent among older, more economically insecure, white working class voters, particularly those, such as the ‘C2s’, with skilled manual jobs. The flipside to this is that the young, educated middle class voters (who have traditionally found the Liberal Democrats most appealing) were little concerned by immigration, as were the ethnic minority

voters and public sector middle class voters who form other important pillars of Labour support.

Labour did particularly well in diverse urban areas.⁵ Could it be because of their anti-discrimination stance? Could the Gillian Duffy comments have inadvertently reinforced the view among ethnic minority voters that Labour is their party? (Gillian Duffy may have abstained, but Labour gained Rochdale after all.) This might be putting too much emphasis on identity politics among voters when there are other plausible explanations (for example, the Iraq effect unwinding) but is nevertheless worth considering.

Overall, the picture from the BES suggests that immigration concerns were widespread, though perhaps less salient and intense than in 2005, and that they were concentrated among white working class voters with traditional affinities for Labour, whose support was critical to winning a fourth term. In this sense, commentators are right – but did concern actually translate into a loss of votes?

Did immigration cost votes?

We can test if immigration cost Labour votes by examining whether views on immigration *changed* votes. To do this we can exploit the panel nature of the BES. In one wave, before the election campaign began, respondents were asked who they voted for in 2005; after election day, they were then asked who they voted for in 2010. Separating the questions in this way helps to limit voters’ tendency to project their current preferences back to previous elections.

In Table 2 below we show the vote choices of 2005 Labour voters, comparing those most concerned with immigration with the rest of the sample. In each case,

Table 2:
2010 vote choice and immigration attitudes among 2005 Labour voters

	2010 vote choice	Measure of anti-immigration attitude, 2010					
		Rated immigration as most important problem		Very negative about Labour’s immigration performance		3 or 4 negative emotions about immigration	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Labour	62.8	58.4	63.5	37.6	71.4	53.6	65.5
Conservative	11.0	13.6	10.5	26.4	5.7	18.0	8.9
Liberal Democrat	21.2	17.5	21.8	24.8	19.9	19.5	21.7
UKIP	2.1	5.6	1.5	6.1	0.8	5.1	1.2
BNP	0.8	2.6	0.4	2.6	0.1	1.4	0.6
Other	3.1	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.1	2.4	2.1
<i>N (weighted)</i>	4080	988	3492	1046	3034	934	3146

we observe the same pattern: those who were most worried about immigration were less likely to remain loyal to the Labour party, and more likely to vote for the Conservatives or one of the fringe right-wing parties.

2005 Liberal Democrat voters were also more likely to defect to the right if they were concerned about immigration. There was very little effect on 2005 Conservative voters.

The evidence suggests that voters who were annoyed about immigration were more likely to defect from Labour. However, this surface relationship may be misleading. We conducted a range of regression analysis to test whether immigration was a significant influence on 2010 voting patterns, building models of Labour voting and vote-switching from Labour to the right-wing parties, and assessments of the three main parties' leaders. The findings from all the models are fairly consistent: Labour's performance on immigration was a significant factor in vote choice decisions, particularly a decision to switch from Labour to a right-wing party, and in assessments of Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

Prioritising immigration as the most important problem facing the country or having negative emotions about immigration were associated with more negative feelings about Nick Clegg and a lower likelihood of voting for the Liberal Democrats, but had little effect on voting for the other two parties or assessments of their leaders.

Judging the weight of immigration's impact

Critically however, immigration did not decide the election: in our models of overall Labour voting and voters' judgements about Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, assessments of Labour's economic performance loomed much larger.

Voters' assessments of their personal economic circumstances and of national economic circumstances were more important, with views about how the national economy had performed over the previous year particularly acute. While immigration does seem to have influenced some voters, it is clear from these models that this election was, to a greater extent, a referendum on Labour's performance in the economic crisis. Labour might have won some voters back had it adopted a more restrictive or populist line on immigration, but it would have won back far more by convincing the electorate that its economic policies were the best available.

The Liberal Democrats did perform less well among anti-immigration voters, but it is not clear from this analysis

whether this was due to their specific policies in 2010 or their more general, longstanding association with liberal migration policies. It is quite likely that the Liberal Democrats would have performed poorly among anti-immigration voters regardless of their specific policies.

Finally, it is worth noting that the impact of immigration was focused on policy. It was not the voters who prioritised immigration who deserted Labour, nor was it the voters with the most negative emotional reactions to the issue: it was the voters who felt Labour had not adequately *managed* the issue. Our evidence suggests that voters did not simply desert Labour because they were angry about immigration, they switched because they were angry about immigration *and they believed Labour had failed to address their concerns*.

For many of these ageing, white working class voters, such feelings about immigration may also be a particularly salient expression of a more general sense of abandonment caused by the party's move towards the centre over the last decade and a half.

Labour's performance on immigration was a significant factor in vote choice decisions, particularly a decision to switch from Labour to a right-wing party

In a similar vein to Labour, the Liberal Democrats experienced some limited vote-switching, but the 'Cleggmania' surge did not pop like a balloon, as some have suggested. A better metaphor would be a slow puncture, as is shown by polls which chart the 10–12 point surge in the Liberal Democrat share of the vote after the first televised debate falling back steadily to a point, in the end, not dissimilar from where it started.

Our analysis should not surprise observers. Analysis of commercial opinion polls suggests immigration was important to voters but also did not *determine* the overall result. Polls before, during and after the election (including exit polls) did not show immigration as a determining factor. MORI polling consistently showed that immigration/asylum was not critical. In fact, it was the fourth priority in the election, behind the economy and related issues. Only 14 per cent of voters

considered it 'very important'. (This is lower than the issue's importance suggested by its profile in day-to-day politics.) These polling results (that immigration was the fourth-most important issue) applied to *specific polls in marginal seats* as well as across the general public.⁶ Polls for YouGov ranked immigration higher (the second issue) but it was still behind the economy. A major exit poll conducted by Greenberg-Rozner indicated immigration was a key issue and cost Labour, but again did not determine the result.

Some of the narrative is therefore true. The loss of C2s is a salient fact in Labour's defeat, and immigration was a major part of the decision to switch votes. Meanwhile, the sharp rises in BNP and UKIP support is very likely to be linked to their anti-immigration policies, as well as their appeal to those wanting to support anti-establishment candidates.

However, the evidence indicates that the bigger element in all of these decisions, by an order of magnitude, was

economic opportunity, not immigration. Immigration-as-cause-of-failure is, in short, not backed up by empirical evidence.

Moreover, our review of the role of immigration in the 2010 election campaign, including the evidence provided by the various surveys of opinion and the gold standard of the BES, has not led us towards a conclusion that tougher messages would have won over parts of the electorate that had turned against Labour's record.

In short, our view is that immigration as an issue was symptomatic of a wider breakdown in communication between Labour's elite and its base, a problem unlikely to be resolved by more restrictive immigration policies, however well they are communicated. A more intensive campaign by Labour to persuade 'traditional' Labour voters that the party was listening to them and responding to their concerns on immigration, and on other issues, might have won over many of the voters who switched parties.

Notes

- 1 The source of this view derives mostly from a pamphlet written for *Progress* by Liam Byrne MP, *Why did Labour Lose – and How Do We Win Again?*
- 2 'Industrial Heritage' voters are those who live on reasonable incomes in former manufacturing areas.
- 3 The academic literature on the impact of immigration is relatively clear. The effect on the wages and jobs of C2s of immigration to the UK over the last decade has been marginal, perhaps slightly negative *at worst*. However, this does not mean that C2s are enjoying economic opportunity and prosperity. Technological change in particular is squeezing wages and prospects for advancement. Some may argue that the evidence is irrelevant, that it is the *perception* among voters that immigration is the cause of economic insecurity. Those making such an argument are on a better footing but the evidence is hardly overwhelming. The perception of increased competition from immigrants is certainly widespread but it is not overwhelming and is *not* concentrated among left-leaning voters.
- 4 The negative words were 'angry' (45 per cent of voters expressed this feeling about immigration), 'disgusted' (41 per cent), 'uneasy' (45 per cent) and 'afraid' (29 per cent).
- 5 See Curtice J, Fisher S and Ford R (2010).
- 6 IPSOS-MORI poll for Reuters.

2.

Reactive, defensive and weak

Ed Owen, former special advisor to Jack Straw, candidly admits that when New Labour came to power it did not have a strategy on immigration

Ed Owen was special advisor to Jack Straw – New Labour’s first Home Secretary – from 1993 to 2005.

Gordon Brown’s disastrous confrontation with Gillian Duffy in Rochdale during the 2010 general election campaign was perhaps a fitting finale to the Labour government’s uncertain and uncomfortable relationship with the issue of immigration.

For most of the party’s 13 years in office, the issue stalked ministers fearful of its potential electoral consequences, causing internal party strife, numerous crises and a handful of resignations. On immigration more than any other issue, Labour was rarely anything but reactive, defensive and weak – and to understand why it acted so ineffectively we must go back to a time well before the 1997 election.

Skirting the issue

In 1995, Andrew Lansley – then the Conservative Party’s Head of Strategy and now David Cameron’s Health Secretary – wrote an article in the Observer suggesting that immigration had the ‘potential to hurt’ Labour at the forthcoming general election. Privately, senior Labour politicians agreed.

Tony Blair, Labour’s direct line to the instincts and fears of swing voters in marginal seats, strongly believed that immigration was one of a clutch of ‘hard’ issues that could undermine the party’s chances of election victory. The paramount priority for him and the Labour leadership was for it to be neutralised as a possible Conservative line of attack.

Yet unlike other policy areas where Labour had traditionally been weak – such as crime, defence and the economy – there was no deliberate and substantive work on immigration issues undertaken in opposition,

no attempt to develop a coherent strategic position that might serve as the basis for a programme for government.

The consequences of this lack of deliberate policy thinking were disastrous, as Labour in office lurched from crisis to crisis – firstly in facing a meltdown in the asylum system and then in handling immigration from the new EU states of central and eastern Europe. Attempts to set out a clearer policy vision while simultaneously dealing with such external pressures were unconvincing and, frankly, too late.

So why was Labour unable or unwilling to confront properly the immigration issue before 1997 and shape a coherent policy agenda in the way that it had done on public spending, education and law and order?

Confusion in opposition

A good part of the answer lies in the confusion that existed among many in the Labour Party – and across the progressive left more generally – about the relationship between immigration and race.

Forged in the political struggles of the 1960s and ‘70s, the party’s deep attachment to promoting racial equality was part of its moral purpose – and still is. Yet it prevented a serious examination of migration issues, and of what Britain’s response to those issues should be, in the mid-1990s and beyond.

For some, across all levels and wings of the party, the very notion that the Labour Party should have an immigration policy at all was tantamount to flirting with racism. For most, the less said about the issue the better. While the party leadership was happy to challenge

traditional party positions – and face down internal opponents – on trade union rights, civil liberties, welfare and defence, immigration was one policy bridge too far. Evidence of this is provided by the opprobrium heaped on Jack Straw, then Shadow Home Secretary, when he proposed in 1995 that Labour MPs should not oppose all aspects of Michael Howard’s legislation to bring the UK’s asylum system more into line with the rest of Europe.

So, beyond two particular commitments to abolish the primary purpose rule and to regulate unscrupulous immigration advisers, Labour went into the 1997 general election with one overriding position on immigration – to avoid being labelled as ‘soft’ on the issue.

Crisis in government

The manifesto said that a Labour government would be committed to an immigration system that was ‘fairer, faster and firmer’ but there was no explanation as to how that would be achieved nor any effective analysis of how the UK would deal with the increasing international migration challenges, created around that time by rapid globalisation.

As a result, when asylum numbers began to climb rapidly in late 1997, newly installed Labour ministers were completely unprepared. The subsequent near-collapse of the asylum processing system – a result of operational changes made by their Conservative predecessors – left the government hopelessly exposed.

The result was ‘policymaking by crisis’. Political opponents from the right screamed that Britain under Labour had become a ‘soft touch’, while critics from the left pilloried efforts to modernise and ‘tighten’ a system that was close to breaking point. The middle ground appeared to be a very lonely place for ministers.

So great was the political impact of the ongoing ‘asylum crisis’ that, in late 2000, senior Labour strategists genuinely feared it might scupper the party’s chances of being re-elected the following year. Internal party polling at that time found voters saying that asylum and immigration was the most important issue facing the country.

Facing the consequences

These dire warnings of impending political doom turned out to be nonsense, as Labour stormed to a massive election victory in 2001. Immigration issues rarely determine the outcomes of general elections, and William Hague’s attempts to exploit the issue failed abysmally, as did Michael Howard’s dog-whistling Conservatives four years later.

Nevertheless, the government’s political insecurity and weakness on immigration did feed into the wider decline of public trust in Labour. Its policy goals were never clear and its vision non-existent as it was buffeted by criticism for being too harsh or too soft.

Ministers were too late in trying to develop a coherent policy middle ground that recognised and articulated the economic and social advantages of immigration to the UK alongside a clear and developed operational approach to regulate demand in the face of rapidly changing patterns of migration.

Labour could have developed a clear programme of reform while safely in opposition

Labour should have been doing this long before it came to power in 1997. It could have developed a clear programme of reform and made the necessary political decisions associated with doing so while safely in opposition rather than in power. Then, ministers would have been able to approach the issue of immigration and asylum with greater confidence and clarity, and with a more defined mandate for change.

Had Labour done so, perhaps Gordon Brown would have reacted more confidently in the face of his Rochdale interrogator. Perhaps – just perhaps – she may not have raised the issue at all.

3.

Making the best of immense challenges

Former Immigration Minister Barbara Roche argues that Labour's immigration record is better than some critics allege

Barbara Roche was Immigration Minister from 1999 to 2001. The MP for Hornsey and Wood Green from 1992 to 2005, she also served as a minister in the Treasury, the Department for Trade and Industry (now Business Innovation and Skills), the Cabinet Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

When I was told, in the July 1999 Cabinet reshuffle, that I was moving from the Treasury to become the Minister of State for Immigration and Asylum at the Home Office, I was appalled. I am Jewish and an essential part of my political outlook has been shaped by my community's history and campaigning against racism and inequality. In my mind, it was always going to be difficult to disentangle these issues from the public perception of immigration. In fact, if anything, I underestimated how fiercely contested this area would prove to be.

Struggling to cope with asylum

Labour came into power in 1997 with no real idea that this subject would dominate a large part of the political landscape for the next decade or more. Being 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime' were the priorities for the Home Office. This suited the officials there as well: historically, the civil service prefers to deal in criminal justice policy rather than the operational work that is at the heart of asylum and immigration. Like many other European governments, we did not fully appreciate what the collapse of the Soviet bloc regimes – along with modern telecommunications, cheap travel and organised crime – would mean for the movement of people.

The Home Office itself was in no position to deal with the situation. The previous Conservative government had introduced a new computer system, which proved to be an expensive failure, and instituted a programme of voluntary redundancies in the Immigration and Nationality Department. These limitations resulted in a backlog of over 50,000 cases. When I arrived at the department I was told that there were only 50 officials who were able

to make decisions on asylum cases. Because of this and the inadequate processes then in place, the backlog only increased. Every month, more asylum applications were made than decisions given. This is not, by the way, meant as an attack on the rank and file of civil servants, many of whom were trying to do a decent job.

It is important to remember that at the time it was asylum, not immigration, which was the big issue. Although the asylum system needed sorting out operationally, and was my immediate priority, I was convinced that a positive narrative about our policy on asylum would be possible to communicate. It seemed so clear to me. The right to claim protection from persecution is a fundamental human right enshrined in the tenets of all the world's major religions and reinforced by the Geneva Convention. The convention was born out of the horrific experiences of the Second World War and the need for international humanitarian action. Our duty was to provide refugee status for those applicants who had well-founded cases and, where there were no compassionate grounds, to return those whose claims were unfounded.¹

But the sheer number of applicants meant it was very difficult to make this message heard. In many cases, asylum claims were being used as a backdoor route to economic migration. I believed passionately – and still do – that asylum is too valuable an ideal to lose and should not be conflated with economic migration. Moreover, we were immediately confronted with a number of controversial issues, which seemed to come at us thick and fast: the Sangatte Refugee Centre, the Afghan hijack and the organised criminal exploitation of children for

begging. (I was subsequently criticised for using language strongly condemning this practice.) Most tragic of all were the deaths of Chinese asylum-seekers who had been trafficked by ruthless people-smugglers.

Politicians are often accused of blaming the media for communication failures but it is a matter of record that the press played a major role in what was to become an increasingly polarised debate. According to the newspaper you read, asylum claims were either utterly unfounded or totally valid. There was no middle ground and the broadcast media were also not immune.

The benefits of economic migration

There was, however, very little debate in the media or elsewhere about broader immigration policy. In my first few weeks at the Home Office, I asked what our policy was – unsurprisingly, there was no definitive answer. There had been very little proper debate on immigration over the preceding 30 years. The assumption behind the Immigration Act 1971 was that so-called primary immigration ‘should be ended’ and that migration was not a ‘political good’.

I thought the opposite. I had always believed that Britain was a country of migrants (just read Robert Winder’s remarkable book, *Bloody Foreigners*, on the history of British immigration) and my time as a minister at the Department for Trade and Industry and at the Treasury had convinced me that, in an age of globalisation, legal migration was an economic as well as a social and cultural good.

By autumn 2000, the asylum system was improving. Decisions on asylum applications exceeded the number of applications made, and the backlog had reduced. This gave me the opportunity that I wanted and so I delivered a speech on migration at an event organised by ippr in September of that year. I wanted to change the nature of the debate and create a much more positive environment. I used the speech to outline the enormous contribution that migrants had made to the UK, to argue the case for managed migration, to talk about points-based systems, and to float the idea of citizenship ceremonies. This agenda was then taken forward after the 2001 general election.

Citizenship ceremonies became a reality and, despite the cynicism of many, have become a great success, especially at the local level. The points-based system was introduced and administration at the Home Office continued to improve. The major recruitment exercise, which I had launched, began to deliver results – in addition to the arrival of much-needed extra personnel, the make-up of the Immigration Service itself began to change. The service, which provided passport control at

UK airports and ports, became much more representative of modern Britain, in terms of ethnicity and gender.

However, Labour struggled to convince the public that it had a grip on the issue and failed to articulate how managed migration could be a source of competitive advantage. We should have argued the case much more forcibly and placed it in a global context. The failure to do so left us vulnerable to the anti-migration message of our political opponents and groups such as MigrationWatch.

Staying positive on migration

It would be a shame if Labour’s current introspection about our election defeat led to the conclusion that progressive migration policies must be abandoned. There has been a remarkable reversal on this issue by some on the left: their aggressive rhetoric against our ‘illiberal’ policies has been replaced by the mantra that ‘we let down the white working class’.

I wanted to change the nature of the debate

This view ignores much of the research on migrant workers, the labour market and social housing, which does not attribute poor wages and housing to migration policies. It also leaves us without a full response to the Coalition government’s policy of imposing an annual cap on non-EU migration. The argument against the cap should not be left to the business sector alone: the cap is a crude instrument which owes more to rhetoric than to well-thought-out policy. The great danger for Labour is that we could become too defensive about our record. There is nothing incompatible in being robust about the need to control borders and the belief that legal migration is essential and desirable.

Globalisation means that the movement of people will continue. The task for progressives is to work out how to manage it fairly and efficiently. After all, Britain’s identity has in part been forged by the significant contribution of generations of migrants. That is truly an achievement to celebrate.

Note

- 1 Returning unsuccessful applicants, however, is simple in theory but complex and often distressing in practice. Passports have been destroyed, countries refuse to re-admit unsuccessful asylum-seekers, detention may be needed – and behind the statistics are individuals and families who have made their homes here.

4.

Economic gain, political cost

Sarah Spencer argues that mixed messages, conflicting objectives and lack of attention to the integration of new migrants won Labour few friends

Sarah Spencer is Deputy Director of the Centre on Migration Policy and Society (COMPAS) at Oxford University and a former head of migration at ippr.

History may be unkind to New Labour on migration. Taking office with no vision of what it wanted to achieve nor any sense of Britain's place within the global flow of people, Labour and its policy was often reactive, inconsistent and, in some respects, inhumane. Yet in its openness to the economic benefits of international students and workers, Labour transformed the parameters of policy and debate: that success in marking Britain as a country open to overseas talent has been confirmed by Theresa May's insistence that the Coalition government still wants to attract the 'brightest and the best', despite the headline policy of capped immigration.

Immigration, for the economy's sake

When we argued in an ippr report in 1994¹ that the UK economy needed to be more open to labour migration if it was to remain competitive, it was a heretical view. Six years later it was government policy, heralded by Immigration Minister Barbara Roche using an ippr event to announce that Britain wanted to attract 'the entrepreneurs, the scientists, the high-technology specialists who make the global economy tick'.²

Few questioned the wisdom of Tony Blair's campaign to secure 25 per cent of the English-speaking international student market, earning the economy an estimated £8.5 billion in 2003–04,³ expanding the range of courses available to UK students and bringing significant cultural benefits to education. There is less agreement now on the benefits of large-scale labour migration. A much-cited House of Lords inquiry in 2008⁴ was notably sceptical and, emerging from recession, it is easier to see that benefits to an employer do not necessarily translate into benefits for all. That was less apparent when the NHS

plan launched in 2000 brought about an increase of 9,500 doctors and 20,000 nurses, an increase that could only be fulfilled by staff from abroad; or when business, in a period of economic growth, demanded red tape be cut to allow them access to the IT specialists, engineers or intra-company transfers they needed.

Moreover, in opening up legal channels for low-skilled workers and later for A8 'migrants' from an enlarged EU, Labour recognised that the absence of legal entry channels – in the face of strong demand for labour in sectors like construction, agriculture, and hospitality – could only fuel demand for irregular workers. The employment rate of A8 workers – more than 81 per cent, compared to 74 per cent for the UK born⁵ – demonstrates that, notwithstanding the significant numbers that came, the jobs were indeed here to be had.

'Demand' for migrant workers, however, can reflect a shortage of local people with suitable skills, or the pay and conditions employers are willing to offer. Up-skilling was a priority for Labour. Its expansion of training places for doctors and nurses did, for instance, substantially address the NHS's heavy reliance on overseas health professionals. But tackling low pay and poor working conditions proved more problematic: in sectors like social care which are heavily reliant on migrant workers but facing public expenditure constraints and in sectors where employers and agencies are determined to exploit irregular migrants. The Gangmasters' Licensing Authority and the Minimum Wage were important steps but ultimately inadequate to curtail the spaces in which vulnerable workers can be exploited and hence to dampen the ongoing demand for their labour. High-tech border controls are no substitute for tackling demand.

Just how hard was the hard line on asylum?

In the face of unprecedented numbers of asylum-seekers in its early years in government, Labour went to extraordinary lengths to prevent them reaching Britain, to curtail safeguards in the refugee determination system, to detain adults and children and to remove them from the UK. True, the pressure from the tabloid press was extreme – Labour feared a surge in support for the extreme right and also inherited a backlog of 50,000 applications in a case management system unfit for the purpose – but in the overt use of destitution as a means to deter new arrivals and encourage refused asylum-seekers to leave, it crossed a line that some will not easily forgive or forget. In its rhetoric, moreover, Labour exacerbated its own predicament: with each new assurance that it would be ‘tough on asylum’ it reinforced the fears it hoped to assuage. Asylum numbers fell by some 70 per cent from their peak in 2002, but the public was not reassured.

In other respects, Labour sought to alleviate some of the hardship imposed by immigration controls: it ended the iniquitous ‘primary purpose’ rule which barred legitimate marriages, curbed the excessive delays faced by families waiting in the Indian subcontinent, and removed the bar on entry for same-sex couples. Its Human Rights Act (albeit to ministers’ regret) enabled individuals more readily to challenge rules breaching the European Convention on Human Rights, while strengthening discrimination law enhanced the potential, if not yet the reality, that migrants will benefit from that protection.

Towards a comprehensive policy

Moving responsibility for labour migration across to the Home Office in 2001 made it possible to develop a comprehensive policy, linking labour migrants, family, asylum and citizenship. The downside was its isolation from other departments which might have tackled the causes of demand for migrant labour and its continuing disconnection from departments like international development, education and health that urgently needed to be given a say. There was no mechanism for reconciling competing policy objectives, for engaging effectively with the devolved administrations and local government, or for ensuring that local impacts were taken into account – hence the kick-back after A8 migrant numbers brought unanticipated consequences for local services. These weaknesses in governance often allowed the imperatives of migration control in the Home Office to override other considerations.

Yet Labour did initiate one innovation that improved transparency and promoted reasoned debate – the Migration Advisory Committee. Taking evidence and

applying rigour to its analysis of the need for and implications of labour migration, the committee’s value has been recognised in the Coalition government’s decision to retain access to its advice.

There are two further omissions that any future Labour government cannot afford to overlook. First, the lack of any strategy to foster the economic, social and civic participation of new migrants – the 1,500 people who, on average have arrived each day to stay for more than a year. With the exception of refugees, there has been a policy vacuum on integration, no department charged with leadership, no clear objectives, no framework within which to mobilise employers and civil society partners or support local authority initiatives. For long-term residents, an encouragement to learn English and build knowledge of ‘life in the UK’ gave way to ‘earned citizenship’ provisions that would have further marginalised migrants from the mainstream.

With the exception of refugees there has been a policy vacuum on integration

Secondly, the greatest need is to change the terms of the debate, to earn public support for a migration strategy that is feasible. It will be necessary to share with the public the reality of what can and cannot be achieved, the trade-offs and constraints that explain the apparently inexplicable – why government cannot simply decide to shut the door. The costs to the tourist industry, to small businesses, universities and prospective UK students, to families divided from loved ones, to refugees denied sanctuary, to Britain’s international reputation: all these factors need to be communicated outwards. The public has been given no explanation, no rationale. Knowing the reasons may not change minds; but it could at least form the basis of a more reasoned, inclusive debate.

Notes

- 1 Spencer S (ed)(1994) *Strangers and Citizens: A positive approach to migrants and refugees* London: Rivers Oram/ipprr
- 2 Roche B (2000) *UK Migration in a Global Economy*, presentation to ipprr conference, 11 September 2000, London: Home Office
- 3 Lenton P (2007) *Global Value – The Value of UK Education and Training Exports, an update*, British Council. www.britishcouncil.org/home-press-180907-global-value-study.pdf
- 4 See www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldeconaf/82/82.pdf
- 5 Migration Advisory Committee (2009) *Analysis of the Points Based System: Tier 2 and Dependants*, August 2009, Table 3.5

5.

Fighting new battles on old territory

With an eye on Britain's history, Claude Moraes argues that New Labour failed to renew its approach to migration

Claude Moraes has been Labour MEP for London since 1999 and is deputy leader of the Labour Group of MEPs. He is the Socialists and Democrats Group spokesperson on Justice and Home Affairs. An immigrant to the UK from India in the 1970s, Claude was Director of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants from 1992 to 1999.

It is now obvious that New Labour in government struggled to handle migration. Yet I think the party was, while in opposition, fully aware of how difficult it would be as an issue. There had been internal party conflicts in dealing with Commonwealth immigration and its legacy throughout the 1960s and 1970s. During that era it was not an issue of too many immigrants creating resource or labour market pressures, but the fact that the people arriving mainly from South Asia and the Caribbean were non-white.

During the post-war period and into the 1960s, the UK economy needed workers and Britain's colonial history meant that a special immigration relationship was created with the Commonwealth. This was followed later by a 'rush to close the door'. One broad grouping within the Labour Party understood the racism that would accompany highly publicised events like the arrival of the Ugandan Asians and made a robust defence of immigration and related anti-discrimination legislation, leading to the first Race Relations Act in 1976. The other broad camp could not come to terms with large-scale non-white immigration and preferred to deploy arguments about jobs and wages than to address their opposition based on cultural, race and ethnic difference, particularly in working-class inner cities.

New Labour, new migration issues

The hangover from this period affected New Labour profoundly. Mrs Thatcher used Labour's perceived 'weakness' on immigration as a major electoral asset in her 1979 victory, and during their period in office

the Conservatives targeted secondary immigration – the families and visitors of the first generation of Commonwealth immigrants – and told the public that it was doing so. The New Labour leadership saw how the Conservatives played 'tough' on immigration, as they had done traditionally on crime, and were determined not to be outflanked.

However, towards the end of the 1980s primary non-white immigration had ceased to be the main issue. Instead the focus had turned to integration, with the inner-city riots of the 1980s exposing the disadvantage and discrimination faced by many Black and Asian communities. Meanwhile, by the mid-1990s, the big inflows of people were coming via the asylum system.

From my vantage point at the time – as director of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, a fiercely independent migration NGO – I could see an emerging New Labour treading cautiously. I advised and lobbied Labour on the Asylum Bill in 1995–96, but the party's policy on asylum was a broadly a restrictive one. For example, Labour attacks on the Conservative government focussed on the chaos within the Home Office and Immigration and Nationality Department rather than the fundamentals of how Britain should interpret its international obligations.

At that time, Tony Blair was reshaping crime policy in a high-profile way – but migration was a more complex proposition. Crime was something that affected 'our communities' more than any other group. A similar

narrative on migration was seen by New Labour to be politically sensitive, so a strategic silence would often accompany Conservative statements on asylum. The Labour left did not force the issue during this period – instead, it tended to make niche arguments about issues like immigration detention and the treatment and deportation of asylum-seekers. In a party hungry for power after three Tory terms, there was little appetite for deep left/ right party divisions. At the same time, the UK tabloid press had settled into a ‘white noise’ approach in their regular attacks on asylum-seekers, giving New Labour strategists, in their eyes, little room for manoeuvre.

Substantial election victories in 2001 and 2005 proved to Number 10 that the whole immigration debate could persist in a microclimate all of its own, having little overall impact on New Labour’s popularity

In office, New Labour’s first change to the immigration landscape was Jack Straw’s welcome abolition of the subjective primary purpose marriage rule, hated by many as a policy that targeted marriage and family reunification. It was a nod to those in Labour who cared about years of unfairness and delay on immigration policy, but it was done in the full knowledge that asylum policy would continue in a restrictive manner. After all, asylum-seekers were not voters and so were not part of Labour’s ethnic minority support base.

Despite hysterical media coverage and denunciations from migrant-supporting organisations and the left, substantial Labour election victories in 2001 and 2005 proved to Number 10 that the whole debate could persist in a microclimate all of its own, having little overall impact on New Labour’s popularity.

In my view, this all changed in the third term. By then, asylum numbers had fallen sharply – instead, New Labour’s biggest challenge came with the accession to the EU of the new, mainly eastern European states in 2004. The policy of eschewing transitional Labour market controls favoured by Germany and France was seen as a bold and progressive step: it would bring economic

benefits, and the issue of ‘difference’ in relation to eastern European migrants was not initially seen as a major one. However, it turned out that the predicted numbers were hopelessly inaccurate. At least a million Poles came to the UK and from then on migration stood at the top of polling concerns, culminating in the disputes at Lindsey oil refinery in 2009 and the calamitous Mrs Duffy incident during Labour’s 2010 general election campaign.

Three lessons from government

What could New Labour have done differently, and what lessons can be learned? The first point is to understand that the UK was not the only major EU country to have difficulty managing free movement policy or to have stumbled through the period of relatively high asylum applications during the mid-to-late 1990s. The push and pull factors between the developed EU and developing countries, and between the richer and poorer EU member states, were always going to produce political difficulties for the wealthy nations in the equation.

I do not believe, as some have asserted, that New Labour was pursuing an agenda to promote multiculturalism through free movement. I believe that the leadership saw the benefits to a growing UK economy but failed to learn the lessons of integration from the first wave of Commonwealth mass immigration.

New Labour could have approached the issues differently. On asylum, free movement, the points-based system and ID cards there was little in the way of a sophisticated policy response, but rather a Dutch auction with the Conservatives. The Labour leadership should have realised there was no mileage in trying to outflank the right. Instead, Labour should have built a stronger narrative for British citizens – many of them former immigrants themselves (myself included) – as to why, for example, we needed to embrace our international obligations for refugees or how, with free movement within the EU, the UK’s economy could benefit and UK citizens could take up employment in other member states.

A major feature of both episodes was that the public did not believe in the accuracy of migration statistics and could see little in the way of integration policy for new migrants and the communities they were coming to. Government seemed to believe that eastern European immigration would have no implications for public services and that the notion of ‘difference’ was not an issue with white eastern Europeans in the way it had had been with earlier non-white Commonwealth immigration.

In my view, New Labour was right to embrace free movement of EU workers, but fell down badly in

explaining what it would mean for the UK. Practical examples included the failure to understand that companies posting workers to the UK from other EU countries could legally undercut the wages of workers in the same workplace.

After the Lindsey oil dispute, the plea by Labour MEPs (myself among them) and the TUC that the government should focus sharply on the revision of the Posted Workers Directive and regulate agency workers was ignored because of a failure to understand the bigger picture: that free movement of labour can only work on an even playing-field.

Along with many in the area, I had advocated some type of 'green card' or points system to manage immigration to the UK as far back as 1992. But when the Labour government transplanted the points-style system from Australia and adopted the rhetoric of 'earned citizenship', it missed the point. The iconic US green card is not perfect but it is a positive concept – you earn your right to be a US citizen, but the rules also allow some margin of unskilled entry through a lottery. The narrative around the US green card symbolised what was good about immigration: improving your life chances and contributing to your new host country. The UK points-based system (PBS) was badly presented and widely seen for what it was: a way of limiting rather than managing non-EU immigration when it was impossible to control EU migration.

Because of this poor narrative, the UK PBS failed to capture the imagination of progressives and ultimately gave the Conservatives greater justification for introducing the absurd immigration cap policy.

Perhaps the biggest problem for New Labour was that it fought its immigration battles on old territory. Letting more people in was seen as broadly progressive, while restricting immigration was seen as a policy of the right, but one which needed to be emulated.

That territory was always going to be one in which Labour would struggle – never tough enough for the tabloids, and never fair enough for the NGOs and the left. However difficult, New Labour should have learned the lessons of the Commonwealth immigration period and 'unpacked' the immigration debate. This may have led to a greater understanding of why migration should be managed, but also of the limitations of such management. Where controls cannot be imposed, such as on EU migration, government must intervene more in integration policy and in communicating the reality of what is happening, preferably in politically neutral ways and with independent statistics trusted by the public.

As Labour now rebuilds under Ed Miliband, it needs to think hard about a new approach to migration. Hopefully it will learn the lessons of the New Labour era. The first signs are that the new Coalition government has not, and it is likely the immigration cap will become symbolic of that.

6.

Fairness, entitlement and common obligation

John Denham argues that Labour failed to appreciate the local impacts of immigration

John Denham, Labour MP for Southampton Itchen, was Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government prior to the 2010 general election. He also served as a Home Office minister and as Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

No one who worked in the 2010 election seriously questions the importance of immigration to the voters who deserted Labour this time around. And most who would listen knew that it was a concern among many of the 4 million who walked away from Labour between 1997 and 2005.

Understanding why the party so mishandled such a salient and charged issue is important to our future – not just because immigration is likely to remain a hot topic, but also because it betrays wider problems of government and of the relationship between party and people.

It's a complex story, covering planned and unplanned migration, abuse of the asylum system and genuine refugees, access to public services and earned entitlements, economic need and economic competition, new arrivals and communities rooted in previous generations of migrants, cultural sensitivities and insensitivities, metropolitan assumptions and regional realities.

Appraising Labour's record

I'm one of many Labour ministers who must share responsibility for our failure. At different times I was responsible for responding to the 'northern riots', tackling 'health tourism', leading Select Committee inquiries, helping to shape student visas and the regulation of colleges and, most recently, launching the Connecting Communities initiative aimed at white working class communities. But it does us no good to avoid a frank appraisal of our record.

Put simply, Labour never really grasped the complexity of the issue as a whole nor wished to construct a

comprehensive, integrated approach to it. Often, we chose instead to try to narrow the issues down, to try to find a manageable, achievable aim which would 'demonstrate our willingness to act'. In these chosen areas, real progress was often made: an early focus on asylum, for example, resulted in a much faster system and reduced the number of those seeking asylum by three-quarters compared to the peak. And yet, so often, the political rewards were slight, as attention inevitably turned to those other issues which had been neglected in the pursuit of some single-minded objective. For example, it was the growth of illegal migration which replaced asylum in the media and in popular concerns.

More recently the ending of low-skilled migration from outside the EU cut little ice with those who saw the recent mass migration from the A8 states as having the biggest impact.

The tendency to tackle just one part of the migration problem was mirrored in the reluctance of government as a whole to 'own' the challenge. Much of the government machine – despite the often supportive views of ministers across Whitehall – worked against Home Office ministers struggling valiantly to get the system in order. Treasury growth forecasts relied on the wage-depressing effects of continued migration. Business departments reflected the economic need to bring in skilled labour where it was not immediately available, and were wary of onerous enforcement of employers' use of illegal or exploited labour. Successive education departments resisted attempts to close bogus colleges. Social security disowned problems with national insurance numbers and did not want to tackle anomalies in the EU benefits agreements. And when migration from the A8 countries

exceeded all predictions, the entire governmental system proved unable to provide ministers with timely and reliable analysis of what had actually happened across the UK.

After 13 years, we left the migration system far better designed and managed than it was when we came to power. But change happened far too slowly, and all too often we sounded as though we didn't really understand how migration was seen by voters or its impact on their lives. This was more than a failure of government – it was a failure to understand what migration is all about.

Migration and cohesion

When former Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins first promoted multiculturalism, the unspoken message to the majority community was that if you just respect newcomers, your own community – and the country at large – will not have to change. Multiculturalism has great strengths, but in this it was wrong. Any significant migration will change any host society, economically, socially and culturally. And the extent to which that change is manageable and has benefits which outweigh the conflicts depends crucially on how the process takes place.

The exploitation of the migration issue by far-right racists encouraged many progressives to assume that being concerned about migration was necessarily a racist response. When the Conservatives first started to say – under Michael Howard – that it wasn't racist to talk about immigration, many Labour members thought the Tories were sending a coded message, that it was okay to be racist. The other way to look at it – whatever the Tories intended – was that it was okay to support immigration control. We came to this conclusion too late.

But if concern is not necessarily racist, what is it about? Essentially, I think it is about the fundamental desire most people have to live in a community that provides some sense of cohesion based on some shared experience, shared obligation to one another and shared values. Diversity *per se* poses no threat to this cohesion: at the very least, 'live and let live' is one of those shared values and, more positively, all the evidence suggests widespread ease with and enjoyment of a diverse society.

However, migration raises more widespread concerns when it appears to undermine that cohesion, or when it is seen to threaten other core values, most notably of fairness and mutual obligation.

By and large, Britain has managed migration pretty well, and certainly as well as most other European countries. But we learned in the early years of this century, when riots

spread across northern towns, that we were not always successful at building cohesive communities. While the riots, and the almost contemporaneous events of 9/11, focussed on Muslim communities, it was only recently that Labour began to engage openly with the experiences and concerns of white working class communities. There's no doubt that some see these concerns, wrongly, as an unavoidable consequence of migration.

The most corrosive effects of migration are not found in overt conflict but when the impact of newcomers is felt to have undermined shared values of fairness and entitlement

Yet the most corrosive political effects of migration are not found in such overt conflict or tensions but rather when the impact of newcomers is felt to have undermined shared values of fairness and entitlement. Most of us share a deep-seated sense of fairness, based on the idea of entitlement based partly on the sense of 'belonging here' and partly on having 'paid my taxes, made my contribution'. A tension between the entitlements of the settled and the rights of the newcomer is inherent in the process of migration in any advanced society. The ability of migrants to access work, benefits or public services is seen to be – and indeed actually is – in competition with some of those in the settled community.

Appreciating the local impacts

It may well be true that the overall economic impact of well-focussed migration is positive, or that the tax take outweighs the cost of services, but this high-level and intellectually detached overview ignores the fact the migration takes place in real, local communities. That the wider economic benefit of migration is positive is scant compensation for the person who has seen their wages fall, or the person on the housing waiting list who sees a home go to a recent arrival who, through homelessness, goes ahead of them.

In my experience, government did a poor job of understanding these vital local impacts. I tracked A8 migration in my constituency but was confronted with official data that underestimated the number of migrants by 90 per cent and did not reflect the impact on wage rates in the construction industry which I had personally monitored.

As a direct consequence of this lack of understanding, Labour's political discussion of migration sounded out-of-touch long before Gordon Brown's notorious encounter with Mrs Duffy. And this stoked another sentiment, also much in evidence during the last election: 'You don't speak for people like us any more.'

The lessons we draw from New Labour's experience are essentially political. Detailed policy implementation matters – letting foreign prisoners go or failing to close dodgy colleges does feed public anxieties. But most important is simply for Labour to understand again how

migration works and what it feels like at local level. Only then can we find the language and the policies to eliminate or mitigate the negatives and enhance the positives. We have to be as concerned for the views and experiences of the settled communities as for the migrants', and recognise that both geography and class affect the experience of migration. Labour must understand that the very values which are sometimes threatened by migration – fairness, entitlement and common obligation – are the foundations of our progressive politics, and we treat them lightly at our peril.

As a direct consequence of Labour's lack of understanding, its political discussion of migration sounded out-of-touch long before Gordon Brown's notorious encounter with Mrs Duffy

7.

Where was the new radical cosmopolitanism?

Gloomy pessimism about the working class prevented New Labour from making immigration popular, argues the leading migration expert Don Flynn

Don Flynn is the founding director of the Migrants' Rights Network. He has 30 years' experience of working on immigration law and policy, and is a former policy officer at the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

For anyone involved in the policy discussions, legal dogfights and community activism surrounding immigration, it was clear that New Labour's approach to the issue was going to be different from the status quo that had been in place since the early 1970s.

The difference was not at first found in the work of the Home Office, traditionally responsible for immigration policy and which, under Jack Straw, remained a bastion of slow-witted conservatism. It emerged first of all in the economic departments. Treasury plans for growth presumed that inflationary pressures arising from labour shortages would be contained by fresh supplies of workers from the global markets. At the prompting of Number 11, David Blunkett ordered a sweeping reform of the work permit system, from his vantage point as Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Employment.

Championing economic migration

During this early period of New Labour government, the central nostrum of immigration policy was subtly shifted from the reduction of immigration for work and settlement to an irreducible minimum – otherwise known as 'zero immigration' – to the management of immigration in accordance with the needs of the British economy.

What Labour was getting at with these changes was made clearer in its second white paper on immigration policy – Secure Borders, Safe Haven; Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain – unveiled in the early months of 2002. Blunkett had by this time become Home Secretary, and he had brought his reforming ideas across with him.

The vision which motivated policy during this period was one of a modern Britain, committed to globalisation and determined to draw in all the resources that were needed to keep its goods and services at the forefront of world markets. A proactive immigration policy made sense in this context, and government ministers were becoming aware of the need to deal with bottlenecks at both the skilled and the unskilled ends of the labour market. The white paper came up with the plans to do exactly that.

This part of the story accounts for the fact that economic migration grew more than threefold in the early years of the Labour government, and was to escalate beyond that with the fateful decision to open up the UK to unrestricted migration from the A8 EU accession countries in 2004. But it doesn't explain why the ministers in charge failed so completely in doing what New Labour was supposed to be so good at: putting a positive spin on all these developments and persuading the British public to feel good about the changes.

Misjudging the public mood

The fact was that New Labour looked at the prevailing moods of public opinion during this period and came to some very gloomy conclusions. Their thinking largely rested on functionalist sociological approaches, which saw social cohesion being sustained by values generated by close-knit, trusting communities with strong core identities. A veritable bevy of commentators and journalists stood up during this period to proclaim that immigration threatened the premises of these community-based value systems and would inevitably produce alienation and breakdown.

A veritable bevy of commentators stood up to proclaim that immigration threatened community-based value systems and would inevitably produce alienation and breakdown

Labour was caught in a quandary by these despairing proclamations. In terms of its economic strategy, the strength of its commitment to make a success out of globalisation meant there was no going back from policies which facilitated the movement of ever-larger numbers of people across borders. But the 'progressive dilemma' thesis announced by the pessimists meant that it could never make this policy actively popular. What it attempted instead was a pretty clumsy attempt at triangulation.

If New Labour could never hope to get the people to love immigration, they could at least try to contain the fears and anxieties they imagined it provoked. 'It is all under control,' they said. 'We are dealing with the "bogus asylum-seekers" who are cheating the system. We know who are the "good" economic migrants and who are the "bad". We have all-singing, all-dancing control mechanisms in place which allow us to maintain the highest levels of surveillance. Just trust us, please, trust us!' The voice of the Home Office increasingly sounded like Corporal Jones, shrieking to his fellow members of Dad's Army, 'Don't panic! Don't panic!' – the message the public heard was 'Panic!'

From this point onwards, people's perceptions of migration were driven by the alarming results of public opinion polls. Discontent mounted as the 'control' message fell apart and headlines swelled with media reports of miscalculations in the numbers of eastern Europeans coming to the country, far larger than had been predicted. A recalibration of government policy was needed, and the Home Office lurched from its 'five-year plan' under Charles Clarke to a declaration by John Reid that it wasn't fit for purpose.

No breakthrough by the far right

At this point, it would not have been out the question for an uncontrollable upsurge in right-wing mobilisation to have occurred, along the lines of the National Front in France, the Flemish bloc in Belgium, the Pim Fortuyn

movement in the Netherlands or the Northern League in Italy. English versions of these movements have certainly happened, in the form of the European protest vote success of UKIP and local council wins by the British National Party (BNP). But generally speaking, nothing comparable to the dislocation from conventional, mainstream politics seen in other countries has occurred in the UK. The reluctance of the first-past-the-post voting system to admit fringe parties to the mainstream is usually credited for this, but we ought to consider some other possibilities which might explain why unhappiness with migration has not yet translated into large-scale political mobilisation.

Part of the answer is surely the importance of London as a powerful economic and cultural driver, a bulwark against which the waves of right-wing extremism in Britain have historically broken. The BNP's success in Barking and Dagenham and the London Assembly in 2008 show that they have their moments to celebrate, but the capital's 'convivial cosmopolitanism', to use Paul Gilroy's phrase, tends to rally and has shown the vision and resourcefulness to put the far right back in its box.

Outside the south east of England it is easy to get the sense that London is not loved. But in the large cities of the English regions and the nationally-minded redoubts of the Celtic nations, London's cultural and economic revival is generally interpreted as modernisation, and political leaders aspire to their share of the diversity and the global skills-base which England's biggest city garners in such large portions.

The feminist cultural historian Mica Nava illustrated the bottom-up drive towards diversity in her account of the 'visceral cosmopolitanism' that rolled through the lives of many women throughout the 20th century. Their resistance to the drab world of the household and underpaid labour, and the mating patterns of impoverished working class locales, continually pushed women towards the transgression of narrow identities and cultural rules which limited their access to the 'foreign'. Much of the multiculturalism which marks our lives in the great towns and cities of Britain is closely entangled with these passionate real-life situations, and only secondarily with the policies coming from the various levels of officialdom.

This story can and should be supplemented by other accounts of the ways in which modernity – far from making us fearful and insecure – has enriched the social imagination and pushed our sense of society towards bigger themes. The appropriation of aspects of black identity by white youth in the construction of identities which rocked against racism in the 1970s and '80s, and the thoughts and actions of the 'reflective middle

classes' – lampooned by New Labour strategists as the 'Guardianista' – help to make up the cultural capital available to any political entrepreneur looking for space for a new radical cosmopolitanism to flourish in place of old reactionary xenophobia.

It was the absence of this perspective which, more than anything else, doomed New Labour in its efforts to sustain a politics which could come to terms with the reality of migration in the modern world. Instead it floundered with its great experiment – running a partially liberalised immigration policy while at the

same time talking and acting in ways which amplified sentiments of insecurity and national preference. No proper attempt was ever made to relate to the popular desire to participate more fully in the wider world which exists in inchoate and contradictory forms across broad sections of the population. Instead of assuming that the working classes could only harbour dysfunctional, bigoted attitudes towards immigrants, an orientation to the cosmopolitan moods which undoubtedly exist across the country could have, and still could, sustain a popular and progressive political narrative in favour of open immigration policies.

Labour floundered with its great experiment – running a partially liberalised immigration policy while at the same time talking and acting in ways which amplified sentiments of insecurity and national preference

8.

Numbers matter

Matt Cavanagh, a Number 10 insider, argues that Labour was too slow to understand people's real concerns on immigration but has another chance to claim the centre ground

Matt Cavanagh is a former special advisor at the Home Office, Treasury and Downing Street.

Since the general election, immigration has become – along with Iraq – the most popular answer to the question: Where did Labour go wrong? In fact it was obvious for several years that the issue was damaging the party. But the factors causing this damage had built up over a long period, and were hard to reverse.

A mistake with a long history

In Labour's early years in government, annual long-term immigration rose by over 50 per cent, from just over 300,000 in 1997 to well over 500,000 by 2004 – and then remained broadly stable. The increase did not have an electoral impact at the time but did so later, by which point the scale and duration of the increase meant that any sensible adjustments were unlikely to make an impact on immigrant numbers.

While some of the increase was due to factors outside Labour's control – including EU enlargement, and a general increase in the global movement of people – some was undoubtedly due to policy choices, including the abolition of the primary purpose rule on family migration, the expansion of work permits and student visas, and the decision not to impose transitional controls on immigration from new EU countries. For these reasons, Labour could not credibly argue that the overall increase wasn't its responsibility.

Perhaps equally significant, there was an increasing tendency for economic migrants to present as asylum-seekers, and a smaller but high-profile category of 'benefit tourists', which contributed to a shift in public perceptions of the typical migrant, away from 'honest hardworking people looking for an opportunity to better their lot' and towards 'people who are dishonest or a burden on society'. Finally, a relentless flow of media stories about operational failings in the system helped fix the public view of immigration as 'out of control'.

The view from Whitehall – conviction and denial, inertia and polarisation

Labour responded to the public's concerns with a great deal of activity and new initiatives, but without questioning their own fundamental assumptions. Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and the great majority of their ministers shared a conviction that immigration for work and study was good for Britain and the British economy, that it would become even more important with increasing globalisation, and that a mature and progressive country should not allow anti-immigration sentiment to stand in the way of its economic interests.

Of course, they were also aware of the steady rise of immigration up the list of voters' concerns, but they believed that the public's disquiet and anger was directed not at immigration itself but at various specific problems associated with it – in Blair's era, the spike in asylum claims and various operational failings; in Brown's, the growing sense that migrants were adding to pressure on housing and public services and, after the downturn, on jobs and wages. Labour's leadership believed that if these related problems could be seen to be dealt with, public concern about immigration would drop away to manageable levels.

This was a mistake. Even after David Blunkett's reforms as Home Secretary helped bring asylum claims down to early 1990s levels; even after a stronger 'grip' on the immigration system – under Immigration Minister Liam Byrne and chief executive of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) Lin Homer – helped staunch the flow of damaging media stories; and even after the points-based system (PBS) and earned citizenship reforms began to make immigration more selective and more responsive to perceptions about the pressure on housing and services – still public concern about immigration kept on rising.

It was not only the political side of government which failed to grasp the depth and spread of this concern. I disagree with the view (encouraged by an unfortunate intervention in the debate by Andrew Neather, a former speechwriter to Jack Straw and Number 10 advisor) that the expansion of immigration was primarily or exclusively a 'political' decision. There was indeed strong political support for the expansion of immigration for work and study but there was also strong official support, as well as support from economists outside government. Later, when ministers started to question this consensus, there was strong official resistance to any major shift.

Some of that resistance was down to the familiar problem of institutional inertia, but it also reflected a fairly broad and deep official orthodoxy that immigration was a good thing. In later years, the Home Office started to dissent from this, but rather than seeking to resolve the question, Whitehall indulged in the wishful thought that it was helpful to have 'balance' in the debate. In fact the result was not balance but polarisation, corrosive both to internal decision-making and to external credibility. An increasingly hawkish Home Office would propose a stream of initiatives to reduce low-skill migration or tackle illegal immigration, which increasingly liberal Treasury officials would then block, supremely confident in their view that all immigration was economically beneficial.

If necessary, Treasury officials would co-opt other departments, including the Foreign Office, which could be relied on to object to any proposal which might upset foreign governments; the business department, which could be relied on to object to any proposal which might upset business; and the universities department, which could be relied on to object to any proposal which would reduce the number of foreign students, on whose fee revenue our universities were becoming increasingly reliant.

This is not meant as an excuse for Labour's slowness to react – it is right that politicians ultimately take responsibility for the overall direction of policy, including for failing to challenge official orthodoxy or resolve institutional impasses – but it is crucial to understanding what went on inside Whitehall in this period.

A late change of direction

It was only in early 2009 that immigration itself – rather than asylum or various immigration-related problems – became the subject of serious Cabinet debate. Even at this point, most ministers continued to argue that people weren't really concerned about immigration itself, only about pressure on services, housing and labour markets. But eventually it was agreed – in a split decision, with

Gordon Brown coming down on the side of Jacqui Smith and Liam Byrne – that we needed to change our approach and accept that immigration itself was a major issue for voters. In particular, we needed a clearer answer to the basic question as to how many migrants we wanted, or thought Britain could cope with – economically, socially, and in terms of infrastructure. It didn't matter that, for some people, this question was a cover for a simple dislike of immigration, or even for racism. For the majority, it was a genuine and valid question.

Some of the resistance to change was down to the familiar problem of institutional inertia, but it also reflected a fairly broad and deep official orthodoxy that immigration was a good thing

The new strategy that emerged in Labour's last year in office had four broad elements. First, we would talk more about immigration – to refute the dangerous myth that people 'aren't allowed to talk about it', while making clear we were talking about it not because the right-wing media wanted us to, but because we were listening to ordinary people's concerns.¹ Second, we would be more prepared to admit that we had made mistakes.² Third, while sticking to our argument that immigration is generally good for Britain and for the economy, we would in particular acknowledge more explicitly that not *all* immigration is good, nor is it good for *everyone* – and start a new debate about fairness in the labour market and in the allocation of housing and access to public services, in the light of communities' recent experiences of immigration.³ Fourth, we would set out for the first time a clear position on the question of overall numbers, rejecting the idea of a cap but accepting that numbers matter and reassuring people that numbers were stabilising or coming down, due partly to new policies and partly to the downturn.

Crucially, we would reassure people that we would use the new policies, in particular the PBS, to ensure that as growth returned we would see rising levels of employment and wages, not rising immigration – but that we would do so in a flexible way, which helped business and the economy.

Too late to make a difference

This may seem like common sense, but it was hard work at the time – it had to be imposed by a weakened Downing Street on a Cabinet and an official machine which remained largely in denial. It did at least have the advantage of being underpinned by an immigration system which, though far from perfect, was continuing to improve in administrative terms; by the PBS, introduced in 2008 and now being progressively tightened; and by new electronic border controls, which were starting to ‘count in and out’ in a meaningful way for the first time. These were real reforms, which made it harder to dismiss the new strategy as mere spin.

But all these changes – in policy and language – were deliberately incremental rather than disruptive. While incremental changes are often preferable in policy terms, it simply wasn’t enough in political terms – and it was definitely too late. Voters were no longer listening. They didn’t believe there was more control, particularly in the face of a well-grooved narrative from both opposition parties and most of the media that the contrary was still true. The downturn was sharpening people’s resentment at the perception that migrants were adding to the pressure on housing, public services, and especially jobs and wages, and were doing so faster than those pressures could be alleviated by new policies like the Migration Impact Fund and reforms to social housing allocation rules.

It became increasingly clear that, for this electoral cycle at least, Labour had lost the argument. More importantly, we had lost people’s trust. The best we could hope for in the election campaign was damage limitation, and instead we got Gordon Brown’s meeting with Gillian Duffy. Indeed, those involved in the campaign knew weeks or even months before the Duffy incident that immigration was playing the same damaging role on the doorstep that Iraq had played in 2005.

Where now for Labour on immigration?

So it was no surprise when immediately after the election a series of senior Labour voices, including leader-to-be Ed Miliband and most of the other leadership contenders, identified immigration as one of the party’s key mistakes. Some in the media saw this as a cynical move but, unlike Iraq, immigration is still not an issue a Labour politician would choose in pursuit of votes from party members.⁴ Nevertheless, it is an issue which is vital to Labour’s relationship with the wider public – our credibility and trust on the issue broke down, and needs to be restored.

How can Labour and its new leader best achieve this? Some will argue that we should sit and wait for

immigration to drop down the list of voters’ concerns, or for the realities of government, or coalition tensions, to erode the Conservatives’ credibility on the issue. But the former is unlikely any time soon and the latter, although highly likely – indeed already under way – is not enough. Labour must strive to rebuild its credibility on immigration and to occupy the centre ground on the issue.

For too long there was no centre ground on immigration – it was one of the few areas which continued to run on old left–right dividing lines. Crudely, Labour was pro-immigration, the Tories were anti. This was at the very least a mixed blessing for Labour, but up until the 2010 election it was not disastrous. What has happened since 2005 is, firstly, the public has continued to move to the right on the issue and also, perhaps as significantly, both main parties have tried to claim the middle ground. They have tried to shed their old positions and image, and are competing to be identified with a new, centrist position – roughly, ‘pro-immigration, but less of it’.

Both parties have tried to shed their old image and are competing to be identified with a new, centrist position, roughly ‘pro-immigration, but less of it’

I believe this remains the right path for Labour. Where the Coalition develops policy along similar lines, we should acknowledge and support them – for example, on sham marriages or bogus colleges. Where we think our policies better capture the middle ground – most obviously the PBS versus the cap – we should continue to make the argument. But these are technocratic, ‘managerialist’ arguments – we must also set out how our version of this centre ground would be distinctively progressive, distinctively Labour, and we must confront and address the lack of public trust we currently have on this issue.

Setting out a distinctively Labour approach to the centre ground means making the pro-immigration case for reasons other than the purely economic, especially narrow business reasons. It means approaching related issues, like reforms to the way migrants access public services, in a way that is clearly driven by fairness. In both these areas, Labour’s traditions and values should enable us to be more convincing than the Conservatives, and more

united. But we must explain how the Labour version of 'pro-immigration but less of it' is truly 'for the many not the few' and make this explanation far better than we were able to do in government.

At the same time, Labour must acknowledge that the real problem is that – even if its policies are better, even if its values are more in-tune with modern Britain – the Conservatives remain more trusted on the issue. It is trust and credibility which Labour needs to rebuild in order to claim the centre ground.

One way to begin would be to change our position on Turkish accession to the EU. We should make clear that this is nothing to do with being anti-Turkish, indeed nothing to do with foreign policy generally. Instead,

we should argue that, on an obviously complex issue like EU enlargement, it is reasonable for caution about the knock-on effects on immigration to tip the balance. A policy shift of this magnitude could help us start to convince people that Labour, rather than the Conservatives, has learned from the experience of the 2004 EU enlargement and is being realistic about the fact that Britain (along with Germany) will be a favoured destination of new EU citizens regardless of any transitional controls we might impose. Many will attack this as the immigration tail wagging the foreign policy dog. But the implicit assumption – that foreign policy is more important than immigration policy – may be just the kind of 'elitist' axiom which people want to see Labour distancing itself from, if we are to regain their trust on this emotive issue.

Notes

- 1 Gordon Brown (2009), speech on immigration, 12 November 2009: "So if people ask me, do you get it? Yes, I get it."
- 2 Alan Johnson (2009) 'We got it wrong on immigration', *The Times, Independent, Mail*, 4 November 2009.
- 3 Gordon Brown, *ibid* ("If you work in a sector where wages are falling or an area where jobs are scarce, immigration will feel very different for you, even if you believe that immigration is good for overall employment and growth"); also John Denham's speeches in September and October 2009 – echoing themes earlier raised by Jon Cruddas, among others.
- 4 This was confirmed in early August by a YouGov poll for Left Foot Forward.

9.

Untying the gag

Phil Woolas argues that Labour's fear of offending people stopped the government from taking the steps needed to control immigration

Phil Woolas was Immigration Minister in the Labour government from 2008 to 2010, and also served at various times as Minister for Local Government, Environment and the Treasury.

In 2008, as Minister of State for Environment, I spoke at around 50 fringe meetings at the Labour Party Conference in Manchester. A year later in Brighton, as Minister of State for Immigration, I was invited to just one meeting – and that was on the rights of immigrant workers. Here was one of the biggest policy issues of Labour's 13 years in power and one of the biggest concerns among voters at the forthcoming general election, and we were scared to talk about it, even at a party gathering. We had imposed a gag on ourselves.

True, by early 2009 Gordon Brown had decided that our failure to speak out on immigration was no longer tenable. As the party of government, we had to have something to say, and it wasn't as if we had to be on the defensive at this point. Domestically, the key goal of immigration policy is not to show that the government is either 'tough' or 'liberal': it is to reassure voters that migration is being managed in the country's interests. The points based system (PBS), much improved visa management and the sophisticated border control measures that my predecessor Liam Byrne and I had put in place were managing immigration in just that way, with the additional benefit that the regular migrant could be reassured that their status wasn't being undermined by the irregular migrant. But by the time we started talking, the public had stopped listening.

Labour's history on immigration

The self-imposed gag can certainly be traced back to Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech to the Birmingham Conservative Association. From that time, all talk of immigration control was seen as likely to stir up racial division and hatred. But in truth the left has never felt comfortable talking about the subject. It offends our very sense of freedom and purpose. At heart, the democratic socialist creed is internationalist,

built on the high ideals of human equality and solidarity. Anything that smacks of 'keeping out' foreign fellow workers does not sit comfortably with these principles.

After the Second World War, our obligation to the Commonwealth led us to welcome immigrants, particularly from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent. After all, we had liberated the world alongside our Commonwealth comrades, as the war cemeteries of Northern France testify. While the Conservatives did not reverse the policy in 1951, the seeds were sown: Labour was the party of immigration. In the 1960s and '70s, Labour led the way in bringing in policies to stop racism and discrimination against immigrants. It was these measures which we were proud of – and wanted to talk about. Immigration control was always a taboo subject. Then Powell in his speech tied the issues of immigration and race firmly together. On the left, we consequently bound a gag around our own mouths, not on the issue of race – quite rightly – but on the issue of immigration. In doing so, we conceded vast tracts of political ground – ground we only made up halfway through the 13 years of Labour's time in government.

Into this vacuum, in the early Blair–Brown years, stepped Treasury orthodoxy. The idea of immigration as part of a flexible labour market is very attractive to the Exchequer, yielding increased tax revenues, a free flow of labour and the closing of skill gaps without additional investment, among other benefits. This predilection was backed up – powerfully – by the successive departments of industry and, since the introduction of full-cost overseas student fees in the early 1980s, the universities, and with them the successive departments for education.

At the same time, those more attuned to public opinion kept quiet on the issue. The trade unions,

understandably, focussed on exploitation and the protection of migrant members. The party activists did not want to talk about immigration, in part because of the misapprehension that immigrants themselves did not want to – the truth, in my experience, is the opposite. All we would allow ourselves to speak about was immigration as a way of helping individuals – a sort of philanthropic welcoming of those deemed worthy.

All we would allow ourselves to speak about was immigration as a way of helping individuals – a sort of philanthropic welcoming of those deemed worthy

Embracing New World thinking

‘New World’ countries, like the United States and Australia, have no problem whatsoever in asking newcomers to face border controls, to come in on quotas and to swear oaths of allegiance. And yet they see themselves as ‘countries of immigration’. ‘Old World’ countries like the UK do not have the same national narrative to draw on. But what Labour faced at the turn of the 21st century was governing an old world country facing new world migration pressures. The globalisation of the economy and communications required new thinking; the problem was that we were stuck with old thinking. We tied ourselves up in knots with the fear and guilt of offending the newcomer when we needed to be finding ways to manage inflows and help to integrate new citizens.

There were positives of course. On European migration, for all the pressures, we were broadly right. Our attitude to the EU is to allow free movement to mutual benefit. As the accession countries (the A8) rise in wealth and income as a result of club membership, net migration settles to a politically and economically manageable level.

Yet with respect to the developing world we do not tie immigration and development policies together. ippr is leading the way on this point, and its research presented to the Global Development Network¹ is the best way forward for the anti-poverty lobby. Our policy should reflect this and the PBS could be used to that effect. We rightfully give and invest millions in aid and development in the developing world and yet arguably we deprive the poorest countries of their best and brightest for our own selfish ends.

Hard-headed future strategy

As far as the 2010 election is concerned, we said in the run up that we had to talk about immigration and we did just that. But the public thought that we were shutting the stable door after the horse had bolted – and, even worse, that we were doing so purely for electoral gain. We never had an ‘open door’ policy in the early years of our government and by the time I arrived at the Home Office we had one of the more efficient immigration systems in the western world, but nobody believed us.

Now, the Coalition is likely to get the credit for the policy successes of Labour’s later years. What we need within the Labour party is to carry out a hard-headed analysis to determine what sort of future strategy on migration we will need if we return to government. And we need to get to grips with the harsh political fact that, for most of our time in office, we were out of tune with the British public. We need to keep talking about immigration – and we need to keep listening too.

Note

¹ Chappell L et al (2010) *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration’s Economic and Social Impacts* London: ippr

10.

How tough is too tough?

The scapegoating of migrants was no way to tackle the UK's immigration issues, says the community activist Arten Llazari

Arten Llazari is Chief Executive of the Refugee and Migrant Centre of the Black Country based in Wolverhampton. He came to the UK as a refugee from Albania.

When I arrived in Britain in October 1999, Labour had been in power for about two and a half years. The high number of asylum claims during that time was fast emerging as the tabloids' favourite topic; the influx of Eastern European migrants after the EU expansion in 2004 was yet to happen. However, because I was living in Enoch Powell's former constituency – which by then was already a conglomerate of different minority ethnic groups – I was never under the illusion that my experiences, or the issue of immigration in general, were in any way new.

Labour's discomfort

I have spent the last 10 years working within the system and, at times, I have sensed first-hand the guilt and discomfort of Labour politicians in dealing with the issue of immigration. The declared progressives, who had been passionate defenders of human rights for everyone, were now being asked to be very tough on some very vulnerable people for the sake of political pragmatism. I remember a former Immigration Minister recalling among her third sector friends how reluctant she had been to accept the job, while one of her successors referred to his role as 'the new Northern Ireland job'.

Labour convinced itself that it had to appear tough on immigrants if they wanted to be re-elected, but I am not sure they had it in them to be as draconian as some of the public would have wanted them to be. While certain Home Secretaries never appeared to lose too much sleep over their tough policies or the language they used, their junior colleagues seemed to struggle quite a bit. However, they all knew that staying in power (obviously for the sake of the greater good) was far more important than the fate of any desperate immigrant. As the years passed, the term 'asylum-seeker' became a synonym for dirt in much of the media. Meanwhile, there was never

enough time for practitioners to get familiar with one immigration and asylum bill before the next one came along.

I have worked with thousands of locals during my time in UK and I would say the vast majority have been Labour supporters. I have seen their disappointment at the harsh policies and the language used by the Labour politicians towards vulnerable migrants. They understood the need for effective immigration policies but had expected a progressive debate and framework from New Labour, not a return to the old populist approach.

As to what could Labour have done differently, I don't think they could have been much tougher, although I am aware this might not be a very popular opinion. Looking back at the election campaigns in 2001 and 2005, one would be forgiven for thinking that the country had no other problems during the first half of the past decade except tackling asylum 'abuse'. Asylum-seekers were simply a very easy focus for frustrated xenophobia and pent-up resentment towards immigrants in general. Labour's years in power corresponded with wars in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan as well as ongoing conflict situations in countries like the Congo, Somalia and Zimbabwe, which resulted in high numbers of asylum claims. But the system came down on these people like a tonne of bricks, and made a point of refusing to grant leave to remain to the large majority of claimants.

What this meant in reality was that thousands of Afghani and Iraqi people (to name only the countries that regularly make the news) were kept destitute and in legal limbo for many years, despite the fact that the British and allied forces' casualties in those conflicts illustrate plainly the dangers of their home countries. The system kept refusing refugee status to people that it could not remove

Asylum-seekers were simply a very easy focus for frustrated xenophobia and pent-up resentment towards immigrants in general

and then, simply to appear tough, continued to damage further their mental health – only, many years down the line, to finally grant most of them ‘leave to remain’ through partial amnesties and ‘legacy case’ exercises.

Labour took the easy route by introducing harsh policies and trying to appear tougher than its political opponents. It did not even attempt to have an open and hopefully honest debate about an issue that would not, and certainly will not, go away.

The limits of tough policy

After the EU expansion in May 2004, many questioned the government’s decision to allow nationals of the newly joined EU countries the unrestricted right to work in the UK. However, two things need to be remembered. First, the booming British economy of the pre-recession times needed them, and several hundred thousand people seemed to find employment relatively easily. Second, after the influx of Eastern Europeans migrants it was made harder for non-EU migrants to enter the UK, so the freedom of movement within the EU was effectively used to slow down the flow of migrants from outside the EU. This created resentment in communities that have long-standing historical links with the UK – on one hand the door was open to the ones that ‘look like us’ and on the other hand the entrance was made narrower for the ‘visible ones’.

I do not believe Labour could have done more to reduce immigration during its years in power without making some very drastic decisions, such as withdrawing from the EU, for example. The immigration process for non-

EU migrants, including those coming via family reunion or applying for spousal visas, has been made far more demanding. The introduction of citizenship tests for people who wish to settle in the UK and, more recently, the requirement to speak English before gaining entry was aimed primarily at communities that have tended to live insular, poorly integrated lives in the past. Unless the government chooses to restrict basic human rights – like the right to marry who we wish – I do not believe much else can be done. The real pull for the great majority of these immigrants was the economic boom of Labour’s first 10 years in power, not lax entry controls or a generous welfare state.

As others in this volume have pointed out, it is not clear to what degree the immigration issue has damaged Labour politically. They won previous elections despite the Conservatives’ heavy use of the issue. Furthermore, the 2010 election was certainly not lost because of it and, compared to previous campaigns, the Tories appeared reluctant to make immigration a central topic.

New migrants and the local community

As for the future, while the advantages from immigration to the business sector and most of the middle classes are evident, it’s the working class who have little to benefit in practical terms. Their concerns need to be properly heard and a migration policy designed which takes into account the economic and social impacts of immigration on poorer communities. Paying lip service to peoples’ fears of newcomers is not a new trick in politics but further tightening of entry and even greater stigmatisation of migrants is a wrong-headed approach – looking for scapegoats has never helped to solve a problem.

The new migrants – of all nationalities, backgrounds and immigration statuses – are eager to be full members of the community. Their aspirations to contribute and to belong are the same as those of long-established residents. Let’s try not to bring up (yet again) a generation of UK citizens who will remember how badly their immigrant parents were treated, and all because of some short-term political gain.

11.

Fair treatment for all workers

Greg Thomson argues that there is no contradiction between protecting the rights of migrant workers and supporting British workers

Dr Greg Thomson is National Development Officer for Migrant Workers at Unison, the public sector union.

For too long under Labour, the immigration debate was toxic. Many in the Labour movement hoped that if they didn't talk about it, it would go away. It didn't. Our silence sounded like guilt, and talk of Britishness turned out to be a huge pratfall. Rather than trying to avoid immigration, there are two important things that Labour can and should be saying about it.

Lessons from New Labour

When speaking out about immigration, Labour needs to learn the lessons of 13 hard years in government. First, there is nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, from a race to the bottom: the voters didn't believe that Labour was being tougher than the Conservatives on immigration, even when it had introduced one of the most rigorous immigration systems in the world. It's a contest that the party simply can't win and, indeed, should not want to win.

But that is not to argue for a laissez faire approach on migration. Migration only makes sense if the UK has a labour force that allows the economy to fulfil its potential. The points-based system (PBS), for all its faults, was an honest attempt to tie immigration into the needs of the economy and the needs of the country. The new Shadow Home Secretary Ed Balls should speak out for the merits of the PBS, not look for ever more restrictive policies.

Such an approach puts Labour in a strong position to highlight the potentially damaging effects the cap on economic migrants will have on filling skill shortages in industry and essential public services, and on promoting business in the UK to international firms. Labour would not be alone in saying this. The Coalition government has

achieved that rare thing – agreement between employers and unions – as both flanks of industry agree that a cap on economic migration from outside the EU is damaging to the economy.

Second, Labour should recognise from its time in office that immigration does not put a burden on public services. On the contrary, many of our most cherished public services like hospitals and social care for the elderly could not function without migrant workers. Any burden on services needs to be balanced against both the economic benefits of immigration and the essential role immigrants play in delivering many of our public services. Too often over the past 13 years myths peddled by the far right about migrants taking social housing or living off benefits have been left to fester. Restricting the ability of our public services to use migrant labour to fill skill shortages will damage those services, not protect them.

Reform for the future

Labour in power did not do enough to end the exploitation of migrant workers. It made an excellent start with the Gangmasters Licensing Act in 2004, but should have gone further. Trade unions with migrant worker members are only too well aware of the exploitation that these workers face in the workplace. Protecting migrant workers from exploitation would have helped to stop undercutting and so contributed to community cohesion. It could also have formed part of a wider and more fundamental agenda aimed at tackling vulnerability and low pay among all workers, whether they are British or migrant workers. 'Fair treatment for all' is a rallying call that goes to the heart of the labour movement in a way that 'British jobs for British workers' never can.

The immigration system that Labour implemented also created a huge imbalance of power in the workplace for some lower-paid non-EU economic migrants. They are obliged to stay with their employer as part of their permit to work. Changing jobs can be practically impossible and if they lose their job, no matter whose fault it is, they stand to lose their right to work in this country. For many of the lower-paid workers in crucial areas like social care, they simply cannot afford to lose their jobs. Coming from low-wage economies they will have borrowed a lot of money to cover travel and fees to come to the UK. Almost all will have family members dependent on the remittances they send home.

Loss of employment means that, instead of being able to help their family, they are left with a huge debt they cannot repay. Unsurprisingly, many choose to put up with bullying and even sexual harassment in the workplace rather than risk losing their jobs. In the future, Labour needs to show it is firmly on the side of the vulnerable worker.

Ending exploitation stops undercutting in the marketplace and protects the employee in their workplace.

Workers United

Labour needs to talk about policies that have a more general application to all workers in a way which shows how they will support the resident workforce, without demonising migrants or seeking to impose damaging arbitrary limits. Tackling exploitation is one element of this.

Another is around the skills deficit. Labour should be clear that it will provide training for the resident workforce where there are skills gaps. In power, Labour did much to promote lifelong learning, but there is a need to go further. Increasing the skills of the resident workforce makes economic sense: it is transformational for the individuals concerned in a way that accords with traditional labour movement values and is a far more rational approach to dealing with the shortages highlighted by immigration than capping the migrant worker population would be. Stopping skilled vacancies from being filled by migrant workers where there are no resident workers with the skills to do the job in the meantime is not a sensible answer. And where migrants are needed then Labour should be at the forefront of providing protection from exploitation.

Labour needs to talk about policies that have a more general application to all workers in a way which shows how they will support the resident workforce, without demonising migrants

12.

A clear and present peril

Immigration has become the new fault line cutting across the British political landscape argues Jon Cruddas

Jon Cruddas is MP for Dagenham and Rainham and founded the All Party Parliamentary group on Migration.

Race, class, economics, law and order, foreign affairs, religion, education, employment, community cohesion, social identity: sooner or later every major political issue is channelled through the prism of immigration. And as it refracts, so it is subtly redefined.

The immigration debate itself is, of course, not new. From the Windrush generation of the 1950s, through the radical social realignment of the '60s, the far-right backlash and anti-fascist fight-back of the '70s, the Thatcherite neo-nationalism of the '80s and the Cool Britannia patriotic reclamation of the '90s, immigration and race have always occupied a prominent place on the political agenda. However, in the past they have existed either as self-contained issues or as a subset of a wider political discourse. Never – at least not in my lifetime – has immigration had such a dominant or pervasive hold over every strand of our national politics.

Increasing voter concern

At the time of the 1997 election, MORI's Issue Tracker recorded those citing race or immigration as the most important issue facing the nation at 3 per cent. By last May's election, it was 38 per cent. In 1997, the British National Party (BNP) put up 54 candidates and secured 36,000 votes, at an average of 664 votes per candidate. In 2010, 339 BNP candidates obtained more than half a million votes, at an average of 1,663 votes per candidate. A YouGov poll taken in March found that 69 per cent of those questioned believed Labour's management of immigration had been bad for the country, compared to 21 per cent who thought it had been beneficial.

Immigration, the elephant in the room? Not any more. Now it's parading down the high street, garlanded in ribbons, leading a three-ring circus.

This detonation over migration has shaken both left and right. For the Conservatives, who had long seen the issue as a licence to print votes, the increase in support for the BNP has presented a serious political problem, akin to UKIP in bover boots. It has also generated a wider debate within David Cameron's inner circle about whether tough lines on immigration cut across the 'New Tory' brand, a debate heightened by the awareness that both William Hague and Michael Howard, when they were Tory leader, ran hard on the issue, to little tangible benefit. To be fair, there's also a generational shift taking place within the Conservative Party, with a number of younger MPs and members looking to put distance between themselves and the legacy of Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' and Tebbit's 'Cricket Test'.

For the left, the issues thrown up are even more challenging. We're now confronted with a need to reassess old certainties on three fronts: political, economic and cultural.

Past failures

Politically, our response has been disastrous. Immigration had been seen as just another issue to triangulate. Attack the BNP, whilst co-opting their language; criticise Tory dog whistles as we blow trumpets about 'British jobs for British workers'; pay lip service to the 'white working class', then thrust them to the margins in pursuit of votes from the citizens of a middle-English Shangri-La. The immigration genie burst from its box on Labour's watch. And we must adopt a radically different political posture if we're going to get it back in again.

On an economic and policy level, we've also been chasing shadows. On the Labour leadership debate shown on Channel 4 News in September, the candidates were asked the patsy question, 'has there been too

much immigration? They trotted out their responses, each pitching to their constituencies. But it's a false question, without a tangible answer. Because we don't have an immigration problem – we have an immigration management problem.

What is a sensible limit? 1000 – 10,000 – 100,000? The numbers are an abstraction. Yes, we need controls on migration. But whatever the figure, what really matters is our capacity at a national, regional and community level to manage the migratory shifts that do occur. A net increase of 1000 migrants is nationally insignificant. But if those migrants settle in a single location, within a community that has little or no experience of external migration, with no flexibility in its capacity to provide housing, employment, education and other social services, then that's a recipe for trouble.

Perversely, Labour's broader policy agenda has cut right across this imperative. At the macro-economic level we've been using migration to introduce a covert 21st century incomes policy. Our housing policy has vainly relied on the market to follow migratory patterns, instead of allowing the state to predict, plan and build around those patterns. Our failure to tackle the legacy of de-industrialisation, fused with the globalisation of employment markets, is creating a battleground between domestic and migrant labour. Again, these are policy legacies of both Tory and Labour governments. And again, we need to construct a programme for integrating migration policy, as well as moulding migration into a wider progressive socio-economic narrative.

But perhaps the biggest challenge we face on the left is cultural. How can we reconcile our progressive instincts with the demand from elements of our working class base to directly confront the inverse inequalities in housing, employment and education that immigration is perceived to have generated? Because there is no mileage in pretending any longer that those demands aren't being made.

New opportunities

My own view is that we must view this challenge not as a threat but as an opportunity. Until recently, Labour's working class base was politically marginalised. Now there is a consensus across the party that this support can no longer be taken for granted. While immigration is seen right now to lie at the heart of white working class concerns, if we can deconstruct the issue into its component parts – job creation, quality education for all, affordable housing – we have the first outlines of a new and exciting political agenda.

We can also seize the organisational opportunities. The threat posed by the BNP has mobilised our activist base like no other issue since we entered government. The organising model pioneered by the Hope Not Hate campaign, which routed Nick Griffin and his party at the general and local elections, provides the perfect blueprint for revitalising our own party structures.

But perhaps most crucially, the immigration debate provides the opportunity to construct new progressive alliances, and reach across what is essentially an artificial divide. In my own Dagenham constituency, the migratory patterns of African families are precisely mirroring the migratory patterns of 50 or 60 years before, when white working class families moved out of inner East London. They have a strong belief in education, advancement and aspiration. There aren't anti-social behavior problems or issues of neighborhood nuisance. They bring strong faith traditions with them, in exactly the way that people nostalgically remember their own migration here 50 years ago. And, as we saw locally, when the community was forced to face up to the challenge presented by the BNP then similarity and commonality were thrown into focus just as sharply as any difference.

Perhaps most crucially, the immigration debate provides the opportunity to construct new progressive alliances, and reach across what is essentially an artificial divide

Of course, the challenges surrounding immigration policy are significant. The BNP's implosion provides some breathing space but does not represent a cessation of hostilities. The Coalition's cuts agenda will further strain the social fabric. A Labour Party coming to terms with opposition for the first time in over a decade will have its missteps as it sets out on a new political journey.

But at least the fault line running through British politics is a clear one. The perils are out in the open, not lurking beneath the surface. We have the tools to bridge the divide. All that's needed are the wisdom and courage to use them.

13.

Immigration as performance politics

The academic Shamit Saggar argues that managerial failures were at the heart of Labour's difficulties

Shamit Saggar is Professor of Political Science at University of Sussex, and a former senior official in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. He has published widely on immigration, electoral behaviour, regulation policy and religious extremism and counter-terrorism.

Immigration, once again, is in the frame to explain Labour's electoral fortunes and to chart its revival. It is right that a robust examination takes place, not least because uncharted levels of immigration have changed the landscape of the country. David Miliband has pointed to an uncharacteristic sluggishness on Labour's part to recognise the need for selectivity in assessing the value of some migrants over others. The party's slow pace in adopting a points-based system, closely geared to labour market preferences, is just one example of poor management on the issue.

Looking back over Labour's time in power, I think there are three main observations to make: that the period of electoral failure prior to New Labour's rise scarred the leadership's outlook in office, that the immigration issue resembles other so-called performance issues that Labour was normally quick to address, and that a new approach prioritising practical solutions at the local level is the best bet going forward.

For more than 40 years the issue of immigration has cast an awkward shadow over domestic electoral politics in Britain. It has been implicated in the electoral difficulties that beset the Labour Party in the Wilson–Callaghan years and again in the electoral wilderness years after 1979. The issue has been intertwined with sensitivities about ethnic diversity and racial strife. And, during Labour's last lengthy recent tenure, it has become a byword for the disruptive and unwelcome face of globalisation.

For sure, New Labour failed to carry its core supporters with it on immigration, but what is not so clear is whether this was a symptom or a cause of its electoral problems. It

has been convincingly argued that a wider breakdown in the relationship between Labour's elite and its grassroots support has been apparent for many years.

An unhappy history

There is, before the current debate, a long and unhappy history on immigration for Labour. In the mid-1970s, Labour leaders, supporters and activists witnessed their party being placed on the back foot on immigration, welfare and trade union rights. Research based on the British Election Study demonstrated how these three issues created a wedge between the party and its core. Labour identifiers very quickly found that the Conservatives under Mrs Thatcher echoed their scepticism towards mass immigration.

This era undoubtedly haunted the generation who led Labour in office since 1997. It was this generation who observed and internalised the lessons of issue-based voting and its haemorrhaging effect on the party's electoral base. A risk-averse stance emerged, based on the calculation that the Conservatives would always win on immigration. It was simply a Tory issue. It was in this context that Jack Straw famously declared in 1996, on the threshold of government, that not so much as a cigarette paper should separate Labour from its Tory opponents on immigration policy.

Curiously the Blair–Brown generation's wariness only partially impacted on policy when in office. This is one of the unexplained puzzles of New Labour. Some, such as the former Number 10 advisor Andrew Neather, have imagined an unspoken conspiracy to use mass

immigration as a means to both change the demographic character of Britain and to gain electoral advantage for Labour. No such plot existed and this fantasy has, not surprisingly, been seized on by 'Little Englanders' to attack metropolitan values at large. A better reading is that the value of increased immigration was central to sustaining an economic boom while the social and other impacts at a local level were greatly underestimated.

Managerial delivery

In its traditional form, held for much of the post-war era, the issue that is 'immigration' has largely ceased to exist. Immigration has been debated as a positional matter, with pro- and anti- camps separating out socially conservative creeds from metropolitan liberal ones. Yet public attitudes are less and less strongly linked to basic sentiment towards ethnic and cultural diversity.

Attitudes and outlooks have changed significantly. The British Social Attitudes survey for example points to a substantial softening in traditionally hard-line attitudes towards immigrants generally and towards black and Asian immigrant offspring in particular. Younger, educated, female parents in southern England have led the way in creating a new tolerant minority. Simplistic binary terms no longer stand up. What matters are specific localised and personalised impacts, alongside public reactions to a larger, national narrative about the rationale and value of fresh immigration.

This should not be especially surprising, given changes in the way in which voters behave. For one thing, there is much greater emphasis on the notion that voter choice is shaped by iterative and cumulative judgments about a party's results while in office. Ideological blurring, the rise of cross-cutting political issues and the rise of arm's-length bodies responsible for delivery are all salient factors in this change. It presents a new 'framework for competence' as the central body through which voters, parties and leaders interact.

David Sanders and Paul Whiteley, with colleagues in the United States, argue that performance politics lies at the heart of modern British democracy. It is a characterisation that sometimes sits uneasily with left-leaning activists, since it implies an instrumentality at the core of voter choice. Nevertheless the psephological evidence to support this claim is compelling: doing the best job with the reins of power in hand is the simplest way to attract and retain electoral credibility. Period.

The implications for parties in addressing immigration are not hard to see. To begin with, it is quite proper that political leaders should concern themselves with ensuring

that the mechanisms for operational delivery are in place. The chaos of asylum-seeker backlogs, failed deportations, ineffective visa regimes and undetected illegal entry all individually and collectively undermine a party's claim to basic competence, and stands in line with its mechanisms to deliver other basic outcomes in school attainment, university student recruitment, hospital waiting lists and food safety. Voters, in other words, have become used to dealing in these terms, heavily discounting against perceived false promises.

The chaos of asylum-seeker backlogs, failed deportations, ineffective visa regimes and undetected illegal entry all individually and collectively undermine a party's claim to basic competence

Labour's period in office was littered with managerial and operational difficulties on immigration. At one point, the machinery of government itself was famously condemned by then-Home Secretary John Reid as unfit for purpose. Reliable capacity and competence, by contrast, were closely woven into the party's broader offering to voters, suggesting one obvious gap that needs to be closed.

Political trust

The immigration issue knocked Labour's record in two other ways. The first was by allowing voters to doubt the government's word. The basic factual picture often seemed unclear and unreliable, reflected in the recurring immigration rows over operational failure and performance measures. In the end, these second-order issues hurt ministerial careers and the government's reputation harder than the shrill and abstract claims about 'too many migrants'.

The response should be to rethink how voters regain confidence in policy, institutions and government itself. The answer has tended to be to place more responsibility in the hands of arms-length regulatory agencies charged to act in the public interest. This is already a norm in many areas of public policy where public doubts have been politically costly (school exam results, competition

policy, consumer finance and others) and Labour should be prepared to extend this principle as far as possible in managing an immigration policy set by ministers.

The second source of mistrust is more serious, and has been most persuasively aired by John Denham. Migration policies under Labour from 2004 onwards helped to corrode public confidence in fairness. The implicit rule that had brought Labour to power and intellectually sustained the New Labour offer was undermined by the appearance of unfairness, especially in public services. Much has been written about a new migration contract that spells out the expectations on migrants to accept conditional access to tax-funded services and to earn full access within 3–5 years. Such conditionality underpins more and more thinking towards welfare and also towards citizenship.

The risks of poorly policed borders are damaging to a party in office. Any muddle at the top over the reasons for a massive increase in economic migration is damaging further. And a silence about migration's losers – never minds its winners – also characterised much of New Labour. But allowing immigration policy to clash with and contradict the party's ethos of fairness and open opportunity reveals an appalling lack of intellectual surefootedness.

Renewing political trust means recognising that the party is now viewed with significant suspicion on immigration, on the economy, and on war and peace. In pollsters' terms, these are no longer 'Labour issues'. There may be hope: voters may not hand over this territory necessarily or automatically to Labour's rivals, so the performance

of the Coalition on these issues will also shape electoral opinion. But none of that should detract from the need for Labour to start building migration policies that are heavily insulated from the charge of political interference and for it to employ modern regulatory thinking and managerial methods to achieve this important objective.

Learning the lessons

Looking ahead, this new political context suggests that much greater clarity and honesty is needed to allow the party to answer tough questions about immigration. The economic rationale in evidential terms remains strong and attractive, so it is vital to champion the economic and social contribution of most – but not all – kinds of immigration. Greater use of selectivity in immigration policies is long overdue, but this is not helped by an instinctive reticence to draw such distinctions. Finally, a clear emphasis on ways to accelerate integration – best done through labour markets rather than by governments – is sorely needed.

A new generation of Labour leaders have found it easy to make the intellectual connection between a modern, globalised economy and international migration. But Vince Cable's ability to fight this corner in the Coalition government indicates that this insight is not unique to Labour and will not be enough to sustain a genuine strategic vision. This will only be possible when it is based on a transparency about losers as well as winners, a willingness to bring forward solutions to disruption in schools and housing, and, above all, an acceptance that voters will respond most keenly to managerial effectiveness rather than lazy gestures.

The new political context suggests that much greater clarity and honesty is needed to allow the party to answer tough questions about immigration



ippr, 13–14 Buckingham Street
London WC2N 6DF
+44 (0)20 7470 6100
info@ippr.org • www.ippr.org
Registered charity no. 800065

Prospect

Prospect, 2 Bloomsbury Place
London WC1A 2QA
+44 (0)20 7255 1281
www.prospect-magazine.co.uk