

Immigration: Concerns on both sides of the Channel

At a time when positive news on the Brexit front seems to be in short supply, the latest immigration figures, which were published last week have brought some welcome cheer. Long term net migration fell by 106,000 to 230,000 in the year following the vote to leave the EU – the biggest drop since records began in 1964. The number of arrivals in the UK fell by 80,000 and the number of departures rose by 26,000. Even so, this welcome fall still leaves the Government a long way short of its target to bring down net migration below 100,000.

Naturally, not everyone is happy. Jonathan Portes, a senior fellow at The U.K. in a Changing Europe, said the statistics show the country is “less attractive” to migrants from Europe. *“Whatever your views on the impact of immigration, it cannot be good news that the U.K. is a less attractive place to live and work, and that we will be poorer as a result,”* he said.

Conversely, Lord Green of MigrationWatch gave the figures a cautious welcome. *“This is a significant and very welcome reduction in net migration – especially by EU citizens who do not have a job to come to,”* he said. *“It points to what could be achieved once the UK regains full control over migration. Meanwhile, employers who raise cries of alarm should be reminded that we still have a net inflow of over a hundred thousand from the EU, plus 170,000 from outside the EU and last week’s figures saw a new record of 2.4 million for the number of EU workers in the UK.”*

This is the bottom line. Our country is full up. Unless things change quickly, to quote the MigrationWatch website, *“A new home will need to be built every five minutes over the next 25 years just to house future migrants and their families.”* There is no doubt that some people are making themselves very

wealthy by running businesses which rely on migrant labour and there is no doubt too that a sudden and complete stop in immigration would cause problems in some sectors, but there are many reasons to be concerned about mass migration, which are nothing to do with being "racist". In this excellent piece, Kathy Gyngell pulls no punches:-

"There's a reason why our roads are blocked with traffic, why there's a housing shortage, why there are not enough school places, why the NHS is creaking at the seams. It's called population growth, something that the political class choose to ignore, let alone see the need to be planned for....Driven by record migration levels, our population has seen its sharpest growth ever. Britain has experienced a population increase of over 5 million in a just over a decade, from 2005 to 2016."

So what has been our politicians' reaction? *"Both the Conservative and Labour parties appear to be in some sort of denial, their heads firmly stuck in the sand. Dare to ask the unmentionable – whether the country can possibly cope with these numbers without irrevocably and irreparably changing – and you are silenced, cast as racist or fascist."* That such words should be written a year after the referendum is a tragic indictment of our elected representatives. True, the main reason we voted to leave was to regain our sovereignty, but concerns about immigration loomed large. One must not interpret Dan Hannan's comments about the negative effects of last year's "Breaking Point " poster to imply that its emphasis on immigration was a turn-off right across the board. What he is saying is that its style was too crude to win round undecided voters. There were plenty of people who had already decided to vote to leave the EU because of the immigration issue so the poster was merely preaching to the converted.

Opponents of Brexit claim that anyone hoping for a cut in net migration is going to be disappointed. Thankfully, they have already been proved wrong, although it is too early to be confident that the recent figures represent a long-term trend,

Meanwhile, it's not just the UK which is experiencing "migration fatigue". Even the famously tolerant Dutch are getting fed up. The decision to relocate the European Medicines Agency from London to Amsterdam on Brexit has not been universally welcomed in the Netherlands' most popular tourist destination. "Expats go home and leave the City to us," said Danielle van Diemen, a 5th-generation Amsterdammer. "I am like a visitor in my own neighbourhood," said Bert Nap, who lives near the centre. "We have lost all our bakers and other shops to tourism-orientated shops," he added. Like London, Amsterdam is experiencing a housing shortage and it's not the predilection of the indigenous Dutch for large families which is causing the problem.

However, it's not only UK politicians who are refusing to admit that there is a problem. The European continent "will clearly need immigration in the coming decades," said Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, a few days ago.

It won't just be the UK and Amsterdam where words like this will go down like a lead balloon. Take Hungary for instance. The big problem of illicit migration has been contained by the erection of a border fence complete with surveillance equipment – and the measures are widely popular with voters. The Hungarian government is currently planning further to toughen the border defences and cares not one iota about the condemnation it has faced from certain quarters, including some Western European politicians, who have accused the Hungarians and some other Eastern European countries of "retreating from European Values".

Eastern Europeans, on the contrary, would claim to be defending and preserving European values. They look at what has happened in the Western part of the Continent and shudder. In Poland, less than 10 percent of respondents disagree with the statement that "all immigration from majority Muslim nations should be stopped." Mariusz Blaszcak, the Polish

interior minister said, "The security of Poland and the Poles is at risk" by taking in migrants. "We mustn't forget the terror attacks that have taken place in Western Europe, and how – in the bigger EU countries – these are unfortunately now a fact of life." In the Czech Republic, former president Vaclav Klaus said, "We refuse to permit the transformation of our country into a multicultural society . . . as we currently see in France and in Great Britain."

There are many in the UK who read Mr Klaus' words with a sense of shame. Many of us never wanted multiculturalism and even if we would never abuse individual immigrants, it is by no means racist to be concerned about the threat to our countryside posed by the growing population, nor to point out that more monocultural societies like Japan and South Korea are also the most stable and much less plagued by violent crime. In Japan, opposition to mass immigration remains solid, in spite of the falling birthrate.

Furthermore, the economic arguments in favour of mass immigration are wearing thinner and thinner. The advances in robotics are likely to see as many as 11 million UK jobs automated by 2036. True, we are currently short of skilled medical staff, but sensible education policies ought to be able to address this in a decade or so. In spite of the repeated mantra that large-scale immigration is a good thing, the likes of Mr Portes are failing to grasp the point that the referendum was something of a turning point in this debate. Not only are there a sizeable number of people who have never accepted that the benefits of immigration outweigh the problems but they are now increasingly less afraid to say so and challenge the prevailing wisdom – and are doing so in the knowledge that such sentiments are being increasingly voiced in other countries too. The sentiments in Eastern Europe summarised above, Donald Trump's proposed US-Mexican border and the success of anti-immigration parties in Germany and Austria are all signs that this issue can't be swept under

the carpet any more.

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