

# Peace & Progress

## General Election 2010

### The trouble with immigration

Immigration is not about controlling numbers. It isn't about meeting the needs of the economy. It isn't a question of being part of Europe. It isn't about the strain placed on local resources. It isn't about 'British values' or a 'British way of life'. It isn't a question of hospitality or being swamped.

Immigration is simply a movement of people that happens to be across borders.

The movement of people for any number of reasons, most often within the borders of one country, is one of the most natural processes in human development and most people don't think twice about it. In fact many people expect it.

Ironically, as the election gathers pace, thousands of people were stranded abroad unable to travel back to Britain because of volcanic ash. People who, for the most part, chose voluntarily to travel to another country - for a holiday, to visit family, for business. They expected to be able to cross borders without restriction but an 'act of God' put paid to control over their lives and the choices they could make. Some resigned themselves to the cost of their extended trip abroad. Some showed remarkable imagination, resilience and determination to find a way of getting to their chosen destination, to get 'home'.

But no one in their right mind would question their right to travel across borders, to be able to move back and forth with minimum fuss and restriction.

Admittedly, for many this will have been a temporary sojourn abroad. But they will not hesitate to do it again and to do so on the assumption that their freedom of movement between countries will not be questioned.

For most people moving to Britain, for a short or a longer period of time, there is no choice involved. Yes, there will be students who can afford to pay high fees and take advantage of a good education system, providing much needed money for universities. Others will have skills that are needed and gain from the employment opportunities available and benefit the UK economy while doing so. But for the vast majority it is either stay home and suffer death, torture, rape, violence, imprisonment or starvation, or at best endure a life of poverty with the added indecency of watching your family suffer as you helplessly stand by. And they show courage and determination to look for something better, a chance to save or improve themselves and maybe in the process to do some good for their family back home who cannot make the journey with them.

Some of them come from a country where, although it is part of the European Union, the opportunities for work are not even as good as working for a minimum wage in Britain doing jobs that the local community is not interested in.

For many, if there was half a chance of survival or a semi decent standard of living at home, they would never have set out on a journey which leaves them stranded between a rock and a hard place, not because of an 'act of God' but because their chances of a peaceful, productive life in their own countries are negligible or non-existent.

For the communities in Britain where new arrivals seek to settle there is little information available about why these movements of people take place and why they will continue to do so. And there is no desire in government of any of the main political parties to explain or to enable these communities to see that, in fact, they have more in common with these new arrivals than with those in power or those who make huge profits from migrant labour.

Immigration is a key issue in the election because it is a diversion from the things that matter most and which politicians either do not have the answer to or choose to ignore. There is huge debt in the economy not because of immigration but because there is no regulation on the free movement of capital or on a banking system and financial institutions, ever hungry for more profit, that have recklessly, criminally, caused the worst recession since the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

There are not enough houses because there has been no sustained building programme for many years to provide affordable housing.

Schools are under resourced not because of the migrant families who have settled here. This is not because of the fact that some, perhaps many, children do not speak English as a first language, but because the resources are diverted elsewhere, for example to fight a war in Afghanistan which no one in Britain had any choice about.

Politicians are good at talking tough on immigration. In fact it is almost farcical to see them tripping over each other for the opportunity to show just how tough they can be.

What they will never admit is that they cannot stop people crossing borders because people will do whatever they have to in order to survive. And if they are seeking protection because they cannot get it at home then they will stay away until it is safe to go back. If they are looking for a chance to earn a living and help themselves and their family back home to survive, then they will go where there is a chance to 'earn a crust', Britain or elsewhere, and move on again when conditions change and prevent them from doing this.

If you want what every ordinary man, woman and child needing protection desires, or what those seeking survival or better chances for themselves and their families are striving for, then start asking the politicians what they are going to do to give you the opportunities you and your family need. And don't let them divert your attention away from the opportunity that this election brings to make a difference for yourself and the majority of ordinary, hard working people in Britain which in reality includes those for whom this country is at least a temporary home.

The trouble with immigration is that the way it is presented by the main political parties and the media makes you think that if 'they' weren't here it would be okay or at least it would be better. But if you really stop and think about it, most people in Britain struggle to make ends meet and it has always been the same. The

community might have changed but your opportunities for work, home and family haven't really. There are some bigots who hate and fear people because they are different; there are some who are in politics and big business that benefit from an indefensible electoral system, that are happy for us to scapegoat immigrants or fight amongst each other over the scraps whilst retaining power and profit. Make your voice count in this election. Don't let them get away without answering the real questions.

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*If you want to see if the candidates in your area actually know what they are talking about regarding immigration, ask them the following questions:*

1. *Why are people who are citizens of other European countries allowed to enter Britain and work here without any or with very little restrictions?*

(Answer: because the countries in the European Union have created an area where there is freedom of movement of capital and goods to allow for free trade and, to make that work, it also needs the free movement of people).

2. *How many people in the world are forced to leave their country because it isn't safe? (Answer: 16 million); What percentage of 16 million refugees come to Britain? (Answer: 2 %).*

3. *Which are the top 5 countries from which people have come to Britain in 2009 in order to claim asylum? (Answer: Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Does the candidate think that those countries are generally considered to be safe? (All of them have gone or are going through major upheaval with many deaths from state violence, intimidation, civil war or starvation)*

4. *How much money does a single asylum seeker get each week to spend on food and other daily necessities, clothes, travel etc., and is that enough to survive? (For information, the rate of income support paid to a single person aged 25 and over is £65.45 per week. This is considered to be the minimum necessary to live off. A single asylum seeker gets £35 per week).*

5. *Given that most migrants and refugees do not choose to leave their homes and families, what are the candidates' proposals for making their countries (like those above) safer and less impoverished?*

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