

British media publicise anti-immigration outfit

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20 August 2002

Migration Watch UK, a newly formed anti-immigration group, was able to grab the media headlines this month by stating that the level of immigration into Britain will run at nearly 250,000 a year, more than two million a decade, for the foreseeable future.

The group claim that according to official figures more than 180,000 people migrated to Britain in 2000 and a further 60,000 overstay their visas or enter the country undetected each year. The group wrote, “That means a population the size of the city of Cambridge being added every six month or a population of Birmingham every five years”, predicting that immigrants would “have a profound effect on the nature and shape of our society for decades to come.”

The group’s boast of being an “independent think tank” was initially uncritically endorsed by both the BBC, who broadcast the claims on their flagship *Today* programme, and the liberal *Guardian*, though both later wrote articles refuting the figures. No such refutation was made by the popular and the gutter press, such as Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun* newspaper, which viewed the group’s apocalyptic warning as grist for the racist and xenophobic mill and accorded it front-page status.

The founder of the organisation is Sir Andrew Green, a former ambassador to Syria and Saudi Arabia, who claims he became interested in Britain’s asylum laws in 1996 during the case of Mohammed al-Masari, a dissident Saudi physicist who operated a political campaign against the Saudi regime by fax from London.

He told the *Independent* newspaper he was under-secretary for the Middle East and was trying to remove Islamic extremists from Britain, but, because of the asylum laws was unable to do so, despite having the support of the then Prime Minister John Major. He

started his outfit in December 2001 and began the search for academics that could give his organisation legitimacy. It was in the letters pages of the *Times* that Green became aware of 57-year-old Dr David Coleman, who regularly pushes his right wing views on immigration. He has advocated that, “migrants should in general accommodate themselves to local conditions, not oblige the customs and institutions of their new home to make way for them” and has also stated that Sir Winston Churchill was right in his belief that immigration from Commonwealth countries should be tightly controlled. As well as being a reader in demography at Oxford University, Coleman has published 90 papers and eight books on the growth and movements of populations. As a former adviser to the Conservative government and special adviser to both Leon Brittan at the Home Office and William Waldegrave at Environment, he describes his own politics as “on the right, rather than the left”.

Far from being independent, therefore, the group’s two leading members have direct links to the Tory Party.

The third key member of Migration Watch UK is Bruce Lewis, a publicist, who was also recruited by Green after writing a letter to the *Times* in which he asked when the government was likely to put a cap on immigration. Lewis is a former journalist for the *Western Daily Press* and founder of the DBR Consultancy in Bristol.

Migration Watch UK’s statistics are taken from the International Passenger Survey, which asks those arriving at British ports whether they intend to stay for 12 months or more. According to the Home Office, the inward figure of 180,000 does not take into account British citizens returning to the country from abroad and neither is the figure of two million over 10 years

broken down. As for the claims of the 60,000 who enter the UK but “disappear”, this is based on a series of assumptions—firstly that 35,000 from outside the EU come on a visitor’s visa and never leave and secondly, that there at least 25,000 who arrive “clandestinely”.

The Home Office has denied that the group’s figures were accurate and said the country was likely to see net migration of around 135,000 people a year. Tauhid Pasha, of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, said, “David Coleman’s report at the very best should be treated with scepticism, and at worst is scaremongering.”

Keith Best, a former Tory MP and chief executive of the Immigration Advisory Service, said, “I think they are being somewhat naïve if they think that putting out some of the figures they have is not going to be picked up on by the tabloid press and hyped up in order to try to scare the British people witless.”

The highly publicised statements of the group coincided with Home Office officials, the Immigration Advisory Service and Refugee legal Centre meeting to discuss government plans to fast track the appeal system for asylum seekers. Under the new proposals, failed asylum seekers will be dragged before courts within eight days, which refugee groups says does not leave enough time to prepare a proper legal case.

Migration Watch UK found admirers on the extreme right. The British National Party comments on its web site that it “welcomes the creation of such an academic body which is long overdue.”



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