

UK Prime Minister David Cameron beats the anti-immigrant drum

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UK Prime Minister David Cameron kicked off the Conservative Party's campaign for elections in Scotland, Wales and northern England with another anti-immigrant speech to members in Hampshire.

His remarks were widely acknowledged to be an attempt to shore up the Tories' right-wing base against competition from the British National Party and, especially, the UK Independence Party. His call for "good immigration, not mass immigration" deliberately evoked the anti-immigrant "swamping" rhetoric employed by the likes of Conservative MP Enoch Powell in 1968 and Tory leader Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

There are other similarities.

Powell and Thatcher's vicious demagoguery bracketed periods of economic crisis and social upheavals. Talk of "rivers of blood" and Britain being "swamped by an alien culture" was intended to scapegoat immigrants for social problems and use racism to divide working people.

Cameron likewise heads a government whose plans to cut some £83 billion in public spending will provoke major class confrontations.

The prime minister made only a passing reference to these measures—the most severe austerity cuts since the 1930s—saying they were "unpopular". The rest of his speech employed every right-wing *bête noire*—young British girls being "bullied" into marriage; abuse of overseas student visas, illegal immigration, etc.

Immigrants were failing to "integrate", he continued, creating "a kind of discomfort and disjointedness in some neighbourhoods".

Cameron explicitly identified the attack on immigrants as integral to government plans to dismantle social provision.

"Immigration and welfare reform are two sides of the

same coin", the prime minister said. Migrant workers were "filling gaps in the labour market left wide open by a welfare system that for years has paid British people not to work", he said.

This had left "persistently, eye-wateringly high numbers of British born people stuck on welfare".

"We will never control immigration properly unless we tackle welfare dependency", he continued. That is why "this government is undertaking the biggest shake-up of the welfare system for generations ... ending the option of living a life on the dole".

The implications of Cameron's statement are ominous, but so too was the reception it received from the Labour Party and the Tories' Liberal Democrat partners in government.

In the general election, the Liberal Democrats had denounced efforts to stigmatise immigrants and asylum-seekers. No doubt with an eye to the party's own efforts to keep hold of some of its support in the elections, Liberal Democrat Business Secretary Vince Cable initially described Cameron's speech as "unwise" for "fanning the flames of extremism". Within hours, however, Cable had retracted his criticisms, saying that the coalition were at one over immigration policy.

As for Labour, Yvette Cooper attacked Cameron's speech from the right—denouncing the government for not tackling immigration effectively enough.

Writing in the *Guardian* newspaper, Dan Hodges for the pro-Labour blog, *Labour Uncut*, praised Cameron's "political savvy", arguing that the Tory leader's anti-immigrant speech was in part intended to "set a trap" for Labour leader Ed Miliband. Cameron hoped that Miliband would respond by denouncing him as a racist. But "Miliband isn't stupid", he claimed. "Hence his attack from the centre-right, on Cameron's failure to

deliver on promises to manage the issue, rather than from the left”.

Labour’s efforts to beat Cameron on the right come under conditions where the profoundly anti-democratic content of the Tory leaders’ speech was writ large—particularly his argument that because some people, in some neighbourhoods (never identified), feel “discomfort” in the presence of immigrants, the rights of the latter must be curtailed.

It is worth noting that in the same week as Cameron made his speech, a gay couple were evicted from a pub because their kissing apparently made other patrons “uncomfortable”. Neither Cameron nor Miliband have given their opinion on this, given that the “discomfort” of some is now held up as the criteria for granting or revoking rights.

Cameron’s speech and the response to it underscore the pronounced rightward shift of official politics across Europe.

In France the ban on the full-face veil, the niqab and the burqa, came into force on April 11. The government of Nicolas Sarkozy claims that the ban is aimed at defending French “values”, a claim supported by the Socialist Party and the fake-left groups.

This fundamental assault on democratic rights has supposedly been necessitated by a security threat to France posed by the no more than 367 women who wear full-veils in public (figures according to *Le Monde Diplomatique*). The full force of the state is being brought to bear to impose this ban, with a number of women wearing full-face veils having been arrested, along with several others protesting against the new law.

Across the continent governments have implemented similar legislation and are whipping up anti-immigrant sentiment. There is more than a whiff of Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, albeit with anti-Muslim prejudice in place of anti-Semitism.

There is a common objective. European governments—whether nominally Labour or Conservative—are making sweeping cuts in social provision, while funding the banks and financial institutions to the tune of billions.

As Cameron’s speech made clear, anti-immigrant measures are not only intended as a “diversion” from this class agenda, they are central to it.

In the UK for example, tens of thousands of workers

are being made unemployed as a consequence of the government’s cuts, while youth unemployment is heading for the one million mark. The government’s “shake-up” of welfare really means withdrawing the right to unemployment benefit so as to force people into low-paid work, thereby driving down wage rates overall.

Already, real wages have declined at the fastest rate since the 1920s, according to the Centre for Economic and Business Research. The government intends to accelerate this significantly.

That anti-immigrant propaganda is almost invariably anti-Muslim is also no accident.

In a speech to the Munich Security Conference in February, under the guise of anti-terrorism, Cameron had attacked “state multiculturalism”, identified British Muslims as a potential terror threat and said, “We need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and much more active, muscular liberalism”.

Anti-Muslim prejudice was also the subtext to his speech in Hampshire.

This “active, muscular liberalism” is currently on display in Libya, where France and Britain are leading the intervention in the country’s civil war to support opposition forces—many with links to the CIA and MI6. Efforts to scapegoat Muslims are an integral part of trying to condition the populations of their countries to accept the revival of naked neo-colonialism, militarism and war.



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