

British Labour Party steps up anti-immigrant rhetoric

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The recent Eastleigh by-election has been the occasion for a marked shift to the right in official politics, with the Labour Party assuming pole position.

The Liberal Democrats managed to retain the seat but under conditions of a significant collapse in their vote and that of the Conservatives. With Labour recording virtually no change, the anti-European and anti-immigration United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) benefited from a swing of nearly 20 percent in its favour.

After Eastleigh, Rupert Murdoch dined with UKIP leader Nigel Farage. They were reported to have discussed the possibility of UKIP allying themselves with the Conservatives if party leader and Prime Minister David Cameron was replaced as leader by a more hardline Eurosceptic (opponent of the founding of the European Union.)

In an attempt to position itself to the right and win support from UKIP's electoral constituency and from Murdoch, it was Labour that moved most decisively in taking up anti-immigration propaganda.

Within days of the election, a party political broadcast featured leader Ed Miliband stating that the previous Labour government of Tony Blair/Gordon Brown had "got it wrong on immigration" and that he had "a new approach".

Miliband complained that "low-skilled immigration has been too high". Labour supported "maximum transitional controls" on immigrants from eastern Europe, he said, in reference to the fact that Romanian and Bulgarian citizens will be able to work in the UK when restrictions on those countries are lifted at the end of this year.

Labour would also demand a greater focus on the use of the English language, including a rule that all public sector workers in face-to-face contact with the public

"need to be able to speak English". The broadcast ended with Miliband stating that the new immigration policies were central to his "One Nation" vision of Labour, in which "everybody contributes to the country".

Miliband continued his theme in a column published in Murdoch's *The Sun* on Sunday. After waxing lyrical on "Our families and our friends" having "roots in the islands of the Caribbean, the hills of the Punjab, the villages of Eastern Europe" and the UK having "won the Olympics because of the vision of a diverse Britain we sold to the world", Miliband got down to the business at hand.

"The pace of change has been fast," he said. "People have seen rapid change in their streets and neighbourhoods, with new cultures and new ways of life."

His statement has clear parallels with those of Margaret Thatcher in 1978, prior to the general election the following year, who declared that the "British character" was being "swamped" by alien cultures. Like Miliband, she too mouthed platitudes of how "minorities" have added "to the richness and variety of this country," but her message enabled the Tories to take almost the entire vote of the fascist National Front.

Miliband went on to associate immigration with declining living standards, writing that it had put wages under pressure in "low-paid parts of our economy."

In fact, the lowering of wages is the result of a deliberate policy pursued by Labour and the Tories with the absence of any checks on the employers' other than a paltry and barely-enforced minimum wage. More fundamentally, depressed wages and living standards are a product of the savage cuts imposed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition following the Labour-initiated £1 trillion-plus bailout of the banks, with pay cuts, pay freezes, the slashing of welfare and

rising unemployment ensuing.

Miliband's diatribe was followed by a March 7 policy speech by Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, who called for the introduction of a "presence" test to the existing habitual residence test that new migrants from the European Union currently have to meet to claim unemployment benefits. This would require immigrants having to prove that they had been in the UK for at least three months before being able to claim Job Seekers Allowance. Cooper also called for the removal of child welfare entitlement for immigrants. The previous Labour government should have been "quicker to introduce the Australian style points based system" and "should have kept the transitional controls in place for eastern Europe," she said.

On immigration, Labour "would support the government where it brings in sensible policies"—citing the cap on the number of "tier 2" workers brought in 2010. Tier 2 (General) visas are granted to foreign nationals who have been offered a job that cannot be filled by a UK worker and applicants must score 70 points on the UK points-based assessment system. In the year to June 2012, the UK Border Agency granted fewer than half the Tier 2 visas available under the cap—with just 8,927 issued.

Seeking to pit worker against worker, Cooper stated there "needs to be a mature recognition that there are different kinds of immigration—immigration that works and immigration that doesn't both for the immigrant and the country."

Labour's attempt to raise the spectre of the immigrant coming to Britain in order to be a "welfare sponger" doesn't correspond to any reality. According to the government's own figures, only 7 percent of working-age migrants claim benefits compared with 17 percent of British citizens. It is estimated that migrants to the UK contribute 30 percent more in taxes than the amount taken in the use of public services and welfare.

Cooper's speech the *Guardian* noted that "Labour's new approach... appears designed to ensure that nobody can put a cigarette paper between" it and the Tories. It might have said the same about UKIP.

Miliband and Cooper's intervention followed two speeches by the Labour leader in December where he decried "uncontrolled" levels of immigration, while advocating a strengthening of "national identity."

Such right wing nostrums have marked Miliband's leadership. Following his 2010 election as leader, he was presented as representing a break with the "New Labour" regime of Blair/Gordon Brown. He is rather a supporter of the "Blue Labour" tendency, which promotes anti-immigrant chauvinism, support for the free market and condemnation of what remains of Britain's welfare state.

Blue Labour was founded in 2009 by the academic Lord Maurice Glasman and leading Labour figures such as Jon Cruddas. Its message of "flag, faith and family" is summed up in the book *The Labour tradition and the politics of paradox*, which has an introduction written by Miliband.

Labour's One Nation rhetoric and promulgation of filthy anti-immigrant policies has escalated in line with the deepening crisis of British capitalism. It was then Prime Minister Gordon Brown who—borrowing from the arsenal of the fascist British National Party—first raised the slogan of "British jobs for British workers".

Evocations of "One Nation" Britain are Labour's latest and more comprehensive offering to the ruling elite, in alliance with the trade unions, of a means to divide workers in the UK from their class brothers and sister in Europe and internationally in order to better carry out the destruction of jobs, wages and conditions.



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