

UK government slashes non-EU migrant worker numbers

Joan Smith, Paul Mitchell
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As part of the UK Conservative government's plan to restrict immigration levels to "tens of thousands" by 2020, further restrictions on non-European Union (EU) workers will come into effect in April 2016.

The most vicious measure proposed is the deportation of 30,000 or more non-EU workers, who fail to earn more than £35,000 [\$US 54,000] per annum, after being in Britain for six years.

Prime Minister David Cameron told parliament, "In the past, it has been too easy for businesses to recruit from overseas, undermining those who want to work hard and do the right thing. As part of our one-nation approach, pushed forward by my immigration taskforce, we have asked the migration advisory committee to advise on what more can be done to reduce levels of work migration from outside the EU."

About the only way workers from outside the EU can work in the UK is if they meet the criteria in Tier 2 of the Points Based Visa System introduced by the previous Labour government in 2008. They have to be skilled and sponsored by an employer for a job included on the "skills shortage list". Last year, some 52,200 non-EU nationals were allowed into the UK—15,000 "general" workers, 36,500 workers relocated by a multinational company (Intra-Company Transfers, or ICTs), 400 ministers of religion and 150 sports persons.

It is Tier 2 visas that Cameron has ordered his taskforce, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), to cut. Naturally, no such measures are to be taken with individuals applying for Tier 1 visas—those classed as "high value" immigrants—investors and entrepreneurs.

Deporting those earning less than £35,000 is a form of ethnic cleansing, complete with economic criteria, that will not only impact workers, but also their partners and children.

Other proposals include preventing dependents of Tier 2 workers from working, cutting the occupations on the "skills shortage list", restricting the time an occupation can be on the list, reducing the number of ICT workers and levying visa applications to fund apprenticeships in the UK.

The National Health Service (NHS) will be hardest hit by these changes. Due to the shortage of trained nurses in Britain, the NHS has had to rely on recruiting from overseas—spending £20 million so far this year to recruit over 3,000 nurses from non-EU countries.

The £35,000 minimum salary rule will exact a terrible toll on migrant nurses, whose average wage is well below the new threshold—£22,000 a year rising to £28,000 after eight years. A Home Office spokesperson callously declared, "Employers have had since 2011 to prepare for the possibility their non-EEA [European Economic Area—EU plus Switzerland] workers may not meet the required salary threshold to remain in the UK permanently."

In response to the government's attack, Royal College of Nursing (RCN) General Secretary Dr Peter Carter declared, "The UK will be sending away nurses who have contributed to the health service for six years. Losing their skills and knowledge and then having to start the cycle again and recruit to replace them is completely illogical."

"The only way for the UK to regain control over its own health service workforce is by training more nurses", Carter added, revealing little concern for the welfare of other overseas workers or the raft of anti-immigrant measures being introduced by the government. The union's only plea is that nursing be added to the shortage list so that they are exempt from the new measures.

The RCN's response is unsurprising. The trade

unions have done little or nothing to protect, integrate and organise migrant workers. Instead, they have played a crucial role in fomenting divisions between workers, with their demands about the need for “local jobs” and “British jobs for British workers”, which complement the government’s xenophobic rhetoric about migrant workers and the despicable role played by the Labour Party and its allies in what passes for the left-liberal media establishment.

One of Cameron’s first acts following his re-election as prime minister in May was the announcement of a new Immigration Bill, which targets an estimated 310,000 to 860,000 “illegals”. Many are refugees fleeing wars and economic and social catastrophes, in which Britain played a major part, who “disappear” after their applications for asylum are refused and become part of the growing black economy where they are cruelly exploited.

Some are asylum seekers who are still waiting for their claims to be processed and are forced into illegality because they are banned from normal working and are expected to survive on a cash payment of £5.23 a day. The UK received 31,400 asylum applications last year, far lower than Germany (166,800), Sweden (81,300), France (63,100) and Italy (56,300). Other “illegals” include those who have entered the UK without authority, entered with false documents, overstayed their visas or worked on a tourist visa.

Even the inhuman conditions undocumented workers already endure are too decent as far as the government is concerned. The bill includes a new offence of illegal working, which allows the police to confiscate wages as proceeds of crime; extends the “deport first, appeal later” process; requires banks to check bank accounts against databases of people deemed illegal; creates new powers for councils to evict illegals more quickly; makes it an offence for employers and agencies to recruit abroad without advertising in the UK; and extends the use of biometric testing and health surcharges.

Cameron also wants to restrict the number of EU workers coming to the UK. He has placed immigration reform at the centre of his attempt to renegotiate Britain’s relationship with the EU before the 2017 referendum vote on continued membership of the bloc. He wants to ban EU workers from Britain unless they have a job, to restrict their rights to public services and

benefits and to deport those who cannot support themselves.

The constant identification of foreign workers as a threat to jobs, or a competition for housing, health and education, is a policy of divide and rule, which the British ruling class has pursued for decades at home and abroad. Immigrants are being made scapegoats for the social crisis caused by the most severe austerity measures since the 1930s.

The Socialist Equality Party defends the rights of workers to be able to move freely around the world. We condemn and oppose the entire reactionary framework of “border controls” and anti-immigrant legislation and call for full democratic and citizenship rights for all migrant workers, including the undocumented.



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