

Starmer invokes Enoch Powell’s “rivers of blood” speech to launch Labour’s anti-immigration offensive

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UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer announced a raft of anti-immigration measures Monday, confirming that his Labour government is a far-right monstrosity.

Starmer’s move—egged on by a xenophobic media—was on one level an inevitable response to the success of anti-immigrant Reform UK in the May 1 local elections. But his speech was pitched so far to the right that he even aped the infamous, racist 1968 “rivers of blood” speech of Conservative MP Enoch Powell, dredging up his hysterical scaremongering about Britain being overrun by foreigners.

Powell had said that white Britons “found themselves made strangers in their own country.” Starmer declared, “Without them [strict immigration rules], we risk becoming an island of strangers...”

The white paper, “Restoring Control over the Immigration System”, maps out anti-immigration measures including restricting international law, but which Starmer made clear are only a downpayment on the brutality to come.

His speech was timed to coincide with the third reading of the Labour government’s Trump-style Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which, with Labour’s substantial majority, will pass its final stage in the House of Commons this evening before being reviewed by the House of Lords.

The Bill deepens the criminalisation of any immigration not carried out through strict “official” channels, seeking to jail, deport, and tag as many migrants as possible. It is expected to be law within weeks.

Close your eyes and Starmer’s speech could have been delivered almost in its entirety by Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. Since 2016, every right-wing scoundrel in Britain has embraced leading Brexiteer Dominic Cummings’ anti-immigrant Brexit slogan “Take Back Control”. Starmer’s narrative was that the Brexit pledge had been betrayed by the previous Conservative government, which had “lost control” of the UK’s borders.

The white paper, he announced, “will finally take back

control of our borders and close the book on a squalid chapter for our politics, our economy, and our country.”

“Everyone knows that slogan [Take Back Control] and what it meant for immigration, or at least that’s what people thought. Because what followed from the previous government, starting with the people who used that slogan, was the complete opposite.”

He complained “Between 2019 and 2023, even as they [the Tories] were going around our country telling people, with a straight face, they would get immigration down, net migration quadrupled. Until in 2023, it reached nearly 1 million, which is about the population of Birmingham, our second largest city. That’s not control—it’s chaos.”

The British people had essentially been “stabbed in the back” by a liberal elite. Starmer declared of the Tories’ 14-year record on immigration: “They must answer for themselves, but I don’t think you can do something like that by accident. It was a choice. A choice made even as they told you, told the country, they were doing the opposite. A one-nation experiment in open borders conducted on a country that voted for control. Well, no more. Today, this Labour government is shutting down the lab. The experiment is over.”

In opposition to an “immigration system that seems almost designed to permit abuse,” Starmer declared, “I believe we need to reduce immigration significantly. That’s why some of the policies in this white paper go back nearly three years”. Repeating words he first made at Labour’s annual conference last autumn he declared, “Taking back control is a Labour argument.”

Under Labour, “every area of the immigration system—work, family, and study—will be tightened up...”

This includes a proposal to curb the powers of judges to block deportations. At present, courts can grant asylum to foreign criminals and asylum seekers under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in “exceptional circumstances”.

The former human rights lawyer Starmer proposed to close what he described as a “loophole” earlier this year, not against criminals, but after a Palestinian family of six from Gaza were granted the right to live in the UK on the basis that there was a compelling case under the right to a family life—with a relative living in the UK.

The new policies also include:

- Scrapping visas for social care workers. This will intensify the overall decline in foreign-born workers being employed in the National Health Service post-Brexit, threatening its collapse.
- Overseas workers seeking to work in Britain will require degree-level qualification to apply for the main skilled worker visa, as opposed to the equivalent of an A-level. The government estimates this will prevent new visa applications for around 180 jobs, reducing immigration by around 39,000 per year by 2029.
- At present, immigrants need to live in the UK for five-years before applying for the right to stay indefinitely. This will be doubled to 10 years
- Overseas graduates will only be allowed to remain in Britain for 18 months after completing their studies, instead of two years currently.
- Digital identity will be compulsory for all overseas citizens.

Starmer again directly appealed to Farage’s constituency, stating there would be “English language requirements across all routes [to enter and live in the UK]—including for dependents.” The white paper outlines a policy that a basic understanding of English will be extended to people applying to come to the UK as adult dependents of visa-holders.

Concluding his rant, Starmer declared that “some people think controlling immigration is reining in a sort of natural freedom rather than a basic and reasonable responsibility of government to make choices that work for a nation’s economy. For years, this seems to have muddled our thinking but let me be clear—it ends now.”

Any immigrant allowed in by Labour’s border Gestapo would now have to first demonstrate their commitment to “help rebuild our country,” as “Settlement becomes a privilege that is earned, not a right...”

While not setting a number capping migration, saying that every previous target set by the Tories had failed, Starmer pledged that by the end of the parliament net migration would be cut “significantly.”

Every attempt was made to whip up divisions between workers in Britain and migrants. Downing Street’s press release announcing the white paper was headlined, “Migration system will back British workers, boost economic growth and control our borders under the Plan for

Change.”

Its main theme was “British jobs for British workers”, another slogan beloved of the far-right. Labour’s was a “new common-sense approach, one that backs British workers over cheap overseas labour... Lower net migration, higher skills and backing British workers” was the aim.

Downing Street boasted that “More than 24,000 people with no right to be here have been returned since the election—the highest rate in 8 years—including a 16 percent increase in foreign national offender removals.”

Migration was blamed for all social ills. Record immigration meant “Public services were stretched, housing costs soared, and employers swapped skills investment for cheap overseas labour.”

The answer was “tougher rules on who can come to work, study or bring family. Every part of the system is being tightened. Backdoor routes to settlement will be closed, enforcement will be stepped up as we end abuse of the system.”

Even more brutal attacks on immigration are being prepared beyond those measures in a white paper concerning “legal” migration. Starmer declared in his speech, linking the lack of vital resources to too many immigrants, “If we do need to take further steps, if we do need to do more to release pressure on housing and our public services, then mark my words—we will.”

This was the thrust of the foreword to the paper by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, who presented it to Parliament later on Monday. She wrote, “Later this Summer, we will set out further reforms to the asylum system and to border security in response to irregular and illegal migration, including plans for new legislation building on the new measures already set out in the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill that is currently passing through Parliament.”



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