

Introduction

The Abandoned Line

This book is about the profound failure of Home Office immigration/asylum policy and the inability to put even the flawed policy into practice. Far from just being a problem of tens of thousands of East Europeans slipping illegally into Britain ahead of Mayday 2004 – as Government apologists would have you believe – I reveal how the systematic abuses of procedure and open invitation to fraud (instigated and allowed by the Home Office at ministerial and top management levels) extend across the whole of Managed Migration. This applies to all of the different types of cases: in particular students, marriage and dependent relatives. There are fundamental problems with both the general ways of working and all the various ways to avoid bothering to apply particular immigration rules. The whole shebang clearly was inspired by what, to most people's minds, is a bizarre attitude to the relation between British citizens and all the other people in the world.

Managed Migration is the main application processing part of the Home Office's Immigration & Nationality Directorate (IND), that also comprises Work Permits UK and the Immigration Service (immigration officers at key points of entry). As I show, from my own research and that of others, and from official reports and news stories cropping up as I was writing *all three* divisions – IND in its entirety – is riven with across-the-board and in-depth failure. One of the most significant aspects of the chaos of Work Permits emerged fully only late in the day (July 2004); while the farce of the immigration and asylum front line has been charted for some time, with recent events only confirming our worst fears.

The disaster – and that is the only way to describe it – is so serious that there are now calls for the Home Office to be relieved of the whole of its immigration and asylum brief. This is such a central feature of public administration that it is no exaggeration to say the present Government has shown itself to be unfit for office.

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Before I started working for the Home Office in Managed Migration I didn't have a clear opinion on immigration other than that a balance between those entering and those leaving Britain would seem to be a normal and healthy aspect of any developed country, and which must have some obvious benefits. I was happy to unthinkingly support net inward migration, assuming that there must be some benefit — otherwise why would it ever have been encouraged or allowed to happen? Before I looked at the research I didn't object in principle even to *mass* net immigration. Not that I supported it either: I just felt indifferent apart from the (demographic and resource implications).

Since my suspension from work, I have had time and reason to have a thorough look at the researched facts. Together with a full realization, in part through working at the Home Office, that Britain is currently sustaining uncontrolled mass net immigration, it is now clear to me that firm opposition to this is the only rational position to adopt. The combination of having very recently worked on the 'front line' and the rare freedom to speak the truth about current practice, plus a good grasp of the research on the various aspects of immigration and a range of related problems, I think leaves me almost uniquely qualified to comment on immigration, albeit that I am not an expert on any aspect. Solid work experience at the coalface surely places me above any general commentator who, no matter how astute, will not have been able to get anything like the perspective and range of information.

The BBC and some other sections of the media mostly refuse to listen, or to not listen seriously, to either experience or research that contradicts the standard political bigotry of the so-called intelligentsia on the subject of immigration, and willful ignorance is smugly paraded under a cloak of supposed public service. The issue is not going to go away and they are going to have to listen, or face the consequences of otherwise fair-minded people being swayed by unsavoury political opportunists, or in vast numbers giving up on the political process altogether.

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I have tried to tell the story of the extraordinary events from my own perspective in the hope of shedding more light and detail on the scandals and cover-ups at the Home Office regarding both policy and implementation in Britain's immigration system. The lengths

that the Home Office predictably went to flout the maxim about digging and holes is as comical as it is contemptuous.

The structure of the book is one of storyline chapters alternating with chapters discussing different aspects of the immigration issue (or 'ishoos', as Tony Benn likes to refer to them), the latter including a discussion of the relevant scholarly literature in demography, economics and psychology. Each strand can be read separately if so desired as each chapter is labelled either 'storyline' or 'analysis'. But I wouldn't recommend this approach, because elements of both strands feature in some chapters — it was difficult always to maintain the distinction, which inevitably is forced in places. (I suppose that any structure imposed on writing to make it more coherent is bound to be a heavy compromise.) Anyway, for a sense of neatness, if nothing else, the chapters are symmetrically clustered around a central pivot (Chapter 9) recounting the key event of the visit to Sheffield by the immigration minister Beverley Hughes on December 4 2003, and looking at the general problems I encountered in how the Home Office dealt with immigration applications.

The storyline sections are chronological bar one sharp flip back in time, while the issue sections are placed in some sort of order of importance to the immigration debate and salience to roughly where the storyline has got to. Finally there is the Epilogue, dealing with the Home Office's unsurprisingly convenient contortion of facts to 'find' that actually I had *not* complied with the Public Interest Disclosure Act. So I end up where I started, with another thread of interest: 'whistle-blowing'.

The trouble to which the Government and even the media went to suppress debate is explained by the emptiness of the rhetoric that is all that props up a bankrupt political position, as discussion of the issues shows. The story and the analysis should cross-illuminate and put each other into context. I hope I have done better than just add some 'human interest', so that the book is more than just the sum of its parts.

Perhaps most important of all, I want to introduce readers to the idea that immigration is not an isolated topic but tied up with questions of equal opportunity, men-women relations, the family, the nature of work and many other subjects, all of which are connected in a contemporary (mis)understanding that is set to implode and be replaced with a far more realistic world view. This may sound like out-dated over-optimism, but honesty about immigration looks like the thin end of a highly interesting wedge that could benefit us all.

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The usual slur chucked at anybody talking about immigration needs to be seen off at the outset. It should go without saying that, as a former Lib Dem council candidate in a heavily Muslim ward (with one of the leading members of the recently arrived Bengali community as my running mate), I don't have *any* racist, xenophobic or other irrational feelings towards any individuals or groups either of ethnic minorities or of white people (from Eastern Europe or from anywhere else), or to any religion or the practitioners of any religion. Neither do I seek to encourage racist, xenophobic or other irrational feelings in others. This is anyway a much overblown problem, as I will explain. My contempt is for the *policy*, or lack of it, that allows lax immigration procedures or no procedures at all, and the underlying politics that makes such a bogus and deceitful case.

Individuals can hardly be blamed for taking advantage of an open door to gain personal advantage by successfully relocating to Britain as an economic migrant. Providing that someone's presence here is not by illegal means, including deception, then it would be pointless or counter-productive as well as unfair to attack the person rather than the ill-thought-out law that allowed them to settle and the incompetent, un-democratic and self-serving politicians and mandarins who allow the situation to continue. Even so, it is not possible to say what proportion of recent immigrants have not simply walked through an open door but arrived illegally or by active deception or collusion with criminals or non-bona fide representatives. We know the proportion is very high, and we know that of these a very high proportion are not making a useful contribution to our society. These people do deserve censure and some may feel that it is now reasonable, with the problem so serious, that a 'rule of thumb' perhaps should err on the side of the tarred brush rather than the complacent platitudes currently on offer from the Government and their left-liberal supporters.

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The ethnic or national origins of anyone coming to Britain for permanent settlement would be immaterial if immigration was based only on natural population exchange within the developed world of the skills and experience countries think it is desirable to exchange. It so happens that most of these people would be white, for the simple reason that most of the developed world is white; but there would also be Japanese and Indian sub-continentals, South-East Asians,

Chinese and a few black Africans and South American Indians — some of those from the higher echelons of their societies. It would hardly matter if the colour mix was reversed, with a large majority of non-whites; because all of these people would be socialised in 'Western' ways with excellent English language skills, a higher education and good career prospects. They would be relatively easily assimilated, notwithstanding their individual higher visibility resulting from their skin colour.

However, this is not at all the reality of immigration today. Most people who come to Britain for permanent settlement at present happen to be non-white, because of the ethnic composition of underdeveloped nations from where unskilled economic migrants come. Again, their non-whiteness would not be an issue, but most of these people tend to behave in a completely different way to nationals from developed countries. They seek out fellow countrymen to live in enclaves because they are not orientated to Western culture, or through peculiarities of their own culture, poor English, or the absence of any skills (let alone higher education) and a lack of knowledge of labour markets. Inevitably such enclaves are likely to be, or seen to be, difficult or a burden for the wider community. Skin colour (together with facial characteristics and maybe dress) merely serves to make it easier to spot individuals from such enclaves — or to make a reasonable guess that someone is likely to be so. Ethnic minority per se is not at all the root of the problem for all it is routinely claimed.

It would be logical to support net inward migration if for some reason the kind of immigration proposed could be shown to provide a lasting benefit to our society. But on the evidence there is no benefit, and no circumstances, either now or in the foreseeable future, where there could be a benefit. As I will explain, mass net immigration is a clear *disbenefit*.

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One of the stances I take in writing this book is that debate should not be hampered by fear of talking about sub-groups within society rather than the individuals that comprise them. It is not excusable to deny debate because of the supposedly overriding need to constantly assert that generalisations cannot be made about groups without unfairly labelling all of the individuals within the group — who may well as individuals not behave like the typical group member. After all, this is precisely what is being done when it is decided

that an ethnic minority community is disadvantaged and so for this reason that particular community as a whole must somehow be helped. The politically correct cannot have it both ways and change from one to the other view to suit their position while insisting that others cannot do the same.

In fact the distinction is a red herring, because all people behave much the same if the social group of which they are a member is displaced to a context of a wider or adjacent social group that in some way is very different. Yet the differences between either individuals or groups are not as salient as the simple fact of inter-group dynamics. This is the case with clearly separate enclaves, for example of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Northern cities. These are sub-groups within society in the true sense, in that they function vis-à-vis the wider society in an 'in-group'-'out-group' relationship. For their predominantly white neighbours the relationship tends to be reciprocal.

There are social dynamics that will always place these communities apart from the wider society, albeit that there will be assimilation into the mainstream culture at the margin. This is not in any way to do down either individual (for example) Pakistani or Bangladeshi men and women, or the groups that comprise them. Indeed, these groups have – or (as we shall see) used to have – some obvious virtues in more successfully retaining social order and values that to some extent have been lost in the wider society. This tends to produce worthy people useful to society, given a more collective and less individualistic orientation; but the question is: useful to the wider society or useful mainly or only to the ethnic sub-group?

If honesty is seen as something between fellow (for example) Pakistanis or fellow Bangladeshis, but not between a Pakistani/Bangladeshi and a white person, then this is a problem. It is a problem if there is allegiance and a feeling of responsibility to the ethnic community, but not to society as a whole, leading to (for instance) unusually widespread tax evasion that was a matter of indifference or even encouragement by the ethnic community.

It is undeniable that these communities are necessarily divisive in their very presence within the cities where they are located. This is not due to racism by the majority white population but to natural social forces operating both within the enclave and outside it. The strongest forces are actually those within the enclave. It is not helpful to call this racism, just as it is not helpful to use that term to label the

wariness of those in the wider community towards the enclave and its members.

These communities are with us and so we have a responsibility to help them to thrive, but we do not have a responsibility to encourage or allow them to expand still further by mass chain immigration of people from the same countries of origin. But this is indeed what is happening, by both legal and illegal means. Neither do we have a responsibility to help the sub-group over and above providing the same help to the individuals within it compared to individuals belonging to the wider society.

These are some of the arguments I will be developing: ones that I draw your attention to at the outset to encourage the reader to pay particular attention when they arise and not to misunderstand them or their context.

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My work in the Managed Migration division was as an in-country 'backroom boy', in common with that of the Work Permits division. This book is about immigration and asylum as a whole but focusing on in-country immigration applications, specifically at Managed Migration. I deal with Work Permits and asylum in sections of the book but, to finish this introduction, as necessary background I think I should give you a picture of the forward troops: the Immigration Service. 'The abandoned front line' (if you forgive the military analogy), although the metaphor even then does not conjure the full extent of the problem. Defensive forward positions in a theatre of war rarely fail to take a considerable toll on an attacking army (providing the defenders don't run away); and even if they do retreat there are fallback positions that can at least check incursions for a time. If that fails then regrouping for counter-attack may well expel the invaders. None of this holds regarding immigration. There is little in the way of a front line of immigration officers to check people on entry and even less once within this super-thin porous membrane to distinguish unwanted newcomers from everybody else. As for the threat of being sent back over no-man's land: this is effectively non-existent apart from relatively rare cases.

This is despite the Immigration Service Union regularly sounding alerts. Their cries have become routine and wrongly presumed by many to be false shouts of 'wolf', for all the evident mounting tally of dead sheep. It is quite amazing that the very people whose careers put them in the most ideal position possible to comment on prob-

lems on the ground are the very people whose comments are ignored — and don't I know the feeling. Nobody explains why people who work in immigration would want to exaggerate rather than, if anything, to minimise the chaos they have to confront. After all, it is natural to talk up and to justify your role in life, not to do down your own efforts.

The person who has done most, very recently, to count the piles of ovine corpses and attest to the reality of the wolf at the door is Harriet Sergeant. She put herself among immigration staff at their places of work and talked with their union spokesmen. The resulting book, *Welcome to the Asylum*, published in 2001, remains the only full-length journalistic investigation into the mess; just as her similar work, *No System to Abuse*, charted the impact of uncontrolled immigration on the NHS (see Chapter 14).

Just as I saw for myself in Managed Migration, Sergeant found that nobody within the system actually got shot of people out of the country. This was her main point when I talked with her. 'They just don't deport people', she complained. I should here explain the difference between a 'removal' and a deportation. A deportation order comes from the Home Secretary and should mean that there is no recourse to re-entry until it is lifted — normally after three years. It has to be applied for by an Immigration Service official and applications are rare. A 'removal' on the other hand is just an administrative concept and not a sanction. These are much more numerous than deportations, but they are of little use since they do not prevent someone re-entering the UK, and as soon as they like. This makes the work of the Immigration Service even more futile than it would seem. (I only found out about the distinction myself when I talked to fellow whistle-blower James Cameron, the former British consul to Romania.)

But even 'removal' was not being done. John Tincey of the Immigration Service Union told Sergeant: 'From what our members say I would be very surprised if we were removing more than 12 people a month who really do not want to go home. We really don't have a working method for removing people who don't want to go.' Quite amazing though it is, there are delays of several months to deport even those illegals who are being held in prison after criminal conviction, where deportation forms part of their sentence. Martin Slade, the general secretary of the Immigration Service Union, commenting to the press in 2002, described the shockingly inept removal process: 'In some cases they're simply escorted to an airport and left

to decide whether to board the plane themselves'. This is because anyone who is put on a plane must be escorted by two immigration officers and obviously these cannot be spared from other duties given that there are not even sufficient staff to man an initial cursory gateway check (the ISU complained in April 2004 that Dover was completely unmanned at weekends and during unsocial hours). In any case, airlines refuse to board anyone who is distressed or violent. I will return to the question of removal and deportation in Chapter 12 when I consider asylum policy and look at the Government's recent figures, but here I just want to look at general problems on the ground at ports of entry.

The first difficulty British immigration officers face is the sheer lack of numbers and resources, which itself appears to be a deliberate ploy by the Government. This has a dire effect on the ability both to intercept clandestine illegal immigrants and to properly process ostensibly legal ones. Commenting to a newspaper in January 2003, John Tincey (who is himself an immigration officer at Stansted) said that not only were arrival posts 'badly understaffed' but were 'often manned by beginners'. The number of dogs trained to sniff out people has actually been *reduced*. One of Sergeant's immigration officer informants told her: 'They were finding too many people. We think the authorities would prefer just not to know. We have no deterrent. If we catch them, all we do is put them into the benefits system. Why go to the trouble and expense of searching for illegal immigrants if they are allowed to stay anyway?' The 2001–2 Home Office Business Plan targeted immigration interviews for cost-cutting. 'IND funding is tilted in favour of inactivity despite the dramatic increase in abuse', Sergeant concluded. One completely fed-up IO repeated to her the cliché many of them must often have used: 'If you ask no questions, you get told no lies.'

In the week prior to Sergeant's visit to Dover, nearly 300 clandestine illegals were discovered in the course of just three days, despite only a very small percentage of vehicles being checked. Sergeant extrapolated this to arrive at the figure of 300,000 people a year smuggled through the port of Dover alone. As cannot too often be repeated: nobody, not least the Home Secretary – who openly admits it – has even a remote clue as to how many illegal immigrants come into Britain each year, nor how many are here in total. It is not just road vehicles, but trains come across the channel unchecked at the French end and, when illegals are found on any

foreign-run train the companies simply refuse to accept their liability to pay fines.

As regards those who are not hiding but do actually present themselves, the situation is severely exacerbated by the operation of the Schengen Convention, to which the UK is not a signatory, whereas our EU partners all are. This legitimates Britain being treated as the EU's dumping ground for unwanted immigrants: a 'third country' within the meaning of the Convention. Although in this case migrants have actually gone to the trouble to get themselves some documentation, obtaining a Schengen area visa is remarkably easy. Alternatively, many come with fake ID. In general, the EU is the 'major means of illegal entry to the UK' by means of forged documents, according to the ISU. Sergeant was once again flabbergasted to find that: 'When immigration officers pointed out the widespread use of forged identity cards to the IND, the Home Office prevaricated. They feared travellers would get upset if they were stopped and questioned. The immigration officers persisted until the Home Office finally sent a note with the simple exhortation: "Do your best".' As we shall see, this (supposed) fear of upsetting people is the standard excuse the Home Office falls back upon to cop out of any responsibility for the failure of their gatekeeping function.

Summarising the whole debacle of the front line immigration chaos, Sergeant could not be clearer:

Every policeman and immigration officer I interviewed, not to mention immigration lawyers and aid workers, believed (whatever their political convictions, on this they all agreed) that immigration should be removed from the control of the Immigration & Nationality Department of the Home Office. Or, as one policeman remarked, Parliament should send in the audit office and take them apart 'in the public interest'. ... Both the police and the immigration officers to whom I talked believe the Home Office views immigration as a 'problem that can't be solved'. Their energies are directed, rather, towards 'bluffing the British public' that all is well in the wonderland of immigration.

This book is a testament that Managed Migration (and Work Permits) are failing at least as badly, and furthermore that even if any division of IND did work, the whole thinking behind immigration and asylum policy is fundamentally in error.