

Britain: Labour promotes anti-immigrant chauvinism

By Jordan Shilton
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British Labour Party leader Ed Miliband has intensified his party's promotion of anti-immigrant chauvinism. In two speeches now, Miliband has decried what he terms are uncontrolled levels of immigration, while advocating a strengthening of national identity.

On December 14, he delivered a speech in Tooting, south London, billed as a major address that would advance future policies if Labour were to return to government. In it, he said that the previous Labour government had "made mistakes" with immigration policy, chiefly its decision to allow unlimited migration from the 10 countries, mostly eastern European states, that joined the European Union in 2004.

The aim of Miliband's remarks was to place the blame for the disastrous decline in living standards for the broad mass of the working class in recent years onto immigrants and shift the debate sharply to the right. He claimed that there were legitimate concerns in Britain about the impact of uncontrolled immigration on the provision of key public services, which a future Labour government would address.

Miliband said nothing on the destructive role played by the financial elite, whose speculative activities over decades have in reality led to declining living standards and the decimation of public services—exemplified in the massive bailout for the banks from public funds that was one of Labour's real crimes when in office.

He indicated that Labour may accept the Conservatives' policy of an immigration cap, which is being enforced by implementing stricter conditions for entry into Britain.

Miliband demanded that all immigrants to Britain commit to learning English. He advocated that English proficiency be made a condition for employment in public sector jobs, and indicated that similar

discriminatory measures could be employed in the allocation of housing. Councils should cut budgets for providing translation services, he added, in favour of funding English language courses.

He made clear that far from being provided with assistance to improve their language skills, responsibility would be placed firmly on the individual and families to do so. He advocated the use of "home school agreements" to ensure that parents be made responsible for the English language abilities of their children. Under conditions where school budgets are being slashed nationally and the education system as a whole sold off to the private sector, such proposals are part of an agenda to eliminate public education.

His remarks naturally allowed Conservative Party prime minister David Cameron to go on the offensive. Cameron denounced Labour, stating, "They presided over a completely broken immigration system that over 10 years allowed 2 million people net come to the UK—that is two cities the size of Birmingham. What we inherited was a complete and utter meltdown and mess. Theresa May [the home secretary] made an excellent speech this week in which she explained some of the steps she has taken, including closing down 180 bogus colleges."

May's speech was a rant that promoted all the usual nostrums of anti-immigrant chauvinism. She cited census figures showing that "whites" were in the minority in London and vowed to impose the government's immigration cap. In particular, she emphasised the need to slash the number of international students coming to the UK by more than 100,000.

Miliband's anti-immigrant stance was based on a declared "one nation" vision borrowed wholesale from the Tories, which he had raised in his party conference

address in October. He concluded his speech on December 14 by declaring, “If we work hard, and we work together, we can build One Nation. A proper strategy for integration. So that we have a fair nation not an unjust one. A nation with common bonds, a common life, where everyone has a stake, not a segregated society.”

Two weeks later, in his new year’s message released December 28, Miliband continued on his “one nation” theme, stating, “One nation Labour is about reaching out to every part of Britain, it’s about a party that is as much the party of the private sector as the public sector, a party of south as well as north, a party determined to fight for the future of the United Kingdom, and a party rooted in every community of our land.”

The themes raised by Miliband—flag-waving nationalism, anti-immigrant chauvinism, support for the free market and a hostility to what remains of Britain’s welfare state—have been discussed in the party for some time. Such ideological positions were the basis for the formation of the Blue Labour faction in 2009 by the academic Maurice Glasman and leading Labour figures such as Jon Cruddas.

Glasman denounced the “state-driven, redistribution-driven, equality-driven Labour tradition that comes straight out of 1945” in a book entitled “The Labour tradition and the politics of paradox”. This work—endorsed by Miliband, who authored an introduction—outlined the standpoint of Blue Labour summed up as “flag, faith and family.”

Glasman wrote, “The blue refers to the centrality of family life, a recognition of the importance of faith, a real commitment to the work ethic, a very casual but nonetheless profound patriotism that people feel about England.”

He criticised the previous Labour government under Tony Blair, which he asserted had embraced a “globalisation” that had produced an “influx of immigrants”. Glasman went so far as to call for “engagement” with members of the English Defence League, a fascist organisation sponsored by the state that organises acts of violence and other provocations against immigrants.

Miliband took up this core message last summer, seizing on the occasions of the Queen’s diamond jubilee and the summer Olympics in London to

advocate nationalist politics. In *Daily June 7 Telegraph* article, Miliband wrote, “In the midst of the Jubilee, the European Football Championship and the Olympics, we have a unique chance to reflect on who we are as a country. And now, more than ever, with the Union under threat in Scotland, we need to talk about the different identities that make up the United Kingdom. In particular, we need to talk about England...we should talk about England as we forge a progressive patriotism which celebrates our differences and honours our people.”

Under conditions of the imposition of a social counter-revolution by the ruling elite throughout Britain, the anti-immigrant and nationalist demagoguery traditionally associated with the far right is seen as a useful tool to divert the mounting social anger in a reactionary direction to divert blame from the ruling elite for implementing the deepest austerity measures since the 1930s.

Miliband’s reactionary pronouncements were embraced by the *Guardian*. Jackie Ashley penned a piece in the traditional paper of the liberal “left” entitled, “Labour can afford to push harder on immigration”. Ashley argued, “There are some fundamentals on which Labour should be more forthright, less mealy-mouthed. One is language. What we want is a strong sense of common citizenship, obligation and rights going together. That’s always been the progressive position. But it’s impossible to fully participate if you don’t speak and understand English. Miliband is talking about this at last, but can afford to push harder.”

Working people must reject with contempt the entire framework of the official “immigration debate”. The resolution of the bitter and deep-seated social, economic and political problems confronting broad layers of the working class in Britain and internationally is only possible by tackling them at their root cause, which is the capitalist profit system.

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