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LIBERAL DEMOCRAT IMMIGRATION POLICY

Summary
1 Tough rhetoric about "control" seems designed to distract attention from the absence of limits of any kind.

Introduction
2 Liberal Democrat policy on immigration has three main strands : [1]
a) Emphasis on "control"
b) A scheme for directing immigration to some regions
c) Support for illegal immigrants to be allowed to "earn regularisation".

Control
3 There is strong emphasis on the need for control - a theme which features strongly in focus group discussions of immigration. The main Liberal Democrat attack is directed at the absence of checks on individuals as they arrive and depart. These were abolished for EU destinations by the Conservatives in 1994 and for the rest of the world by Labour in 1998. The Liberal Democrats can therefore attack both main parties, pointing out that the government no longer has any idea who is in the country. A scheme to replace the previous system of landing cards with "e-borders" has been in preparation for five years and will have 95% coverage by December 2010. It will not achieve full coverage for another two or three years. Liberal Democrat claims that they would introduce such checks "immediately" are not remotely practicable.

Comment: An easy target but stress on control is entirely hollow in the absence of any overall limits to immigration –only talk of "managed" inward migration.

Regional Migration
4 In an interview on the Andrew Marr show on 17 January 2010, Nick Clegg claimed that other countries had shown that it was "relatively easy" to target immigration at areas with proven labour shortages and away from crowded ones. He may have been thinking of Australia which allows state governments to offer their own incentives for immigrants. This is popular with some states but Australia is not comparable with the UK in this field;

- Britain is a small island with a population nearly three times that of Australia which, of course, is a continent.
- Consequently, distances are much smaller in respect of subsequent (internal) migration.
- The scheme is difficult to enforce, even in Australia which has a much more effective immigration system as well as exit checks.

5 Nick Clegg suggested that "It is relatively easy, when people register to work that they do so with local authority so you know who is working where. It is plausible. It works in other countries". The aim appears to be to create "post code prisoners" but this would be completely unenforceable in Britain. The local authorities have no powers to dictate where people should live - nor does the central government. The only possibility would be to deport those who were found to be in breach of their immigration conditions. For this to work they would have to be detected (unlikely) and then removed. The removal process is notorious for

opportunities for delay. After some years of residence in the UK there would be grounds to claim "a right to family life" (under the European Convention on Human Rights) to which Australia, of course, is not a party. After five years any such regional migrant would be entitled to apply for settlement and/or citizenship whereupon any movement restrictions would lapse.

Comment: Local immigration schemes are impossible to enforce in British conditions. They would rapidly become side doors to settlement.

6 In the specific case of Scotland there is no decline in population. Contrary to popular belief, the population of Scotland has been stable at about 5 million for past half century and is projected to increase by about 7% in the next 25 years. Scots are, indeed, ageing as is the case everywhere in the developed world but all authoritative studies have concluded that immigration is not a solution to the pensions problem. [2] As for the Borders region of Scotland, which Clegg mentioned, the present population is less than 1/5th of 1% of the UK population. To base immigration policy for the UK on the Borders would be a serious case of the tail wagging the dog.

7 It should be noted that, according to a poll published in The Sunday Times, 72% of the Scottish public are opposed to a regional migration scheme for Scotland because Scotland already had "too many immigrants". Only 16% agreed with the statement "I approve of this idea because Scotland needs more skilled workers" . [3]

8 The Migration Advisory Committee has considered whether there should be special arrangements for Scotland. They have concluded that occupations where shortages exist are very similar in Scotland to those in the UK as a whole. The specifically Scottish Shortage Occupations List is, as a result, a very short one .[4]

Earned Regularisation
9 This is a euphemism for an amnesty for illegal immigrants. It is strongly opposed by both major parties for the very good reason that it has been shown to attract even more illegal immigrants. The case of Spain is the clearest example where there have been six amnesties in the last 25 years; the number of claimants increased sharply as shown below [5]:

Spain					
1985/86	1991	1996	2000	2001	2005
44,000	135,000	21,000	127,000	314,000	700,000

10 A further consideration is the cost to the public purse of admitting what could well be nearly a million illegal immigrants to full access to the welfare state. There is also a very high risk of fraud since, by definition, none of these cases could be supported by documentary proof. A similar American scheme for Mexicans attracted 75% false applications.

Comment: Support for "earned regularisation" amounts to support for a continued, indeed increasing, volume of people entering Britain illegally or, more likely, staying on beyond their visas illegally.

Other policies
11 See Annex A

Asylum
12 The other aspect stressed by Liberal Democrats is "fairness" - particularly in regards to asylum. It should be born in mind, however, that the numbers granted asylum are running at about 7,500 a year compared to net foreign immigration of 163,000 in 2008. Asylum, therefore, is less than 5% of foreign immigration and, from the point of view of numbers, should be kept in perspective.

Conclusion

13 None of these policies contain any limits, expressed or implied, on future immigration.

6 March, 2010

NOTES

1.   http://www.libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/Policy%20Briefing%20%20Immigration%20Oct%2009.pdf

2.   http://www.migrationwatchuk.com/briefingPaper/document/179

3.   Cello MRUK poll for The Sunday Times, 29 August 2009.

4.   MAC Second review of shortage occupation lists. October 2009

5.   Home Office on-line report 58/04 Table 5.1.

6.   http://www.libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/Policy%20Briefing%20%20Immigration%20Oct%2009.pdf.

Annex A

Other Liberal Democrat Immigration Policies
1 In addition to their policy briefing paper on immigration, there is also one on asylum. [6]
2 The following are our comments:

Immigration

- Full complaints procedure for visa applicants.
  A review of the restrictions on rights of appeal is also promised. This would be an administrative nightmare given that two million visas are issued every year (and about half a million are refused). It would also be extremely costly. This proposal appeals to the immigrant communities but at the tax payers' expense.
- A surcharge on work permits.
  There is no harm in what amounts to a levy on work permits but the sums gained will be trivial compared to the actual costs of training British workers.
- A review of social housing allocation. The government have already adjusted the guidelines. Since June 2009 Local Authorities have been able to give greater weight to local connections and length of time on the waiting list.

Asylum

- Establishment of an Independent Asylum Agency.
  This has been tried in Canada but it was taken over by the asylum Industry. Applicants under the present system have the right of appeal to the courts which, of course, are independent.
- Permission to work after two months.
  A clear incentive for unfounded claimants. Ruled out by successive governments.
- Applications at embassies abroad.
  Dangerous for genuine applicants. An encouragement for false claims.