

Comment – Deidre Brock on the Immigration Bill

by Deidre Brock MP for Edinburgh North and Leith

This week brought another sad moment at Westminster when we saw a majority of MPs vote for an Immigration Bill that would remove our rights to freedom of movement.

This seeks to take millions of Europeans out of a system which works very well and make them subject to one which doesn't work at all. They are being told to join the queue in that miserable morasse of bureaucracy known as the UK's immigration system.

They too will become subject to the confusing, ever-changing mash of rules which have deliberately been designed to be hostile, to make things as costly and difficult as possible for vulnerable people, to split up families if they don't earn enough, to stop parents and grandparents visiting loved ones.

These rules are regularly changed at the whim of Ministers and without parliamentary scrutiny, based not on evidence but on a desire to be tough, pandering to prejudice and xenophobia. To add Europeans to the dysfunctional mess they have created, instead of fixing it, makes no sense.

It's not just the detail of this bill which I oppose – its core reason for existence is wrong. Freedom of Movement is one of the great joys of being a European citizen. It has enriched our lives in ways that can't be counted.

The negative myths that have been peddled about EU migrants are rubbish – and while not many of them are prepared to stand up for freedom of movement, both the UK Government and its

'official opposition' know the benefits it has brought.

[Even reports the UK Government commissioned into the impact of EU migration](#) concluded there was no negative impact on UK born workers' jobs or training opportunities, there was no increase in crime, no impact on the educational attainment of UK born children (although they are often outperformed by their multilingual classmates).

EU migrants offered a positive contribution to the economy through their taxes and a positive impact on health and social care services – adding far more to these services through work than they consume.

Instead of sticking to the facts and standing up for the rights of European citizens, we have had politicians from both Conservative and Labour benches prepared to cynically fan the flames of resentment, letting migrants take the blame for the policy failures of successive UK governments.

Removing freedom of movement, and imposing the recommended £30k salary threshold for future visas, will be absolutely devastating for the economy – and this will be most acutely felt in Scotland.

In Scotland's crucial food and drink sector, for example, there's an absolute reliance on migratory labour from field to fork. Non-UK EU nationals account for around half of the workforce in food processing and seafood sectors. 98% – almost all – of the official vets for Food Standards Scotland are EU nationals.



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Up to 22,000 non-UK seasonal migrant workers are employed in the soft fruit and veg sector. The pitiful plans for a pilot Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme with 2,500 visas available do not go anywhere near meeting the worker shortage that has been flagged up – it's almost an empty gesture.

Tourism too, will be devastated by the loss of European workers, particularly in remote and rural communities – this is an industry providing 200,000 jobs, 10.5 per cent of which are held by non-UK EU nationals.

Losing these workers will be a catastrophe for the economy. The President of NFU Scotland Andrew McCornick starkly warned that ['we cannot feed our nation without this labour'](#).

When will the UK Government stop dismissing the experts, consider the evidence and put a halt to this sorry business?

Scotland did not vote to be pulled out of the EU yet the concerns of The Scottish Government, the Scottish people and Scottish businesses have been dismissed. There has been no attempt to recognise our vote or take sensible steps to meet our differing demographic needs.

To be stripped of freedom of movement rights and have these kind of damaging rules imposed upon us would be an act of political and cultural vandalism.