

Local immigrants set up opposition to restrictions

A CALL for local action to fight the proposed "squalid additional restrictions" on immigration, went out to a 100-strong multi-racial meeting in Oldham on Sunday. And, keeping a silent watch on proceedings, were eight members of the National Front, who marched out halfway through the two-hour session.

Guest speaker at the public meeting, in Greenhill Community Centre, was Mr. Ian Martin, a leading authority on immigration law.

Mr. Martin, from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, said that local opposition, as well as national demonstrations, was vital.

But it was unlikely to block Tory proposals from becoming law.

"We might effect some small changes, but we won't stop the Government from making these new squalid additional restrictions—the most directly racist proposals any government has made yet," he said.

"Such controls are nothing new. What is new is that people are now willing to fight against this racist numbers game in immigration.

"What we are doing is building a campaign that will eventually be unstoppable in bringing down the racism evident in our immigration control.

'An attack'

"Future governments will then realise they have the massive weight of public opinion against them if they try to introduce further restrictions."

Mr. Martin said that the Asian community would be the most directly affected by the new restrictions. But they were aimed "against black people in general".

Families from the Caribbean would be prevented from looking after an elderly parent in this country. And the proposed new rules were "an attack on all the rest of us committed to racial equality and integration".

The Home Secretary, Mr. William Whitelaw, who outlined the package, last Wednesday, claimed that it did

CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT 'SQUALID' LAWS

not discriminate on the ground of race.

Yet he agreed to use his own powers of discretion to allow in foreign husbands of white women born outside the UK.

Under the new proposed rules, no Asian girl who was a full British citizen would not be granted the same rights as another born of Asian parents in this country.

No husbands, or fiancées, would be admitted where the couple were thought not to have met before—even though the woman was born in this country.

"This is a clumsy effort to stop arranged marriages. Ministers are going around smearing the Asian community by talking about arranged marriages as though they are in themselves an abuse," said Mr. Martin.

"To justify his proposals Mr. Whitelaw is attacking a cultural tradition."

It was already very difficult for immigrant families to get permission to look after an elderly parent in this country. They had to prove that the parent was financially dependent on them.

Students

The new proposals would make it "virtually impossible" for an elderly parent to come to Britain in future.

"Here is a government that applauds white families who assume responsibility for an elderly person, saying to the immigrant community, 'You are not to be allowed to do so'," said Mr. Martin.

"All this so that 1,000 or so can be dropped from the immigration figures at great distress to the families concerned."

There would more problems, too, for overseas students. Their wives would not be allowed to work, and they themselves would be restricted to a maximum of four years' stay in Britain.

More powers would be given to immigration officers.

But, although these new measures had not yet reached the statute book, when they did—in December, or January—they would be effective retrospectively from their announcement on November 14.

Applications made before this date would, however, be treated under the old immigration law.

Tougher

Mr. Martin went on to warn of the threat of even more restrictive legislation. Mr. Whitelaw, he said, has made no reference, yet, to the suggestion of new nationality laws. These would almost certainly mean more difficulties in obtaining UK citizenship, and would end dual nationality—meaning that those who became UK citizens would have to give up their rights if they returned to their country of origin.

Already sensing the new political climate, immigration officers were exercising tougher controls, said Mr. Martin. A total of 1,200 immigrants were refused entry at London airport in August—a rise of 40 per cent.

He referred to the extensive legal powers over the arrest and detention of alleged

illegal immigrants. They could be returned to their country of origin without being given a chance to challenge the evidence against them.

And, he concluded: "We must express the widest possible opposition to these proposals, in a very limited time."

"Pressure must be brought to bear on the MPs who will be voting on them. We can show that there is much more public opposition, than there has ever been before, to these racist proposals."

"And the extent of public opposition could make them the last. In future we can then argue on our terms about reform of existing legislation."

Mr. James Chapman, vice-chairman of Oldham Council for Racial Equality, said the new proposals would be discussed at an open meeting of the council, on Thursday.

'Disgust'

"We want to show our disgust and fight them as much as possible," he added.

Many speeches at the meeting—chaired by Mr. Dave Hannay of the Oldham co-ordinating committee on immigration laws—were translated into Urdu and Bangladeshi by interpreters.

And the meeting heard of several local cases where present immigration laws had separated families.

Mr. Jabban Ali, of Belmont Street, Oldham, said that he was separated from his wife and five children who were in Bangladesh—because two of his children were born there.

He had left for Bangladesh with his wife and three children—who were all British citizens—in 1975. But when he wanted to come back to this country, the authorities claimed that he had made false tax claims, and kept his passport for 19 months.

Two more children were born while the family was out there, and now they could not get back.

Discrepancies

A Rochdale mother of three, born in Birmingham, told of her fight to bring back her children from Pakistan.

Mrs. Anwar Sultana Ditta (25) said she had been fighting since 1975 to be reunited with them. She married her husband in Pakistan, in 1968, when she was 15, and returned to England about four years ago, but the children were not allowed to follow.

The Home Office said that the couple had not established that they were the parents of the three children, there were serious discrepancies concerning her age, her husband's overstay in the UK, and their second marriage in England, in 1975.

She said: "My parents separated, I was placed in my father's custody and sent to Pakistan when I was nine, to live with my grandparents. My mother and father live here, but I and my children are being made to suffer because of what my parents did."

"I appealed against the decision in July and was told to ring again in 1980-1. My mother-in-law, who looks after the children, is sick, and if anything happens to my children the Government will be to blame."