

## **Immigration will make us hungry.**

In 1973 I was campaigning, as part of a national effort, to raise awareness of overpopulation in the UK. We gathered signatures on a petition calling for improvements to the family planning services then on offer, and for education to address the risks arising from ever growing numbers. Despite our best efforts nothing seems to have changed much. UK population back then was 56 million, now it's 64 million.

The opening times of NHS family planning clinics are still pretty limited – some opening for only a couple of hours on one day per week, or even alternate weeks. This is particularly noticeable in services designed for students or young people generally, though open discussion of the subject is now normal. Where educating students on the hazards of overpopulation is concerned, curricula include the study of sustainability and numbers, but it's shoehorned into a welter of required subjects as just another topic to be ticked off; special enthusiasm is needed from already stressed teachers to focus on the subject as the key to future social wellbeing.

But this subject will never go away: in simplest terms, as numbers rise, resources shrink. Population Matters campaigns on overpopulation: we talk about the situation on the planet and the state of affairs in the UK and England, and we're in the best possible company, including David Attenborough, Chris Packham, Martin Luther King, and many others – look at our page <http://www.populationmatters.org/making-case/quotations/> and you'll see how many.

The problem is the same, but the emphasis is changing. Whilst, at this pivotal time in history, family planning and contraception are crucial pathways to a viable future for the World, the new risk for the UK is excessive immigration - a massive driver of ever rising numbers, especially in cities of preferred destination in England.

At the time of writing, pre-election 2015, most political parties have something to say about the high level of immigration, offering suggestions about what they might do in government to soothe public anxieties. Bucking the trend, the Greens proclaim that people across the World should have the right to travel to anywhere they would like to live. As there are nearly a billion people living in poverty, many of them hungry, the prospect of a significant proportion heading for Europe and the UK is an ill-considered idea. At the other end of the spectrum UKIP have made strong pronouncements, saying they will leave the EU and take back control of our borders.

To be precise, the significant numbers most often quoted are in fact those of Net Immigration - the numbers coming in annually minus those going out. That's so far as anybody can tell, since the resources devoted to actually counting the relevant flows are hopelessly inadequate. So we should perhaps say that the *best guess* for net migration to the UK was:

*"... 243,000 in the year ending March 2014, according to latest provisional estimates .."*

or so says the Office of National Statistics. The ONS goes on to say that these figures refer to what it calls Long Term International Migrants, that is:

*"... someone who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence."* (1)

This, again according to the ONS, is part of an ongoing trend, which if continued sees the overall UK population rising from the current 64 million to 70 million by 2027. That boils down to 12 cities the size of Manchester. Of this growth, 60% is due either to direct net immigration (43%), or to the higher fertility levels and younger ages of the bulk of the incomers (17%). As reported in The Times on March 17<sup>th</sup>, the latter statistic is illustrated by comments from a Home Office Minister, Lord Bates,

who had told the House of Lords on March 16<sup>th</sup> that foreign born mothers have on average more children; most recently available figures show that, in 2013, a quarter of all UK births were to mothers born outside the UK, the highest ratio since records started 46 years ago. This significant trend is related to fertility rates. The latest figures show that the total fertility rate of immigrant mothers is 2.19, whilst for UK born mothers it is 1.79 (2). 60% of projected population rise due to net immigration leaves 40% attributable to other factors; these include still increasing longevity and the children of baby boomers reproducing their numbers, some still above personal replacement.

Population Matters concentrates on overpopulation as a threat to a viable future; in this article I highlight net immigration as the *largest single factor* contributing to the UK situation, since immigrants cannot bring land and accommodation with them. England itself is already Europe's most densely populated country.

But does all this really matter? It's not helpful to add to the already fraught debate around cultural differences. Whilst the horrors of female genital mutilation and degrading rituals are deplored, the diversity of food, colourful customs and range of useful skills introduced by immigrants add to our identity, as they have over centuries. Break down each migration statistic to a living person, and we usually find somebody like us, in search of a life better than that of comparative hardship from which they are trying to escape, and for which chance most are usually willing to work hard.

But, unfortunately, it does matter very much, since, to reiterate: "...as numbers rise, resources shrink". And that's the main point. The argument that "We are a nation of immigrants..." may be true as an historical generalisation but it is irrelevant to the current situation which is vastly different.(3). Where once the land was quiet and forested, with abundant space available for the axe and plough, the same spaces are now an intense patchwork of agricultural fields, dense urban conurbations and smaller suburban communities, all with their busy infrastructure. Yet we all depend upon the land for food, that most important resource of all, so it is on this we need to focus for the long term, even whilst in the short term the NHS, accommodation, and services generally sag under growing numbers.

Despite the best efforts of farmers, we now produce about 60% of all that we eat, enough to feed about 38 million people with current consumption patterns. This percentage has declined steadily over the years, despite DEFRA's rejigging of the statistics in 1998 (4). Accurate data are difficult to find, but a common assumption is that about 30% of food is wasted along what Tesco refers to as the 'value chain' from growth to consumption. In the unlikely event that every scrap of food produced were to be used, then a back of the envelope calculation tells us that we could feed about 54 million.

DEFRA had considered this, and concluded that  
*"A radical and prolonged breakdown in European and international trade or shipping would not undermine the UK's fundamental ability to produce enough nutritious food for the population, albeit with much simpler diets",*

continuing that:

*"Maximising calorie production would require a dramatic reduction in livestock production with all crop production used for human food where possible instead of animal feed ... the UK could produce more than enough food to feed itself with a much changed diet."* (5)

DEFRA therefore assumed that we might need to change to more vegetarian food and eliminate waste, though the kind of vegetarianism that encompasses dairy products would in any case include livestock.

At the time of DEFRA's announcement, the UK population was about 62 million. Respected commentators such as Simon Fairlie had earlier produced carefully calculated strategies, some

including veganism, whereby such a number could be catered for, though Fairlie had based each of his plans on a population of 60.6 million. He sensibly had included food waste as food for pigs and poultry, though this is currently illegal.<sup>(6)</sup> Given current population and immigration statistics, it is plain that, should things continue as projected, we shall have to grow more food on less land, the rest having been built over to accommodate numbers envisaged neither by DEFRA nor Fairlie. We shall thus need to seek increasing amounts of food on world markets to keep the wolf from the door, a situation which begs the question: “Shall we find enough food around the World to feed the projected numbers?”

No crystal ball can answer that question. So far as sourcing food from the EU is concerned, elsewhere on this website I have stated:

*The population projections for the EU show only a modest increase by 2050, which may imply enough food to feed the inhabitants, though the possibility is clouded by .. soil loss, and also by uncertainty regarding available fuel to power the technology and by mass migrations fleeing the chaos across the Mediterranean.*

To break this statement down: the current population of the EU is 507 million, projected to increase to 517m by 2030 and 514m by mid-century <sup>(7)</sup>; the exodus to Europe from North and Sub-Saharan African is a phenomenon which has likely increased since the statistics were compiled, and may not have been included in the projections.

Soil loss is a problem for the EU:

*The European Agricultural Conservation Foundation has estimated that soil erosion and degradation caused by conventional agriculture affect c. 157 million ha (16% of Europe, roughly three times the total surface of France). Average soil erosion rates in Europe are judged to exceed the average rate of soil formation, with most EU countries affected. In the Mediterranean – from which the UK derives much horticultural produce – soil erosion is deemed “very severe”. <sup>(8)</sup>*

The health of UK soil will therefore become increasingly important as the century progresses, but that’s not in the best shape either, as a recent study by scientists at the University of Sheffield has concluded that

“ ... we only have 100 harvests left unless dramatic action is taken ... ” <sup>(9)</sup>

Fuel available for agriculture and all other food processes will become scarcer and thus dearer. Current low oil prices are an anomaly, not a trend. The latest trumpeting of massive oil discoveries beneath the Weald should be treated with caution: even if completely validated they would only make a blip if sold on the world market, whilst the idealised claim reported in *Proactiveinvestors UK* by UK Oil and Gas chief executive Stephen Sanderson that “...By 2030 we could produce 10%-to-30% of the UK's oil demand from within the Weald area” seems to assume that the UK would keep it all, and that the remaining 70% - 90% would be accessible internationally, despite generally dwindling reserves and the fiercest competition. <sup>(10)</sup>

So where do we stand when sourcing food from further afield? Competition is stiffening and an international land grab is underway. With a current World population of about 7.3 billion (that’s seven thousand three hundred million) projected – on current trends – to reach about 9.6 billion by mid century (that’s nine thousand six hundred million), that is hardly surprising. An article in *The Economist* points out that “*Food is becoming the new oil*” and goes on to list countries, often with their own pressing needs, whose autocratic rulers prefer to lease land options to foreign investors.

Thus -

*The Sudanese government has leased 1.5 million hectares of prime farmland to the Gulf States, Egypt and South Korea for 99 years...*

*Kuwait has leased 130,000 hectares of rice fields in Cambodia.*

*Egypt plans to grow wheat and corn on 840,000 hectares in Uganda.*

*The president of the Democratic Republic of Congo has offered to lease 10 million hectares to the South Africans.*

*This spring,[2009] the king [of Saudi Arabia]attended a ceremony where he took delivery of the first export rice harvest, produced exclusively for the kingdom in hunger-stricken Ethiopia (11).*

The list continues, with China – a nation of 1.3 billion – moving strongly into other nations: *China is already the largest purchaser of both soy and other agricultural commodities from Brazil – having recently jumped ahead of the EU. Its demand is helping to drive intensive farming into previously undeveloped areas of the richly biodiverse Brazilian Cerrado, say observers. “The Cerrado in Brazil is fast becoming a soybean monoculture largely to feed the Chinese market,” says Janet Larson, from the Earth Policy Institute. “Soybean farmers have been pushing cattle farmers further into the Brazilian Amazon rainforest. (12)*

This situation is exacerbated by ongoing pollution which renders much of China’s soil dangerous to use, creating impetus to the need for her to look abroad.

The link between Net Immigration as the largest contributory factor to our swelling numbers, and food security, is thus considerable. And what should our attitude to that be? As with all problems relating to overpopulation, any stance we take must ultimately be ethical.

Most of us no doubt feel moved to ease the suffering we see in the media every day. To do that we can offer sanctuary to the worst affected and turn a blind eye to the thousands who are in the UK illegally. In either case we could certainly do more to prioritize those in the most desperate need, for which purpose a vetting system already exists, albeit one hopelessly under-resourced. But there must be limits, which can only be achieved, ultimately, by a policy of zero-net immigration. Otherwise, when we have conserved whatever can be conserved, reduced whatever waste can be reduced, returned many of our hard-won wildlife reserves to arable land – or built over them - changed our diets to whatever menu can keep us alive, and have reached a situation where we have done all we can to accommodate numbers, and it dawns upon us that real hunger has become a feature of national life - what then? Projections beyond those dates quoted above envisage no significant tailing off.

Immediate compassion should not exclude care for future generations in the UK. Surely, our children and later descendants have the same right as many of us still have to enjoy the beauty and harvest time of the countryside. Or must we be content to see it fade away and become accessible only to the dwindling few with the wealth to purchase space and security? Must we quietly accept denser congestion, rising crime levels, failing services, ever more cramped living accommodation, increasing shortages of energy, and ultimately of food?

Thirty or forty years ago, with sound international and UK foresight – all available to the interested at the time - the current quagmire could have been largely averted; but we are, where we are. There are now no easy or pleasant answers, but the situation will not go away. The readers of this article will, with their children, become increasingly enmeshed – unless we all begin to discuss the situation and agitate for change.

One thing we must at all costs avoid is to blame immigrants as people, instead of mass immigration as a failing policy. The former are humans like us; the latter is a product of weak government, interested only in short terms of office. But manage the situation we must, or the bullies of the extreme right will fill the no-man’s-land into which few commentators have dared tiptoe. We must resist the specious argument that we need low-paid workers to support the aged, since they also will age and add to the situation, and the immorality of plundering developing nations of their brightest experts. We can train to any level of any skill needed - to claim incompetence in that, is to imply that our citizens are somehow inferior.

We cannot solve the World's problems. By continuing to act only in the short term our politicians introduce policies which satisfy some of the current electorate, but damage the future wellbeing of the majority; that is not the purpose for which we elect them.

Edmund Davey

April 16<sup>th</sup> 2015.

- (1) ONS migration statistics quarterly report August 2014.
- (2) Total Fertility Rate (tfr) is a statistical term which indicates what would be the fertility trend in mothers in the lowest age group, were they to follow the same rate of fertility as all the other mothers up to the highest child-bearing age. Replacement Fertility - that number of children born per mother which would be just sufficient to replace a given (Developed World) country's population – is 2.1. From the tfr's cited above, it is clear that the differential fertility rates of the groups noted would inevitably lead to a change to the relative proportions of those groups in the UK; this is, of course, additional to the actual annual net numbers of new incomers.
- (3) *QUOTE: Britain has experienced many relatively small episodes of immigration over the centuries. For nearly a thousand years migration was on a very small scale compared to the size of the population. In the decades between the Second World War and the late 1990s, foreign immigration grew steadily at a relatively modest rate before declining in the late 1960s and becoming fairly stable between 1971 and 1981. The massive increase in the level of migration since the late 1990s is utterly unprecedented in the country's history, dwarfing the scale of anything that went before.* <http://www.migrationwatchuk.com/Briefingpaper/document/48>
- (4) *QUOTE: In 1998 DEFRA changed its method of assessing our self sufficiency, so that the figures lifted from 53% to 68%. By March 09, however, the new methodology could only claim 60%* [http://www.populationmatters.org/documents/food\\_problem.pdf?phpMyAdmin=e11b8b687c20198d9ad050fbb1aa7f2f](http://www.populationmatters.org/documents/food_problem.pdf?phpMyAdmin=e11b8b687c20198d9ad050fbb1aa7f2f)
- (5) DEFRA UK Food Security Assessment: Detailed Analysis, Aug 2009, pp 60 & 61. The statement was authorised by Hilary Benn, then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- (6) The Land 4, Winter 2007 – 8: Can Britain Feed Itself?
- (7) Population Reference Bureau Washington, 2014 data
- (8) Rethinking Britain's Food Security, David Barling, Rosalind Sharpe, Tim Lang, Centre for Food Policy City University London; A research report for the Soil Association, November 2008
- (9) My Science website, Oct 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014.
- (10) *QUOTE: These figures should be treated with caution. They may be perfectly accurate but no one will know for 20 to 30 years," said Professor Richard Selley, of Imperial College London, who was one of the academics to peer-review the British Geological Survey's assessment of the Weald Basin. ...Dr Doug Parr, chief scientist of Greenpeace UK, said: "Energy analysts are right to take these claims with a pinch of salt. The Horse Hill site estimates are based on findings from only one well and contradict the UK's leading geological experts".* *Independent Business 100415*
- (11) Economist August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009 (Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan)
- (12) China Dialogue: China should ditch some of its self-sufficiency targets; June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.