



---

# A People's Immigration Policy

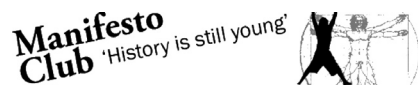
Christian Michel

A Manifesto Club Thinkpiece

---

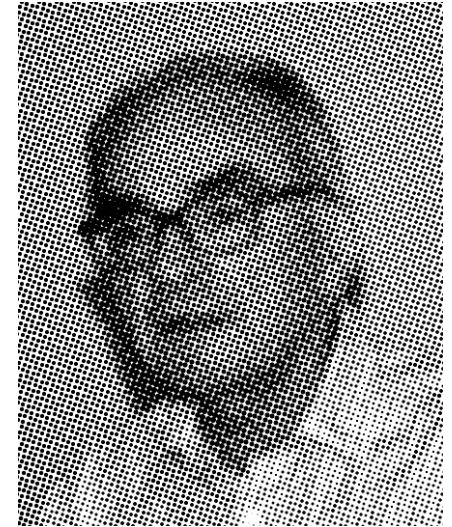
## About Thinkpieces

Our ambition at the Manifesto Club is to start to develop the theory and substance of a new progressive politics. Thinkpieces are deep-thinking, spirited proposals for how to do things better in a particular area of life, written by Manifesto Club members from all over the world. Subjects can range from education policy to the running of a local school, from immigration to public culture. For more information, or if you are interested in writing a Thinkpiece, see [www.manifestoclub.com/thinkpieces](http://www.manifestoclub.com/thinkpieces); or email Josie. [Appleton@manifestoclub.com](mailto:Appleton@manifestoclub.com)



## About the Author

Born and educated in Paris, Christian Michel did odd jobs in the film and advertising industries, before entering real life as telex operator at an American stock broking firm. Working his way up the corporate ladder, he became finance director of a public company in Geneva, before running his own business. In 2001, Christian Michel moved to London. Here he hosts salons and intellectual gatherings, both informally and at the French Institute on Saturday mornings: these events are a magnet for London's curious and questioning. He carries out consultancy for a variety of organisations, and is president of Libertarian International, and a director of ISIL and the Libertarian Alliance.



**In short...**

State immigration policies obstruct our private relationships with colleagues, friends or partners from different countries.

Governments are unable to judge who would, or who would not, make a valuable addition to a country.

Building walls between people who want to shake hands cannot be morally glorious. Immigration policy should be placed in the hands of the people.

Citizens should be free to 'invite' over people from other countries to live here – for work, pleasure, or love.

Is there a contradiction in the globalisation discourse? It calls for the free movement of goods and services across borders, but not of human beings. Trade should be liberalised, apparently, but men and women should remain stuck where they are. The double standard would be odious if it didn't overlook the obvious: goods do not land on our doorstep 'uninvited'. If they travel from one country to another, it is because individuals and corporations at destination need them and value them enough to specifically order them and pay for their shipment. If goods were not expected on arrival, they would not be transported in the first place, or would end up littering the streets and in junkyards.

No one expects our government to decide what goods should be imported and what other goods should be denied entry into the country. Our economy would soon resemble that of the Soviet Union, with shortages and waste, misallocations of resources, ultimately causing appalling human costs. Yet, it is our government that sets immigration policies; it allocates visas and residence permits according to its own Gosplan, and the resulting human costs at home and abroad are staggering.

This is a time when many of us have friends, colleagues and partners from a variety of different countries. Yet these private relationships are frequently obstructed by state bureaucracies; those with whom we want to live or work are kept out, merely because they do not fit into the state's visa categories.

Two types of individuals cross borders. Tourists make up the first lot. The statistical definition of the term includes business travellers, and finance ministers love tourists because they support their stay in the host country with means they bring from their own. In a mercantilist view of the economy, this is deemed beneficial. The other category is less popular. These new arrivals not only intend to live permanently in the country, but, many argue, on the country. They are migrant workers. They come with hope, ambitions and courage, all qualities that may not immediately translate into tax contributions. Meanwhile, they free-ride on the capital amassed by their hosts, straining the capacity of public services.

Migrants end up being caught in a double-bind. So long as they are not integrated, migrants are blamed for living on state handouts and for creating alien enclaves with people of the same ethnic and religious background. As soon as they integrate, their crime is to compete with the local workforce, driving down wages, bidding up rents, crowding schools with their children and hospitals with their elderly. Government is called upon to regulate the influx, even turn off the tap, or at least to pick and choose the best elements to allow in.

But is it wise? Do we really need an immigration policy - and is not government intervention in this field compounding the problem rather than solving it? Would it not be better for citizens themselves to decide who they want to come here, by 'inviting' over people from abroad, as employees, nannies, friends, collaborators, lovers?

### **The economic argument**

The most popular anti-immigration argument is the economic one. Economics sounds rational. The existence of free 'public goods' and the availability of welfare benefits would act as a magnet on the planet's poor. They flock to the easy life in the land of plenty. The proposition seems to make sense in our social-democratic societies. Quite a few of our nationals are happy to live on the dole, and perhaps more would, were it not for controls.

It is hard to believe, however, that young and enterprising people will give up all that is familiar, leave behind a spouse, kids, friends, relatives, and take the risks of a journey in the hands of human traffickers to face the hostility of an alien culture, all because they are too lazy to get a job. On the face of it, it would seem that the reverse is true. The overwhelming majority of migrants are here to work, and work hard. Of course, if they are offered benefits, migrants will take them, as do their local co-workers. Why not?

Interestingly enough, there is a long-standing nationalism underlying state welfarism. I remember many years ago I was sitting on an airplane next to a Frenchman who engaged the conversation by mentioning he was a tax inspector. Making sure not to disclose my full identity, I asked him in the course of the conversation to give me one good reason why I ought to pay taxes. 'What about helping the poor?' he offered. 'Indeed. Shall I not then send my tax money to Haiti or Niger?' 'Not at all', protested the friend of the poor, banging the armrest between us. 'You are French, and your contribution must go to the French!' It does not take long to find the nationalist hiding behind every bureaucrat.

Sacrifices are better accepted if the beneficiaries are kindred [1]. Somehow there is a feeling among the British, the French, the Dutch, etc...that they and their fathers worked hard to create their present prosperity and they see little reason why other people who lacked the same energy and ingenuity should now have a share of it. Let's not even consider the moral case, but only hard facts and figures. I am not an economist, but many statistics I have seen show that immigrants globally are self-sufficient. They don't want anything they have not earned. Not unexpectedly, when you think of it. Migrants are generally young, healthy and single, and will need little medical care. If, ultimately, they are joined by a family, putting kids at school and calling on the NHS, it is when their integration into the workforce has made them net tax contributors to this country [2].

But if they do work and pay taxes, is it not that immigrants nabbed jobs from host country workers, undercutting local salaries and working

conditions? Yes, maybe. And...?

When we were buying goods and services, were we not shopping for the best quality at the lowest price, shunting out the market producers who couldn't deliver? A few of us may be now the shunted out - until we find new activities. Isn't that fair? Could we expect that the sauce for the goose would not be sauce for the gander? The protectionist argument springs to mind again here. Jobs should be for the locals. In a funny sort of way, that protectionism is one of the roots of the present wave of immigration. Throughout the past two centuries, the rich countries' measures to make life easier for their farmers and industrialists have not only inflated their populations' cost of living; they have also deprived the poorest producers abroad of their best chance to improve their condition. The most enterprising are now converging here to get the jobs we denied them there.

The nationalist reaction in smallish European states is to claim '*Das Boot ist voll*' when new faces peek in, as the Swiss 65 years ago told refugees from neighbouring fascist regimes. (At least the Swiss had an excuse: food did not come by easily in this infertile mountainous country, entirely surrounded by great powers at war, while half the world today is begging fortress Europe to take in more of their agricultural products.) But when is the boat full? Unlike animals, human beings are not predators of their environment. An increase in animal population means ultimately less food will be available, whereas since human beings ceased being hunter-gatherers we increased resources through farming and the division of labour. We don't simply take what Mother Nature has on offer, we make her produce more, we substitute one depleting resource for another, and it is questionable whether the sum total of her resources is finite. Everyone alive today bears witness that Malthus was wrong. Britain supports in relative affluence a population 10 times larger than the killjoy East India Company economist ever thought possible.

A high-population density is not a bad thing. It intensifies the division of labour. What our limited minds cannot assimilate will be processed for us by others while we provide them with what we are best at. Hayek

correctly perceived that 'we have become civilized by the increase of our numbers, just as civilization made that increase possible: we can be few and savage, or many and civilized.'

Cities throughout history and their phenomenal expansion since the Industrial Revolution are striking illustrations. The population cities attracted, often as ethnically and culturally diverse as present-day immigrants to Britain, far from impoverishing their culture and economy, fostered their development in a cumulative process that has been characteristic of human progress. Think Istanbul in the sixteenth century, Prague and Vienna at the end of the Habsburg Empire, and observe today's great cosmopolitan cities. (And conversely, consider the demise of once flourishing centres of trade and culture after a myopic, if not criminal, nationalist policy 'cleansed' them of their 'alien' populations: Smyrna, Alexandria, Salonika....)

Purity in societies is lethal. Life has more imagination than all of us combined, and we cannot stir population change in the direction we believe is best without restraining its abundance to our narrow comprehension.

### **The cultural argument**

But are not these considerations dryly materialistic? Even if it is proven that immigration leads to more prosperity, some people may prefer to live frugally but among their own kind. Indeed, it is the reason so many poor do *not* emigrate. They will not abandon life in the ancestral village for the prospect of riches abroad. It is a perfectly respectable decision. But ought they to impose this choice on others? I have always believed that one of the assets of Western society is our freeing of clannish and tribal fetters, and our right to associate with whomever we please.

The question of migration (*in or out*) becomes therefore: *who makes the decision?* If I do not wish to live among my clan, be bound by a stifling tradition, or subjected to an oppressive regime, is it not my human right to

seek out abroad other people to associate with and join them if they want me?

And if they do want me, why should I be prevented from joining them? If a church or charity or any organisation considers its mission is to offer shelter here to victims of wars and persecutions abroad, isn't this an admirable project that many among us will want to support? If I wish to invite my Brazilian girlfriend to stay with me in London, or associate with a Russian oligarch, or an Indian accountant, or a Senegalese musician (yes, these are clichés), should it not be our joint decision to live or work together? Why should I have to ask anyone's permission, least of all some grey official in some Kafkaesque ministry?

Whatever the issue, there will always be people eager to interfere with the lives of others. That is what politics is about. A bunch of activist pests, often not even a majority, claim to know what is best for everybody and call upon the government to enforce their views on innocent fellows who think otherwise. So unpleasant! Government intervention might be necessary, or so goes the theory, to provide a service and impose payment through taxes when nobody can be excluded feasibly from the service. Her Majesty's Navy defends all of us on this island. It cannot specify: 'except old Mrs Jones, of Nottingham, who is a pacifist; and Abdullah Al-Saudi, of north London, who would welcome an invasion by fellow jihadists.' The justice system likewise is applicable to everyone, especially those criminals who would be happier without it.

This standard justification of government action, however, is plainly irrelevant to the case of immigration. A strain of activists may deem this island is overpopulated already, and another one may fear that Christian families will be overtaken by more prolific Muslim ones. These assessments, even if correct, give neither group the right to decide how many children, if any, my wife and I must produce. So if people ought not to decide on the number of individuals I may add to the local population through sexual reproduction, why should they have anything to say about the number of individuals I invite for love, work or pleasure?

### Let the people decide

Immigration policy should be placed in the hands of citizens themselves. Of course, objections come fast and furious. First, as we have said, it is not just a matter of numbers, but of culture. Children raised here are moulded by the school system, calibrated and formatted into true and loyal British subjects (theoretically!), while *adult* immigrants come with a baggage (such as my accent and grave reservations concerning Fashoda). Somebody – the government, of course – must make sure that individuals allowed into this country will not tear up its delicate economic and cultural fabric. Not anarchic, but 'selective' immigration must be the sensible policy, with bureaucrats making the selection. In other words, immigration has to remain a nationalised industry.

With the same predictable results of all nationalised industries: monopoly, bureaucracy, ignorance and arrogance.

Competition is the rational process of exploring reality. When any organisation is granted a monopoly it finds itself looking at its mission from its restricted particular viewpoint. It cannot benefit (and neither can we, the public) from different approaches that would be initiated by players in that field – a variety of potential solutions to be emulated and improved upon. This rational process is the norm in science, the arts and business.

When a government, as Mr Sarkozy's in France, loudly declares it will enforce '*selective immigration*', it must have in mind a selection criterion, such as 'immigration that is beneficial to the country' or 'immigration that is needed by the economy'. But, of course, it does not have a clue. The government has no way of discerning whether young Fatima is a potential scholar who will honour the Sorbonne, or a future lapdancer in Pigalle; whether Omar will become a commodity trader or a drug dealer (same business, but governments prefer the former to the latter).

It is not only that busy bureaucrats cooped up in a Ministry for the Selection of Promising Aliens cannot filter out skivers, frauds and

terrorists; it does not even know who to filter in. Who defines what the economy requires? From its limited viewpoint the government may believe France is short of builders and IT engineers (I am making these needs up, exactly as the government does). That opinion is likely to have been informed by favoured business interests, but are these the 'voice of France'?

Any government tends to identify with the clique running the country's major industries, whether the 'red managers' in the old USSR or the Fortune 500 CEOs in the USA. It could well be, however, that what the country calls for is not represented by any lobby. Granting work permits to tens of thousands of housemaids is certainly not on France's immigration agenda, but the measure may help as many skilled mothers to retain qualified jobs and could prove more beneficial to these mothers' wellbeing and the economy as a whole than allowing in foreigners to fill in the same jobs. Who knows? Working mums (even less so would-be working mums) have no political clout. Nor should they. In a free and moral society each individual – mother or tycoon – ought to be free to associate with whoever wishes that association, whether they come from Milan, Manila or Manchester. Building walls between people who want to shake hands cannot be morally glorious.

Only these myriads of individual decisions will define what the economy – read the people – really needs in matters of immigration.

And then, let's welcome with open arms and open eyes immigrants who are seeking freedom and prosperity, as we would ourselves if we were in their shoes (or without any).

## **Endnotes**

[1] The strength of nations-states is their capacity to mobilise. Multinational empires, typically the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman ones, could not secure the loyalty of ethnic group in times of conflicts (why would a Czech regiment sacrifice itself to allow the retreat of a Slovenian one?). What is called 'racism' today is often the reluctance of one population to pay social services benefiting another. 'When you confer citizenship on a low-skill immigrant, you are granting them the right to use the electoral process to access your income' is an argument often heard.

[2] See a recent Trades Union Congress report, *Economics of Migration*, which supports the Home Office conclusion that migrant workers contribute more to the British economy than the costs of the public services they receive.