

## **What the Immigrants Can Do for Us; or the Socio-economic Consequences of Mr Blunkett**

The University of Buckingham welcomed Professor David Coleman, who on September 8<sup>th</sup>, gave a seminar entitled 'What the immigrants can do for us; or the socio-economic consequences of Mr Blunkett.' David Coleman is Professor of Demography at the University of Oxford. He discussed one of the most controversial contemporary issues in national and international politics: migration. He described the shift in policies and attitudes towards immigration that took place since 1997, with the incoming Labour government, especially under David Blunkett as Home Secretary. Since the late 1950s a restrictive policy on immigration was aimed at keeping immigration to the UK to a minimum. Now, the commitment for 'minimising permanent settlement' has been substituted by a new belief in immigration as a positive economic, social, cultural and demographic contribution to the country.

Professor Coleman explained the arguments often put forward in defence of this claim. Its supporters consider immigration to benefit Britain fiscally by a positive tax contribution, and demographically, by promoting population growth – populations are declining these days in many European countries. Lower fertility rates and longer life spans are reducing the size of the working population. Immigration, it is believed, could prevent it. It would solve the pension's crisis, emerging old age care problems and increase the size of the labour force. The 'home' workforce is also benefited because immigrants are more willing to perform the 'dirty jobs'. These, among other factors, would therefore be essential for Britain's economic and social development. However, David Coleman showed that UK is not facing such a serious population collapse as other countries; Germany and Italy for example. Population ageing is a feature of developed and mature societies and projections for Britain do not show an imminent threat. Besides, actual workforces are not only determined by immigration numbers but also by 'participation rates' in the labour market. In terms of fiscal contribution, skilled and unskilled immigrants should be distinguished, as well as those not entering UK for purposes of work. Health, education, crime and housing are among the social issues often ignored. Professor Coleman finally explained how immigrants cannot do much for UK but it is they who can benefit considerably.

That is why, he suggested, the government should admit there is an 'altruistic dimension' to its immigration policies instead of claiming that it is a great economic benefit to UK. His evaluation of the empirical evidence led him to doubt the economic case for extensive migration. Professor Coleman's discussion was undoubtedly a valuable contribution to what is likely to be a permanent debate.

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A slide presentation on this title can be found on

<http://www.slideserve.com/bandele/what-the-immigrants-can-do-for-us-or-the-economic-consequences-of-mr-blunkett>

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