

Selling labour migration: Democratic vs. technocratic modes of justification

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Debates on immigration are frequently highly emotive, and migration researchers often berate the media and politics for their ill-informed and populist treatment of the issues. However, with some European governments and international organizations keen to make the case for labour migration, there has been a rising interest in research on the social and economic ramifications of immigration. And on a number of occasions, such research findings have found their way into public debates, cited in political speeches and media coverage of immigration policy. A case in point is UK debates on labour migration from around 2002.

The question of how issues of labour migration are debated and justified in public discussions is significant. Once such debates are successfully shifted onto “technocratic” grounds, they can take on a substantively different tone, couched in terms of evidence about labour market needs, the impact of skills, etc. rather than cultural or value considerations (Boswell 2009). Often, the outcome is a more liberal and open approach to immigration. This can carry risks of a backlash, however. Rival political parties or the mass media can label such debates as “elitist”, as dictated by business interests, or as out of touch with real public concerns about migration. They may seek to shift debate onto less technocratic ground, emphasising contention over interests or values, rather than expert knowledge. In other words, opposition parties or the media may seek to switch from a technocratic to a more democratic mode of settlement.

The distinction between technocratic and democratic modes begs the question as to when, and why, immigration debates can become the object of this type of technocratic form of discourse. This paper considers the factors influencing the role of expert knowledge in debates on immigration policy. It focuses on a comparison of two cases: German debates on labour migration from 2000-2003, and UK debates on labour migration from 2002-2004. In both cases centre-left governments were keen to introduce more liberal labour migration programmes. However, the subsequent denouement of debates, and the role of research, diverged considerably. In the UK, politicians and the media largely accepted the validity of a “technocratic mode of settlement”, whereby expert knowledge was attributed authority in settling conflicting claims. In the German case, the attempt to launch a more technocratic discussion quickly foundered, and the SPD fell back on a more “democratic mode”. Within this mode, the decisive factor influencing policy was the preferences (interests and values) of the electorate and representative organised interests.

In the final part of the chapter, I shall suggest possible explanations for this divergence, and put forward some thoughts about the conditions under which debates might be expected to shift on to more technocratic terrain.

THE UK: TECHNOCRATIC ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST LABOUR MIGRATION

From around 2000, the Labour government began to make changes to immigration rules to help address skills shortages in the labour market. However, at the outset the changes were relatively low-profile, and there was little discussion of reform in parliament or the media. This changed from early 2002, when the government began to make a more public case for the reforms around the launch of the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme. In February of that year it published a White Paper advocating expanded labour market access for both high- and low-skilled workers. The White Paper argued that ‘developed economies are becoming more knowledge-based and more dependent

on people with skills and ideas. Migrants bring new experiences and talents that can widen and enrich the knowledge base of the economy'.¹

To support these claims, the Labour government made extensive use of expert knowledge. The White Paper drew heavily on a major study commissioned by the Cabinet Office in 1999 and jointly prepared by researchers from the Home Office and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), entitled 'Migration: A Social and Economic Analysis' (Glover, Gott, Loizillon, Portes, Price, Spencer, Srinivasan, and Willis 2001). And in the course of the debate that ensued, the government referred to a number of research reports commissioned by the Home Office to justify labor migration policy reforms. They did this through high-profile launches of Home Office funded research, and through the continuous citing of specific research findings in speeches, policy papers and press releases. One example of this is the Home Office's launch in December 2002 of research it had commissioned on the economic impact of immigration. The report, which the Government hailed as 'independent academic research'², was a summary of three Home Office commissioned studies, carried out by scholars from University College London and the University of Leicester. In the words of immigration minister Beverley Hughes, the research showed that 'it is simply not true that migrants "take the jobs" of the existing work force. It confirms that migrants can add to our economy, expand businesses and create success, jobs and opportunities for us all'.³

The research was frequently invoked to support the government's new, more liberal policies on labour migration. As mentioned, it provided much of the evidence drawn on in the 2002 Home Office White Paper; and, more generally, helped substantiate what, in the words of Hughes, 'marked a radical shift in policy, based on a recognition of the positive contribution of migration'⁴ It was also drawn on by the pro-immigration Liberal Democrats. As the Home Affairs Spokesman Simon Hall put it, 'All the evidence from the Home Office and elsewhere shows that the migrant population coming to the UK is net financially beneficial ... Unless people can disprove that, we must be very wary of suggesting that migration is not a benefit.'⁵

Probably the best example of a single research finding being drawn on to justify policy was an estimation of the fiscal contribution of migrants published by the Home Office in 1997. The report, which was produced by the Home Office Development and Statistics Directorate in collaboration with the IPPR, estimated that immigrants in the UK had made a net fiscal contribution of £2.5 billion in 1999-2000 (Gott and Johnston 2002). This figure was repeatedly referred to in speeches, press releases and parliamentary debates.⁶

The notion that immigration was economically beneficial did not appear to be fundamentally questioned by most of the political establishment. There were some isolated doubts expressed by the Conservatives about the authority of the research findings. For example, as Conservative MP Nick Hawkins argued in a parliamentary debate:

¹ Home Office, 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain', White Paper (London: Home Office, 2002), p. ii.

² No. 10 Downing Street, News, 10 December 2002 (available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk>).

³ Home Office, 'Migrants Boost UK Labour Market', *Press Briefing*, Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate, 10 December 2002. Available from <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk> [Accessed 28 November 2006].

⁴ House of Commons. Westminster Hall Debate on Immigration, 19 March 2003. Available at <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates> [Accessed 25 November 2006].

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David Blunkett, 'Home Secretary's Speech to the Social Market Foundation', London, 26 June 2002; House of Commons (2002); House of Commons, 'Oral Answers to Questions', 28 October 2002. Available from <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk> [Accessed 26 November 2006]; House of Commons, 'Westminster Hall Debate on Immigration', 19 March 2003. Available at <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates> [Accessed 25 November 2006]; No. 10 Downing Street, News, 10 December 2002 (available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk>); PMOS, 'Press Brief', 5 April 2004 (available at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk>).

If, as the Government claim, high net migration brings many benefits, they should admit the numbers, sell the benefits to the public and bask in the adulation of a grateful electorate for providing such a generally beneficial improvement in our way of life. I see no evidence of that, because so far they have provided few arguments that mass migration is a good thing, but there are many arguments that the numbers put too great a burden on our infrastructure and public services, on the poorest people, and on our way of life.⁷

However, the main reservation expressed by the Conservative Party about these findings was that the acknowledged economic benefits of migration may be outweighed by its negative social impact. Most opposing the government's new policy did so not by denying the economic argument, but on the basis that immigration risked overburdening social services or housing, and created problems with migration control. For this reason, the Conservative leader Michael Howard was convinced that '[wh]ile migration ... is part of a competitive and dynamic modern economy, immigration to Britain cannot continue at its present, uncontrolled levels'.⁸ Unlike in the German debate, however, there was hardly any denial of the relevance of these more technocratic arguments. Insofar as technocratic arguments were questioned, it was more to re-balance the debate and introduce concerns about distribution of social/welfare resources, rather than depicting such economic considerations as irrelevant or inappropriate.

The British press, though hardly renowned for its sober reporting, reflected this use of research findings in its reporting. The *Independent*, a centrist broadsheet, reported extensively on research on the economic ramifications of labour migration. Many of its articles invoked research to support a more liberal immigration policy, on the grounds that labour migration brought enormous benefits to the UK economy. Typical headlines for articles are: 'Migrants make us money', 'The truth is that immigration can make us all richer', 'Migrant workers bring £2.5bn into UK economy, says CBI', 'Britain should welcome immigrants: it needs them', and 'Migrant workers boost economy by £120m'. Making this economic case for migration is seen as a means of undermining 'xenophobic' and 'racist' views propounded in the more populist press and by the Conservative Party. The paper not only cited and fully supported the government's claims about the impact of migration, it exhorted Blunkett and Blair to be far more vigorous in selling the benefits of migration to the British public.

Even the more right-wing press and tabloid papers invoked research in this area – though often to criticize rather than support government policy. On various occasions, newspapers queried the authority of the government's research findings on migration. *The Telegraph* (a centre-right broadsheet) and the *Daily Mail* (a right-wing tabloid) both questioned the methodology behind the claim that immigration brought £2.5 billion to the British economy.⁹ *The Telegraph* also questioned the relevance of findings that focused solely on economic impacts, and which seemed to ignore less tangible social costs. The research was considered deficient because it failed to weigh up the economic benefits against other costs associated with immigration. So the newsworthy aspect of the research revolved around whether the indubitable economic benefits of immigration justified its potentially negative societal impacts.

Apart from these examples, almost all reporting on research took the form of citing new findings that exposed government failings. Most of these findings originated from Migrationwatch, which published a series of high profile reports from Summer 2002 onwards. One of these claimed that official figures on immigration issued by the British Home Office seriously underestimated the true level of immigration. Based on official immigration statistics, estimates of irregular entry and

⁷ House of Commons. Westminster Hall Debate on Immigration, 19 March 2003. Available at <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates> [Accessed 25 November 2006].

⁸ Daily Mail, 'Howard Crackdown on 'Chaotic' Immigration', 22 September 2004.

⁹ Johnston, P., 'Think-tank accuses ministers of "spin" over migrants' tax,' *Daily Telegraph*, 5 January 2004.

overstay, and extrapolation from previous trends, the report suggested that ‘at least 2 million non EU citizens per decade’ were expected to immigrate to the UK in coming years.¹⁰

The report was immediately picked up on by several newspapers, notably the right of center broadsheet the *Daily Telegraph*. On 5 August it ran an article entitled ‘2m migrants for Britain in the next decade’, and in its editorial of the same day used these findings to criticize the government’s immigration policy. According to the *Telegraph*, the Migrationwatch report illustrated ‘how startlingly high levels of immigration to these shores now are’, and demonstrated the need for more data: ‘To work out what we want, we need the facts’.¹¹ Over the next few months – until the end of 2004 – the paper cited findings or comments from Migrationwatch in twenty-one out of a total of thirty-two articles dealing with the level of immigration and asylum flows into the UK. On two occasions they published articles by Andrew Green, the head of Migrationwatch. And on three further occasions, the paper devoted special articles to cover the launch of new reports from the think tank. The *Daily Mail*, a popular right of center tabloid, was another paper to report on the findings of Migrationwatch, though less extensively than the more heavyweight *Telegraph*. It cited reports or comments from the think tank in nineteen articles between the launch of the August 2002 report and the end of 2004. The right-wing press seemed to hail Migrationwatch’s reports as a brave attempt to bring honesty into the debate on an important issue, which was otherwise suppressed by a ‘canting, smug liberal elite’.¹²

Although this reporting of research findings and studies on migration were critical, it nonetheless slotted into the largely technocratic style of debate on labour migration in the UK. In other words, even the anti-immigration press attempted to debate the merits of immigration by invoking data and technical analysis of the issues, rather than resorting to more emotive arguments. To be sure, the deployment of research by both the government and opposition parties and the media were often highly symbolic, with different findings and statistics marshalled to support pre-given opinions. But the point remains that participants in the debate at least in principle accepted the relevance of a technocratic mode of settlement. And this established certain expectations about the quality and type of “evidence” that would be required to underpin claims in this debate.

GERMANY: BEATING A HASTY RETREAT FROM TECHNOCRATIC ARGUMENTS

In February 2000, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder announced the launch of a so-called ‘Green Card’ programme. The scheme was designed to recruit up to 30,000 foreign specialists in information and communications technology (ICT), to help fill acute labour shortages in this sector. In a speech at an ICT trade fair in Hanover, Schröder argued that ‘if we are unable to meet demand in the ICT sector with German workers and we cannot secure workers from abroad, then these jobs will move elsewhere – and no-body in this land – neither unions, nor employers, nor politicians, wants that’.¹³ It was time for a ‘more open policy’, which could compete with the United States in attracting ‘the best people’ to Germany.¹⁴

The context and line of argumentation was significant. By focusing on ICT and presenting the initiative at a trade fair, the Chancellor was signalling that the programme was economically oriented: part of a strategy of boosting the ICT sector, recognizing the need to attract skilled labour

¹⁰ Migrationwatch UK (2002) ‘Migration: Its Present and Future Scale’, Briefing Paper, 30 July. Available from: <http://www.migrationwatchuk.org> [Accessed 18 July 2005].

¹¹ *Daily Telegraph*, ‘Migration Needs Watching’, editorial, 5 August 2002.

¹² *Daily Mail* ‘Howard Crackdown on ‘Chaotic’ Immigration’, 22 September 2004.

¹³ ‘Rede von Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder auf der Schlussveranstaltung des Kongresses FOCUS 2000 auf der EXPO in Hanover’, 26 October 2000, available at <http://archiv.bundesregierung.de>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

in a globalized and knowledge-based economy. This was clearly an attempt to shift the immigration debate onto more technocratic grounds. Schröder and other government politicians repeatedly stressed that the debate on immigration should be more ‘factual and informed’, avoiding the ‘bad blood’ of previous immigration debates.¹⁵ The new programme was depicted as an instrument of economic steering, designed to promote growth in a key sector. It would help put Germany on a modernizing course, making it more international and open, and thereby more globally competitive.¹⁶ Dissenters were portrayed as anti-modernizing, inward looking, wedded to an outmoded, ethnocentric notion of German identity.

However, many sections of the opposition and media were not content to limit the debate to technocratic questions of economic steering. The prospect of liberalizing labour migration generated a number of criticisms, clustered around two central issues. First was concern about recruiting foreign labour at a time of high unemployment in Germany. With unemployment standing at around four million, many questioned how the recruitment of foreign workers could be justified.¹⁷ This line of argument belied existing research findings, which broadly concurred that migrant workers were likely to complement, rather than displace, native workers.¹⁸ Research also suggested that the recruitment of additional high-skilled labour generally had the effect of creating additional jobs – as indeed was subsequently argued in the debate over the impact of the Green Card programme (see below). The arguments put forward by the CDU and its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) clearly challenged (or at least ignored) this evidence. Their claims about foreign workers taking jobs from Germans appeared to be designed to tap public concerns about the distribution of socio-economic resources (‘foreigners are taking our jobs’). This line of argument represented an attempt to shift the debate from a question of economic management, to one of the conflicting interests between nationals and immigrants – precisely the type of more ideological debate the government had wanted to avoid.

The CDU and CSU critique also focused on a second line of attack: the supposed problem of integrating large numbers of new immigrants. In this case, the basis of disagreement was essentially one of value-orientations: did the German public want to live in a ‘multi-cultural’ society, with ‘parallel societies’ and ‘ghettoisation’? Or would the public not rather preserve social and cultural cohesion by restricting immigration?¹⁹

Partly in response to these criticisms, the government decided to establish an independent Immigration Commission to advise the government on the planned new immigration law, from an ‘impartial’ and ‘non-party political’ perspective.²⁰ Interior Minister Otto Schily announced the Commission in Summer 2000, whose task was to gather evidence on the nature, scale, and impacts of immigration. As the Commission’s Chair, Rita Süßmuth, stated shortly before the Commission first convened in September 2000, the aim was to deal with the question ‘in a way that reduces the

¹⁵ ‘Rede von Bundeskanzler Schröder in der Haushaltsdebatte vor dem Bundestag’, 13 September 2000; ‘Rede von Bundeskanzler Schröder anlässlich der Eröffnung der CeBIT in Hanover’, 21 March 2001. Both available at <http://archiv.bundesregierung.de>.

¹⁶ ‘Rede von Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder bei der Eröffnungsfeier der CeBIT’, 23 February 2000; ‘Rede des Bundeskanzlers Gerhard Schröder zum Entwurf eines Zuwanderungsgesetzes der Bundesregierung im Bundestag’, 1 March 2002. Available at <http://www.documentarchiv.de>.

¹⁷ See, for example, the statement of Hartmyt Koschyk, Home Affairs Spokesman for the CDU/CSU group in the Bundestag – ‘Rot-Grüner Gesetzentwurf zur Zuwanderung muss grundlegend umgestaltet werden’, CDU-CSU Fraktion im deutschen Bundestag, 5 May 2003.

¹⁸ For an overview and review of literature on the economic impact of migration in Germany, see European Migration Network, *The Impact of Immigration on Europe’s Societies* (Brussels: European Commission, 2006).

¹⁹ See, for example, comments of Peter Müller, ‘CDU/CSU-Innenpolitiker geschlossen gegen rot grünes Zuwanderungserweiterungsgesetz’, CDU Bundesgeschäftsstelle, 2 April 2003; and Wolfgang Bosbach, ‘Zuwanderung: Integrationskraft Deutschlands wird überfordert: Verabschiedung des Zuwanderungsgesetzes im Bundestag’, CDU/CSU Fraktion im deutschen Bundestag, 9 May 2003.

²⁰ ‘Süßmuth wird Kommission allein leiten’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 June 2000.

tension and conflicts present in our German society'.²¹ Given this aim, it may seem surprising how rarely research findings were drawn on in the ensuing debate. There was certainly no shortage of economic research that would have supported the case for a more liberal entry policy (as we shall see in the UK case). Yet the only research finding that is mentioned by Schröder, Schily and others over the period 2000-2002 is a claim from an ICT employers' association that each Green Card holder created on average two-and-a-half to three additional jobs.²² Other than that, there was very little attempt to counter CDU/CSU arguments about the labour market effect of expanded immigration through drawing on research.

One plausible explanation for this is the government's concern to respond to apparently deep-seated public concerns about the social and cultural impact of increased immigration. CDU/CSU arguments in particular played on anxieties about unemployment, socio-cultural fragmentation, and the desire to avoid becoming a 'multi-culti' society. As I suggested, this represented an attempt to shift debate to questions of values and distributive politics: what sort of society do Germans want to live in, how far should German culture be preserved, and how far should German nationals be prioritized in terms of jobs and training opportunities. Thus, for example, CSU politician Michael Glos contrasted his party to the SPD and Greens: 'The CSU isn't protecting the interests of industry, but of the whole population'.²³ Or as the CDU politician Roland Koch put it, 'The people shouldn't be abandoned with their worries'.²⁴ This was clearly an attempt to depict the government as elitist, technocratic and out of touch, insensitive to the concerns of the public. It almost certainly resonated with the government, encouraging them to avoid a 'hard sell' based on economic arguments.

The Immigration Commission's report came out in July 2001, producing a number of suggestions that were incorporated into a draft law put before parliament in September that year. Both the report and the new bill fuelled criticism from the CDU/CSU, which continued to challenge the government's attempt to limit the debate on immigration to economic issues. The Christian Democrat parties, as they put it, 'rejected the idea of settling immigration on purely demographic grounds'.²⁵ Between Autumn 2001 and Spring 2002, the prospects for securing cross-party consensus seemed to dwindle. The SPD had to confront the prospect that the law could be blocked in the upper chamber, where the government lacked an absolute majority. Over this period, there was a discernible shift in SPD rhetoric, especially on the part of Otto Schily. While the government continued to advance economic arguments for the new law, it increasingly emphasized the fact that the proposals were generating broad social consensus. Schily repeatedly stressed that the bill was supported by the social partners, the churches, the FDP and moderate members of the CDU.²⁶ Meanwhile, the government began to argue that the law did not involve augmenting levels of immigration, but was instead intended to manage, even limit, existing flows. So they effectively retreated from initial claims about the need for additional (high skilled) immigration, defending a far more conservative position, which rendered expert knowledge even less relevant for purposes of justification.

The German press showed a similar lack of interest in research findings in its reporting on immigration policy debates. When the Green Card initiative was first announced, most newspapers

²¹ 'Rot-Grün auf Konsenssuche', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 September 2000.

²² See, for example, Gerhard Schröder, 'Rede von Bundeskanzler Schröder anlässlich der Eröffnung der CeBIT in Hanover', 21 March 2003; Otto Schily, 'Rede des Bundesinnenministers Otto Schily zu Zuwanderung und Asyl vor dem Deutschen Bundestag in Berlin', 13 December 2001. Available at <http://bmi.bund.de>.

²³ 'Es hätte schlimmer kommen können', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 08 November 2000.

²⁴ 'CDU spricht über Ausländer', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 May 2001.

²⁵ 'Union wartet auf Regierungsvorlage', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 06 July 2001.

²⁶ 'Rede des Bundesinnenministers Otto Schily zu Zuwanderung und Asyl vor dem Deutschen Bundestag in Berlin', 13 December 2001; 'Rede von Bundesinnenminister Otto Schily in der 789. Sitzung des Bundesrates', 20 July 2003, available at <http://www.prointegration.org>.

were generally supportive of the initiative, and echoed the Chancellor's arguments about the economic case for expanded labour migration. Even the generally conservative *Die Welt* agreed that 'it's time to get serious about this world society',²⁷ and that 'Germany should wake up to the new global environment'.²⁸ However, there were relatively few attempts by any of the papers to pad out their reports or commentary by drawing on research findings or opinions from experts. News reporting and analysis of the debate was largely limited to the arguments set out by politicians. There are some exceptions, notably in the heavyweight broadsheet the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which gave some coverage to opinions of members of the Immigration Commission around the time of its launch in Autumn 2000 and the publication of its report in Summer 2001. Thus it cites the demographer Rainer Münz on the problem of declining birth-rates in Germany²⁹, and interviews two other academics on their views on immigration (though in the on-line rather than the print version of the paper).³⁰ But the paper was just as likely to draw on representatives from the churches or industry to support various claims about the economic impact of reform.³¹ For such a highbrow paper, the lack of attempt to get behind arguments through invoking experts is a telling indicator of the non-technocratic framing of the issue.

The relative lack of reporting on the opinions of experts is especially striking in the centre-left press, which was very supportive of the government's proposals. Here one finds an almost exact mirroring of the government's arguments, and thus a corresponding lack of interest in using expert knowledge. For example, in a comment piece of February 2002, the main argument invoked by a centre-left broadsheet in support of the new bill is the fact that 'Churches, unions, German employers' groups: all of these want this law, and today rather than tomorrow'. And again, 'A survey confirms that a large majority of Germans favour this law'.³² There is a notable absence of the use of research and expertise to substantiate the government's economic arguments. This tendency was reinforced from Summer 2001 onwards, when reporting on the debate became very much preoccupied with the power struggle between the government and the opposition CDU/CSU, and contained very little substantive debate on the merits of the proposals.

Indeed, where research findings were reported by the press, this could even be to demonstrate scepticism towards the claims of 'scientists'. In an opinion piece of July 2000, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* argued that academic opinion is polarized between 'two catastrophe scenarios': on the one hand, demographers predicting the collapse of the German social system and economy in the absence of immigration; on the other, social scientists warning of social fragmentation and conflict if immigration continues at current levels.³³ Neither extreme, in the paper's view, was realistic. The paper also expresses doubts about arguments from industry calling for increased labour migration:

We are told by 'industry' that Germany is in need of 'qualified professionals'. One minute they tell us 10,000 immigrants per year, the next 100,000, even millions. How many are really required, and over what period of time? And who decides what is required? Only industry, or politics as well? How are they going to establish if someone is 'qualified' or not? Are 'professionals' without the adjective 'qualified' actually unqualified? Do we really need computer professionals most of all, or are there not more acute shortages in care facilities for old people or hotel and restaurant personnel? Basic questions, which no-one has yet been able to answer in a satisfactory way.³⁴

²⁷ 'Wer ist Herr im Hause?', Commentary by Thomas Schmid, *Die Welt*, 25 February 2000.

²⁸ 'Deutschland wird Einwanderungsland', Michale Stürmer, *Die Welt*, 26 February 2000.

²⁹ 'Süssmuth und Beck uneins über Asyl', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 July 2000.

³⁰ 'Migrationsforscher Bade: Zuwanderung ersetzt keine Reformen', *FAZ-NET*, 4 July 2001; 'Völkerrechtler: Grundidee ist vernünftig', *FAZ-NET*, 6 December 2001.

³¹ 'Union lehnt Einwanderungsgesetz im Innenausschuß ab', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 February 2002; 'Einwanderungsgesetz ungenügend', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 August 2003.

³² 'Analyse: Union in der Zwickmühle', Thorsten Denkler, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 February 2002.

³³ 'Fremdbestimmte Ausländerpolitik', Stefan Dietrich, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 July 2000.

³⁴ 'Von der Durchzugs- zur Bleibegesellschaft', Klaus Natorp, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 January 2001.

This quote nicely captures the sense of scepticism, even mistrust, of industry and politics. It begins by expressing doubts about the impartiality of industry as a source of knowledge, but goes on to suggest that ‘no-one’ – neither politics, industry nor science – is giving straight answers. It appears to be tapping into a broader anxiety about the failure of politics and the state to inform citizens about the social repercussions of immigration.

Explaining Modes of Justification

In some ways the divergence between UK and German use of research in debates on labour migration appears to be counter-intuitive. German political debate and press reporting are known to be generally more heavyweight and earnest than those in the UK. In particular, the UK tabloid press has a reputation for sensationalist and personalized reporting, implying it would be unlikely to draw on research. Yet the analysis above suggests that even a right-wing tabloid paper such as the *Daily Mail* was keen to draw on the findings of a think tank to critique government policy; while broadsheets frequently cited research on the economic impacts of migration. The Labour government appeared to be successful in shifting debate onto this more technocratic terrain, where protagonists would need to marshal expert knowledge to lend their claims authority.

There are a number of possible explanations for this divergence, of which I would like to emphasize three: parliamentary dynamics, ideological cleavages, and established patterns of debate on migration.

In the German case, the government was in a relatively weak position in pushing reform through parliament. While the SPD and Green Party had a majority of seats in the lower house (Bundestag), which was the first chamber voting on the bill, it had a very shaky majority in the upper house (Bundesrat), whose approval was required to pass the law. This slim majority was subsequently lost in February 2003 elections. The government was therefore reliant on CDU/CSU support in order to introduce any sort of reform, and the Union parties were keen to use this advantage to undermine the government’s agenda. This may have increased the incentives for the CDU/CSU to use the opportunity to oppose the reforms in order to make the government appear weak. It clearly had some influence on the SPD strategy of securing cross-party consensus around the issue, with Otto Schily emphasizing the extent of public support for reforms as the main justification (rather than expert evidence). By contrast, the Labour government had a firm majority in the House of Commons, and faced no particular threat from a weak House of Lords that had no ultimate veto power and which was largely sympathetic on this issue.

Perhaps even more important, though, were divergences in ideological cleavages between the respective political parties. In both countries, centre-left governments initially made a distinctively “third way” or *neue Mitte* case for reform, emphasizing the impact of globalization and the importance of attracting skilled workers in a knowledge-based economy. This sort of agenda lent itself well to more technocratic arguments, based on data and analysis of the labour market and fiscal impacts of immigration. However, while this agenda was largely supported by the UK Conservatives, it was rejected by the more protectionist Christian Democratic parties in Germany. The UK Conservatives were keen to portray themselves as a pro-business, relatively neo-liberal party, open to fresh talent that would boost productivity and growth. They were also sensitive to criticism about opposing immigration on ethnic or cultural grounds. This made it more difficult for them to carve out a distinctive position in opposition to the government’s modernizing agenda, in a way that would not lay them open to charges of economic protectionism or hostility to business interests. By contrast, many in the CDU and CSU had no such qualms, and were quite willing to mobilize opposition based on popular concerns about cultural diversity, integration and competition for jobs. And these sorts of arguments were far more suited to arguments based on values and

interests, rather than expert knowledge. Indeed, as we saw in the analysis of German party political debate, Christian Democrat politicians even dismissed more technocratic styles of argument as being out of touch with the real and justified concerns of ordinary voters. Interestingly, though, it has proved far more easy for the CDU/CSU to pursue these sorts of cultural/social arguments in opposition than it is when they are in government. Once in power, these parties have often been far more open to economic arguments about the need for labour – as the CSU “blue card” scheme (July 2000) showed.³⁵ Nonetheless, it is a line of argument that appears attractive to them as a way of generating opposition to government reforms.

Finally, both countries had rather different recent experiences with labour migration. Germany had relatively fresh memory of what was widely considered to have been a “failed” labour migration policy in the 1960s and early 1970s (Herbert 2001). The general consensus from at least the 1980s onwards was that it had been a mistake to count on labour migration being “temporary”, and that arguments about the economic benefits of guest worker recruitment had been overstated. From the late 1970s onwards it became clear that many guest workers would settle permanently in Germany with their families, and that various rights would accrue to them as long-term residents (Castles and Miller 1998). This realization was coupled with concerns about the poor educational and labour market performance of some ethnic minority groups in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as anxieties about the “ghettoisation” of certain groups in German cities. The upshot was a wide perception in political debate and the mass media about the importance of learning lessons from the guest worker era, notably that labour migration carries major and long-term repercussions for German society. Under these circumstances, it was more problematic to shift the debate onto purely technocratic considerations, ignoring questions of the long-term social and cultural impact of labour migration. Indeed, Germany’s experience suggested that it was precisely this type of purely labour market driven approach that had created these problems of integration.

By contrast, the UK had no collective memory of a failed labour migration policy. Indeed, it hardly had any experience of pro-active recruitment of labour migrants at all. Immigration in the post-World War II era, as is well known, largely originated from Commonwealth immigrants with claims to British citizenship through their status as British subjects (Freeman 1979). There were clearly economic benefits from immigration from these groups in the 1950s-70s, but the rationale for immigration was rarely articulated in this way. It was only with the Labour administration of 1997 that a British government began to make a clear economic case for additional immigration. Thus the idea could appear fresh and modern, free of the sort of baggage such ideas carried in the German debate.

What implications does this analysis have for the potential success of technocratic modes of settlement in other European countries? One important factor appears to be the degree of acceptance of neo-liberal arguments about the importance of labour migration for the economy. In particular where there is consensus among mainstream political parties about the importance of attracting skills to boost productivity and growth, one could expect these sorts of technocratic arguments to hold sway. Another tentative conclusion would be that countries with a collective memory of a “failed” policy based on labour market considerations are likely to be more wary of technocratic modes of justification. Thus European states that had a guest worker or rotation scheme in place which is widely perceived to have failed might be more sceptical of economic arguments or those based on expert knowledge and research.

A brief examination of European migration countries that have witnessed debates on labour migration seems to bear out these expectations (see Table 1). As expected, countries with a liberal consensus between the main political parties over labour migration policy, and with no collective memory of a failed labour migration policy, have seen a relatively technocratic debate and a liberal

³⁵ This was a scheme introduced by the CSU government in Bavaria to attract high-skilled workers

labour migration policy in recent years (the UK, Ireland, Spain and Sweden). Those with a clear and recent memory of a failed policy, and with no liberal consensus over labour migration (i.e. with protectionist or populist based opposition to such liberalization), have seen the maintenance of more restrictive approaches to labour migration or the blocking of attempts to liberalize policy through arguments based on interests or values (Germany and the Netherlands).

Table 1

	Liberal consensus	Protectionist/populist opposition
Memory of failed labour migration policy		Germany Netherlands
No memory of failed policy	UK Ireland Spain Sweden	France Italy Denmark

Those countries with no memory of a failed policy but facing protectionist or populist opposition (France, Italy and Denmark) appear to adopt a democratic mode of settlement, which equally precludes a liberal consensus on the economic benefits of labour migration. In these cases, the ideological dispositions of political parties are effectively determining the style of public discourse. Of course, this is not to say that migration policy is restrictive in practice. In Italy, for example, there is a marked divergence between a restrictive rhetoric and more lenient practice (Sciortino 2004).

The top left hand box remains empty. It is difficult to find an example of a European country that has a memory of a failed labour migration policy, and a liberal consensus on economic migration. This probably reflects the very powerful role of such collective memories in shaping discourse on migration. Once a country publicly reflects on the complex and often unanticipated consequences of labour migration programmes, it is unlikely that political parties and the media will be willing to return to a purely technocratic discussion of the merits and drawbacks of more liberal policies. This has clear implications for countries like the UK and Ireland. Recent backlashes in these countries against technocratic debate appears to have been triggered by a recognition that more liberal approaches to labour migration have created some inadvertent consequences. In particular, opening the labour market to newly acceded EU countries appears to have generated far larger immigration flows than anticipated. Moreover, few commentators in the media or politics seriously reflected on possible social repercussions of large-scale migration, such as pressures on local accommodation and social services. With the recent economic downturn, we can expect such concerns to become more vocal, probably signaling the effective abandonment of purely technocratic modes of debating labour migration in these two countries.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored patterns of debating labour migration in the UK and Germany. Despite some similarities in the political context of discussions – centre-left governments keen to promote the liberalization of labour migration to fill shortages – discourse in the two countries diverged quite profoundly. In the UK, debate on new labour migration policies from 2002-4 was conducted on technocratic grounds, with protagonists from all three main political parties mainly accepting the benefits of migration to the UK economy. In Germany, initial attempts by the government to sell reforms through economic argumentation failed, with opposition Christian Union parties

successfully shifting debate back onto a more democratic terrain, stressing conflicts over interests and values.

I suggested three reasons for this divergence: parliamentary dynamics, party political cleavages, and collective memories of previous migration policies. I then considered how far the second two factors – cleavages and collective memories – could be generalized out to other cases. How far might these two factors be correlated with democratic or technocratic debates over labour migration? An initial examination suggested that the two factors may well be linked. A collective memory of failed immigration policy appears to make cross-party consensus on the economic benefits of labour migration all but impossible to secure. The electoral incentives created by the possibilities to mobilize support by pointing to previous negative experiences appeared to prove irresistible to opposition parties. The implication is that once a country has experienced such a policy failure, or more accurately, media portrayal of failure, it may be difficult to shift back into a more technocratic mode of debating labour migration issues.

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