

Braverman's War on Migrants is Damaging the UK

By Scott Lucas

Suella Braverman's staff put the UK media on notice. The Home Secretary had something very important to say about visa policy.

The [very important announcement](#) on May 15 would not be made to the Prime Minister or to the Cabinet. It would not be delivered to the Conservative Party. Instead, she would present it to the "Conservative Nationalism" conference in London, organizing by the US-based Edmund Burke Foundation.

One might ponder why — only seven years after screaming about Barack Obama's "intervention" when he warned that departure from the European Union at the "back of the queue" for trade deals — Conservatives and Brexiteers would welcome the bulldozing of UK politics by a little-known, hard-right American group promoting "culture wars" and an ethnically-defined nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic.

But for now, let us consider Suella Braverman's eagerness to dehumanize and destroy migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees — and to damage the UK — in her quest to become Prime Minister.

Suella's Fruit-Picking Nonsense

According to the press release, Braverman's very important announcement would be "a rebuff to cabinet colleagues calling for an easing of visa rules to boost economic growth". She would say overseas workers should not be allowed to cover the UK's labour shortages in sectors such as farming, meat processing, or haulage, pointing to a net migration of more than 500,000 in 2022 and possibly up to 1 million in 2023.

She would explain, "There is no good reason why we can't train up enough HGV drivers, butchers or fruit pickers."

The very important speech, it transpired, would be a hot mess of nonsense.

While the UK's net migration has risen after the COVID pandemic, the large majority of the entrants are not butchers, fruit-pickers, or even the "small boat" migrants and asylum seekers demonized by Braverman for daring to cross the English Channel in search of security.

The first of three major groups according for the increase are humanitarian migrants and refugees. Local councils [helped 163,500 Ukrainians settle](#) in the first year after Russia's invasion of February 2022. Amid China's crackdown in Hong Kong, [more than 144,000 residents came to the UK](#) between February 2021 and February 2023.

The second category is international students. Able to travel again with the easing of COVID restrictions, almost 680,000 foreign nationals studied in UK universities in 2021/2022, a number second only to the US. Universities UK estimated that the "total economic benefits" of the cohort would be "approximately £41.9 billion over the entire period of their studies".

The third category is skilled workers, beginning with a healthcare sector which accounted for more than 50% of long-term employment visas in 2022.

Madeleine Sumption, the head of the Oxford Migration Observatory, noted that if Braverman and her colleagues were serious about the labour situation, they have "policy levers...such as addressing

the funding crisis in social care". The Government could expand funding or even contemplate a meaningful increase in pay and improvement in working conditions.

But clearly that was not Suella's intention. Nor did she seem to have care much about the "butchers" and "fruit pickers": as the National Farmers Union explained, the Government's "Pick for Britain" campaign was failing to recruit enough domestic workers.

Apparently she had not even consulted the Office for Budget Responsibility, which assessed in November 2022 that, far from being a burden on the economy, the increase in net migration would help "offset slower growth in productivity" in Brexit Britain, contributing 0.5% in GDP by 2027.

Suella Succeeds as Government Fails

Ministers and other senior Conservatives were rattled by Braverman's brazen ambition. They were not that concerned about migrants and refugees, but they noted that the Home Secretary was trying to pre-empt the initiative of the Cabinet, including Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, to address labour shortages by easing visa restrictions. And by implicitly portraying Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as weak, Braverman — supported by hard Brexiteers and hard-right "conservative nationalists" — was making her case for an eventual move into 10 Downing Street.

At the end of February, Communities Secretary Michael Gove [invoked a culture war](#) against "the radical social activist movement" to win the next General Election. He also accepted the Edmund Burke Foundation's invitation of an on-stage interview.

Now he had to change tack and rebuke Braverman. He [told the conference](#):

I think that the overwhelming majority of people in this country prefer civility. This goes to the whole question of the so-called culture war that is raging at the moment.

There are certain principles you should defend, absolutely....But we should do so with the self-confidence that means we don't need to be strident.

The shot barely dented Braverman's hard-right protective armor. After all, this was the Home Secretary who was fired on October 19, 2022 by Prime Minister Liz Truss for e-mailing classified Government documents via her mobile phone — but who was rehired by Truss's successor Rishi Sunak a week later.

So it has proven once more. Colleagues or civil servants, unsettled by Braverman's personal approach and possibly her policies on the fly, leaked to media that the Home Secretary was [woefully unprepared](#) for her statements to Cabinet. On up to six occasions, she had to be "fact-checked" by Home Office staff after the Cabinet Office, having consulted other Ministers, raised questions about her declarations.

Last week The Sunday Times was informed that Braverman had asked civil servants to ensure that, following a driving offense in the summer, she did not have to attend a group speeding awareness course. When the civil servants refused, she reportedly sought help from a political aide, who asked the course organiser to arrange a private session, to allow her to use an alias, or to permit her to turn off her webcam.

Once again, the Home Secretary stood accused of breaking the Ministerial Code. Once again, Sunak knelt before Braverman and her hard-right backers: he said on Wednesday that no formal investigation was needed.

Punishing Students and Their Families

Meanwhile, Braverman's May 15 attack on migrants and the visa system was paying off — for her, if not for the UK economy.

On Tuesday, the Government banned foreign postgraduate students on non-research courses from bringing family members.

Doing so, they further eroded the UK's position as a world leader in higher education. They likely gave up the revenue from students who will now go elsewhere. And they punished those who just wanted to earn a degree.

Rotimi, a Nigerian pursuing a Master's in Mechanical Engineering at Wolverhampton University, [explained](#) that candidates "look beyond studying" – and want their family to be "part of that experience".

Jamie Arrowsmith, director of Universities UK International, said the restrictions are likely to have a "[disproportionate impact on women](#) and students from certain countries". Jo Grady, the General Secretary of the University and College Union, summarized.

Those who choose to study in the UK, no matter where they are from, bring huge value to our society and deserve the right to live alongside their loved ones. Instead, they are being treated with contempt.

Deep concern is already being felt across the sector as to how damaging the package of measures could be to the pipeline of international talent coming to the UK.

From Sue Ellen

Suella Braverman's parents named her after Sue Ellen, the character from the 1980s TV series Dallas. Forty years later, it has proven apt: this is a woman drunk on power, strutting as an unfit Minister.

But there is one vital difference.

Whereas the fictional Sue Ellen's damage was largely self-inflicted, the all-too-real Suella is immune from her destruction, suffered by those who merely want to study, to work, or to find a measure of sanctuary.