Does that mean you’re against immigration controls?

Yes, Left Unity is opposed to immigration controls. Immigration controls are bad for all workers. They do not solve any of the problems facing the working class in Britain and other countries today.

Every piece of immigration legislation from 1905 onwards has followed racist, and sometimes fascist, agitation against this or that group of people coming to the country, often fleeing persecution, torture, destitution and the destruction of their environment.

Immigration controls kill. Those crossing borders ‘illegally’ take huge risks to their personal safety and at huge personal cost. If they arrive illegally they are often forced to work in dangerous conditions out of fear.

In 2013, off the Italian island of Lampedusa, 366 migrants died when their boat capsized. Denied access to official routes into Europe, they had each paid nearly £1,000 to people smugglers to get across the Mediterranean. Now the UK is pulling funding for search-and-rescue operations in the area. Is that the kind of society we want?

Survivors of the Lampedusa tragedy

Three years ago David Cameron said “The real issue is this: migrants are filling the gaps in the labour market left wide open by a welfare system that for years has paid British people not to work... So immigration and welfare reform are two sides of the same coin. Put simply, we will never control immigration properly unless we tackle welfare dependency.”

You heard it. Low wages, benefit cuts and immigration controls are all part of the same attack on working class people. We must fight back together – workers, welfare claimants, disabled people and migrants. Don’t let them divide us.

Always remember: an injury to one is an injury to all. Together we can win.

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Romanians and Bulgarians aren’t ‘flooding Britain’

Nigel Farage and the scaremongers from UKIP claimed at the start of 2014 that we were in danger of being overwhelmed by people from Romania and Bulgaria. He said changes in their status in the European Union meant ‘29 million Romanians and Bulgarians will gain the right to live, work and draw benefits here’ and warned of a ‘tidal flood’.

But when the laws changed on the 1st January very few people actually came from Romania or Bulgaria. Talking about ‘millions’ was a deliberate attempt to mislead and whip up racist sentiment.

By the same token the entire citizenship of France could have come here for years. Of course, they don’t, and millions of Romanians and Bulgarians haven’t and won’t either.

Migration isn’t the cause of unemployment

Many communities in Britain have been blighted by unemployment for decades – and it’s got worse since the world plunged into recession. The misery of unemployment needs to be tackled urgently. But we won’t be able to cure the patient if we misdiagnose the illness.

It is repeatedly endlessly that migration causes unemployment, but it’s not true. The massive growth in unemployment we’ve seen since 2008 is a product of the most serious economic depression we’ve experienced since the 1930s. When the economy contracted really sharply and unemployment rocketed, there were actually fewer migrants coming to Britain – not more.

The bottom line is that we’ll only be able to start tackling unemployment if we address the failure of the economy to meet the basic needs of our society; access to jobs, to social services, welfare, health and education.

Don’t migrants undermine terms and conditions?

Migrants are not a threat to workers’ conditions. In fact by improving the skills of the workforce as a whole migration often creates upward pressure on wages. But there is a race to the bottom going in the terms and conditions of the lowest paid, most exploited workers. Bad contracts, poor and unsafe working conditions, and poverty pay can often be found in many sectors where migrant labour is relied upon. But the downward pressure on wages and conditions isn’t the fault of the migrants. It’s about the bosses trying to drive down working class living standards.

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The fact this has happened reflects the retreat of workers’ rights and conditions, the decline in collective bargaining and the weakening of trade unions that we’ve seen in this country over the last decades. Only proper trade union rights and collective bargaining can solve this. And this is where anti-migrant xenophobia undermines our fight back. By dividing ‘native’ workers from ‘migrant’ workers, encouraging one to blame the other for these attacks, the bosses can play a game of divide and rule.

There is a ‘them and us’ conflict, but it’s not about migrants. It’s bosses versus workers.

‘Illegal’ immigrant: just think through what it means

What happens when a whole section of people are deemed ‘illegal’, to have no right to live and work in this country? The simple answer is that it becomes really difficult for these workers to organise for better wages and conditions, because employers can threaten them with deportation. Some bosses take advantage of this quite consciously to employ people illegally below the minimum wage, knowing that if they went to the authorities they would be deported.

This hits everyone else by pushing down wages in the lowest paid jobs. But the answer isn’t to crack down on the migrants. It’s to create a level playing field where everyone has equal rights regardless of their immigration status.

Left Unity argues that we need a living wage and for secure contracts so that the bosses cannot lay off one group of workers and employ others at lower rates of pay – whether they are migrant workers or not.