

Europeans turn against immigrants

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Body

Barking, England --- Peter Taylor sat on a bench in the East London suburb of Barking on a recent day, gloomily surveying the sea of Asian and African faces around him.

"There's just too many foreigners coming in," said Taylor, a white, 49-year-old disabled forklift driver. "There ought to be tighter controls."

As a working man, Taylor has been a lifelong supporter of the Labor Party of Prime Minister Tony Blair. No more. In local elections next month, he plans to vote for the BNP --- the British National Party, a right-wing fringe group accused by critics of racism and ties to neo-Nazis.

Taylor is not alone. There are indications that the demographic changes immigration has caused, combined with a perceived lack of assimilation by newer ethnic groups, are provoking a backlash in England and elsewhere in Western Europe.

As in the United States, the benefits and drawbacks of immigration are the subject of sharp debate. Nearly 600,000 **immigrants** moved to England in 2004.

A week ago, the Parliament member from Barking, Margaret Hodge, who is a minister in Blair's Labor government, said she found while campaigning that eight of 10 white families here were tempted to vote for the BNP.

And new research by a charitable foundation showed that 25 percent of people nationwide have considered voting for the far-right party, which opposes immigration, racial mixing and multiculturalism.

Immigration has been an issue in Western Europe for years, and parties running on anti-immigration platforms have on occasion shown electoral strength in Austria and France.

The backlash **against** immigration has also spread to countries like the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway.

"And these have been traditionally liberal countries," said Charles Westin, a professor at the Center for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Stockholm University.

Governments are responding to political pressure and tightening immigration rules.

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As of March, people applying to live in the Netherlands, for example, must take a test to prove they understand the country's language and culture --- an exam that reportedly requires 350 hours of study.

Also last month, the interior ministers of the six largest European Union countries --- Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland --- proposed that new **immigrants** be required to sign "integration contracts" mandating that they learn the language of their host country and respect Western freedoms.

Massoud Shadjareh, chairman of the London-based Islamic Human Rights Commission, said he believed that, by and large, migration was not the real issue.

"The underlying racism is sneaking back into our society and being legitimized," he said. Polish **immigrants** in Britain are praised as hard-working contributors to society, while the contributions of hard-working blacks and Asians go unsung, he said.

The British National Party spokesman denied that the party was racist and that it had neo-Nazi ties, although he admitted that John Tyndall, the party's founder, was "interested" in Nazism. Tyndall, who was expelled from the party, died last year.

"They call us extreme," said the spokesman, Phil Edwards. "[But] anybody who wants to fill this country with foreigners and destroy British jobs is an extremist."

It is a message that seems to resonate with more and more people.

In general, governments have done a poor job of explaining that immigration is often desirable and even necessary, said Jean-Philippe Chauzy, a spokesman for the Geneva-based International Organization for Migration.

"Europe, especially aging Europe, needs migrants," Chauzy said. "I think the difficulty is to package this and make it palatable to voters."

Some countries are recruiting migrants. Britain, facing a shortage, is recruiting doctors and dentists from former Communist countries. The Italian city of Florence, with a large population of the elderly, is recruiting paramedics from Sri Lanka.

According to the 2001 census, Britain's minority ethnic population was 4.6 million, or 7.7 percent of the country's 60 million total. Indians were the largest minority group, followed by Pakistanis, those of mixed ethnic background, Caribbean blacks and blacks from Africa.

Chauzy said the backlash was linked to the perception --- false, he said --- "that migration flows are not managed, that anyone can just walk in."

Graphic

Photo: Peter Taylor, 49, who lives in East London plans to vote for the anti-**immigrant** British National Party.

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