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Paul Nowak - 'Fixing Britain's migration system starts with fairness, compassion and common sense'

Whenever migration is leading the news – as it has been much of this week – I think about Jozef Nowak and Ching Tsang. Both of my grandfathers came here during the Second World War, Jozef from Poland and Ching from Hong Kong. They found work, got married, had children, and built their lives in Britain. I am proud of the contribution they and millions like them have made to this country, and proud too that Britain has, for decades, played its part in providing sanctuary, support and a home to those fleeing war and terror.

Let's start with the positive in what we've heard this week. I welcome the Home Secretary's decision to open up new safe and legal routes for people to claim asylum in the UK. It's the right thing to do, and essential to prevent people from making dangerous journeys across the Channel and to spike the business model of the people traffickers. The government is also right to prioritise investing in processing claims quickly and fairly, to end the use of hotels to house asylum seekers and to safely return those whose claims fail. These measures can help rebuild public trust in an asylum system that was discredited and brought to its knees by the previous government.

But, alongside these positive measures, there are real concerns about the real-world implications of some of the other policies announced this week. It's vital the government listens to these concerns and ensures its approach is fair, evidence based and rooted in decent values. Labour can't allow Nigel Farage to set the political weather. That won't deliver politically, and won't fix the real problems in our immigration system, our communities and workplaces.

The Government has talked about contribution. They're right that people who come here often have the skills we need and want to play their part. But contribution requires opportunity. That means ending the arbitrary rules that stop people from working for months or years while they wait for a decision. And it also means cracking down on the bad employers who exploit migrant workers and undercut everyone else. I want to see MPs across the political spectrum talk about the dodgy employers who exploit workers, not just those they employ.

Contribution also means offering stability once people are allowed to stay. No one who has lived here for years, worked here, and raised a family, should be left in limbo every two and half years. My grandparents could never have built a life, bought a house, or had children if they thought the Home Office might suddenly uproot them. Would my grandad Joe have been expected to take his Liverpool-Irish wife and six kids (all of whom were born and raised in Liverpool and spoke fluent Scouse rather than Polish) back with him to Poland? What will it mean for kids faced with the prospect of being

uprooted from their schools and communities and returned to places they have never been, and from which their families fled?

Likewise, people who move here can fall ill or face personal tragedy. We cannot have a system that leaves them destitute through no fault of their own.

And then there is the issue of language. We know the far and populist right, from Tommy Robinson to Nigel Farage, have weaponised the issue of small boat crossings. They use language to demonise not just asylum seekers, but anyone who doesn't fit their narrow view of what being British means.

Like me, the Home Secretary has a personal, as well as a political stake in this debate. One of the most powerful parts of her statement to the Commons on Monday was her personal testimony of being racially abused – something I, as a white bloke, am lucky enough to have never experienced. But it is an everyday experience for many of our black and Asian members. Speak to those members, and they will tell you how language that would have been deemed unacceptable a few short years ago, has become normalised by the far and populist right. That's something none of us who care about community coherence – and basic decency – can afford to ignore.

Yes – our migration and asylum system needs fixing. And alongside that, we need a grown-up conversation about migration more broadly. But most people in this country are fair minded. Most are compassionate. We need a fair, managed, values-based approach to migration that reflects that innate decency. The challenge now for the Government is to show it can deliver that.

Support UNISON members at the National Coal Mining Museum



UNISON members at the National Coal Mining Museum near Wakefield are on strike over the management's renegeing on a previous pay agreement. It's a long-running strike

by more than 40 workers at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield and has been extended until the end of January 2026.

They have been on a continuous strike since mid-August in a dispute over pay. The museum management has failed to put forward an acceptable wage-rise to resolve the dispute. The workers feel they have no option but to extend the strike due to the museum management's ongoing refusal to improve what's on the table and backtracking on earlier promises.

UNISON has called a national demonstration in support of the dispute on Saturday 6 December at 12.30pm outside Wakefield Cathedral, Westmorland St Wakefield WF1 1PJ. The demonstration will finish by 2.00pm.

UNITE calls for government action

In June, the Prax Lindsey Oil Refinery, in North Lincolnshire, went into administration. **Unite**, which represents workers at the complex, has demanded the government intervenes to protect workers, oil supplies and the local community.

Lindsey Oil Refinery has powered this region for decades. Now, 125 skilled workers have already been sacked after a night shift — with only statutory redundancy pay. Hundreds more face the same fate, and the knock-on effect could devastate thousands of local jobs.

Speaking at a rally at the refinery in October, Sharon Graham **Unite** general secretary said: "The government must do everything in its power to ensure a sale and safeguard jobs. Ministers should be urging any potential buyer to purchase the site as a whole to prevent it being split into parts.

"The Lindsey refinery is vital national infrastructure; it provides 10 per cent of the UK's fuel supply and is crucial to the regional economy. Its future must be secured."

Action on transport after below offer pay increases are rejected

Hundreds of Greater Manchester workers took strike action in November, with further action planned if a wage increase deal is not reached. Across Manchester's transport services, workers belonging to **Unite** and **UNISON**, walked out to demand a real term pay increase better working conditions, and a 4-day working week.

Action took place on 12 November and 14 November, following strikes and a previous work-to-rule. **Unite** has warned of disruption and further industrial action if a deal is not reached. This action was announced after **Unite** workers rejected a 3.2% pay offer which **Unite** general secretary Sharon Graham called "pay cuts dressed up as increases."

Members in the West Midlands Combined Authority branch took strike action on 14 November and began action short of strike on 15 November. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority strike dates are to be announced soon.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2025/11/three-branches-one-message-unison-rejects-below-inflation-pay-offer/>

Unite has also announced that 320 tram drivers in Greater Manchester will strike in December over working hours and exhaustion. The actions, currently scheduled for 5-7 December, could result in major disruption to Greater Manchester transport services over the festive period.

BBC crisis NUJ reaction

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is concerned that during the Culture Media and Sport Committee hearing on 24 November, board member Sir Robbie Gibb stated that he has become involved in editorial matters.

His evidence highlighted the need for greater clarity and transparency around the process by which members of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee raise issues and initiate reviews.

At present, the process is not clearly defined or publicly understood, which may give rise to uncertainty about how matters are selected for consideration and how potential conflicts of interest are managed. Ensuring clear and robust procedures is essential to maintaining confidence in the BBC's editorial independence.

The **NUJ** has reiterated its opposition to any political appointees being made to the BBC board. Protecting members' right to report freely - without fear or interference - remains a core principle of the union. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-calls-for-clarity-and-transparency-over-bbc-editorial-guidelines-and-standards-committee.html>

BECTU has called for Gibb's removal from the board <https://bectu.org.uk/news/bectu-calls-for-removal-of-robbie-gibb-from-bbc-board>

Action on CrossCountry rail services

RMT members will take strike action on CrossCountry in December after the company failed to resolve long-running issues on pay, staffing and previously agreed commitments. <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/rmt-announces-strike-action-on-crosscountry/>

The union says that it has tried repeatedly for months to reach a negotiated settlement. But regretfully the company has failed to honour agreements on overtime payments, staff resourcing and wage discrepancies for different grades. Strike action will take place on the following days: Saturdays 6/13/20 and 27 December

RMT general secretary Eddie Dempsey said: "CrossCountry has not dealt with the core issues in this dispute and has come back with a proposal that is worse than what was already on the table.

"Our members are still facing unresolved staffing shortages, unfair pay outcomes and broken commitments....."

TUC reacts to the Budget

Commenting on the 26 November Budget, **TUC General Secretary** Paul Nowak said:

“The Chancellor has delivered urgent relief to millions of hard-pressed households up and down the country and helped to rebuild our public services. Bringing down energy bills and taking action to make work pay will make a real difference to people struggling to get by. Scrapping the two-child benefit cap will lift hundreds of thousands of kids out of poverty. And new investment in young people, our public services and infrastructure is much needed. The policy decisions announced today will disproportionately benefit those low and middle income households at the sharp end – and tax increases will fall on the wealthiest.

“Fourteen years of Conservative government took a wrecking ball to living standards – with pay packets squeezed, child poverty at crisis levels and vital public services left on their knees after years of cuts. This government is starting to turn the page on that failed Tory era. But fixing the mess that the Tories left will take time. We now need to see a relentless focus on affordability and making work pay beyond this Budget. That’s how you rebuild the country and show you’re on the side of working people.”

On fair taxes to fund public services in the long-term, he added:

“The task of repairing Britain will need years of sustained investment. To deliver the vital funds needed to rebuild our country, we need a fair tax system where those with the broadest shoulders pay their fair share.

“With a tax on online gambling companies, a mansion tax and increased taxes on dividends and investments, the chancellor has built on the measures she announced last year to make our tax system fairer. But we need to go further in years ahead by continuing to reform and simplify our tax system and ensure that windfall profits are taxed fairly.”

On the need for a review of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) Paul said:

“The TUC has consistently called for a root and branch review into the OBR. After months of destabilising speculation and the bemusing timing of the productivity assessment, the OBR published the Budget forecast prematurely. We cannot continue with the rollercoaster of speculation which surrounds fiscal events – and we cannot afford an unaccountable OBR which holds back growth through its conservative assumptions.” <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/budget-will-deliver-urgent-relief-millions-families-and-help-rebuild-public-services>

A Year of Trade Union Climate Action

The **TUC**, alongside many unions, has declared 2025-26 as a Year of Trade Union Climate Action. A year of trade unions organising for a better, safer, empowering future for workers. A year of workers fighting to futureproof their workplaces during net zero and make the green economy a place where workers have power and pride. A year of workers as agents of impactful and socially just climate and environmental action.

The **TUC North East, Yorkshire & Humber** held a regional online launch event which you can watch [here](#).

To support this, we've relaunched our [regional green organising webpage](#) which now includes a calendar of climate action events which we'll add to over the coming year. Should you have any events you want including, please [share them with us](#) so we can include them here and in our newsletters.

The national **TUC** has also launched a New Year of Trade Union Climate Action Hub (www.tuc.org.uk/climate) where you'll find all the resources, case studies, and information to help you and your members win for workers this year. That too includes a new Climate Action Events feature, where organisers can promote events, courses, demos, and more nationwide.

Government U-turn on workers' rights bill

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Deputy political editor *The Guardian**

The government is to ditch its flagship policy from the workers' rights bill, removing the right to protection from unfair dismissal from the first day of employment and replacing it with a six-month threshold. The move comes after the business secretary, Peter Kyle, told businesses at the CBI conference this week that he would listen to concerns about the effects of the law change on hiring. A trade union source told the Guardian: "They've capitulated and there may be more to come."

The **TUC** said it was prepared to accept the compromise arrangement, after days of negotiation. "The absolute priority now is to get these rights – like day one sick pay - on the statute book so that working people can start benefitting from them from next April," its general secretary Paul Nowak said.

Kyle has replaced Jonathan Reynolds as business secretary, the latter having steered through the legislation with the former deputy prime minister, Angela Rayner.

[Kyle committed](#) on Monday (24 November) to ensuring businesses would not "lose" as a result of the changes, which included a ban on zero-hour contracts and day-one protections for workers against unfair dismissal.

"I will not allow it to become zero-sum, [you] give one to the other, the other loses ... This has to be got right," he said.

A union source said the changes had been agreed to allow the bill to progress faster through the House of [Lords, which has significantly delayed the legislation](#). It will mean the qualifying period for unfair dismissal will be reduced from two years to six months.

Sharon Graham, **Unite** general secretary described the bill as a "shell of its former self".

More at: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2025/nov/27/government-to-ditch-day-one-unfair-dismissal-policy-from-workers-rights-bill>