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Foreigners in London ‘Horrified’ by May’s Immigration Vision

October 6, 2016 – 9:56 PM CEST Updated on October 7, 2016 – 4:36 AM CEST

If Prime Minister Theresa May gets her way on immigration, Victor Villar says he might just leave London.

The 31-year-old Mexican portfolio analytics consultant is among the many foreigners in the City who are reeling from the government’s [proposal](#) to force companies to reveal how many non-British workers they hire as a way to push them to put natives first.

"If things get worse because they approve some anti-immigrant policies in parliament, I would definitely consider a job in the U.S. or somewhere else," Villar, who has lived in the capital for 2 1/2 years, said in an interview. May’s plan is "like shooting yourself in your own foot because many people who come to work here are skilled workers with graduate degrees."

Home Secretary Amber Rudd this week proposed to punish banks and landlords who fail to make checks on foreigners doing business with them. It’s part of the government’s strategy to address public concerns about immigration that were laid bare by the U.K.’s vote to quit the European Union.

Nazi Flashback

A YouGov poll on Wednesday of 5,875 adults found that 59 percent of people support those policies, showing that Rudd and May are in tune with voters. That is of little comfort to the swathes of foreign-born Londoners, many of whom have become naturalized British citizens. For some, there are parallels with pre-World War II Germany.

"I’m horrified by this," said Paula Levitan, an American lawyer at Bryan Cave who’s lived in London for 16 years and has acquired a British passport. "I can’t help but flash on the 1930s and early 40s. Are we going to have to wear badges on our arms?"



Theresa May. Photographer: Chris Ratcliffe/Bloomberg

Youssef Laouiti, a 26-year-old banker born and raised in Britain to French parents, echoes that sentiment. "It's all a bit ridiculous: It starts with name lists and ends up with people being sent to camps," he said. "It's extreme, but a lot of people will confront it, so I'm not frightened" that it'll become law.

Twitter Storm

The Nazi parallels went viral on social media after LBC radio host James O'Brien [read](#) passages of Adolf Hitler's autobiography that had echoes in the Home Office proposals. It touched a nerve, highlighting how emotions have been whipped up.

"If you're going to have a sharp line of distinction between people born here and people who just work here, you're enacting chapter two of 'Mein Kampf,'" O'Brien said.

"Strange times," he concluded.

From Brexit to the rise of Donald Trump, populism in Western democracies is threatening to do away with a [postwar political order](#) and usher into power a new brand of leadership willing to crack down on immigration and revert to isolationist policies. Economic hardship has turned voters against beliefs that open borders, tariff-free trade and greater integration would narrow income inequality and bring about greater well-being.

Hammond in NY

Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond Thursday told Bloomberg Television that the Brexit vote was a call to impose tougher control on immigration amid concerns an influx of foreign workers has pressured wages in the low-skilled workforce.

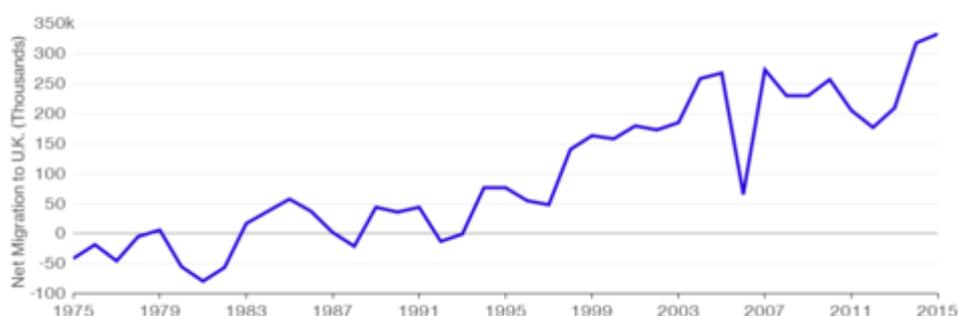
"We have to recognize that part of the mood in the U.K. that drove the referendum decision is a mood about pressure on wages on entry level jobs from high level immigration," he said.

After triggering an uproar, Rudd walked back some of her comments by stressing that the listing of foreign workers is only a [proposal](#) that would be part of a wider review of immigration regulations. Her office said it was modeled on U.S. practice.

Nevertheless, it's clear that the premier has interpreted the U.K.'s 52 percent to 48 percent referendum outcome as an anti-immigration message that gives her a mandate to bring in stringent measures to cut down on the numbers coming into the country. She aims to cut net annual immigration to below 100,000 from more than 300,000 currently.

Peak Migration

A net 333,000 migrants entered the U.K. in 2015, followed seven months later by the Brexit vote



Source: Office of National Statistics via Migration Watch UK

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As an international city, London voted overwhelmingly to stay in the EU, putting the capital at odds with the rest of the country. About 37 percent of its residents weren't born in the U.K., compared with 13 percent nationally. While the City attracts bankers from overseas, there are plenty of other foreigners employed in different industries that are in shock.

Afghan Driver

"We're all human and if my company were to do that it would seem like a racist decision," said Ziaurehman Yaqubi, a food delivery driver from Afghanistan.

Allyson Stewart-Allen, the U.S.-born chief executive of International Marketing Partners Ltd., said she was "gobsmacked" by the rhetoric, which left her feeling "unwelcome and perplexed."

Others are hoping May's words won't translate into action. Raphael Seksik, 21, who was over from France interviewing for internships at banks in London, said he didn't think the measures could be pushed through in his field.

"In this industry they need specific skills and it's very international," he said. "They can't hire just English workers in the banks."