

FULL TEXT OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY PRESS RELEASE, 29/12/05

“Green: Scrap EU Worker Registration Scheme

Conservatives have today called for the EU Worker Registration Scheme to be scrapped.

The scheme requires workers from the new EU accession countries in central and eastern Europe to pay £70 for a form allowing them to work. It was set up so that Government could know how many new workers were coming here, but the effect has been to promote mass evasion. Research from Precision Prospecting showed that 90,000-150,000 workers from the new members were supplied in a year to agriculture and fresh produce. The figures from the scheme showed that 30,000 registered for agriculture and 11,000 for food processing, suggesting that the number of workers is three times the official figure.

Damian Green said:

“This scheme is pushing hard-working people into the informal economy—exactly the opposite of what we need. A civilised and credible immigration policy must be based on accurate numbers. People who come here to work must feel confident enough not to hide from the authorities. That is the way to restore public confidence in the system.”

“We want hard-working people in this country. To charge people big money for a worthless piece of paper encourages them to stay out of the official economy. This is a classic example of the Government talking tough but acting incompetently. Instead of this bureaucracy we need proper border controls so we know who is coming in and going out. That way we will know how many people are here at any one time.”

Notes to Editors

The Accession States Worker Registration Scheme requires workers to register within one month of beginning work in Britain. The fee was increased from £50 to £70 from October 1 2005. Workers are required to fill in the form and send it with their passport to the Home Office. Many are reluctant to part with their passports when they have just arrived in a new country, and see £70 as an extortionate fee, given that many are coming to do low paid jobs.

These drawbacks would be acceptable if the scheme helped us know how many workers from these countries were here, but it does not. The figures it generates are misleading because

- There is no record of workers leaving the country so the figures will overstate the numbers here. This factor will increase as the months pass.

- Self-employed workers are not required to register
- Workers do not need to register until they have worked for a month. The Precision Prospecting Research shows that the average length of stay with one labour provider is one month, and evidence in the survey showed that some were moving just before the cut-off point to avoid paying the fee.”