

We need migration. Now let's work out how to embrace it...

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Will Hutton [sets out a stark choice](#) in the Observer this morning:

Politicians and their electorates now have to make a choice. There is no middle way. The choice is between building walls and electrified fences, creating mass detention centres, organising mass repatriation and conceding to the fear of the other or it is to find a way of sustaining openness while doing the very best that can be done to allay the natural fears and apprehensions of host populations.

I think he is right to be stark.

Except I think there is no choice. Maybe that is because I consider significant parts of my extended family to have come to the UK as economic and political migrants, and I can see all the benefits that have resulted for the country as a result. And maybe it is because I am a Quaker. And maybe it is just because I, in a Rawlsian sense, wonder what would happen if an accident of birth (and it would be no more) had put me in the migrants position. But I do consider we really have only one choice: we have to accept that in the rapidly changing world in which we live migration will be a part.

And that is a positive choice, for three reasons. This country has always benefitted culturally from migration.

This country has always benefitted economically from migration.

And let's also be clear: if the fundamental pension contract that the working generation will look after the old is to be fulfilled then we need more people who can work, pay tax and care in this country. We simply do not have enough now. We can have migration or we can have social collapse in the UK in years to come. That's the actual stark choice. We're already seeing this reality in many of our caring professions. We will witness to ever greater extent over time.

I am wholly aware of the risks and threats. Most especially I am aware that some feel economically left out. So we must make sure they have the skills they need and the opportunities to use them, and are failing to do that.

And some feel left out of housing. So we must address that.

And some feel culturally challenged. I am no expert on this one but I can still recall the days of anti-Irish prejudice that were, thankfully, dying as I grew up. I do not have the expertise to offer on how to resolve new waves of the same sentiment. I think there are those who do possess it.

What I am sure of is that we have to make clear that we need migration, as a matter of fact. That's the starting point for embracing its realities. And that is not said enough.