

Cardinal warns politicians over ‘alarmist’ immigration rhetoric

Britain’s most senior Roman Catholic cleric calls for ‘realism and respect’ in immigration debate amid acrimony over new Ukip poster campaign telling people 26 million foreigners want their job



Britain’s most senior Roman Catholic churchman has condemned politicians for deploying “alarmist” language in the debate over immigration.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales spoke out against the use of arguments which stoke up “distress” about foreigners coming to the UK.

His comments, in an interview with The Telegraph, come amid a furore over a new £1.5 million advertising campaign by the UK Independence Party which includes billboards suggesting to people that millions of foreigners are after their job.

One poster shows a massive finger pointing at the reader next to the message: “Twenty six million people in Europe are looking for work – and whose job are they after?”

Last year Nigel Farage, the Ukip leader, condemned a Home Office poster campaign telling illegal immigrants to “go home or face arrest” as “nasty”.

The latest poster campaign led to accusations of “racism” from political opponents, which Mr Farage strongly denies.

Cardinal Nichols did not single out any individual party but appealed to politicians of all backgrounds to approach the issue with “realism and a sense of respect”.

He said Britain should celebrate the “richness” that immigrants bring the country rather than treating their arrival as something worthy of “anger or dismay”.

The Cardinal argued that immigration is not only good for Britain’s national “well-being” but in turn provides more money through remittances to people poorer parts of the world than the entire overseas aid budget.

He said: “What I would appeal today is that the debate about immigration is done with a sense of realism and a sense of respect – and that it is not cushioned in expressions which are alarmist and evocative of anger or of dismay or distress at all these people coming to this country.”

The latest Ukip campaign poster (PA)

Some Catholic churches in British cities are full to overflowing thanks to immigration, but the Cardinal said the whole country should celebrate what was happening.

“We have to grow to appreciate the richness that immigration brings, not simply to the Catholic church but to the life of hospitals and many public sector areas where we are now embracing and dependent on people who come to this country willing to give and wanting to support their families back home.”

The interview was conducted in the aftermath of a television debate between Mr Farage and Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, in which the Ukip leader argued that migrant labour is driving down wages.

But the Cardinal insisted: “The reality is that the vast majority of migrants to this country add to our well-being.”

He said that it is likely that the amount of money sent home by immigrant workers in this country to support their families was greater than the UK’s overseas aid budget.

“There is no doubt that our welcome for immigrants not only helps this country but also helps the poor in other parts of the world as well,” he said.

He was speaking after attending an event with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Justin Welby, at Giuseppe Conlon House, a Catholic-led refuge for men waiting for clearance from the immigration authorities.

He said that many are being “crippled” by the system during the long wait for a verdict.

“That can take four, five, six, seven years,” he said.

“They will get vouchers for food but all other aspects of life are closed off to them,” said the Cardinal.

“That creates tremendous personal and health issues for people who are waiting. They just live with this profound sense of uncertainty for year after year after year.

“The reality is that people who are waiting to have a due process are treated in a way that leaves them often very crippled.”

Earlier this year, the Cardinal triggered a national debate about food shortages in the UK when he said, during a Telegraph interview, that the effect of cuts was “frankly a disgrace” by leaving people facing “hunger and destitution”.

David Cameron, responded with an article in The Daily Telegraph, arguing that the Coalition's welfare reforms were part of a long-term moral mission for the country.

"Our long-term economic plan for Britain is not just about doing what we can afford, it is also about doing what is right," he said.

"Nowhere is that more true than in welfare.

Cole Moreton and John Bingham - The Telegraph