

Immigration and Legislation

1947

Indians began arriving in the UK in large numbers shortly after their country gained independence in 1947. More than 60,000 arrived before 1955, many of whom drove buses, or worked in foundries or textile factories.

1948

British nationality Act 1948 allowed 800,000 subjects of the empire to live and work in the UK.

The aim of this was to fill gaps in the workforce – mainly in transport and the new NHS.

Many people were brought to the UK on ships like the Empire Windrush in 1948.

1953

Immigration rose from 3000 in 1953 to 136,400 by 1961

1962

Commonwealth immigrants Act 1962 required migrants to have a job before they arrived.

1965

The flow of Indian immigrants peaked between 1965 and 1972, boosted in particular by Ugandan dictator Idi Amin's sudden decision to expel 50,000 Gujarati Indians from Uganda. Around 30,000 Ugandan Asians emigrated to the UK.

1968

Tighter controls were introduced under a subsequent Act in 1968.

Enoch Powell makes his Rivers of Blood speech.

1971

A new surge of immigration followed the conflict in 1971 between India and Pakistan over the region of Kashmir that witnessed Pakistan's unconditional surrender and a treaty that subsequently led to the independence of Bangladesh.

1972

By 1972, with the passing of the Immigration Act only holders of work permits, or people with parents or grandparents born in the UK could gain entry – effectively stemming primary immigration from Commonwealth countries. The Act abolished the distinction between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth entrants.

Conservative Party leader Edward Heath fired Powell from his Shadow Cabinet the day after the speech, and he never held another senior political post. Powell received 110,000 letters – only 2,300 disapproving. Three days after the speech, on 23 April, as the Race Relations Bill was being debated in the House of Commons, around 2,000 dockers walked off the job to march on Westminster protesting against Powell's dismissal, and the next day 400 meat porters from Smithfield market handed in a 92-page petition in support of Powell. At that time, 43% of junior doctors working in NHS hospitals, and some 30% of student nurses, were immigrants, without which the health service would have needed to be curtailed.

