

The policy options on migration

The PM has to consider what to do with the draft Bill in the light of reactions to it and the Parliamentary arithmetic I set out yesterday.

There is no point in amending the bill in the way One Nation and the Opposition want. A weaker bill would lead to more court challenges and delays. Far from Rwanda being a deterrent to migrants they would see such a weaker bill left them more time to get here as the courts generated more uncertainty. Nor are there likely to be enough One Nation rebels to stop the current bill.

He could try to talk those who think the bill is too weak into allowing it a 2nd reading and to spend more time with them to see if amendments can be agreed to meet legitimate worries. He would need sign off from enough rebels to make amendment worthwhile to give him a small majority. It would increase the chances of the bill working.

He could try to push an unamended bill through. This would be possible if Labour abstain but very difficult if they do not. If the bill then leads to more delays and court challenges he is worse off than not trying to legislate. If the bill works he triumphs.

He could conclude that thanks to the Opposition parties, The Lords and some Conservative rebels he cannot legislate. He would need to develop more ideas to whittle down the number of illegal migrants. These could include increased surveillance in France against illegal boats setting out, more police resource to follow the money, more mystery shopping for the boat trips, exposing the gangs, intercepting the boat purchases and breaking more into the sales and support systems of the travel organisers.

Whatever he does he would be well advised to turn more attention to the easier but larger task of deflating legal migration numbers which are so excessive. Many who want the small boats stopped also want much lower overall migrant numbers. Meeting their wishes on that would help a lot. To do this he and his Chancellor have to win a battle with the OBR and Treasury officials. They need to correct their wrong numbers, and understand just how much all the extra public sector and housing costs for migrants adds to spending and the deficit.