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How have we ended up with immigration restrictions this darn bad? [1]

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We around here are pretty much in with the idea of free immigration. Even the scary statistics coming out of places like MigrationWatch show that there's a very small (about £4 a year I recall) benefit to the indigenous population. And of course the value to the immigrant is vast making it a definite pareto improvement. And as Bryan Caplan likes to point out, the immigration of low skilled immigrants still enables a more fine grained division of labour within the country to everyone's benefit.

But OK, let's be a tad political and realise that not everyone agrees with these obvious truths. That immigration must be limited in some manner. So, err, how have we ended up with a set of immigration restrictions that are so stupid [3]?

> The Royal Society says a separate government scheme introduced in 2011 to attract 1,000 top academics and artists had allowed only 50 people in.

That a government policy fails is hardly a surprise. But OK, they're trying to get top academics in. So why would the new rules have meant that one of our recent Nobel Laureates couldn't have got in?

> Russian-born physicist Professor Sir Andre Geim said new restrictions on non-European Union immigrants, including minimum salary requirements of at least £31,000 and tighter student visa rules, are blocking the brightest academics from working at British institutions.

Well, you see, the thing is that British academics aren't all that well paid:

> Sir Andre, 54, first arrived in the UK in the early 1990s as a Russian citizen with a permit to work as a post-doctoral fellow at Nottingham University. His salary would have been around £27,000 in today's money, meaning that he would have been barred from entry under the minimum salary requirement.

So the government wants to get all these top academics coming in, to the point where they've got a scheme to aid them in coming in. At the same time its own salaries that it pays to top academics (and yes, post-doctoral students are indeed that, they're all the people having the bright ideas. Professors are those who are old enough to have stopped having new ideas) mean that they cannot immigrate into this country under the requirements for immigrants to have a high salary.

Something of a facepalm moment that.

Which brings us to an important point. Government just isn't capable of doing these complicated things. Is incapable of the finesse necessary to achieve solutions to tricky problems. So we might well be better off if they didn't even try. You know, cut government back to the basics of defending the country and maintaining at least a semblance of law and order. Once they've shown they can manage that we might allow them to at least trying more difficult things. But not until they've shown they can master the basics.

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