

Increasing attacks on Asylum Seekers

Anarchist Communist Federation

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As you read this, the effects of the government's Asylum and Immigration Bill should be in full swing. Set to be implemented on 8 January with further measures to be introduced in Autumn, it entails an increase in immigration controls, a dubious list of 'safe' countries of origin and the cutting of all benefits for the majority of asylum seekers.

Tighter Controls

The government is increasing visa restrictions — many refugees, due to circumstances, have to get on a plane without a visa. The government also wants to extend visa requirements for more countries. The Bill also ends the right to appeal for many. Incidentally, the success rate of appeals has already declined somewhat. 18 months prior to the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Act, 16% of all decisions were refusals. 1994 saw this leap to 75% refusals. According to the Refugee Council, the nature of refugees' appeals haven't changed, rather there is a 'culture of disbelief' at the Home Office.

Big Brother

There is an increasing 'Big Brother' tone to the bill reflected in the tightening up of internal immigration controls. Employers will be penalised for not properly checking the immigration status of their employees. Many black, Asian and other groups will be forced to undergo immigration checks in order to get social security, healthcare, enrol their children at school, get a job, a student grant or loan. Aside from being a blatantly racist attack, it means that all sorts of public sector workers and officials will now have an immigration officer role.

The White List

The government's white list of 'safe' countries (a motley collection of regimes Britain is pally with, does business with or has economic interests in) include Nigeria (you know the place, military dictatorship, into executing ecologists and other political opponents with the connivance of companies like Shell), Algeria (where hundreds of thousands have been killed either by the government or by Islamic fundamentalists) and other well known sanctuaries.

Then there is the idea of the 'safe' third country. In other words; a refugee may be sent to a country they may have passed through on their way here — irrespective of whether that country will return the refugee to their country of origin.

No Benefit

From January, all asylum seekers appealing against initial decisions and all those applying for asylum who are resident in Britain will be denied any welfare benefits. The DSS estimate 13,000 will immediately lose all benefits (the Refugee Council reckons 40,000 a year will be affected). There will be no extenuating circumstances for people with children, pregnant women, the old and the disabled — however, Home Secretary Howard says those from countries undergoing serious political upheavals will be allowed to receive benefit. NOTE: According to Howard, there are currently no such 'upheaval countries' in the whole world!

Before January some landlords were already refusing to rent accommodation to asylum seekers. It seems that those seeking sanctuary will be forced to live in cardboard city with no means

of subsistence. In short, vulnerable people (some possibly traumatised) will be forced to undergo all sorts of hardship. In the long term, Britain will be recognised by prospective asylum seekers as a no go area. Also Blacks, Asians and others will be subjected to increased state checks, regulations and harassment. Such harassment will take place at all levels.

Divides Our Class

Once again the government is trying to gain some sort of support by using the race card to “keep the immigrants out”. The lives of the vulnerable and the deaths of people like Joy Gardener mean nothing to the government lowlifes in the scramble for the bigot vote. Such racism is intended to divide our class. For us the working class has no country, the real ‘aliens’ are the rich and their politicians (of whatever political party). And let’s be honest about it, if refugees irritate governments who British firms, the British government or multinationals do business with, then those refugees have no rights. The Saudi refugee who supposedly ‘threatened’ arms deals with the Saudi government shows this quite clearly.

Public sector workers should be organising to refuse to implement and co-operate with their proposed immigration officer role. But we need to be organising resistance to the whole system on a wider scale.

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