

# **Give the Racists the Boot**

Workers' Solidarity Movement

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For decades the Irish State and many Irish people have been consistently racist in their treatment of the Traveller population. This has led to a situation where the infant mortality rate among Travellers is three times higher than that of the settled community, 70 – 80% of all adult Travellers are illiterate and over 1,000 families live on unserviced sites without access to such basics as running water, electricity, refuse collection or fire protection. Travellers are treated by State services, and by many people, as Ireland's 'untouchables'; and anti-Traveller protests have been an all too frequent occurrence over the past number of years.

Since the end of June almost 1,000 people whose journeys originated in Britain or in the North have been refused leave to enter the 26-County State. (RTE 9p.m. News, Sat. 11 October) This is an average of over 8 people a day being turned away from our "cead mile failte" shores. The Sunday Tribune of September 7<sup>th</sup> reports that a 20-year old black English tourist, who has been visiting relatives on both sides of the border since he was a child, has recently received a letter from a garda immigration officer informing him that he was prevented from entering the Republic.

Buses and trains from Belfast to Dublin are regularly entered by immigration officers. Again the Sunday Tribune (Sept.7) reports on a bus from Belfast to Dublin which was held up for 30 minutes while the only black person on board, a foreign tourist, was questioned by immigration officers. A recent (early October) bus journey from Derry to Dublin was interrupted 4 times as immigration officers boarded the bus in their search for "illegals". A spokesperson for the Irish Council for Civil Liberties is quoted as saying that there has been "anecdotal evidence of very heavy-handed and severe behaviour by gardai and immigration officers." In *The Irish Times* (18 October) CIE Train workers revealed racist Gardai were asking if there were any Black people on board their trains. The government still denies there are criteria for who is stopped and questioned!

### **How can Racism be fought?**

There are those who argue that a campaign against racism must be inclusive and must include all those who call themselves anti-racist. But we must remember that all the major political parties (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour, PDs, Democratic Left) have been in government recently. They all agreed to immigration controls (as included in the Refugee Act). They all refused to provide decent facilities for Travellers. It was the Rainbow Coalition which in its final days in office introduced the strict border controls now being implemented by Fianna Fail and the PDs in such a racist manner.

Yet the politicians have no problem looking after the beef barons and the supermarket tycoons, they have no problem extending Irish citizenship to anybody who has a million pounds to invest in Albert Reynolds' pet food factory. You will notice, we're sure, that any time an establishment politician – even those who claim to be anti-racist – refers to Travellers or to immigrants, he/she talks about them as a "problem".

There is no point therefore in seeking support for a fight against racism from supporters of the status quo – from representatives of the very system which needs to divide us in order to survive. Irish working class people need no reminder of what it is to be an "economic refugee". We must remember instead that as working class people we have much more in common with people who are coming to this country in an attempt to avoid persecution or abject poverty than we do with the likes of Charlie Haughey, Michael Lowry, Tony O'Reilly, Larry Goodman or any of the rest of our exploiters.

## **Stand up to racism**

A tough anti-racist, working-class-based campaign under a slogan such as “All different, all equal, all exploited” is needed. Let’s build it together.

## **What is Racism**

Racism is, in essence, discrimination against a group of people on the basis of characteristics which are either truly or falsely attributed to them as a group. It can be based on many perceived differences such as skin colour, nationality, language, belief, culture or customs. Its most common manifestation is in discrimination on the basis of skin colour. While racism is usually ascribed to by people who have a belief in their “superiority” over the group which they are racist against, people are not inherently racist. No child is born hating people of a different colour; this is a behaviour which has to be taught. Racism is in fact a product of Capitalism and of the “divide and rule” tactics of politicians and the ruling class.

## **The Case against Immigration Controls**

Having been used to exporting our people (to Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, etc.) the hysteria whipped up when a few thousand refugees and immigrants came here was hypocritical in the extreme. While the government has gardai searching for suspected “illegal immigrants” at the airports, ports and border crossings; the Minister for Justice was able to take a few days off in early October to plead in person with the American authorities for legal status for the tens of thousands of Irish “illegals” in the USA.

Practically every family in the country has relatives living abroad. If there has been any “flood” of people across borders, it has been a flood out of Ireland. 150 years ago there were 8 million living in Ireland. Today it is only 5 million. So, only a lunatic could make a case that Ireland cannot support any more people.

The government has responded to rising racism with measures to make it even harder to get into Ireland. That is why the ‘free travel area’ was abolished and there are now gardai doing passport checks on practically every Black or Asian person who steps off the Hollyhead ferry.

Whenever politicians talk about immigration controls, you can be sure they are not talking about white Americans, Canadians or Australians. A decade ago thousands of white South Africans arrived here. There was no media campaign against them, no politicians stirring up racism, no recruitment of retired gardai to “process” their applications to be allowed stay here.

## **We are all immigrants**

Those who want to “regulate” and “control” entry into Ireland ignore the fact that we are all descended from immigrants. Throughout history people moved from one place to another in search of a better life. What are we “Irish” but a mixture of earlier immigrants: Celts, Saxons, Vikings, Normans.

Anyone calling for stricter controls is implying that refugees and immigrants are a “problem”. But we only hear this said when the immigrants are not white. The assumption is that a few

thousand black people in Ireland is a problem, if this is not a racist assumption what is? Nobody minds if you are from America, but if you come from Somalia you are labelled a “problem”.

Anyone calling for controls is also assuming that refugees and immigrants are a burden. In fact, the opposite is the case. Everyone coming here has the ability to work and earn a living, and most have already had their education paid for by their own country. The burden is on the refugees because the government does not allow them to work until their cases are processed — which can take two years or longer.

Anarchists want to see a world without borders. Just as the rich can go and live where they please, so should the rest of us have the same right. That is why we reject all immigration controls.

Different cultures can add to the rich tapestry of human experience. At the end of the day there is only one race — the human race, but there are two main classes — bosses and working class. The choice we have is to either line up with the Charlie Haugheys and Ray Burkes against ‘foreigners’; or to line up with working people like ourselves against the rich who have been ripping us off for far too long.

## **Who benefits?**

The purpose of immigration controls is not to defend the PAYE tax payer, which is clear when we see incredibly low taxes on profits and tax amnesties for the rich. The purpose is one which suits the government’s own agenda — to suggest that Black, Arab and East European people are responsible for so much of our wages being taken in tax and for the understaffed welfare system.

And this nicely lets the ruling class off the hook. They live a life of magnificent (and usually corrupt) luxury at our expense while we are supposed to turn against each other because some have a different skin colour. It is not a coincidence that the newspapers (*Independent, Herald, Star*) owned by one of Ireland’s richest men — Tony O’Reilly — have been loudest in scapegoating immigrants.

It is the same politicians who made it necessary for so many of us and our families to leave this country in search of work who are now stoking the fires of racism against those who are coming here in search of a better life.

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