

Britain: Racist attacks follow in wake of anti-immigrant press campaign

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A series of vicious racist assaults has occurred in Britain over the last months. In the most infamous incident, three racists attacked Chris Cotter, the white boyfriend of top black athlete Ashia Hansen, outside his girlfriend's home. Cotter was left with three stab wounds to his back and a serious slash wound across his forehead after the three attempted to scalp him. Subsequently, three prominent black British athletes have received anonymous death threats.

Just one week earlier, in an incident that received almost no attention in the press, another mixed-race couple were attacked in Liverpool. Sunil Modi and Claire Nichols were forced off the road by a gang as they drove home and then violently set upon. Modi was dragged out of the car, kicked and beaten repeatedly about the head. His assailants attempted to pull him over to a metal fence, shouting "Spike him, spike him—put the Paki's head on a spike."

The press roundly condemned the attack on Cotter and denounced the racist perpetrators. But their coverage of this case was at odds with the tirade of racial abuse that has been directed against asylum-seekers by the British media in the same period. Journalists claimed to be "perplexed" at the wanton violence directed against Cotter, making no connection between the growth of racist assaults and the welter of anti-immigrant propaganda carried in their own newspapers.

Sections of the press have embarked upon a hate campaign particularly directed against Eastern European refugees, admonishing them as "gypsy scroungers". They seized on the case of a female Romanian refugee who was arrested and heavily fined for begging in London with her child. The woman was chastised by the judge and told to inform other gypsies that they would be imprisoned if they continued to

behave in what he described as a "deplorable" fashion.

Under Labour's new immigration rules, asylum-seekers receive just 70 percent of the usual welfare benefit rates available to British citizens, which are already set at subsistence level. The bulk of benefit payments made to refugees now consists of vouchers, exchangeable only at a restricted number of shops, and a small amount of "pocket money".

Those awaiting a decision on their asylum application are also forbidden to work. So it is hardly surprising that some refugees are forced to make ends meet by begging, or by taking on ultra-low-wage black market jobs. Neither the mass media nor from any mainstream politician has condemned the fact that asylum-seekers and their families have been deliberately placed in such dire straits. Rather, the victims of inhumane and degrading immigration laws were condemned for upsetting "British sensibilities". Articles in the tabloids railed against gypsies, accusing them of ill-treating their children by taking them to beg on the streets. Labour's immigration minister Barbara Roche described the practice of begging with children as "vile".

The *Sun* newspaper, owned by Rupert Murdoch, accused Romanian refugees of "stealing and scrounging" from British taxpayers, to construct "palaces" back in Eastern Europe. Launching its "Britain has had enough" campaign, the paper warned ominously, "This is not an extreme country. Just the opposite, in fact. But even the fairest-minded nation has it breaking point. And Britain has reached it."

Paul Johnson, writing in the *Daily Mail*, portrayed the entire post-war history of immigration to the UK as a cavalcade of "beggar criminals".

The tabloid press were emboldened in their crude racism by the competition between Labour and the

Conservative Party over which was the toughest on immigration. Conservative Home Affairs spokesperson Ann Widdecombe unveiled Tory election manifesto proposals that all asylum-seekers should be kept in custody until their cases are resolved. In response, the Home Office announced new powers to “fast-track” applications of those asylum-seekers convicted of “aggressive begging”, especially if they “exploit” their children while they do so. The government justified the new measures on the grounds that focus group research showed that the public believes asylum-seekers are the reason for the decline of public services!

“Fast-tracking” is a crude euphemism for the abrogation of basic civil liberties and the rapid expulsion of asylum-seekers. This is proven by government boasts that refugees are now being expelled at a faster rate than new applications for asylum are being received—reducing the absolute numbers of asylum-seekers in the UK.

Blair's talk of creating an “inclusive” society does not contradict the government's draconian stance on immigration. Just as black and Asian Britons are supposedly included in the “New Britain”, there are those who must be excluded from it. This enables the government to posture as liberal on matters regarding Britain's established ethnic minorities—“deserving immigrants”—whilst taking harsh measures against more recent refugees and asylum-seekers, who are the “undeserving,” routinely denounced as “economic migrants” and “bogus asylum-seekers”.

The targeting of Eastern European refugees is politically motivated. The European Union (EU) is preparing to incorporate a number of nations from Eastern Europe, thereby enlarging the number of those enjoying freedom of movement within the EU, on paper at least. Europe's mainly Social Democratic governments are all seeking to deny that right to those they deem “undeserving”. At the same time, these governments advocate anti-immigrant measures similar to those advanced by Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria, whom they denounce.

The campaign to abrogate the rights of asylum-seekers and immigrants is part of an offensive against civil liberties in general. Every European government is slashing public spending and cutting welfare provisions. Anti-immigrant propaganda—blaming “dishonest” refugees for the poor state of health care,

social services, etc.—diverts the responsibility for the present state of affairs and justifies the unprecedented levels of inequality. Alongside Romanian gypsies, those routinely demonised by the establishment and press include the “idle” unemployed and “criminal” poor.



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