

Asylum seeker killed in Glasgow, Scotland

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Firsat Yildiz, a 22 year old asylum seeker, was fatally stabbed in the early hours of Sunday morning, in Glasgow's Sighthill estate.

Firsat had only been in Glasgow for a few weeks, when he was attacked by two older white men while walking home from a meal in the city centre accompanied by a 16 year old friend. He was taken to the city's Royal Infirmary, where he was pronounced dead. His friend is now under police protection, fearful of further attacks.

Representatives of the up to 3,500 asylum seekers in Glasgow have assumed that the murder was racially motivated, though the police have suggested his death could have been triggered by a robbery. Immediately following news of Firsat's murder, up to 300 Kurdish refugees protested by blocking traffic within Sighthill, before police, some equipped with riot gear, forced them into a car park. Some fights broke out between Kurds and local residents and youth. Bottles were thrown. Glasgow's police helicopter was deployed. Refugees then marched to the City Chambers, two miles away, a move repeated the next day, demanding more security in Sighthill and the suspension of further movements into the area. On Monday night 100 police were stationed on the estate.

The assumption of a racially motivated assault is lent weight by the report earlier this year of a 170 percent increase in attacks on asylum seekers in Glasgow. According to the Scottish Refugee Council, there have been 70 racial attacks, seven serious, across Glasgow since January.

Sighthill has become a key location for the Labour government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers. Following vicious anti-immigrant campaigns from Conservative councils in the South East, Labour introduced a quota system of dispersal to towns and cities across Britain and away from coastal areas and from London, where most asylum seekers have

traditionally been housed. At the same time the government introduced a scheme through which asylum seekers are given vouchers instead of cash for living expenses. Both measures were implemented against a background of a hysterical press campaign portraying asylum seekers as "bogus" and "economic migrants" seeking to take advantage of Britain's supposedly generous welfare provisions at the expense of the tax payers. For its part, the Labour government launched a campaign to discourage new arrivals, impose ever more punitive anti-immigration laws and increase the number of deportations.

The dispersal policy was advanced as a means of diffusing tensions in the coastal areas by sharing the financial cost posed by asylum seekers more equitably and not allowing the concentration of visible, and by implication provocative, national and ethnic communities. The reverse has been the case for a number of reasons. Firstly, in line with the racism and nationalism that underpins all aspects of government immigration policies, the underlying ethos of the dispersal of asylum seekers portrays them as a financial burden whose increasing numbers pose a danger to harmonious race relations.

Secondly, refugees are denied access to the type of support networks, official and unofficial, that have been built up in London and other major cities. Glasgow's two law centres are to receive £56,000 to improve refugee's access to legal support, while the Legal Services Agency will get £29,000 for some advice leaflets. On the week before he was killed, Firsat Yildiz himself tried to contact the Scottish Refugee Council, but was unable to speak to a case worker. None were available because of the organisation's already excessive workload.

Finally, asylum seekers are naturally sent into public housing, which is generally made up of estates suffering extreme social deprivation. Sighthill is a

prime example. It consists of a number of high-rise blocks, built by the Labour council in the 1960s to hold the largest number of people at the least cost. Although near the city centre, the estate is bounded by a motorway, a railway line, a cemetery and a major road, and is isolated from surrounding areas. Part of the Springburn area, which recorded one of the lowest voter turnouts in the May general election, it has some of the worst health statistics and unemployment rates in Britain with 40 percent of the population living in poverty.

To date 1,200-1,500 asylum seekers have been housed in Sighthill and the figure was expected to increase throughout the year. Several busloads have been arriving every week. Neither the government nor the local authority have provided any additional resources to provide support for the increase in population of an already extremely poor area, although the City Council will eventually receive £110 million from the Home Office.

In the political climate created by the Labour government, the Conservatives and the media—with their ceaseless scapegoating of asylum seekers for every social ill—the development of a racist backlash on Sighthill was predictable. Following the protest by asylum seekers over Firsat's murder, two counter demonstrations were organised by between 50 and 100 local residents protesting against what they alleged was the preferential treatment given to asylum seekers. They pointed to the basic furnishings in asylum seekers' flats, standard issue for homeless persons, as evidence of such favouritism.

On Tuesday night, a 22-year-old Iranian asylum seeker was stabbed in the back on the landing outside his seventh floor flat in a Sighthill tower block. He was rushed to the city's Royal Infirmary, but was released from hospital in the early hours of the morning after receiving treatment. The police are looking for a number of white men in connection with the attack.

Neither the government, nor the Labour controlled Council, can combat the racist sentiment produced by their own policies. Their only answer is to either avoid a concentration of asylum seekers in one area or to increase police numbers where asylum seekers are located. The Scottish Refugee Council's Julia Allan said on BBC Radio Scotland, "A number of asylum seekers have been introduced to Glasgow with very

little ahead planning and this is not eased when you are housing very vulnerable people in a city with economic problems." She expressed her own fears that locals believed the refugees to be "bogus" and said the media and politicians were partly to blame for people making this assumption.



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