

Letters on the Tampa refugee crisis

1 September 2001

Dear Editor,

This recent refugee tragedy off Christmas Island is yet another blow for the rights of refugees. Howard is once again shown as the heartless, selfish and arguably racist leader that he is. Australia is a rich first world nation and as such we have a responsibility to help the desperate and unfortunate people who come to our shores for help. I feel deeply ashamed of the actions of the Howard Government and it saddens me to think that the broader Australian community should support him. This country, apparently built on the anthem “a fair go for all” seems to have forgotten its history as a migrant country. Shame Australia!!

PK

Western Australia

Thank you for your excellent reporting of this shameful episode. It's a great pity that the opposition in this country is now so thoroughly gutted that it will not put forward an alternative view, though I am sure a majority of members of the Australian Labor Party would want a different, more humane approach to refugees.

DG

Dear Editor,

I am deeply dismayed, but not surprised, at the criminal actions of the Australian government in their treatment of the refugees aboard the *Tampa*. As the *WSWS* has pointed out, this is the logical culmination of a policy that victimises and vilifies refugees. I completely agree that there is no “third way” or “middle road” when it comes to the freedom of movement of humanity. Freedom of movement is either there, or it does not exist at all.

Yours

EG

I understand your argument that these asylum seekers in the *Tampa* are entitled to a refugee status entry into Australia, but what are the ramifications of further people doing the same. Are we ever going to say no? Have you considered the other side of the argument?

Will we let people enter Australian shores when we are not sure as to the skills they possess and the backgrounds and the links they have (whether criminally related or not)? This is not an exhaustive list but the main question is when are we going to say no? I don't believe that the infrastructure of

Australia and its economy is such that it can support a large influx of people, and eventually this influx of people will lead to the degrading of the high standard of living that we enjoy at the moment.

I agree that these people are escaping their war torn countries, and countries where there are extreme injustices in more ways than one, but isn't that the benefit of being an Australian, being in Australia? I know I may sound very biased but isn't everyone looking for a better place to live in, and when we, Australia, have an upper hand, we have a choice of the category of people we let into Australia to enhance our future.

Yours sincerely,

A

I read with interest the statement demanding the refugees on the *Tampa* be given immediate and unrestricted entry to Australia, which I agree with.

To that basic right there should also be some other consequences. We should demand the full support of the government welfare and health services for these people to establish themselves. That must not be left to charities and volunteer groups only.

Secondly we should always call for the current detention centres to be closed, i.e. not only do the refugees have the right to enter Australia but also they must then be treated properly.

The position of the Greens and Democrats about population levels and resources is, as the statement says, false. Is the crisis in the public health system because of the growth in population and the “demographic change” to a larger percentage of older people, or is it the shift in social wealth to the ruling class in all manner of ways supported by all the capitalist parties?

The inability of the government to accept and provide for refugees is therefore connected to the cut to health and welfare for workers and youth here and in other countries.

Refugees are not a threat to the jobs, welfare and services for workers here. That is the lie of the Liberals, Labor and Greens and Democrats. The One Nation people are just the most open in promoting it.

There are things outside of the scope of the statement that are also important: the globalisation and free flow of capital

as it says, and the attempts to expand, but regulate the flow of workers, as in the European Union.

The position that the Howard government's "tough stance" reflects the mood of the population is false and reveals the role of the media, unions, academics, etc., in trying to promote that.

Workers in Australia cannot be indifferent to the situation these refugees are leaving, situations that capitalist governments, either openly or secretly, supported in the past. I would think most refugees have left these countries reluctantly and that for millions of the real poor and oppressed they do not even have that option.

The changing of those conditions should be of interest to people here. Why are there refugees?

I have not written to the WSWs before but following discussions and disagreements at work and quite frankly a bit of a shock at what the Australian government has done sending in the troops, I had to send some agreement with the SEP statement.

Regards,

AL

Perth, Western Australia

Dear Mr Editor,

Your article is interesting to read because it is well documented, however, it should be very clearly said and repeated very loudly that Australia's refusal to accord asylum to those miserable 460 refugees is based on cheap racist considerations. It is very sad and very shocking to realise that, on the very eve of the opening of the UN conference on racism in Durban, South Africa, a country built almost 90 percent on immigration denies these 460 *Tampa* refugees the elementary Australian right of being heard by an Australian judge to determine if they are real political asylum seekers as they claim, or economic asylum seekers. They denied them this elementary Australian right simply because of their religion. Simply because they are MUSLIM.

I watched yesterday, Thursday August 30, the "Insight" show on CNN, which in my opinion is neither pro-Muslim nor even sympathetic to Muslims. It was clearly proved without any doubt that the Australian authorities would have easily accepted the 460 refugees if they had not been Muslim!

Once again Australian rulers are showing their real ugly face. RACISTS!! In fact, nothing surprises me from the different governments of this country who refused for two centuries the Australian identity to the Aborigines, the only genuine historical owners of this Continent. WHAT A SHAME!!

SF

Antwerp, Belgium

Dear Editors,

The article today by Richard Phillips and Peter Symonds together with Mike Head's article yesterday on the plight of the 460 refugees aboard the Norwegian freighter, the *Tampa*, are welcome examples of sanity in this disgraceful episode. Yesterday's article suggested there were injured people on board the ship, and today we learn that this is correct, and that the Red Cross together with the International Doctors without Borders group, are concerned enough to fly to Christmas Island, in an attempt to gain access to the *Tampa*, suggesting in the process, that the public denials of Ruddock are at best suspect and at worst lies.

The other thing that should be remembered about this episode is this (and this has been examined previously on the WSWs). This is a global phenomenon which is being driven by the deepening crisis of the capitalist system. Pauline Hanson and the extreme right are products of this process and many people fear for their own future and their families. This fear is understandable because of the social and economic policies that have been implemented over the last two decades by both contending ruling parties. Today I heard a lecturer in media studies at the MIT in Victoria (on ABC radio) suggest that this hysteria is being driven by "shock jocks," but who then said, "the good news is that they are all over fifty years old and they will all be dead soon!!" And this woman teaches media studies. Again, congratulations for both articles, yesterday and today.

Yours sincerely,

AC

Maybe if the silver-tongued Australian Prime Minister Mr Howard lambasted the United States and Britain for bombing the crap out of Iraq and starving their people through sanctions or opposed the supply of armaments to Israel by the United States and Britain to do the same to Palestine we would not have these people fleeing their country for a better life.

The real inhumanity is coming from the United Nations Security Council, which the US dictates too. Still owing hundreds of thousands of dollars in back, present and back dues, the US, being an unfinancial member, should have no say, let alone dictating proceedings because of ideological differences.

RJC



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