

Britain: asylum detainee commits suicide

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The suicide of asylum-seeker Manuel Bravo expresses, just as sharply as the “shoot to kill” policy operational on the streets of London, the vicious social policy being implemented by the Labour government in the interests of a narrow layer of the super rich.

Manuel Bravo hung himself from a stairwell sometime after midnight on Thursday, September 15, in Yarl’s Wood detention centre, Bedfordshire. He and his 13-year-old son Antonio had been taken there from their house in Leeds prior to deportation back to Angola.

The 35-year-old father’s death brought a terrible end to four years of efforts to find safety for himself, his wife, and their two sons. According to the *Independent*, Manuel submitted an appeal for asylum when he first arrived at Heathrow in October 2001. The appeal rested on the circumstances of his parents’ death. Both were politically active in the Association of the Youth Democracy, opponents of the Eduardo dos Santos government, and were killed in August 2001. Shortly after, Manuel fled Angola in disguise, along with his family.

At his asylum hearing in 2002, Manuel was informed by the Home Office that he would get the result of his appeal within a month, but nothing was heard for nearly three years. In the meantime, Manuel moved to Leeds with his family, and became involved in a church in the Armley area. According to the Reverend Alastair Kaye of Christ Church, Manuel found the drawn-out insecurity of the period very disturbing. He became depressed, found it difficult to learn English, and disliked the idleness enforced on asylum-seekers.

Matters were made worse by the arrest of his wife Lydia and younger son Mellyu after they had returned to Angola voluntarily in order to care for an orphaned niece. She was jailed for two months and was again forced to flee the country. Both are now living as refugees.

Events for Manuel came to a head on September 13. Two Immigration Service officials turned up in Armley to check on his location. Manuel concluded that his deportation was imminent.

The next day, at six in the morning, police hammered on the door for 20 minutes before breaking in to seize and remove Manuel and Antonio. Father and son were taken to the Yarl’s Wood detention centre, where Manuel was finally informed that his asylum application had been rejected and he was to be deported to Angola.

Within hours he was dead. Before taking his own life, he had told his son “Be brave. Work hard. Do well at school.”

His last words strongly suggest that Manuel’s suicide may have been a last desperate attempt to save his son from deportation. Children without parents or guardians cannot be deported until they reach the age of 18.

Manuel’s death is the latest in a long series of suicides and attempted suicides amongst vulnerable asylum-seekers caught in the wheels of Britain’s brutal deportation regime.

In June 2005, Kurdish refugee Ramazan Camlica was found dead in Campsfield detention centre in Oxfordshire. The 19-year-old man had been denied bail three times during several months of detention. He was reported to have been depressed over the prospect of deportation back to Turkey, followed by likely conscription into the Turkish army. His mother had also recently died. Friends told the *Independent* that “the uncertainty killed him ... there are too many people stuck ... for four or five months like that, in limbo.”

In April this year, an inquest concluded into the 2004 suicide of Iranian asylum-seeker Hussein Nasseri. Hussein shot himself between the eyes in a car park in the seaside town of Eastbourne. He had just been informed that his asylum application had been refused. Hussein, a homosexual, faced execution on return to

Iran, where his sexuality is considered a crime. Hussein was the second Iranian homosexual to kill himself rather than return to Iran.

In November 2004, Kenny Peter died in Charing Cross hospital, London, three weeks after he jumped from a landing at Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre. Kenny, from Nigeria, had been given Temporary Admission status in Britain some months previously, but was not permitted to work. He was detained by immigration officials for breaching these conditions by working.

In July 2004 Tran Quang Tung, a 23-year-old man from Vietnam, was found hanged in Dungavel detention centre, Scotland. He had been transferred to Dungavel from Harmondsworth detention centre, after the latter was hit by protests and disturbances following the suicide death of Sergey Barnuyck, a 31-year-old Ukrainian.

Commenting on Manuel's death, Jan Shaw of Amnesty International told the press, "Our recent research points to a quite unacceptably high level of suffering for thousands of people who are locked up in the UK under immigration powers. The human cost of this policy is frighteningly high. We found that people are languishing in detention with no end in sight—leading to hopelessness, mental illness, self-harm and even, tragically, to people attempting suicide."

The desperate circumstances faced by asylum-seekers are also generating protests.

Over 30 Ugandan women, also in Yarl's Wood, started a hunger strike in July. The women face imminent removal back to Uganda from where they fled after suffering rape, beatings and imprisonment. Many are HIV positive. Some of the women have been taken to hospital. Others have been moved to other detention centres. One, Harriet Anyangokolo was released from Yarl's Wood after a 33-day hunger strike, and is seeking legal support.

In Canterbury, local people worked to secure a judicial review of the asylum claim of a young Afghan man, Abraham Rahimi, who had been studying English at Christ Church college in Canterbury, prior to being detained. Students and lecturers have supported his campaign.

In Bolton, a demonstration has been called in defence of the Sukula family from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The family fled DRC in 2002 after Ngiedi

Lusukumu, mother of six, was badly beaten by government forces searching for her husband—suspected of being an opponent of the government. Following a ruling by the Asylum Support Adjudicators, the family face being left entirely destitute pending a new asylum claim being lodged. Two thousand people have signed a petition supporting the family's right to stay in Britain.

In Glasgow, a dawn raid last week by immigration officials has produced widespread disgust. The Vucaj family from Kosovo was seized from their home. Father Isen and one of his sons were taken in handcuffs, while younger children were still in their pyjamas. The family had previously reported to an Immigration Centre where they were fingerprinted and searched pending likely deportation to Kosovo or Albania.

Students at the local Drumchapel High School have organised a petition in the family's defence. The family has been taken to Yarl's Wood and face deportation despite a new asylum claim having been lodged.



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