

Britain deports Sri Lankan asylum seekers

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3 January 2012

Disregarding the safety of the deportees and warnings by human rights groups, the British Conservative government on December 15 deported back to Sri Lanka 55 Sri Lankan refugees whose requests for asylum it had rejected.

They had sought asylum status in Britain, to save themselves from the notorious Sri Lankan intelligence services—known for kidnapping and murdering suspects and also for torturing them during captivity in secret camps.

The group was made up mostly of the Tamil minority but included some from the Sinhala and Muslim communities. This is the third such large-scale deportation carried out by the British government since last June. The refugees had been detained in various detention camps for several months.

They were forcibly placed on a charter plane bound for Colombo. Each deportee was accompanied on the plane by two police officers. At the airport hundreds of Tamils assembled on December 16 to greet and protect their relations.

On arrival the deportees were subjected to intensive interrogation for more than 3 hours by the Sri Lankan CID police. Veerakesari Internet TV reporters at Colombo airport interviewed a deportee after his interrogation. He told them: “Confronted with many problems in Sri Lanka, I went to London as a refugee. They declined my application. They sent me back after 14 years of my stay in London. Here I am scared for my life”.

On December 18 the conservative Sri Lankan newspaper *The Island* reported: “The UK has also tightened border controls this year and ordered punitive action against those seeking entry using fraudulent documents.”

Answering accusations that these refugees were in danger of being sent back of imprisonment, torture and death, it added: “The Defence Ministry said that in the

backdrop of thousands of terrorists released from detention facilities since the conclusion of the conflict in May 2009, claims of their being tortured sound ridiculous. In fact, the UK [according to the Defence Ministry] had provided considerable amount of funds in support of the ongoing rehabilitation and reintegration process handled by IOM (International Migration Organization).”

The UK Border Agency has been circulating a report quoting the fraudulent claim by senior Sri Lankan intelligence officials that Tamil detainees are inflicting wounds upon themselves to create scars that will support later asylum claims. The Border Agency also cites a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that not all Tamil asylum seekers are in need of protection.

In reality, the regime of President Mahinda Rajapakse has maintained widespread police-state repression, in violation of domestic and international law.

Several human rights organisations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have raised concerns that Sri Lankan Tamil deportees may face arrest and mistreatment upon their arrival in Colombo airport and that—despite the end of the 26-year civil war in the island nation two years ago—human rights violations and the suppression of democratic rights continue to prevail under the Rajapakse government.

On December 15 the British *Guardian* reported: “Last month, the United Nations' Committee Against Torture reported that it was ‘seriously concerned about the continued and consistent allegations of widespread use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment’, after hearing submissions from a number of NGOs and the Sri Lankan government. The committee also expressed concern at ‘the prevailing climate of impunity’ in Sri Lanka.”

The article continued: “More than 20 of the 35 people

whose cases are detailed in Freedom From Torture's report to the UN suffered burns, usually from a heated metal rod, and often across the back. Fourteen had been tortured after returning to Sri Lanka from abroad."

The Committee reported the existence of "secret detention centers run by the Sri Lankan military intelligence and paramilitary groups where enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings have allegedly been perpetrated."

When mass deportations were planned last September, the British Home Office claimed to be monitoring the well-being of the deported Tamils but later admitted that it was not.

The complicity of British imperialism with the dictatorial Rajapakse government's persecution of his own citizens was reported with sickening gusto by *The Island* on December 18: "Officials said that Friday's deportation of 58 Sri Lankans from the UK proved that the British government no longer took notice of propaganda carried out by various interested parties on behalf of those seeking to remain in the country on false pretexts."

In 2009, during the final stages of the war against the bourgeois separatist LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), over 30,000 innocent Tamils were killed by Rajapakse government forces. Over 280,000 Tamils were detained in notorious detention camps, known as "rehabilitation camps". Military intelligence officials rounded up more than 11,000 Tamil youth from these camps for interrogation. Only 5,000 have been released. The remaining detainees together with 850 detained during the war make a current total of some 7,000. Those Tamils who have been released from detention face continuing discrimination and police monitoring.

European governments including England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium have been taking ever more draconian measures to expel large numbers of migrant workers living in their countries. Most have emigrated to Europe to escape the wars and economic devastation caused by Western imperialism in Asia and Africa.

In 2005 the foreign ministers of the European Union decided to coordinate the control of European borders in a bid to block the entry of immigrants and refugees. In 2008 the former Labour government created the UK Border Agency, which is responsible for deporting immigrants and those seeking asylum who lack official

residence status.

The European Union's armed anti-immigration force Frontex was set up in 2007. The increasingly hazardous access of desperate refugees to Europe via the Mediterranean has caused thousands of deaths by drowning and starvation.

In 2010, 26,000 refugees and immigrant workers were detained in Britain in 11 Immigration Removal Centres (detention camps). Some reports revealed numbers of deaths and suicides among detainees and the continued detention of children. There were hunger strikes in 2010 among female detainees at the Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre. Two men died from suspected heart attacks at Colnbrook near Heathrow airport, and the third killed himself at the Campsfield House detention centre in Oxfordshire

An Angolan, Jimmy Mubenga, died in October 2010 while being deported forcefully by guards employed by the private G4S security company.

These deportations are part of a broad attack on democratic rights. Driven by the global financial crisis and economic recession, the ruling elite are increasingly turning towards whipping up anti-refugee, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim sentiments to divide the working class and divert social tensions into reactionary channels.

The handing over of displaced refugees who had sought asylum to protect themselves from the oppressive rulers to the self-same oppressive rulers reveals the criminal and barbaric role of British imperialism.



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