UK government mounts racist “Go Home or Face Arrest” campaign

Ajay Prakash
6 August 2013

The UK Home Office has launched a racist campaign against immigrants, in which a van drives around urban areas of London displaying a huge advert calling on illegal immigrants to “Go home or face arrest.”

The scheme was piloted in six London boroughs with large migrant populations. It has been followed by reports of increased raids and spot-checks by UK Border Agency (UKBA) officials across the country.

The campaign is aimed at diverting attention from the real socio-economic problems caused by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government’s austerity measures. It seeks to divide workers along ethnic lines in order to impose further austerity.

A clear attempt by the Tories to win over right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP) supporters, the campaign attracted criticism from UKIP leader Nigel Farrage for being “nasty”. A pilot program was launched in London boroughs where UKIP has made gains from the Tories. In Hounslow, for example, a group of Tory councillors recently defected to UKIP.

The two trucks circling the neighbourhoods have displayed an advert reading:

“In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest. Text HOME … for free advice, and help with travel documents. We can help you to return home voluntarily without fear of arrest or detention.”

Immigration Minister Mark Harper said, “We are making it more difficult for people to live and work in the UK illegally. Every single day our enforcement officers are arresting, detaining and removing people with no right to be in the UK.”

The trucks have also displayed the number of illegal immigrants arrested recently in the area. The messages will be published on posters, leaflets and advertisements in local newspapers for a month.

Don Flynn, the director of the Migrants' Rights Network, described the campaign as “shocking.” It has “huge potential to ramp up mistrust and suspicion in local areas with damage being inflicted on a wide range of minority ethnic groups.”

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has begun an investigation into whether the subsequent spot-check and detention programme involved “unlawful discrimination.”

The Liberal Democrats have attempted to distance themselves from their coalition partners. Downing Street said it was a project organised by the Home Office, but immediately declared it a success and suggested it could be rolled out across the country. It has emerged that the campaign was carried out with the support of Jeremy Browne, a Liberal Democrat minister in the Home Office. However, as criticism of the scheme has mounted, the Liberal Democrats have moved to deny this.

Liberal Democrat Business Secretary Vince Cable described it as a “stupid and offensive” campaign, intended to “create a sense of fear in the British population that we have a vast problem with illegal immigration.” Cable’s views reflect ongoing disputes within the Liberal Democratic Party, which is hardening its stance on immigration despite some internal opposition.

Party leader Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister, complained about the way the campaign was undertaken

© World Socialist Web Site

but endorses a hard line against immigration: “You can enforce the law effectively without instilling a tone which is unsettling to communities, particularly to mixed communities,” he pontificated.

In March this year Clegg outlined a Liberal Democrat policy on immigration similar to that of the Tories. He revealed plans to end the amnesty for illegal immigrants who live in Britain for 10 years. Reversing this 2010 election manifesto pledge he said, “Despite the policy's aims, it was seen by many people as a reward for those who have broken the law.”

Clegg has pushed for maximum fines for employers hiring illegal immigrants. He called for doubling the fine to £10,000 per worker, insisting, “Employers need to get the message.”
He advocated the introduction of a £3,000 security bond for visitors from countries such as India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The deputy prime minister has declared, “The Liberal Democrats are seeking to restore people’s faith in the system, confronting illegal activity with a vigour never seen from Labour, and in 2015 people will know that a vote for the Liberal Democrats is a vote for an immigration system they can believe in. A vote for a tolerant Britain that is zero-tolerant towards abuse.”

The London Evening Standard reported that Clegg had complained about the campaign to the Home Office “but is waiting to see how the pilot scheme in London goes” before deciding whether to try and block any expansion of the scheme.

The Labour Party and its leader Ed Miliband has hardened the party’s stand against immigrants while also espousing British chauvinism. Labour is championing “maximum controls” on immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria under the demand of “British jobs for British workers.” It is calling for new anti-immigrant measures, including tests for EU migrants claiming unemployment benefits, the removal of child welfare entitlement for immigrants and enforcing the use of English.

This flag-waving nationalism, anti-immigrant chauvinism, support for the free market and hostility to what remains of Britain’s welfare state are at the core of the Blue Labour faction created in 2009 based on “flag, faith and family.” (See: “Conservatives and Labour step up witch-hunt against immigrants”)

David Goodhart, of the think tank Demos, the origins of which lie in the Communist Party of Great Britain, has been urging the government to stop legal European Union (EU) migrants from claiming benefits during their first two years in Britain. Goodhart’s other suggestions include capping the number of foreign jobseekers, reserving more jobs for British workers and excluding poorer EU nations from the free labour market.

Conservative minister Matthew Hancock, who is in charge of skills policy at the Department for Business, told the press that companies have “a ‘social duty’ to hire local workers before recruiting abroad.”

Once again the anti-immigrant and anti-EU UKIP has provided a mechanism for engineering a further rightward turn in mainstream politics. In May it won an average of 25 percent in local election wards where it stood, largely winning support from discontented Tory voters.

Illegal immigrants are the most exploited layer of workers because of the insecurity of their situation. They receive lower than minimum wages, no holiday pay or accident cover. They do not have the right to access benefits like health and social care.

Last month police and immigration officers raided makeshift camps in the West End of London and deported a number of Romanian citizens. Florin Piompi, 19, was with his wife, who is seven months pregnant. Piompi told reporters, “I am not a beggar or a thief, I want to work. We came here because things are so bad in Romania. There is not enough to eat and there is nowhere to live. We also have a one-year old daughter, things are so difficult.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site