

UK government whips up anti-immigrant hysteria over Eurotunnel security at Calais

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Britain's Conservative government and the media have responded with undisguised xenophobia to attempts by migrants at the French port of Calais to enter the UK via the Channel Tunnel.

The desperate efforts of migrants to enter Britain led to the death Tuesday night of a Sudanese man who was hit by a truck leaving a cross-channel ferry. A spokesman for Eurotunnel, which runs the Channel crossing, said Wednesday, "Our team found a corpse this morning and the firefighters have confirmed the death of this person."

Two other Sudanese migrants, both in their 30s, were recovering in hospital after being struck by high-speed trains on Monday.

This tragedy was treated as a mere detail in lurid reports of between 1,500 and 2,000 migrants "storming" the terminal, as if they were laying siege to the tunnel—a perception reinforced by Eurotunnel having closed the gate "used in the event of a terrorist attack," according to *Sky News*.

It emerged later that the headline figure referred to the total number of *individual attempts* made, not infrequently by the same people.

UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage called for the army to be brought in to help search vehicles coming into Britain for illegal immigrants. Kevin Hurley, the police and crime commissioner for Surrey, specified a preference that Gurkha soldiers be deployed. "The Gurkhas are a highly respected and competent force, and are just around the corner. They could help to ensure that our border is not breached," he declared.

The Tories responded by announcing the convening of an emergency session of the Cobra committee on national security under Home Secretary Theresa May.

Prime Minister David Cameron was quoted

repeatedly, speaking from Singapore, expressing his "sympathy" with British holidaymakers, before adding, "We are working very closely with the French" and "have invested money in the fencing around Calais, including fencing around the entrance to the tunnel."

He was referring to an announcement earlier this month by Home Secretary May of an extra £7 million, on top of an already agreed £12 million, to step up security at the Channel Tunnel railhead in Coquelles, after a meeting with France's Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve. This involves setting up 1.2 miles of fencing around each side of the platform at Coquelles, supplied from the security fencing used at the NATO summit in Wales last year.

Not to let slip an opportunity to pontificate, Cameron blamed "the cancer of corruption" and "low economic growth" in poorer countries for leading migrants to leave their home countries and travel to the UK.

Following the Cobra meeting, May adopted a Churchillian pose: "What we are looking at now is improving security at the railhead at Coquelles, so we can ensure people are not trying to come through the tunnel," she said. This was being done in conjunction with France—"talking particularly on law and order and border security ... Eurotunnel has a role to play here in the measures they themselves put in place to protect their trains."

Asked if the military should be used, May said, "The key thing is to make sure we have got the security right at Coquelles and ultimately actually the answer to this problem is to ensure we are reducing the number of migrants who are trying to come from Africa across into Europe." This involved, in particular "the work we are going to be doing with the French on returning people to West Africa," she said.

Labour was determined not to be outdone by the

Tories. Interim Labour leader Harriet Harman focused on calls for deportations, declaring, “As long ago as nine months ago we were pressing the government that they needed to get on to this and sort this out. ... What the Government should be doing is getting the French to process the 3,500 to 4,000 people who are massed at Calais and need to be documented. Either they are genuine asylum-seekers who should be given asylum or they should be deported. The Government should have got on to this months earlier.”

She was backed by Labour MP Keith Vaz, who chairs the Home Affairs Select Committee, who said migrants need to be returned to their country of origin once they are determined to have no right to stay in France.

In response to migrants’ desperate efforts to reach the UK, a Eurotunnel spokesman issued a statement of breath-taking callousness, explaining that “there was some damage to our fences, which we’ll have to repair, as they tried to board shuttles. Fortunately, there wasn’t any damage to shuttles. Unfortunately, a number of people were injured.”

The company, which made €101 million net profit in 2013, responded to criticisms by governments in both Britain and France that it was not doing enough to stop migrants, by releasing a statement that its security staff had stopped 37,000 attempts to get to the UK via the Channel Tunnel since January. Eurotunnel director of Public Affairs John Keefe said the company had to call in French police 28,000 times between January and June to remove migrants who had broken through security fences.

It has spent €13 million on boosting security at the terminal in Calais—a figure it was seeking to be recompensed for by the British and French governments.

The depiction of Britain having been placed under siege by hordes of migrants is being used not only to conceal but also to justify a human tragedy of monumental proportions, for which the UK and French governments and their counterparts in Europe and the United States bare full responsibility.

The migrants at Calais and Coquelles account for between 3,000 and 5,000 of the many hundreds of thousands who have been rendered homeless in places such as Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran by civil wars and desperate

poverty—both caused by the predatory actions of the major powers, global corporations and banks.

More than 185,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean into southern Europe since January. Most seek asylum elsewhere in Europe, but some end up at Calais seeking access to the UK.

The treatment of those who make it to France is a disgrace. The French government closed the Sangatte refugee camp in 2002, which officially held 600 but ended up housing twice as many people in conditions that sparked riots by those detained.

The official replacement camp, Jules Ferry, has space for just 600 women and children, leaving all the men and most women and children to occupy an unofficial makeshift ghetto known as “the Jungle,” with no running water or sanitation.

Press reports have cited nine migrants having died near the Channel Tunnel terminal since June—the French authorities do not even bother to keep a record of those killed or seriously injured. But according to the Calais Migrant Solidarity group, more than 30 migrants have been reported as having died while trying to reach Britain via the Channel Tunnel since the beginning of 2014. Migrants have suffered horrible deaths due to falls, or being burnt, drowned, crushed or hit by vehicles.

Those who have died in Calais account for a small percentage of the overall deaths resulting from the efforts to transform Europe into a fortress in order to keep out the poor and desperate. Over 22,000 migrants died between 2000 and 2014. In just the first five months of 2015, 1,800 died—over five times higher than the same period in 2014.



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