

UK government pursuing vicious anti-immigrant response to migrant crisis

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The Conservative government in the UK has stepped up its offensive against immigrants, with Home Secretary Theresa May stating in a *Sunday Times* op-ed column that net migration into the country is “far too high”.

Britain can not cope with an additional 330,000 people, she said, adding, “Net migration at that volume is simply unsustainable. It puts pressure on infrastructure, such as housing and transport—and public services, such as schools and hospitals.”

May’s comments came the horrific death toll of desperate refugees fleeing war zones in the Middle East and Africa continues to rise. Thousands have perished, drowning in the Mediterranean Sea or asphyxiating in the back of lorries.

In a statement that contravenes Britain’s obligations under international law to accept refugees and asylum seekers, May said that the only migrants who should be allowed to stay in Britain are those from the Europe Union who have a job already lined up.

May pledged to toughen the laws already in place by the Immigration Act of 2014, which has “made it harder for illegal migrants to access public services, and restricted the ability of temporary migrants to benefit from systems to which they had not contributed.”

She denounced the “European system of no borders, the Schengen area, in which the UK has never taken part.” EU leaders had to look at “the consequences of uncontrolled migration—on wages, jobs and social cohesion of the destination nations; on the economies and societies of the rest; and on the lives and welfare of those who seek to come here,” she said.

International students should face further restrictions on their right to study in the UK,” May proclaimed. “We must also break the link between short-term study

and permanent settlement in this country.”

Last month, Immigration Minister James Brokenshire outlined a raft of new legislation targeting immigrants. Under new rules, those deemed “illegal immigrants” will face up to six months in prison for working in the UK. Takeaways and off licenses (types of food vendors) are to be closed if employers are caught using undocumented foreign workers.

Brokenshire said, “Anyone who thinks the UK is a soft touch should be in no doubt—if you are here illegally, we will take action to stop you from working, renting a flat, opening a bank account or driving a car.” He added, “Illegal workers will face the prospect of a prison term and rogue employers could have their businesses closed, have their licenses removed, or face prosecution if they continue to flout the law.”

This poisonous rhetoric is focused on whipping up anti-immigrant sentiment, with official government policy now echoing that long associated with far right-wing forces.

The *Financial Times* reported that UK border officials will be given powers to temporarily close businesses that break the law by giving jobs to “illegal immigrants”. Officials are also considering whether this power should be extended to cover minicab drivers and operators.

According to the EU border agency Frontex, 340,000 migrants have landed in the EU so far this year. The influx has been called “the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War” by one senior EU official.

Neither the government nor the media seek to examine the cause of this crisis, which is the product of the violence and chaos unleashed by the imperialist powers in the Middle East and North Africa. Instead they seek to utilise the unbearable human suffering that has been created to justify further wars of intervention

and greater powers of repression.

Since the beginning of the year, the government has whipped up hysteria against migrants, camped out in appalling conditions in the French port of Calais, who are attempting to reach the UK. The government has sent police and fences to France to keep them out.

In July, Prime Minister David Cameron said there was a “swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean” to seek a better life in Britain.

At the beginning of August, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond claimed that millions of African migrants pose a threat to the EU’s standard of living and social structure. “So long as there are large numbers of pretty desperate migrants marauding around the area, there always will be a threat to the [Channel] tunnel security,” he declared. “We’ve got to resolve this problem ultimately by being able to return those who are not entitled to claim asylum back to their countries of origin.”

The right-wing media has done its best to justify the governments’ vicious stance on refugees and asylum seekers. Headline stories are routinely used to demonise refugees and asylum seekers in order to sway public opinion. The *Daily Mail* has published articles under the headlines “Holidaymaking family escape horrifying attack by migrants” and “Tax payers face £500m bill to fly illegal migrants home”, while the *Daily Express* has screamed, “Record 27 per cent of babies born to foreign mothers” and “Mass immigration will destroy the UK if we don’t act now”.

The truth is that the UK, according to official Eurostat figures, now accepts less asylum seekers than ever before. The UK’s share of Europe’s asylum claims has halved from approximately 10 percent in 2008 to just 5 percent in 2014.

The Labour Party, which is currently voting on a new leader, has long offered no opposition to the reactionary programme of the Conservatives. Shadow home secretary and leadership candidate Yvette Cooper merely described Hammond’s comments as “alarmist and unhelpful”.

However, Labour has been in the vanguard of support for tougher action on illegal immigration.

All of the contenders for the Labour leadership were part of the party’s election campaign in May, during which then leader Ed Miliband said that Labour would set out a “credible” set of measures on immigration

within 100 days of taking office. He pledged to recruit an extra 1,000 border staff, introduce full exit checks and stop serious criminals from coming to the UK. Miliband said Labour had changed its approach and would “deal with people’s concerns” about the impact of immigration on wages and public services.

The author also recommends:

Julie Hyland's speech to May Day 2015:
Mediterranean migrants and the crimes of imperialism



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