

Members of Windrush generation speak out against UK government persecution

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With each passing week more details of the “hostile environment” for immigrants created by successive UK governments are coming to light.

This cannot be masked or redressed by a change in home secretary. Amber Rudd resigned from Theresa May’s Conservative government cabinet after she was caught lying to Parliament, denying the existence of Home Office deportation targets in the wake of the Windrush scandal.

Tens of thousands of migrants came over to the “Mother Country” from the Commonwealth after the Second World War to alleviate a labour shortage. The first to arrive were from the Caribbean, aboard the Empire Windrush in 1948.

Before resigning, Rudd was forced to apologise to those of the Windrush generation who have been denied healthcare and benefits, lost jobs and either been threatened with deportation or deported. The government has now admitted to a figure of 63 forcibly removed since 2002.

At the recent meeting of the Commonwealth heads of government, May announced that families threatened with deportation could receive compensation. This was prompted by concerns to secure advantageous trade deals with Commonwealth countries as Britain leaves the European Union.

Promises by May that the Windrush generation would be given permanent residency and the replacement of Rudd with Savid Javid—whose parents were immigrants from the Commonwealth—have done nothing to reassure those who have been living in limbo for years. This week it emerged that at least a dozen people from the Windrush generation are either sleeping rough or staying in temporary accommodation, as they wait for a decision on their right to remain in the UK.

WSWS reporters spoke to 67-year-old Louise at

Moss Side shopping centre in Manchester. She came to England 53 years ago as a child from St. Vincent’s. She has been unable to obtain a British passport because of stonewalling by the Home Office and financial obstacles.

“My daughter, who is 50, lives here. But when I applied for citizenship so that I could go on holiday abroad they said I sent in the form too late. My English passport is out of date but to get one I will have to pay £700.”

Adrian Murrell, co-founder of the Windrush Initiative based in Preston, related cases described at a recent public meeting his organization called in the wake of the Windrush scandal. Preston has the largest African-Caribbean community in the north of England outside Liverpool and Manchester. It is also the most integrated community, so that “the majority of Preston’s Black British community is of dual heritage.”

Murrell said his organization was founded because we “realised that the contribution of the people who came over to Britain from the Caribbean 70 years ago had not been acknowledged, respected or appreciated.”

“All sorts of stories are coming to light,” he said. “Some as long ago as 10 years ago, but it’s all very hush-hush. People are only just talking about it, they are frightened and confused.

“We’ve heard of at least one man who got deported as long ago as 10 years, but we don’t know why or what happened to him. ... Another person who came on their mother’s passport was told they couldn’t leave the UK [for a holiday].

“They’re in their 60s, they’ve been here most of his life, but they have no proof.

“There are so many who came over on their mother’s passport. One person in the 1980s didn’t want to pay the £70 to become a British citizen. Another person

who came here when they were two told us he went to Europe and when they were coming back they struggled to get back in. After being allowed back in, they paid the money.”

As for government apologies, Murrell said, “Nobody would trust them. The government destroyed their landing cards in 2009. People are not sure, so they are keeping their mouths shut.”

The 1971 Immigration Act granted leave to remain for post-war Commonwealth immigrants but did not issue them any paperwork or keep records. However, legislation passed in 2012 demanded proof of residency to obtain healthcare, open a bank account, get a job or rent a home.

Governments of all persuasions have deliberately cultivated a climate of fear and intimidation against immigrants. This has stepped up since the banking collapse in 2008 and subsequent austerity, which is crippling the welfare state. The revelations surrounding Windrush highlight the endemic persecution of all immigrants amid policies that are creating general impoverishment.

Winston, 49, also from Manchester, came to England from Jamaica 15 years ago and has been fighting a never-ending battle to secure residency ever since. He said, “I am one of Amber Rudd’s targets [to deport]. I am a fully qualified forklift driver. I applied to stay in England indefinitely. I have paid £2,300 to the immigration service for this. They took my money and then said I can only stay for three years, and each year it’s going up. I know a couple of people facing the same thing.

“I asked if I could pay in instalments, but they refused. One time I couldn’t pay my rent or council tax—I got into massive rent arrears because of this. I had to walk to work.

“The pressure on me ... I lost a lot of weight and when I go home I sit and cry. Every time I wake up in the morning I look for the immigration van.

“As I speak now they are recruiting 32 nurses to come over from Jamaica [to work in the National Health Service]. My son died over here and they told me I had to send his remains to Jamaica.”

The cost of UK citizenship is prohibitive for many. In April 2018, the cost for an adult to naturalise their citizenship was £1,330, and for a child born here £1,020. Children brought to the UK by their parents are

entitled to apply after 10 years, but face fees of £8,521 over 10 years.

Without settled status, young adults will be in effect stateless, and barred from renting a home, accessing the NHS or finding employment. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 enabled patients’ personal details to be passed on to the Home Office, dissuading many from seeking medical help for fear of being deported.

In a letter to Javid, Labour Shadow Health Secretary Jon Ashworth noted that 400 doctors from the Commonwealth, due to take up jobs in the NHS, were refused entry because the government had exceeded its monthly immigration cap of 1,000 to 2,200 maximum.

Ashworth said, “The government’s ‘hostile environment’ policy is now directly damaging NHS patients.” However, Labour is just as responsible as the Conservatives in creating the “hostile environment”—a term coined by the Blairite Alan Johnson when he was home secretary (2009-2010) in the last Labour government.

While Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott expressed outrage at the persecution of the Windrush generation, like all bourgeois politicians they draw a sharp line between legal and “illegal” immigration. The warmongering of Labour and Conservative governments over the last 25 years means they share responsibility, with their imperialist allies, for the enormous dislocation that has created 65.5 million refugees. They would find no sanctuary under a Labour government.



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