

UK continues to separate immigrant children from their families

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The practice of separating children from refugee parents, being carried out by the Trump administration to universal condemnation and revulsion worldwide, has been practised in the UK for years.

As the audio recording of caged children sobbing in distress went viral—with the US admitting to 3,000 children being affected—UK Prime Minister Theresa May was forced to make a statement in Parliament condemning these barbaric practices. She said that children being separated and caged “was deeply disturbing and wrong” and “not the British way”—just as her ailing government prepared to welcome Trump to the UK!

Contrary to May’s declaration, the Bail for Immigration Detainees (BiD) charity says they have represented 155 parents this year already who have been separated from their 170 children while in UK detention. BiD was set up to end the incarceration of immigrants and the separation of children from parents in detention.

In 2013, BiD published a study that followed the cases of 111 parents who had been separated from their 200 children over a three-year period. The average period of detention was 270 days.

Of the children in the study, half were placed in the care of foster parents or local authority homes. In the period studied, half the parents were eventually released. Fifteen were deported without their child. Follow-up research in 2014 revealed that 11 parents were deported without their children.

BiD say they cannot publish the real figures of separations and deportations due to the refusal of the Home Office to divulge the requisite information.

While in most cases it handles, one parent is not in detention, the charity has represented single parents in detention or dealt with cases where both parents face deportation. It cites a case where a father was deported because the Home Office argued he was not involved in his child’s life because the child was born during his

detention. As the mother was unable to take parental responsibility, the child is destined for a life in care due to the decision of the Home Office.

The psychological effect of separating a child from a parent or parents is extremely damaging. BiD director Celia Clarke said, “The impact ... is devastating and long-lasting. Children of parents we have supported regressed, developed behavioural difficulties and suffered from night terrors. The enduring legacy was a constant fear that their parent or parents might be taken from them again.”

In March, Kenneth Oranyendu was detained while signing on at the Home Office, even though his wife was attending her father’s funeral in Nigeria and there was no one to care for their three young children but him.

Now reunited with his family, Oranyendu told the *Independent*, “My children are always scared the government is taking me away from them again. They’re afraid every time I leave the house. We can’t be living like this.”

The *Independent* reported seeing many letters from schools, social services and the National Health Service to the Home Office confirming the deleterious impact of separation. The Home Office is violating its own guidelines, which state that a child should not be separated from a parent if it results in the child going into care.

The Home Office has been accused of breaching government policy by stipulating DNA testing to prove parenthood, a practice also adopted in the US. For example, a letter was received by one applicant’s solicitor from the Home Office declaring a DNA test was “imperative” to confirm paternity to settle their child’s UK status. This was despite the fact that the child had a UK passport.

This sinister compilation of DNA databases echoes the policies of the Nazis against the Jews and other groups deemed undesirable in the 1930s. Only a month ago,

immigration minister Caroline Nokes answered a question in Parliament essentially confirming that the practice took place, saying that if any DNA was submitted it was on an “entirely voluntary basis.”

According to the National Council for Civil Liberties (Liberty), the Home Office incarcerates almost 30,000 people each year, fleeing the horrors and poverty which are a consequence of 25 years of unending imperialist wars—supported by successive Labour and Conservative governments.

Arriving on the shores of the UK, totally traumatised, asylum seekers face further cruelty—the UK is the only EU country that practises detention without a time limit. They are incarcerated without due process at the whim of the Home Office, with no idea when they might be released. Some people are held for years in notorious immigration detention centres like Yarl’s Wood and Brook House, where abuse and neglect have been widely reported.

Some staff at Brook House near Gatwick Airport, run by private security firm G4S, were filmed last year by undercover “Panorama” journalists physically and verbally abusing detainees.

Channel 4 likewise exposed the inhumane treatment of women—who had fled violence in their own countries—in Yarl’s Wood, Bedfordshire, which is run by Serco.

Like the men in Brook House, these vulnerable women—often victims of rape in their own war-torn countries—were subjected to indignities and had their privacy violated during detention. In Yarl’s Wood, children are segregated from their mothers and visiting time is strictly regulated.

Immigrants live in constant fear of Home Office raids. Earlier this month, a 23-year-old Sudanese migrant tragically fell to his death from a rooftop while fleeing immigration officers who arrived at his place of work, a car wash in Newport, Wales.

This “hostile to immigrants” climate is creating a backlash, as seen in growing protests against the persecution of immigrants in the US and Germany.

Earlier this month in London, immigration officers clashed with members of the public protesting attempted arrests of immigrants in the Chinatown area. The officers had to call in local police for back up. During the raid, an elderly lady was hit by an immigration vehicle and was later manhandled by officers. She was protesting the arrest of a relative, one of four Chinese nationals alleged to have overstayed their visas. The four are now in custody pending deportation, and the fifth man arrested has to report regularly to the Home Office. The woman in

question was taken to hospital as a precaution but later released.

Businesses in Chinatown complain they are being “aggressively targeted” by immigration. The restaurant where the men worked was issued with a notice threatening fines of up to £20,000 for each “illegal” worker they employ.

The Home Office is raking in huge sums from the plight of immigrants—having received almost £100 million over five years by charging extortionate fees to obtain British citizenship. By charging fees far in excess of the cost of processing applications, the department earns more than £51,600 a day, and more than £361,000 per week.

Children born in the UK, whose parents, like many of the Windrush generation, had not formally settled in the country, are not considered British. They are in fact stateless until they pay the citizenship fees. The Windrush generation refers to those immigrants from the Commonwealth countries invited to Britain to fill the post-war labour shortage. The first to arrive from the Caribbean disembarked from the SS Windrush in 1948.

Though the 1971 Immigration Act granted them leave to remain, it did not issue any paperwork or keep records. Legislation passed in 2012, however, demanded proof of residency to obtain healthcare, open a bank account, get a job or rent a home, creating a Catch-22 situation.

Obtaining citizenship has proved prohibitively costly for many—the cost for a child stands at £1,102 and an adult, £1,330. As a result, thousands have been denied healthcare and benefits, lost jobs and an unknown number were deported.

The war on terror has morphed into a war on immigrants. Such inhumane treatment of refugees is the favoured policy of capitalist governments across the planet. Even as the existence of brutal camps for immigrants in the US housing thousands was made public to the world, the European Union agreed to establish mass internment camps on the continent to hold refugees in detention.



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