

Johnson government's "hostile environment" for immigrants and asylum seekers wins fascist allies

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The Conservative government's "hostile environment" for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers is leading to a surge in activity by far-right forces.

In response to attempted crossings of the Channel from France to the UK by a few hundred refugees, Boris Johnson's government has mobilised armed forces as if it were repelling an "invasion." This involves RAF Atlas A-400M, Shadow R1 and P-8 Poseidon aircraft and Royal Navy vessels.

The government's filthy xenophobic agenda is amplified by a venal right-wing media. The *Daily Mail* headlined one piece "Despite drowning of young Sudanese man, the boats from France keep coming," referring to the tragic death of asylum seeker Abdulfatah Hamdalla last month. It declared, "More than 1,400 migrants have already crossed the Channel in small boats in August alone—a record for a single month—despite there still being 10 days before September."

In response to Abdulfatah's death, Home Secretary Priti Patel said she would work with France's Macron government to strengthen border controls. This week, the Ministry of Defence confirmed that an Army Watchkeeper drone—previously used in Afghanistan—is to fly over the English Channel to monitor migrant boats. The MoD said, "The deployment of Watchkeeper provides further defence support to the Home Office in tackling the increasing number of small boats crossing the English Channel. It will provide a leading surveillance and reconnaissance capability, feeding information back to the Border Force and allowing them to take appropriate action where necessary."

The Watchkeeper, described as "battle-winning technology," will be operated in the Channel by the 47th Regiment Royal Artillery.

The deployment of weapons of war against desperate

men, women and children crossing the 21-mile stretch is accompanied by a ramping up of deportations of asylum seekers by the Home Office. Official figures show that the Home Office has already spent around £1 million deporting 285 people during the pandemic.

On August 12, a charter flight carrying 14 people destined for France and Germany took off. Those on board had all recently arrived in the UK via the Channel in small boats. This went ahead despite last-minute high court actions and other interventions. Nineteen of the asylum seekers due to be deported, from countries including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Yemen, had their tickets on the flight deferred by the Home Office after intervention by their legal representatives, Duncan Lewis solicitors.

On August 14, an Iranian national who crossed the Channel in a dinghy was deported to the Netherlands. On August 26, the Home Office deported, on a flight to France and Germany, people from Kuwait, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Sudan and Yemen. The following day, the government was prevented from deporting 23 refugees and asylum seekers on a chartered flight to Spain after courts ordered that legal appeals of those on board must be heard.

The *Sun on Sunday*, owned by billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch, editorialised, "It is vital that Priti Patel can protect our borders by deporting illegal immigrants. Delaying tactics by migrant-chasing human rights lawyers are a huge obstacle to this." It cited a Tory government official who denounced "activist lawyers chasing dinghies to get taxpayers' cash for keeping illegal immigrants in our country."

But for social distancing rules stipulating that 20 people can currently be deported on a charter flight, many more would have suffered the same fate. Those being deported

face great dangers and in addition their health is being massively imperilled, with the *Independent* reporting it “understands that there will be no testing for deportees or immigration escorts on departure or arrival, raising concerns that the move could risk spreading COVID-19 between countries.”

So vicious is the “deportation drive” that there have been at least eight suicide attempts in Brook House immigration removal centre near Gatwick Airport. On August 6, a 41-year-old Yemeni asylum seeker, Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah Alhabib, was found dead in a Manchester hotel room where he had been placed by the Home Office. According to a fellow asylum seeker Abdullah was in a state of constant fear of being deported from the UK at any time.

In order to service mass deportations, the notorious Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre has, according to the BBC, “been repurposed to house Channel migrants.” Located near Luton Airport, it can hold up to 400 people in detention.

Even this does not satisfy the media, with the *Daily Mail* complaining Monday in an article headlined “Deportations are lowest on record” that “The number of illegal immigrants, visa overstayers and foreign criminals booted out of the UK fell by a third last year...”

Joining the government-media offensive is Nigel Farage, the leader of the right-wing xenophobic Brexit Party. He is fronting a series of YouTube videos, centred on opposing “illegal” immigration under the title, “Nigel Farage investigates.” On August 16, he released a video enthusiastically endorsing Patel’s description of the number of migrants being able to cross the channel as “unacceptable” and “shameful” and backed the use the military and her appointment of former Royal Marine, Dan O’Mahoney, as “Clandestine Channel Threat Commander.”

But Farage complains that Patel’s “tough talk” is not backed by the appropriate action. In another video, Farage, who said he was acting on a “tip-off,” visits the Rivenhall hotel in Patel’s Essex constituency of Whitham. The hotel was being used to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees. The hotel had reopened at the beginning of August after being closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He is filmed entering the hotel and asking for a room, only to be told it is fully booked until the end of September. Farage tells the camera that his “exposure” could be a “massive embarrassment for Priti Patel.” The video ends with Farage calling for the Tories to get “it sorted” and appealing for “whistle blowers” to

contact him.

The Home Office responded to Farage’s witch-hunting by announcing that the placement of asylum seekers at the Rivenhall hotel had been “an error and alternative accommodation would be sought.”

Other far-right layers saw their opportunity. Last week members of the fascist organisation Britain First entered hotels in London, Essex, Birmingham and Warrington in which asylum seekers were being housed. In Warrington, the fascists filmed themselves banging on hotel residents’ doors and demanding to know which country they were from. Clearly terrified, some said they were from countries including Iraq and Sudan. The leader of the group, Paul Golding, filmed himself following a migrant, who had left a hotel in Epping, and demanding to know where he was from. He then proceeds to film the hotel’s windows before staff call the police. Similar provocations are being organised by another fascist outfit, For Britain.

Far-right groups are now reportedly planning a mobilisation on September 5 to “take Dover by force” by blocking roads and ferries. This is the same day that an anti-racist group intend to hold a protest in Dover town centre “to stand in solidarity with refugees and migrants who are seeking sanctuary from war, poverty, persecution or climate catastrophe.”

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers and young people to demand an end to the systematic brutalisation of immigrants and asylum seekers by the government, the immediate closure of all immigration detention centres and the granting of a right of residence, with full citizenship rights and access to welfare, housing, health care and education, to all those imprisoned in them or forced to endure demeaning stays in hotels that are not fit for purpose.



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