

Johnson government's war on migrants turns English Channel into a “graveyard for children”

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Two children, aged 9 and 6, were among up to seven asylum-seekers who drowned on Tuesday trying to cross the English Channel. A baby on board the capsized dinghy is missing, distressed survivors reported yesterday, with search efforts ended.

The bodies of Rasoul Irannazhad a 35-year-old construction worker, his wife Shiva Mohammad Panahi, and their children Anita, 9, and Armin, 6, have been identified. The couple's 15-month-old son Artin is presumed drowned.

The Kurdish family were from Sardasht, Iran. Yesterday, Rasoul's brother Khalil told the *Daily Telegraph*, “We begged him to not try to cross by boat. He insisted on going... It was the third time that they had attempted to cross to the UK. Two times they wanted to cross via train and the last time they wanted to cross by boat.”

The small inflatable dinghy capsized in rough seas just a few kilometres from the French port of Dunkirk at around 9.30am. Those on board sent a desperate Mayday call, begging, “Help us, we're sinking!”

A 40-foot “pleasure craft” *Marbuzet* reportedly received the distress call, relaying it to French coastguard authorities. But a map published by the *Daily Mail* shows the *Marbuzet*’s course tacking away suddenly near the site of the capsized vessel, raising questions about its failure to assist.

Rescuers, including a fishing vessel, a pilot boat from Dunkirk and a lifeboat from the French commune Gravelines, joined French and Belgian helicopters pulling around 15 people from the water.

Survivors were taken to hospital suffering from hypothermia and cardiac arrest, but six-year-old Armin could not be revived, and nine-year-old Anita died later

in hospital.

Tuesday's horrifying events mark a new daily record for asylum-seeker drownings in the English Channel, with 11 deaths recorded there since December 2018—a figure that almost certainly understates the real death toll.

The 20 asylum seekers who left the coastal area of Loon-Plage on Tuesday morning are reportedly Iranian and Iraqi Kurds. Driven from their homes by British imperialism's wars of aggression across the Middle East, these persecuted people have become the latest victims of the Johnson government's xenophobic “deterrence” regime against immigrants and refugees.

Farhad Shekari, 28, told the *Telegraph* he had been due to leave on the same boat as Rasoul's family but refused to board when he saw how risky it was. “There were 22 people in the boat and I said there are too many people and I didn't want to go... I told people not to get in the boat. I said it was too dangerous.”

The boat set off despite rough seas and wind speeds of 48 miles per hour, with French coastguard officials describing the dinghy as a “death trap”.

Another Kurdish refugee told the *Telegraph* the family had travelled from Turkey, forced on from Italy and Greece, before ending up at the migrant camp in Calais and then Puythouck camp in Dunkirk.

“The family were so frustrated by their treatment in Greece and France that they were desperate to get to the UK. They knew it was dangerous but were prepared to take the risk. The mother said my future is lost because my fingerprints were taken in Italy, as were my husband's, but I hope my children can have a future in Britain.”

In September, the Macron government razed the

Calais migrant camp, leaving 700 refugees without shelter. It was the biggest police operation in Calais since the Socialist Party government bulldozed “the Jungle” in 2016, evicting all 6,400 inhabitants.

Care4Calais founder Clare Moseley said that refugees in Calais were “utterly devastated” by Tuesday’s drownings. “This unnecessary loss of life has to stop. No one should ever feel they have to get into a fragile craft and risk their lives crossing the Channel, least of all vulnerable children.”

A spokesman for charity Save the Children said: “The English Channel must not become a graveyard for children.”

He continued, “Today’s tragic news must be a wake-up call for both London and Paris to come up with a joint plan that ensures the safety of vulnerable children and families.” But the entire political establishment on both sides of the Channel are fully committed to the war on refugees and migrants.

In Britain, the drownings were seized on by the Tories and Labour to call for stepped up attacks on the “people smugglers who organise migrant crossings”. Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated, “We have offered the French authorities every support as they investigate this terrible incident and will do all we can to crack down on the ruthless criminal gangs who prey on vulnerable people by facilitating these dangerous journeys.”

Johnson’s ghoulish Home Secretary Priti Patel declared she was “truly saddened” to learn of the “tragic loss of life”. Patel has led the government’s fascistic military campaign against migrants, appointing Dan O’Mahoney, a former Royal Marine who served in Kosovo and Iraq, to the newly created post of Clandestine Channel Threat Commander, tasked with making the “Channel route unviable for small boat crossings.”

Labour MP Yvette Cooper described the drownings as an “awful tragedy”. The leading Blairite immediately called for measures to stop migrants “getting sucked into the arms of criminal gangs or making such desperate journeys”.

The mounting death toll among asylum seekers is not caused by “people smugglers”, but by British imperialism’s “hostile environment” against asylum-seekers that effectively overturns the right to asylum under international law. This includes the adoption of

“deterrence” measures in which refugees are left to drown as an example to others. In recent months, the Johnson government has unleashed Britain’s armed forces, including RAF Atlas A-400M, Shadow R1 and P-8 Poseidon aircraft, Royal Navy vessels and drones against defenceless refugees in the Channel.

At the same time, the Tories are busy putting together plans to deport migrants as soon as they arrive. Proposals include the detention of migrants on disused ferries, abandoned North Sea oil platforms, and remote islands. Earlier this month, Labour peer Lord West, Baron West of Spithead, a retired Royal Navy Admiral, called for the construction of migrant concentration camps.

In September, the first such camp was opened by the Home Office at the Folkestone Army Barracks in Kent. The facility will hold up to 400 “Channel arrivals” with similar military sites being established in Wales and Dover.

At the same time, more than 40,555 migrants have died since 1993 due to the European Union’s Fortress Europe restrictions. This includes 11,421 migrants who drowned in the Mediterranean between 2016 and 2019.

Workers and youth in Britain and across Europe must oppose the fascistic attacks on migrants and refugees. Such repressive measures are part of the ruling class agenda of austerity and war directed against the entire working class. The ruling class is resorting to racism, nationalism, xenophobia, and fascism as part of its efforts to divide the working class, suppress mass opposition and prepare new wars of imperialist aggression. The answer to this policy of reaction is the fight for socialism and the United Socialist States of Europe.



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