

British government to deport Jamaican “foreign nationals” after fascist campaign

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Twenty-eight “foreign nationals” will be deported from the UK to Jamaica today, after Home Secretary Priti Patel delivered a fascist rebuke to campaigners calling for the flight to be postponed. The number of deportees was reduced from 58 after the Home Office reached a deal with the Jamaican government not to send anyone who arrived in the UK aged younger than 12 years old.

Over 80 public figures had called on airlines not to carry the deportees. Patel responded that these were “dangerous foreign criminals [who] have no place in our society” and that she was “unapologetic in my determination to remove these convicted foreign rapists, murders, and child sex offenders from our country.”

After 70 mostly Labour MPs signed a letter in support of the #StopthePlane campaign, a source in Patel’s department reiterated to the *Times*, “It is foreign national offenders that the Labour Party want to put first. Killers. Rapists. Drug dealers. Convicted foreign criminals who have no right to be in this country.”

In a debate in the House of Commons, Tory MP Brendan Clarke-Smith denounced “activist lawyers... trying to thwart the Government’s legal efforts to deport these criminals.” Another Tory, David Davies, suggested broadening the criteria for who could be subject to deportation and Ben Bradley MP asked the immigration minister to “call out those celebrities who spent their weekends trying to use their public profiles to shame businesses into not helping remove murderers from the UK.”

The ruling Conservatives’ ability to proceed with this foul agenda rests on the thoroughly compromised and cynical opposition of the Labour Party. The majority of Labour MPs, including party leader Sir Keir Starmer, and 12 other front benchers, did not sign the open letter to Patel protesting Wednesday’s flight.

In a speech to the House of Commons, Shadow Immigration Minister Holly Lynch merely asked whether the government had “done its due diligence” with regard to the deportees, assuring the Tory government, “Of course, we recognise that those who engage in violent and criminal acts

must face justice.”

Faced with this, the Labour MPs signing the letter of protest are only attempting to distance themselves from their party’s own anti-democratic agenda without making any real challenge to it. Summing up the token character of their opposition, former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn reproached the government for its “unnecessarily harsh approach.”

Their disagreement is framed entirely around the government’s failure “to learn any lessons” from the Windrush scandal in 2018, which saw the Tories forced to admit that scores of West Indian migrants who arrived in the UK before 1973 had been wrongly deported or denied jobs, houses, welfare, or medical care they were legally entitled to.

The MPs’ letter to Patel reads, “You have previously committed to ‘righting the wrongs’ concerning the Windrush scandal [!]... It has been reported that at least one of those already detained for this flight has a Windrush generation grandfather.”

The treatment of Caribbean migrants is despicable, and all the deportees of today’s flight have a Jamaican background. But the Labour “lefts” and others are using this to set up a self-serving agenda that absolves them from opposing all such deportations in principle. Those targeted by the government’s vicious anti-migrant agenda are not confined to West Indian “foreign nationals,” or even to “foreign nationals” at all.

Answering the government’s critics, Tory immigration minister Chris Philip boasted, “In the year ending June 2020, there were 5,208 enforced returns, of which 2,630, or over half, were to European Union countries, and only 33 out of over 5,000 were to Jamaica—less than 1 percent.

“During the pandemic, we have continued with returns and deportations on scheduled flights and on over 30 charter flights to countries including Albania, France, Germany, Ghana, Lithuania, Nigeria, Poland and Spain, none of which, I notice, provoked an urgent question. The clear majority of the charter flights this year have been to European countries.”

For the Labour Party, the Windrush scandal has become a platform for political posturing which allows them to stay silent on thousands of other deportations carried out with their tacit approval and using their own party's legislation. Philip argued in the House of Commons, "If somebody comes to this country, commits a serious criminal offence and puts our constituents at risk, it is right that, once they have served their sentence, or a great part of it, they should be removed. It is not just me who thinks that; it is the Labour Members who voted for this law in 2007 who think that, some of whom are sitting in this Chamber today."

The 2007 Borders Act was brought in by Gordon Brown's Labour government as part of the "law and order" and anti-immigrant campaign pioneered by Tony Blair. It states that any "foreign national" who receives a criminal sentence of one year or more is liable to deportation.

Crimes that can receive a one-year sentence include shoplifting, burglary and relatively minor drug offences. Many of those ultimately deported are not informed that a one-year sentence could see them deported, meaning some plead guilty without knowledge of the terrible consequences. As the WSWS reported last month, they are then routinely denied effective access to their legal rights.

Once deported following a one to four-year sentence, individuals are barred from re-entry to the UK for 10 years. Sentences of longer than four years mean a permanent re-entry ban. Over 30 children stood to lose fathers when today's flight was initially chartered. Some of the deportees will face threats to their life—at least five people removed from the UK to Jamaica were killed in the year to May 2019.

This amounts to cruel and unusual punishment after a sentence has already been served. It reinstates the infamous practice of penal transportation in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, which saw thousands of poor men, women and children shipped to British colonies as a punishment.

As the WSWS wrote on a deportation flight earlier this year, these cases also "establish a precedent for the mass removal of foreign nationals and ... the use of Gestapo-type tactics against them.

"If even the most minor conviction can become a cause for deportation on the grounds that it affects 'the public interest', then it is only a few steps until migrants can be kicked out of the country for demanding too much of state services or provoking fascist mobs."

The criminality of today's deportation flight is determined by these assaults on fundamental democratic rights. It does not hinge on whether one of the deportees has a family connection with the Windrush generation.

Nor does it depend on the crimes held to have been committed by the deportees. No one should take at face value the government's attempt to blanketly condemn these

individuals as a group of hardened criminals, which recalls US President Donald Trump's vicious demonisation of Mexican immigrants as "rapists" and "animals". But even assuming the worst, this does not change the fact that deportation is a barbaric punishment with grave implications for the democratic rights of the entire working class.

The essential argument being made by the government is that they have no obligations to "foreign criminals," even if they have lived and worked in Britain most, or even all their lives. If these rights can be withdrawn in any individual's case then they are no longer rights, but privileges awarded at the whim of the most right-wing government in British history. Specifically, of the fascistic Patel—a liar, bully, inciter of violence against immigration lawyers, and admirer of the far-right Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, responsible for waves of communalist violence across India.

With this established, what is to stop other "criminals," whether foreign or British citizens, having their rights withdrawn? Penal transportation was frequently used to punish political opponents—most notably early trade union organisers and the Chartists.

Without confronting these class questions, no successful fight in defence of migrants can be waged. That there are nearly 80 million forcibly displaced people in the world, and an estimated ten million stateless people, is proof that world capitalism is incapable of providing the basic conditions of life to the global population. Close to one and a half million lives lost to COVID-19 testify to the same fact.

Faced with rising social desperation and fearing an explosion of social opposition, the ruling class is seeking to replace democratic rule with fascist repression, directed not only against migrants, as was brutally displayed in France last week, but against all workers and young people. Overcoming these forces requires mobilising the full might of the international working class on a socialist programme, guaranteeing the right of everyone to live and work where they choose.



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