

Johnson and Macron governments step up collaboration in persecution of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

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11 December 2020

The British and French governments are at loggerheads over Brexit and as yet cannot reach agreement on commerce, trade, imports and exports. But they can find ample mutual purpose to persecute and trample on the democratic rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Rather than offer shelter to those fleeing the impact of decades of Western military aggression, the two governments have joined forces for the most odious and reactionary campaign to scapegoat them in the public eye.

A new deal between the Johnson government in London and Macron administration in Paris, was agreed on November 28 by British Home Secretary Priti Patel and her French counterpart, interior minister Gérald Darmanin.

Speaking following talks with Darmanin, Patel announced how the new package “effectively doubles the number of police on the French beaches, it invests in more technologies and surveillance—more radar technology that support the law enforcement effort—and on top of that we are now sharing in terms of toughening up our border security.”

This pledge to brutalise migrants comes only days after French security forces rampaged through the streets of Paris in what can only be described as a police riot, ruthlessly beating migrants and journalists.

Both governments, despite pleading poverty to their citizens over the response to the pandemic, managed to conjure up millions for a host of new state-of-the-art military surveillance technology, drones, radar equipment, cameras and optronic binoculars.

Officials revealed how the UK has provided France with a total of £192 million of funding since 2014 aimed primarily at preventing migrants crossing the Channel by tunnel, train, ferry and in dinghies. The majority was spent on infrastructure like border controls and security in and around Calais on the French coast.

During the weekend the deal was signed, French patrol boats intercepted 45 migrants, including a pregnant woman and children apparently suffering from hypothermia,

struggling to make the crossing cross from France. There have been more than 8,000 crossings so far during 2020. In 2019 there were 1,844 crossings and 299 in 2018.

The additional measures to prevent asylum seekers crossing the English Channel came into force December 1. French police patrols will be doubled along stretches of coast with the shortest and easiest crossing distances to the UK. The manhunting of migrants and asylum seekers along this stretch will lead to more deaths by forcing desperate people to begin their journey from more remote sections of coastline and attempt even more dangerous methods and routes to reach the UK.

Four people attempting to make the crossing are known to have died last year and seven so far this year.

Patel claimed the agreement between the two European governments represented a significant advance in their “shared mission to make Channel crossings unviable”. She said the number of migrants making the crossing had grown exponentially and blamed trafficking gangs for “facilitating” dangerous journeys. Lying through her teeth, Patel continued, “We should not lose sight of the fact that illegal migration exists for one fundamental reason: that is because there are criminal gangs—people traffickers—facilitating this trade.”

The Home Secretary knows full well the tide of humanity forced to flee to Europe from the Middle East, North Africa and the Persian Gulf does so not because of human traffickers. These extremely vulnerable people are fleeing from the wars, fratricidal conflicts, and economic and ecological destruction created and exacerbated by the world’s imperialist powers, foremost in Europe by Britain and France.

The Tory government are doubling down on their policy of creating a “hostile environment” for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The Home Office is seeking to criminalise migration by painting a lurid and inaccurate picture in the public eye of “criminal migrant gangs”

crossing the Channel and “invading” the UK.

The Anglo-French deal was criticised by Amnesty International UK. Steve Valdez-Symonds, the organisation’s refugee and migrant rights programme director, declared, “Women, men and children make dangerous journeys across the Channel because there are no safe options provided for them—to either reunite with family in this country, or access an effective asylum system, to which they are entitled. The UK government must share responsibility for providing sanctuary with its nearest neighbour. This continued focus on simply shutting down routes to the UK is blinkered and reckless—it does nothing but increase the risks that people, who have already endured incredible hardship, are compelled to take.”

Last month, it was revealed that migrants are being jailed by the Johnson government for taking the tiller of the flimsy vessels used to cross the Channel. Those steering the craft are being charged with “facilitation”. People seeking asylum are being sent to prison for preventing their seaborne craft from drifting aimlessly in the dangerous conditions and busy shipping lanes of the Channel.

The immigration enforcement unit is analysing drone footage of the boats carrying migrants across the English Channel in order to single out for prosecution those who steer the vessel. Thus far eight migrants who steered vessels on the perilous journey have been jailed since August. The draconian sentences handed down range from 16 to over 30 months in prison. To heap insult upon injury, migrants serving these prison terms are eligible for deportation once their sentences are served because their sentence was for longer than 12 months—under the Labour Party’s 2007 Borders Act.

Gloating government press releases announcing the imprisonment of migrants for steering dinghies describe people frequently fleeing the devastation wrought by NATO forces as “people smugglers”. This legal outrage is in breach of the United Nations Refugee Agency definition of smugglers as facilitating journeys for “a financial or other material benefit”.

The Home Office is also engaged in an attempt to cover up any public knowledge of the horrendous conditions at a former army barracks where asylum seekers are held behind barbed wire.

Visitors to the Napier barracks near Folkestone, Kent must now sign the Official Secrets Act to prevent them from speaking about the numerous hunger strikes, suicide attempts, general malaise, unrest and regular medical emergencies among residents.

Volunteers who provide clothing, amenities, company and counselling to the 400 male asylum seekers held at Napier barracks are being issued with a confidentiality form by the

private security firm on behalf of the Home Office. The *Guardian*, who saw firsthand the agreement, say it commits the signatory to treating as confidential any information about Napier “service users” i.e. the asylum seekers.

Such information is subject to the Official Secrets Act, designed to guard issues of national security, intelligence, defence, international relations and information which has been entrusted in confidence to another country. Breaking the Official Secrets Act threatens a jail term of up to two years in prison.

A spokesperson for the Home Office gave a dismissive response to press queries: “We have worked closely with our accommodation provider Clearsprings Ready Homes and stakeholders to ensure the Napier site is safe and secure.”

The *Guardian* reported that while the Home Office commissioned Clearsprings Ready Homes to run Napier, the company has subcontracted significant responsibilities for the day-to-day management of the detention centre to “a letting agent and property management firm called NACCS”. The detention of asylum seekers is therefore being run by a company of private landlords and property developers.

The Congress Resolution of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Britain, passed in October this year states that the “SEP will wage a determined struggle in defence of immigrants and asylum seekers. The victims of imperialist wars and brutal exploitation by the transnational corporations are subjected to the vilest crimes, hunted collectively by Europe’s governments using warships, allowed to die in their thousands at sea, imprisoned in concentration camps and subject to deportation.” It pledges that the SEP “will work with our international comrades in combating the Fortress Europe policies of the EU governments, of which the measures taken by the UK remain an integral part. We will highlight the terrible death toll in the Mediterranean and the appalling conditions in which asylum seekers are held in de facto concentration camps.”

The SEP in Britain and its sister party in France, the Parti de l’égalité socialiste, call on workers and youth across Europe to oppose the fascistic attacks on migrants and refugees.



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