

Two immigrants rescued from deportation in Glasgow by community intervention, as government escalates “hostile environment”

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Repeating the Brexit mantra, “taking back control of our borders,” the Conservative government is escalating its systematic campaign to eradicate the rights of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

In the recent Queen’s Speech, which lays out government policy priorities for the next year, Home Secretary Priti Patel’s draconian “New Plan for Immigration” was given centre stage. The legislation means that those who enter the UK “illegally”—i.e. the vast majority of refugees because all legal avenues have been sealed off—will not then be able to automatically claim asylum. Instead, they will only be granted “temporary protection,” meaning they will be closely monitored and repeatedly targeted for removal from the UK.

Before the Bill is even on the statute books, brutal raids by Home Office Immigration Enforcement officials are already being stepped up.

There was an openly provocative element to one such raid undertaken on May 13, in a Glasgow district with a sizeable Muslim population and on the Islamic holy day of Eid al-Fitr—the second in less than a month. Glasgow is Scotland’s only “dispersal city” for asylum seekers arriving in the UK.

At around 10am, immigration officers removed two men, Sumit Sehdev and Lakhvir Singh, from their top-floor flat in Kenmure Street, Pollokshields, on Glasgow’s southside. Singh said the officers “barged” in and arrested him and his friend Sumit Sehdevi on suspicion of immigration offences, having allegedly lived in the UK without leave to remain for 10 years. The two men, Indian Sikhs, were removed to a Home Office Immigration Enforcement van waiting in the street outside to be taken to detention.

Neither Sehdev nor Singh were in hiding, nor on the run

and had zero advance warning of their removal. Singh and Sehdev, a mechanic and chef respectively, have lived in the UK for years and are “part of a community,” said the refugee and migrant charity Positive Action in Housing. Both were well-liked and respected members of the local Sikh Gurdwara temple where the two friends worked feeding the homeless.

What transpired gave a glimpse of the hostility in the working class to the endless scapegoating of immigrants and asylum seekers by the political establishment and its compliant media.

News soon spread through the Kenmure Road area and beyond of the attempt to remove Sehdev and Singh and hundreds of local people flooded onto the street to block the immigration van’s exit. Swelling in numbers by the minute, the demonstration blocked the vehicle from leaving for several hours. One neighbour lay underneath the van to stop it departing. Local residents even established a snack centre for protesters in a bus shelter, with nearby families providing food and water.

As the protest grew larger, up to 50 police cars and vans descended to the street and side streets. Dozens of police officers ringed the van as the surrounding crowd chanted “cops go home” and “leave our neighbours, let them go”. Police repeatedly pushed and shoved peaceful protesters and journalists reporting the event.

Police Scotland eventually ended the standoff and freed the men, effectively preventing their immediate detention.

Human rights lawyer Aamer Anwar was among those who led the eight-hour effort to release Sehdev and Singh. In a statement, he accused the Home Office of inciting “carnage” on the streets of Glasgow with its provocative dawn raid.

Another preventing the removal was Roza Salih, a Kurdish refugee and co-founder of the Glasgow Girls

campaign. In 2005, together with fellow school pupils, Salih campaigned to prevent the deportation of a school friend. She told the *Guardian*, “I’m just overwhelmed by Glasgow’s solidarity for refugees and asylum seekers... refugees are welcome here”.

Another at the protest was Mohammad Asif of the Afghan Human Rights Foundation who spoke for many when he said, “We’re here against the hostile environment created by the Tories and the British state.”

Thanking those who defended their democratic right to remain, Lakhvir Singh, speaking through a translator, told ITN News, “I was taken unannounced from my flat, they barged in and took me into the van. I was anxious and upset wondering how I would be treated at the detention centre. I’m so happy that my fate brought me here to live in Glasgow where the people are so connected that they’ll come out into the streets to help one of their own. I’ve been astonished and overwhelmed by the support I’ve received from the people of Glasgow. It’s the happiest feeling. Thank you very much.”

Singh concluded, “There were only five or six people at the time but word spread and then there were crowds of hundreds. We are so grateful for the support.”

Director of Sikhs in Scotland, Robina Qureshi commented, “The Home Office have referred to these men as illegal. Well they are wrong, and we are now investigating legal action against the Home Office for casting such aspersions.”

Qureshi noted that, like many asylum seekers targeted for forced removal, Sehdev and Singh have not had access to legal representation: “The fact that they had no active legal representation before means they were left vulnerable. Dawn raid vans have no place going into communities dragging innocent people from their homes. They are not, categorically not, criminals.”

Jelina Berlow Rahman, a lawyer instructed to represent Singh, said he has been in the country since 2008 and “has a right to a private life, a family life”. She added, “It was evident the number of people who came together, that was his community, that was neighbours, that was his friends—the majority of people knew him.”

Despite the protest, the Home Office insisted the raid was a legitimate operation that was “tackling illegal immigration and the harm it causes, often to the most vulnerable people, by removing those with no right to be in the UK.” The Home Office statement concluded with the warning: “The UK government continues to tackle illegal migration in all its forms and our New Plan for Immigration will speed up the removal of those who have

entered the UK illegally.”

The Glasgow raid is the tip of an iceberg. Earlier this month, the *Financial Times* noted that it had seen a letter from the Home Office sent to a non-Arab fleeing Darfur, in Sudan. The FT noted that, in Sudan, “the International Criminal Court has alleged non-Arabs have been subject to crimes against humanity, including genocide. Such people are presumed eligible for refugee protection if they reach the UK.” However, the Home Office letter states, without evidence, that the recipient may have come to Britain via another European country and therefore threatens to reject their asylum application out of hand.

“As part of this consideration,” the letter reads, “we may make inquiries with safe countries to verify evidence or ask if, in principle, they would admit you.” It warns, “If your claim is treated as inadmissible, we will not ask you about your reasons for seeking asylum or make a decision on your protection claim.” It then offers “help and advice” on leaving Britain.

The FT estimated that based on the 30,000 asylum claims lodged last year hundreds or even thousands of asylum seekers will have received such letters. This was backed up by Minnie Rahman, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants campaigns director, who told the FT that “almost everyone” who made an asylum claim in the UK since January had been sent such a “threatening letter”.

The Socialist Equality Party solidarises itself with the workers and youth who acted heroically to stop the removals in Glasgow in defence of democratic rights. We demand an immediate end to all deportations and that all immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers be welcomed and provided with all the benefits of citizenship.



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