

UK: Johnson government wages dirty war on migrants and asylum seekers

Robert Stevens
9 August 2021

Britain's Conservative government is stepping up its onslaught against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

The Tory government is advancing an anti-immigration agenda as its flagship policy. This is centred on Home Secretary Priti Patel's Nationality and Border Bill, moving through parliament after passing its second reading last month. With the Tory's 80-strong majority, the legislation will pass later this year.

The most-right-wing sections of the pro-Brexit media are spewing out invective demanding that the clampdown on "illegal" immigration is stepped up as the only way to stop an "army" of migrant "invaders" reaching Britain's shores.

Last month's *Cabinet Office Outcome Delivery Plan: 2021 to 2022* report outlined the importance of tackling migration to the government's agenda. The report states that the UK must "seize the opportunities of EU Exit," which requires "creating the world's most effective border to increase UK prosperity and enhance security."

The government and media have focussed their propaganda on securing the border against dinghies and small boats containing migrants who arrive in the UK via the Channel between England and France. With no exception, from the supposedly "impartial" BBC to the Murdoch-owned Sun, the media pointed out that last Wednesday saw a "record" 482 migrants arrive in the UK via this route. For good measure the BBC pointed out, "A further 475 migrants crossed the English Channel in 15 small boats on Thursday."

Every newspaper declared in banner headlines that the numbers who crossed on Wednesday took the total arriving via the Channel this year to more than 10,000, with the *Daily Mail* complaining that it "smashed the previous daily record set on July 19 when 430 arrived." The "Channel migrant crisis" it intoned, would lead to 22,000 entering Britain that way by the end of this year.

The government, backed by its media echo chamber,

has escalated tensions with France and the European Union (EU), complaining that too few migrants are being stopped in northern France before they attempt the crossing. Last month, London agreed to pay Paris £54 million to double its anti-migrant police force stationed in northern France to monitor beaches and ports, to 200 officers.

The agreement came under attack, with Tory MPs and the *Daily Telegraph* denouncing France last week for not doing enough to stop journeys taking place and complaining that the £54 million was money down the drain. Saturday's *Telegraph* article opened with the words, "France is under pressure to set up a joint maritime brigade to turn back migrants, as 1,500 more mass on the coast ready to cross to the UK."

The *Telegraph* cited Tony Smith, the former director general of Border Force, which is responsible for the UK's air, sea and rail ports, who said, "We need a joint agreement with the French that migrants will be instantly taken back to the point from where they came and their asylum application would be considered there."

Conservative MP Tim Loughton, a member of the home affairs committee, said, "If they are talking about intercepting the boats and returning migrants to France, that is the key to all of this. If their actions can match their words when they are in a position to do it—and if a joint force is deemed necessary to execute it—then that's fine. We need to do something that effectively deters them."

Last week, the Johnson government dispatched immigration minister Chris Philp to meet French police officials with a remit of ensuring they "continued to get results for the British public".

Home Secretary Priti Patel and her French counterpart Gérard Darmanin have formally agreed to "support the idea of a UK-EU readmission agreement to mutual advantage in terms of deterring illegal migration, protecting the vulnerable, and tackling the criminal

gangs”.

Paris nevertheless insists that maritime law prevents it from bringing back to France those boats which manage to leave French shores.

Britain is cynically using the tragic fate of scores of migrants who died attempting the treacherous crossing to ensure that everyone possible is prevented from making the journey.

The *Telegraph* cited UK sources claiming the European Commission is “turning a blind eye to people dying” by refusing to enter talks to allow Britain to send migrants back to France, blaming “post-Brexit shenanigans... EU officials are understood to have insisted that the right to negotiate asylum and readmission agreement rests entirely with the bloc, and not individual member states.”

Interviewed on LBC Radio, Rear Admiral Dr Chris Parry, the first Chair of the UK Government’s Marine Management Organisation until 2011, attacked France for being reticent when “a crime is being committed in their territorial seas.” France is “supposed to stop the migrants coming off the French coast but part of the problem is that the French aren’t doing their job very well.”

He advocated “various solutions which are available at the moment, on the real hard-edge you have the Australian method which is you tow people back like they did in the Pacific. Make it an offence to try and get into Australia and if you committed that offence then you’re never allowed to settle there and everyone is processed offshore.”

Last week, Home Secretary Patel visited Greece on a two-day fact-finding trip to discuss Fortress Europe’s southern border. The EU, Greece and Turkey have set up an anti-immigration system manned by hundreds of boats in which Greece blocks entry to thousands of desperate asylum seekers.

Greece has one of the most brutal anti-migrant policies in Europe. Patel and Greek migration minister Notis Mitarachi discussed the country’s latest measures and visited a newly constructed asylum “reception centre” on Samos Island, which will operate on a “closed and controlled” basis from September. Patel plans to introduce a similar operation in Britain.

Last November, the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment issued a report on the islands. On visiting two Greek police holding cells on Samos, its delegation “found 93 migrants (58 men, 15 women—three of whom were pregnant—and 20 children, 10 of whom were under five years old), crammed into the two cells.”

The detained men, women, and children “slept on blankets or on cardboard placed on the cell floor.”

Last week, Labour MP Diane Abbott authored a piece in the *Guardian* on the conditions facing migrants at a “holding facility” in Dover that were nearly identical. “The facility was terrible. There were 56 people crammed into a small room, including women, young children and babies. They were sitting or lying on thin mattresses which covered the entire floor, including the aisles between a small number of seats. At night they would sleep on these same mattresses.”

Every filthy device available is being utilised to demonise migrants and asylum seekers and to curb immigration. The *Guardian* reported that the Home Office has financed a website and front organisation, *On the Move*, supposedly offering independent advice to migrants, as part of a £23,000 social media campaign. It declares, “The UK asylum process does not offer any advantages. It is safer and easier to apply for asylum in the country you’re in now.”

The filth pumped out by the government and media serves to legitimise anti-migrant attacks by far-right thugs. The *Guardian* reported on a freedom of information request it submitted which revealed that “70 racist incidents by far-right supporters against asylum seekers in barracks and hotel accommodation” had taken place between January 2020 and July 13, 2021. This year, the number of far-right attacks on those accommodated in hotels has more than tripled, rising to 40 from 13 in the whole of 2020.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)