

Arson attack on UK asylum centre the product of government's anti-migrant agenda

Thomas Scripps
31 October 2022

A man attacked Western Jet Foil migrant processing centre in Dover Sunday before killing himself. He threw three firebombs at the facility, with two minor injuries reported. He was reported to be laughing as he tossed petrol canisters with fireworks attached from the window of his car.

Whatever the man's background, this act of right-wing terror is the direct result of the filthy anti-migrant atmosphere whipped up by the Conservative government, the Labour opposition and the media.

Just two days before the attack, *The Times* published the article, "'Desperate' new arrivals drive Dover into taking up arms," which began with the line "Homeowners in Dover are sleeping with sledgehammers by their beds". It features a picture of a coastguard ship crowded with rescued asylum seekers next to a woman posing with a hammer. This is only one of many such incendiary articles.

The government has done everything to generate a siege mentality towards a few tens of thousands of vulnerable people arriving this year and last on small boats from across the English Channel.

Writing in the *Mail on Sunday*, before the attack, Tory MP for Dover Natalia Elphicke declared the situation "intolerable" and called for "constant vigilance", denouncing "the handwringing rights industry".

This rampant xenophobia is used to justify the brutal detention of tens of thousands of people and the denial of their democratic rights. Sunday's attack is an individual expression of the systemic violence meted out to migrants by the British government, and all governments across Europe. An arson attack was mounted this month on a refugee centre in Germany.

After the incident in Dover, 700 people were evacuated to the Manston short-term holding facility in Thanet, Kent, which made the headlines this weekend for its inhuman conditions and the refusal of Home Secretary Suella Braverman to address them.

Manston is a former Royal Air Force base now designed to hold 1,000 people, with 1,600 an absolute maximum. There are currently 4,000 migrants at the site. While the centre is

designed to hold people for 24 hours, or five days at the most, roughly 1,600 people, including families, have been there for three-four weeks.

David Neal, chief inspector of borders and immigration, described himself as "speechless" at the "wretched conditions", including the risk of infection, fire and disorder, and the lack of qualifications among staff.

Migrants have their phones taken off them. The *Guardian* reports that they are issued numbered wristbands and referred to by their number rather than their name and that unaccompanied children have been kept at the site for weeks.

Scabies is widespread. Outbreaks of norovirus and more recently diphtheria have also been reported. One of the migrants infected with diphtheria has also contracted MRSA.

The *Daily Mail* reported whistleblowers from the camp who said, "A small Army detachment is inside to help keep order. We have been told riot police are on standby to enter if the migrants kick off in the next few days." According to the *Morning Star*, migrants who staged a sit-in protest last Thursday were manhandled into vans by security.

The *Mail's* sources added, "Migrants are now being allowed into pens outside the marquees." They described a "deliberate conspiracy of silence" by the government, continuing, "'Everyone working there has to sign the Official Secrets Act and they are afraid of telling the true story for fear of ending up in court.'"

Having worked to close off legal avenues for seeking asylum, the government brutalises those who make it to Britain by different means to deter others. Similarly appalling conditions were exposed at the Napier and Penally barracks migrant centres early last year.

Multiple sources have informed *The Times* and *Bloomberg* that Braverman was told by Home Office officials three weeks ago that the Manston site was illegal, an effective "unofficial detention centre". One commented, "She knew exactly what she was doing and she still went ahead with it."

Sources also claimed that Braverman had “deliberately” not signed off enough hotels for use as asylum accommodation while attorney general, adding to the overcrowding in nominally temporary sites.

Life in asylum hotels is hardly better. Conditions have been described as “prison like”, with asylum seekers unable to access essentials, suffering severe physical health problems and left suicidal.

Grotesquely, the attack on the Dover centre is already being used to step up the anti-migrant crackdown. Within hours of the attack, Elphicke declared, “Every single attempt to get on top of this is delayed or thwarted by a rag bag of people who seem to want open borders and don’t seem to want us to get a grip on this particular situation,” resulting in “this uncontrolled amount of people arriving.”

Writing in the *Spectator*, Patrick O’Flynn demanded Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stick to his “ten-point plan” for “Taking control of our borders and tackling the flow of illegal migration” first published in the *Telegraph* during the summer Conservative leadership election.

Sunak promised then to “tighten our statutory definition of who qualifies for asylum in the UK”, to “tackle” the European Court of Human Rights, to “crack down as hard as is humanly possible” on small boat crossings and do “whatever it takes to implement” the policy of shipping asylum seekers to Rwanda for processing.

In reappointing Braverman as home secretary—a woman who described a front page of the *Telegraph* with a picture of a flight heading for Rwanda as a “dream” and “obsession”—Sunak has found a psychopath matched to the task. She told parliament Monday evening that she was “serious” about “stopping the invasion on our Southern coast” and the “scourge” of illegal immigration.

Kevin Saunders, a former chief immigration officer for UK border force, lifted the veil on the debased conversations going on behind the scenes by telling the BBC, “I would put a cruise liner in the middle of the Channel and put all asylum seekers on that, put it in international waters so they can’t claim asylum, because it’s not the UK.” The idea was first exposed in October 2020.

According to *The Times*, Home Office officials recently approached leaders of London councils about keeping asylum seekers in tents in London parks.

There is barely even a presentational difference between Labour and the government on this question. Both compete over who can get better value “for the taxpayer” in abusing migrants. Earlier this month—after it was revealed that Braverman plans to ban anyone who enters Britain illegally from claiming asylum—Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves criticised the right-wing lunatic for “not deporting people today”, telling the Tories to “get a grip” and “get people out

of the country.”

Responding to Braverman in parliament Monday evening, Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper complained that the Tories’ flagrantly anti-democratic Nationality and Borders Act has “in fact added further bureaucracy and delay” to the asylum system, leading to “more than £100 million extra on asylum accommodation bills.” She asked why the government had refused Labour’s calls “for a major new National Crime Agency Unit” to “crack down on the gangs” in the Channel.

The hypocrisy of the Labour and Tory parties, who promised to find space for refugees from Hong Kong and Ukraine when it suited their foreign policy interests, but who declare other refugees an intolerable burden, is sickening. Many of the asylum seekers crossing the Channel hail from countries devastated by imperialist wars and sanctions—carried out under the banner of all manner of “humanitarian” concerns—including Syria, Afghanistan and Iran.

Even the cynical embrace of refugees from Ukraine has had a short shelf-life. Warnings are now being raised over the looming homelessness crisis among Ukrainians in the UK as six-month Homes for Ukraine placements come to an end. Nearly 2,000 are already homeless, 4,000 are looking for a new sponsor and an additional 14,000 are set to do so by Christmas.

The treatment of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers shows the ruling elite’s hatred of the working class in its purest form, enacted against workers cut off from their communities and held at the mercy of the state. It is the responsibility of the entire working class to rally to their side as part of a broader defence of democratic rights against a government turning to increasingly dictatorial forms of rule.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact