

UK and France sign new repressive anti-immigration deal

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The war against refugees and asylum seekers escalated this week with the revised agreement between the UK and France intended to stop thousands of desperate people crossing the English Channel.

On Monday, after months of negotiations, UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman met with French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin to sign off on an increase in payments from £55 million to £63 million a year to keep refugees out of Britain. It was completed after final talks between UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, and his French counterpart Catherine Colonna. Since London began to pay Paris in 2018 for preventing migrants reaching UK shores, total costs to the UK have reached €200 million.

The deal finances a 40 percent increase in the number of officers patrolling French beaches (from 200 to 300) and further use of high-tech equipment such as drones and night-vision cameras. The Home Office said it would fund further investment “in cutting edge surveillance technology, drones, detection dog teams, CCTV and helicopters to help detect and prevent crossings.”

Its statement boasted, “The arrangement means, for the first time, specialist UK officers will also be embedded [in French control rooms] with their French counterparts, which will increase information sharing, improve understanding of the threat, and ensure UK expertise is at the heart of efforts to disrupt crossings and clamp down on people smugglers. This more integrated approach will also include strengthened operational co-operation, including joint UK-France analysis teams supporting the co-ordination and exchange of information by French-command HQ.”

Britain would support, “reception and removal centres in France for migrants whose journeys to the UK are prevented, to further deter crossing attempts.”

The new funding and measures aimed at tearing up the democratic rights of asylum seekers are in place despite

the existing repressive apparatus already preventing, as the UK Home Office boasted, “over 30,000 illegal crossing attempts since the start of the year – more than 50% more than at the same stage last year.”

The repression to come is aimed at stopping entirely the remaining tens of thousands who make the hazardous crossings. The numbers reaching Britain are just 40,000 so far this year, compared to the millions of refugees seeking to flee their homelands destroyed in imperialist wars and proxy wars.

To even reach the French shoreline to attempt the crossing, refugees have to undertake an arduous trip, passing through numerous borders. Many who arrive in the UK come from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. But NATO’s proxy war in Ukraine has created millions more refugees.

As with the growing tally of refugee deaths in the Mediterranean/Aegean, many do not survive the attempt to get to Britain. November 24 will mark the first anniversary of the horrific deaths of 27 refugees when their inflatable dinghy capsized in the English Channel. Just two others survived and were rescued, and another is still missing, presumed dead.

Despite the crisis of the British bourgeoisie necessitating an unprecedented five prime ministers since 2016 (three in 2022 alone) and six home secretaries, the whipping up of anti-immigrant sentiment is an ever more ferocious constant.

The arrival of a few thousand migrants annually in Britain is often referred to as an “invasion”, giving succour to a xenophobic media demanding harsher crackdowns and creating an environment in which fascists organise attacks on asylum seekers. Last month, a fascist attacked the Western Jet Foil migrant processing centre in Dover with three firebombs before killing himself.

The signing of the latest deal was trailed by French police putting on a brutal display as to what asylum

seekers can expect. On Saturday morning, two days before it was finalised, riot police attacked refugees with CS spray at a beach in Gravelines. This was after police slashed and deflated several rubber dinghies that were being prepared for crossing.

On the deal being signed, there were immediate complaints in British and French ruling circles and right-wing media that it was still too lax and would not prevent refugees from getting to the UK.

Darmanin, speaking to the *Voix du Nord* newspaper, insisted that the UK's employment laws be further tightened: "[The Britons] need to first of all change their labour market rules as you can work without papers in the UK... They need a normalised relationship with the European Union, a treaty to determine the entry rules for immigrants."

Last year, Darmanin, a sympathizer of the far-right *Action française* movement, championed an "anti-separatist" law imposing draconian restrictions on Muslim organizations in France. This month, he announced plans for a major new law next year restricting the right to asylum. While allowing immigrants to stay in France if they work in "tense industries" where there are not enough workers, it would primarily allow for rapid expulsions of asylum seekers and drastically limit their right to appeal expulsion orders.

The *Financial Times* noted the concerns of "British unions, politicians and migration experts" because "there is no provision in the agreement for the UK to return migrants who reach Britain, or for the processing of those travelling to the French coast in the hope of crossing."

Tory Dover MP Natalie Elphicke denounced the deal, saying: "What's needed is a step-change in approach with joint border patrols and a Channel-wide joint security zone. It's only when migrants and people smugglers alike know that they can't succeed in crossing the Channel in a small boat that this crisis will come to an end."

The opposition to the deal from the trade unions was equally right-wing in character, with Kevin Mills, a Public and Commercial Service union representative for Border Force staff in Kent complaining, "This deal is not enough and the lack of detail is telling. If you stop thousands today and let most of them go, how many are just going to try again tomorrow?"

The Labour Party is in agreement with sealing off Britain's borders to "illegal immigration", with leader Sir Keir Starmer stating that the deal was a "step in the right direction". Shadow Immigration Minister Stephen Kinnock, son of former party leader Neil Kinnock, called

for the UK to introduce ID cards to "reassure the public we are in control of our borders".

The British government remains intent on sending refugees who make it across the Channel to Rwanda, 4,000 miles away in Africa. The first attempt was made in June but was halted after legal challenges were made on behalf of the asylum seekers on board a plane ready to take off. The Home Office statement on the deal signed with France included a reference to "our world leading partnership with Rwanda which will see migrants who make these unnecessary journeys relocated there".

According to the rabidly right-wing *Daily Express*, the government is looking to seal similar partnerships, including with Paraguay, thousands of miles away in South America.

The brutal treatment of asylum seekers who are detained in appalling conditions as they await the outcome of their case is to be worsened. In the *Sunday Telegraph*, Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick outlined a "Ten-point migration plan to end 'Hotel Britain'." He denounced the "unacceptable" cost of asylum seekers being accommodated in hotels totalling £5.6 million a day. This was fuelling "asylum-shopping" economic migrants who saw Britain as a "destination of choice". Jenrick declared, "'Hotel Britain' must end, and be replaced with simple, functional accommodation that does not create an additional pull factor."

The newspaper reported, "Ministers are understood to be looking at larger and less luxurious sites including disused student accommodation, defunct or underperforming holiday parks and, possibly, budget cruise ships, as used by the Scottish Government for Ukrainian refugees."

The working class in Britain, France and throughout Europe must oppose the witch-hunting onslaught against millions of desperate people. History shows that the assault on the democratic rights of immigrants is always a precursor to an offensive against all workers. This is why the passage of the authoritarian Nationality and Borders Act took place alongside the equally draconian Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act and soon to be enacted Public Order Bill.



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