

# Britain's Conservative government and Labour opposition compete over far-right anti-immigration agenda

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The frenzy over the passage of the ruling Conservatives' anti-immigration legislation foreshadows the most right-wing general election campaign ever to be held in Britain. An election must be called by the end of 2024, with November touted as the most likely month.

For weeks on end, the British media has been force feeding the population reports of every twist and turn of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's pledge to enforce an anti-immigration policy centred on deporting to Rwanda those deemed to have illegally entered Britain.

Last week, the front pages of every paper carried headlines asking whether Sunak would be able to pass his Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill at its third reading, or whether it would be scuppered by rebels from his own party. At each stage of the legislation—which has been repeatedly stalled over the last two years by Britain's Supreme Court and the European Court of Human Rights—it has been challenged by Tory MPs who insist it be made even more draconian by junking any concessions to international law.

Sunak staved off a rebellion, with two amendments defeated and the Bill passed by 320 votes to 276, with just 11 Tory MPs voting against. The legislation now goes before the House of Lords for around two months, before coming back to Parliament—where any further amendments will be considered—before being passed into law.

The main reason for the rebellion melting away was that the Tory rebels—numbering around 60—see an election looming and were happy to secure the most right-wing immigration policy ever passed in the UK without bringing down Sunak and with it the entire

government and their careers. Their concerns were summed by Tory MP Sir Bob Seely, who said potential rebels were living in “la la land”. He warned, “We kill the Bill tonight, we can all go and look for new jobs, so that is what we are facing”.

The government also offered the rebels a commitment that if the Bill is finally passed it will scrap guidance to civil servants saying they must always obey injunctions from the European Court of Human Rights (rule 39 orders) blocking deportations.

There are several bogus aspects to the media's portrayal of the infighting in the Tory Party. The extreme right-wing character of the opposition to Sunak—including his former Home Secretary Suella Braverman whom Sunak was forced to sack after she denounced him for being soft on immigration—is being used to conceal the far-right nature of the legislation they are rebelling against.

On this basis, the nominally liberal *Guardian* hails the One Nation faction of the Conservatives as something other than the anti-working-class, Thatcherite bloc it is. These 100 or so MPs want the harshest anti-immigration agenda possible while still being able to claim they are abiding by international law.

One of their number, Matt Warman, said prior to the third reading of Sunak's Bill that he would back it as “part of a package that is part of making sure we are tackling this really vital issue of illegal migration. It's simply a case of wanting something that doesn't get challenged yet again in the courts... and as you heard from the prime minister, [it is] the toughest piece of legislation to come to the Commons ever on this issue so people should take yes for an answer and get on with

tackling this issue.”

Even more grotesque are the effort of the *Guardian* and another Labour Party supporting outlet, the *Mirror*, to prettify Labour’s opposition to the Rwanda Bill.

The Labour Party is just as right-wing as the Tories on every policy, including immigration. For the last two years, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and his Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper have denounced the Rwanda policy not for being the focal point of a vicious anti-immigration agenda, but as an expensive “gimmick”. Labour’s preferred policy is that Britain should work with France and other European Union countries to prevent asylum seekers reaching UK shores in the first place, portrayed as “smashing the gangs” smuggling them across the Channel.

Last year, Cooper joined in as the government, backed with fascistic coverage from the tabloid media, whipped up a frenzied campaign calling for an end to asylum seekers being accommodated in hotels pending their cases being processed. Cooper said, “The key thing here is there is existing long-standing asylum accommodation across the country that’s been in place for years... What they need is a proper strategy to end hotel use.”

Shadow Immigration Minister Stephen Kinnock has confirmed to *Sky News* that Labour in office would even continue to use floating barges, newly deployed by the government, to house asylum seekers, along with the rest of the repressive infrastructure they would inherit from the Tory government.

Starmer has declared, in denouncing the organisers of small boat crossings, that he is in favour of using Section 38b under the Terrorism Act 2000 to require people to inform on anyone involved in such crossings—including the family members of those onboard. Asked if he supported prosecuting such families he told *Sky News*, “What I have said is that we need to put them in the bracket of terrorists. That’s how we smash those gangs behind the boats.”

Just prior to the third reading on the Rwanda Bill, Starmer continued spouting far right politics using all of his six allotted questions of the prime minister to ask the whereabouts of over 4,000 people who were due to be deported to Rwanda. They were, he complained, seemingly at large and not under lock and key as they would be under a Labour government.

Starmer crowed, “The Government have been forced

to admit that they have lost contact with 85 percent of the 5,000 people earmarked for removal to Rwanda. Has the prime minister found them yet?”; “The prime minister did not answer the question, so I will ask him again: where are the 4,250 people the government have lost? Where are they?”; “What progress has he made in locating the 4,250 people his government have apparently lost?”

He condemned the Tories “who spent £400 million of taxpayers’ money on a Rwanda scheme, yet cannot deport a single person... Only this government could waste hundreds of millions of pounds on a removals policy that does not remove anyone.”

This all confirms that the Tories and Labour are going to fight the general election as a competition over who can advance the most ferociously xenophobic policies. The lurch to the right, replicated in all the imperialist countries, is the ruling class’s response to the enormous social anger building up over the cost-of-living crisis and decades of austerity, and set to be further enflamed by the costs of Britain’s involvement in two raging wars—in Ukraine against Russia and their arming of Israel in its genocide against the Palestinians.

With no social programme whatsoever to address these concerns, and sharing totally the militarist agenda of British imperialism, Labour and the Tories are seeking to scapegoat migrants and poison the political atmosphere with nationalism and chauvinism, the better to divide workers.

From the standpoint of the working class, it does not matter a jot whether the Tories or the Labour Party wins the next election. Workers and young people must turn to the building of their own internationalist party, the Socialist Equality Party, which together with our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, fights for high-quality living standards all over the world and upholds the right of workers from every corner of the globe to live and work in whatever country they choose, with full citizenship rights.



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