

UK Tory government passes fascist Bill on deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda

Robert Stevens
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The Conservative government has finally passed the legislation required to deport immigrants and asylum seekers to Rwanda. After two years of blocking by the House of Lords, the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill was passed just after midnight Monday.

The Bill, first introduced by then-prime minister Boris Johnson in April 2022, was expected to be passed last week. However, this was delayed once again by amendments to the legislation by peers in the House of Lords.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that MPs and peers would have to stay up all night if necessary to get the Bill through. It passed after a majority vote of 75 (312 to 237) to throw out the last remaining Lords amendment—on setting-up a monitoring process on whether Rwanda is a safe country, as the government claims.

One of the main objections in the Lords to the Bill was that there was no specific exemption from deportation for Afghans and others who had served with UK forces. An amendment demanding this from former Labour Defence Minister Des Browne was defeated by 305 votes to 234. Browne accepted a verbal commitment that such Afghans “will not be sent to Rwanda” and all those from Afghanistan whose claims had been rejected under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme will be reassessed.

Sunak issued a statement declaring, “The passing of this landmark legislation is not just a step forward but a fundamental change in the global equation on migration.” It was now “very clear that if you come here illegally, you will not be able to stay. Our focus is to now get flights off the ground, and I am clear that nothing will stand in our way of doing that and saving lives”.

Just hours after the legislation passed, another five people—a seven-year-old girl, a woman and three men—lost their lives trying to reach Britain. They were trying to cross the Channel in a small boat and were found

near the French town of Wimereux, south of Calais. The latest victims of the UK’s vicious clampdown were among 112 people on board the overcrowded boat: 47 people had to be rescued with four taken to hospital.

The government can now theoretically deport around 52,000 people to Rwanda with at least £370 million, and an estimated up to £500 million, to be paid to the Rwandan government to accommodate them. In a breach of international law, the Bill creates a new power to ignore any “interim measures” (injunctions) the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) may make ordering a flight set for Rwanda to stay on the runway in Britain.

Sunak pledged that the first flights to Rwanda will set off “in 10 to 12 weeks”, with some of those to be deported already selected and others to be rounded up.

Speaking in Downing Street hours before the measures passed Sunak could not contain his glee. He said, “Starting from the moment that the Bill passes we will begin the process of removing those identified for the first flight. We have prepared for this moment. To detain people while we prepare to remove them, we’ve increased detention spaces to 2,200.”

Among the other measures in place to enforce this brutal policy are: 200 case workers hired; 25 courtrooms and 150 judges to hear asylum cases, offering 5,000 days in court; a pre-booked airfield with slots for commercial charter flights to Rwanda booked; 500 escorts for the flights, with 300 more in training.

Minister for Illegal Migration, Michael Tomlinson, stated that following the Bill being given Royal Assent imminently by King Charles and the signing of a final treaty with Rwanda, “We need to get the flights off the ground, and that’s when we will see the deterrent effect kick in”.

In a warning to civil servants who have threatened to strike rather than break international law Sunak warned, “We’ve put beyond all doubt that Ministers can disregard

these injunction with clear guidance that if they decide to do so, civil servants must deliver that instruction.”

The legislation was denounced by human rights groups, Freedom from Torture, Amnesty International UK and Liberty who described Parliament as “a crime scene.” A spokesperson said, “We all deserve the chance to live a safe life, and to seek protection when we need it most. This shameful Bill trashes the constitution and international law whilst putting torture survivors and other refugees at risk of an unsafe future in Rwanda.”

Filippo Grandi, the UN high commissioner for refugees said the law was “further step away from the UK's long tradition of providing refuge to those in need, in breach of the Refugee Convention... This arrangement seeks to shift responsibility for refugee protection, undermining international cooperation and setting a worrying global precedent.”

In fact the fascistic policies being rolled out by London are being implemented everywhere by the capitalist class, as they whip up a foul anti-immigration atmosphere the better to pursue policies of austerity and war.

These policies have led to 30,000 dead in the Mediterranean over the last decade as “Fortress Europe” is enforced. This month, the European Parliament adopted the Common European Asylum System, effectively suspending the right to asylum and turned the immigration policies of the extreme right into law. As the WSWS noted, “The measures adopted provide for Europe’s external borders to be hermetically sealed off. This means that refugees will have to undergo their asylum procedure outside the EU in closed, militarily guarded detention centres.”

Fascist Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has struck a deal allowing the deportation of 1,500 refugees and asylum-seekers to Libya over the next three years. On top of this, those intercepted or rescued by Italy in the Mediterranean Sea and deemed “illegal” will be sent to Albania for identification, asylum processing, and repatriation, and held in two detention centres able to hold 3,000 people. Last November, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged to “examine” whether asylum applications could be processed abroad, with Austria considering the same policy.

That the Tory government is prepared to squander half a billion pounds—with the expected cost of sending the first few hundred asylum seekers to Rwanda working out at £1.8 million per person—indicates how critical the whipping up of putrid anti-immigrant sentiment is for the ruling class. Sunak’s leadership contains a pronounced

fascist layer that also reflects the party’s reactionary, ageing, middle class constituency, whipped up by a ferociously xenophobic tabloid media.

The Labour Party has pledged to repeal the Rwanda Bill on coming to office, but not on any principled basis. Its pitch to the ruling class is that it can use all the existing repressive legislation to ensure asylum seekers are kicked out and borders tightened—enforced at a fraction of the cost.

As is now usual for Sir Keir Starmer’s right-wing party, Labour reasserted its alternative to the Rwanda policy in the pages of a pro-Tory paper, this time the *Telegraph*. Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper penned an op-ed, “Labour will stop the small boats.” She opened with “Dangerous small boat crossings undermine our border security” and “add to the chaos in our asylum system...” What was needed was “urgent action” to stop the gangs organizing the boats “and to strengthen Britain’s borders”.

The problem with the Rwanda scheme was that it was “extortionately expensive” and “only covers 1% of those arriving in the UK”. Copper complained, “there is no plan for the other 99% who will now join a permanent costly backlog, with the taxpayer footing the bill.”

Labour would “put the Rwanda money into strengthening our border security instead. That means new counter-terror style powers, new international intelligence sharing agreements and new cross-border police working with European partners...”

She pledged to “clear the asylum backlog with a new fast track system for safe countries, end asylum hotel use, and set up a major new Returns and Enforcement Unit to swiftly return those with no right to be in the UK. Returns have dropped by nearly 50% since the Conservatives took office, undermining the credibility of the entire system. We have to restore order to the border.”



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