

# Mobilise against UK Tories' roundup of asylum seekers for deportation to Rwanda!

Chris Marsden  
28 April 2024

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all workers and young people to mobilise against the planned mass deportation of asylum seekers set to begin this week.

On Sunday, the *Observer* newspaper ran an exclusive reporting that the Home Office will launch a two-week national campaign to detain asylum seekers on Monday in preparation for their deportation to Rwanda.

The details of the fascist initiative presented are chilling. Weeks earlier than expected:

- Officials will pick people up nationwide and hold refugees who turn up for routine meetings at immigration service offices.
- They will be immediately transferred to detention centres already prepared for the operation and held to be put on later flights to Rwanda.
- The Home Office had begun hiring civil servants to travel to Kigali before Parliament passed the Rwanda Act.

Though some asylum seekers identified for these flights have already been held, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's earlier declaration that the first flights to Rwanda would take off in "10 to 12 weeks" was assumed to mean that roundups would not take place for several weeks.

But the government has speeded up its gestapo operation ahead of Thursday's local council elections in England. With the Tories predicted to suffer major losses, and rumours circulating of a leadership challenge and even a snap election, the prime minister's response is a visceral appeal to the party's xenophobic base.

On April 22, the Conservative government finally passed the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill to deport immigrants and asylum seekers to the African country, after two years of blocking by the House of Lords.

Sunak hailed this "landmark legislation" as "a fundamental change in the global equation on migration... 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". He boasted, "We have prepared for this moment. To detain people while we prepare to remove them, we've increased detention spaces to 2,200."

The rounding up of the 2,200 is now underway, with the legislation ultimately threatening around 52,000 people with deportation to Rwanda. In a breach of international law, the Bill creates a new power to ignore any "interim measures" (injunctions) the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) may make ordering a flight set for Rwanda to stay on the runway in Britain.

Moreover, the Refugee Council has predicted that 115,575 asylum seekers will be left in "permanent limbo" by the end of this year, because the new law bars the UK from processing their claims and there is not the capacity for them all to be deported to Rwanda.

The UK measures pave the way for further outrages throughout Europe and internationally, as the ruling class whips up foul anti-immigration sentiment, nationalism and xenophobia to facilitate their policies of austerity and war.

This month, the European Parliament adopted the Common European Asylum System, meaning that refugees will have to undergo their asylum procedure outside the EU in military-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, while those intercepted by Italy in the Mediterranean Sea and deemed "illegal" will be sent to Albania for asylum processing and repatriation, held in two detention centres able to hold 3,000 people.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has pledged to “examine” whether asylum applications could be processed abroad.

The Republic of Ireland’s Justice Minister, Helen McEntee, will meet UK Home Secretary James Cleverly in London Monday to coordinate immigration policy. Prime Minister Simon Harris has asked McEntee to “bring proposals to cabinet to amend existing law regarding the designation of safe ‘third countries’ and allowing the return of inadmissible international protection applicants to the UK.”

McEntee told RTE, “My focus as minister for justice is making sure that we have an effective immigration structure and system. That’s why I’m introducing fast processing, that’s why I’ll have emergency legislation at cabinet this week to make sure that we can effectively return people to the UK, and that’s why I’ll be meeting with the home secretary to raise these issues on Monday.”

Sunak boasted that these comments were proof of success: “[That] is why you’re seeing multiple countries talk about doing third country partnerships, looking at novel ways to solve this problem, and I believe [they] will follow where the UK has led.”

Legal challenges to this crime are being shut down. The principle of “non-refoulement” guarantees that no one should be removed to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, or other irreparable harm. But amid reports of an exodus of civil servants opposed to the breaking the law and threats of a strike, Sunak has warned regarding all international and domestic legal challenges to deportations: “We’ve put beyond all doubt that Ministers can disregard these injunctions with clear guidance that, if they decide to do so, civil servants must deliver that instruction.”

Politically, the Labour Party marches in lockstep with the Tories on immigration, just as it does on austerity and war. Labour has pledged to repeal the Rwanda Bill on coming to office, but only because it is too expensive and inefficient. Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper pledged in the *Telegraph* 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... We have to restore order to the border.”

Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting said it was unlikely a Labour government would bring people back from Rwanda if some are sent there. “Once people are settled in Rwanda, they’re settled in Rwanda,” he told Sky News, and it was doubtful that Labour would “unpick that situation”.

Neither will the trade unions do anything to oppose the government’s scheme.

Everything depends on the independent intervention of workers in defence of asylum seekers.

The government knows this. The police are already preparing to repress opposition. The *Observer* reports that “Police in Scotland have been put on alert because of the high risks of street protests and attempts by pro-refugee campaigners to stop detentions... Local communities in Scotland have twice prevented deportations by staging mass protests on Kenmure Street in Glasgow, in May 2021, and in Nicolson Square, Edinburgh, in June 2022.

“On both occasions, hundreds of people surrounded immigration enforcement vehicles to prevent asylum seekers being removed after tense standoffs between protesters and police.”

The police were eventually forced to release two men, a failure that the Border Force is determined to prevent this time. The *Observer* reports that “Officers will not take part in the detentions for the Rwanda flights operation but will take part in crowd control and policing the operations.”

Workers and young people must pick up the gauntlet thrown down by the government and the police. Protests must be organised wherever asylum snatches are made, outside detention centres and at airports. Civil servants and other workers must not allow themselves to be dragooned into criminal activity by state intimidation and the refusal of union leaders to fight. Strikes must be mounted and blockades implemented.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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