

# London protest halts Conservative government's round-up of asylum seekers for deportation to Rwanda

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2 May 2024

Hundreds of people blocked a coach from leaving outside the Best Western hotel in Peckham Road, south London, and taking away at least eight asylum seekers to put them aboard the Bibby Stockholm barge. Among the asylum seekers being targeted were reportedly teenagers attending colleges in the area. The protesters included many local residents.

The Bibby Stockholm is a disease-ridden barge docked at Dorset on England's south coast, transformed into a floating prison to detain asylum seekers before deportation.

When the coach pulled into a bus stop at around 8am, protesters linked arms and surrounded it for hours. Among their chants were "Migrants welcome" and "Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here".

A mass of police arrived in vans and on bikes, while police vans blocked both ends of the road.

Anna Pichierri, of Movement for Justice, said, "When I got here at around 8am the coach was already surrounded [by protesters]. People from the community all came out and were peacefully protesting."

Later, police began attacking the protesters, dragging them away from the coach and making a total of 45 arrests. Pichierri said, "Someone got punched in the throat by a police officer, others were kicked."

The *Guardian* reported, "At least one person received medical attention when they were knocked to the ground after police moved in at about 12.30pm."

As police surrounded the coach, protesters then sat down in the road, preventing the coach from moving. The coach was forced to leave the scene empty at around 3pm, with police clearing the area by 4pm.

In another incident, a group of Just Stop Oil protesters, with a banner reading "No Prison Ships",

blocked a coach from proceeding along the only access road to the Bibby Stockholm on the Isle of Portland.

Britain's gestapo-style operation to round up asylum seekers and deport them thousands of miles away to Rwanda, east Africa, began this week. On Wednesday, the Home Office put out a celebratory video showing immigration enforcement goons raiding houses, bringing out people detained in handcuffs and bundling them into a van.

The move by the Conservative government follows the passage last month of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act. Passing the legislation, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said, "Our focus is to now get flights off the ground, and I am clear that nothing will stand in our way of doing that..."

The operation, which officially began April 29, was initially reported as lasting at least two weeks by the Sunday *Observer* newspaper. The *Guardian* updated Wednesday, "Nationwide operations began this week to detain adult men and women, with more activity due to be carried out over the next 11 weeks leading up to a one-way flight to east Africa."

According to the newspaper, "Officials refused to say how many people had been held so far, but sources said there had been 'dozens' of detentions across the UK, in cities including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol. Enforcement action is said to have taken place in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland."

Home Office Director of Enforcement Eddy Montgomery said, "It is vital that operational detail is kept to a minimum... ensuring we can deliver this large-scale operation as quickly as possible." To carry this out the "Home Office has increased detention capacity

to more than 2,200 detention spaces, trained 200 new caseworkers to quickly process claims and has 500 highly trained escorts ready.”

Every means possible is being utilised in a massive dragnet to detain asylum seekers. A man from Sudan who turned up at a routine Home Office appointment at the Lunar House immigration reporting centre Monday was seized, held in Croydon, south London, and told he was being deported to Rwanda. Another two, including an Afghan, were reportedly being held under the same conditions.

Others are being removed as part of a scheme where people leave “voluntarily” for Rwanda in exchange for £3,000. The *Guardian* reported that the first such deportation took place Monday, with the man flown to Africa on a commercial flight.

Raids on houses are being combined with pre-planned operations, as in Peckham, to remove asylum seekers from hotels where they are being accommodated.

In their efforts to whip up a fascist constituency, the tabloid media, which have previously described immigrants as vermin, are redoubling their efforts to ape the Nazi propaganda rag *Der Stürmer*. The *Daily Mail* responded to the Home Office video by publishing stills and the video, and hailing “illegal migrants” being raided as the top story on its website under the headline, “Next Stop, Rwanda.”

Last week the tabloids devoted pages to demonising immigrants and asylum seekers, including those attempting to arrive in Britain via the perilous Channel crossing from France. Among the headlines were, “Army of migrants overpower armed French police before boarding boat to UK” (*Express*) and “French navy lets packed migrant boat reach England despite five deaths on board” (*Telegraph*). The *Mail* also wrote of “an army of migrants” who “overpower tear gas cops and ride on ANOTHER dinghy to the UK”.

This is just the echo of what is coming from the highest echelons of government, with Sunak’s press secretary stating, “People are ultimately breaking into our country so of course we want to get moving as rapidly as possible...”

None of this could have proceeded without the collusion of the Labour Party—which formally opposes the Rwanda scheme, but only to demand a more efficient, less expensive means of mass

deportations—and the trade unions who have not lifted a finger to mobilise their membership.

In the words of Labour MP Stephen Kinnock in this week’s debate in Parliament on immigration policy, “Labour has been absolutely clear that we reject the £500 million Rwanda scheme, based on its unaffordability and unworkability.”

He added that Labour “will repurpose that money to smash the criminal smuggler gangs with our new cross-border police unit and a security partnership with Europol. Crucially, our new returns and enforcement unit will ensure that *more flights take off to other countries*, which will remove foreign criminals, failed asylum seekers and visa overstayers so that we can restore some control and integrity to our asylum system in a way that is firm, fair and well managed.”

Adding to the frothing hysteria being whipped up against asylum seekers he declared, “We will also end the use of 250 asylum hotels and other inappropriate accommodation for asylum seekers, which is costing the British taxpayer millions of pounds every single day.”



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