Fascist mobilisations in Britain: For a socialist defence of asylum seekers and refugees!

Robert Stevens
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Workers and youth in Britain must come to the defence of migrants and refugees. Far-right forces have been mobilising in their hundreds outside hotels and hostels housing asylum seekers over the last weeks, demanding their closure and mass deportations of immigrants.

The mobilisations are a repeat of those held last summer after a fascist-organised riot in Southport, England, following the tragic stabbing deaths of three children by a mentally disturbed 17-year-old British citizen, Axel Rudakubana. A series of pogrom-type attacks were carried out nationwide, mostly targeting asylum seeker accommodation, with an attempt made to set one building on fire.

This year's events began July 13, when protesters gathered at The Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex to demand an end to its use as accommodation for asylum seekers. Among them were many members of fascist parties. Local Conservative MPs used the event as a platform to demand the hotel be closed to asylum seekers.

The pretext was the arrest of a man from Ethiopia accused of propositioning a girl. He has denied the charges and will attend a two-day trial from August 26.

Counter-protests were mounted by anti-fascist groups. On July 20, police issued a dispersal order preventing people from gathering and protesting outside or near the Bell Hotel. The far-right, backed by the tabloid media, cried foul and claimed police were supporting the counter-protesters. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage even declared that Essex police had "bussed" them in.

The truth is that counter-protesters at Epping were confronting ranks of police protecting the fascists.

Events at the Bell Hotel were used as a launchpad for a national campaign of far-right mobilisations against asylum accommodation. In Canary Wharf, an attempt was made to break into the building. In Manchester, the fascist Britain First group led a march of hundreds chanting, "We want our country back" in a "March for Remigration" through the city centre.

Farage and his Reform UK party have provided a steady stream of support, having popularised provocations at asylum accommodation for years. Just a few weeks ago, he had organised photo-ops of himself on the lookout for small boats of asylum seekers arriving in Britain via the Channel.

He said of the anti-migrant demonstrations: "Don't underestimate the simmering anger and disgust that there is in this country that we are letting in every week, in fact, some days, many hundreds of undocumented young males, many of whom come from cultures in which women and young girls are not even treated as second-class citizens."

Farage egged on the fascists, speaking of "civil disobedience on a vast scale" on the horizon, while claiming that this was "the last thing many of us want to see" in order to insist that the government should therefore act on their demands.

Reform UK and the fascist demonstrations do not come from nowhere. The far-right are able to mobilise because their message is only the most concentrated form of the anti-immigration agenda of all the main parties of the ruling class, starting with the governing Labour Party.

Figures at the end of last month on record UK population growth of 700,000 last year, driven almost wholly by migration, prompted Labour Home Secretary Yvette Cooper to respond that they "confirm the truth of the Tory legacy on immigration". She complained, "Under the Tories... lower-skilled migration soared while the proportion of UK residents in work plummeted".

With anti-migrant demonstrations in full swing, US President Donald Trump used his visit to the UK to rant about migration, "You're not going to have Europe any more, you've got to get your act together… You've got to stop this horrible invasion that's happening to Europe." Prime Minister Keir Starmer stood beside him saying

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nothing, before moving on to the usual praise and pleasantries.

Asked directly about the far-right protests, Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds declared, “I think what we’ve got to talk about is: why are people unhappy with, say, the asylum system? Are they reasonable? Are they upset for legitimate reasons? Yes, we share those as a government… That is why we are sorting it out.”

It was briefed to the media that Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner had suggested limiting migrants’ access to the state pension and welfare benefits and increasing the National Health Service surcharge that they must pay for health treatment. The prime minister’s official spokesperson said in reference to the ongoing provocations, “I think she sees a link between concerns that people have about where the Government is acting on their behalf and acting in their interests”.

This follows a general election campaign a year ago in which Labour made a pledge to “Stop the Boats”, referring to asylum seekers crossing the Channel, a flagship policy. It comes just one month after Cooper’s “summer blitz” of police raids on immigrants, and two months after Chancellor Rachel Reeves’s pledge to end the use of asylum hotels by 2029 to save £1 billion a year.

In March, Starmer delivered an anti-immigration speech behind a lecturn reading “Securing Our Borders” as he boasted of “Just focusing our efforts and resources on the nuts and bolts of removing people.”

Labour’s stance is reflected in its friendly press. Over the weekend, the *Guardian* provided sympathetic coverage to some of those jailed for their role in the attack on and setting fire to a hotel in Rotherham, South Yorkshire last year. The building housed 200 asylum seekers.

The article’s strap line reads, “Men sentenced to prison time for role in violent protests after the Southport murders describe their feelings of injustice.”

In this noxious atmosphere, and with Labour continuing the Tory assault on the living standards of the working class, Reform is gaining ground politically. The party is now polling in first place in the UK at close to 30 percent. The *Daily Mail*, and the Murdoch media—the *Times*, *Sunday Times* and the *Sun*—traditionally associated with the Tory Party are lending Farage an ever friendlier ear.

In its 2024 Congress resolution, the Socialist Equality Party argued that the far-right danger does not flow primarily from the social dust that makes up the various fascist outfits, but from a lurch to the right of the entire capitalist political system as it seeks to impose a deepening social catastrophe and expanding agenda of war on the working class.

The SEP concluded, “Opposing the far-right therefore entails not only the necessary defence of immigrants and Muslims from violence instigated by fascist thugs such as Tommy Robinson and egged on by Farage. Above all, it means a fight against the Starmer Labour government, its allies in the trade union bureaucracy and their agenda of austerity and war.”

This has been confirmed in spades. Only by mounting a socialist challenge against the Labour Party—relentlessly exposing and opposing its right-wing, warmongering, pro-austerity policies—can a movement of the working class defend migrants in a struggle for the rights of workers everywhere to good jobs, housing, wages and social services.

The SEP counterposed its perspective to the programme of the Socialist Workers Party, which politically leads the Stand Up to Racism counter-protests opposing the fascists outside asylum seeker accommodation. We noted, “SUTR’s calls for a ‘United Front’ of all ‘democratic forces’ against fascism, led by the Labour ‘left’ and the trade unions, prevents any action being taken against root causes of the far-right’s growth”.

A July 22 piece in the *Socialist Worker*, as the far-right demonstrations in Epping got underway, presented the battle as being one against “hardened fascists”, including supporters of Tommy Robinson, without once mentioning the right-wing rhetoric coming from the Labour government. #

Subsequent SWP coverage has referenced the comments of Reynolds and Rayner, while insisting that the main task ahead is not the struggle against the Starmer government but confronting fascists outside hotels and preparing to gather numbers for an expected national protest by Robinson’s supporters in September.

Without a political offensive against the Labour Party to put a stop to its continual impoverishment of workers and scapegoating of migrants, aided by the trade unions and the state, the far-right cannot be defeated.

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