

Burnham backs Labour's brutal anti-immigration bill on day he becomes uncontested party leader

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Andy Burnham, on the day he secured the nominations required to become Labour leader unopposed—demonstrated his right-wing credentials to Britain's ruling elite by backing further brutal anti-immigration measures.

Burnham voted for Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood's Immigration and Asylum Bill at its second reading on Monday evening. The legislation passed by 264 votes to 90. Despite talk of a rebellion on Labour's backbenches, just 14 Labour MPs (of more than 400) voted against. The main body of MPs against were opposition Conservative and Reform UK MPs, who deemed the legislation still not tough enough.

The vote took place just hours after Burnham secured his final votes from MPs, meaning that his taking the leadership of the party on Friday at a Special Conference takes the form of a coronation. No other Labour MP stood against Burnham in the contest to replace Starmer after his resignation on June 22, with Burnham securing the nominations of 322 last week, with a further 27 nominations on Monday taking him over the number required to win. The 85 percent of MPs backing him included the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG), with its chairperson Richard Burgon nominating Burnham and claiming his leadership will be a shift to the left.

Backing Mahmood's Bill exposes this lie. It is the fifth major piece of legislation since 2022 curtailing the rights of migrants and asylum seekers, worsening the attacks carried out under successive Conservative governments. This includes using disused military barracks and repurposed barges as accommodation; prolonging detention periods and the Conservatives' abortive scheme to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. Mahmood's predecessor as Home Secretary, the Blairite Yvette Cooper, oversaw a record for migrant removals, expelling almost 13,500 since Labour came to office in July 2024, and exceeding the previous Conservative government's rate of deportations.

Last month Mahmood announced that the government would more than triple the capacity at the Campsfield and

Haslar detention centres from a planned 290 beds up to 1,000 beds—a 40 percent overall increase in the UK's immigration detention capacity.

Presented by Mahmood as means of reducing the number of people crossing the Channel in small boats towards “safe and legal routes,” the Bill tightens the application of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) protecting the right to private and family life, stripping away one of the main grounds on which asylum seekers have been able to resist deportation. It replaces immigration judges with a system of “independent adjudicators,” tasked with fast-tracking deportations. Refugee status is to be made temporary, subject to reassessment every 30 months, with those granted sanctuary living under permanent threat of having it revoked.

The legislation stipulates a financial “contribution” be paid by those seeking asylum, aping Canada where resettled refugees must cover the cost of travel documents and transport to the country by accessing government loans that they begin repaying a year after arrival. In the UK an asylum seeker who receives subsistence payments or Home Office accommodation, while barred from working, must repay the cost—expected to total around £10,000—but could be many thousands of pounds above that—once they begin to earn.

Invoking the ringleader of a grooming gang—who was jailed but is now free—as justification, Mahmood announced further amendments removing the legal protection preventing the deportation of some long-term Commonwealth citizens convicted of serious offences. Criminals are not the ultimate target of such laws, which will be wielded against thousands of asylum seekers in future.

In the run-up to the vote, some 80 Labour MPs criticised aspects of the legislation in a letter sent to Burnham. The backbenchers called for a few changes to be made by the incoming prime minister before the Bill becomes law under his premiership. It revealed how right-wing the Labour Party is, especially by its focus on concerns over the global

reputation of British imperialism and its ability to secure international alliances.

Echoing the propaganda of the far-right and the Starmer government, the letter stated, “The public are rightly concerned about irregular migration”, before complaining, “These changes target people who came here through legal routes, who work, pay taxes and contribute to our communities.”

The legislation aims to raise the qualifying period for indefinite leave to remain from five years to between 10 and 20 years, applied retrospectively to around 1.6 million people who arrived from 2021. The dissenting MPs countered, “With a 10-20 year settlement period, the UK would be an international outlier—*weakening our soft power* and our appeal as a place to study, invest, build a life and form relationships.” [emphasis added]

Of the 14 MPs who voted against the Bill, 13 were Socialist Campaign Group members, meaning that around 11 members of the group backed the Bill without qualification.

Burgon summed up the duplicity of the “left” in voting against the Bill backed by his leadership nominee Burnham—who made clear he would do so during his Makerfield by-election campaign, when he told the media, “I do agree with what [Reform UK leader Nigel] Farage is saying. What we’ve got to do is get back to a sense of order.” This required a “greater use of detention so that people who have got no basis for a claim are not actually admitted into the country.”

Opening the debate, Mahmood boasted of what Labour has already done to restrict immigration and enforce deportations. “In the last two years, this Government have begun the work of restoring order to our borders,” she declared.

In partnership with French law enforcement, 46,000 attempted Channel crossings had been stopped, she said, and a new deal signed in April would fund increased patrols and intelligence operations with a 53 percent increase in personnel on the French coast.

Mahmood cried that in May nearly two-thirds of attempted small boat crossings had been thwarted, decisions on asylum seekers’ claims were at a 24-year high, and removals stood at their highest level in nearly a decade—up 41 percent on the period before Labour took office.

In a targeted appeal to far-right anti-migrant protesters, she added that Labour was committed “to ending the use of asylum hotels within this Parliament. Two years in, we have already emptied one in five, reducing the hotel population by 29 percent and cutting asylum costs by £1 billion.”

On the same day that Mahmood, Burnham and the rest of their rotten party were progressing the Bill, the Refugee

Council reported that since the Labour government suspended the refugee family reunion route last September an estimated more than 16,000 people have been barred from applying to join relatives in Britain—including 9,273 children and 5,835 women.

Ever since moves began for Burnham to replace Starmer, the corporate media have guided his every policy move to shape his government and dictate its real agenda.

Ahead of the vote the *Times* issued an editorial demanding that Burnham kept his word over tightening the UK’s borders, headlined “The PM in waiting should back Shabana Mahmood plans to toughen up rules in the face of opposition from many of his backbenchers.” It warned, “Mr Burnham should stand firm on curbing immigration. Or accept that he will be just another short-lived prime minister”.

The working class must oppose the scapegoating of migrants being ruthlessly pursued by the main parties of the ruling elite, which uses such foul means to divert workers from the real cause of all social ills—the rule of a money-mad oligarchy demanding the looting of all society’s wealth to pay for military rearmament on a scale not seen since the 1930s lead-up to World War II.

Opposition cannot be entrusted to the Labour “left”, which has proved yet again that their true loyalties are to the party apparatus, the government and the capitalist class which they all serve. It requires the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist programme to oppose the economic and military despoiling of the planet that forces millions worldwide into a desperate fight for survival.



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