

# Starmer's UK Labour government escalates offensive against immigrants and asylum seekers

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Within 48 hours of Labour coming to power, British Home Secretary Yvette Cooper announced the creation of a Gestapo-like Border Security Command (BSC).

Labour committed to more tightly policing the UK borders in its manifesto, along with setting up a Returns and Enforcement Unit to swiftly deport anyone deemed a “failed” asylum seeker. Making his first speech as prime minister on the steps of Downing Street, Sir Keir Starmer emphasised that his programme for “secure borders” would be enacted immediately.

The manifesto pledged, under the guise of breaking up the “criminal gangs who trade in driving this crisis” of desperate people trying to reach the UK via the perilous English Channel route, that Labour would create “a new Border Security Command, with hundreds of new investigators, intelligence officers, and cross-border police officers.” It added, “This new Command will work internationally and be supported by new counter-terrorism style powers”.

On mass deportations, the manifesto stated, “Labour will set up a new returns and enforcement unit, with an additional 1,000 staff, to fast-track removals to safe countries for people who do not have the right to stay here. We will negotiate additional returns arrangements to speed up returns and increase the number of safe countries that failed asylum seekers can swiftly be sent back to.”

A Home Office announcement made July 7 states that “the process of recruiting an exceptional [Border Command] leader used to working in complex and challenging environments, for example, at senior levels of policing, intelligence or the military, will kick off tomorrow.”

Reporting to Cooper, the “Border Security

Commander will provide strategic direction to work across agencies, drawing together the work of the National Crime Agency (NCA), intelligence agencies, police, Immigration Enforcement and Border Force, to better protect our borders and go after the smuggling gangs facilitating small boat crossings.”

The Border Command is modelled on the government. The unit’s website states, “Our unique position means we are responsible for both counter terrorism and national level security and protection.”

Border Command officers will be handed extraordinary powers, to be announced as part of the government’s legislative programme for the year in next week’s King’s Speech. A mini British Gestapo will be handed enhanced stop-and-search powers and be allowed to examine and seize mobile phones and copy any data held on the devices.

Labour’s anti-immigration offensive includes its scrapping of the previous Conservative government plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda—a policy which has already cost £240 million and was set to cost more than £500 million had it remained in place beyond April 2027.

But Labour’s differences with the Tories are purely tactical, with the former preferring to collaborate more closely with France and the European Union to “Stop the Boats” and to deport asylum seekers to other countries. Labour’s main complaint with the Rwanda policy was that it was an expensive and inefficient “gimmick” which only dealt with 1 percent of the asylum seekers arriving in Britain and diverted the resources needed to seal the border.

Starmer has declared the Rwanda policy “dead and buried”, with Cooper stating that Border Command will

be funded in the first year from the £75 million due to go to the Rwanda scheme. She complained, “The Conservatives ran this Rwanda scheme for two and a half years and sent simply four volunteers [to Rwanda], as well as hundreds of millions of pounds.”

Cooper added that the government would seek to recoup money handed to Rwanda, but the government has been told by the African nation it will get nothing back.

Labour MP Stephen Kinnock declared in the run up to the election that a Starmer government “will repurpose that money to smash the criminal smuggler gangs with our new cross-border police unit and a security partnership with Europol.” Deportations flights wouldn’t be going to Rwanda, but would instead be going to many other countries. “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...” said Kinnock.

The *Financial Times*, which like the *Sun* and the *Times* backed Labour in the election, reported that 1,000 extra staff will form “a new Returns Unit that will rapidly review people who arrive from ‘safe’ countries like Albania and India, so they can be swiftly sent back.

“The [Labour] party has also said it will form bilateral returns agreements with countries not ravaged by war, like Vietnam, Turkey and Kurdistan, as well as forge a new returns deal with the EU. So far in 2024, Vietnamese migrants have topped the list of arrivals.” The paper cited a “Labour insider” who commented, “Returns is resource-heavy work but it’s not impossible, we’re not chasing a pipe dream.”

Labour’s policies are a declaration of war against the working class, centred on the stepped-up persecution of the most desperate people fleeing their homelands devastated by war and poverty arising from British-backed imperialist wars and oppression. They build on the battery of fascistic measures already imposed on tens of thousands of immigrants and asylum seekers: the product of years of the Tories and Labour—egged on by a xenophobic media—competing over who has the most right-wing immigration policies.

The *Independent* reported this week that the brutal policies in place have led to five United Nations special rapporteurs raising concerns that Britain is possibly

breaching international law, following revelations that child asylum seekers are being locked up in adult detention centres after crossing the Channel on small boats.

“At least 1,300 child refugees who arrived alone in the UK were wrongly identified as adults by border officials in the 18 months from January 2022, with nearly 500 placed in adult detention or unsupervised accommodation, a report by the Refugee Council and other charities found.”

The special rapporteurs sent their letter in April, urging the then Tory government to take “all necessary interim measures” to “halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence”. All such brutal policies remain in place under Labour.

The immediate rolling out of iron-fist border control and deportation policies by Labour must be met with the organised opposition of the working class. With no social programme whatsoever to address the social crisis facing millions—and billions instead being shovelled into a burgeoning military budget supporting Britain’s role in the NATO war against Russia and Israel’s genocide against Gaza—Labour is seeking to scapegoat migrants and poison the political atmosphere with nationalism and chauvinism, the better to divide workers.

Such policies are replicated by the governments of the ruling class in all the imperialist countries.

Workers and young people must turn to the building of their own internationalist party, the Socialist Equality Party, which together with our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International fights for high-quality living standards all over the world and upholds the right of workers from every corner of the globe to live and work in whatever country they choose, with full citizenship rights.



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