

# UK Labour government deports thousands of migrants, raids ports and workplaces and arrests hundreds of alleged “people smugglers”

Steve James  
5 December 2024

The UK Labour government under Sir Keir Starmer and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper is continuing to ramp up its brutal assault on migrants and asylum seekers, escalating from where its Conservative predecessor left off.

On December 1, the *Observer* reported that over 600 Brazilians had been deported by the Home Office on secret flights. According to Freedom of Information requests, three flights in August and September removed 629 people, including 109 children. Never before have such numbers of a single nationality been deported on charter flights.

Those deported, some of whom were falsely classified as voluntary on the basis that they were to be given a pittance stored on a cash card that activated after removal, included whole families. The deported children would likely have spent their whole lives in the UK. One woman, despite being a victim of domestic violence—with two sons, one of whom is disabled—and who had been hustled from one hostel to another was refused right to remain and had no choice but to return to Brazil.

The removals appear to have been carried out without any public knowledge. The Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK noted, “Brazilians face significant barriers to accessing high-quality information and accredited legal advice, particularly in their own language.” Many Brazilians arrived in the UK from the European Union (EU), but post Brexit rule changes have left hundreds of individuals and families at risk.

In total, the Labour government deported around 9,400 people in the first three months since coming to

power, a 16 percent increase on figures from the previous year under the Tories. Brazilians account for 12 percent of removals from the UK.

This points to complicity from the Brazilian administration of, nominally left, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. A statement from the Brazilian foreign ministry maintained the UK government’s fiction of voluntary removals, claiming to the *Guardian* “this is not a case of deportation, but rather a voluntary decision by participants to join the British initiative. Besides, the flights were not secret.”

In total, more than 25 return flights have taken place, deporting people to countries including Albania, Brazil, Poland, Romania, Vietnam, East Timor, Nigeria, Ghana, and China.

The *Guardian* also reported, December 5, on a clampdown in ports and airports in Northern Ireland and in the UK airports and ports of Manchester, Liverpool, Holyhead and Cairnryan. For three days, immigration officers carried out “multiple” arrests of individuals travelling from Belfast to the UK, under the pretext of every anti-immigrant clampdown worldwide of “cracking down on people smugglers.”

The arrests were reported as part of Home Office led Operation Comby designed to impose immigration controls on travelers moving within the Common Travel Area, which covers both the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Launched last April, and given priority by the incoming Labour government, Comby complemented a similar operation by the Irish government targeting people moving in the opposite direction, from the UK to Ireland. In total, the

*Guardian* reported, hundreds of people had been arrested.

Post Brexit, with the UK outside of the EU, under the terms of the agreement between the UK, Ireland and the EU, both the British and Irish governments are obliged to avoid border controls between the six counties of Northern Ireland and the 26 counties of the Republic. Both countries, however, are seeking to witch-hunt and demonise migrants and asylum seekers and normalise ever more repressive controls. Both countries blame the other for allowing migrants and asylum seekers to enter across the Irish Sea.

On Wednesday, there was a huge sweep of pre-dawn raids in Germany, at the behest of the French and likely the British authorities, seeking to disrupt migrants' efforts to reach the UK. Ostensibly targeting "people smuggling" and "criminal gangs", over 500 officers searched locations across Germany in operations coordinated with Europol, the EU's police agency, and French security services. Houses and storage were raided in Gelsenkirchen, Grevenbroich, Bochum and other cities, including a refugee home in Essen.

One of the Starmer government's first acts was to establish a Border Security Command (BSC) in the Home Office, targeting those organising small boats for dangerous crossing across the English Channel. In the intervening months, the new body, on top of the existing massive and complex Border Force and UK Visas and Immigration—also part of the Home Office—has recruited hundreds of staff tasked with creating a vast new spying apparatus with "state of the art monitoring", improved "intelligence collection across UK police forces."

The raids in Germany come days after Home Secretary Cooper signed a pact with the government of Iraq "tackling people smuggling and to bolster border security." Cooper, along with the BSC head, Martin Hewitt, also visited the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The pact intends a propaganda campaign to deter people considering the dangerous and lengthy attempt to reach the UK, citing the terrible experiences of those whose loved ones have perished in small boats in the Channel.

The campaign will not, of course, blame the systematic brutality of the immigration policy but will, once again, clamp down on the arrangements desperate and fleeing people have been forced to make.

Labour is also targeting workplaces. A December 2 Home Office statement cited Cooper as hailing a 34 percent increase in workplace raids and a 25 percent increase in arrests compared with last year. In total, since the election, 3,188 employers were raided and 2,299 arrests made. The raids focused on "nail bars, supermarkets and other relevant industries including car washes and construction." One single operation, Operation Tornado, carried out in November, raided 235 nail bars and convenience stores and arrested 154 people of 19 nationalities. 50 businesses were issued with fixed penalty notices, making them liable to fines of up to £60,000 if they "failed to conduct relevant pre-employment checks."

The Labour government's frenzied attack on migrants and asylum seekers, fleeing poverty, war, climate change, underscores the fact that US President-elect Donald Trump's policy of mass deportations is setting the bar for governments everywhere. Labour's raids and deportation flights also make clear that the attack on migrants is an attack on the entire working class, one in which Labour is systematically adopting policies demanded by the far-right.

Responding to Cooper's statement in the House of Commons, Nigel Farage—the far-right leader of the Reform UK party—welcomed Cooper's criticisms of the previous government's Rwanda plan for not going far enough. Farage asked where did the 69 percent of the 84,000 asylum seekers arriving in the UK last year, who did not come across the Channel in boats, come from? Cooper took the bait readily, promising a review "to get to the bottom of what is happening and why." The government is preparing a new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill with fast track deportation decisions and further surveillance measures.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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