

UK Labour government expels record 13,500 asylum seekers and migrants since coming to office

Margot Miller
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The UK Labour government has set a record for migrant removals, expelling almost 13,500 since it came to office in July and exceeding the previous Conservative government's rate of deportations.

The news was reported by the Home Office this month with the headline, "Huge increase in migration returns and illegal working arrests." Home Secretary Yvette Cooper boasted, "The number of operations and arrests are up, and we are on track to meet our target of increasing removals to the highest level in five years."

Deportations to seven countries have been carried out, including Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria and Albania. The *Guardian* reported, "Sources in the [Home Office] department confirmed that 37 people were removed on the Pakistan flight. One of those forcibly removed was a refused asylum seeker whose wife was a dependant on his asylum claim", adding "The Home Office removed him but left his wife in the UK."

To expedite the removals, the government carried out workplace raids, targeting "nail bars, supermarkets and other relevant industries including car washes and construction." The Home Office report continued, "...illegal working operations and arrests since the new government came into power are up by almost a third on the same period last year."

In a December 23 update, the Home Office's Immigration Enforcement department noted that, just in London, "Nearly 1,000 enforcement visits have been carried out across the capital since the summer, thanks to a crackdown on illegal working by the Home Office's Immigration Enforcement team. Between July and November, 996 visits resulted in 770 arrests and 462 premises receiving civil penalty notice referrals."

To beef up the capability of the Immigration and Enforcement agency further, an extra £5 million was

announced for body-worn cameras to aid 1,200 frontline officers in the collection of evidence against errant employers. New fingerprint kits costing £3 million will be purchased to improve identity checks.

The government has also redeployed an extra 1,000 employees to Border Security. This enabled the return of more than 800 migrants on 33 charter flights to countries in Europe, Africa Asia and South America since July.

While denying the right of asylum to people displaced and/or without a livelihood—due, among other factors, to over 30 years of NATO wars in the Middle East and North Africa and routine imperialist plunder of the majority of the world's economies—inhumane anti-immigrant policies are framed by Labour as preventing exploitation at work, and "smashing the [people smuggling] gangs".

Cooper stated, "Illegal working is a blight on our economy. It is deeply exploitative and undercuts those employers who do the right thing and play by the rules." This is a cynical ploy to blame migrants in cheap labour jobs for driving down wages, aiding the scapegoating efforts of Nigel Farage's Reform UK party.

To demonise asylum seekers and immigrants further, the Home Office reported that of the 13,500 removed, 2,100 were criminals convicted of "drug offences, theft, rape and murder," without breaking down this figure.

The department is also launching a publicity campaign directed at prospective migrants warning of "exploitative practices" and "dire and inhumane living conditions" should they come to Britain. So impressed with the government's ruthless purge of immigrants was the right-wing *Daily Express* that it ran with the headline: "Yvette Cooper tells illegal migrants 'don't come to Britain—you'll hate it.'"

But for the mouthpieces of the most right-wing sections

of the media, no number of deportations is ever enough with a constant drumbeat demanding more. The *Telegraph* complained that Cooper had not set a timetable for reducing small boat crossings from France, lamenting the arrival of 609 people in nine dinghies December 12—a daily record since October 18.

The nominally liberal *Independent* reprimanded Labour for failing to include targets to reduce migration, both legal and illegal, in the review of its six missions. The publication complained that small boat crossings are on the rise, with 34,880 people arriving this year, including 21,306 since the general election. It cautioned that former Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's failure to "stop the boats" helped bring down his government.

Interviewed on the BBC's *Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg*, Cooper declared that "border security is one of the [government's] foundational issues, before you even get to any of the missions."

Julia Tinsley-Kent, head of policy and communications at the Migrants' Rights Network, accused the government of "criminalising migration", adding "people are forced into making dangerous crossings because safe routes do not exist... Punishing migrants without permission to work or reside ... pushes [them] into exploitative conditions."

Emma Ginn, director of the charity Medical Justice, said, "The new data being celebrated by the government includes real people who have been unable to access legal representation, nor the medical and expert evidence needed to properly present their case, meaning some may face real risk on forced return to their country."

"Our volunteer doctors have visited some of them and documented their physical and psychological scars of torture as well as deterioration due to the notoriously dangerous UK immigration detention conditions. Many have been forcibly separated from their family, their friends and their community."

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 77 people have died attempting the hazardous English Channel crossing this year. Another three were reported dead today. The IOM calls for an end to preventable deaths and wants safe and legal means of entry. But the Labour government, like its counterparts throughout the European Union, is determined to seal the borders.

On December 10, Cooper co-hosted alongside Germany a meeting in London with the Interior Ministers of Belgium, France and the Netherlands to coordinate efforts to stop migrant flows. The day previous, the UK signed a "joint action plan on irregular migration" with Germany.

In September, Starmer held a "fantastic" meeting with the Italian Prime Minister, the neo-fascist Georgia Meloni, singling out her anti-immigration policies against refugees as a model to be emulated. Meloni's party the Brothers of Italy is the scion of Mussolini's Republican Fascist Party.

Italy has opened two detention camps under Italian jurisdiction in Albania to hold up to 3,000 migrants at any one time while awaiting processing, at an initial cost of 16.5 million euros.

Cooper declared in November that Labour wanted to fast-track deportations of "people who are arriving from predominantly safe countries...", adding "What Italy is looking at with Albania is being able to take those fast-track decisions".

Regardless of the political coloration of the governments in Europe, the political establishment is adopting the policies of the far-right. Meloni's latest fans include Spain's Socialist Party led government, which has just granted her "one of the highest honours of the Spanish state: the Grand Cross of the Order of Isabella the Catholic."

The Italian premier's politics are of a piece with those of Marine Le Pen in France and US President-elect Donald Trump. The latter has declared his administration's aim from day one will be to deport 11 million undocumented immigrants, including children born on American soil.

Billionaire Elon Musk, who is to lead a US Department of Government Efficiency under Trump, is promoting the global fascist right, including, in the UK, Farage and Reform UK.

The Labour government's mass round-up of migrants and their scapegoating is being carried out to deflect attention from the real cause of the destruction of essential social services and growing immiseration, which is capitalism. The attack on the democratic rights of immigrants must be opposed and requires an international mobilisation of the working class bound up with the fight to defend jobs and living standards against the rise of fascism and danger of a third world war.



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