

carf58

CAMPAIGN AGAINST RACISM & FASCISM • OCT/NOV 2000 • 80p



CIVIL RIGHTS CARAVAN SPECIAL ISSUE

UK CIVIL RIGHTS CARAVAN

3 Leicester welcomes the Caravan

Report of Civil Rights Caravan visit to Leicester

4 Caravan in London and Sheffield

The Caravan was launched in London, before travelling to Sheffield and Newcastle

6 Caravan programme

The ten basic demands of the Civil Rights Caravan

NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

CARF magazine incorporates a four-page pullout section with news of NCRM campaigns

7 Safrez Najieb

Why has the trial been adjourned?

8 Christopher Alder inquest

The unlawful killing verdict is a victory for the campaign

9 Prison racism

Reports on the justice campaigns for Zahid Mubarek, Edita Pommel and Satpal Ram
Also: update on Roger Sylvester justice campaign

10 Support the Balaz family

Ladislav Balaz and his family are Roma Gypsies from the Czech Republic who have been facing racial harassment in north London

Justice for Samar and Jawad

At last Samar and Jawad will have the opportunity to appeal their convictions

FEATURES

11 The dispersal of xenophobia

A special report on how the government's dispersal programme is leading to mounting violence against asylum seekers

15 New frontiers in refugee control

Following the deaths of 58 Chinese stowaways at Dover, European governments are implementing even tighter anti-trafficking measures

16 Germany's Caravan movement

Campaign Against Racism and Fascism

BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 020 7837 1450 Fax: 0870 052 5899

E-mail: info@carf.demon.co.uk

Website: <http://www.carf.demon.co.uk/>

To receive regular news from CARF by e-mail, send an e-mail to carf-subscribe@listbot.com

ISSN 0966-1050 · Printed by Russell Press (TU)

CARF was formed in the late 1970s, at a time of increased racial violence. A wave of popular racism was washing over the country, encouraged by mainstream politicians and commentators, and the National Front was gaining electoral ground. Besieged by racist policing, racial attacks and immigration laws that tore families apart, black communities began to close ranks and organise their own defence. CARF was born out of those struggles – to cohere and inform the various anti-racist campaigns.

And the values established then have remained to this day. CARF has eschewed being tied to any faction or allied to any party. It has held to the same principle: that it services the anti-racist movement by reporting on its cases, reflecting its concerns, connecting issues and providing new thinking. It has clung to the belief that its role is not so much to claim glory or court the influential as to record the hard-edged impact of racism and the ways that people are fighting back, both here and in Europe, and, in the process, provide the analysis necessary for action.

As we approach a general election which looks likely to be fought on the terrain of national identity, it is difficult to ignore the revivalist racism of the '70s when politicians and the paparazzi, as now, summoned up the bogies of race, nation and immigration. Portillo – whose own father was a refugee – recently proposed on television that a Tory government would incarcerate all asylum seekers in detention camps. But, what is worse is that the Labour government is itself planning a huge increase in the imprisonment of asylum seekers. Encouraged by the dangerous posturing of government and opposition alike, popular racism has found respectability under the guise of xenophobia and violence is on the increase, particularly against refugee communities. The root and branch removal of racism from England's institutions, promised by Macpherson, is now nothing more than a fading memory. We are once again in a period of crisis as a new racism takes hold of popular culture. The values forged by CARF in the heat of another battle are needed now more than ever.

On 28 September, activists from CARF and the National Civil Rights Movement (NCRM) released 157 black balloons outside Downing Street into the sky above London. Each balloon represented one person who had died in the last seven years since the murder of Stephen Lawrence because of racism or xenophobic laws. Some have lost their lives in suspicious circumstances in prison, police and psychiatric custody. Others have died in suspected racist attacks. Still more have not survived the treacherous journey from outside Fortress Europe to seek asylum in the UK. The release of the balloons marked the launch of the Civil Rights Caravan in its unique journey across England (documented in this issue) – to link the campaigns for the victims of racial violence to the campaigns for asylum rights, to link the fight against institutional racism to the fight against state-sponsored xenophobia, to link the black experience and the refugee experience.

The scale of the emergency now facing us demands a proactive response. The new racism currently coalescing around the issue of asylum is still being shaped and can therefore still be unshaped. A pro-active movement today can make sure we are not counting more deaths tomorrow.

And to that end we are delighted to join forces with the NCRM, co-sponsors of the Caravan, and devote a section of the magazine to its campaigns. ■



Civil Rights Caravan on campaigning tour

Since 28 September, a group of around 40 refugees, migrants and their supporters have been touring the country campaigning against racist violence and for full rights for asylum seekers. The idea, borrowed from similar movements in Germany (see p16), is to link up with asylum seekers who have been forcibly dispersed to towns and cities around the UK and are living in isolation and destitution as a result. The Caravan also seeks to provide support to black families who have suffered racist violence, particularly in rural areas. The principle on which the Caravan is based is that there can be no distinction between the rights of a family who have been in this country for two hours or for two hundred years. As we show elsewhere in this issue of *CARF* (see p11), the government's asylum legislation is unleashing a wave of racism and xenophobia around the country which affects anyone who is perceived to be foreign. On these pages we document the tour of Leicester, Sheffield and Newcastle while members of the Caravan give their reasons for joining. ■

Leicester, 15 September

Leicester is thought of by many as a successful example of 'multicultural' Britain. The Diwali celebrations, which take over the city's streets annually in October, have become well known as a symbol of this success. Yet, as became apparent at the Civil Rights Caravan welcoming meeting on 15 September, for many of Leicester's residents the city remains a dangerous and hostile place.

CARF readers will be familiar with the case of Liban Ali, a Somali asylum seeker, who was beaten by a racist gang of four white youths while waiting with a friend at a Leicester bus stop in June 1999. Liban Ali did not die but he remains in hospital in a vege-

tative state. Out of the four attackers only one was charged with attempted murder and this charge was eventually reduced to grievous bodily harm. He will probably be back on the streets in six months' time.

Liban is not the only asylum seeker in the city to have faced violent racism. The 300 people who attended the Caravan meeting heard from refugees currently accommodated at the International Hotel, a rundown hotel which is now being used as a hostel for around 400 asylum seekers. They spoke of regular racist attacks on them which, in some cases, left them with serious injuries. An Iranian refugee said that a couple of months after an attack, he still has difficulty walking. 'We have reported the case to police officers but we have never heard anything from them. I have been to hospital a couple of times but they ask me to sit there for six or seven hours and then do not give me any treatment at all.' Since June, doctors' surgeries in Leicester have refused to register any more refugee patients.

On the night of the meeting a further 100 people had just arrived at the hostel after being forcibly dispersed there from London. It was not clear where beds would be found for them. There was little doubt that people were just being dumped in hostels without any care or concern for their welfare. The

result was that many people were in a state of confusion. Conditions in the hostel itself were described by Afshin, from Iran, as inadequate. 'The hotel is unhygienic and the food that they are giving us is insufficient. Nothing gets cooked properly; nothing gets washed. One of my friends in the hotel went to the kitchen to try to give them a hand and saw for himself that none of the food was being washed or cooked properly. The heating system, the air conditioning and sometimes the electric power does not work at all. Even the lift does not work. A friend of mine who is pregnant finds it really hard to get to her room. They are keeping us in camps and they call it a hotel.' Complaints to the management have been met with indifference.

The Caravan meeting also heard from Walcott Hill, a black man who has lived in Leicester for decades, about the death of his son, Spencer, in August last year. Spencer was walking in the town centre with a friend. On their way to a nightclub, they turned a corner to be confronted by a gang of white people who shouted 'get the niggers'. They chased Spencer and his friend, while a police car arrived on the scene. The police car chased after Spencer, who, in fleeing, leapt over a barrier and was hit by the car and killed. Suresh Grover, chair of

'NOW AFTER ALL THE DANGERS THAT WE HAVE HAD, WE HAVE COME TO THIS COUNTRY AND WE CAN SEE THAT HUMAN RIGHTS IS JUST A DREAM.'

**Iranian refugee,
Leicester**



Monica Hingorani

continued overleaf

Why am I on the Caravan?

'The situation in the Czech Republic is very difficult for Roma people because of racism and widespread sympathy for skinhead groups among the general population. Every day I receive more and more news about what is happening there. The police, judiciary, councils and government alike do not care about attacks on the Roma people. The Czech media do not report these attacks for fear of jeopardising EU entry. Roma are running from their country every day. When I was in Czech Republic I was a member of parliament, representing the Roma community. I was told not to criticise the government's treatment of Roma. Me and my family were in danger.

In the UK, we have had serious problems with solicitors, social services, doctors, schools and the Home Office who do not believe what we tell them about what is happening in our country. The new policy of putting most Roma refugees in detention centres and separating families is very wrong. Now they are sending people back to Czech Republic without any appeal. The attacks on refugees in the UK take place because this government has sent out the message that all refugees should go back to the country they came from. That is why we have established the Europe-Roma organisation to help people with these problems. We hope that together we can work for human rights and stop this government's current policies.'

Ladislav

'I came to the UK with my two sons – aged 9 and 4 years old – as a political refugee from Colombia. My partner had been a political prisoner for four years. Then within a few months of his release, he was 'disappeared'. Seven days after his assassination I found his body hidden in a rubbish tip, as though he had no identity. There were visible signs of torture.

I denounced his disappearance publicly. This put me on the road of protest against violations of human rights, for which I too was threatened. My 8-year-old son was followed on his way to school. My lawyer at that time (who has since also been assassinated) along with others helped me to leave the country.

Human rights are violated every minute in Colombia and many families are forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge in other countries. Right now there is 'Plan Colombia' (supported by the US and UK governments) which in reality is a plan for war. Eighty per cent of the aid will go to the military, who in turn back the paramilitaries who are responsible for daily massacres. The multinational corporations are using these massacres to clear out millions of Colombians from the interior of the country. There are 3 million internally displaced people, and many more forced into exile. There are about 10 million of us who are internal or external migrants and refugees.

For me, the Caravan represents the right to defence and the right to protest by refugees and immigrants from Colombia and from everywhere else.'

Teresa

continued from previous page

the NCRM, said of the case: 'While it is shocking that Walcott has lost a son in these circumstances, it is also outrageous that there has not been an inquest to find the cause of death and none of the white perpetrators have been arrested or charged. Instead one black victim has been arrested and charged with an offence and fined for it. Walcott and his wife have not had a shred of news from the police as to what the nature of the investigation is, or

whether there is any investigation at all.'

Following the meeting, a local Civil Rights Caravan support group was established by Leicester residents. The support group has brought together volunteers with legal, medical and teaching skills who are offering practical support to local asylum seekers in weekly drop-in sessions. ■

For more information on Leicester Civil Rights Caravan support group, contact Priya Thamotheram on 0116 253 1053.

'MY COUNTRY HAS HAD SANCTIONS FOR TEN YEARS. I ESCAPED FROM THOSE SANCTIONS BUT NOW I FACE SANCTIONS HERE IN LEICESTER.'

Iraqi refugee, Leicester

London, 28 September



Dot Gibson

The Civil Rights Caravan was launched in London on 28 September. 157 black balloons were released from opposite Downing Street, one for each person who has died as a result of racism and xenophobic laws since the murder of Stephen Lawrence. ■

Sheffield, 29 September



Elisabeth Eschbacher

On 29 September the Civil Rights Caravan arrived in Sheffield (pictured, left) to be greeted by a local welcoming committee in the town centre. The Caravan toured the inner area of the city, examining conditions in a refugee hostel and assisting asylum seekers with shopping trips to supermarkets using vouchers. A public meeting in the Burngreave area (pictured, right) was attended by around 300 people. Maria Vasquez, a Chilean woman who settled in Sheffield with her family in 1978 after fleeing the Pinochet dictatorship, recalled how her community was able to maintain an informal network of local support for new arrivals, something not possible under today's dispersal programme. Summing up the mood of the meeting, she complained that: 'People don't seem to make the connection between the treatment of asylum seekers and racism.' ■

Newcastle, 30 September



Elisabeth Eszabner



Damaris Hernandez (pictured left, standing with her translator David), a Colombian refugee and member of the Caravan, was one of the speakers at a rally in Newcastle's Bigg Market on 30 September (pictured, right). 'I am in the Caravan because I believe that it is a place where human and civil rights of all can be defended. We all have a common theme, which is respect for people.'

The Caravan arrived in Newcastle to join a demonstration of around 500 people protesting against the treatment of asylum seekers. Following the demonstration and rally a meeting was held with locally based refugees. The Newcastle group is now meeting fortnightly. One of the main concerns will be to develop support for the Angel Heights Seven, a group of refugees who campaigned for improved living conditions in a Newcastle hostel, only to be charged with violent disorder. The Seven are still awaiting trial.

For more information, contact North East Campaign for Asylum Rights, PO Box 787, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE99 1DJ.

Forthcoming events

As well as the tour of Leicester, Sheffield and Newcastle documented here, the Caravan has also participated in the Barbed Wire Conference in Oxford on 17 September and the protests outside Campsfield Detention Centre on the same day, as well as protests in Brighton during the Labour Party conference on 24 September. The Caravan, which is set to continue its current tour until the end of October (see below), has been organised by CARF and the National Civil Rights Movement.

Exeter, 6 October

3:30pm, Press conference
4:30pm, Anti-voucher picket
6:00pm, Public meeting
8:30pm, Benefit concert, St. George's Hall

Plymouth, 7 October

11:00am, Caravan to visit gypsy community
12:30pm, Anti-voucher picket
2:00pm, Public meeting
6:00pm, Picket outside police station
Evening, Rock Against Racism event

Bristol, 8 October

12:00pm, Welcome rally, city centre
1:00pm, Anti-voucher picket
2:30pm, Visits to refugee hostels
7:00pm, Rock Against Racism event

London, 14 October

National demonstration against racism on the anniversary of the disappearance of Ricky Reel.
Assemble 1pm, Embankment, London

Margate, 20 October

12:00pm, Caravan arrives in Margate. Walk from the sea front to St. Paul's Community Centre
1:00pm, Gathering at community centre
3:00pm, Public meeting
7:00pm, Party in Dover

Dover, 22 October

11:00am, Caravan welcomed at Market Square
12:00am, Civil rights walk from town centre to the sea front
1:00pm, Vigil at sea front
4:00pm, Visit to reception centre at Ashford

Coventry, 27 October

Events to be confirmed

Birmingham, 28 October

Events to be confirmed

Manchester, 29 October

Events to be confirmed

Please call CARF on 020-7837 1450 for latest information on these events or go to the website: www.ncrm.org.uk

Why am I on the Caravan?

'I fled from repression in Iran. Many of my family members were executed or killed by the regime. I was in danger myself. The Islamic Republic of Iran stones people to death for consenting sexual relationships, lashes women for 'improper' veiling or young people for listening to the wrong music. People are executed for organising strikes or just for their political opinions. Despite conditions in Iran, the British government is rejecting Iranian asylum seekers and deporting them. The Home Office rejected my asylum application saying that it had been handed in too late, although I personally took it there myself on time. By rejecting me and other asylum seekers on false pretences, the government is hoping to reduce my chances of gaining my right as a human being to live a relatively freer and safer life. Unfair laws, detention, deportation, mistreatment and abuse, expedited procedures and discriminatory practices facilitate the government's attack on asylum seekers. By providing myself and others with substandard and inadequate housing, unsanitary conditions, poor and insufficient food at hostels or vouchers that cannot reasonably feed any human being, by dispersing us, the government hopes to dehumanise us so that the public will more easily accept its violations against us.'

I know the government is unleashing the fascists and racists on us in order to deter us from coming or remaining. Their attacks on us here are a continuation of the attacks on us by regimes the UK and the West have supported. I also know, however, that there are many people and organisations, like those organised in the Caravan, who will fight for full rights for asylum seekers and against racism and racist violence.'

Jamal

'It was not easy for me to leave my family and friends behind. I would not seek refuge without strong reasons. My story is long and sensitive. From 1995 I was accused by the military regime in Sudan of organising against Islamism. I was detained and tortured and only released after signing a document agreeing not to engage in any activities against the regime. Later in 1997 I was imprisoned without trial again, beaten up and tortured. It felt like I was in Hell. I managed to flee to London, but by now I had developed tuberculosis. I was in hospital for three weeks and continued to receive treatment for a further six months. Now I am awaiting my asylum decision but I don't know about tomorrow and the day after. During the two years I have been in the UK, I have still not felt freedom. I am in open detention.'

Elsir

Civil Rights Caravan programme

The Civil Rights Caravan has a set of ten basic demands which it is fighting for as it travels around the country.

1. FULL RIGHTS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES AND UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that asylum seekers should have the same rights as everyone else: the same cash benefits, full access to health care and education. We also demand that asylum seekers be given the right to work. Undocumented workers should be given an immediate amnesty.

2. JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF RACIST ATTACK

The Civil Rights Caravan believes that the government, the police and the judicial system have failed in their duty to protect black and refugee communities. People are still living in fear of attack and are failed by the authorities when they become victims. We also believe that communities have the right to organise self-defence.

3. END DEPORTATIONS

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that deportations from the UK should be halted immediately.

4. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that the criminal justice system be made fully accountable to the communities it is meant to protect.

- i) The police complaints authority must be replaced with a fully independent and accountable police complaints system, and effective disciplining of police officers;
 - ii) Full freedom of information must include the right to disclosure of evidence to families at inquests into murders and deaths in custody;
 - iii) There must be full legal aid and representation for asylum seekers at all stages of the claims process;
 - iv) Trial by jury must be restored;
 - v) Asylum seekers must have full rights of appeal.
- Fast-tracking asylum cases without proper hearings must end.

5. NO FORCED DISPERSAL

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that asylum seekers be free to live in the location of their choosing, in an environment they feel safe in.

6. END POLICE BRUTALITY

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that the violent treatment of black people in the custody of the police, prisons and mental health system be ended and that the officers involved in such mistreatment be properly charged and convicted. Police and courts must stop their targeting of refugees, who are now being arrested and imprisoned for the smallest civil offence.

7. CLOSE THE DETENTION CAMPS

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that all asylum seekers and undocumented workers in detention be released immediately.

8. SCRAP ARBITRARY POLICE POWERS

The Civil Rights Caravan believes that all police powers based on the suspicion of crime, rather than the actual committing of crime, are undemocratic and need to be scrapped. New draconian powers under the prevention of terrorism act will have the effect of criminalising entire refugee communities and those who support them. The power to stop and search must be curbed as it is used by the police in an arbitrary and discriminatory way.

9. ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE IMMIGRATION SERVICES

The immigration services must be made accountable. Race relations laws, human and civil rights guidelines must cover immigration officers. The Civil Rights Caravan calls for the hidden deceptions, intimidation, sleep deprivation and food deprivation inside the holding centres at British ports of entry to be exposed and outlawed.

10. STOP COLLUDING WITH OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS

The Civil Rights Caravan demands that the British and other European governments stop giving export credit to corporations involved in human rights abuses or the trade in arms. We demand that the EU stop using its economic power to force poorer governments to curb migration at the point of departure. We demand that the EU stop attempting to force poorer governments and their embassies to collude in deportations.

Refugee experience in Coventry

Following a series of racist attacks on asylum seekers in Coventry, the police have advised asylum seekers to avoid the city centre after 5pm during the week and to stay at home on weekends.

Representatives of the Civil Rights Caravan recently went to Coventry to meet a group of

Iraqi asylum seekers, to find out about their daily experience. The asylum seekers described how, since April, they have lived in constant fear of racist attack. Most of these attacks go unreported because many asylum seekers believe that their application for asylum will be jeopardised if they go to the police.

updates

Nail bomber in racist attack



David Copeland, convicted of the Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho bombings, broke the jaw of a Jewish man imprisoned in Broadmoor with him. In September a fight in the showers left 23-year-old David Levy with his jaw broken in several places. (Levy is on remand at Broadmoor on suspicion of killing his grandmother.) The fight came after earlier incidents where the two men had argued over Copeland's anti-Semitism.

Dublin attack update



In CARF 57 we reported the racist attack on a white man, David Richardson, who was stabbed after racists targeted his black wife. Their son, Christian, has now been driven from Ireland after being chased and abused by a group of white men in Dublin. In August, Christian was on his way to work when he was chased by the gang. The incident was the last straw. He packed his bags, gave up his job and returned home to Bristol. His father has also returned home and is still recovering from injuries which may not allow him to work again.

Eric Smith

The family of 53-year-old Eric Smith, who died three days after being sprayed with CS spray in 1998, (see CARF 47), have won a fight for legal aid for their representation at his inquest. This continues the precedent set by the grant of legal aid to the family of Christopher Alder (see p 8). A date for the inquest has yet to be set.

National civil rights movement

Issue 2, autumn 2000

newsletter

National Civil Rights Movement,
14 Featherstone Road, Southall,
Middlesex UB2 5AA.

Tel: 020-8574 0818 /
020-8843 2333

Fax: 020-8813 9734

E-mail: info@ncrm.org.uk

Web: www.ncrm.org.uk

Free race and policing
helpline: 0800 374618

Call this number anywhere in the
UK for assistance with police
racism.

The hugely successful campaign waged on behalf of Stephen Lawrence over the last six years has highlighted the nature and scale of racism in this country. As a result of the Lawrences' campaign, the Macpherson inquiry produced an indictment of institutional racism across our society and in particular within the police force.

In recent years a number of families of the victims of injustice have shown a remarkable determination to campaign for truth and accountability. Their experience and confidence form the basis of the National Civil Rights Movement. Inspired by their example, we have come together – families, campaigners, lawyers and community activists – to build a new movement. Our aim is to provide support for the victims of racial injustice, to promote family-based campaigns and to challenge the criminal justice system.

At the launch of the National Civil Rights Movement on 28 March 1999, family and campaign members made clear the need for a new kind of network that would make practical solidarity its priority. Please help us build and strengthen that network by joining the National Civil Rights Movement.

RACIST ATTACK

Red card to justice

On 25 September, Leeds crown court adjourned the trial of four footballers allegedly involved in an assault on Safrez Najieb in January (see *CARF* 54 and 55). The trial was successfully delayed until the end of the football season by lawyers who argued that the footballers had commitments to fulfil. The trial will be resumed in Sheffield on 6 June 2001.

The men, 23-year-old Lee Bowyer (Leeds United), 20-year-old Tony Hackworth (Leeds United), and 20-year-old Jonathan Woodgate (Leeds United), all pleaded not guilty to charges of grievous bodily harm and affray. Woodgate also pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. 24-year-old Michael Duberry (Leeds United) was not at court to answer charges of conspiracy to

pervert the course of justice, but is also expected to deny the charge.

Two other men, Neal Caveney and Paul Clifford, 21-year-olds from Middlesbrough, denied charges of GBH with intent, affray and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. The judge and prosecution lawyers also stated in court that the case was not racially motivated, despite police initially treating the attack as racist.

The decision means that another family is made to wait for justice from a system that will delay a trial for the sake of the careers of highly-paid professional footballers. Safrez, on the other hand, cannot pursue a normal life. Months after the attack he is still not fully recovered and will not return to university this year. ■



Safrez Najieb



Alder family campaign victory

The inquest into the death of 37-year-old Christopher Alder finally began on 3 July, two years after his death on 1 April 1998 (see *CARF* 53 and 54). The proceedings lasted 34 days – the longest ever hearing on a death in police custody. The jury recorded a unanimous verdict of unlawful killing – the seventh such verdict on a black death in custody case in the past 30 years.

Legal wranglings had delayed the inquest until it was decided last

December to hold it before the trial of the five police officers on charges of misconduct in public office. At the inquest eight parties, including the Chief Constable, the five officers involved in the death and the hospital, were represented separately and their legal representation was met through public funds. The Alder family, on the other hand, had to fight to get legal aid, which they eventually won under exceptional circumstances. Representations were made by lawyers to the Lord Chancellor's department, which granted legal aid on public interest grounds. However as lawyer to the family, Ruth Bunday told *CARF*, recommendations in the Macpherson Report that 'consideration be given to the provision of legal aid to victims or the families of victims to cover representation at inquests,' may well have played a part.

At the inquest, held in Hull crown court, packed on each of the 34 days with family members,

friends and campaigners, the most harrowing evidence presented was the CCTV footage of the 12 minutes Christopher lay on the floor of the custody suite in Queen's Street police station. Not one police officer attempted to touch him, let alone check his breathing or rouse him to question him as he lay gasping for breath. The tape shows quite clearly the 37 breaths he struggled to take before his death. He died with no dignity, his trousers and pants around his ankles, hands behind his back, dumped like a sack of potatoes on the floor of a police station. Five police officers stood round him making comments such as: 'He is as right as rain ... this is just a show', 'He kept doing a dying swan act falling off the trolley' followed finally by, 'He's not fucking breathing lads ... do you want an ambulance?'

The verdict of unlawful killing was a victory for the family campaign, which faced an onslaught on the evidence of their pathologist. He testified that Christopher's position led to obstruction of his airways and caused his death. Police pathologists tried to cast doubt on that conclusion by saying death could have been caused by any number of factors. And the coroner hardly helped matters by saying that there was 'no evidence, that what happened ... had anything to do with the colour of Christopher's skin'.

The five police officers involved failed to answer 150 potentially incriminating questions. They were able to do this under inquest rules which allow people not to give

evidence if they feel it may incriminate them (remember the inquest into the murder of Stephen Lawrence?). Now, to add insult to injury, the five have applied for a judicial review of the verdict, hoping to have it overturned. They are claiming the jury was swayed by the opinion of an expert who did not examine Christopher's body and that the coroner, Geoffrey Saul, was wrong in allowing the jury to even consider the verdict of unlawful killing.

The CPS is again reviewing the case to see if charges of manslaughter should be added to the existing charges of misconduct in public office that the officers face. However, if additional charges are brought against the officers, a conviction would be little short of miraculous. The first and last time any police officers were convicted in relation to a black death in custody was in 1971, on the death of David Oluwale. David was found in the River Aire in 1969, after witnesses saw him being beaten by police officers and chased along the river bank. Inspector Geoffrey Ellerker and Sergeant Mark Kitching were tried for manslaughter, assault and perjury (relating to false notebook entries following the attack on David). They were acquitted on the charges of manslaughter and perjury but found guilty of assault. ■

Justice for Christopher Alder Campaign
c/o Red Triangle Cafe, 160 St James Street,
Burnley, Lancs. BB11 1NR. Tel: 01282 832319.

United Families and Friends Campaign,
c/o Inquest, Ground Floor, Alexander National
House, 330 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2PJ.



History

Christopher suffered a head injury after a fight at the Waterfront night club in Hull. He was taken to Hull Royal Infirmary. Doctors claimed Christopher was a troublesome patient and discharged him after deciding the egg-sized lump on his head was not serious. Christopher refused to have an x-ray. After refusing to go home he was arrested for breach of the peace and taken to Queen's Road police station in the back of a police van. On arrival at the station he was found to be unresponsive. Officers then dragged him from the van and laid him face down in the charge room. ■

Key Facts

- Christopher was half-naked and lain face down.
- He was unattended for 12 minutes.
- His clothing was destroyed before it was forensically examined because it was not 'evidentially significant'.
- Unexplained cuts to his face were found after his death.
- Police officers cleaned their uniforms before they were forensically examined.
- Traces of blood were found in the police van.

Other unlawful killing verdicts

13/7/81 Winston Rose (27)

Wrestled to ground and held in head lock by 11 Leyton police officers detaining him under the Mental Health Act. Family awarded damages in 1990. No apology and no convictions.

24/7/90 Oliver Pryce (30)

Collapsed and died in police van after arrest by five Middlesborough officers. 04/95 – Cleveland Constabulary admitted liability after civil action by Oliver's family and paid damages. No apology ever given nor any officer charged or disciplined.

8/10/91 Omasese Lumumba (32)

Political asylum seeker, died of a heart

attack in Pentonville prison while being restrained by six officers. 07/92 – inquest ruled that he was unlawfully killed using improper methods and excessive force in the process of control and restraint. CPS decided in 1993 to charge no-one.

27/1/92 Leon Patterson (32)

Held on remand for six days, died in Denton police station covered in bruises. Inquest recorded verdict of unlawful killing with a failure of duty which contributed to, or caused Leon's death. 05/94 – High Court overturned verdict and in 11/97, another inquest recorded verdict of 'misadventure to which neglect contributed'.

16/12/94 Shiji Lapite (34)

Collapsed and died after arrest by Stoke Newington police for 'acting suspiciously'. Up to 45 separate injuries on his body. No-one charged in relation to his death.

16/3/96 Ibrahima Sey (29)

Gambian asylum seeker with history of mental instability died after sprayed with CS spray while handcuffed and on his knees in Ilford police station. 10/97 – inquest recorded verdict of unlawful killing through an act of gross negligence and that he died through 'postural asphyxia and excited delirium.' No-one prosecuted in relation to his death. ■

Justice for Zahid Mubarek

The trial of Robert Stuart, the man accused of the murder of Zahid Mubarek, is due to start at the Old Bailey on 24 October 2000. It is expected to last for six days. The fact that Zahid was killed in Feltham prison and shared a cell with such a person has raised fundamental issues of culpability and negligence in the prison regime. In recent years Feltham has come under severe criticism from both official and other sources regarding its



treatment of inmates, the number of suicides and general lack of care of prisoners.

Immediately after Zahid's murder, the Director of Prisons, Martin Narey, wrote to the family formally apologising for failing to protect Zahid. The family has also seen the Minister for Prisons and Probation at the Home Office, Paul Boateng, and has urged him to instigate a public judicial inquiry into the events surrounding the tragic killing and racism in prisons. In October the family and the NCRM launched a public campaign to ensure that the demand is met. ■

Justice for Edita Pommel

Edita Pommel, aged 20, died by hanging in HMP Brockhill on 5 May 2000. Before her death she had complained about racial harassment from a particular prison officer who she said had threatened her. Her death is now the subject of an investigation being carried out by West Mercia police.

Pommel's death raises profound concerns over the system of prisoner supervision and care in

operation at Brockhill, because it was the fourth such death to occur at the prison within the last 18 months.

Despite the tragedy and the prison's appalling record, the authorities have so far refused to offer an apology to the Pommel family, who continue to insist that the authorities conduct a public inquiry into all the deaths at HMP Brockhill. ■

International day of action for Satpal Ram

The Free Satpal Ram Campaign is calling an international day of action on 16 November, the anniversary of the racist attack on Satpal and his friends. The campaign is organising a picket of 10 Downing Street and is encouraging supporters in other countries to call pickets outside their British embassies. The action comes as



Satpal, after thirteen years in prison, awaits a decision on his parole hearing. Satpal's sentence was set at 11 years in 1987, but 13 years later he is still in prison. Satpal has consistently fought his conviction and as a result has been moved over 63 times, held in solitary for over five years of his sentence, subjected to unnecessary beatings and strip searches... and still he fights to clear his name. Please support the Free Satpal Ram Campaign! ■

Free Satpal Campaign (London) PO Box 30091, London SE1 1WP Tel: 07947 595367

E-mail: freesatpalcampaign@hotmail.com

campaigns

POLICE

Roger Sylvester's family still waiting



The CPS is still holding the PCA investigation file into the death of Roger Sylvester and still prevaricating over whether to prosecute any of the officers involved in his death. It has now delayed a decision until the end of October (he died in January 1999).

Essex police investigating the death for the PCA opened another investigation after they discovered pages ripped from a police note book of one of the officers involved in the restraint. Tests showed that the missing pages did not contain any information about Roger's death and the CPS decided that no criminal charges were necessary. ■

Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign, PO Box 25908, London N18 1WU

Tel: 07931 970442 E-mail: rsjc@hotmail.com

Free Satpal Ram actions

- **16 November – Picket of Downing Street, 12pm–4pm.**
- **18 November – Benefit gig – The Scala, Pentonville Road. London (DJs, Live PAs etc).**
- **28 November – Criminal Cases Review Commission meeting on the case.**

RACIAL HARASSMENT

Support the Balaz family

Ladislav Balaz and his family are Roma Gypsies from the former

Czechoslovakia.

Ladislav was the leader of the Romany Party in Parliament. Following violent attacks by fascist skinheads on his immediate family and general widespread attacks on Romany people, the Balaz family fled to the UK and sought asylum. Their application for refugee status has been pending for over two years.

In that time the family have lived in Haringey where they were placed in temporary accommodation by the local authority. Since moving there the family have been racially harassed on a regular basis. The harassment has consisted of verbal abuse – 'go back black gypsy', criminal damage to the front and back door, an arson attack and, more recently, extremely serious death threats. All these have been reported to the council and the police. The housing department's response has been shameful and abysmal and reeks of institutional racism. It has refused to consider the harassment as racist and even

implied that the attacks could have been organised by other asylum seekers who had contacted Ladislav for help and support. All formal complaints against the Council remain unaddressed and all recent telephone calls to the Department by the family and their representatives continue to be ignored.

The Balaz Family Support Group has now been set up jointly by Europe-Roma and the NCRM to ensure that the authorities listen to the family's concerns. Local actions are planned in October and November. ■

Elisabeth Eszabner



Ladislav Balaz speaking as part of the Civil Rights Caravan in Newcastle.

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

Justice for Samar and Jawad

On 24 October, the appeal of Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh will, at long last, be heard at the Royal Courts of Justice. They are appealing against their conviction for conspiracy to cause explosions (the 1994 bombings at the Israeli embassy and Balfour House) for which they were sentenced to 20 years. The pair were granted an appeal in May 1999 on the ground that evidence (including that of MI5

whistle-blower David Shayler) was withheld. Other crucial evidence was withheld by the Home Secretary using public interest immunity certificates to stop information being given to the defence. That is exactly the same method that was used to withhold evidence in the case of the M25 Three, who were recently released after fighting for ten years to prove their innocence (see *CARF* 56).

Now, 16 months after the appeal hearing was granted, Samar and Jawad have a chance to prove their innocence. Please show your support by joining the picket on Tuesday 24 October, 10-12.30am and 2-4pm, Royal Courts of Justice, The Strand, London WC2. ■

BM Box FOS, London, WC1N 3XX. E-mail: postmaster@freesaj.org.uk Tel: 0208 863 2294 / 0958 680 449 web: www.freesaj.org.uk

Join the National Civil Rights Movement

Individual membership of the National Civil Rights Movement is £10 per year (£3 for unwaged, pensioners, students and low-waged)

We would also encourage organisations to affiliate to the NCRM. Minimum organisational affiliation fees are: national organisations – £150; branches of national organisations – £50; local organisations/community groups – £25; chambers/legal firms – £250; private companies – £200.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Organisation: _____

Telephone (Home): _____

Telephone (Work): _____

Telephone (Mobile): _____

Fax number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Please return with payment to: National Civil Rights Movement,
14 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5AA.

I agree to the aims and objectives of the National Civil Rights Movement.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

The information below helps us to monitor our equal opportunities practices.

Age: _____

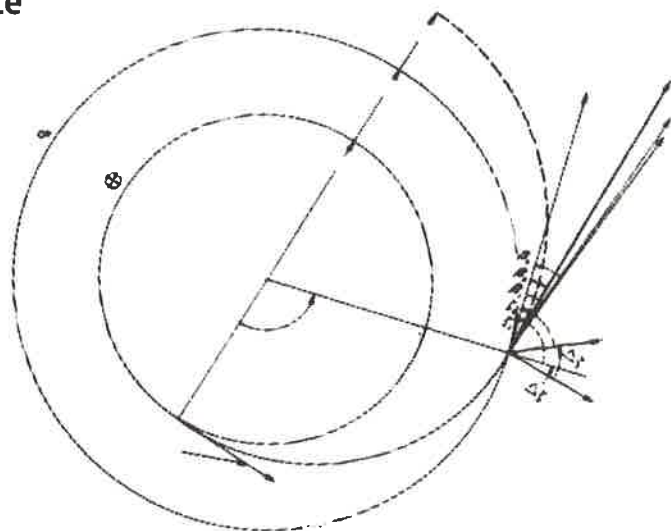
Gender: _____

Ethnic origin: _____

Registered disabled (Y/N): _____

Occupation: _____

Who is to blame for mounting racial violence against asylum seekers? State-sponsored xenophobia is having a corrosive effect on political and popular culture, argues the Institute of Race Relations



the dispersal of xenophobia

In Spring 2000, the governments of the UK and Ireland set in motion a new system for the reception of asylum seekers. Despite warnings from NGOs and refugee organisations that dispersal of asylum seekers on a no-choice basis to designated accommodation across the country would leave them isolated, socially excluded and vulnerable to racist attack, the UK Home Office and Ireland's Department of Justice pressed ahead with these controversial plans.

A deep-rooted xenophobia has risen to the surface in rural, coastal and port areas of Europe as a result of dispersal. Its source lies not just in the insular and conservative culture of these areas. It can be located too in the state's attitude to asylum seekers and the way in which asylum issues are being debated by political parties for electoral gain.

How the state creates xenophobia

In the UK and Ireland the government ministers responsible for asylum policy, the UK Home Office's Jack Straw and the Irish Department of Justice's John O'Donoghue, have not presented dispersal as a process that could enrich local communities. On the contrary, governments have preceded a decision to disperse asylum seekers with a profoundly negative debate, describing them as a 'flood' and stereotyping them as criminals – 'bogus' and 'illegal' claimants.

■ By utilising the language of deterrence

Indeed, dispersal and the removal of asylum seekers from mainstream social welfare benefits is not, as UK Home Office minister Jack Straw openly admits, a positive response to asylum seekers or a way of encouraging them to help revitalise the UK economy by settling in parts of the country experiencing depopulation and social decline. Rather, dispersal, as Straw acknowledges, has been introduced as part of a deterrent asylum strategy to make the UK less attractive to asylum seekers and to stop bogus claims. And in Ireland, as the *Irish Times* points out, 'Irish people have been subjected to a steady diet of media stories reflecting the Department of Justice's view that those arriving represent a flood or a crisis.'

This language of deterrence, this constant reference to the 'flood' or 'influx' or 'tide' of 'bogus' 'illegal' and 'fraudulent asylum claims' hardly contributes towards the creation of a positive political climate whereby local communities are encouraged to welcome asylum seekers. Instead, it has set the tone for the overwhelmingly negative representation of asylum seekers in local newspapers in areas to which they are dispersed.

Katryn Holmquist, a columnist for the *Irish Times* who regularly surveys coverage of important issues in the local and regional media, found that coverage in nearly all local papers of the government dispersal of asylum seekers to their areas was negative. And in the UK, when

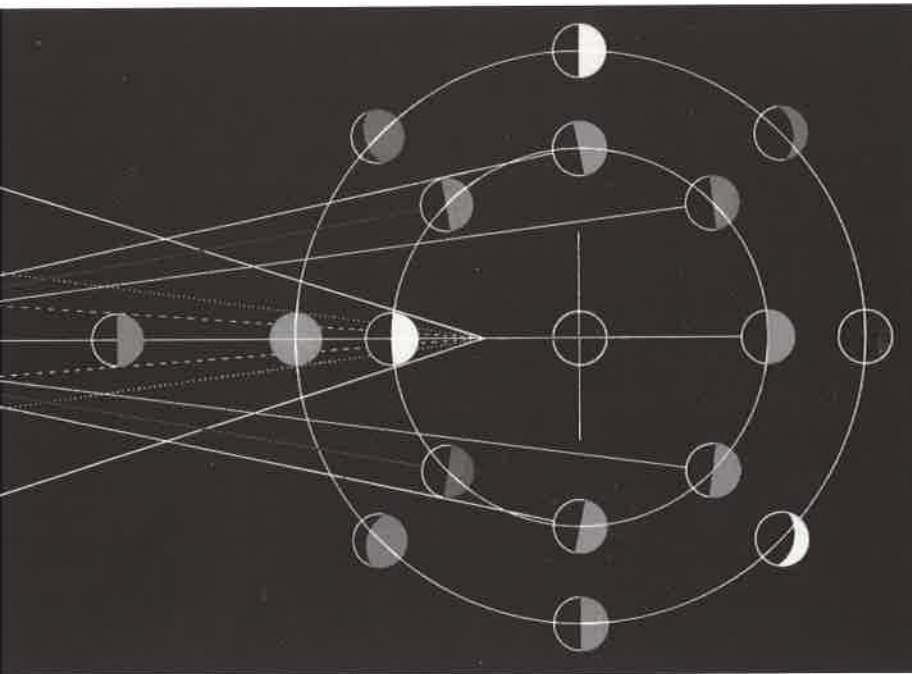
This is a shortened version of an article first published in the *European Race Bulletin* nos 33/34, August 2000, available from IRR, 2-6 Leake Street, London WC1X 9HS

'Isolation is one of the great mental disorders for asylum seekers. I know because I am a refugee. When you are isolated, you start thinking about what has happened to you.'

the Audit Commission analysed 161 local newspaper articles collated by the Refugee Council in October/November 1999, it found that in only 6 per cent of stories did journalists cite any positive contribution made by asylum seekers and refugees. On the other hand, 28 per cent of stories focused on housing and/or employment difficulties and 15 per cent concerned crime and offences committed by asylum seekers.

■ By feeding paranoia through lack of consultation

The governments of Netherlands, Ireland and the UK have come under further criticism because of their under-resourcing of the dispersal system and the arrogant and top-down manner in which dispersal has been handled,



with barely any attempts at consultation with local communities in reception areas. In mid-April, the *Irish Times*, reporting on resistance to asylum seekers in Rosslare, Carlow, Athlone, Tramore, Ennis, Kilcare and Tralee, warned that the government's failure both to consult on dispersal and to articulate a new vision of a multicultural society was 'feeding a sense of anxiety which verges on paranoia in small, local communities, where rumours are running wild every time a piece of land goes up for sale that it will be purchased for asylum seekers'. Indeed, when the Irish government announced its dispersal policy, it refused to name the locations where temporary centres would be created, leading the *Irish Times* to warn that this 'lack of candour or willingness to be publicly accountable on this most sensitive social issue of the day is a factor in heightening local concerns and distrust'.

■ By failing to make social provision

The dispersal of asylum seekers is acting as the barium meal exposing the poverty and infrastructural decay in many of the poorer areas of western Europe. When

governments fail to meet the social costs of the reception of asylum seekers, then asylum seekers are unjustly blamed for social decay. In Ireland and the UK, NGOs and refugee organisations had pointed out, prior to dispersal, that the lack of social provision and specialist care outside major cities would lead to a backlash against asylum seekers who would be blamed for stretching already under-resourced health and social services to new limits. In the UK, the Audit Commission has added its influential voice to the argument. On the basis of research in 15 fieldwork sites – ten councils and five health authorities – the Audit Commission has warned that the dispersal of tens of thousands of asylum seekers away from London and the South East will lead to increased racial tensions unless there is an immediate injection of cash to help recently-established consortia cope with new arrivals. Its report highlighted the absence of mental health services, English language support, legal representation and refugee community support in the dispersal areas, the lack of school places for the children of asylum seekers, and the fact that many GPs' practices were closing their lists to asylum seekers. In addition, several investigative reports in national newspapers have highlighted the private profiteering that UK government policy has given rise to as the Home Office hands over lucrative dispersal contracts to poorly-regulated private companies.

The corroding effects of the numbers debate

A key element in the growing xenophobia is the constant attention national politicians and the media give to the numbers of asylum seekers seeking refuge in Europe. The debate on asylum has become synonymous with the debate about numbers and this is having a corrosive effect on political and popular culture, with local government and representatives of grassroots residents' campaigns attempting to negotiate with the state in order that their communities take in the lowest number of asylum seekers possible. In these negotiations, use is made of the popular argument that integration of asylum seekers is hindered by the concentration of too many foreigners in any one locality – for it is the numbers of asylum seekers, we are told, which gives rise to xenophobia and hostility. This convenient myth diverts governments from their overriding responsibility towards asylum seekers: namely, to provide a safe haven for those seeking refuge in Europe. Until governments tackle the deep-seated racism, particularly in monocultural, overwhelmingly white, rural, seaside and port areas, they have no business to expose asylum seekers to the hazards of dispersal.

CASE 1 The United Kingdom

The constant vying between political parties about which is tougher on asylum numbers is particularly disappointing in the UK, which has had past experience of the devastating consequences of the 'numbers game' in creating a culture of popular racism. Powell's

opposition in the 1960s and '70s to the number of black immigrants coming to the country, his concentration on immigrant birth rates and the threat 'they' posed to the British way of life, dominated media debate and led to outbursts of racial violence and racially-motivated murders of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Yet, unbelievably, politicians have learnt nothing from this earlier period and the 'numbers game' has taken root in the UK again today.

The Dutch auction over numbers

In the run-up to local elections in 152 English councils in May 2000, the issue of asylum seekers dominated political debate, with the Conservatives and the Labour Party blaming each other for the large numbers of so-called 'illegal' asylum seekers resident in the UK. The debate reached such base levels that the Liberal Democrat Party called on the Commission for Racial Equality to carry out an investigation into whether the Labour Party and the Conservatives were inciting racism, and the UNHCR condemned the xenophobic tone of debate. It was the declared intention of the Conservative leader William Hague to make asylum the prominent election issue by, for instance, warning that asylum seekers were costing taxpayers £180 million a year, that old age pensioners now get less money than refugees and by visiting Conservative-controlled seaside resorts described by Conservatives as 'dumping grounds' for asylum seekers.

But the response of the Labour Party to Hague's campaign was to point to its tough approach on bogus asylum claims. In an unseemly Dutch auction which could only degrade public debate still further, the two main political parties vied with each other as to which could curtail numbers, seemingly oblivious to the effect that this would have in promoting xenophobic reactions to asylum seekers on the ground. Indeed, xenophobia and racial violence against asylum seekers were used by Labour to justify its dispersal policy on the grounds that smaller concentrations of asylum seekers would be integrated more successfully into local communities and would ensure that asylum seekers were no longer a magnet for extreme-Right groups like the National Front which had been demonstrating in areas like Dover. But the government's approach, far from countering xenophobia, legitimises it by implying that there is something inherently problematic about asylum seekers' foreignness – handleable, perhaps, in small concentrations, but inevitably provoking hostility when numbers accumulate beyond a certain threshold, which generates xenophobia.

Local authorities and xenophobia

The Dutch auction over asylum numbers, coupled with the popular argument that too great a concentration of asylum seekers in any one place generates xenophobia, informs the approach of some local authorities, principally in seaside, port and rural areas of the UK, towards asylum seekers. Prior to the introduction of the national dispersal system in April 2000, around ninety per cent of asylum seekers were housed in London where there was no mass xenophobic reaction against them. However, many London local authorities, experiencing a severe shortage of cheap temporary accommodation,

began unofficially to disperse asylum seekers to the South East, to seaside resorts and port towns which were overwhelmingly white, Conservative and monocultural, but where the costs of accommodating asylum seekers were reduced. To these London asylum seekers were added claimants who entered at ports like Dover.

It was a recipe for disaster. Prior to the arrival of asylum seekers, ethnic minorities in Dover comprised just 0.6 per cent of a total population which, in the words of one local MP, has 'no culture, experience or history of receiving visitors'. But when hostility towards asylum seekers reached new levels, fuelled by the *Dover Express* which described asylum seekers as the 'backdraft of a nation's human sewage', not one government spokesperson was prepared to denounce xenophobia in the sections of the Dover population which were hostile not just to asylum seekers but to the very idea of a multicultural society. Instead, the government bowed to pressure from Kent County Council and afforded the County special status whereby it would take no more asylum seekers but hand over responsibility for port of and in-country applicants to the new National Asylum Support Service. The Kent approach was quickly imbibed by twenty other local authorities which immediately applied to the government for special status on the ground that they too had reached saturation point.

CASE 2 The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, local authorities are also taking their lead from a government debate which focuses not on tackling the xenophobic campaigns in rural and seaside communities but in refining a system whereby municipalities are afforded a quota of asylum seekers to be accommodated in asylum seekers Residence Centres (AZCs), by introducing measures to 'improve' the concentration and distribution of asylum seekers.

Refining the numbers debate

Here too, the government approach legitimises the view that xenophobia arises when a community is pushed beyond its 'threshold of tolerance' for asylum seeker absorption. So while the government has rejected opposition calls for a reduction in asylum numbers sent to rural communities, it argues that what is key is how these numbers are concentrated and distributed. Thus, the ruling-PvdA group on Kollumerland Council, in its thankless efforts to find a solution to the deadlock over the introduction of a new AZC, has bowed to the argument that the only solution would be for the government to make Kollum a special case and reduce the number of asylum seekers sent there.

CASE 3 Ireland

With government policy based on the stigmatisation of asylum seekers as bogus and the idea that numbers can no longer be absorbed, hostile reactions by local communities to dispersed asylum seekers are hardly surprising. For state-sponsored xenophobia has a trickle-down effect. And what is even more disastrous for asylum seekers is that once the government's xenophobic message is absorbed by rural communities, it triggers older prejudices, stereotypes and suspicions of outsiders

► 'You are only allowed to use vouchers to buy food. You can't even have a haircut. It made me feel different, like someone who was just living to eat.'

traditionally vented on socially excluded groups like Gypsies and Travellers. In Ireland, the xenophobia sponsored by the state is being overlaid on a fabric of rural racism – and the combination is explosive.

A cocktail of prejudices

Since the so-called direct provision policy for the reception of asylum seekers was introduced in April, the Department of Justice has had to find 8,000 short-term places for asylum seekers in the space of a year. It plans to construct 4,000 places of permanent accommodation as quickly as possible, with flotel (floating hostels), prefabs and pavilion-style villages with canvas tops all being considered. While we readily acknowledge that the motives for opposition to dispersal have not been one-dimensional, we cannot agree with those in the Irish regional press which attribute the unrest solely to the government's lack of consultation, or plead for tolerance of local suspicion on the grounds that rural Ireland has been treated contemptuously by successive governments. While this may well be true, it should not be used to legitimise xenophobia towards asylum seekers, which has found expression through ideas of:

i) Culture swamping: some local papers are suggesting that the Department of Justice is engaged in a conspiracy to plant alien cultures on rural communities. When a plan was revealed to accommodate 300 asylum seekers in mobile homes in a former army barracks in Co. Kerry, the *Kerryman* backed protests by the villagers of Ballymullen, near Tralee, seemingly agreeing with the argument that unless villagers stood up for their rights they risked becoming a minority in their own community. The *Nationalist* condemned the bullish Irish state for picking on a small rural area with no infrastructure in order to 'plant a lot of people' from a 'different culture' who have barely any money and will have nothing to do all day. And some residents in one Co. Kildare village asked that a wall be built around the site of a disused army barracks set to be turned into a permanent asylum centre.

ii) Threshold of tolerance: The political parties' obsession with numbers is also reflected in local protests which implicitly take the view that there is a threshold of tolerance beyond which a community cannot go. Just how low that threshold is, has been illustrated by the villagers of Ballymullen who opposed the accommodation of 300 asylum seekers in a former army barracks, and the villagers of Clogheen, Co. Tipperary, where an arsonist set fire to the Vee Valley Hotel just hours before the Department of Justice's Directorate for Asylum Support Services (DASS) was due to debate with locals about the hotel's purchase for transformation into a reception centre for asylum seekers. During the subsequent Clogheen meeting the DASS was told that, as only 400 people lived in Clogheen, the village should

not be expected to take in more than ten asylum seekers. There was loud applause when one woman asked how many asylum seekers dispersed to Clogheen would be rapists, paedophiles or murderers. Meanwhile in Ballymullen – a village which has recently received Heritage status – a proposal to accept 27 asylum seekers (equal to ten per cent of the village population) was rejected by villagers who backed the counter-proposal – that the village should accept none.

In seaside resorts and port towns, the tourist industry backs campaigns for a reduction in numbers of asylum seekers on the grounds that resorts can't afford to have asylum seekers hanging out on the beach, getting bored and turning to stealing. Tramore Tourism said that while it opposed the DASS's plan to house asylum seekers in two guest houses it planned to purchase, it would have no objection to six or seven families being properly integrated in the community. In such resorts, the problem of asylum seekers' visibility is key. Hence, the residents' committee formed at Rosslare Harbour, Co. Wexford, to oppose the sale of the Devereux Hotel to the DASS for transformation into an asylum reception centre attempted to force the DASS to change tack by identifying an alternative site for the reception centre in the hinterland of Rosslare Harbour. The idea presumably being that out of sight is out of mind!

iii) Carriers of disease: The idea that immigration should be curtailed as immigrants are the carriers of infectious diseases has long been part of the classic scare-mongering of fascist parties and anti-immigration lobbies. In Ireland, the Immigration Control Platform (ICP) has attempted to whip up prejudices in the Clonakilty area of Co. Cork by distributing leaflets warning that Aids is rampant in many of the countries Ireland receives asylum seekers from. The fact that fear of hepatitis, tuberculosis and, most often, a fear of Aids has raised itself at many meetings to discuss dispersal, suggests that the ICP has a steady stream of prejudice and fear to tap into. In Co. Kildare, 300 people, including 70 children, carried placards stating 'Health: are we at risk?' as they marched to oppose the creation of a permanent reception centre at another former army barracks, warning 'Your town will be next'.

Such hysteria, however, is not without its contradictions. On the one hand, demands were made, at a consultation meeting at Rosslare, for the compulsory Aids testing of asylum seekers; but residents also expressed the view that asylum seekers arriving at Rosslare Harbour (about one in ten of all asylum applicants in 1999 entered Ireland via the port of Rosslare) looked too healthy to need help. There was scant charity for the privations the asylum seekers had experienced on account of their voyage. When an ambulance driver spoke of how he had to take a young child to hospital suffering from severe dehydration there were cries of 'Turn the boats around and turn them back!'

Xenophobia is legitimised when the government implies that there is something innate about asylum seekers' foreignness – handleable perhaps, in small concentrations, but provoking hostility when numbers accumulate beyond a certain threshold

European governments are steaming ahead with their anti-trafficking measures despite the tragedy at Dover

While UN Human Rights Declarations enshrine the right to leave your country and seek asylum abroad, anti-trafficking measures being discussed now at the EU level will violate this fundamental human right by ensuring refugees never even get to Europe in the first place. Meanwhile, the Irish, UK and French authorities are pursuing their own action plan against asylum seekers by treating France, Ireland and the UK as a common travel zone with a common frontier, and pooling immigration resources accordingly.

EU migration action plan

The year 2000 is the year of the EU's anti-trafficking action plan headed by Europol. So imagine the horror on the faces of Brussels bureaucrats when news filtered through that the bodies of 58 Chinese stowaways had been discovered during a routine customs check at Dover. Horror not that 54 men and four women suffered a torturous death as they gasped for breath in the giant airtight refrigeration unit in the lorry in which they had been hidden, but horror that all the resources the EU pumps into border policing and anti-trafficking measures are failing. There was a predictable round of bitter recriminations between national governments, before the EU leapt into action. In July, the French government put forward an 'action plan to improve the control of immigration' – featuring 'early warning and response

systems' to warn of 'potential migratory dangers and risks'. As the EU turns reality upside down to treat nations, not refugees, as the victims of the traffickers, the action plan instructs member states to report 'a threat at its borders or a weak link in its control arrangements' immediately, to protect its partner states. This is called 'solidarity'.

Pre-embarkation checks

Other features of the action plan include the organisation of 'a network of officers responsible for immigration matters in the countries of origin', so that in each country which is a source of refugees, the EU is represented by a liaison officer who will help that country's officials keep unauthorised people off the flights to Europe. Worse still is the pressure applied on the countries from which the refugees come to prevent them from leaving. The Sri Lankan government has been pressured by the British government to adopt laws making it illegal to leave the country except through the proper channels and with the correct documents. And in the wake of the death of the 58 at Dover, the Chinese government has agreed to crack down on illegal exit, in exchange for European support for its membership of the World Trade Organisation.

A new inner frontier

Treating France, the UK and Ireland as a common travel zone is resulting in closer liaison between immigration services to monitor ports to prevent 'migratory threats' and pool information on all asylum applications, including exchange of fingerprints of all asylum seekers over 14, ostensibly to prevent multiple applications. Since July, French police at Calais have been using a British-made machine to detect the presence of stowaways on board lorries to ensure that they never get to the UK (they claim to have detected 1300 people in a month). In September, Irish gardai travelled to England and Northern Ireland to meet police, customs and immigration officials to discuss new measures to clamp down on trafficking, particularly via the Larne ferry port in Northern Ireland. Already, Irish transport companies have been affected by UK immigration law and the Irish Road Hauliers Association has warned members making channel ferry crossings to be more vigilant in detecting stowaways. ■

At a remembrance service held by the Dover 58 Coordinating Committee on 27 September, campaigners spoke of the need to find a peaceful resting place for the dead and assist families in making funeral arrangements for their loved ones. Further information from NCRM.

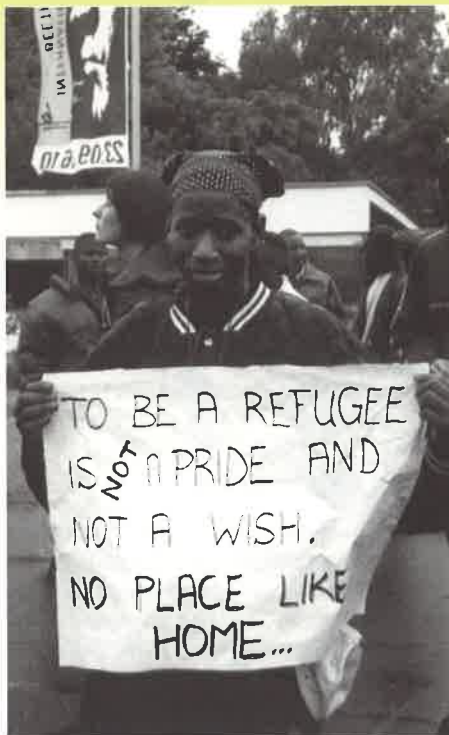


Wales: is dispersal doomed?

Why, when Wales was meant to take in 2,000 asylum seekers under the new reception arrangements, had only two arrived by the end of September? A special investigation by BBC Radio Wales' *Eye on Wales* programme (24.9.00) reveals that negotiations between the Home Office and the consortium representing all Welsh local authorities (except Cardiff) are hopelessly deadlocked, with the consortium accusing the Home Office of arrogance and of putting financial considerations over asylum seekers' welfare. The consortium says that if dispersal is to work the Home Office must fund it properly. But the Home Office refuses to reimburse local authorities for costs over and above housing and the provision of vouchers. The consortium now fears that the Home Office, in its

search for ever cheaper options, will by-pass it by setting up schemes with unscrupulous private sector providers in run-down inner-city areas where asylum seekers will face isolation and hostility. Already there are fears that the harsh anti-asylum climate will lead to a backlash against refugees in Newport (the most economically deprived area of Gwent) and Cardiff. Earlier this year, a hostel in Caerau, Cardiff, identified as suitable premises for an asylum assessment centre, had to be demolished after it was set on fire by arsonists.

When BBC Radio Wales invited Home Office minister Barbara Roche to appear on the programme, they were told that she was too busy. Meanwhile, dispersal to Wales has been delayed at least until the New Year. ■



Demonstrators in Bonn protest at foreign embassies' collusion in deportations

Germany's resistance movement

The Caravan movement in Germany has provided the inspiration for the UK Civil Rights Caravan

Just as Martin Luther King's civil rights movement engendered sit-ins and boycotts against segregation laws, Germany's Caravan movement is acting as a catalyst for a whole host of civil disobedience measures against laws that institutionalise racism against refugees.

When the Caravan movement was formed in 1998 its aim was to link German anti-racists from different Länder with dispersed refugees from different national backgrounds by touring 44 cities in 36 days. Adopting the refugee slogan, 'we have no vote, but we have a voice', the Caravan sought to provide a counterweight to increasing attacks against refugees in the media and from politicians. However, it was at the Refugee Congress in Jena in April 2000,

attended by over 600 people from 40 different nationalities, that the Caravan movement recognised the need to go still further. A programme against the social exclusion of refugees in Germany's apartheid-style asylum system, together with a fight-back against Germany's brutal deportation system, was launched. Now Caravan campaigners in Hamburg have built on the boycott of compulsory refugee identification parades before West African embassy officials (see CARF56) by holding a national demonstration in Bonn against Germany's neo-colonial deportation strategy and launching a civil disobedience campaign against the Law of Obligatory Residence in October.

No to asylum gulags

The 1982 Law of Obligatory Residence compels refugees to stay in the district to which they have been dispersed, creating what amounts to a kind of gulag for asylum seekers. To leave the district for any reason they have to apply to the local foreigners' office for permission. (Most applications to travel are refused, while some districts even impose a fee for the privilege of applying.) In October Cornelius Yunfani, a member of the Voice Africa Forum in Jena and co-ordinator of the 'Campaign for Political Prisoners in Cameroon', became the first refugee

publicly to defy the law when he told a court in Eichsfeld, 'I have decided never to buy my freedom of movement'.

He faces two fines totalling 698 marks for travelling without permission to a counter-demonstration at the G7 summit in Cologne and for attending the Refugee Congress in Jena (see CARF56). Officials from the foreigners' office sent a newspaper report of the Congress, in which he was quoted, to the police who then served the Cameroon activist with a fine of 600DM.

How far are we from a residence law in the UK? While there is no fine for leaving a dispersal area, those who are away for over seven days lose all entitlement to support. Police and immigration officials have powers to search the accommodation to ensure that the people designated to be there are there, and post office officials must inform the Home Office of any redirection notices relating to the accommodation.

Deportation defiance

Defiance against deportations is also escalating. According to a report for the EU Council's Migration and Expulsion Working Party, 32,233 people were deported from Germany in 1999. According to refugees from the Caravan, 'this is only possible because our respective embassies are collaborating with the German government to issue travel certificates which are then used to deport us'. Over two days, the Caravan held non-stop pickets of the ministry for overseas economic co-operation in Bonn and the embassies of African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and Eastern European countries. Protesters commemorated all those who had been killed by the police during deportations or who have died in deportation prisons. The African Refugees Association described the collaboration between the German government and African diplomats as 'the extension of the corruption, authoritarianism, neo-colonialism and disrespect for human rights which is practised by corrupt regimes and dictatorships; an extension of the very politics which leads to persecution and torture and which forces Africans to seek refuge in Germany in the first place.'

In the UK, too, there is co-operation with officials at the embassies of rejected asylum seekers for the issue of travel documents for deportation – a practice which continues even after warnings of its dangers for asylum seekers from countries where the act of seeking asylum can bring about persecution. ■

photos: Corni Günther



CONTACTS

Caravan Group Hamburg,
c/o Hamburg Refugee Council,
Fax: 00 40 430 44 90

African Refugees Association,
email: african_refugees@
hotmail.com

Caravan Group Bremen,
email: mail@humanrights.de
www.humanrights.de

The Voice Africa Forum,
Goettingen@gmx.de