

Britain: Tory Scum and Migrant Crossings

Sunday 28 November 2021, by [FAULKNER Neil](#) (Date first published: 28 November 2021).

Neil Faulkner comments on the latest Channel atrocity.

Labour deputy Angela Rayner is regarded by some as an authentic working-class voice on the opposition front bench; in contrast, as it were, to the dull, conformist, middle-class lawyer beside her. Anyone who believed this should have been disabused when she apologised for calling the Tories 'scum'.

Here is one small measure of the ongoing decay of British social democracy. When Aneurin Bevan, the leader of the Labour Left in the 1950s, called the Tories 'vermin', he never apologised. So let me add the tiny voice of this website to the abuse: the Tories are scum.

One could substantiate this by reference to any one of a dozen contemporary issues. The deaths in ambulances because of Tory NHS cuts. The suicides of disabled people because of Tory benefit cuts. The mass murder in Yemen because of Tory-supplied armaments. The Covid fatalities because of Tory pandemic negligence. And so on.

But let us focus on just one example of Tory class politics: the migrant deaths in the Channel last week.

Just before 27 people drowned when their dingy capsized, Boris Johnson had met with Tory backbenchers at Westminster. What was the issue raised more than any other? Government corruption? The screwing of the working class in the Social Care Bill? The axeing of local rail projects in the north? No, it was how to stop small numbers of desperate people fleeing war and persecution, in many cases the threat of murder, torture, rape, and incarceration, from arriving in Britain.

Home Secretary Priti Patel – whose bullying, racism, and chilling lack of compassion seem positively pathological – is, we are told, under pressure to reduce the rising numbers making Channel crossings in small boats. The pressure comes from Downing Street and from Tory backbenchers like Edward Leigh, who describes the situation as a 'national emergency'.

No-one is explaining how the numbers are to be reduced. The Tories already spend vast sums on border fences, maritime patrols, detention centres, and so on. Patel is talking about creating offshore holding camps. (On islands? On decommissioned warships? Perhaps the latter, in keeping with traditional Victorian values. You can read about the convict 'hulks' in Dickens.)

The racism of the regime and the ruling party is hidden behind phoney rhetoric about 'criminal traffickers' and 'saving lives'. The way to cut out the traffickers and prevent migrant deaths is, of course, to open safe routes for those seeking asylum. There are none. That is why people first tried getting across on lorries – some with fatal consequences – until the militarisation of the Channel ports reached the point where this became virtually impossible. So there is now a surge in boat crossings – which, of course, are far more dangerous. Adding to the trauma of the migrants are

French police attacks, designed on the one hand to stop attempted crossings, and on the other to destroy improvised encampments.

Also central to Tory arguments is the distinction between 'asylum seekers' and 'economic migrants'. Patel claimed that 70% of the people crossing in boats were economic migrants. This was a barefaced lie: a large majority are asylum seekers, mainly from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Kurdistan. Again, it is very much in keeping with traditional Victorian values to distinguish between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor.

But this is all smoke and mirrors anyway. On the one hand, there are no safe routes for asylum seekers, so the Tories have created a 'hostile environment' even for those they deem 'deserving'. On the other, every scrap of evidence we have shows that 'undeserving' economic migrants are net contributors to national wellbeing - a fact now proven by the catastrophic labour shortages consequent upon Brexit, with 100,000 vacancies in the NHS, another 100,000 in social care, more than a million across Britain as a whole.

Socialists, anyway, make no such distinction. We see the working class as an international class and free movement as a basic human right. We are against all borders and for welcoming all migrants. More than that: as a wave of nationalism, racism, and fascism sweeps the world, we see anti-migrant racism - typically, in Europe, laced with Islamophobia - as the cutting edge of the scapegoat politics of the authoritarian right.

Anti-migrant racism was the subliminal message of the Leave campaign's 'Take Back Control' propaganda during the Brexit referendum. It was the alliance of the reactionary middle class and backward working class constructed then that enabled the Tory right to win the 2019 general election. State racism and repression remain at the core of the regime's politics for the simple reason they have nothing else to offer.

Representing corporate power, the greed of the rich, and the privilege of the middle class, all their talk of 'levelling up' is spin and lies. Millions of lives continue to be blighted by benefit cuts, low wages, unaffordable housing, rising bills, NHS waiting lists, and so much more. What the Tories can offer is a culture war designed to divide the working class and demonise the oppressed. Patel's border thugs and concentration camps are the sharp edge of that culture war. Muslim migrants are the Jews of 21st century creeping fascism.

The numbers coming to Britain are tiny in the context of the accelerating global crisis. An estimated 750 million people - 10% of the world's population - are either internally or externally displaced. They are victims of war, dictatorship, police violence, warlord militias, mafia gangs, climate change, agribusiness land-grabs, and 'structural adjustment programmes' that have destroyed jobs and livelihoods in the interests of corporate profit; they are victims of militarism, the carbon economy, transnational capital, and the global police state. They are the wretched of the earth. Handfuls of them reach the Channel. Those responsible for their deaths are scum: responsible for what Frederick Engels, as long ago as 1845, called 'social murder'.

How do we save lives? First, by opening safe routes to all migrants. Second, by demilitarising the borders. Third, by welcoming all migrants, whatever their reason for flight, whatever their avenue of access.

But let this also be said: the migrant crisis is a visceral expression of the compound crisis of world capitalism. And while the response of the authoritarian right is racism and repression - supported by the fake liberals and social democrats of the political mainstream - our response is to say the working class and the oppressed must unite in mass struggle to bring down the system response for

atrocities like the Channel drownings last week.

As for Rayner, perhaps she apologises for calling the Tories 'scum' because of the sickening behaviour of her own party. What did Starmer have to say? Migrants are not the enemy? Border controls are racist? The Tories are guilty of social murder?

Of course not. Pandering to racist voters instead of standing up for basic solidarity and socialist principle, he said Patel had lost control, failed to deliver on pledges to reduce crossings, and failed to agree strong measures with the French. Is 'scum' too strong a word?

Neil Faulkner

P.S.

- Anti*capitalist Resistance. 28 Nov 2021:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/tory-scum-and-migrant-crossings/>

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