
Blunkett's plans for asylum seekers

10 things you need to know

- 1) The government, under pressure, is scrapping the hated voucher scheme, but it is replacing it with Smart Cards — in essence, electronic tagging. With photograph and fingerprints, they could be the forerunner to every government's dream — identity cards for all.
- 2) Asylum seekers, who will still not be allowed to work, will continue to receive just 75% of normal income support — around £40 a week.
- 3) The government's main aim is to, as much as possible, segregate asylum seekers from the bulk of the population, helping to fuel the ugly levels of racism which its policies have already fostered. A three-layer system of accommodation and detention centres is centrepiece of its policies.
- 4) Induction centres — such as the controversial Oakington centre near Cambridge — will process the claims of arriving asylum seekers.
- 5) Accommodation centres will then house those asylum seekers allowed to remain. The centres will provide full board, education and health facilities — cutting inmates off from the wider community. Asylum seekers who refuse to stay in the centres will lose their rights to all state support.
- 6) Those asylum seekers who lose out in the state's lottery for refugee status will be banged up in Removal Centres — soft prisons. The government plans to have the capacity to lock up around 4,000 men, women and children in such places over the next two years.
- 7) The system of forcibly dispersing asylum seekers to some of the most deprived parts of the country will remain.
- 8) The government is quadrupling the number of people it deports each year to 30,000 — a totally arbitrary figure which goes against the Geneva Convention's principle that every case be treated on its own merits. That means the number of asylum seekers either taking their own lives, or who die fleeing or fighting snatch squads of police and immigration officials, is set to increase markedly.
- 9) The government's new anti-terrorism measures — in themselves the biggest attack on civil liberties for decades — will directly affect asylum seekers by giving immigration officials even more power to discriminate against specific ethnic groups and individuals.
- 10) In contrast to hysterical claims of waves of asylum seekers which New Labour has encouraged, Britain only takes 0.05% of the world's refugees. It is New Labour's backing of IMF/World Bank policies, US imperialism and repressive regimes around the world which is helping to fuel the massive increase in the world's population of asylum seekers.

Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

Model resolution

This branch notes:

- 1) The horrific conditions which force asylum seekers to flee war-torn countries, as illustrated by the war in Afghanistan.
- 2) The Home Secretary's 29 October announcement scrapping the voucher system for asylum seekers.
- 3) That despite this welcome decision, the voucher system will continue until autumn 2002, at 70% of income support — around £40 per week.
- 4) The ID cards which replace vouchers will be a form of electronic voucher, thus continuing the stigmatising effect of the voucher system.
- 5) The ID cards, which contain fingerprint and photograph data, could be a test run for a national identity card scheme.
- 6) Asylum seekers will no longer be held in mainstream prisons, but the number of places in detention centres — in effect, special prisons for asylum seekers — will increase from 1,900 to 4,000. The accommodation centres may offer many facilities that asylum seekers and their supporters have long argued for, but asylum seekers will be given no choice as to whether they stay in them. If they do not, they will receive no support.
- 7) Forced dispersal will continue, with asylum seekers compelled to live in areas where they lack both family and community support.
- 8) The government's quotas for the removal of asylum seekers effectively breaches the requirement of the 1951 Geneva Convention that each asylum claim to be treated on its individual merits.
- 9) The government has, since early April, given the Immigration Service the power to discriminate against particular ethnic groups, determining in advance that there can be no legitimate asylum claims from their members.

This branch believes:

- 1) The government's measures and proposals fuel racism, and form part of a general assault on civil liberties.
- 2) The government finally scrapped the voucher system following persistent campaigning against it.

This branch resolves to campaign for:

- 1) The defence and extension of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the rights of asylum seekers.
- 2) For asylum seekers to receive cash benefits at the level of income support, and to have the right to work.
- 3) The closure of detention centres, and for asylum seekers to have the right to choose whether to stay in open accommodation centres with no loss of rights, and support for those choosing not to.
- 4) An end to forced dispersal.

The branch agrees:

- 1) To submit a resolution on these lines to the union's next annual conference and seek support for it from other branches.
 - 2) To support and encourage the union as a whole to support all initiatives towards these ends. In particular, we agree to support the National Assembly Against Racism's "Speak Out Against Racism" campaign and the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers.
 - 3) To encourage members to attend the conference in Manchester called by organisations, including the National Civil Rights Movement, National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, Barbed Wire Britain, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers and Jewish Socialist Group, for 23 March 2002, with the aim of improving co-ordination between the many organisations working in support of refugee and asylum rights.
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