

# Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

info@defend-asylum.org

## NEWSLETTER No.4

### Stop the Dispersals

From the 4th July, the government intends to "ring fence" London for asylum seekers - i.e. to prevent them settling there. Most people will be dispersed on the day they make their application for support. Asylum seekers will initially be placed in "emergency accommodation" outside London (it is predicted for 7 to 14 days, though this will no doubt stretch).

This is clearly a stepping up of the dispersal programme, intended to prevent asylum seekers making contact with others of similar background in London before being told they have to move to a town where they know no-one and there are few support facilities.

### International Refugee Week

The beginning of International Refugee Week and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Convention were marked with meeting and events across the county.

More than 300 people heard Tony Benn make the opening address at a conference held at the University of East London. He condemned the government's anti-asylum seeker policies, Tory and Labour politicians who played the race card during the general election, and the racism that has been whipped up. He called for a united campaign to defend the Geneva Convention.

Delegates discussed the impact of globalisation on asylum seekers, media coverage and a host of other issues. Teresa Hayter, author of *Open Borders, the Case Against Immigration Controls*, led off a workshop, which examined the case against all immigration controls.

In Barnet, some 150 people, mainly asylum seekers, attended a celebration of the contribution which immigrants have made to UK society. Christopher Akonlick for the Post Graduate Unit for the Training of Asylum Seeker Doctors said his unit had saved the government some £3 million in the few months since it had been retraining asylum seekers. Cristal Amis condemned the government's policies, which left women and children asylum seekers particularly vulnerable to terrible stress, poverty and illness.

## **University caterers get new prison-camp contract**

University caterers Sodhexo are extending their global empire with a contract to run Harmondsworth, a new government detention centre for families seeking asylum in the UK.

The 550-bedded unit will be the biggest in Britain and completely self-contained, with no opportunity for detainees to leave. For those singled out as troublemakers there is a special isolation area.

The Paris-based multinational is the second biggest operator of private prisons in the world, but recently lost a contract in the US because even by American standards conditions were appalling. For example 18 young men were found sharing one cell with only paper cups for toilets.

At Harmondsworth, which will also have facilities for disabled asylum seekers, inmates will be able to do cleaning and cooking jobs for a £12 weekly wage.

Sodhexo, already run the notorious voucher system for asylum applicants, who are not allowed to work and live on 70% of income support - around £36 a week, with only £10 payable in cash. This highly discriminatory scheme has been condemned by charities, church groups and trades unions alike and government immigration minister Barbara Roche admitted it costs six times more to run than if people were given cash.

## **Harmondsworth Protest**

250 protesters gathered to protest about the extension of Harmondsworth Detention Centre on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June. The demonstrators included international representatives, trade unionists, refugees, students and a wide range of other organisations. They assembled outside the grim building which is inaccessible by public transport and lies in the flight path of Heathrow airport, right on top of a busy 'A' road. Prison-like, it could not be more different from the safe secure haven needed by individuals who are fleeing torture and death.

**Shut down Harmondsworth Campaign**  
**07960 099457 -**  
**Close racist detention centres**

## **Diary dates**

**Saturday 7 July**



Emergency Protest

No Deportations, No Detentions, No Dispersals

Assemble 12pm, Finsbury Park (Manor House entrance) for march to Wood Green

**Saturday 7 July**

Bedford campaign to close down Yardley Detention Centre

Strategy meeting.

Details from Emma Gin, 077 6741 4714

**Saturday 14 July**

March to support Turkish political prisoners

Assemble 12.30pm, Whitehall Place (near Embankment Tube)

**Monday 16 July, 6.30pm**

Fortnightly meeting of the CDAS at Camden Town Hall, Judd Street (opp St Pancras Station)

**19-22 July**

Four days of resistance at the Campsfield Detention Centre, Oxford

Details from Close Campsfield Campaign,

[closecampsfield@yahoo.com](mailto:closecampsfield@yahoo.com)

**Tuesday 31 July**

Close down Harmondsworth

Details to come

**Join the CDAS committee**

We meet fortnightly on Mondays at Camden Town Hall.

For inf: **E mail: [info@defend-asylum.org](mailto:info@defend-asylum.org)**