

RACE AND ASYLUM

Congress condemns the recent distasteful spectacle of refugees and asylum seekers being used as a political football. Congress also recognises that many of the countries that asylum seekers are fleeing from also have an appalling human rights history regarding the treatment of women. In particular, Congress condemns the Conservative Party and William Hague for preying on the fears of seeking asylum in the UK.

Whilst government has the right to implement an immigration policy, it also has clear international obligations:

- i)** the obligation to offer security to those who are persecuted and oppressed; and
- ii)** the obligation to lead a moderate debate with moderate language.

Sadly, in recent months we have seen precious little in the way of moderation from politicians. But our politicians must never forget that it is the rights of asylum seekers that should be at the centre of this debate:

- a)** rights to basic needs;
- b)** Rights to civil and public protection
- c)** Rights to fairness and justice
- d)** Rights to human respect

In the current climate we are in danger of losing sight of those rights.

Congress believes that this situation will be helped by the implementation of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, the main provisions of which came into place on Saturday, 1 April, and initiates the following:

- 1)** Asylum seekers will be required to live in designated no choice areas
- 2)** asylum seekers will be made to live in designated no choice accommodation;
- 3)** asylum seekers can be subject to house and area curfew;
- 4)** asylum seekers will not be allowed to settled in leave their designated house or area for more than 7 days;
- 5)** asylum seekers will be forced to live on vouchers and £10 cash weekly (total of only 70% minimum DSS weekly rates), with shopkeepers forbidden to give change where goods obtained are less than the value of the voucher.

Congress is concerned that such rules can only serve to further alienate, stigmatise and segregate refugees, which could, in turn, lead to an even more negative reaction from the local communities into which they are integrated.

In addition, Congress believes that the proposal to introduce a system of £10,000 bonds to those wishing to enter the UK from certain countries is morally wrong and inherently racist and should be strongly opposed.

Finally Congress condemns the scapegoating of

- British lorry drivers, who are targeted through no fault of their own, and calls for the introduction of pre-UK checks before lorries leave for the UK.
- Congress pledges its support and solidarity to all refugees arriving in Britain and urges the TUC General Council to do all within its powers to:

A) campaign against the harassment and intimidation of refugees and asylum seekers, engendered either indirectly by the media or directly by organised fascist groups;

B) lobby the Government to relax the stringent conditions placed on asylum seekers and to provide more support to them through a very difficult, harrowing and vulnerable period.

C) work to build a greater understanding among British people of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, and the fact that the majority are genuine cases deserving our full support; and

D) review the present dispersal arrangements, as well as measures to ensure adequate funding to support local authorities with the integration of asylum seekers into local communities.

Congress is concerned that recent events to those seeking asylum are being misrepresented and this is leading to prejudice and bigotry. Those fleeing countries where they have suffered oppression are being portrayed as 'economic migrants' with no real fear of persecution. This is also having an adverse impact on those members of ethnic minorities who are already settled in this country.

Congress calls upon the Government to our international obligations and maintain a humane and decent asylum policy, and to avoid using language and taking attitudes which only give succour to those in our society whose intent is to foster prejudice and bigotry.

Congress therefore calls on the General Council to continue the campaign against racism and in particular to campaign for the abolition of the voucher system and the bond scheme.

Congress believes that racism remains one of blights on our society. The Macpherson Report revealed not only the extent and effects institutional racism, specifically in the police force, but also the problems of offensive language in the 'canteen culture'.

The 1999 review of equality and fairness in the fire service identified similar problems highlighted 'an overriding imperative for the service to move forward to recognise the importance of diversity in every context and welcome the opportunities and benefits that diversity brings'.

Congress emphasises how critical it is for both public sector workers and the public they serve for employers positively to demonstrate their determination to pursue equality of opportunity for all their employees.

Congress welcomes the decision by the General Council to run the special free phone hotline in June, to discover the extent of such and the effects on those at whom it is directed, and thereafter to continue referrals via the 'Know Your Rights' line.

Congress believes that it is a continuing responsibility of all affiliates to examine our own procedures and those of employers, identify failings in our responses to the needs of our members and to adopt best practices.

Mover: Transport & General Workers' Union

Seconder: National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers

Supporters: Transport & Salaried Staffs Association; Fire Brigades Union