



In Wales There Will Always Be a Welcome in the Valleys

Flintshire City of Sanctuary Group have this week called for the House of Lords to challenge the Nationality and Borders Bill, which will potentially strip British Citizenship from those living in the UK, without their knowledge. Sadly, while the media have been preoccupied with the imminent publication of Sue Gray's report of the investigation into parties and gatherings in Downing Street, there has been minimal coverage of the continued progress of this cruel and inhumane major legislative in parliament. Having passed its third reading by a 298 to 231 majority vote in the House of Commons in December 2021, this week it reached the Committee stage in the House of Lords. This legislation seriously undermines the UK's obligations under International Law and has been described by Windrush Lives, an advocacy group and victim support network led by Windrush victims, as "racist, xenophobic and an affront to basic human decency". This is further supported by Taiwo Owatemi, Shadow Equalities Minister, who said, "Its tough sounding measure are unworkable, and it breaks key international humanitarian conventions".

Flintshire City of Sanctuary, a registered charity and member of the City of Sanctuary UK movement of welcome, stands firmly against this Bill and are concerned at reports that refugees are being used as scapegoats in the current political battles raging at Westminster. We also endorse in its entirety the statement made by Jane Hutt, MS (Minister for Social Justice) on 6th December 2021, and the desire and affirmation by the Welsh Government for Wales to become, and be known as, a Nation of Sanctuary; a noble and humane aspiration.

Flintshire City of Sanctuary, like all members of the City of Sanctuary UK movement, hope that British "kindness will win", because Refugee Rights are Human Rights. Wales has a long and proud history of welcoming and integrating peoples seeking safety and a better life - from Ireland following the Famines of the mid-19th century, Belgian and Italian citizens after the two

World Wars, and more recently, skilled European workers and their families. We do not believe that the people of Flintshire support what this Bill proposes to permit 'in our name'.

Under Clause 9 of the Bill, people can be stripped of their British Citizenship, without notice or their knowledge. Potentially, this could disproportionately impact 2 in 5 (40%) of people of ethnic minority heritage living in England and Wales, effectively making them second class citizens, (source New Statesman 1st Nov 2021), “even if doing so would render them stateless (if they are not dual nationals)” (New Statesman, 8th December 2021). We agree wholeheartedly with the Welsh Refugee Coalition that this “violates basic principles of justice”.

Under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, for which the UK was a founding member and signatory, it is not illegal to seek asylum. Yet, the Nationality and Borders Bill also serves to criminalise those entering Great Britain by *irregular means* and does not consider in any way the creation of safe and legal routes to asylum within this country. Brexit means that we are no longer party to the Dublin Agreement, which enabled the UK to return some asylum seekers to EU Member States without considering their asylum claim. Therefore, Britain no longer has the legal right to return people to the first EU in which they arrived.

Travel restrictions due to Covid-19 reduced access to regular air and sea travel to the UK, meaning that those seeking sanctuary in the UK were forced to take longer, more dangerous routes. This effectively places those desperately seeking asylum into the hands of criminal traffickers, facing a hazardous and treacherous journey, and even death, as we know from recent tragic events.

Clause 11 focuses on how and by what means someone arrives in the UK, rather than the validity of their claim to stay here. This breaches the 1951 Refugee Convention and undermines its established rules and aims. Consequently, even someone who rescues people fleeing from war, persecution and environmental and climate disaster will be liable to prosecution. In complete contrast, Border Force patrols and the Armed Forces, if deployed as proposed recently by the Home Secretary, will be exempt from prosecution, allowing them to turn those at sea in flimsy dinghies, away and back from our shores, even if this results in deaths. International Maritime Law stipulates that passing boats should always come to the aid of those distressed

and needing help. This is yet another breach of our humanitarian commitments and contravention of international law. This Bill will not stop the traffickers and it will not stop the Channel crossings.

The true narrative of the situation is that the UK takes fewer refugees than any other EU nation. Indeed, there has been little increase in the numbers coming since 2016. Statistics show that two-thirds of those who cross the Channel are genuine refugees.

Once here, asylum seekers are often found poor quality accommodation and are not permitted to take up employment. They are expected to manage on a daily income of £5.66 to purchase food, clothes, and other essentials. Even those granted asylum under this Bill will have only a temporary leave to remain, living under constant and pernicious threat of expulsion, with no right to reunion with family members in the UK.

Distinguished members of the House of Lords have already proposed changes to the Bill. Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate, a former Conservative immigration minister, supports an amendment for the UK government to set a target to resettle at least 10,000 refugees a year. Flintshire City of Sanctuary are also encouraged that an amendment to remove Clause 11 has been tabled by the Liberal Democrat and Labour front benches with the Bishop of Durham and former Home Secretary Lord Blunkett co-sponsoring. Both amendments will be debated at Committee Stage.

We ask that the people of Flintshire, support us in our concern about this Bill, by writing to their MP and MS, and to add a signature to the petition asking for the withdrawal of Clause 9 from the Bill, before it is enacted, even though the current number of signatures has reached the threshold for it to be debated in Parliament. We ask this because, as has been stated by SEIN (South East Integration Network), "There is power in community, in collective grief, in collective anger, in collective support and collective action"

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/601583>

We ask also that you consider joining the City of Sanctuary movement.

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