

MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, 31.8.16

Pinar Aksu (Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees), Phil Clinton (Migrant Workers Rights, Australia), Nuria (Oficina Precaria), Stan Reeves (The Welcoming)



Pinar Aksu from the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees spoke of her experiences visiting Lesbos (Greece) and the camps in the Calais/Dunkirk area, where there are about 10,000 refugees, including 800 unattended children.

Despite the racist claims of "massive numbers", countries outside the EU were bearing the main brunt of the refugee crisis. Turkey, for example, now had 2.5million refugees. The UK had only offered to take 20,00 Syrian refugees by 2020. So far only 1800 have settled, including a 1000 in Scotland. 26 Scottish local authorities have accepted refugees.

In line with Cameron's 'Big Society' thinking, which was about withdrawing state support for welfare, a new 'Sponsor a Refugee' initiative had emerged, which was like sponsor an unwanted pet.

The Syrian refugee crisis had also moved the focus away from the inhuman treatment of people at Dungavel. There is still no time limit on detention.

Phil Chilton from Migrant Worker Rights in Australia outlined the horrific treatment of asylum seekers and migrant workers in Australia. Their meetings always started with a recognition that they were being held on land stolen from the original Aborigine population.

The Howard government had first ramped up the attacks on refugees who arrive by boat. Now the Turnbull government refuses all refugees who have arrived in this manner. Those that make it near the Australian coast are detained in Christmas Island (Indian Ocean), Nauru (Pacific Ocean) or Manus Island (Papua and New Guinea). These centres are run by private companies - Broad Spectrum and Wilson Security, and their running is deemed to be a private matter covered by business confidentiality. Conditions are appalling, leading to several attempted suicides. Refugees are offered money to return. The big pay-outs to Nauru and Papua & New Guinea the security companies and the amounts offered to returnees highlights that cost is not even the main factor, but overt racism. Islamophobia plays a major part in stigmatising refugees.

Phil also outline the work of (Trade) Unionists for Refugees.

Nuria from Oficina Precaria (OC) said she represented a 'Tory nightmare'. She is a socialist, feminist, single mother and a migrant! OC was set up to provide practical help to all migrants, provide mutual aid, advocacy (including legal backing) and empowerment.

Since 2004, the Residents Test has been used to impose completely arbitrary rulings, with threats of deportation if people don't accept the unacceptable, e.g. working unpaid hours. The new 2016 Immigration Act will have the effect of turning UK subjects, especially landlords, into agents of the state policing migrants. Byron Burgers has already collaborated with the state in deporting workers. the Migrant Solidarity Network had organised a protest on 5th August.

OC has been involved in the Justice for Carers campaign. It also has a Roadshow which goes around the country with a power point presentation about Migrant Rights.

OC workers with the Edinburgh Campaign Against Poverty which meets at the Autonomous Centre. Mike Vallance gave a brief outline of this work.

Stan Reeves from The Welcoming (TW) outlined the origins of this campaign in the Pauli Friere bases idea of Dialogue. TW was initiated by the Adult Learning Project. One of their earliest initiatives had been a forum on the issue of land, which brought together Scottish campaigners and refugees from other countries where people had lost access to the land. A further fillip to TW was the decision to send refugees originally housed in Glasgow to Edinburgh.

TW is involved in the teaching English. It has also been involved in cultural exchange including a music project in Calais. TW uses Freire methods designed to provide empowerment through education in all its work.

The meeting then broke up into 4 groups to discuss the issues raised. After reporting back it was agreed to:-

- i) The wording for a new RIC-Edinburgh banner was agreed (see above)
- ii) Back the demo on the 17th September, 15-17.00 at the Scottish Parliament. The RIC-Edinburgh banner will be there. Further info will be circulated.
- iii) To send representatives to the next Migrant Solidarity Network meeting on Friday, September 9th, at 18.00 in the Autonomous Centre.
- iv) Investigate how to put pressure on the Scottish government over Dungavel, the unattended children at Calais, and the effect of the 2016 Immigration Act.

Allan Armstrong, 7.9.16
