



Celebrating Sanctuary?! What Sanctuary?

At a time when enforced deportations are at their highest rate ever and corporate-run detention centres are packed with thousands of people, whose only crime was to seek sanctuary in this country; when dawn raids and the weekly reporting are constant nightmares for many asylum seekers; when the government is introducing increasingly more restrictive and racist immigration controls every day (asylum quotas, immigration point system etc.); comes Refugee Week to “promote understanding and to celebrate the cultural contributions of refugees.”

While the “nationwide festival” is, indeed, an opportunity for refugees and immigrants to make their voices heard, faced with all the “asylum madness” of mainstream media, there are many reasons to assume that the event is essentially a cheap public-relations exercise, both for the government and for some of the organisations and corporations involved. The events appear to be designed to deliberately hide the real issues surrounding asylum and immigration. Serious political content is systematically suppressed. Furthermore, the way in which things are organised mirrors much of Labour's discredited multi-cultural policies in terms of dividing refugees along ethnic lines.

Celebrating Sanctuary is Birmingham's contribution to the festival. Besides the Home Office, the organisation is partly funded by the Angel Group. Last year, the Home Office carried out an investigation into claims that the London-based company charged both the Home Office and Leeds City Council for the same properties. Company records, internal emails and testimony from former Angel employees also showed the company was paid for accommodation that was “unfit for habitation” or for which it had no keys. Records further suggested Angel claimed discounts on council tax to which it was not entitled to in Leeds and Newcastle upon Tyne. The Asylum Profiteer Group, with more than 50 subsidiaries, is 100% owned by 48-year-old Julia Davey. In 2003, she paid herself a salary of £458,000 as well as collecting nearly £1m in dividends.

However, many grassroots groups throughout the country are organising events and actions, during and around the Week, to bring these issues to the fore. Next Saturday there will be a candlelit vigil on 20th June, organised by Birmingham Anti-Racist Campaign (ARC), to remember those who took their own life in detention, followed by a Refugee Sleep-out and guerrilla screenings in Pigeon Park (St. Phillip's Cathedral). Birmingham NoBorders is also organising a day of events on the 30th of June, starting with the monthly ARC-NoBorders picket at the immigration reporting centre in Solihull and ending with a fundraising gig at the Spotted Dog pub in Digbeth.

Birmingham NoBorders is a network of activists who stand against repression and all forms of border control and struggle for the freedom of movement for all people.

E-mail: noborders-brum-contact@aktivix.org