

Searching for Asylum

William Clark

The Targeting and Criminalisation of Kurdish Asylum Seekers

Desmond Fernandes

(available from Peace in Kurdistan, 44 Ainger Road, London NW3 3AT)

This excellent report by Desmond Fernandes argues that Kurdish asylum seekers and refugee communities have been targeted and criminalised in a number of ways by state and parapolitical agencies. It provides evidence that across 'Fortress Europe' prison, immigration, security and policing services adopt institutionally racist, brutal and unaccountable policies and procedures.

Many asylum and refugee groups which have already fallen prey to an insidious coalition of the tabloid press, political opportunism, far-right groups, corrupt police and an unaccountable Security Service are now the subject of the government's proposal that people are categorised as a "national security risk and international terrorist" on the basis of the Home Secretary's beliefs or suspicions. The criteria for which are not given in the new legislation and the basis for the suspicions will be secret. Anyone who appeals against the decision, will have their case heard in a closed hearing, which may take place in their absence without full disclosure of the evidence.

While Turkey, the UK and the US routinely bomb northern Iraq themselves, the law is being perverted to give politicians the right to return asylum seekers even although they will be killed. The authorities need no longer look into reasons why people may be fleeing. Even being subjected to torture now means nothing. Those likely to seek political asylum because of their political affiliations will be considered 'terrorists'.

The Immigration Service guided by a succession of Home Secretaries (Baker, Hurd, Howard...) have long been active in contravening its own rules, ignoring the basic fact that "...asylum seekers ha(ve) a perfect right under present law—i.e. under the 1951 Convention—to use illegal means (such as false documents) to claim asylum." (p10)

Decisions are "simply political", concludes Fazil Kawani from the Refugee Council, rather than being based upon clear humanitarian considerations and principles:

"Such a desire to deter and target 'key' national 'undesirable' groups has led to a range of new, discriminatory 'measures' being institutionalised against Kurdish—and other—asylum seekers. At the beginning of May, 2001, for instance, Barbara Roche, the Home Office Minister, brazenly announced that immigration officers were now being openly permitted to officially discriminate against eight nationalities, one of which was Kurdish." (p11)

Jack Straw is now imposing a policy that institutionally targets and swiftly deports 'Turkish' Kurdish (as with other) asylum seekers fleeing from military conscription in their 'home' countries:

"In Turkey, one must remember, several Kurds have been forced to flee rather than be jailed/tortured for conscientiously objecting, or forced to join an army that has been involved in the genocidal destruction of over 3,000 Kurdish villages in the south-east, the deaths of



thousands and the forcible displacement of over three million Kurds since the early 1990's alone...government policy is now set to possibly target and deport/criminalise up to 6,000 'bogus' Kurdish asylum seekers in this way, after an appeal in Britain's High Court failed to reverse this policy." (p12)

for those who somehow manage to live here there is the policy of dispersal. In Glasgow alone:

"There have been more than 70 racist attacks in the Sighthill area since refugees began arriving on the estate, more than a year ago, often under cover of darkness. Refugees have complained of being spat at and verbally abused ... Many of them have remained holed up in their flats, too frightened to venture out". In Robina Qureshi's opinion: "The government must have known that bringing empty council houses into use for its targeted "asylum seekers would result in mass concentration of asylum seekers and fuel racial tensions in already deprived council estates". (p14)

Investigative reporters have observed that NATO and the EU have (through the Schengen agreement and the expansion of 'Europol') developed ideological agendas which seek the criminalisation of "Turkish' Kurdish asylum seekers and refugee communities which they perceived to be 'pro-Kurdish' and/or 'pro-PKK' in orientation. According to the lawyer Gareth Peirce, "the British and Turkish governments, under the rubric of 'suppression of terrorism', have managed to criminalise the Kurdish (refugee) community of Great Britain. Without engaging the legitimacy of a Kurdish struggle for national rights, the British police has deliberately worked to cast doubt on every Kurd in the UK as terrorist suspects". (p15)

Fernandes' report notes that the only potential source of terrorism in Britain identified by name alongside the IRA in (ex-MI5 head) Stella Rimington's maiden broadcast were 'the Kurds'.

"MI5 and police Special Branch are making a considerable investment in portraying Kurds in Britain as terrorists" and criminals. "With such expenditure of resources, they are likely to be looking for results, if only to maintain their credibility and position within the increasingly competitive world of the British security



and intelligence services." (p18)

That such results are accomplished by provocation and frame-ups should come as no surprise—the report has details on several framing, incitements and intimidation incidents—but if our society refuses to distinguish between the guilty and not guilty we are all in danger.

British intelligence information about émigré political activities is also exchanged with the Turkish State. According to Tony Bunyan, the editor of Statewatch, MI5 seem to be doing the job of the murderous Turkish Secret Police:

"...they will come to public meetings of the group...They will take down the numbers of the cars which are outside the building, a technique which again goes way back and was widely used in the days of the Campaign



for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in this country. They will try and infiltrate the group and get a feel for the group and...they will often use inducements. They say: 'We will give you the right to stay in this country. We will get you a passport, if you give us information, if you will inform on your group'. These are well-tried (targeting) techniques from their history. They will produce assessments of the threat posed by the groups. They will associate groups with terrorists—all refugees equal criminals, equal terrorists'...Of course, they have a long history of working with their counterparts, with their so-called friendly allies in NATO, which has included the CIA, and (with) Mossad and no doubt Turkish intelligence. There is a long history of collusion with these foreign intelligence agencies".(p17)

The report distressingly suggests that police agents and the Special Branch PKK Desk were allegedly involved in:

"making deals with actual criminals; hit-men who are subcontracted to carry out physical assaults and intimidation of the ('pro-Kurdish' refugee) community. Outside London, the situation is worse. Through phone tapping and informants, police are tipped off about any



All images:
Doug Aubrey
except far
right:
Unknown



(public community/refugee centre) event taking place: in one case prior to a (public Kurdish) community centre event in Scotland”—which was taking place legally—“police were waiting outside to arrest Kurds from the local community arriving to attend. Those travelling from London”—again, perfectly legally—“to address the meeting, were stopped six times en route by police controls. Another witness elsewhere revealed the gun he was given by police to ‘shoot up’ visiting Kurdish (human rights) speakers...Shop keepers have told us how they’re being pressured and threatened to act as police informants. In return for information, they’re being bribed with money or offered more secure legal/asylum status and protection.” (p21)

A lot of the work here has gone to a booming private sector, some of whom even offer extra-judicial killings as a service. The report also mentions the UK based ‘consultancy group’, Aims Ltd (which I believe has some connection to the old far-right Aims of Industry organisation) which through its close links to British Intelligence and the SAS:

“...also happens to be the organisation which was exposed as having “plotted to assassinate Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the...PKK group” and “offered to arrange to irradiate Kurdish rebels held by the Turks in northern Iraq. The company told Turkish authorities that after the Kurds were released, the radiation would make it possible to track” and target “their movements and follow them to their bases. It added that the prisoners could fall ill from radiation poisoning within 21 days”. It was also “one of two British firms which provided military equipment and training facilities to members of the Turkish special forces who captured Ocalan”.

How did they get access to radioactive material? No action is being taken against this company—why is this? It would seem that if you have the right contacts you can not openly plot murder in the UK but make money out of it. Somehow or other that is not terrorism.

The implications of the Terrorism Act 2000 were still unfolding as the report was being written, but it notes that organisations such as the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism are warning that:

“the Act’s provisions are drawn so widely as to give police and prosecutors freedom to arrest most people who are involved in any way in refugee communities’ activities or in solidarity work”. Anyone in the UK writing an article or speaking in support of Kurdish self-determination could be construed as supporting a proscribed organisation. A meeting in any public venue which is “in support of asylum rights (but) which is addressed by a member of one of the organisations” which has been proscribed (e.g. The PKK) “could land the organisers in prison...” (p31)

How can democratic opposition be said to exist here? With the recent World Trade Centre bombings and Tony Blair’s increased commitment to assist the US government in its war’ against ‘global terrorism’—and the enactment of ever more intrusive ‘fast-tracked’ anti-terrorism laws—it seems even more likely that Kurdish refugee—and other—communities in the UK will feel the unaccountable wrath of Europol, MI5 and Special Branch. These organisations are clearly (as the

report argues) being increasingly ‘tasked’ to ‘target’ and obtain quick populist results against proscribed ‘global terrorist’ organisations.

The situation in Germany is in some ways more advanced in the criminalisation of Kurdish Asylum Seekers and Refugee Communities. Here mainstream politicians adopted the rhetoric of the far-right and incited an atmosphere of racial hatred. A special investigator for the European Parliament’s Commission of Inquiry on Racism and Xenophobia states that it legitimised their views and gave neo-Nazis the green light to step up their attacks:

“Eager to instrumentalise the asylum question, the government of Helmut Kohl was deeply implicated in the neo-fascist resurgence that occurred in Germany...Gunter Grass went so far as to liken members of Kohl’s cabinet to ‘white collar skinheads’ who were even more dangerous than the ultra-right-wing street gangs. ‘They are nicely dressed with beautiful hair. They speak well. But they think in the same way as the young kids who shave their heads and carry swastikas and demonstrate...”

We can compare this with the situation now in the UK and make some predictions of a likely future. We also saw a similar picture of active recruitment among the Italian police of far-right activists in Genoa and their use—dressed as police—against peaceful demonstrators.

The criminalisation and targeting is also a result of Turkish State’s ‘Psychological Warfare Operations’, which Fernandes has written about in Variant and elsewhere. In Germany members of the Turkish Secret Service (MIT) were caught completely out of control and behind arson attacks against Turkish-owned businesses in Germany. The social chaos and destruction that is the cost of this collusion and importation of Turkey’s dirty war is having an increasingly destabilising effect on UK society—it has destroyed civil society and freedom in Turkey.

“According to determinations made by Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), an MIT employee working in Turkey’s Consulate General in Stuttgart stored a large quantity of gasoline in 20-litre containers, despite the fact that his vehicle had a diesel engine. It is stated that this gasoline was utilized in attacks against Turkish businesses. MIT then sought to “unfairly target, criminalise and “blame the PKK” and its Kurdish refugee supporters in Germany “for these arson attacks in order to tarnish the public image of the Kurds. German intelligence officials (have) thus arrived at the conclusion that ‘Turkey was doing all in its power to ensure that Germany would perceive the PKK as an enemy of the state’” and act accordingly to target/criminalise/deport its refugee ‘supporters’ within the country.”

Fernandes’ report confirms that there has been extensive targeting and criminalisation of Kurdish asylum seekers and refugee communities in the UK and Germany over the past two decades—all of which—deserves to be revealed, morally damned and opposed.

