

Robert Kilroy-Silk writes on...Asylum-Seekers - Peterborough Under Stress

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Last week, a leaked Home Office memo painted a horrendous picture of the enormous strain that this government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the country is putting on towns like Peterborough in Cambridgeshire. The local council says that there are 800 refugees in the city and another 4,000 immigrant workers.

The Home Office admit that the influx has brought "a dramatic change in the atmosphere/tensions in the culture of the city that will threaten the harmony and racial accord in the city if action is not taken. This is manifesting itself in an increase in lawlessness, an increase in chronic health issues, an increase in disruption to education and an indigenous population beginning to resent the newcomers". The Cabinet Office admit that local service providers "are no longer able to cope with demand".

This is not acceptable. It is not right. It is not fair - not on the immigrants nor the local people. No government has the right to inflict this kind of mayhem and disruption on an unsuspecting community. The people of Peterborough - and other towns in a similar position, of which there are many - were not asked if they were prepared to have their city irreparably altered and their quality of life, and the prospects of their children, destroyed.

There was no discussion, no debate. No-one carried out a referendum or called for a vote. They were not even informed of the dramatic way in which their lives were to be damaged.

Like the rest of the country, they were lied to. They were told that the numbers dispersed would be small. They were told they would not be noticed. They were told they would integrate. They were told that there would be proper preparation and additional resources. They were told a pack of lies.

They were, of course, told all this by the likes of the Blairs who never have to suffer the nasty consequences of the policies they happily impose upon others. If their local school is overcrowded or inadequate, then people like Blair and Diane Abbott and Harriett Harman move their kids elsewhere or pay for extra tuition.

If the NHS is under pressure then, like former Labour Minister Barbara Castle they go private - whilst telling everyone else is that it is immoral.

Why can't the government be honest about what it is doing to the country? Why is the memo secret? Why can't we discuss it publicly? Afraid of the truth, are they? You bet they are.

Just as they refuse to discuss the way they are destroying Peterborough, so they also hide how many asylum seekers are in prison. In 2001, David Blunkett told the Labour Conference that the imprisonment of asylum seekers “was a scandal which should never have occurred”.

So why are there hundreds of them - including children - still in jail today? Why have some of them been behind bars for over 2 years? This is, indeed, a scandal, and an expensive one we all pay for.

Those seeking asylum should be dealt with quickly, within a few weeks. The genuine ones should be welcomed and well cared for, and the rest, the majority, sent packing, for their own good and, most important, for the people of places like Peterborough.