

Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

WORKING WITH REFUGEES
AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

A tougher regime for asylum seekers?

■ As we go to press, the much criticised voucher system is under review, with a consultation document from the Government due in autumn. Amongst others, welcome changes are expected in relation to the rights of asylum seekers to find paid or voluntary work in their first six months of residence. However, the promise of a 'tougher' regime for failed asylum seekers is worrying. The experience of many asylum seekers is of a perfunctory and often hostile asylum process. Consequently, the notion of a 'failed' asylum seeker is a politically charged one; and plans to increase detention and forcible removal should be of serious concern to all of us.

However, what the review does show is that the Government is not immune to active pressure. As more people get involved with the asylum issue, asylum seekers continue to organise their own resistance, as recent hunger strikes at Liverpool (Walton), Haslar and Lindholme detention centres/prisons show. Solidarity is what asylum campaigning is all about – solidarity with these and other actions; and everyday solidarity with people who are trying to get their lives together, often against the backdrop of threatened deportation.

Meanwhile, the tragic murder of Firsat Yildiz in Sighthill in Glasgow raises a number of issues, not least that of how asylum seekers are supported within economically stretched communities and how those communities are supported in accommodating asylum seekers. In

Sighthill, it seems little was done to pre-empt the resentment of local residents who have coped for years with inadequate housing when they saw unoccupied flats being made ready for newcomers. Those of us active in the asylum rights 'movement' need to be sensitive to the fact that the poverty and conflict that causes people to seek asylum, though much worse in their country of origin, can also be found closer to home. We welcome the recent joint demonstration by Sighthill residents – refugees and non-refugees alike – for better conditions for all.

Of course, there are those who will use Sighthill to stoke the fires of moral panic. Some argue that their rhetoric is designed to stop folks recognising what they have in common. They may be right.

Campaign Contacts

Sighthill, racism and asylum seekers in Glasgow

Positive Action in Housing
www.paih.org.uk, Glasgow Asylum
Rights Campaign, 146 Holland St Glasgow
G2 4NG

Liverpool Hungerstrikers and other campaigns

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation
Campaigns (North West), 110 Hamstead
Rd Birmingham B20 2QS
ncadc@ncadc.org.uk
Greg Dropkin, Merseyside Against
Detention. gregd@gn.apc.org

The Alpdogan family



MUST stay

Mahmut and Zeyneb Alpdogan and their children, a Kurdish family from Northern Kurdistan in Turkey, have been living in Nottingham since December 2000. Between 1981 and 1996, the Turkish military frequently came to the family's village, arresting and beating up villagers. Mahmut was detained twice and badly beaten. In December 1996, soldiers came to arrest him on the basis of a statement made by a member of a Kurdish nationalist organisation that he had stayed one night at the Alpdogan house. Mahmut was not at home and they detained his wife for 3 days at the local barracks. It was at this point that the family decided to flee Turkey.

They first went to Germany. Their application for asylum was refused and three years later they lost their appeal and were told that they would be returned to Turkey. They then fled to England to seek asylum here. They spent a few months in London before coming to Nottingham as part of the Home Office dispersal programme. Mr. Alpdogan is not in good health and is receiving treatment here. The children have settled well in school and have made friends.

The family's application for asylum was refused but they were given a further 3 months to make their case after an intervention by John Heppell MP. Their second interview was due to take place on August 18th at Dover but

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but in the week prior to this date they received a letter telling them to present themselves at Stansted Airport for deportation to Germany on August 21st. An application for judicial review has now been launched by their solicitor so the deportation order has been stayed until their case goes to the High Court. The letters below were sent by the two younger children to John Heppell in early July.

Dear Mr. Heppell

My name is Tarik Alpdogan. My family and I are refugees. I have missed my brother and family in Turkey. I have not seen them for four years.

When I was seven years old I was sent to the city by my father. The village I lived in was not safe for me. The village was a Kurdish village but it was being attacked by gunmen and Turkish paramilitary. It was forbidden to speak or write Kurdish. I was alone in the city and missed my family. After two years of fighting my family's village was destroyed. We had to go to Germany to save our lives. We left Turkey illegally but we did not have enough money to take my twelve year old brother. It broke my mother and father's heart to leave their son. We have not seen him since we left. We spent three years in Germany. It was difficult to learn German but I tried hard and became good at German. We then found that we were to be deported to Turkey. We again had to leave and hoped we would be safe in England.

I have spent time in many schools in Turkey, Germany and now in England. This is very hard for me although I am happy in my schools and think I will do well.

Now the British government will send me back to Germany. The German Government will send me back to Turkey. This frightens me. I am scared. I know I would never see my family again. Sometimes I don't care about me. I know I am strong and healthy. I worry about my dad. He is not strong and when he was in jail he could not see properly.

Please help me. I can not go to Germany. I watched a programme about Turkey. It showed a Turkish prison. There were children who were only twelve years old in the prison. The children in the prison are beaten by the guards and scared. I saw a child kicked in the eyes and blinded. I think this will happen to me if I go back to Turkey. My mum tried to stop me seeing the programme.

I hope you will help us. I like England. I am safe and better here. Can you help us? Please, please, please don't send us back to Germany.

Yours

Tarik Alpdogan

(To writing the letter a teacher help me)

My name is Fidan. I am a girl and I am ten years old..

When I was seven years old I left Turkey. I can remember these things. I can remember the sound of the guns and my mum covering my ears. Then the village was crashed and the soldiers took my mum. I remember her saying "I want my girl with me". They were hitting her and pulling her hair. They took her away. Yesterday I was watching a programme about Turkey and I was scared and crying. I could not sleep. I had to sleep with my mum and dad.

When we go back to Turkey I think the same thing will happen to my mum and dad. On the film I saw how they were hitting the children. They were not with mums and dads. I think it will happen the same with me and my brother.

Please please don't send me to Germany. When we go back to Germany they will send us to Turkey. When I was living in Turkey I could not see my big brother and his name is Ali. I have not seen him for four years.

Love from
Fidan

Since these letters were written, Ali has now joined his family in Nottingham and has made a separate application for asylum.

The Alpdogan family



MUST stay

A campaign is being launched to prevent the deportation of the Alpdogan family.

If you would like to be involved or to receive further information, telephone Myra on 9603355, or Rob on 0794 674844.

Letters of protest should be sent to: Lord Rooker, Minister for Citizenship and immigration, The Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT.

You will need to mention the family's Home Office reference number in your letter which is A1078481. It would be extremely helpful if you could send a copy of your letter to:

The Alpdogan Family Campaign, c/o NNRF, 67 Lower Parliament Street, Nottingham, NG1 3BB. Donations to the campaign will be extremely welcome since we will need to print leaflets and petitions and fund other campaign expenses. Please make cheques payable to *Refugee Campaign Group*.

Please Act quickly as the situation is becoming urgent

NNRF Annual General Meeting- July 7th, 2001

The AGM was held at the YMCA and attended by 28 individual members and representatives of organisations. The meeting began in the traditional way with reports from the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Forum. They outlined a busy formative year, during which the Forum has grown to over 100 members and raised a substantial amount of money through subscriptions, donations and grants. The Chair outlined progress to date on securing a building for a drop-in centre, and other members of the management committee reported on the practical support extended to Notts asylum seekers and the ways in which asylum seekers themselves are meeting together and identifying their needs. The activities of the NNRF are documented in the Annual Report 2000-2001, copies of which are still available from the Secretary, Linda East.

The formal part of the meeting concluded with the election of officers and members of the management committee. Mike Scott, Bob Crane and Linda East were re-elected as Chair, Treasurer and Secretary respectively. The following members of the Forum were elected to the management committee: Nawzad Awchi; Sam Azad; Patsy Brand; Jeff Cohen; Gary Freeman; Pete Loewenstein; Rajeev Nath; Rob Peutrell; Debbie Ross; Patricia Stoa and Myra Woolfson. Barrie Brazier (Nottingham and District

Racial Equality Council), Bea Tobolewska (Nottingham City Arts) and Krista Blair have been co-opted onto the management committee and Fatma Kayhan has agreed to join as a further representative of Notts refugee communities.

The second half of the meeting was spent in three workshops addressing issues around 1) campaigning, 2) priorities for the NNRF in the coming year and 3) volunteering to work with asylum seekers. Feedback from the three groups showed that valuable discussion had taken place and members were better informed on the issues that concerned them. Before leaving, those attending the AGM were asked to sign up if they wished to become more active in volunteering with the NNRF and to identify any particular skills or resources they could bring to the Forum. It was noted that it has been difficult to identify a role for volunteers in the first year of the NNRF, but that opportunities will expand rapidly once the drop-in centre is open and the co-ordinator appointed.

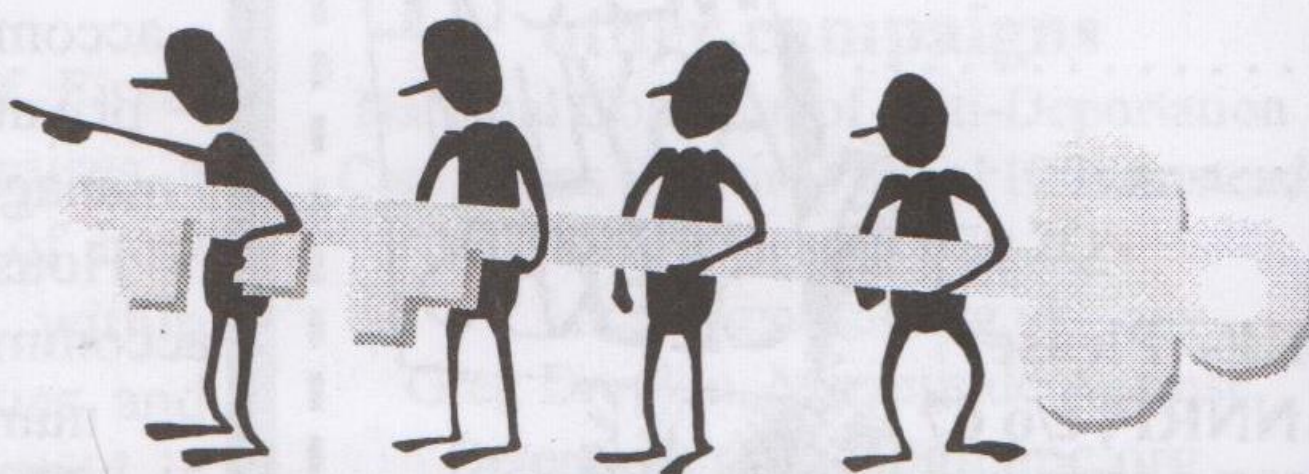
Linda East
Secretary, NNRF



KURDISH DANCERS IN THE MARKET SQUARE DURING REFUGEE WEEK

New Premises

NNRF has now signed the lease on a building, which will be familiar to many readers of this newsletter – 118 Mansfield Road. The City Council have given it a bit of a makeover since it was the community resource centre but it still needs a lick of paint so we don't yet have a moving in date. We will mail all members when we do. A half-time worker has just been appointed. His role will include recruiting and supporting volunteers and helping to manage the building. So there should be lots of changes in the near future and more opportunities to get involved.



Karnival 2000

We have been awarded a grant of £500 by the University of Nottingham Karnival 2000 appeal for which we are very grateful. The money is to organise a big social and cultural event which we hope will bring together refugees from many of the different countries who are now living in Nottingham (estimates are that this is now 40 countries) to enjoy an evening of international music and dance.

Harassment

A number of refugees have experienced harassment from the employees of one of the private firms contracted by the Home Office to provide housing for dispersed asylum seekers. At the time of writing, two of the employees have been arrested by the police and released on bail pending further enquiries.

Summer events

Nottingham celebrated Refugee Week with music and dancing in the Market Square on 24th June, led by Kurdish musician Kirwan Nanakali.

The **Street Music Festival** was held over the same weekend and used the opportunity to support Nottingham refugees both by raising money for NNRF and by featuring Kurdish music and dance. NNRF is grateful for all their support.

Refugee Cafes in Nottingham, a church-supported group, organised a series of picnics and English practice classes during August.

The Tuesday Refugee Club, which is a self-organised group, supported by members of NNRF, had a picnic in Wollaton Park on Bank Holiday Saturday. About 40 families attended, including many families with children



broadway

Over the past year Broadway Cinema has shown a number of films from Iran directed by leading Iranian filmmakers such as *Ranghe Khoda* (The Colour of Paradise) by Majid Majidi, and *Bad Ma Ra Khahad Bord* (The Wind will Carry us) by Abbas Kiarostami. Some films, such as *Takhte Siah* (Blackboards) and *The Last Resort* (a UK film by Paul Pavlikowsky) have concerned themselves with refugees and the issue of asylum seekers directly. Recently we participated in the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, and showed a number of films about the Human Rights situation in Israel, Turkey, South Africa, East Timor and Afghanistan. Naturally, many refugees want to see films about their own country and in their own language, and we at

Broadway have noticed a great deal of interest from Nottingham refugees, particularly in Iranian cinema. Although we keep ticket prices as low as we possibly can for refugees, because of the voucher situation and the fact that they actually have no money, great efforts have to be made within the community for refugees to be able to see these films. Perhaps if people are offering gift vouchers to refugees they



Admit Four

could also send in gift vouchers from Broadway? On our part, we would ensure that for a £6 gift voucher 4 refugees could get into the cinema. We could also put a poster up at Broadway to encourage people to buy vouchers and send them to NNRF. Is this an idea people would be interested in supporting?

Caroline Hennigan

Allotments, chess & backgammon



Yes it's an interesting idea to go down to your allotment to play chess, but why not? Easier than weeding.

Better still give us all your unwanted (good condition) gardening equipment so that we can set up more allotments for refugees. The existing allotment has a wonderful variety of fruit and veg – tomatoes, broccoli, green beans, spinach, blackberries and more. There are now others interested in allotmenting.

We could also use more chess and backgammon sets so please let us know if you have any going spare. All offers to the NNRF secretary Linda at 958 6515 or ring Myra on 9603355.



Organisations supporting NNRF include:- Nottingham and District Racial Equality Council; **Refugee Action**; Refugee Housing Association; **Nottingham City Council**; Student Action for Refugees; **Diocese of Southwell Social Responsibility Group**; Notts County Unison; **Nottingham City Unison**; East Midlands Socialist Party; **Lady Bay Baptist Church**; Jewish Socialists' Group; **Notts Socialist Alliance**; Oxfam; **Nottingham Amnesty International**; Medical Foundation (Nottm)

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please tick as appropriate

☐ I would like to become a member of NNRF.

(Membership is £5 waged and free for those who are unwaged/low waged.)

☐ I do not wish to become a member at present but would like to be kept informed. Please put my name on your mailing list.

☐ Please send me information about how I can help refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham.

☐ I would like to make a donation to NNRF and enclose a cheque for £ _____

NAME

ADDRESS

Postcode

Tel No

Cheques should be made payable to: NNRF- Please return this form to: Linda East, Secretary, NNRF, c/o 67 Lower Parliament Street, Nottingham NG1 3BB



Sport and Housing

Nottingham City Council

is keen to ensure that refugees in Nottingham can have access to sports facilities. A meeting was held early in the summer to discuss how this might be

achieved but there may be some delay in making progress on this issue. This is because those in the City concerned

with refugees have been extremely busy as a result of the recent housing contract with the Home

Office. The City Council is now responsible for

providing a number of housing units for refugees.

(Prior to this, nearly all accommodation was provided by the private sector.) The properties are managed on its behalf by the Refugee Housing Association. Most of this accommodation is for families. The total number of refugees dispersed to Nottingham is now about 950.

