

## **VICTORY for Yarl's Wood women**

### **Collective resistance stops mass deportation to Nigeria**

#### **Movement inside & outside detention strikes blow to charter flight policy**

- **Shut down detention centres! End charter flights! Stop immigration raids & deportation! Amnesty Now for immigrants & asylum seekers!**
- **Stop Scapegoating Immigrants – Unite the struggle against Government-imposed austerity & poverty with the fight for Immigrant Rights**
- **Open the Borders! Equal citizenship rights for all who live, work & study in Britain**
- **Build the Independent, Integrated, Mass Civil & Immigrant Rights Movement TO WIN**

Following well co-ordinated mass resistance the latest mass deportation charter flight to Nigeria / Ghana (Tuesday 24/11/15) had to leave without the great majority of the 30 plus women in Yarl's Wood detention centre who were scheduled to be on it. Reports from Lagos say there were only 4 Nigerian women on the plane. This is a massive victory for the strategy and method of the Movement for Justice, building an organised, united movement of action inside and outside detention. It was achieved because the Yarl's Wood MFJ group planned and prepared for this day, they got together, stayed united, and successfully disrupted the deportation process.

This victory represents a big advance in the organisation, consciousness and determination of the movement. The series of *Surround Yarl's Wood* demonstrations, led on the inside and outside by the Movement for Justice, have been vital to that advance. Each action is a triumph of creative organisation and preparation in defiance of their jailers and breaking business-as-usual. Detainees displaying their demands on hand-written placards, waving improvised flags through windows, throwing toilet paper streamers and ignoring guards' threats in order to join the protests are all asserting their voice and collective power. Everyone inside and outside leaves the demonstrations with more than when they came – more confidence that the oppressed can win, more unity and power, and more fire.

Our optimism has a solid basis: our oppressors' authority relies on our submission to the rules they set for us and on their ability to divide us. When conscious of the power of the oppressed standing together, we can form a coherent strategy to mobilise and wield that power. That optimism was further consolidated by the most recent and largest yet demonstration at Yarl's Wood on 7<sup>th</sup> November. From there the MFJ could extend the fight against the Government's racist, anti-immigrant, divide-and-rule policies by organising against the inhuman policy of mass deportation.

#### **Mass deportation – an over-reaching policy**

Mass deportations by secret, late night charter flights to Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica, Pakistan etc. are not only a way to speed up and increase the number of deportations; they are a chilling 'terror' tactic, a display of naked power by the state, of its cynical readiness to divide families and communities, trample on human rights and knowingly deport people to their deaths. The Government wants to increase the use of charter flights to intensify the 'hostile environment' it is creating for immigrants, refugees and international students. That is the policy outlined in the Immigration Bill now going through Parliament.

This is an over-reaching policy that creates many more enemies for the Government; it can be defeated if we use that weakness and turn it against the Government. If the Government wants to step up mass deportation it will have to round up increasing numbers of people who have lived and worked in Britain for many years or for decades, often men and women who have grown up here. That policy is already dividing families and communities, and already creating resistance. Not a week goes by without an angry attack on the hated Immigration Enforcement vans.

In the same way, the Government's racist arrogance is creating conflicts with the countries where it plans to send the people it deports. These nations are former colonies of Britain; they are economically dominated by western imperialist powers and beset by growing social, political and military problems that have arisen because of that unequal relationship. The governments of Iraq and Afghanistan, two countries that have been wrecked by western imperialist wars, have effectively stopped accepting deportees. In Nigeria there has been a sharp backlash against Britain's recent demand for it to co-operate with more charter flights in order to **deport 29000 Nigerians**. These demands and that outrageous figure have created a backlash in Nigeria as well as anger in Britain's Nigerian community. They were condemned by the Nigerian parliament and even the normally compliant Nigerian embassy in London has been forced to express its opposition.

## Stopping mass deportation from Yarl's Wood

From inside Yarl's Wood and on the outside the Movement for Justice made this an international fight to demand that Nigeria stop the charter flight. The Nigerian women in Yarl's Wood drew up a dossier of their stories for public circulation – the stories of women, from their '20s to their '60s, who had spent most of their lives in Britain, who had partners and children here, who were carers for chronically ill relatives, had major health problems themselves, or were victims of terrible abuse and had no family they could go back to. They issued a powerful public statement, ***Nigeria, where is your backbone? Where is your pride? Where is your freedom?*** They declared that, "With these flights, the UK government is able to continue their racist and continuous attacks on Nigerians, Ghanaians and other countries that are scheduled on the flight, safe in the knowledge that the Nigerian government is in their pocket;" they asked, "Nigeria.... Where was your patriotism when people who do not know Nigeria and people with mental health issues were dumped in Nigeria to fend for themselves in a foreign country?" and concluded with the demand "Stop colluding with the racist attacks of the British government, Fight for Nigeria – Fight for our freedom."

The women kept up a sustained phone and fax bombardment of the Nigerian High Commission (embassy) and mobilised their families and friends to do the same. Movement for Justice members held two demonstrations at the increasingly nervous and defensive High Commission, and leafleted in Peckham, home to one of Britain's largest Nigerian communities, and at Nigerian churches in east London. We have now seen an increase in Nigerian media coverage of the charter flight and the opposition to it both here and in Nigeria.

The High Commission held a meeting with Home Office officials to discuss the situation. The outcome was not made public, but by 24<sup>th</sup> November a good number of women had their deportations cancelled. The majority (20+) of those who still had tickets occupied a room together, with the support and co-operation of Movement for Justice women from various countries. They refused to leave, no-one responded to calls to go to 'Legal' (the immigration office in Yarl's Wood) or go to Reception to be ready for transport to the airport. They gave interviews to the media and resisted all threats and appeals, including an attempt to 'negotiate' by the pastor brought in by the centre managers.

Soon after 8pm the Tascor coach had to leave for the airport almost empty. Women detainees saw from their windows only saw 6 women taken to the coach, including an elderly Ghanaian and a Nigerian woman well-known to have serious mental health problems. With more people acting on our perspective we can save more.

## Building the movement – winning the future

There will be another Nigeria charter flight in the next couple of months. We must organise now to stop that flight, using the lessons from the fight that stopped the deportation of Yarl's Wood women. The fight must be expanded in three main directions: in the community, in Nigeria, and across all detention centres. There must be wider action in and by the Nigerian and Ghanaian communities (the charter flights usually go on to Ghana) with street and campus rallies, speaking at churches and Mosques, demonstrations at the embassies, community organisations writing to the High Commissioners etc. The more extensive that movement becomes the easier it will be to link with and step up the opposition in Nigeria to these charter flights, and open up opportunities to take the lessons of Yarl's Wood into the men's detention centres. As we become effective the struggle will be taken up by Pakistani, Jamaican and other detainees threatened with charter flights, and by their communities.

Our movement is growing, spreading and attracting new forces because it offers real hope for change and progress – for immigrants, refugees and detainees, and for growing numbers of youth who recognise that this is a fight for their future and for the future of oppressed and exploited people of all races who live, work and study in Britain. That is why we should be confident that we can make the mass deportation policy unworkable, just as the movement has made the Detained Fast Track policy unworkable in asylum cases and compelled the Government to abandon it and to halt the expansion of detention.

Our movement is the most powerful challenge to the racist, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim scapegoating that the Government and the rich & powerful instinctively grasp as their most important weapon in times of crisis. The Government is wielding that weapon with redoubled force in its drive for another imperialist war in the Middle East. Contrary to the opinion of liberal commentators and politicians including Labour, the racism of the rich and powerful and those who control the state is far more profound than the racism of the poor and working class, because for them it is rooted in and serves their material interests. For the rest of us, we can only build a movement to win the fight against austerity, poverty and war by rejecting racist divide-and-rule and bigotry in our movement. We can be confident that millions in the British black and Asian communities and among the poor, working class and struggling middle class of all races will recognise, respect and be inspired by a serious fight against our common enemy and its savage attacks on the hopes that we all share for a better, fairer and more secure future and for greater equality and more freedom.

**Building our movement nationally and internationally we can win a future of equality, integration, freedom of movement and equal citizenship FOR ALL.**

**JOIN THE MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE**