



LUDICROUS RESPONSE: The Loughshore Hotel in Carrickfergus where a small group of asylum seekers are being housed PICTURE: Mal McCann

Refugees are at the mercy of the Home Office's 'hostile environment'

WHEN the end-times arrive, former MEP Nigel Farage will still be hovering around the English Channel to see if he can spot any refugees.

An entire political career built on being not too keen on foreigners has landed him lucrative radio presenting slots and now a job on GB News - the 'I can't believe it's not Fox News' channel for people who don't like American accents.

True to form, Mr Farage did a live report on migrant crossings in the Channel where he speculated that a dinghy carrying a group of refugees was "stolen" and if the calm weather changed "that'd be the end of that lot".

Fed on a diet of 'they're taking our jobs', it's no wonder that news of a very small number of refugees being housed in a hotel in Carrickfergus drew a ludicrous response from the same old reliables.

Former Belfast councillor Jolene Bunting, previously aligned to far-right group Britain First, recorded herself ringing up the Loughshore Hotel to ask why she could not book a room then accosted refugees outside the building.

"After speaking to them it's quite easy to tell it's a migrant situation, it's not a refugee situation," she claimed, based on no evidence whatsoever.

Did the man being filmed know that his face would be plastered over Twitter? Did he even know why he was being quizzed by Ms Bunting?

A self-professed 'Conservative-Christian', Ms Bunting showed no signs of basic empathy, never mind loving thy neighbour as thyself.

Her unhelpful contribution was to be expected, but comments made by DUP councillor Marc Collins were particularly worrying.

As a member of a mainstream party, he should have been aware that his remarks would carry some weight.

Claire
SIMPSON



"I can already see the claims of racism that are going to come my way but that's not what this is about at all," he said.

So why say anything? Mr Collins's suggestion that somehow a group of around 30 refugees were taking up valuable bed-space that could be used by homeless veterans was laughable.

Homelessness is a major issue but his logic was pure whataboutery.

Helping one vulnerable group does not mean we can't help another.

By that reasoning there would be no money for schools because the entire public budget should go towards the NHS.

If Mr Collins did have genuine concerns he could have waited for a response from the Home Office before writing a statement and posting it on Facebook.

He queried why the asylum seekers were

being temporarily housed in Carrickfergus, if they had received Covid vaccinations, and why working-class families could not "be provided with their food and drink free?"

The answer to the last question is that many working-class families have had to rely on food banks, long before the pandemic, due to Conservative austerity policies - nothing, in fact, to do with migrants.

All Mr Collins and Ms Bunting have done is fuel conspiracy theories about migration.

In reality the Home Office has shown systemic hostility to migrants for a decade.

The 'hostile environment' policy, first announced under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2012, made it as difficult as possible for migrants to stay in the UK.

The policy was so stringent it led to the deportation of Windrush and other Commonwealth citizens, even though they had a guaranteed right to remain in the country.

In recent weeks, Holocaust survivor Irena Jendrycha, who moved to Britain as a young child, spoke of her fears of being deported after Brexit.

She said her draining experience of applying for settled status had left her feeling as if "any goodness was sucked out of me like a syringe".

No-one has done more to discourage migrants than this Conservative government.

Home secretary Priti Patel already wants offshore centres for asylum seekers and criminal charges for migrants "knowingly" arriving in the UK without permission.

She has even opened talks with Denmark over sharing a 'processing centre' in Rwanda for refugees.

Far from being housed in a "luxury" hotel, as Ms Bunting claimed, the few refugees at Loughshore are only at the start of a gruelling process which may, for some, end in deportation.

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ON THIS DAY

JULY 26 1971

Prelude to Internment?

THE hounding of Republicans and their families in yesterday's dawn raids by 1800 troops, backed up by large numbers of police, brought a wave of protest from all over NI last night. Just after 4 a.m. the Army swooped on houses and other premises in Belfast's Ardoyne, Falls, Finaghy, Ballymurphy, Whitehead, Markets and Stranmillis areas and in nine towns, including Armagh, Portadown and Lurgan. Last night Republican organisations and Civil Rights groups were arranging protest meetings in towns across the North against what was being regarded as obvious moves towards internment.

Mr John Hume of the SDLP said: 'We all agree on the need to end violence and death on the streets of NI. We disagree on the means to achieve that end. In our view the British Government has had only two courses open to it. One was outright repression, the other was a change in the system of government which, in our view, lies at the root of all our unrest and troubles. The Government had chosen repression - which might succeed temporarily but would not solve the problems in the long term. It might even result in a "mammoth reaction".'

Plea to Protestant Refugees

An appeal was made last night by Mr Paddy Devlin, MP for Falls, to Protestant mothers and children from Malt Street, off Grosvenor Road, who are now living in a children's youth centre in Nuffield Street to return to their homes. He told them that 'the good people of the district will do you no harm'. After claims that threats had been made against the Protestant families in the street by outsiders, a number of mothers and 38 children went to the youth centre while their menfolk remained.

Inquest into IRA Man's Death

A Belfast gun battle in which IRA lieutenant, William James Reid (32), labourer, Sheridan Street was killed was described at the City Coroner's Court yesterday.

In a statement, a soldier said he decided to stop a car carrying three men shortly after midnight on May 15. 'As I got near it I saw a man in the back seat lowering a rear window and a gun was poked out. Shots were fired and I returned more shots.'

EVEN at the time the dawn raids

on the homes of Republican suspects in July 1971 were seen as a dry-run for the forthcoming internment operation and would prove to be cataclysmic. Hume was right to fear a 'mammoth reaction' from such an initiative. Meanwhile Protestant as well as Catholic families in isolated areas were being driven from their homes as Belfast's sectarian faultlines were gradually redrawn.

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