

## **Britain's anti-immigrant shame**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

May 26, 2000, Friday, 0 South Pinellas Edition

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**Section:** EDITORIAL; EDITORIALS; Pg. 16A; EDITORIAL

**Length:** 347 words

### **Body**

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The United Kingdom today is a vibrant multiracial society much enriched by its immigrants. Yet despite the obvious success of a multicultural Britain, the opposition Conservative Party is retreating to its old xenophobia. Leader William Hague warns against "floods" of foreigners swamping "soft-touch" Britain. He wants refugees, mostly Kosovars and Romanian Gypsies, to be locked in "detention centers" while their claims are judged. Under the Conservative plan, these destitute people, fleeing civil war, persecution, even starvation, would be incarcerated like criminals and presumed to have "bogus" claims until they can prove otherwise. (U.S. immigration policy makes it hard for Americans to lecture the British.)

#### **REFUGEES**

While the Labor government condemns this "concentration camp" idea, it hasn't been much more compassionate than the Tories toward asylum seekers. Faced with a backlog of about 100,000 unprocessed applications for entry into the U.K., Home Secretary Jack Straw has promised to clamp down on mere "economic migrants" and "freeloaders." The anti-foreigner tone of both Labor and Tory politicians has led the United Nations to reprimand both sides for hateful, racist and generally unhelpful attitudes toward people who, even if they are fleeing poverty rather than ethnic cleansing, hardly stow away in the backs of refrigerator trucks or pay smugglers to get them places in airplane cargo holds just for the fun of it.

The doors are slamming in the faces of refugees all over Europe. The French Right still agitates for limits on the intake from France's former colonial possessions; the Austrian Freedom Party, now part of the government, wants mandatory jail terms for those who enter the country illegally. And in recent Italian regional elections, the right-wing party of the scandal-dogged former premier Silvio Berlusconi hooked up with the Fascists and won big on an **anti-immigrant** platform.

For many refugees, Britain, with its reputation as a liberal, tolerant, diverse nation, seemed a good place to go. Now they aren't so sure.

### **Classification**

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (90%); POLITICAL PARTIES (90%); REFUGEES (90%); JAIL SENTENCING (89%); RACE & ETHNICITY (78%); SMUGGLING (78%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); LIBERALISM (78%); POLITICS (78%); RACISM & XENOPHOBIA (78%); ETHNIC GROUPS (78%); ETHNIC CONFLICTS (77%); POLITICAL ASYLUM (77%); HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (76%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (76%); PUBLIC POLICY (75%); ELECTIONS (73%); UNITED NATIONS (72%); WAR & CONFLICT (71%); TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES (71%)

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**Company:** UNITED NATIONS (55%); UNITED NATIONS (55%)

**Organization:** UNITED NATIONS (55%); UNITED NATIONS (55%)

**Person:** JACK STRAW (58%); SILVIO BERLUSCONI (50%)

**Geographic:** UNITED KINGDOM (94%); FRANCE (90%); KOSOVO (79%); UNITED STATES (79%); EUROPE (79%); AUSTRIA (78%); ITALY (69%)

**Load-Date:** May 26, 2000

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