

MIGRATION AND THE FAR RIGHT: BRIEFING 1

Immigration has always been a focus for the far right, the recent and explicit targeting of people who are migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and the organisations that support them has rightly triggered concern, and has brought to the fore the needs of the migration and refugee sector to better understand the threat and how to respond.

That's why HOPE not hate charitable trust and Migration Exchange have developed the Response project, which aims to better equip the migration and refugee sector to understand the extent and nature of the threat posed by the far right, supporting them to apply that understanding through more appropriate responses in both the long and short term.

As part of this project, we will be sending these updates, to share what we are seeing through our monitoring and intel work, to offer you a clearer picture of the far-right threat around immigration and asylum.

RECENT ACTIVITY: A REVIEW OF ACTIVITY IN RECENT MONTHS

While the coronavirus outbreak put the brakes on much political activity, over the spring and summer we saw the British far-right last become animated by cross-channel migration. Increased arrivals of people crossing the channel in dinghies motivated these actors, not just because of their anti-migrant stance, but because the pandemic put the far right in a position where they found it difficult to

cut through the media noise with several of their existing campaigns. Fear-mongering around the tiny number of migrants crossing the channel illegally was primarily a method of regaining some form of political relevance.

Though not the first to draw attention to the issue, Nigel Farage was important in drawing attention to the topic when he travelled to Dover to film migrants on April 29th. As Britain's largest far-right figure on social media, this drew attention to the topic for the wider movement and mainstream media.

Since May 2020, a handful of far-right activists have spent large amounts of time filming the arrival of boats and busses and various locations used to house arriving migrants. Their videos, which have sometimes included chasing migrants with cameras, have quickly spread across far-right social media platforms.

Over the summer and into the autumn, the focus of these groups and individuals shifted primarily to Dover and towards accommodation for asylum seekers, with the army barracks in Welsh town Penally receiving attention, alongside hotels offering contingency accommodation. After some activists were bogged down in legal issues in November and December, their activities have resumed more recently, with the focus again on Dover and Penally from which videos are spread widely on far-right social media accounts.



The focus and mode of activism (filming and confronting migrants) has shown to be relatively effective. Videos get significant spread across social media platforms and a small number of new activists have become animated by the issue, specifically focusing on migrant arrivals despite having little previous engagement with far-right issues. These new activists include individuals like Nigel Marcham (aka Little Veteran) and Alan Leggett (aka Active Patriot UK) who are profiled below.

Existing far-right groups have also taken on the issue. Among them are Britain First, who had been active around the issue in 2019 when they planned to patrol the English Channel “to deter migrants” and revived their plans due to increased media attention on the issue. In-part because of issues with their boat, their activism instead focused on finding housing, mainly hotels, where activists travelled to film themselves as they confronted residents and staff. These videos were circulated on social media alongside with information on the location of the hotels which had mainly been gathered through tips from supporters.

It is important to note the division between different elements of the far-right here and the fractures between them. For example, Nigel Marcham (Little Veteran) said before a demonstration in Dover that he did not want anything to do with fascist groups like the National Front or Patriotic Alternative, nor Britain First. Nonetheless, these groups have made use of the content produced by the likes of Little Veteran and benefitted from his anti-migrant campaign, making use of it to promote themselves and a more explicitly racist politics by victimising white people, moving the focus from British citizens or Army Veterans.

Towards the end of 2020 the police began to clamp down more heavily on those far-right individuals engaged in anti-migrant activism. Both Marcham and Leggett have been arrested numerous times in recent months for a range of offenses. While waiting for court cases they were subject to bail conditions which severely limited their ability to continue their anti-migrant activism. However, as of January 2021 both have been found not guilty or had charges dropped on a number of cases meaning they are once again able to engage in their more confrontational activism free of bail conditions. That said, the police continue to watch them closely and Leggett was arrested once again in January at a hotel housing migrants and has again received restrictive bail conditions, this time reportedly including a ban from North Yorkshire. In the medium term we are likely to continue to see this cycle of far-right activists being arrested, bailed and facing charges for relatively low level public order offences which will limit and disrupt but not stop their activism.

UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT

The anti-migrant activists that primarily film migrant arrivals in Dover play an important role in the wider far-right landscape by presenting cross-channel migration as a clear and simple issue that has broad

support in both the more extreme and less extreme parts of the far right. Even though they might not openly collaborate with more extreme, fascist groups, their content is appreciated and exploited by these groups. They produce visual content that is easily shared and seem to prove their point that Britain is “overrun” by migrants. Their role is to help give the argument credibility and helps promote negative attitudes towards migrants.

A central element of the campaign is to highlight the perceived conflict between migration and care for (implicitly white) homeless veterans and elderly Britons. It aims to sow distrust towards both the government and progressives by asserting the idea that migrants are prioritised over people born in the UK. The focus on these vulnerable groups makes the argument more ‘palatable’ by justifying anti-migrant positions on the basis that one seeks justice.

This narrative has likely contributed to the increase in mainstream attention around channel crossings. Several large media outlets have covered the issue and it has gotten especially negative coverage from right wing press, but also the [BBC has profiled far-right anti-migrant activists](#) like Steve Laws and Alan Leggett (profiled below) at length, giving their views the legitimacy when they are quoted at length. The distance these actors have publicly placed between themselves and organised far-right and fascist groups has enabled them a mainstream platform. Online and offline activism are intertwined for far right activists, for example, filming offline activity such as confronting migrants in hotels produces material that can be shared on social media to garner support from online far-right communities. In many cases this is their primary motivation. But this should not understate that confronting migrants in hotels naturally is also a direct threat to those people. Similarly, online organising has built support for offline protests or campaigns, for example in Penally.

RESPONDING

Understanding the far right threat around these issues is critical for an effective response. While mainstream news, both local and national, have carried the subject of asylum accommodation and channel crossings into the mainstream and amplified the messaging of some far right actors, far right activity around these issues remains peripheral. Responding directly to, or confronting, far right actors on or offline often unintentionally gives them oxygen. A core intention of the majority of these actors is to provoke, with angry responses from progressives more likely to boost the image they are hoping to portray to far right communities, while sharing content, even if in outrage, can raise their profile and reach.

But this does not mean progressives have to sit in silence. Reporting content to social media companies can feel futile, but it can also be effective and ensure content is removed. Equipping people who are migrants and asylum seekers, and those who work to support them, with an awareness

of how these actors operate and their intentions can help to de-escalate situations.

Promoting positive stories is important, as is getting messaging right to help limit the spread of far right messaging into the mainstream. For example, suggesting that there is a conflict between the wellbeing of migrants and people already living in the UK may simply amplify and justify already existing feelings of unfairness. It may be better to instead focus on shared struggle.

PROFILES

NIGEL MARCHAM **(aka Little Veteran)**

Nigel Marcham has accrued just over 13,000 subscribers since starting his channel, he has become increasingly well known in far-right circles in recent months, spending long periods on the south coast living out of his car and making videos about arriving migrants. His newly acquired profile resulted in an invite to speak at a far-right demonstration in Nottingham, which saw an array of figures and organisations, including some extreme figures from the neo-nazi Blood and Honour scene, coming together to protest against a range of issues, including veteran's affairs, Muslim grooming gangs and illegal immigration.

Marcham was one of the principal organisers behind the demonstration in Dover in September.



ALAN LEGGET **(aka Active Patriot UK)**

One of the more notable activists is Alan Leggett (aka Active Patriot UK), who has quickly accrued over 50,000 YouTube subscribers due to his regular live streamed videos which have attracted thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, of viewers. Leggett has been active within the UK far right for several years, being one of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon's (AKA Tommy Robinson) most ardent supporters. In fact, much of his viewership comes via Lennon, who has taken to referring to him as "our man on the ground" and regularly promoting his videos.



STEVE LAWS

Laws is one of the most active of the people filming migrants in Dover. He has a Twitter account where he posts videos multiple times a week. The content is shared broadly in the far-right and often form the basis of other organisations propaganda. Laws has connections to the far-right party For Britain, for which he has been delivering leaflets.

Laws has also promoted and helped organise demonstrations in Dover.



- **To receive updates, you can sign up to the project mailing list here: <https://action.hopenothate.org.uk/page/s/sign-up-to-receive-updates-MEX>**
- **We've also created a form for sharing intel, so that we get a fuller picture of far right activity alongside our monitoring. You can submit anything you're coming across on or offline: <https://action.hopenothate.org.uk/page/s/response-project-intel-submission>**
- **And for anything more specific, or for any questions, please email: response@hopenothate.org.uk**