

## Asylum seekers' accommodation

### *It's time to End the scandal*

**Recent events have highlighted the grim reality of accommodation for asylum seekers in Ireland. People who have come here to escape oppression in other countries are forced to live in sub-standard conditions, and moved around from one end of the country to the other without being given a say in the matter.**

People who seek asylum are generally put into a system called 'direct provision'. They are housed in hostels which provide bed and board, and are given just €19.10 a week for themselves. The hostel owners are paid by the state for each resident, and can make a great deal of money out of the business. People often live in these hostels for years until their asylum application is processed.

Many of these hostels fall extremely far short of acceptable standards for people to live in. Accommodation is often cramped. Meals are very basic indeed, with little or no choice on offer. Health and fire safety regulations are sometimes breached. There have even been cases of deaths in unexplained circumstances. A committee of TDs and Senators recently examined asylum seeker hostels and concluded that some were unfit for human habitation.

These hostels are inspected by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice. But because this is the same body that awards contracts to the hostels, they are effectively being allowed to police themselves. When abuses occur so regularly, their methods of inspection are clearly very weak indeed. Independent groups concerned with asylum seekers' welfare are prevented from examining conditions, even when invited to do so by residents of hostels.

Recently, RIA attempted to force asylum seekers at Mosney in Co. Meath to move to a different hostel in Dublin. They had no more than a few days' notice, and were given absolutely no choice in the matter. Many of them have lived in Mosney for years, and are part of the local community. They had no desire to leave a centre where they were relatively happy for a hostel with worse conditions. If less accommodation is now needed for asylum seekers, then the bad hostels should be closed down rather than the better ones. After the asylum seekers refused to go along with this forcible transfer, RIA has backed down—at least for the time being.

**But the problem has not gone away. The system of accommodation for asylum seekers needs to be radically reformed. The following measures at least should be implemented without delay:**

- Hostels should no longer be inspected by RIA. A body entirely independent of the Department of Justice—along the lines of the Health Information and Quality Authority—should inspect them. Their inspections should be unannounced, with the power to impose immediate penalties on hostel owners who breach basic standards of decency.

- Asylum seekers in hostels should have a say in how they are run. Representatives chosen by residents—not hand-picked by hostel owners—should have a guaranteed involvement in managing hostels.
- Access for independent groups advocating the rights and welfare of asylum seekers should be facilitated when residents invite them to inspect hostels. Only hostel owners who have something to hide prevent them.
- No compulsory transfers. People who have suffered enough should never be subjected to being forcibly moved from places that have become their home. Only when people have agreed to move voluntarily should they be transferred to other hostels.

**The scandal of asylum seekers' accommodation is just one aspect of the unjust way that the Irish state treats people seeking refuge here. Instead of being welcomed and helped to rebuild their lives, people escaping from war, persecution and poverty are branded as criminals from the start, with the asylum process constantly looking for excuses to deport them rather than seeking to help. Anyone who wants to see an Ireland free of the scourge of racism should support the demands of asylum seekers for humane accom-odation and basic justice.**