

Dr Evan Harris MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir Christopher Meyer
Chairman
Press Complaints Commission
1 Salisbury Square
London EC4Y 8JB

27th December 2004

Please quote in future correspondence: EH/SL.ox.St John

Dear Sir Christopher,

Please find enclosed a cutting from the Internet of an item in the Bristol Evening Post of the 27th November 2004 where they state that "the Evening Post has been vocal as anyone about illegal immigrants, and failed asylum seekers who go to ground and scrounge a living off the rest of us".

I am concerned that asylum seekers are being elided with illegal immigrants in this way, and that they are accused of scrounging a living off the rest of us when in fact this would imply that both groups of people are on benefits (which - by law - they are not or are somehow beggars). I do not know if the newspaper can be asked to produce evidence that (all) failed asylum seekers are "scrounging a living off the rest of us".

Dr Evan Harris MP
Oxford West and Abingdon

Enc: Copy of cutting from the Bristol Evening Post of the 27th November 2004

Please send correspondence to:
Oxford West & Abingdon Liberal Democrats
Constituency Office: 27 Park End Street, Oxford OX1 1HU
Tel: 01865 245584/Fax: 01865 245589

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MOD100039409

----- Original Message -----

Sent: Sunday, November 28, 2004 12:20 PM

Subject: Update on Super Urgent Action - Lina and Miguel

Update on Super Urgent Action - Lina and Miguel

We have just received confirmation that Lina Castano and her son Miguel have NOT been deported and that they are in the process of being moved to Oakington Reception Centre. We will provide a fuller update tomorrow once we have spoken to her solicitor and have more information. Please keep the pressure on the Home Office in any ways that you can think of.

regards

Bristol branch

Bristol Evening Post article and comment

Lina Castano and Miguel Castano Bristol Evening Post 27 Nov 2004

DAWN RAID LEAVES MUM AND SON FACING RETURN TO COLOMBIA

BY SIMON PEEVERS S.PEEVERS

11:00 - 27 November 2004

A Mother and her seven-year-old child were taken from their Bristol home in a pre-dawn raid by immigration officials and are now at a detention centre waiting to be deported. Friends of the pair have organised a last-ditch campaign to stop them being sent back to their homeland, where they fear they could be murdered.

Seven police officers and an immigration officer went into the home of Colombian asylum seekers Lina Castano and her son Miguel without warning at 6am on Thursday.

They said they had a warrant to detain them under immigration rules, despite the Home Office having not made a final decision on their asylum application, which is still going through the system.

Lina was strip-searched and a friend said she was forced to get dressed in front of a male officer.

It is also claimed that officers presumed she could not speak English and made derogatory remarks in front of her.

The pair were taken away without being given a chance to pack a bag.

Josh Richards, who was sharing his Easton house with the family, said: "A woman with a warrant said she was here to look for Lina and Miguel.

"The police came in and took control of the house.

"Having been woken in her pyjamas, Lina was then strip searched and left in her bra and knickers in front of male police officers.

"Assuming she didn't understand English, the officers stood round discussing the cheek of these 'illegals' daring to exist within our borders before Lina vocally informed them that, not only was she not stupid, but that she did

speak English and her family had reported to the police station every month for the past three-and-a-half years.

"She was treated like a criminal and was not given a chance to take anything with her."

Pupils at Miguel's school, St Nicholas of Tolentine in St Jude's, were said to be upset at the news of his detention.

Miguel has written a letter to say how sorry he was to miss school.

He said: "I got arrested but I didn't do anything wrong."

The class have written letters back, some apologising for the actions of the British government.

Head teacher Isobel Flexman said: "Miguel was a bright and friendly boy who was doing very well here. I have rarely met such a nice family.

"The children here have collected a few things for Miguel and were in tears when they heard about what happened."

Lina, 34, and her husband Luis Orozco Collazollos, came to Britain more than three years ago from Colombia seeking asylum.

Mr Collazollos, whose application for asylum has already been turned down, was not at home at the time of the raid and is now in hiding.

Mr Collazollos was an engineer in Cali, Colombia, where he says he discovered the company he was working for was responsible for polluting a river, causing deformities in new-born babies.

He says that when he tried to alert the authorities, his father and brother were murdered.

They fled for their lives and have since established a life in Bristol.

Mr Collazollos found a job as a kitchen porter as soon as he had a work permit and his wife works for Ikea. Both were able to work because they applied for asylum before the Government changed the rules to stop asylum seekers from working.

The family fears that they will face certain death if they are returned to Colombia because they say the authorities are corrupt and there is nobody to protect them from those who want them dead.

A campaign has been launched by friends to try to stop the family from being deported.

Lina has been told that she has seven days to make her case to stay in Britain and will be held at Oakington Immigration Reception Centre in Longstanton, Cambridgeshire.

After seven days she could be sent back to Colombia with her son if the authorities do not accept her case.

Amparo Vizcaino, a family friend, said: "Their case has not even been heard and they have been taken without warning."

Campaigners met with Jean Corston MP yesterday.

A spokeswoman from her office said: "We will be taking up the case of this

family."

TREATED WITH NO COMPASSION

11:00 - 27 November 2004

One minute, Lisa Castano and her seven-year-old son Miguel were tucked up in their beds. The next, they were the targets of a pre-dawn raid by a clutch of police officers and carted off to a detention centre.

If the details they have given their friends are correct, seven police officers and an immigration official served their warrant on these asylum-seekers at 6am on Thursday.

It is claimed Lisa was strip-searched, forced to get dressed in front of a male officer and had to listen to derogatory remarks about "illegals". She and her son were whisked away to the other side of the country without even being given time to pack a bag.

And all this, before the Home Office has even made a final decision about their case.

The Evening Post has been as vocal as anyone about illegal immigrants, and failed asylum seekers who go to ground and scrounge a living off the rest of us. But the Castano family is different, and surely a case for compassion - not the brutally abrupt treatment they have been given.

They have been in this country for three and a half years after husband Luis blew the whistle on his company for a water pollution scandal. Luis was under threat after his father and brother were murdered.

They have settled in Bristol and have jobs. Miguel, who has already spent half his young life here, is getting on famously at school, where his head teacher said: "I have rarely met such a nice family."

Anyone who has a heart could not read Miguel's letter of apology to his teacher for missing school without feeling ashamed at this country's officialdom.

Jean Corston has met the group of people campaigning for the Castanos and will take up the case with the Home Secretary.

We can only hope that the Bristol East MP can prod the ministry into demonstrating a more decent, more British attitude towards what seems to be a genuine family with a genuine justification for being allowed to stay.