

Government has sent a clear message to the far right: arson and violence work

It may be that the decision to stop locating accommodation centres in parts of the country takes the heat out of anti-migrant protests. But given the victory they have just been handed, I wouldn't bet on it

According to internal documents, as [reported by Conor Gallagher in The Irish Times last week](#), the [Government](#) has decided – in response to what the documents term “local and political feedback” – to stop opening [asylum](#) centres in certain parts of [the country](#). One of the major forms of such feedback, the documents specify, is “violent protest and criminality”.

A brief reminder of what that violent protest consisted of might be useful here.

In November 2018, a [hotel in Merville](#), Co Donegal that was being prepared to accommodate 100 asylum seekers was deliberately set alight. In [Rooskey](#), on the Leitrim-Roscommon border the following February, a hotel that had been earmarked as a direct provision centre was set on fire, in what gardaí described as [a premeditated attack](#) involving careful planning and co-ordination. In January 2023, [a derelict former school building on Sherrard Street](#) in Dublin was broken into and set alight after rumours circulated that it would be used to accommodate asylum seekers.

In the two years that followed, arson attacks were carried out on numerous similar properties, and for similar reasons – in Ballybrack, in Rosslare, in Tallaght. All over the country these acts of arson occurred; wherever accommodation was being prepared for asylum seekers, anti-immigration activists appeared, hateful propaganda about “unvetted males” as a danger to Irish women and children was spread, and buildings were set on fire.

And it wasn't just buildings either, we should recall. We should recall, too, the murder threats against security personnel at asylum accommodation centres, the [arson attacks on tents](#) belonging to [homeless refugees on Dublin's Sandwith Street](#) and, for that matter, the [riots that convulsed the capital](#) in November 2023, and which were incited by far-right social media activists spreading anti-immigrant hysteria.

When the Government document mentions “violent protest and criminality” in relation to its decision to no longer open asylum centres in certain locations, this is what is being referred to. The International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS), the state body responsible for such projects, is, according to the document, unique within the Civil Service in that “the work of the division is subject to significant instances of protest, instances of arson and other violence or criminality, and targeting by anti-immigration or far-right activists”.

There are a number of implications to this decision and to the wording around it – some blatantly obvious, some less so. The first of these, surely, is that the anti-immigrant right, which has thus far failed to become a serious electoral force in this country, has been handed a pretty clear tactical victory.

In saying that it will no longer open asylum accommodation facilities in places where violent resistance to those facilities has occurred, the Government is acknowledging that this tactic of violent opposition – of intimidation, of arson, of spittle-flecked fury and dehumanisation – is a potent one, one that gets results.

Terrorism is a famously vexed and slippery term, but one fairly uncontroversial definition of it would be “the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims”. And when I say uncontroversial, I mean that this is literally the precise definition you

will find in the Oxford English Dictionary. Those tent burnings, those acts of arson against buildings housing asylum seekers, those murder threats against security guards employed to protect them: these were, precisely, unlawful uses of violence and intimidation against civilians in the pursuit of political aims.

It was terrorism at a fairly low level, certainly, and hardly threatened the fabric of society or the rule of law, but it was nonetheless very effective in achieving a political aim.

[[Inside Crooksling: 'Sleep is the only escape' from the 'dirty, unsafe' asylum seeker campsiteOpens in new window](#)]

Anti-immigrant campaigners were pleased with the outcome – understandably so, as people always are pleased when their plans come to fruition. If you require evidence of this, you'll find it on Twitter/X, which is well on the way to becoming a propaganda organ of the international far right.

Responses to one post about the news, by a failed independent general election candidate, included such sentiments as: "Resistance works"; "About time they listened to the locals!"; "This should tell every Irish person that they can get results if they start taking action"; "Very important to keep fighting back"; and "So now we know what works."

This last was the bluntest of all, and the most obviously correct. We – meaning all of us, not just the anti-immigrant right – know now exactly what works. What works is violence. What works is arson and threats and dehumanisation.

One desire here, on the part of the political establishment, is presumably that this capitulation to the opportunistic thuggery of the anti-immigrant right will also function to remove much of the political charge from that movement. No longer accommodating asylum seekers in areas where the locals don't want them means removing the arena in which the far-right stages its overwrought psychodrama of threatened innocence, with its pantomime villains and damsels in distress, its peaceable burghers pushed too far by globalists bent on destroying their communities and their culture by infecting them with foreign elements.

It may be, I suppose, that this political calculation eventually works out. It may be that it serves to diminish the force of the extreme right as an organised electoral threat.

But given the victory that has just been handed to their movement, I wouldn't want to bet on it. I wouldn't want to bet on these people forgoing further violence, and further capitulations by the State. Because despite their rhetoric about wanting to protect local communities from the threat represented by immigrants – immigrants who are, in many cases, fleeing horrendous violence and oppression in their own countries, and in other cases simply seeking a better life for themselves and their families – these activists in fact thrive on causing the very violence and chaos they claim to be trying to prevent.

[[Immigration and the rise and fall of the Irish far right in 2024Opens in new window](#)]

The far right is still, thankfully, a fairly pathetic formation in this country, peopled mostly by obsessive misfits and cheap grifters. It would be comforting to believe that having won this battle, it would stop prosecuting its war against immigrants. But these people want power, and power, for the extreme right, is drawn from the generating of hatred and fear. They will likely find other sources from which to generate that energy.