

# South Carolina Town Blocks Refugee Resettlement

*Cayce resident speaks out in exclusive interview*

The Refugee Industrial Complex doesn't always succeed. Sometimes communities successfully resist. One was Cayce, South Carolina, a town of 12,500. In February 2003, Rev. Richard Robinson of Lutheran Family Services (LFS) indicated to the city government that he was interested in resettling one or two families of Somali Bantu Muslims. That summer, however, many in the community were surprised to learn that the number was one-hundred and twenty.

Cayce Mayor Avery Wilkerson wrote "[This] resettlement...will place a major burden on our small city which has very limited resources, on our school district which has already been greatly reduced, and on our interfaith groups...who already have their hands full in providing for those in the community who need assistance." Though Robinson claimed that resettlement would not cost Cayce anything, School Superintendent Barry Bolen expressed opposition to the plan because of "the extreme financial hardship that such a move would place on us." 1

A number of residents objected that the significant cultural differences between the Cayce citizens and the Somali Muslim refugees would cause significant problems. Some critics of Cayce charged that "racism" was the town's motive, even though both white and black citizens were protesting. Robinson attributed the reaction to "xenophobia" and stated "You have all this anti-Muslim sentiment." 2

That fall LFS had to withdraw its plan after the State Department withdrew its support. The reason for the State Department's action, according to The Associated Press, was "insufficient local community support." 3 The Social Contract conducted an interview with Concerned for Cayce, the pen name of a local resident who opposed the resettlement.

**Social Contract:** How did you become aware of the plan for refugee resettlement in Cayce, and what agency was promoting it?

**Concerned for Cayce:** Let me explain a little about Cayce. We are a small city with about 12,500 inhabitants. We have a large population of elderly and working class people. Our school district uses the money that it gets and has always had to be careful with the money. We learned about the plan from a neighbor, who worked with Lexington District 2 (the local school district for Cayce). She was in charge of the English as a Second Language program. The representative for Lutheran Family Services of the Carolinas (the resettlement agency), Richard Robinson, came to Lexington District 2 headquarters and basically told them to get ready.

**TSC:** Did you feel that the sponsoring agency gave your community adequate notice about the proposed resettlement. And do you feel that they adequately addressed your concerns.

**CC:** LFS didn't give Cayce any notice. Robinson went behind our back and contacted the man who owned the low rent apartments where LFS wanted to put all the refugees together. The owner started to give the regulars notice to plan to move out so he could get the money from the government.

**TSC:** How did you go about organizing to deal with this situation?

**CC:** The City called Mr. Robinson to come to the City Council and explain what he was up to. I was on the Planning Commission at the time, and I knew we couldn't as a city afford any further drains of funds to provide these refugees additional services. At this time I contacted Vdare.com, and I looked up everything I could find out. We were lucky in the fact that we had a Cayce man who had formerly worked with refugees and could explain how the system worked. We found out that the refugees are entitled to government benefits when they arrive, and the LFS and other resettlement



groups take them to apply. And a few months later those groups walk away.

**TSC:** Do you think the media treated your side fairly, or did they show bias? What suggestions do you have for dealing with the media?

**CC:** Oh, Hell no! We have been labeled racists, anti-Christian and xenophobic. The media eats this stuff up with a spoon. They have always sided with the resettlement agency against our community. It is the liberal thing to do! I personally cornered a reporter from one of the TV station, and he told me that the news that squeaked the loudest gets the oil. We decided that we would have to squeak a whole lot louder. We had to take our letters-to-the-editor directly to the newspaper office because if we sent them, they'd disappear!

**TSC:** What would you recommend that other communities do if they faced a similar situation? Specifically, what can communities like yours do to stop unwanted resettlement?

**CC:** We just said no, no and no again. Find out everything you can about who is coming and who is resettlements them.

**TSC:** If you could go back and do something differently, what would it have been?

**CC:** I still say just say no, no and no again! I would get the media's attention as soon as I could. Now you can use Social Media to get the word out. Defend your property, your school district, your city, and your way of life. These resettlements interfere with all of these things, and you will pay for it in so many ways.

### Endnotes

1. David Axe, Not in My Town, Cayce Resists Influx of Somali Bantus, Columbia Free Times 7/16/03
2. Ibid.
3. The Associated Press, Federal Agency Calls off Bantu Resettlement in Cayce. *The Augusta Chronicle*, 10/9/03.