

Britain: Kurds on hunger strike against deportation

Steve James
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Three Kurdish men in Glasgow, Scotland are on the verge of starving themselves to death in a desperate bid to avoid deportation from Britain to Iran. Faroq Haidari, Fariborz Gravindi and Mokhtar Haydary, all in their early thirties, sewed their lips together on February 19. All are now in a dangerously weak condition; two are often unconscious.

The three men, deprived of any social security payments by the asylum policies of the Labour government, are threatened with return to Iran, where they believe they will be executed.

Haidari, the only one of the Kurds still fully conscious, and who sewed his lips less tightly together to allow speech, told the *Sunday Herald*, “We cannot go home. If we go home we will be killed. Better to die here like men through our own choice, than to be executed in Iran.

“When I stitched my lips, the pain was extraordinary, but I wanted to show the UK government that the human rights they talk about don’t exist.... We are not doing this for benefits from your welfare state. Who would suffer this for such a thing? We are doing it to save our lives, to show politicians that we deserve asylum.

“We are doing this because we are hopeless, we have no one to help us and nowhere to go. Sometimes you have to risk death to live. Time passes so slowly here. It’s strange, but this is actually boring. I think of death, but I have to be brave. I’m tired. I can’t walk. My mind plays tricks on me. I haven’t slept in 24 hours.

“I was in hospital for 48 hours last week because I had refused all water for many days, now I am drinking because I need to keep this fight going. I’m also very lonely. Day by day I am forgetting how to eat; how I used to eat. We have had no contact with the Home Office since this began more than two weeks ago. They

don’t care—that is shameful. I won’t give up.”

Twice since the hunger strike began, the men have needed urgent medical attention. Haydary and Gravindi have lost consciousness, only to refuse further assistance when revived.

All three men are from Kermanshah on the Iran-Iraq border, where they were active in the 1990s student protests against the rule of the Iranian mullahs, and are supporters of Kurdish autonomy. Iranian government spies infiltrated their group and they were betrayed. All three have scars from prison beatings.

One of the terrible ironies of the men’s plight is that they chose to flee to Britain because they were attracted at the time by the Labour government’s claims to have an “ethical foreign policy.” They paid \$5,000 each and spent a month locked in a container while they travelled across Europe, arriving in Dover on the British south coast in 2001.

Three years later, after the continual tightening of the asylum regulations by Home Secretary David Blunkett, their appeals for asylum have been rejected. Were the men not on hunger strike, they would be transported to a detention centre before deportation to Iran.

The Labour-dominated Scottish Executive, despite numerous protests and demands, and a demonstration in Glasgow on March 2, has maintained silence, washing its hands of the matter on the pretext that asylum decisions are the prerogative of the Home Office. The Scottish Parliament’s presiding officer refused to allow a motion from the Scottish Socialist Party calling for a debate on the issue.

Equally contemptible has been the role of the Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council, the landlord of the overcrowded bedsit on whose floor the three men are currently starving. The council is threatening eviction because, according to a spokesman, they are legally

obliged to so do. According to the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, 170 asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected by the Home Office are currently homeless in Glasgow alone. The council's eviction policy was introduced in 2003, and campaigners believe that about 10 families a week are being denied all social support in the city. As with all the rejected asylum seekers in one of the richest countries in the world, the starving men now depend entirely on their friends and supporters.



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