

Former Guantanamo detainee David Hicks speaks with the WSWS

Richard Phillips
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On February 19, a US Military Commission Review Board overturned its bogus 2007 “terrorism” conviction against former Guantanamo prisoner David Hicks. The decision, which came after several years of legal action by Hicks’s lawyers, is further proof that the US-led “war on terror” and its associated crimes—illegal detention, torture and kangaroo courts—are built on lies.

Hicks, an Australian citizen, was captured in Afghanistan by the Northern Alliance in late 2001, sold to the US military and sent to Guantanamo Bay. He spent five and a half years in the prison hellhole where he was subjected to sleep deprivation, beatings, solitary confinement and was injected with unknown substances.

Hicks’s “providing material support for terrorism” conviction in 2007 was part of a plea deal for his repatriation to an Australian prison. Hicks was told that if he did not accept the deal, which was cooked up behind the scenes by the Howard government and the Bush administration, he could spend the rest of his life in Guantanamo.

Hicks spoke with the World Socialist Web Site this week about the court ruling, the response of the Australian government and media, and his concerns about escalating attacks on basic democratic rights and preparations for war.

Richard Phillips: First of all congratulations. When were you told, and what was your reaction?

David Hicks: Although we were expecting the decision we weren’t exactly sure when. My American lawyers said they wouldn’t hear about it until about an hour before the US media. Stephen Kenny, my lawyer in Adelaide, was contacted at about 4 a.m. on Thursday and he phoned me straight away.

And my reaction? It was a combination of being tired

and a bit of relief that all this business had finally come to an end. At last the media, I thought, could no longer keep accusing me of being a terrorist. Of course, they’ve kept doing it but they’ve got no legal basis to do it. I’m not really jumping up and down about the decision. Maybe I’m not as happy as people might think I should be, but it is the end of a process and I’m just glad it’s all over.

RP: We commented on the WSWS that the ruling not only exonerates you but is another demonstration that the “war on terror” is built on lies.

DH: Yes and that’s why the government and the media are so resistant to the US ruling.

RP: What has been the response from ordinary people?

DH: It’s been good. Supportive messages have been sent to my lawyer and lots of people at my work—many that have never spoken to me before—went out of their way to congratulate me and that was really good.

There’s a lot a people I have to thank during this long battle—my lawyers in the US and Australia and the thousands of others across Australia who fought to get me out of Guantanamo and who knew that the conviction was a frame-up.

RP: You told the press conference that government and media critics who are still accusing you of being a terrorist were supporting torture. Could you elaborate?

DH: My thinking is that if you’re not outraged by what happened to me at Guantanamo—the torture and everything else that went on there—then you must support it. These people seem to be looking for any kind of justification for my torture or developing propaganda to support this crime. What other conclusion is there?

Four or five weeks ago, when it looked like my conviction was going to be thrown out, most of the

media appeared to be quite supportive. Now they are completely hostile, claiming that I hadn't answered any hard questions and suggesting that I wanted millions of dollars in compensation. It was as if the clock had been wound back to when I was released from prison. I was in Guantanamo five-and-a-half years and would have committed suicide if I'd been held there any longer. There are people in Guantanamo who have been imprisoned there for more than 13 years. You can only imagine what state they are in.

RP: You rejected suggestions last week that the government should apologise to you over what happened. Why is that?

DH: I'm not interested in an apology and even if the government made one it wouldn't be sincere. But the government should be paying for the medical treatment I need as a result of what happened in Guantanamo. My back is in bad shape and I'm in a lot of pain in my left knee, my right elbow and my wrist, and this is getting worse as time goes on. I've lost several teeth—they've had to be pulled out—because I couldn't clean my teeth in Guantanamo.

RP: You previously called for a public inquiry into your illegal imprisonment and torture. Are you still making that demand? No one has been charged or held accountable for your torture in Guantanamo.

DH: It would be excellent to make them accountable for what happened but nobody seems to know how to do it and it would be big dollars if I lost any sort of legal case. Those responsible seemed to have covered their tracks.

We called for a public inquiry in order to fully expose who was responsible for this. Unless this is brought to light it will happen again, that's guaranteed. This is not about me but protecting Australian citizens from being treated like I was.

I've done quite a few media appearances over the past five years, carefully explained what happened to me and answered what the journalists' regard as the hard questions. Now they're talking as if I've never said a word about it. I guess they've been telling their readers that I've been a terrorist for more than ten years and they can't afford to reverse this.

RP: The ongoing government and media denunciations of you are to justify the "war on terror" and its crimes.

DH: Yes and this has been underway for some time.

It feels like I'm being used for a purpose that I'm completely against, which is justification for the stripping of our basic legal rights and protections. The problem is that most Australians don't understand what this is all about and how dangerous it is. I'm concerned that when they wake up to this it will be too late.

I'm disappointed that there has been no outcry over the latest legislation to stop whistleblowing by journalists. I've read some of the international comments on these laws. Many people from other countries are amazed about how laid back Australians seem to be about this and let these laws just go ahead. People have to protest and speak out against these things.



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