

Two more refugees commit suicide in Australia

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Australia's bipartisan policy of seeking to block entry and residency to all asylum seekers is leading to a wave of suicides by traumatised refugees, at least four of whom have taken their own lives this year out of fear of being deported.

Last Thursday, Reza, a 26-year-old Iranian whose last name cannot be published out of concern for retribution against his family, killed himself at Brisbane airport. According to his friends, he was increasingly worried that he was being followed by the authorities and would be taken back into immigration detention to be removed to Iran.

Reza lived in Melbourne for two years on a temporary bridging visa but recently experienced severe mental health issues. "He was scared and thinking that people would get him if he stayed here," a friend told reporters. "He thought that he must escape from this area as police and people were chasing him. He got to Brisbane and he stayed in the street until morning."

This was the second suicide by a refugee in Brisbane this year, after Omid Ali Avaz took his life in March upon hearing of his mother's death in Iran. Avaz was also fearful of being returned to detention or forced back to Iran after being granted only a 12-month visa.

Last month, another refugee killed himself by self-immolation, the second such horrific act in four weeks. On October 18, 30-year-old Khodayar Amini, fearing would be sent back to detention, doused himself with petrol during a video call with refugee advocates. His body was found in bushland near Dandenong, an outer suburb of Melbourne.

A month earlier, in September, Ali Jaffari, 40, committed suicide by setting himself alight in the Yongah Hill Detention Centre, near Perth, after being reimprisoned to face either indefinite detention or

deportation back to Afghanistan.

Two months before his death, Amini began writing accounts of what happened to him in Australia. What is revealed in these accounts, and his life and death, underscores the terrible human cost of the repressive measures taken by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments to repel asylum seekers, most of whom are fleeing for their lives as a result of the mounting wars instigated by US imperialism and its allies, notably Australia.

Amini came from Afghanistan and was a member of the persecuted Hazara ethnic community. After the Taliban murdered his entire family, he fled to Australia in September 2012, arriving in a small vessel holding 86 asylum seekers. The boat was set adrift after the engine stopped working, before the Australian Navy eventually picked up the passengers.

Amini was taken, along with 54 other asylum seekers, to Australia's Indian Ocean detention centre on Christmas Island, which is notorious for its inhuman conditions. The other passengers were taken to the "offshore processing" detention centre on the Pacific Ocean island of Nauru, which was reopened in August that year by the previous Labor government.

Amini was later transferred to a detention centre in Darwin for five months before being released on a bridging visa without the right to work, study or travel. In Darwin he was constantly harassed by immigration officials and the police. He stated he was beaten by police officers twice, once so badly he had persistent injuries.

In early 2014, Amini was re-detained after a minor dispute with a government agency over a licensing fee refund. He was sent to the overcrowded Yongah Hill detention centre, some 2,500 km from Darwin. He was imprisoned there for 11 months before being cleared of

any misconduct.

Amini was then sent to Adelaide in South Australia, before being shifted to Sydney, where he began living with other refugees, including some who were on the boat with him to Australia. His harassment continued, affecting his already deteriorating mental and physical health. He developed a persistent cough and his housemates reported he would stay in the house all day and stay awake at night.

In one statement Amini wrote: “I can’t sleep at night because I fear the police would kill me. I am extremely scared ... in 2013, they hit me so hard that still feel the pain from that time.”

Three months ago he called Red Cross, a non-government organisation that the government funds to provide support to refugees upon release, and insisted that he receive medical treatment. He was accused of threatening violence to a Red Cross employee on the phone.

Amini’s solicitor, Besmellah Rezaee, said Amini had no intention of hurting anyone, but said something like, “they kill with cotton”—a Hazara phrase meaning to kill someone slowly.

The police immediately sent four officers to where Amini was living. In his account of the incident, Amini said he was punched, tortured, detained at a police station for about five or six hours and forced to give an interview.

Amini was released without charge but on October 15 he received a phone call from a friend informing him that his old address in Sydney was raided by the newly-formed Australian Border Force, a paramilitary agency. Fearing he would be sent back to detention, Amini fled to Dandenong where he wrote to friends and different advocate groups seeking support, before killing himself three days later.

In one statement Amini summed up his time in Australia as follows: “My crime was that I was a refugee. They tortured me for 37 months and during all these times they treated me in the most cruel and inhumane way. They violated my basic human rights and took away my human dignity with their false and so-called humane slogans. They killed me as well as many of my friends such as: Nasim Najafi, Reza Rezayee and Ahmad Ali Jaffari.”

Najafi and Jaffari both died in suspicious circumstances. Jaffari, 26, died in Sydney’s Villawood

Detention Centre in 2013. The immigration department claimed that he suffered a sudden heart attack. Nasim Najafi, 27, died on July 31 this year in the Yongah Hill detention centre, again said to be the victim of a suspected heart attack, after being locked in solitary confinement in a 2-metre by 2-metre cell while suffering from seizures.

These deaths are an indictment of the criminal “border protection” regime imposed by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments. The cruelty inflicted on refugees flows from the deliberate policy of seeking to strike fear into the hearts of anyone contemplating finding refuge in Australia.



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