

Sudanese asylum seeker shot dead in Glasgow

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Sudanese asylum seeker, Badreddin Abadlla Adam, was shot dead in Glasgow's Park Inn Hotel last Friday after he had stabbed six people. Those wounded at the hotel, in temporary use as an asylum hostel, included three other asylum seekers, two hotel staff and a police officer. One of those stabbed is in a critical condition.

Within minutes of the initial attack, a squad of armed police stormed the building, shooting 28-year-old Badreddin dead. For reasons yet to be explained, the incident was initially falsely reported by the BBC, and then other media, as a terrorist attack with three fatalities.

It was the desperate conditions facing asylum seekers under Boris Johnson's government that pushed Badreddin over the edge. Fellow asylum seekers had raised concerns about Badreddin's mental state in the days before his death. Siraj, a resident at the hotel, said that Badreddin, only recently arrived in Britain, had felt "people were against him, people hate him." Siraj likened the hotel to a prison. He had tried to calm the attacker down, telling him to ignore everything because "no one was happy inside".

Badreddin was forced to stay in his room and self-isolate for one month, with suspected coronavirus. There is no evidence that he was tested. One of his friends told Sky News, "Because of bad food [at the hotel] this man [Badreddin] started to suffer from abdominal disturbances and vomit every time. The people thought he was affected by coronavirus and detained him in his room for one month which affected his mental health badly."

Since April, several hundred asylum seekers have been placed in five hotels around the city during the pandemic. Asylum seekers, mostly men but including some pregnant women, were rounded up in vans and forcibly removed from the temporary flats they had been allocated.

The mass eviction was carried out by Mears Group, the housing and services company that operates the multi-billion asylum housing contract in Glasgow on behalf of the British Home Office to save money.

Reports quickly emerged that the hotels, all empty due to the lockdown, were unable to cope with the social distancing and infection control required to limit

transmission of the coronavirus. Because meals were available along with a laundry service, the Home Office withdrew the asylum seekers' miserly £5.39 daily allowance, leaving them penniless and unable to buy phone top-ups to contact legal representatives and family members, sanitary products and other essentials.

Residents reported prison like conditions, with limited access to Wi-Fi, strictly enforced mealtimes, poor quality food and inappropriate diets, lack of hygiene products and no food or drink available outside of mealtimes. Some bedroom windows in cramped rooms did not open.

The action by Mears Group and the Home Office is only the latest episode in a series of outrages against asylum seekers in Glasgow. Badreddin Abadlla Adam is the latest tragic victim.

In 2006, Zamira Sadigova fell to her death from her 11th floor flat as police were breaking down the door to section her under the Mental Health Act. In 2007, Uddav Bhandari, from Nepal, doused himself in petrol and set himself alight in the offices of the Immigration Tribunal. He died shortly after. In 2010 Sergei Serykh, his wife Tatiana and their 21-year-old son jumped from the 15th floor of their tower block. The family had recently been told that their asylum claim had been rejected.

In 2012, 80 asylum seekers were evicted from their tower block flats by the Y People charity, having had their asylum claims rejected. Locks on the flat were changed and the electricity turned off. The evictions were triggered because Y People lost the Home Office asylum accommodation contract to Serco, who wanted vacant possession of all flats.

In 2018, Serco tried to evict 330 asylum seekers in line with the Conservative government's "hostile environment" strategy against immigrants. Serco's move generated massive popular opposition and the company was forced to delay evictions. In August 2019, Serco restarted evictions and asylum seekers with no active asylum claims were pitched onto the streets following a Court of Session decision in the company's favour. Protests and legal action stayed evictions pending appeal.

Later that year, the Court of Session again sided with Serco. This April, the verdict was also upheld by the UK Supreme Court.

Last year, Mears Group took over the lucrative Glasgow contract for Home Office accommodation from Serco. At any one time some 5,000 people are housed in and around Glasgow under the scheme. Mears Group's own mass evictions are proof that the Tory "hostile environment" policy is still in operation.

This time Mears Group targeted people whose asylum claims are recent and still being processed. Mears Group told the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee that the decision was to avoid the need for staff to deliver cash and to offer better access to health services. These claims are absurd. Why would removing hundreds of people from their private flats into five hotels do anything but accelerate coronavirus transmission? Mears Group has confessed it had not carried out any risk assessment of the move, despite the vulnerability of those involved.

Days before the tragic events at the Park Inn, Ronier Deumeni, of charity African Challenge Scotland, voiced concerns over the mental health pressures confronting asylum seekers. He told the *Herald*, "Levels of anxiety and depression are very high and lockdown has triggered incidences of post-traumatic stress, with people being reminded of treatment during detention or before they came to the UK. There is real atmosphere of fear." The Refugee Council report that 61 percent of asylum seekers experience serious mental illness.

In May, Adnan Olbeh was found dead in the McClay's Guest House in Glasgow. Adnan was a 30-year-old Kurd, who left Syria in 2012. He endured abuse and torture in Libya while making his way to Europe, a journey that took many years. After a period in Denmark, Adnan eventually arrived in Britain.

Having spent time in Dungavel detention centre and then a night shelter, he was finally given a temporary flat in Glasgow while his asylum claim was processed. He was in the flat for four months before being evicted by Mears Group and dumped in McClay's hotel. His friends reported he had become distressed and suicidal and was experiencing flashbacks to his ordeals in Libya.

In addition to the risks of contracting COVID-19, residents report other health conditions being ignored or dismissed. One man told staff at the Ibis Budget Hotel he feared he had broken his foot. Hotel staff refused to provide painkillers or help transport the man to hospital. Mears Group staff told the man to put his leg up and wait till after the weekend.

On Friday June 12, a 67-year-old man at the Park Inn reported a "strong pain in his back and around his heart and he was having difficulty breathing" to Mears Group staff, who told him to wait until Monday.

Residents and their supporters have launched protests. Twenty asylum seekers at McClay's Guest House, the Ibis Budget Hotel and the Mercure Hotel went on hunger strikes demanding better food.

Two demonstrations were organised in support of the asylum seekers. One was called off in the face of fascist and loyalist mobs claiming to be defending statues in George Square, in central Glasgow. A second larger demonstration attended by several hundred people went ahead June 20, World Refugee Day, and also faced loyalist provocations and a large police operation.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) has issued repeated condemnations of the treatment of asylum seekers, but otherwise has done nothing, under the pretext that immigration is not a devolved matter and is the responsibility of the Home Office. Last year, local council leader Susan Aitken washed her hands of responsibility for asylum seeker housing, declaring, "In order for Glasgow City Council to provide support, I would have to instruct officers to break the law." The SNP issued a statement boasting that it had supplied a paltry £150,000 emergency funding "to strengthen local advocacy support for destitute asylum seekers at risk of eviction."



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