

After police killing of Badreddin Abadlla Adam

More evidence of ill-treatment of asylum seekers in Glasgow hotels

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Two weeks after the police killing in Glasgow, Scotland of 28-year-old Sudanese man Badreddin Abadlla Adam, little has been revealed about the immediate events leading to his death.

Adam was shot by police after he stabbed six people, including one police officer, in a city centre hotel being used during the pandemic as a temporary asylum hostel. From numerous accounts Adams' violent outburst came during a mental health crisis after spending three months, including a period of quarantine isolation, in the overcrowded Park Inn hotel.

The incident is under investigation by the Scottish government's Police Investigations and Review Commissioner. Press reports claim that police attempted to use tasers against Adam, and that he was shot when these failed. No explanation has been given for why police did not use some other non-lethal means to detain Adam. Neither has any explanation been offered for initial reports that the incident was terrorism related, why armed police were on the scene so quickly, nor of the eyewitness reports of police with riot shields leaving the building.

Whatever happened June 26 in the hotel, however, it is clear that Adam was driven over the edge with such terrible consequences thanks to the British government's brutal and ongoing "hostile environment" policy towards asylum seekers. This has been intensified during the pandemic.

The measures taken by the Home Office and accommodation provider Mears Group against recently arrived asylum seekers in Glasgow are extraordinarily callous. Adam was one of 370 asylum seekers, mostly men, who were required, with only a few minutes notice, to vacate flats they had been using for some months. They were transported four to five in a van, without masks and during the peak period of the coronavirus infection in

Glasgow, to six hotels across the city.

The move was in blatant breach of lockdown regulations barring evictions and non-essential travel. Reports from the hotels highlighted unsafe communal areas, poor food, lack of bottled water, sanitary products, a prison like environment—while asylum seekers were deprived even of their below subsistence level £5.39 daily allowance.

Vulnerable people who had suffered torture, abuse and other trauma in their journeys to the UK were pitched back into conditions of deep uncertainty and insecurity. Mears Group have not produced any risk assessments, 370 of which should have been prepared, considering the impact of such sudden and dramatic upheaval on the individuals affected. This is despite asylum seeker Adnan Olbeh—who was under the responsibility of Mears—being found dead in May in the city's McLay hotel following reports that he was deeply depressed.

Further details of the appalling condition in the hotels have since emerged.

Glasgow-based migrant charity Positive Action in Housing (PAIH) reported that its volunteers had been contacted last week by asylum seekers in the Tartan Lodge, a budget hostel on the city's Alexandra Parade. Some 30 people from Iraq, Iran, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Vietnam and elsewhere are being kept in a converted church building. Those held in the hotel include a former UN worker, a civil servant from Sierra Leone, and an Iranian musician. One isolated man spoke no English, and no one else spoke his language.

The residents complained of malnourishment because of the poorly-cooked or unsuitable food, no cooking facilities, and lukewarm food provided in takeaway containers without plates. Laundry services were provided only once a week, the rooms were rarely cleaned. People

reported bed bugs and one young man was covered in bites. One man told PAIH, “I complained about the food, and she [Mears staff] said if you don’t like it, you will be sent to a detention centre and then you will be deported.”

PAIH organised a press conference this week outside the Tartan Lodge to publicise conditions in the building. The charity noted the generosity of Glasgow’s working class population, who offered donations of smart phones and food to the asylum seekers. This is in stark contrast with Mears Group Chief Operating Officer, John Taylor, who refused to answer any of the concerns raised by PAIH over the circumstances of these in hotel detention.

Mears Group’s asylum accommodation contract for Scotland, the North East of England and Northern Ireland is valued at over £1 billion over the next 10 years.

Mears Group’s hotel detention operation is only one aspect of the company’s lucrative business based on offering the most basic accommodation, care and housing service to the most vulnerable. It is one of many firms that emerged from successive Labour and Conservative government privatisation programmes that transformed social housing and local authority provided services into revenue streams for business. The company won its first local authority support contract in 1992 and now employs around 8,000 staff and has local authority maintenance contracts for 650,000 homes. The company made £213 million gross profit last year on total revenue of just over £900 million.

Like its rivals, Serco, Mitie, G4S, and others, Mears Group piles up profits based on a cheap labour workforce and overseeing social misery. It claims to be the “Largest provider of temporary accommodation in UK: More than 86,000 households are currently living in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfasts, hostels and private rented accommodation.” Mears Group also views the care sector, particularly for old people, as a potentially lucrative growth area.

Mears Group’s major shareholders include hedge fund PrimeStone Capital, Shareholder Value Management, Majedie Asset Management and Artemis Investment Management. PrimeStone targets companies it views as undervalued and likely to be lucrative over the longer term. Artemis describes itself as “the Profit Hunter” and manages £23.7 billion worth of assets.

While his company deprived asylum seekers of £5.39 per day, Mears Group director David Miles earned £469,000 last year. Fellow directors A C M Smith and A Long earned £310,000 and £256,000, respectively. Miles owns nearly 340,000 company shares. Smith and Long

own nearly 291,000 shares between them.

Mears Group came in for criticism from the National Audit Office (NAO) in a recent report on asylum accommodation contracts. The company was fined £3.1 million for failing to “meet targets on moving people to dispersed (longer-term) accommodation, property maintenance and responding to complaints”.

A measure of the incompetence and profit gouging with which every aspect of the asylum contracts is saturated is the performance of the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) telephone support line instigated last year. AIRE was supposed to provide a one stop line for accommodation issues, repairs, and information on the progress of asylum claims on which, at any one time, around 48,000 asylum seekers lives and futures depend.

Migrant Help, a charity offering advice and support to refugees, victims of slavery, human trafficking, and asylum seekers, were given the contract to run AIRE and deal with tens of thousands requiring urgent assistance. According to the NAO, in the closing months of 2019, Migrant Help could only answer 2 percent of calls within the target of 60 seconds. Twenty percent of callers had to wait more than one hour. Seventy four percent of calls were abandoned before they were answered. Of calls requiring specialist advice only 13 percent were transferred within the target 3 minutes.

Migrant Help had to recruit three times the number of call handlers initially anticipated to reduce waiting times to a more acceptable level. The NAO noted that neither Migrant Help nor Mears Group even understood the reporting requirements demanded of them.



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