WSWS hosts webinar with Momodou Taal, target of Trump’s efforts to deport anti-war students

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On Thursday, the *World Socialist Web Site* hosted an urgent online event titled “Stop the attack on Momodou Taal!” The webinar featured Momodou Taal, a British-Gambian PhD student at Cornell University facing imminent deportation; his attorney Eric Lee; David North, chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US); and Joseph Kishore, SEP (US) national secretary.

We urge our readers to watch the full event here and read more below.

Background and targeting of Momodou Taal

Thursday’s event addressed the Trump administration’s targeting of Taal after he filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of recent executive orders aimed at suppressing pro-Palestinian speech. Within days of filing his lawsuit, Taal was ordered to surrender to ICE for deportation—a clear case of political retaliation similar to recent actions against other activists, including Mahmoud Khalil and Rumeysa Ozturk.

Taal’s case was connected to the broader assault on democratic rights and the accelerating global trend toward authoritarianism and dictatorship. Participants emphasized the need to mobilize the working class against state repression and in defense of free speech and immigrant rights.

The event began with Taal speaking about his background and how he had come to be targeted by the Trump administration. A third-year PhD student in Africana Studies at Cornell, Taal has been at the center of campus protests calling for university divestment from weapons manufacturers and companies profiting from the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Following a protest at Cornell on September 18, 2024 against a recruitment drive by defense contractors L3Harris and Boeing, Taal faced serious repercussions. “I was there for about 5 minutes, and then I left,” Taal explained during the webinar.

He said:

> Upon leaving, I then received an email that I had been suspended. I was called into a meeting, which essentially said, “You’ll be de-enrolled within 48 hours, and you have to leave the country soon.”

After a public outcry, Cornell allowed Taal to maintain his enrollment but imposed restrictions on his campus activities. This disciplinary action later became the basis for the federal government’s targeting of Taal under Executive Order 14188, signed by Trump on January 29.

On March 15, 2025, Taal, along with fellow Cornell student Sriram Parasurama and Professor M?koma Wa Ng?g?, filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Trump’s executive orders targeting pro-Palestinian speech. Just four days later, unidentified agents began surveilling Taal’s residence near campus, and by March 21, the Justice Department ordered him to surrender for deportation.

A political attack on democratic rights

During the webinar, Taal described the political targeting he faces, stating:

> I think given the nature of the escalation to the fact that [protest] is now being seen as a deportable offense makes me have to step back and question what is really happening here. It can’t just be on the merits or the actions that have been taken by protesters, but rather because … it ties into a broader critique of US foreign policy, of the state of Israel, the genocide, the working class more broadly, and I think these are what’s feeding into the repression.

Taal’s attorney Eric Lee emphasized the unprecedented nature of the government’s actions, noting:

> Momodou’s case is a test case; it’s a trial run. The Trump administration plans to do to many, many more people—permanent residents, visa holders, citizens—what it’s trying to do to Momodou and what it’s trying to do to the other students that it’s snatching off of college campuses and public sidewalks and their homes across this country right now.

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Situating these attacks in their historical context, Lee stated:

> We're supposed to mark the 250-year anniversary since the founding of the country in 1776 next year, and the writing of the Declaration, the great historic document and revolutionary achievement of mankind. In the run-up to this, we have a government that is moving very rapidly to establish a dictatorship.

He continued:

> There is no historical precedent for such a broad restriction on freedom of speech. The closest example is the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, the hated anti-canon of the illegalization of criticism of the government. But even there, not to make light of the implications of the Alien and Sedition Acts, that legislation only banned *libel* against the government. These executive orders ban telling the truth.
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> These are not orders that come from a position of strength. They are a direct attempt to shut the valve on left-wing, anti-imperialist, socialist, pro-Palestinian, anti-genocide views, to not only non-citizens but those citizens, those millions and millions of us who want to hear those views and have a right to hear those views.

The role of the Democratic Party and the way forward

In his remarks, SEP (US) National Secretary Joseph Kishore placed Taal's case in its broader political context, condemning the complicity of the Democratic Party:

> This has to really be seen as an absolute condemnation of the Democratic Party, which is doing nothing to oppose it. Momodou referred to the role of Cornell University in creating the framework for what Trump is now doing by seeking to discipline him during the protests against the genocide last year. …
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> The Biden administration was overseeing, financing, politically justifying the genocide, as well as the attacks on protesters in the United States, bringing forward the lie, which is now being resurrected by this gang of fascists in the Trump administration, that opposition to Israel is antisemitic and opposition to the genocide is antisemitic. All of that, the basis was created by the Democratic Party, which supports it.

Summing up the event, SEP (US) National Chairman David North drew out the parallels between the return of fascist barbarism today and its historical antecedents in the Nazi regime in Germany, stating:

> This is not something entirely new in history. What we are witnessing is the resurgence of imperialism in its most brutal forms. It is a sort of experience which was passed through with horrific consequences frequently in the 20th century, in the form of World War I and World War II. In just a few weeks, in May, we will be observing 80 years since the end of World War II, the end of the Nazi regime, and yet everywhere throughout the world we are witnessing a resurgence of fascism—that is, capitalist barbarism.

North emphasized the international dimension of the struggle against genocide, war and fascism, noting:

> All the cases we've discussed tonight, the case of Momodou, very much personify the international character [of these struggles]. The protest took place over the atrocities in Gaza, supported by all the imperialist powers. American students are opposing it and demonstrating against it, and the response of the state is repression. And that repression is part of a broader campaign to wipe out democratic rights in the United States.

North concluded with a call to action, stating:

> What we're putting forward, what the *World Socialist Web Site* advances, the Socialist Equality Party here in the United States and all the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world, is the mobilization of the working class on an internationalist and socialist program. That is the critical issue. It is a question of perspective, because on the basis of a perspective you can fight and we can win.

The event ended with a call for solidarity with Taal and other targeted anti-war activists, with North urging viewers to become active in the struggle to mobilize the working class against fascism and war by contacting the *World Socialist Web Site* and joining the Socialist Equality Party or its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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