

# Under threat of seizure and disappearance, Momodou Taal leaves the US

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1 April 2025

Cornell University Ph.D. student Momodou Taal, under threat of seizure and disappearance by the Trump administration, has been forced to leave the United States.

In mid-March, Taal and two co-plaintiffs at Cornell University filed a lawsuit challenging Trump's executive orders, which equate criticism of Zionism and the Israeli state with "antisemitic harassment" and lay the pseudo-legal basis for mass political expulsions. The response from the White House was immediate and extraordinary: His F-1 student visa was summarily revoked, and federal agents were dispatched to surveil and arrest him.

Taal faced imminent detention, deportation or possible transfer to a prison in El Salvador—where immigrants have already been disappeared into mega-prisons overseen by Trump ally and fascistic President Nayib Bukele—or even Guantanamo Bay.

Taal and his attorneys filed emergency requests for a temporary restraining order to block his seizure while the suit against Trump's executive orders went forward. The judge in the case denied an initial request, and an amended request is still pending. Even if Taal was able to win in court, however, the Trump administration has made clear that it will violate court orders that go against it.

"Trump did not want me to have my day in court," Taal wrote in a powerful statement released Monday evening. "Given what we have seen across the United States, I have lost faith that a favorable ruling from the courts would guarantee my personal safety and ability to express my beliefs."

Taal's attorney Eric Lee told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

Momodou has his freedom, and that is most important. But the administration drove him out of the country for his speech and for exercising his right to a day in court. Everyone should be outraged that courageous young scholars like Momodou are being forced to choose between opposing the government or staying in the country.

Taal has been driven out of the country by a government of criminal, corrupt oligarchs that is presently overseeing the slaughter that Taal protested: the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. Just days ago, 15 emergency and aid workers—including members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Gaza Civil Defense and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—were found buried in a mass grave in southern Gaza. They had been hunted down and killed by Israeli forces, then bulldozed under mounds of sand.

Taal wrote in his statement:

It is surreal that we live in a world where you get into trouble for saying killing babies is wrong. ... Where those advocating for, and celebrating, endless massacres against Palestinians are able to, time and again, present themselves as victims while presenting those fighting against genocide as oppressors.

Taal's case is part of a broader system of state terror now unfolding in the United States. Dissent is being criminalized, and the legal architecture of dictatorship is being constructed.

Peaceful student protesters, such as Mahmoud Khalil, Rumeysa Ozturk and others, have been abducted. The Trump administration has invoked the Alien Enemies Act to carry out mass deportations, in defiance of court rulings.

Among those deported into mass detention camps in El Salvador are individuals "identified" as gang members solely because they have tattoos. The administration has now acknowledged that one person, Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia, a legal resident, was deported due to what the government now calls an "administrative error." The Trump administration claims that because he is no longer in US custody, federal courts have no jurisdiction to intervene.

In remarks given at the Leipzig Book Fair this weekend, WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North laid out the situation unfolding in the US and its historical

context: “Scenes reminiscent of the Chilean, Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships of the recent past, and even of Nazi Germany, are now becoming common in the United States,” he said. “Night and Fog—*Nacht und Nebel*—has come to the United States.” The reference is to Hitler’s 1941 decree authorizing the secret seizure and disappearance of political opponents across occupied Europe.

While the immediate targets of this repression are immigrants and students opposing genocide, the political logic of dictatorship leads inevitably to the targeting of all opposition, including by US citizens. If the First Amendment is declared null and void for 30 million immigrants, it is null and void for everyone. Trump, moreover, has made plans to invoke the Insurrection Act, which would allow the deployment of the military against protests in American cities.

While Trump is spearheading this assault, he has many enablers. It was under the Biden administration that the slaughter in Gaza and the repression of protesters began, justified with the slander that opposition to genocide is “antisemitism.” Last month, the Democrats ensured the passage of Trump’s spending bill, and they have maintained silence in the face of mass detentions and deportations.

Pseudo-left figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have played a particularly foul role. While Sanders postures as an opponent of “oligarchy,” he has said not a word about the political persecution of Momodou Taal. In fact, as Taal was being hounded by ICE agents, Sanders went out of his way to praise Trump for “doing right” in cracking down on immigrants. Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America who is being elevated into the leadership of the Democrats, has likewise issued no statement condemning the assault on Taal or demanding that he be allowed to remain in the country.

Then there are the university administrations, tied to the Democratic Party, which are acting as willing accomplices in Trump’s reign of terror on the campuses. Harvard has removed both the director and associate director of its Center for Middle Eastern Studies and cut ties with a Palestinian university on the West Bank. Columbia has implemented a list of repressive measures demanded by the Trump administration, including placing entire departments—Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies and the Center for Palestine Studies—under supervision.

At Cornell, the administration set the stage for Taal’s targeting by attempting to suspend him last year over his participation in peaceful protests. And just this week, Yale University summarily fired Dr. Helyeh Doutaghi, a respected scholar of international law and critic of the Israeli assault on Gaza, without any semblance of due process.

The trade union bureaucracy is no less complicit in these

dictatorial policies. Taal is a dues-paying member of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), which has done nothing to mobilize opposition. Shawn Fain, president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which represents over 100,000 graduate students, “applauded” Trump’s nationalist trade war measures just days before Taal was forced to leave the country. The AFL-CIO apparatus, staffed with functionaries making six-figure salaries, functions as an adjunct of the state, policing the working class and facilitating the transition to dictatorship.

There exists, however, another social force: the working class of the United States and the world. The Trump administration and the ruling class it represents are lashing out not from strength but from fear. They recognize the enormous danger posed to capitalist rule by the growing opposition of workers and youth to its program of war, repression and social reaction.

Workers, however, must recognize that the persecution of Momodou Taal, Mahmoud Khalil and so many others is directed at the entire working class. The measures being tested on campuses today will be used tomorrow to deport striking workers, detain those who resist the destruction of social programs, and criminalize all opposition to the policies of the corporate oligarchy.

This also points to the basis upon which the defense of democratic rights must be waged: the conscious political struggle of the international working class.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* stand unconditionally with Taal and all those resisting this regime. The fight to defend free speech, stop mass deportations and end imperialist war must become a fight to overturn the capitalist system itself, which concentrates wealth and power into the hands of a criminal financial elite. The alternative to dictatorship and genocide is socialism: the democratic control of society by the working class, in the United States and around the world.



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