

Momodou Taal meeting in London wins powerful support

Our reporter
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Momodou Taal, the British-Gambian student who challenged US President Donald Trump's unconstitutional war on free speech and the right to protest the Gaza genocide, spoke at a public meeting in London on Saturday, hosted by the Socialist Equality Party (UK).

Taal was forced to leave the US to avoid arrest and detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in retaliation for his lawsuit against Trump. He spoke alongside his lawyer, Eric Lee. They were joined on the platform by Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States.

More than 100 workers and youth attended the meeting at the Crowne Plaza in King's Cross. This included several students who have faced unprecedented state repression in Britain for their pro-Palestinian speech and activism.

Chris Marsden, national secretary of the SEP (UK), chaired the meeting. He denounced Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government for its refusal to defend Taal from arrest and detention by the Trump administration. Marsden quoted a letter sent by the SEP to UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy, which warned: "If the government will not oppose the illegal and arbitrary detention of its own citizens in the US, then it will not be long before foreign nationals will be deported from the UK for politically opposing the UK's collusion with the Gaza genocide and its broader predatory war aims."

Taal spoke at Saturday's meeting for the first time about the circumstances surrounding his persecution by the US government. He was greeted with sustained applause for his courageous stand.

He recalled joining a pro-Palestinian protest last year at Cornell University: "I attended the protest for five minutes in September 2024. I left the protest, and then upon leaving, a police officer who had been a campus

police officer recognized me and then reported me."

Taal explained, "Cornell subjected me to some extremely draconian measures." These included restrictions on his right to free movement on campus—where he lived—and even requiring written permission to visit a doctor.

"I was given a form by campus police that declared me *persona non grata*, and I was banned from teaching as well—all for attending a peaceful protest," he said.

Taal referred to Trump's statement on the campaign trail last year, when he threatened international students that if they engaged in pro-Palestinian protests, "we are going to find you and deport you." It was at that moment, Taal said, "I realised that my time in the US was going to come to an end at some point."

Trump came to office "and signed an executive order, under the title 'combating antisemitism,' making it incumbent on universities to give up international students."

Taal filed his lawsuit against Trump on March 15, after discussions with Lee and his legal team, seeking a national injunction against the removal of all international students. One day later, "I sat with Eric and my legal team, and we received a call that said the FBI and ICE are looking for Momodou right now."

Forced into hiding, Taal recalled, "The next day ICE agents did turn up to my house. They couldn't find me. Two days after that, my lawyers received an email saying that you must surrender Momodou to ICE custody, and two days after that I get an email from the Department of Homeland Security that my visa has been revoked, and this was all before we had even seen a judge." Taal was forced to leave the US shortly afterwards.

In his remarks at the meeting, Lee made clear that Taal is one of hundreds of international students being arrested, detained, disappeared or deported across the United States for their political activities. Columbia University graduate

and Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil, for instance, remains in detention after three months, separated from his family since his abduction by ICE agents acting on behalf of the Trump administration.

To audience applause, Lee stated: “At this meeting, we send our deepest regards to Mahmoud, to his wife Noor, to his family and to his legal team as they fight for his freedom.”

Lee discussed the significance of Trump’s war on the US Constitution:

There is no historical precedent at any time in the country’s 250-year history for what is presently taking place. The president is attempting to establish a dictatorship, to abolish the most basic democratic rights, including the right to habeas corpus, the right to free speech, the right to seek redress and grievance by suing the government over constitutional violations as Momodou has outlined.

Lee emphasised that the grounds for Trump’s assault on democracy had been prepared and enabled by the Democratic Party.

But there is growing opposition in the population and among American workers to Trump’s dictatorial measures. Lee said Taal’s case was showing there are “tremendous opportunities for alerting people” and for developing mass opposition to these policies.

Kishore reviewed the broader political situation within which Taal’s case has unfolded:

We are now more than four months into the second Trump administration, and the pace of political reaction is accelerating by the day. The seizure and deportation of opponents of the Gaza genocide; the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to carry out mass expulsions; the open defiance of court rulings and even the arrest of judges; the targeting of students and immigrants; the systematic assault on free speech, particularly on university campuses.

We could certainly spend a great deal of time speaking about the dictatorial actions of the Trump administration, but I imagine that those of you here do not need convincing on this score. Rather, the question is, what is to be done?

Kishore stressed, “Over the past five years, the political trajectory of the ruling class has been defined by an accelerating turn toward reaction, war and dictatorship. But this is not the only process unfolding. At the same time, a powerful counter-current has emerged in the form of the growing social and political radicalization of the international working class.”

A growth in the class struggle was underway, but opposition in the working class had “not yet reached the level of political generalization required to fundamentally alter the balance of class forces. This is a question of political leadership. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to arm this movement with a clear understanding of its tasks—to unify the working class across all national boundaries and to direct its strength against the capitalist system itself.”

A lively Q&A followed the speeches, with several university students and other young people taking part. Questions included what role liberal Zionism played on US campuses; the history and role of identity politics, the implications of the “unitary executive theory” regarding the US Constitution, and the abuse of executive orders by the president. Discussion also centred on the Labour government’s far-reaching assault on the right to protest the Gaza genocide, including the use of counter-terror laws to silence dissent.

Over the next days the WSWS will publish the remarks of Taal, Lee and Kishore, along with interviews with attendees.



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He added: