

Stop David Lammy killing political prisoners! Release all Palestine protesters!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (UK)
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The British government is starving to death eight young people it has imprisoned for protesting Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and UK complicity in the destruction of Gaza.

Participants in Palestine Action (PA) protests prior to the group's proscription by the Labour government, they are carrying out a hunger strike demanding immediate bail, the right to a fair trial, an end to censorship of their communications, the de-proscription of PA and the closing of all UK sites run by Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit.

To date, 33 members of PA have been imprisoned for taking part in peaceful direct action against the genocide. This includes the Filton 24 and at least five people imprisoned for dousing an RAF plane in red paint in protest at UK military support for a genocide that has killed over 70,000 people according to official figures, including over 19,000 children, and wrecked over 80 percent of Gaza's buildings, including virtually all schools and hospitals.

Five of the hunger strikers have been hospitalised. Amu Gib and Qesser Zuhrah have refused food for 44 days, Heba Muraisi for 43 days, Jon Cink 40 days, Teuta Hoxha 37 days, Kamran Ahmed 36 days, Lewie Chiaramello 22 days and Muhammad Umer Khalid 12 days. Death usually occurs after 60-70 days, meaning some could die before the new year.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) condemns the Labour Party war criminals responsible for this savagery and demands the immediate release of all political prisoners.

Labour and British imperialism

Keir Starmer's government is repeating some of British imperialism's worst brutalities as part of its unprecedented war on the right to protest and free speech. It is following in the footsteps of the vicious measures enacted by the Liberal

government of H.H. Asquith, which carried out the mass arrest and imprisonment of Suffragettes as part of its wider war on the labour movement.

From 1909, around 100 people went on hunger strike in the UK after being imprisoned for actions in support of women's suffrage. Many were force-fed, with some dying from complications afterwards or going on to suffer serious physical and mental health conditions. After four years, in which the issue became the cause of mass popular protest, the government passed the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act in 1913, known as the "cat and mouse" act, allowing for the release of hunger strikers until they were well enough to resume their sentences.

Labour has shown no hint of releasing anyone. Justice Secretary David Lammy has stonewalled attempts by lawyers, medical professionals and politicians to even secure a meeting on the situation.

Lawyers for several of the hunger strikers put the matter sharply in a letter to Lammy sent last week: "should this situation be allowed to continue without resolution, there is the real and increasingly likely potential that young British citizens will die in prison, having never even been convicted of an offence."

Over 50 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion calling on the justice secretary to intervene "urgently to ensure the treatment of the prisoners is humane," to no response. According to Jeremy Corbyn, a reply from Lammy to his own correspondence read: "Considering the ongoing proceedings, it would not be appropriate for me to meet with you to discuss the situation in any greater detail."

Starmer's government has taken the same attitude as Margaret Thatcher's towards Irish Republicans in the 1980s, most famously Bobby Sands, who went on hunger strike to protest the British government's revocation of Special Category Status for political prisoners of war. Ten starved to death, even as Sands was elected to the House of Commons, and two other Republican prisoners (one hunger striker) to the Dáil Éireann.

Starmer's police state

Labour have gone further than Thatcher by not even waiting for a conviction to mete out this punishment. Every one of the hunger strikers and their co-defendants are legally innocent. They are in prison on remand--most of them held for more than a year now, with several months to go--having not been convicted of a single charge. The standard maximum for pre-trial detention is six months.

Conditions have been made worse by the court's arbitrary and unjust claim that charges against individuals arrested for PA protests have a "terrorist connection". They have repeatedly complained of ill treatment and unjustified blocks on communication with the outside world.

Even worse has been done to the hunger strikers, with Zuhrah reportedly left lying on her cell floor in Bronzefield with severe chest pains for hours, requests for an ambulance ignored until she lost consciousness. Pentonville prison has blocked Ahmed's family and solicitor from receiving medical updates from the hospital, requiring them to go through its legal team.

These are the vindictive, lawless actions of a police state. Labour has branded Palestine Action and its supporters "terrorists" to justify swallowing innocent people into the prison system and subjecting them to cruel and unusual punishment.

Every anti-democratic attack pioneered by the British ruling class in the persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, declared a "hi-tech terrorist" by Joe Biden, is now being used against protesters.

Assange was denied basic legal rights and held on remand in life-threatening conditions for close to five years in a maximum security prison. His punishment for exposing war crimes, we wrote, was the "spearhead of a crackdown on opposition to war, in preparation for the eruption of military violence now underway. It was intended to set a chilling precedent that anyone who gets in the way of the war plans of the imperialist powers will be silenced and destroyed."

It is not the opponents of genocide who are terrorists, but the Labour Party using the repressive powers of the state to frighten and silence its opponents.

Mobilise the working class!

Every worker and student's neck is on the line. The treatment of the hunger strikers confirms the political Rubicon crossed by Labour with its proscription of Palestine

Action, as explained by the *World Socialist Web Site* this July. The transformation of a party which arose out of the fight for workers' democratic right to organise and strike against their employers into the spearhead of the worst attack on democratic rights in British history:

cannot be attributed to a few bad leaders. Rather Starmer, a former human rights lawyer turned right-wing zealot, and his government are the end product of a fundamental shift within the very foundations of world capitalism...

Capitalism is being driven into an existential crisis by its inherent contradictions, between an interconnected system of production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states based on upholding private ownership of the means of production. To maintain its rule and immense privileges, the bourgeoisie in every imperialist country must wage trade and military war abroad and class war at home to ensure national competitiveness against their rivals.

This agenda is incompatible with the preservation of democratic rights. They are being torn up first in the case of scapegoated migrants and political protesters, before the same attacks are turned against the whole working class. Starmer's Labour government is proof that Trump's drive towards dictatorship in the United States is only the most advanced expression of a forced march to far-right authoritarianism underway internationally.

A counteroffensive in defence of democratic and social rights and against war and genocide cannot be left to the heroic self-sacrifice of a few. Their cause is the cause of the entire working class and student youth, which must be mobilised in their defence. The IYSSE urges students:

? Organise meetings on campus to prepare a cross-campus campaign in defence of the PA prisoners.

? Take the campaign to the workplaces, encouraging and collaborating with workers to mount protests in defiance of their Labour Party-aligned trade union leaderships.

? Contact the IYSSE for assistance and send videos and messages of support to be published on the WSWs.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact