

Former Guantánamo detainees and other political prisoners defend UK's pro-Palestine hunger strikers

Thomas Scripps
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Two-dozen former hunger strikers have released an open letter to Keir Starmer's Labour government in defence of the Palestine Action political prisoners refusing food and at imminent risk of death.

Heba Muraisi has spent 72 days on hunger strike, Kamran Ahmed 65 days, and Lewie Ciaramella 51 days (fasting every other day as he is type-one diabetic). They are among 29 young people—the Filton 24 and Brize Norton 5—held on remand for over a year in exceptionally repressive conditions for alleged participation in direct action protests against the Gaza genocide.

Starmer's government refuses to even meet with the prisoners, their legal representatives or their families.

“Survivors of state violence”

The letter's signatories have histories of imprisonment at the hands of the Israeli government in Palestine, the British government in Ireland and the American government in Guantánamo.

They write “as survivors of state violence,” explaining, “The Palestine Action political prisoners began their hunger strike when they had no other choice. The state's decision to rely on the use of the classification of ‘terror’ to enforce the systematic repression of those who refuse to conform has left them with no other alternative as they seek the rights they are entitled to by law.”

Their letter demands: “An urgent ministerial meeting with families and legal representatives”, “Immediate bail for the Palestine Action prisoners”, the “Dropping of terror charges designed to criminalise dissent”, “Fair trial conditions free from fear-driven narrative and political interference”, “Immediate access to independent medical care chosen by the prisoners” and “An end to censorship and restrictions on family visits.”

A veil of silence has been drawn over the event in the media, whose corporate owners and political handlers understand the

explosive significance of a letter highlighting the dictatorial record of the “war on terror”—written by many of its victims. In their words, the use of terror legislation to target Palestine protesters “is not a new phenomenon”:

the use of the word “terror” has long been used to manufacture fear, to poison public perception, to justify the repeated violation of even the most basic human rights. Once this label is attached, rights become conditional, liberty becomes transactional, and the presumption of innocence evaporates. The rule of law that is so proudly claimed to be upheld is swiftly desecrated in the face of a singular word, deployed by unscrupulous politicians determined to protect their own interests: “terrorist”.

The “war on terror” continued

Most of the signatories are former Guantánamo Bay detainees. They include Lakhdar Boumediene, lead plaintiff in the *Boumediene v. Bush* case which sought to secure the right of detainees to challenge their detention in US courts, and Mansoor Adayfi and Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel, whose writing raised international awareness of the crimes committed by the American government.

Their intervention coincides with the British government paying “substantial” compensation to Abu Zubaydah, the first man subjected to CIA torture under the euphemism of “enhanced interrogation”. He was waterboarded 83 times, locked in coffin-shaped boxes and physically assaulted.

Agents working for British intelligence services MI5 and MI6 passed questions to his CIA torturers. They observed in internal communications that his treatment would have “broken” 98 percent of UK special forces soldiers.

Zubaydah is still held in Guantánamo, without charge, 24

years after being kidnapped by the US in Pakistan in 2002. His international legal counsel Professor Helen Duffy commented, “The compensation is important, it’s significant, but it’s insufficient,” adding that the UK and other governments “share responsibility for his ongoing torture and unlawful detention”.

Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer is directly implicated in these crimes. As Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), he protected MI5 from prosecution in 2010 for its involvement in the torture of Binyam Mohamed, a British resident also kidnapped in Pakistan in 2002 and subjected to torture during his seven-year detention in Guantánamo. Starmer claimed there was “insufficient evidence” to prosecute.

Two years later, with police having spent the last 30 months investigating the crime, Starmer admitted that MI5 had “provided information” to the CIA but claimed was “insufficient evidence” of knowledge of “a real or serious risk that Mr Mohamed would be exposed to ill-treatment amounting to torture.”

Starmer gave the same answer to allegations of MI6 involvement in torture at Bagram air base in Afghanistan.

Labour’s right-wing authoritarianism

The lawless violence rubber-stamped by Starmer as DPP under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition is now directly employed by him at the head of a Labour government. He is overseeing a massive strengthening of the authoritarian powers of the state, from the proscription of Palestine Action to the intimidation of journalists, draconian sentencing and restrictions on mass demonstrations. Labour’s treatment of the hunger strikers is the most brutal example to date of anti-democratic crackdown.

Workers in Britain have been outraged by the murder of Renee Nicole Good at the hands of ICE. The Socialist Equality Party (US) described the killing as the “intended consequence of the massive paramilitary mobilization that the Trump administration has unleashed in cities across the country, the spearhead for the broader conspiracy for dictatorship.”

That conspiracy is intertwined with the American imperialist policy pursued abroad. In the words of an earlier WSWS statement: “To impose neocolonial domination abroad, the administration must also overcome mass opposition at home. The inevitable disasters flowing from this strategy will be met with even greater violence, both internationally and within the United States.”

In the same way, Starmer’s own authoritarian agenda could soon add the bodies of three British citizens to the toll of its genocide-supporting, militarist foreign policy.

A new labour movement against imperialism

The long and extensive record of oppression inscribed in the biographies of the open letter’s signatories is deeply significant. It underscores that what the hunger strikers and all pro-Palestine protesters confront is not just Starmer, his government, or even the British political establishment, but a global imperialist system: a sprawling apparatus of violence and coercion serving the interests of a capitalist oligarchy and political elite.

Confronting such an enemy requires the development of a mass movement against all imperialist wars—from Venezuela to Gaza to Ukraine—and attacks on democratic rights. Moreover, that movement must be built in the working class as the sole social force capable of defeating the imperialist governments.

Enormous popular opposition to the genocide in Gaza and British government complicity—bringing millions into the streets on national and local demonstrations—was led down the dead end of supporting appeals to Starmer made by the Labour left handful and the trade union bureaucracy, backed by no action whatsoever.

Many young people turned to Palestine Action as an alternative to this impotent perspective. What is being done to them shows the stakes. As the SEP’s youth movement in the UK wrote of their fate last year: “Every worker and student’s neck is on the line... Their cause is the cause of the entire working class and student youth, which must be mobilised in their defence.”

The trade union bureaucracy and Corbynite lefts are the opponents of such a mobilisation. It must be accomplished through the dogged reconstruction of a labour movement infused with socialist principles: the establishment of rank-and-file committees as “the practical means through which workers can coordinate actions across industries and borders, defend targeted communities, expose state and corporate propaganda, and unify struggles against repression, austerity and war into a conscious political movement.”



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