

Refugee Action Collective – Freedom for Manus

Why did asylum seekers start their hunger strike?



The hunger strike was sparked by the threat of forced 'resettlement' of 8 asylum seekers to Longerau on Jan 22, where there have been death threats against them. After the attacks that murdered Reza Barati and left over 70 seriously injured (with injuries from brain damage to loss of eyes) these threats are taken seriously. In addition pumps broke and there is no running water and no date for it to be fixed. Finally it was also caused by eighteen months of indefinite detention with no safe or permanent resettlement in sight, and the threat of mass deportation for those who do not agree to be resettled on PNG.

Is the hunger strike continuing?

Yes. Over 800 asylum seekers remain on hunger strike despite, brutal raids on Delta compounds. After first claiming the situation was peacefully resolved Immigration Minister Peter Dutton now says a 'degree of force' was used. Claims from both PNG and Immigration Minister of potential violence are nonsense. Not only do asylum seekers have banners reading 'peaceful' and 'no violence' most were severely weakened from hunger strike. The continuing hunger strike remains peaceful. The truth as has emerged from asylum seekers is that hunger strikers who were too weak to move were beaten like dogs. The raids and mass imprisonment of hunger strikers and removal of those targeted as 'leaders' to the



Chauka punishment unit has not diminished the cry for freedom.

How has the Immigration Minister responded?

New Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is following Scott Morrison's playbook – lie and deny. At first he denied there was a hunger strike, until photos and video proved it. Two days ago he claimed the hunger strike was over. New video and a letter signed by 184 asylum seekers in Foxtrot compound saying they are still on hunger strike has shown this to be false. Dutton also claims asylum seekers were not denied water for several days. See the video and pictures at www.rac-vic.org and judge for yourself. Dutton says there will be no policy change as a result of the hunger strike. However it is increasingly likely that there will be no forced moves to Longerau on the 22nd of January. Peter Dutton now needs to start talking about permanent safe resettlement for asylum seekers. This is not possible on PNG. We say shut Manus and bring the asylum seekers to Australia.

How has the ALP opposition responded?

The shadow Immigration Minister Richard Marles has been just that – a shadow and said nothing. Opposition leader Bill Shorten has called on the Coalition to end the secrecy. These mild comments enraged Peter Dutton but to really put pressure on Dutton, Shorten needs to go much further. The ALP has tied itself in knots over refugees because it was Kevin Rudd who sent asylum seekers to Manus. If Shorten was to come out and say, 'we made a mistake, Manus is destroying lives, we will abandon offshore processing' this would be real leadership that would actually challenge the Coalition's brutal policies. It would save lives. With hundreds on hunger strike Manus does not have the facilities to treat or examine them all; there is a real risk of deaths in the coming days.

What is happening elsewhere?

In Darwin Iranian hunger striker 'Martin' is perhaps days away from death after more than 70 days on hunger strike. He has lost 40% of his body weight. He was living in the community for two years before being re-detained. Iran will not accept forced returns so his detention is cruel, pointless and effectively indefinite. Peter Dutton has so far ignored calls to save the man's life.

Only a month ago new legislation was brought in by the then Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Scott Morrison allowing unprecedented powers to determine the fate of those who seek asylum in Australia. Despite a promise that children on Christmas Island would actually be freed by Christmas, these children and their families are still detained, albeit at least on Australian soil.

Members of the Refugee Action Collective held a demonstration attempting to stop the forced deportation of Gulistan, a Hazara man from Afghanistan. While at Sydney Airport, there was success in stopping the deportation of Wei Lin to danger to China, when passenger refused to sit until the asylum seeker was taken off the plane. He is now able to make a new claim for asylum. Read more:

<http://rac-vic.org/2014/12/23/deportation-stopped-by-passengers-protest/>

From new Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's 2002 maiden speech to parliament:

"...the aspirational voter of our generation, as some like to term them-are fed up with bodies like the Civil Liberties Council and the Refugee Action Collective, and certainly the dictatorship of the trade union movement."

On Nauru refugee recently protested against plans to resettle them in Cambodia. Refugees in Nauru are asking to be allowed back into detention for their own safety. Those in Australia on bridging visas will need to personally apply to the Minister to be granted work rights - yes that all 25,000 - 28,000 of them. There is still no schedule for when those in detention centers around the country will be released on temporary visas or how they will cope with the stringent requirements each type of visa imposes on them, let alone a fast track process that does not allow for appeals.

The Refugee Action Collective will continue to campaign to free the refugees. Join Us

Get Involved! RAC meets every Monday 6.30pm ANMF House 540 Elizabeth St City. New people welcome. Next RAC meeting is Monday Feb 2

For more info: www.rac-vic.org
Chris 0403 013 183

Walk For Justice for Refugees – Palm Sunday. This rally for refugee rights which drew close to 10,000 people last year is on again. Sunday March 29, 2pm State Library, Melbourne

Join the emergency contact list! RAC is aware of more looming deportations. To be informed of snap protests join our contact list: <http://rac-vic.org/subscribe>

RAC STALLS are an opportunity to raise awareness of refugee issues, upcoming events, and help us raise money. Stalls are held weekly at Bourke St Mall, outside Myer (every Thursday from 12pm) and on alternating Saturdays at Victoria Market and South Melbourne Market, and at rallies. If you would like to help on these or any other stall, or would like to ask about organising a stall in a location near you, contact Peter (0409 866 414) or Sophia (0458 488 253)