

The 'disturbances' inside Morton Hall Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) over Christmas and New Year were reported in the Echo and made the national news.

But what was missing was the perspectives of detainees themselves.

I have spoken to them, and they have made allegations of the water supply to cells being cut off as a collective punishment for a detainee accidentally leaving a tap running in a basin that overflowed, food served cold, detainees' Christmas presents and money withheld by the authorities and instances of racism and violence from some prison staff towards detainees.

Detainees report that many of them at Morton Hall are without legal representation, and those that do have a solicitor are charged 10p per page to receive faxes, out of a daily allowance of £1, making it extremely difficult to prepare a legal challenge.

Some have made official complaints about their treatment, but many say they are too scared to do so. Detainees say conditions were getting particularly bad in the period before Christmas, which led to the protests on December 24 and 25.

This background of frustration also created an atmosphere of tension that contributed to a fight among detainees on December 30.

These are men cooped up indefinitely together, some for years on end, and include migrants who have agreed to return to their home countries, but are being detained indefinitely.

Currently two men in Morton Hall are on hunger strike in protest at how long they have been held awaiting a flight, one an Italian citizen of Somali descent and the other a Pakistani national. Many detainees are refugees.

I have found in my research how the UK asylum system frequently compounds the trauma of refugees' backgrounds.

At 4am on January 9, Morton Hall detainee Amuda Yusuf Sheidu slit his wrists, but survived.

Amuda is a refugee from Darfur, Sudan, who has submitted extensive medical evidence in support of his asylum claim, but has been detained for nine months, and now faces deportation to Nigeria, where he knows nobody.

At home, Amuda's eldest daughter, who has British citizenship, has been absent from school because she is so distraught at the absence of her father.

Amuda is only the latest in a long list of immigration detainees who have attempted to end their life rather than continue in the limbo of the UK asylum system or face deportation.

The last Labour government expanded immigration detention to a capacity of more than 3,000, numbers in detention reached a record high in September 2012 and the current government is aiming for further expansion.

This serves to divide and rule. Where people seeking asylum have been allowed to live in local communities, British people have often organised in solidarity with them, making it more difficult for the government to carry out deportations.

But out of sight and out of mind, inside immigration prisons like Morton Hall the government is free to treat people how it sees fit.

A further reason this is convenient for the British government is that it prevents British people speaking to refugees who have direct experience of some of the worst consequences of British foreign policy, including the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, support for repressive regimes in Uganda and Nigeria, and proxy wars in Libya and Syria.

At a time when the government is also attacking living standards in Britain, alliances between British workers, refugees and other migrants could benefit all of us. This can start with us standing in solidarity with their struggles against detention and deportation.