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Guests

Roger Waters

legendary musician who co-founded Pink Floyd, one of the most popular rock bands of all time.

Andy Worthington

British journalist and co-founder of the Close Guantánamo and We Stand with Shaker campaigns. He is the author of *The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison*.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Seven years ago today, President Obama signed one of his first executive orders upon taking office—calling for the closure of the Guantánamo Bay military prison within one year.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: In order to effect the appropriate disposition of individuals currently detained by the Department of Defense at Guantánamo and promptly to close the detention facility at Guantánamo consistent with the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States and the interest of justice, I hereby order. And we then provide the process whereby Guantánamo will be closed no later than one year from now.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: But here we are now in 2016. Obama's last year in office began this week with Guantánamo still hanging over his presidency seven years since his executive order. Guantánamo Bay remains open due to repeated Republican obstruction and Obama's refusal to take action on his own. With the transfer of 10 prisoners last week and two more on Thursday, the Guantánamo prisoner population has fallen below 100 for the first time since the military prison opened 14 years ago this month. But 91 prisoners still remain. About one-third are cleared for release and could be freed as the year continues. Defense Secretary Ash Carter has announced he's preparing a plan that would move Guantánamo's remaining prisoners to a secure site in the United States. President Obama is reportedly in the final stages of review.

AMY GOODMAN: As administration officials decide on Guantánamo behind closed doors, we turn to two guests mobilizing for Guantánamo's closure from the grassroots. Our first guest needs no introduction: the world famous British musician Roger Waters, founding member, bassist, singer, songwriter for the iconic rock band Pink Floyd. The band is perhaps most well known for their record *The Wall*. For three years, between 2010 and '13, Roger Waters toured the world with a dazzling concert of the same name. The Wall tour featured the album performed in its entirety, along with a massive stage production conveying antiwar themes. It broke records as the highest-grossing tour for a solo musician in history. Roger Waters is set to hit the road again for another world tour this year to coincide with the release of his first new solo album in more than two decades.

Roger Waters was one of the celebrities featured in the We Stand with Shaker campaign, a grassroots effort to win the freedom of British resident Shaker Aamer from Guantánamo. Aamer had been cleared for release since 2007, but the U.S. kept him locked up without charge until this past October. He was subjected to beatings, to torture, to sleep deprivation, starvation, doused with freezing water, forced to stand for 18 hours at a time. For the campaign, Roger Waters and other notable figures posed with photographs alongside a giant figure of Shaker Aamer. People around the world also submitted photos of themselves with homemade signs reading "I stand with Shaker."

We're also joined by Andy Worthington, British activists, investigative journalist, who served as the co-director of the We Stand with Shaker Aamer campaign, the author of *The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison*.

On Wednesday, Roger Waters and Andy Worthington helped launch the "Countdown to Close Guantánamo" campaign, which, like Shaker Aamer, asks people to take photos of themselves with signs calling for Guantánamo's closure before President Obama leaves office in 2017.

Well, last week, Roger Waters and Andy Worthington stopped by the *Democracy Now!* studios to discuss their campaign for Shaker Aamer's freedom and for Guantánamo Bay prison's closure.

ROGER WATERS: I got involved really with Shaker when Clive Stafford Smith, who's his lead attorney from Reprieve in London, received a letter from him where Shaker describes how part of his technique for staying sane in Guantánamo was to remember songs and sing them. And one of them was a song of mine called "Hey You." So he wrote some words down in the letter, and Clive forwarded that letter to me. And I answered it, and I sent a letter to Shaker, and then I made a video. And I—you know, I was immediately sucked in, because this man has got an extremely powerful and forceful personality and an extraordinary message of resilience and love for the rest of the world. And I was deeply moved by his letter, and so I got involved in the campaign that Andy and Jo MacInnes in London were running to have him released.

AMY GOODMAN: Could you sing *a cappella* the words of "Hey You," what so expressed Shaker's feeling?

ROGER WATERS: Well, Hey you, out—"Hey you, out there in the cold, getting lonely, getting old, can you feel me?" is the first line. And in his letter, he says that those words and the couplets that come after it—he said, if you want to know how it feels to be in here, to be incarcerated, you should listen to this song, because it describes my feelings—which was very moving for me, for him to say that.

I mean, it's impossible for any of those of us who have not been incarcerated, as entirely innocent men with no recourse to the law—I mean, this is the fundamental problem with Guantánamo and the law involved, is that *habeas corpus* has been thrown out of the window, and so we no longer have our fingertips on the grasp of the law that we've been used to for the last 800 years since Magna Carta in the fields of Runnymede in London. And it's gone now. We don't—we don't have it. It's been removed from us. And so that's what's so important about Guantánamo and all the work that Andy and Jo and people are doing.

AMY GOODMAN: So, tell us about the campaign you waged. You know, when people see it in the media, a man released, they might think it's on the whim of one of his jailers. They say, "OK, he's free today." But this is a result of a massive movement.

ANDY WORTHINGTON: Yeah, well, there was a—you know, there was a grassroots campaign called the Save Shaker Aamer campaign, which had been running for years, with people standing outside Parliament, so just to keep reminding MPs. And then, we would hold parliamentary meetings every six months in support of MPs that—Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were two of the very supportive MPs all along. And at one of the meetings, we would—I was talking, and I was trying to come up with an idea that might help us to grab the attention of the public. And I had this notion of a giant figure of Shaker that would rise up behind the prime minister and government ministers whenever they went anywhere, to raise the point, you know, kind of—essentially, that he was the elephant in the room when it came to discussions with the United States about things. And, of course, you can't have a huge figure rearing up behind the prime minister, because his security people would—you know, would arrest you immediately. But the notion of the giant figure was really—Joanne MacInnes was in the audience that night, and she liked the idea. So we got it made, and then we started approaching people.

And it could have gone either way, Amy, to be honest. You know, when you come up with a gimmick, are people going to think it's ridiculous, or are they going to go for it? And actually, people liked it. And I think it had something about it of being larger than life, which really is something that reflects what Shaker is like. So it just took off. But, you know, we had—at the same time that we launched it at the end of 2014, there was support from the media in the U.K., and Britain's, you know, most popular conservative tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, got behind the campaign.

AMY GOODMAN: How did you get them behind the campaign?

ANDY WORTHINGTON: Well, it's funny. The *Daily Mail* is really not always very good on issues to do with race, but it turns out they're opposed to the use of torture, and they uphold the rule of law. So they made it an issue that they also care about *habeas corpus* as much as we do.

AMY GOODMAN: The president has made a big deal of gun violence and taking executive action because he can't get Republican support on curbing the access to guns. Do you think he should do the same thing on closing Guantánamo, doing it with an executive order, like he

issued an executive order, first one in his presidency, one of the first in those first few days, saying he would close it by the end of the year?

ANDY WORTHINGTON: Yeah, well, you know, I think that he's still trying to work with Congress. I don't know whether he's going to manage that. You know, Senator McCain heads the Senate Armed Services Committee and could work with him if he came up with a plan that he liked. But there's no—

AMY GOODMAN: Who was a prisoner himself.

ANDY WORTHINGTON: Yeah, who was a prisoner himself. But there's no guarantee that Senator McCain can influence some of the—some of the people in Congress now. If that route doesn't work, then I think he absolutely needs to take the executive order route.

ROGER WATERS: But to give Obama his due—

AMY GOODMAN: Roger Waters?

ROGER WATERS: To give him his due, in his State of the Nation address a couple of days ago, he did actually get up on his hind legs and say how malign it was that the Republicans and the right wing were singling out the Muslim religion. And he did say we cannot lump all Muslims together in, OK, which is exactly what Trump and Cruz and the rest of the Republican presidential hopefuls are doing. So, I really applaud him for saying that on national television in a very, very important speech. And he has done the deal with Iran. And, I mean, Obama has had a pretty hard row to hoe during his incumbency as the president, and clearly the machinery of government that he's trying to work alongside is broken. It has broken. It's far too susceptible to financial considerations and so, after *Citizens United*, as we all know.

So, yes, let's try and encourage him. You know, he's got 365 days from today until he leaves office, so Andy's plan is, let's get Guantánamo closed before the end of that time. It is fundamentally important to every citizen of the United States of America that we—although I'm not a citizen, but I live here and I care about this country—that we return to the rule of law. It's taken many, many years to develop it. Every civilized society has to have law to which we abide. We cannot be ruled by the Donald Trumps and Ted Cruzes of this world. So, please, Obama, let's get this thing closed by the end of your presidency. That would be a great way to finish.

AMY GOODMAN: So, Roger Waters, as you said, you're a British citizen, you live in this country—two of the leading world and war powers. I mean, President Obama is now presiding over the longest war in U.S. history in Afghanistan, and the Middle East is exploding right now. You're about to go on a world tour for your new solo album in two decades.

ROGER WATERS: Well, I'm not about to. It's very unlikely that I will start touring anywhere this year. These things take a long time. It took me about 10 months to put together The Wall tour. I still have to finish making the record. But, yes, it is my determination to go back on the road.

AMY GOODMAN: And the record will be called?

ROGER WATERS: That, I'm not quite sure yet.

AMY GOODMAN: Will it be around war?

ROGER WATERS: It will be about peace and love. It will be about my concern for the children of the world and how they're being slaughtered willy-nilly by whoever it is that runs everything. You know, I don't want to go all deep state on you, but this whole charade is being controlled—I'm not suggesting conspiracies, but it is being controlled by a group of important elements—you know, the banks, Wall Street, the Pentagon, the NSA, the CIA, the this, the that, the other, the U.K. You know, conservative policies all over the world control the way that we all live. And it is very important that we try to wrest control back to the people.

So we need to educate. We need an educated electorate who can start confronting the problems that lead to the children of the world, all of them, all the children all over the world, not living in an atmosphere of peace and love, which is what they deserve and which is what we have to bring to them somehow. And Andy and Jo, the work that they're doing with Shaker and with Guantánamo is fundamental to that more general—more general work that we need to focus on, is my view.

AMY GOODMAN: Andy Worthington, you have launched this campaign, Close Guantánamo. What are you doing to try to achieve this?

ANDY WORTHINGTON: Well, I set up the campaign four years ago with the attorney, U.S. attorney Tom Wilner, who represented the Guantánamo prisoners in Supreme Court cases for *habeas corpus* in 2004 and 2008. And as we now approach the last year of the Obama presidency, we decided that it would be a good idea to count down, drawing on the things we learned from the We Stand with Shaker campaign, so to draw in both celebrities and ordinary people so that they can make their voices heard. So we're asking people to go visit the website, CloseGuantanamo.org, to get a poster from there, to stand with the poster, to take a photo. And we're already lining up celebrities who are going to be involved, as you'll see from some of the photos that we're showing here. And—

AMY GOODMAN: Tell us some of the celebrities.

ANDY WORTHINGTON: And ordinary people can get involved. Well, Roger, of course, is involved. We've had—we've got Brian Eno. We've got Mark Rylance, the actor. It's just the start. I know the calls are going now to get people involved. And we're hoping that it will be able to do the same thing that we did with Shaker Aamer, but for the whole of Guantánamo, and to raise people's awareness of what's happening, through celebrity support, which, you know, helps get the word out to people, but also giving ordinary people the opportunity to say that they're opposed to it and to provide a few words themselves about why they need to see Guantánamo closed. And we'll have the posters that will count down every 50 days, and we'll be trying to organize events throughout the year and helping everybody to support President Obama in getting the place closed.

That's Roger Waters performing "We Shall Overcome," accompanied by Alexander Rohatyn on cello in the *Democracy Now!* studio.