

Britain: Hicham Yezza threatened with imminent deportation to Algeria

By Robert Stevens
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The British government is stepping up its efforts to deport Hicham Yezza to Algeria. The Home Office has decided to deny Yezza his right to a trial on alleged immigration charges and has stated that after December 2, he will be liable to be deported from the UK.

The Socialist Equality Party and its student organisation, the International Students for Social Equality, strongly condemns and opposes this attack on the democratic rights of Hicham Yezza including the denial of his fundamental right to due process. We call on all working people and students in Britain and internationally to demand an end to the attempt to deport him.

Yeza, an administrator at the University of Nottingham, and Rizwaan Sabir, a student, were both arrested on May 14 under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act on suspicion of the "instigation, preparation and commission of acts of terrorism". Sabir and Yezza were then subjected to a traumatic period of detention in police cells in which they faced hours of interrogation. The two were held for six days and then released without charge on May 20.

Yeza has lived, studied and worked in the UK for 13 years and currently resides in the city of Nottingham, East Midlands. Up until his arrest by the police, the authorities had never sought to challenge his right to live and work in the UK. He was at that time employed as a principal administrator in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Nottingham. Before this, he won a scholarship and studied for a masters and a PhD. He is a popular figure in Nottingham, with a broad network of friends at the university and in his local community where he has regularly organised and participated in cultural activities.

Sabir is a postgraduate international relations student at the university and was researching his PhD proposal when he was arrested. As part of his preparation, he downloaded, from the US Department of Justice website, a copy of a document known as the "al-Qaida training manual". The document is freely available on a number of web sites, including Federation of American Scientists and can be

bought on Amazon.com.

Due to the length of the document, Sabir could not afford to print it himself. He therefore emailed the document to his friend, Yezza, to print it for him. Yezza had been assisting Sabir for some time in drafting his PhD proposal.

Several months after this, a university employee contacted the police stating that the manual had been seen on Yezza's computer. The police mounted an immediate operation codenamed Minerva that resulted in the arrests of Sabir and Yezza. It was led by the West Midlands counter-terrorism unit and involved 26 police officers. The operation included three police raids, the search of university premises, the use of forensic experts, and a substantial police presence on campus for several days.

Speaking in a *Guardian* interview on August 18, Yezza described the immediate circumstances behind his arrest:

"Once in custody, almost 48 hours passed before it was confirmed that the entire operation (involving dozens of officers, police cars, vans, and scientific support agents) was triggered by the presence on my University of Nottingham office computer of an equally absurd document called the 'al-Qaida Training Manual', a declassified open-source document that I had never read and had completely forgotten about since it had been sent to me months before."

Following his release Yezza was immediately re-arrested on alleged immigration charges and placed in detention. He was denied the right to attend a scheduled hearing and, on May 23, the Home Office issued an order to deport him to Algeria.

The planned "fast-tracked" June 1 deportation of Yezza was cancelled on May 30. The change was necessitated by an application to the High Court seeking a judicial review of the Home Office's decision.

Yeza was held in detention for a further 27 days, during which time he was moved to numerous facilities and was forced to endure some 20 hours of police interrogation. He was finally released on June 16, following an application lodged by his legal team to have him released on bail.

Yeza has been a high-profile political activist and

campaigner at the university and in Nottingham for some years. During his time as a student, he served as a member of the Students' Union Executive Committee and on the University Senate. He was the president of the Arabic Society and the editor of *Voice* magazine, a journal for international students. For the past five years, he has been the editor of *Ceasefire*, the political journal of the Nottingham Student Peace Movement.

Sabir had also been involved in a number of political campaigns and actions. On November 29 last year, Sabir was arrested for a "breach of the peace." His arrest took place during a protest, organised by the Palestinian Society, against the construction of the Israeli West Bank Wall.

Following his arrest he said, "A University campus is meant to be a place where an exchange of ideas and beliefs through peaceful means is encouraged. The University's clamping down on this fundamental right highlights the restrictions that peaceful protestors face when undertaking peaceful protests on issues such as Israel, which it seems to me is becoming taboo to even talk about."

Yezza has consistently rejected all alleged immigration charges against him and has sought to have his case heard in court, where he expected to be cleared and be allowed to remain in the UK. Following his re-arrest he flatly refused to accept an offer from the Home Office to have the immigration charges dropped in exchange for him agreeing to leave the country without protest.

On November 19 Yezza was due to attend a court hearing regarding the charges that formed the basis of his attempted deportation in June. Immediately prior to the hearing the Home Office announced that it had decided to reject his right to remain in the UK and stated that he was to be given until December 2 before being liable to be deported.

Commenting on this decision, Hicham Yezza's Facebook campaign page stated, "In other words, the Home Office has opted to assume Hicham is guilty rather than let a court of law decide. Hicham's solicitors have called the decision (and its timing) a clear attempt at 'psychological warfare' in order to unsettle Hicham before the hearing and to intimidate him into giving up."

Dr Alf Nilsen, a research fellow at the university's school of politics and international relations, said at the time that Yezza was being held at Colnbrook immigration removal centre: "If he is taken to Algeria, he may be subjected to severe human rights violations after his involvement in this case. He has been in the UK for 13 years. His work is here, his friends are here, his life is here".

The fact that Yezza has now been denied the right to a trial after months of legal proceedings and faces being arbitrarily and summarily deported underscores the blatant political

nature of his original arrest and ongoing harassment at the hands of the British state.

On June 2, the International Students for Social Equality published a statement on the *World Socialist Web Site*, "Demand the release of Hicham Yezza". It explained, "The arrest of Sabir and Yezza and the attempt to deport Yezza is part of a broader systematic assault on democratic rights and civil liberties being conducted in the name of the 'war on terror.' Under conditions of entrenched opposition to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and mounting concern over a possible attack on Iran, the deeply unpopular Brown government is resorting to ever-more repressive measures."

It continued, "The arrest of students and members of university staff for reading and researching freely available works is a sign of the times. It means that the state and its institutions can arrest virtually anyone for reading or possessing material deemed 'illegitimate'". (See: "Demand the release of Hicham Yezza")

We urge all our readers to demand that Hicham Yezza be allowed to remain in the UK and that all deportation proceedings cease. For further details on the campaign to stop the deportation of Hicham Yezza and to make an online donation to his legal fund please visit:

www.freehicham.co.uk/what-can-we-do/

Letters of protest can be addressed to the Home Secretary
Jacqui Smith below: E-mail:
indpublicenquiries@ind.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
Fax: 0208 760 3132

Letters of protest should also be sent to Phil Woolas, the Minister of State for Borders and Immigration.

E-mail: woolasp@parliament.uk

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>