

Britain: An interview with the manager of Hicham Yezza's defence campaign

“The Home Office acts like a faceless machine”

30 May 2008

The World Socialist Web Site spoke to Musab Younis about the arrest and imminent deportation to Algeria of Hicham Yezza, a faculty member of the University of Nottingham, England. (See “Oppose deportation of Hicham Yezza”)

Musab Younis is the manager of Hicham's defence campaign and a close friend. The following is his interview.

Hicham was arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 a couple weeks ago for getting a copy of the Al Queda training manual sent to him by a friend, Rizawaan Sabir, who was doing research on terrorism. He was forwarded a copy and it was suggested to him that he print it out. The training manual is available on the Internet and can be bought on Amazon and is on government web sites.

He just had the document on his computer. He never actually printed it. Somebody saw it on his computer and alerted the University of Nottingham. The university didn't think of looking on Google and seeing that it was a document that was widely available.

He was detained for six days and released without charge. Then Hicham was rearrested on immigration grounds and he was kept in detention centres and moved every day or so.

He was talking to his solicitor and thought he had a really good case to stay here. The immigration charges were quite limited, but then suddenly the Home Office issued a removal notice. He had a trial date scheduled, but they said on condition of removal we will drop all the charges. We just want to get rid of you essentially.

That's when the whole campaign started, because Hicham has been here for 13 years; he's been on the student's union executive, editor of a political magazine, etc. He is very well known here and has

done undergraduate and post-graduate degrees.

Now suddenly the Home Office are saying they want to deport him. He has been in contact with the Home Office about his visa application before the arrest and it was all being sorted out. The Home Office hadn't had any problems. After he was arrested under the Terrorism Act they suddenly decided they had a problem with his immigration status and wanted to remove him.

So most people think this is related to the initial arrest and that the Home Office want to pin him down on something. The Home Office has an interest in getting convictions for terrorism charges.

So that is the situation so far. An appeal has been lodged against his removal. Now we are seeing what happens with the legal process and are campaigning hard with the Home Office and other influential people who can try to help.

Our local Member of Parliament, Alan Simpson, has taken a really keen interest in the case and has been writing letters to Ian Byrne and talking to Hicham's solicitor. Another MP, Nick Palmer, has also taken an interest in the case. We have had loads of support from organisations such as the University and College Union, who recently passed a motion supporting Hicham. Most student unions we have contacted have given their support.

Bettina Renz is Rizwaan's personal tutor. In the school of politics we do a lot of research related to international security and terrorism. Right from the start the tutors knew what this was about. They talked to the police and said this is for legitimate research purposes, freely available and in the public domain. They were concerned about the implications of these arrests. Obviously once the university starts vetting

that, this is very concerning to the academics in those fields.

One of the police officers told one of the academics that this would never have happened if they had been blond-haired Swedish PhD students.

It is a very dangerous situation where a university calls the police on a very flimsy suspicion. And there was clearly no reason for the police to take so long and to hold them in detention for so long. Six days in police custody is punishment in itself.

The Home Office's actions are indicative of a dangerous attitude. It is that it picks on certain people and decides to remove them. The Home Office acts like a faceless machine. It just treats him like a common criminal, which is not the case.

We are very concerned that the university bureaucracy has decided to take a position where they fully cooperated with the police action and implicitly assumed the guilt of their own students.

When Sabir and Yezza were released without charge they didn't apologise and said this was necessary for the safety of the community. At first when the arrests took place they were saying there is no threat to the community. We thought that already there was Orwellian language involved here.

Then when Hicham was rearrested they made no attempt to support him. This is the university bureaucracy, not the academics and staff. All I have encountered from them is 100 percent support. The bureaucracy has decided to distance themselves from him. They have refused to admit that he was a student here for so long. They have tried to paint him as a clerical assistant, which is not really the case. They also said he was an illegal immigrant and while the case is ongoing it is not really their place to say.

When we demonstrated at the university, we got a call from Hicham. He relayed a message of thanks and goodwill to everyone and expressed his gratitude. He thanked everyone for their solidarity. We want the Home Office to reconsider what they are doing and we are hopeful about his case. We are hopeful that he will be able to stay.



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