

Britain: Demand the release of Hicham Yezza

By International Students for Social Equality
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The planned June 1 deportation of University of Nottingham staff member Hicham Yezza was cancelled on May 30. The change was necessitated by an application to the High Court that same day, seeking a judicial review of the Home Office's decision.

Yeza is currently being held at the Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre, near Heathrow Airport in London.

A further application has been lodged by his solicitors, Cartwright King, calling for his release from detention while his case is reconsidered.

David Smith, of Cartwright King, said, "We hope and trust that the Home Office will now release Mr. Yezza and reconsider his case properly and in accordance with the law; we will proceed vigorously with the High Court action unless they agree to do so."

Immediately following the cancellation of his deportation order, after more than two weeks in detention, Yezza was told on May 31 that he was to be moved from Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre to a detention centre in Dover. Yezza is refusing to be moved yet again and issued the following statement as soon as he was told.

"I have just been informed that I am to be moved to a detention centre in Dover. This would be the fifth movement in nine days and is therefore unacceptable. It is deeply saddening for both myself and my visitors; it is also a great source of distress at this time and an affront to human dignity and my human right to be treated with respect and consideration. I am thus categorically refusing to go. I am not a piece of luggage but a human being, and deserve to be treated as such."

A statement on the Stop the Deportation of Hicham Yezza web site said, "Despite the existence of a long term facility adjacent to Hicham's current location he is once more being transported. Hicham's dignity should not come second to the interests of private sector detention centres whose main aim is to delay release procedures and maximise profits. Given that the outcome of his bail application is imminent further transportation is unnecessary, such disruption would not only violate Hicham's right to private life through contact with visitors and the outside world, but also places a

needless burden on the tax payer." (<http://freehichamyezza.wordpress.com/>)

Yeza and University of Nottingham student Rizawaan Sabir were both arrested on May 14 under the Terrorism Act 2000. Sabir is a Masters student in politics at the University and was researching his dissertation on "the American approach to Al Qaeda in Iraq." As part of his preparation, he downloaded, from a US government web site, a copy of an Al Qaeda training manual. The document is freely available on a number of web sites. As it was some 1,500 pages long, Sabir could not afford to print it himself. He therefore emailed the document to his friend, Yezza, and asked if he was able to print it for him. Sometime after this, a university employee contacted the police stating that the manual had been seen on Yezza's computer.

The two were held for six days and then released without charge on May 20. Subsequent to this action, Yezza was immediately rearrested on immigration legislation 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 University of Nottingham has played a key role in this attack on democratic rights. Immediately following the arrest of Sabir and Yezza, spokesman Jonathan Ray said the institution "has been cooperating fully from the outset throughout this inquiry." He added, "Here, at the institution, we fully accept that this sort of police operation is necessary and reasonable for the welfare of our communities."

Following their release without charge, the university was forced to backtrack on its initial position that the Al Qaeda manual was not "legitimate" research material. But it still claimed "the university and police were concerned by material, an Al Qaeda training manual, that was in the possession of someone who wasn't a student or member of the academic faculty and it was that anxiety that led to the chain of events which followed. We are reassured by the police investigation and know that the young man, who is articulate and intelligent, has demonstrated to the police that he had an academic interest in the material."

In fact, Yezza is an employee of the university's School of Languages and Cultures as the PA to Professor Lesley

Milne. Before this, he won a scholarship and studied for a degree, a master's and a PhD. He is a popular figure, with a broad network of friends at the university and in his local community. Leading members of the faculty, including Sabir's own tutor, Bettina Renz, have expressed their dismay that the university did not even consider contacting them to ask them about the research material in question.

Speaking at a fringe meeting of the University and College Union (UCU) in Manchester last week, Renz said, "Risawaan was doing an MA dissertation on understanding radical Islam and American approaches to Al Qaeda in Iraq. Our concern is how could this have happened? Why didn't whoever saw this on the printer contact me as his personal tutor? The research material was legitimate for the student, but not for a clerical member of staff. It's ridiculous that a member of a university is not allowed to be involved in politics. That still seems to be the perception. Any kind of guidelines that require us to ask for permission before we research something I would find very worrying."

She added, "If I was researching the subject very likely I would have looked at this myself. The severity of the reaction is just mind-boggling to me, to be honest."

The campaign to oppose the deportation of Hicham Yezza has won wide support in Britain and internationally. Hundreds of students and academics at the University of Nottingham held a demonstration on May 28 to demand his release from detention.

Some 64 members of the faculty at the University signed a letter addressed to the vice-chancellor and published on May 29 in support of Sabir and Yezza, stating, "We would like the University's declarations about upholding academic freedom to be reflected in its response to the arrests. In particular we request the University refrains from using prejudicial language against Hicham and Rizawaan and makes good its offer to provide them with substantial support and counselling.

"We hope and expect the University will develop in consultation with its employees guidelines designed to avoid such unnecessary arrests and invasions into academic freedom in the future. Finally, the University can best demonstrate its commitment to uphold academic freedom by pursuing all means possible to ensure Hicham receives a fair trial."

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.

The government is currently seeking to increase the time it

can hold "terror suspects" without charge from the current 28 days to 42 days.

As well as this, proposals were recently leaked to the media of plans to set up a massive database, which, according to the *Times*, would hold "details of every phone call, email and time spent on the Internet by the public... Internet service providers (ISPs) and telecoms companies would hand over the records to the Home Office under plans put forward by officials. The information would be held for at least 12 months and the police and security services would be able to access it if given permission from the courts."

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."

Commenting on this danger Alf Nilsen, of the University of Nottingham's school of politics, said, "Hicham was a very prominent member of student political society. That says something about the potential implications of being politically active on campus in a time when a culture of fear merges with draconian terror legislation.

"It's a question of intellectual freedom, not just academic freedom. What does this say about people's right to inform themselves about issues of public concern?"

The Socialist Equality Party and its student organisation the International Students for Social Equality call on all students and working people nationally and internationally to demand the immediate release of Hicham Yezza.

Letters of protest can be addressed to the Home Secretary Jacqui Smith below.

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Fax: 0208 760 3132



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact