

Youth and families targeted for collective punishment over UK riots

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Daniel Sartain-Clarke, 18, his mother and her eight-year-old daughter from Battersea, south London are amongst thousands of victims of a campaign of reprisals in the wake of civil disturbances that erupted throughout England in August.

Sartain-Clarke faces a long prison term on the flimsiest evidence. If he is sentenced, his family will be the first to be issued with an eviction order and driven from their council flat.

Sartain-Clarke is accused of violent disorder and burglary in Clapham Junction. He has pleaded not guilty to both charges. His mother described her son as being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He saw disturbances and went to have a look at what was happening.

He was arrested by riot police outside an electrical goods store. A photograph published by the *Daily Mail* shows him surrounded by ambulance crews, bloodied, bandaged and handcuffed. In the 24-hour courts which rushed through hearings with numerous breaches of standard procedure, he was remanded in custody in Feltham prison until a September 6 hearing. His mother, Maite de la Calva, was terrified that a barely concealed press campaign encouraging existing prisoners to attack jailed rioters could result in her son being injured or killed because he cannot defend himself and suffers from a depressive condition that renders him passive.

Within hours of Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron's August remarks urging local councils to evict tenants involved in rioting, Tory-controlled Wandsworth Council issued Maite de la Calva with an

eviction notice in order to "get the ball rolling". Housing Minister Grant Shapps declared, "I will back social landlords who evict tenants involved in any rioting."

Ravi Govindia, the leader of Wandsworth Council, after issuing the first eviction notice in England, declared, "Our officers will continue to work with the courts to establish the identities of other council tenants or members of their households as more cases are processed in the coming days and weeks."

In a letter to the family, the council cited existing legislation and "anti-social" behaviour laws brought in under the last Labour government allowing for tenants to be evicted. They also cited her rent arrears.

Maite de la Calva spoke to the press, describing her son as the victim of police violence for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the assault on her human rights. Her efforts were turned against her and presented in a most vile manner.

The August 13 *Daily Mail* began by mentioning efforts to remove her from her "£225,000 taxpayer-subsidised flat," drew attention to her being "Spanish-born" and concluded by reporting a petition for the removal of welfare benefits for those caught in the riots.

Wandsworth council proceeded with the eviction process, even though Sartain-Clarke has not been convicted of any crime, to ensure they will be able to initiate final eviction proceedings with minimum delay ahead of his final court appearance.

Sartain-Clarke was bailed on September 6, under the most draconian conditions. He is living in Bath under a 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. curfew and is not allowed into London except for court appearances, a form of internal exile. In Bath the media has pursued him, publishing his photograph. This served no other purpose than to leave him open to further vilification.

Sartain-Clarke said his mother had nothing to do with the actions he has been accused of and should not be punished.

De la Calva is a low paid, part-time worker and charity volunteer. She has explained that she has no money and private rented accommodation is completely out of her reach. Describing the persecution of her family and the actions of Wandsworth council, she said, “I think what they are doing is putting everyone in the same basket and that is dictatorship-like and they are like fascists. Yes, I think Wandsworth Council are behaving like fascists.”

De la Calva has received growing support in her neighbourhood and throughout London. A petition against their eviction is growing daily. The petition has gained qualified support from Labour Party councillors on the Wandsworth borough council. However, Labour-run councils in London have been just as vicious as their Tory counterparts in pursuing evictions.

On August 10, Chris Roberts, Labour leader of Greenwich Council, stated, “We shall seek the eviction of anyone living in council property if they are found to have been engaged in criminal acts.”

Labour controlled Southwark Councillor Ian Wingfield said, “As a council we will seek, within the confines of the law, the eviction of anyone living in a council property who is found guilty of these crimes.”

Gerri Scott, Strategic Director of Housing Services for Southwark Council, issued the following letter to 35 households in the area: “The council has been advised that you, or a member of your household residing at this address, has been charged with criminal conduct associated with the recent disorder in London. I am writing to advise you that, under the Housing Acts and

the conditions of your tenancy, if you or a member of your household are convicted of a criminal offence the council has the power to ask the court to evict you from your home.”



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