

UK family face eviction as collective punishment

Trevor Johnson
13 December 2011

An entire family, including a young baby and an eight year-old child, face being thrown out of their family home in Manchester, England, under anti-democratic legislation.

The seven members of the family of Munir Farooqi are being threatened with the collective punishment, after he was convicted of terrorist offences and jailed in September.

The basis for eviction is that the house in the Longsight district of the city was the location of some of the crimes of which Farooqi was convicted. Under the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, the house is being subject to forfeiture as property, as it was deemed to have been used “for the purposes of terrorism”. The attempt to seize the home and evict three generations of the family is the first time the forfeiture clause in the law has been used since it was passed.

A spokeswoman for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said, “The power to forfeit residential premises in these circumstances is a new power under the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, and before any decision is made, the forfeiture application is considered by the court and the family will be given an opportunity to be heard.”

If the order is granted, the property would be sold and the proceeds placed into the Magistrates’ Court. The state is attempting to seize the home, even though it does not belong to Munir Farooqi. The deeds of the property are in the name of his wife, Zeenat Farooqi.

Munir’s son, Harris Farooqi, lives in the house and was acquitted of a charge of preparing for an act of terrorism. He explained, “It’s a family house. Why is it collective punishment in a democratic society? I don’t understand. We as British citizens work here all our lives and then we’re thrown out onto the streets.”

Farooqi was sentenced to life imprisonment after

being found guilty of engaging in conduct in preparation for acts of terrorism, three counts of soliciting to murder and dissemination of terrorist publications. Two other men, Matthew Newton and Hussain Malik, were also jailed following an undercover operation by police from the North West Counter Terrorism Unit (NWCTU). As part of the operation, which was more than a year in duration, undercover police met with Farooqi in his house and made secret recordings of conversations.

Farooqi and the other defendants in the case denied all the charges against them. He is appealing against his conviction.

The men were jailed, despite the police finding no evidence that they were actually preparing a crime. Instead, they were jailed on the basis of their “ideology”. Detective Chief Superintendent Tony Porter, the head of the NWCTU, was forced to acknowledge, “This was an extremely challenging case, both to investigate and successfully prosecute at court, because we did not recover any blueprint, attack plan or endgame for these men.”

He added, “However, what we were able to prove was their ideology. These men were involved in an organised attempt in Manchester to recruit men to fight, kill and die in either Afghanistan or Pakistan by persuading them it was their religious duty.

“That is not an expression of religious freedom, but a concerted effort to prepare people to fight against our own forces abroad. In law, that is terrorism.”

Assistant Chief Constable Dawn Copley claimed that most of the acts took place at the Farooqi family home. “If it can be shown to a court that Munir Farooqi was in possession or control of a property used for the purposes of terrorism, a court may make a forfeiture order for that property,” she said.

The police and CPS are also seeking to seize two other properties belonging to the Farooqi family, currently let out as student accommodation. The family has insisted that the income from the rent of these properties is needed to pay the legal costs of the trial and forfeiture proceedings, as well as providing their livelihood.

The family are heading a “Save the Family Home” campaign that has attracted significant support. A petition of around 13,000 names was handed to the CPS on November 8. The family are seeking to collect 100,000 signatures by February of next year, before the case is to be heard in court in March.

Munir Farooqi’s 28-year-old daughter Zulaika said, “Leaving three generations of a family homeless, including an eight-month-old baby, is disgusting, it’s not British law, it’s just wrong and inhumane. We have so much public support against this, not just from the Muslim community but also from non-Muslims too.”

On October 18, local residents campaigning in support of the family held a vigil outside Longsight police station, to demand an end to attempts to evict them. On October 31, a public meeting was held in the area to highlight the case.

The power to order forfeiture of property “used for the purpose of terrorism” was inserted into the Act in 2009, under the previous Labour government of Gordon Brown. Its provisions are so all-embracing and vague that even Conservative Party member of parliament Dominic Grieve said the power had “the potential of becoming a draconian side sanction that may be out of all proportion to the actual offences being committed.”

Grieve is now Attorney General in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government.

The move to seize the home of the Farooqi family echoes the efforts to instigate mass collective punishment in the aftermath of the summer riots in London and other major cities and towns. Led by calls from Prime Minister David Cameron, who demanded that social housing be taken away from the families of residents involved in the disturbances, Wandsworth Council in London served an eviction order on the family of Daniel Sartain-Clarke. Sartain-Clarke lives in the home with his mother and her eight-year-old daughter. Other councils, both Conservative and

Labour Party-run, followed suit.

Plans are also being considered to strip people accused of involvement in the riots of their welfare benefits, even if they are not convicted of any offence.

Commenting on the attempt to seize the Farooqi family home, a BBC News web site article noted, “The [London] Metropolitan Police said it would be watching the outcome of the case with interest.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact