

UK schools told “anti-capitalist” teaching prohibited

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Government instructions against the teaching of anti-capitalism in schools in England have deservedly earned widespread condemnation.

Department for Education (DfE) guidance issued last week deems anti-capitalism an “extreme political stance,” equivalent to antisemitism and terrorism.

The original edict to head teachers on setting the relationship, sex and health curriculum, barred teaching any materials that could include, “a publicly stated desire to abolish or overthrow democracy, capitalism, or to end free and fair elections; opposition to freedom of speech; the use of racist, including antisemitic, language; the endorsement of illegal activity; and a failure to condemn illegal activities done in support of their cause.”

The guidance was angrily denounced on social media. Many noted that it would effectively veto large elements of the English literature curriculum—including Shakespeare, Dickens and Priestley—and much of the history curriculum—from the English Civil War, Ireland, the American War of Independence and the Russian Revolution, to South Africa and Israel/Palestine.

As for the claim that the veto is in line with “British values,” Britain's ruling elite routinely breaches virtually all of its strictures.

The Johnson government has declared its intention to break international law in pursuit of its Brexit bill and is pushing through measures empowering intelligence and military actors to kidnap, torture, and murder with impunity. It routinely deploys racist—specifically anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim—language in support of its right-wing agenda. It is one of the few countries in the world to have suspended elections under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As for “free speech”, one needs look no further than the politically motivated show trial of WikiLeaks

journalist and publisher Julian Assange. The hearing at London's Old Bailey has been marked by the blatant trampling of any democratic and juridical norms as part of efforts to dragoon Assange into an American high security prison for the rest of his life, as payback for exposing imperialist war crimes.

The DfE's subsequent “correction” changes nothing. This states that the veto applies to resources, “produced by organisations that take extreme political stances on matters. This is the case even if the material itself is not extreme, as the use of it could imply endorsement or support of the organisation.”

The guidance builds on the Prevent strategy, first implemented by the Blair Labour government, which targeted Muslims as potential extremists and required schools (later local authorities, prisons and the National Health Service) to report anyone they deemed “vulnerable to radicalisation”.

This state surveillance policy is to be massively extended under the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill, backed by the Labour Party, now before parliament.

Driving these measures is the discrediting of capitalism by the global pandemic, which is fuelling a resurgence of working class struggle.

COVID-19 is being allowed to rip through the population as the ruling elite force the reopening of workplaces and education facilities to recoup the multi-billion handout to the super-rich and major corporations. The result is that more than 1 million people globally have died, and the health of millions more has been severely compromised through the policy of “herd immunity” implemented by virtually all governments. In Britain, as elsewhere, health and social care are collapsing, millions face unemployment and destitution, and young people see their education,

health and any decent future prospects laid to waste. More than one in six secondary schools are not fully open, and at least 20,000 pupils and 25,000 teachers nationally are currently forced to self-isolate due to COVID outbreaks.

The introduction of new curriculum instructions under conditions where schools are barely functioning underscores the real objective of the DfE pronouncement. It is because education facilities are at the epicentre of the “back-to-work” drive and, amid the spread of the pandemic, the government is preparing for massive resistance to its criminal measures by proclaiming “anti-capitalism” as a threat to national security.

This is an international process, led by the US. The DfE guidance came just days after President Donald Trump denounced US public schools as centres of “left-wing indoctrination” and said he would create a national commission to promote a “pro-American curriculum that celebrates the truth about our nation’s great history.”

Trump's fascistic declaration is of a piece with his mobilising of right-wing militias, police, and military units to intimidate, terrorise and murder left-wing and anti-racist protesters.

His efforts are aided by the divisive, anti-working class politics of the Democratic Party and its pseudo-left supporters, who promote their own version of the so-called “culture war” based on identity politics, specifically the claim that white workers are de facto white supremacists.

UK Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said that the DfE measures were guided by the need for “political impartiality”. This claim is made when education has been the focus for the deliberate encouragement of fascistic ideology and movements by the Tory government and the highest echelons of the state. The promotion of eugenicism in the universities was integral to its wholesale adoption by government and media alike, through the policy of herd immunity.

The target of the “anti-capitalist” measures is the working class. In the UK, as in the US, the bourgeoisie fears that its homicidal rule is threatened by a mass, socialist movement from below.

True to form, all the efforts of the dwindling Labour Party “left” and its pseudo-left coterie are directed at diverting from this essential class truth. Former Labour

shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, described the DfE instruction as “another step in the culture war”, while Tariq Ali, an inveterate political opportunist, soothed that the measure was “futile” in the face of the internet.

Meanwhile, arch-Thatcherite and former Tory cabinet minister, Esther McVey, told the Blue Collar Conservatism conference that “a left-learning bias” needed to be “removed from the whole educational system.”

Conservative Party co-chairman Amanda Milling was more explicit. Denouncing calls from teachers and other education staff for the closure of schools as “hard-left”, she called on Labour leader “Sir Keir Starmer and the NEU [National Education Union] ... to take a stand and put a stop to this action. Getting children back to school is a key priority.”

Labour and the teaching unions have been key to reopening schools. In August, Starmer told Prime Minister Johnson that he expected students “back at school. No ifs, no buts, no equivocation.”

With so many schools now partially or wholly closed, undermining the government's back to work drive, NEU joint General Secretary Dr Mary Bousted is calling for the creation of “Nightingale classes”. These would be “pop-up” schools, based on the so-called Nightingale Hospitals—the exhibition centres and similar large facilities requisitioned in March to provide hospital bed space.

Bousted also called for the “drafting in of retired, supply and newly qualified teachers to get class sizes down.”

It should be noted that under the cover of the pandemic, the government is significantly expanding the role of the private sector in education. Its National Tutoring Programme is part of a £1 billion “catch-up” programme which involves an assortment of nominal charitable trusts, such as the Education Endowment Foundation, Sutton Trust, Nesta and Teach First, working in partnership with global consultancies KPMG and Bain & Company, and the international law firm Freshfields.



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