

Workers defend Lisa Diaz as UK government steps up crackdown on parents

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Parent Lisa Diaz, a member of the SafeEdForAll (Safe Education For All) campaigning group and leader of #SchoolStrike2021, has received widespread support after being threatened with prosecution and the Family Court over her daughter's school attendance.

She told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The support I’ve received has been overwhelming. I think because it’s struck a chord. It’s not just about me. It’s not even just about schools. It’s about the government and its treatment of people. It’s about herd immunity. It’s about the 150,000 needless deaths.

“I’ve had support from all walks of life. Lawyers, social workers, all kinds of different people, teachers, people from different professions...

“Whether it be children dying, care home workers dying, teachers dying, it’s all part of the same battle. It’s all about people being nothing but cannon fodder. The absolute disregard for life is really sickening. It’s so depraved. It’s so cruel.”

Lisa continued, “People want to support this because it’s become a symbol of struggle. It’s for the people who have got Long COVID, the children who’ve got Long COVID, for the people who have lost loved ones. Anybody who’s been affected in any way by the pandemic or by this government in other ways, with other cruelties.”

Supporters of the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (UK) made statements in Lisa’s defence.

Jude Jackson commended her “courageous” stand “to keep her children safe from COVID-19”, saying she was “proud to stand with Lisa.” She denounced the government for having “recklessly played down the seriousness of the pandemic and refused to listen to the clamour of leading scientists for a proper public health led response and for the elimination of this escalating virus.”

Ben Hughes commented, “Taking Lisa to a Family Court means making her children LESS safe and worse-educated than now.” He condemned Wigan Council for “obeying a government that is altogether dangerous to health”.

Teacher Ruth said Lisa’s “sharing on social media helps to bring families together to support each other and get support from others as they fight for their families’ health, safety and education.” She called the threats against her “a disproportionate and vindictive response targeted against one

particular parent who has gained a high profile that they find embarrassing.”

Chris Porter, a university lecturer, opposed “parents being threatened with fines and family court for the ‘crime’ of prioritising their child’s health during a pandemic.” Referring to the UK’s COVID policies, he said, “what has changed is not ‘the science’ but government policy on the extent they’ll allow public health concerns to impinge on economic interests.”

Socialist Equality Party member and retired teacher Margot Miller said, “The most basic rights and instincts of parents are being trampled on by this hateful Johnson government, as it subordinates lives to bloated profits... We must stand with Lisa and mobilize workers far and wide with the call, ‘an injury to one is an injury to all’.”

Brian Robinson, a former teacher from Lancashire, offered “wholehearted support for Lisa as she and her family face the threat of prosecution and fines for doing nothing more than keeping her children safe. This exposes how the government, through the department of education, will not tolerate any dissent or deviation from their murderous ‘learn to live with’ the virus, herd immunity at any cost, policy... Lisa is an inspiration for caring and enlightened parents everywhere and cannot be left to fight against the forces of the state on her own.”

Statements of support were posted on social media, using the hashtag #IStandWithLisa. One of those was WSWs supporter Marian Gladstone, who tweeted, “The savage attack by #WiganCouncil against mum #Lisa for keeping her child from unsafe school must stop immediately. The imposition of fines and threats withdrawn and #WiganCouncil prosecuted & fined for harassment.”

Others sent comments directly to the WSWs. Martin, an electrician, wrote that the ruling class was threatening “someone who has the audacity to speak out. They will not stand for any challenge to their authority however small for fear it might snowball”. He accused the world’s governments of failing to “look after the interests of their citizens”, only “the super rich, big business and the banks.”

Mark, a railway worker, called the council and government’s threats “a brutal psychological attack aimed at silencing a mother who refuses to place her children in danger.” He

insisted, “No worker must die as a result of the pandemic for the sake of the profits of the rich.”

Kodoma, a founder member of Teachers With Covid UK, drew the connection with the situation confronting educators: “School staff are unable to speak out without risking their careers and livelihoods, and many parents feel too intimidated by a brutal system aimed at protecting profits for a few over health of the many. [Lisa] has been courageous and relentless in her cause and deserves the support of the whole community.”

As many declaring their support understand, the attack on Lisa is the spearhead of a broader government crackdown on families resisting the deliberate mass infection of children.

Yesterday *Schools Week* reported a letter sent by Conservative government Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi to local council leaders ordering them to threaten parents with “repercussions” for keeping their kids off school. The letter encouraged councils to consider involving social care services.

Another letter sent to school leaders on November 23 declared, “We are at a crucial point in the pandemic and must collectively act now to ensure lower levels of attendance do not become the accepted norm. I hope you agree on the urgency”. It called on schools to “make full use of enforcement actions”.

The government has now hired five “attendance advisers” who will be paid £500 a day to work with academy trusts and local councils to improve attendance rates. Reports this summer described the team as a “pupil absence hit-squad”.

Stories continue to emerge of families victimised for trying to protect their children.

Twitter user @Tall_Paul_05, a member of the SafeEdForAll team, posted yesterday, “After refusing to pay a £120 fine by lasts night's deadline. My child today will be attending #SchoolStrike2021.” He received the fine only days before his child's academy trust sent a letter to parents and families explaining, “We are seeing staff affected by Long COVID and we have staff being hospitalised, it is a horrendous situation.”

Two more cases were reported by the *Daily Mirror*, of the clinically extremely vulnerable families of Abi Morris and Sarah Brooks. Morris told the newspaper, “we're stuck in this nightmare... There are thousands of families like ours put in a position where schools are saying they can't authorise any absence”.

Both families are being supported by the Good Law Project (GLP), which is challenging the government over its refusal to allow schools to show discretion on attendance to clinically vulnerable (CV) and clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) families. In mid-October, the GLP secured a letter from the Department from Education (DfE) acknowledging that children from CV and CEV families could learn from home if they chose. But this cynical assurance has not impacted on the policy enforced by the DfE in practice.

Yesterday the GLP tweeted, “It's pretty unsatisfactory for the Education Secretary to be saying one thing to Good Law Project—when threatened with judicial review—and another

thing entirely to schools and councils.”

Government intimidation, implemented by councils led by all parties, proceeds with the complicity of the Labour Party and the trade unions. Lisa commented, “I'm just waiting for somebody to jump into action from Labour and condemn what is going on but it's like radio silence... And I know why. I know what the answer is. It's all part of keeping the same machine running.”

The UK has recorded over 104,000 COVID cases in just the last two days. Yesterday, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) weekly survey found that almost 900,000 people in England had COVID on any given day last week—up 4 percent on the previous week. Of particular concern was the ONS finding of a rise in infections among children in the two to 11-year-old range.

Some 208,000 children were off school for COVID-related reasons on November 25, a 60 percent increase in a fortnight. Two more children have been reported killed by the virus in the last week, taking the total to 115. Concerns are mounting over the specific threat posed to children by the new Omicron variant.

Yesterday, minutes were released of a November 25 meeting of the government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group, warning, “We cannot exclude that this wave would be of a magnitude similar, or even larger, than previous waves.” It added, “Although data on disease severity associated with B.1.1.529 [Omicron] are not yet available, a large wave of infections will be accompanied by a wave of severe cases and the subgroup cannot rule out that this may be sufficient to overwhelm NHS capacity.”

Under these conditions, the ruling class fears the development of mass social opposition and is seeking to make an example of its most prominent critics. All those wanting to fight to end the pandemic must rally to Lisa's defence.



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