

After the queen's funeral: the class struggle returns

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Queen Elizabeth II's funeral is anticipated to be the most watched event in history, with an estimated global audience in the billions. In the UK, millions will be in London to line the route of the funeral procession.

It will not be so very long before many of those who do, will look back and wonder, "What was I thinking?"

Many people have been convinced that they should grieve over the death of a 96-year-old monarch who embodies class oppression and hereditary privilege. Such a mass phenomenon requires explanation.

In Britain above all, the ruling class has attributed extraordinary historical significance to the late queen, designating her as the representative and even "grandmother" of the nation, the embodiment of duty and personal sacrifice who supposedly shared the painful experiences of generations, beginning with World War II. The queen was "a fixed point of grace and civility in the consciousness of nation and Commonwealth," the *Observer* editorialises. "The public's remarkable reaction to the death of Elizabeth II is a corrective to the myth of British decline, to the fantasy that we are irreconcilably divided," declares the *Telegraph*.

This is an appeal to confused emotions designed to rally workers behind a myth of national unity and an equally mythical version of the queen, to buttress their own fractured rule in the face of the unprecedented class divisions tearing society apart.

Likewise, the world's media and politicians have combined to portray this event as one of major import. Elizabeth Windsor served as monarch and head of state in Britain for 70 years. But anyone watching TV or reading a newspaper could be forgiven for thinking she was honorary queen of the world.

Almost 100 presidents and heads of government will be in Westminster Abbey for the one-hour funeral ceremony, including US President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden. The list of attendees betrays the imperialist character of the entire affair.

Right-wing political filth including Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe will be honoured guests, while no invite was extended to Russia, Belarus, Myanmar, Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan and other regimes targeted for hostile action by British, US and European imperialism. Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan's attendance provoked howls of outrage at "appeasement" from within the Tory government and from Labour peers.

It is in pursuit of the shared interests of the imperialist powers

that world leaders have lined up behind the British bourgeoisie in its efforts to assign world historic significance to the death of the queen. She has come to symbolise for them what the monarchy has always symbolised in the UK—the representative not of feudalism but of the existing capitalist social order, of inherited wealth and privilege amid vast social inequality, of "stability", "order", patriotism and every form of political backwardness.

The assembling of members of mostly long-deposed "royal families" from across Europe and around the world is not merely a survival from the past, but proof that "monarchs" still play a political role for the bourgeoisie even in the 21st century.

Millions in the UK have been made a captive audience, with hagiographic media reports, delivered in the necessary solemn tones, forcing the entire country to show their respects whether they like it or not. State-orchestrated intimidation has therefore played an essential role in reinforcing the apparent "national consensus" that the queen's passing must be mourned by all—exemplified by the arrest of several people protesting peacefully against the institution of monarchy.

There is, in addition, the assiduous manipulation of confused popular sentiment. Among most workers, nostalgia, misplaced empathy, and respect for the queen as an individual are more significant elements than patriotism, nationalism, and support for the monarchy as an institution in shaping identification with the rigamarole surrounding her death.

There is also a definite element of genuine but misdirected grief in a country that has lost over 200,000 loved ones to the pandemic, without any of the official national mourning afforded to Elizabeth Windsor, who died peacefully in her bed from old age. The hundreds of thousands queuing to see her lying in state have passed by the UK's National COVID Memorial Wall, covered in hand-painted hearts representing lives lost needlessly to COVID-19.

Even so, many workers remain indifferent, or hostile to the spectacle proffered. And many have bridled at the excesses imposed on them—including the cancellation of flights to and from Heathrow, along with thousands of medical procedures including for cancer and heart disease, and the postponement of private funerals, all as a supposed "mark of respect."

The most politically significant expression of opposition is the anger aroused among more class-conscious workers at the suspension of national strikes by the rail and postal unions for the whole of September. This action, taken without consultation

within an hour of the queen's death, comes after a summer of the most explosive class struggles in almost four decades. Led by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, the bureaucracy has done all it can to suppress and contain social anger by limiting workers to sporadic and isolated strikes while preventing millions more from acting through an endless round of balloting.

Above all, it must be understood that if sections of workers have proved susceptible to the propaganda of the bourgeoisie, this is the product of the decades-long offensive against the socialist traditions of the workers movement by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and the worldwide impact of Stalinism in discrediting socialism and then carrying through the restoration of capitalism. Not a single Labour politician, from Sir Keir Starmer to Jeremy Corbyn, has not grovelled before the royal family since the queen's death.

Ultimately, however, the £9 million spent on the funeral and the countless millions lavished on the promotion of "national unity" around the monarch will come to nothing. It should be recalled that the last such great occasion of manufactured national grief, following the death of Princess Diana in 1997, is now looked on with a sense of bafflement even by those who lost their critical faculties at the time.

The project will crash on the rocks of social reality, including the greatest cost-of-living crisis since the Great Depression and malignant growth of social inequality. The UK now has a record number of billionaires, 177, with a combined wealth of £653 billion, a rise of 10 percent over the past year. Workers have suffered the longest sustained fall in wages since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

No wonder support for the monarchy is at an all-time low and declining. The National Centre for Social Research (NCSR) has been charting attitudes towards the monarchy since 1994. Its most recent survey found that the core group who believed the monarchy was "very or quite important" was down to 55 percent. Fewer than half of people in Scotland said they supported retaining it, while most importantly only 40 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds and 37 percent of people from an ethnic minority, many of whose families will have suffered the realities of brutal rule by British imperialism, did so.

In a 2021 YouGov poll, 41 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds thought there should now be an elected head of state. During the weeks of official mourning, the hashtags #AbolishTheMonarchy and #NotMyKing have been viewed millions of times on TikTok and have consistently trended on Twitter.

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Surveys of popular opinion never factor in the most crucial social distinction in determining attitudes to the monarchy, social class. Nevertheless, the young are the most accurate representatives of contemporary social relations and a pointer to the future. Their growing hostility to the monarchy reflects a society characterised by hardship for millions, of long hours of work for little reward, and only the prospect of things getting worse. To ask young workers to identify with an ossified caste of spongers who live lives of fabulous unearned wealth and privilege is regarded as both insulting and a bizarre anachronism.

Not only to them. In the period ahead, the realities of life under capitalism will assert themselves after their temporary burial beneath a deluge of royal propaganda.

A particular warning must be sounded at the incessant promotion and glorification of the military. Members of the Royal Family have appeared in full military dress, their chests emblazoned with medals, emphasising the monarch's role as Head of the Armed forces. Fully 6,000 members of the armed forces will take part in Monday's state funeral in full dress uniform.

This coincides with Britain's escalating participation in NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. The British working class is being dragged ever deeper into a conflict that is leading to world war, under a government they despise, led by a psychopath who boasts she is ready to initiate nuclear Armageddon. Politicians and generals calmly discuss the likelihood of a nuclear exchange in Ukraine, while a deranged media eggs them on.

Scientists and health officials are warning of a winter resurgence of the pandemic coinciding with an early and doubly large flu season—a "twindemic" that will devastate an already overloaded National Health Service.

The position of the working class is ever-more intolerable, as the economic crisis deepens and millions are forced to pay for bailouts to the pandemic profiteers, the cost of war in Ukraine, and sanctions on Russia. The latest report from the Living Wage Foundation found that of the 4.8 million people earning less than the supposed "real living wage" of £9.90 an hour, or £11.05 in London, 42 percent had skipped meals for financial reasons, and more than half had used a food bank in the last year.

The trade union bureaucracy and its parliamentary allies in the Labour Party will be unable to suppress the coming eruption of class struggle. Such is the strength of feeling in the working class that strikes by 2,500 dockworkers in Liverpool and Felixstowe begin on September 19 and 27. On October 1, they will be joined by tens of thousands of rail and postal workers who begin a new round of one-day strikes that will see 170,000 workers act.

This emerging movement will pit workers directly against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy in the fight for social equality, against capitalism, war and class privilege, and will be international in scope.

After the mawkish and socially obscene celebration of royalty comes the inevitable hangover. Britain's rulers must face their nemesis—the working class.



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