

Scottish school teacher suspended for encouraging discussion on the monarchy

Steve James

22 September 2022

A school teacher has been suspended for encouraging his class to take a critical approach to media coverage surrounding the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

According to *Novara Media*, the teacher, who is protecting his identity, posed his Politics and Society class of 14-year-olds with the following question: “Have you noticed the media coverage about the royal family? And have any of you ever thought that it’s a bit odd that you don’t hear any dissenting voices, everybody’s all pushing the same narrative? You know, you don’t hear anybody saying, ‘Well is this maybe a time to think about moving away from a royal family?’”

The teacher, employed in a comprehensive school in North Lanarkshire, near Glasgow, said that while most of the students were sympathetic to his comments, one girl took offence. She told him, “You must be a Catholic” and demanded he “must respect the Queen”. The teacher replied, “That’s how my mum responds when I raise this issue with her.” He said the girl stormed off in a rage.

Five days later, the teacher was suspended, pending a protracted and stressful investigation. The educator of over two decades standing was escorted off the school premises, supposedly due to concerns for his safety. He received a letter from Janie O’Neil, head of North Lanarkshire’s education and families team, explaining his suspension was due to a “parental complaint... alleging that you made inappropriate comments whilst teaching a class about the royal family ... [and] mocked pupils in relation to this.” O’Neil did not explain which comments were deemed “inappropriate”.

That a relevant and topical discussion should provoke such a vindictive response from the North Lanarkshire authorities points to the purpose of the deluge of media-led mourning surrounding the 96-year-old queen’s

death.

In suppressing all criticism of the monarchy, a class institution defined by its immense wealth, privilege and monstrous failings, the British ruling class is seeking to shift official politics drastically to the right. War and levels of class tensions not seen for decades mean that British imperialism cannot tolerate any objective discussion about the family sitting on top of every branch of its hallowed state apparatus.

To this end democratic norms are being trampled on. Amid the mourning over Elizabeth, protestors peacefully voicing criticisms have been brutally arrested and silenced.

At the same time, the most reactionary elements in society are being emboldened. It is not an accident that the teacher has been victimised in North Lanarkshire, an area long notorious for the sectarian and vicious character of its local politics. Much of the West of Scotland still hosts Orange Order marches with all the anti-Catholic venom and Union Jack-waving of their counterparts in Northern Ireland.

One of North Lanarkshire’s predecessor authorities was Monklands District Council which, in the 1990s, was characterised by bitter feuds between the largely Catholic town of Coatbridge and Protestant Airdrie, with allegations of spending bias and nepotism engulfing the Labour Party and its Conservative Party and Scottish National Party (SNP) rivals. The authority is currently controlled by a minority Labour administration, which in August replaced the SNP with the help of the Tories. The deciding vote was cast by the far right, anti-immigrant British Unionist Party’s sole councillor.

The teacher’s suspension points to the crucial and criminal role played by the SNP, the Labour Party and the trade unions in endorsing every aspect of the state-

orchestrated wailing over the death of one of the richest women who ever lived. In calling off strikes and strike ballots out of “respect” for the monarch, the trade unions have given unwarranted confidence to the Tories, monarchists, Orange bigots, right-wing Labourites, former and current spies, army officers and outright fascists that infest British political life.

The trade unions’ role is part of their campaign over the last months to disarm and neutralise a series of potentially very powerful strikes across Britain. Section after section of workers continue to see their strikes fragmented along sectional lines, badly coordinated, called off at the last minute with bogus and sub-inflation offers and subject to repeated “consultative” do-nothing ballots.

The North Lanarkshire teacher’s union, the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS), this week announced the result of its own “consultative ballot” over a vastly below-inflation 5 percent pay offer. Fully 94 percent of members voting rejected the pay cut and 91 percent indicated their willingness to strike. While teachers are keen to fight in defence of their living standards, the EIS leadership intends to continue its strategy of delay—excusing itself with reference to the anti-strike laws the trade unions have done nothing to challenge.

According to EIS General Secretary Andrea Bradley, “Formal notice of the statutory ballot will be issued to all employers within the next fortnight, with ballot papers to be issued to EIS members one week later, in line with trade union law. This will be a postal ballot only—another consequence of the UK government’s deliberately obstructive trade union law—which will necessitate a ballot period of almost four weeks.” A result will not be known until November 8.

In contrast with EIS foot dragging, the response among workers on social media to the teacher’s victimisation has been immediate and powerful. A comment explaining the circumstances of his suspension was shared over 1,000 times and received nearly 3,000 likes in a matter of hours.

Supportive comments included:

* You were suspended from your post teaching politics & society for questioning the place of monarchy in our politics & society? What on earth?

* Solidarity - the bosses view education as conditioning - fortunately two thirds of UK 18-24 year

olds think the monarchy should be abolished (31 percent think it’s an embarrassment) according to a recent poll cited in the *Guardian*. I hope your union gets onto this quickly - best wishes!

* Clearly certain things beyond discussion! I always thought debate was good to encourage creativity of thought. Obviously the bit I got wrong there was thought. Not encouraged at all!

* Bloody hell, that’s awful. Solidarity. If my kids were still in school I’d expect their teachers to be free to encourage discussion on relevant political & social issues. The system is broken if freedom of thought is to be policed so harshly. I hope your union resolves this.

* It’s a good thing you didn’t suggest that the Earth was round.

* How are you meant to teach your subject without discussing the role of the monarchy and whether it remains relevant in the 21st century? Opening up a debate is not giving your own personal political opinion... it’s helping children to think critically.

* As a teacher myself, I have, over many years, made lots of carefully worded political comment. My view has always been that I owe it to the kids to give honest answers, followed by an invitation to form their own opinions.

* They’ll be suspending English teachers next for discussing the divine right of kings when doing *Macbeth*.

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (ERFSC) demands that the suspension on the North Lanarkshire teacher is lifted immediately. Teachers must not be victimised for teaching!

The case opens the question of whether other teachers have faced similar pressures in the weeks since Elizabeth’s death. Have you had similar experiences? Contact the ERFSC today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact