



Is Britain now a police state? Genuine question

Description

UK: The arrest of gender-critical feminists should concern anyone who believes in liberty.

There is so much bad faith in the free-speech debate. We're told it isn't really an issue. People being sacked after they tweet something? That's just accountability. Speakers being No Platformed on campus? That's just students exercising *their* free speech. Censorship is only really about the state, the cancel-culture denialists tell us.

Well, a woman in Scotland is facing up to two years in prison for... tweeting. Marion Millar, 50, has been charged under the Malicious Communications Act over tweets she sent in 2019 and 2020. Given how deeply concerned woke leftists apparently are about state censorship, you'd expect them to be up in arms, right? And yet, crickets.

Precisely what Millar is supposed to have said is unclear. She stands accused of posting 'transphobic' and 'homophobic' tweets. But the only specific example cited in reports is that of a 'photograph of a bow of ribbons in the green, white and purple colours of the Suffragettes, tied around a tree', according to *The Times*.

We await more details. There may well be stiffer stuff in her police file that we are yet to hear about. But, regrettably, there needn't be to warrant her prosecution. The legislation under which Millar has been charged criminalises online speech which is 'grossly offensive' – a standard which is so broad as to criminalise almost anything.

What's more, Millar is a trans-sceptical feminist, and in Britain in 2021 that's the closet thing we have to a heretic. A prominent campaigner, she is an opponent of gender self-ID and Scotland's Hate Crime Bill, which many fear would criminalise speech on trans issues. On that score, it seems the law is already more than sufficient.

A few weeks ago, stickers appeared on lampposts in Kirkcaldy saying 'Women won't wheesh't' ('Women won't shut up'). It's a slogan of For Women Scotland, a campaign group Millar works for.

Kirkcaldy Police, receiving reports of the ‘controversial’ stickers, urged members of the public to get in touch if they saw them so that they could be promptly removed.

More starkly, Kate Scottow, 39, was arrested in 2018 after referring to a trans woman on Twitter as ‘he’ or ‘him’. It was rude, certainly. But a police matter? Scottow was reportedly arrested in front of her two young children, and held in a cell for seven hours. (She was found guilty of communications offences, later overturned on appeal.)

Father Ted co-creator Graham Linehan, a strangely prominent figure in gender-critical politics, also got a visit from the police. He was given a warning by cops in 2018 after he ‘misgendered’ and ‘deadnamed’ a trans activist on Twitter – as it happens, the same activist who complained to the police about Scottow.

Getting a knock at the door for saying controversial or rude things is not what should happen in a free society. Arresting dissenters in front of their kids is the behaviour of a police state. When Millar was initially contacted by police, she was told that social workers would be sent to care for her autistic twin boys while she was questioned. All this over tweets?

Britain’s authoritarian laws are a menace to free speech in general, police in Scotland seem particularly keen on enforcing them. Coatbridge, where Millar was charged, is also home to YouTuber Mark Meechan (aka Count Dankula), who was found guilty of causing gross offence in 2018 for teaching his dog to do a Nazi salute as a joke.

The trans debate has become a kind of perfect storm for this authoritarianism. Our broadly defined speech laws collide with those willing to weaponise them and police desperate to be seen to be tackling ‘hate’. Only the ‘hate’ in this case often refers to people who believe, as most of the country does, that biological sex is real.

We have become almost accustomed to this. To state censorship. To the police collaring people for what they say. Woke leftists are, despite all their bullshit, basically in favour of it, because the cops are on their side on these issues. Such is their historical illiteracy that they are completely chilled out about the state taking on the power to police speech.

The next time they say free speech isn’t really under threat, tell them about Marion Millar.

By Tom Slater

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