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The Anti-Monarchist Turn in British Politics, Society, and Culture: Diana, Harry and After

Le tournant anti-monarchiste dans la politique, la société et la culture britanniques : Diana, Harry et après

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The Anti-Monarchist Turn in British Politics, Society, and Culture: Diana, Harry and After

Antony Taylor♦

Anti-Monarchism

Anti-monarchism is a subject that attracts far more attention than in the past. Turmoil in the royal family, Prince Harry's memoirs, the decision of Barbados to replace the monarch with an elected head of state, Jamaica's discussion of a referendum on the issue and the re-emergence of an explicitly republican platform following a Labor party victory in Australia make the subject of opposition to monarchy a timely subject. This is an area of debate that is too often addressed in terms of the failings of individual monarchs and their courts. This article goes some way towards challenging this view.

Loyalism and patriotism have been seen as key themes in British constitutional history. Assessments of the role of the monarchy within the British constitution, royal hagiography, and the histories of individual monarchs and their contribution to the development of the state, feature in most studies of the British past, giving debates about the monarchy a strong relevance to discussions about the health of the kingdom. These accounts have emphasised the British monarchy's propensity for reinvention and renewal in the face of internal threats and the shortcomings of individual monarchs (Cannadine, 1983: 43-100; Kuhn, 1992: 1-31). In this sense, debates about the monarchy and opposition to it are often difficult to disentangle from debates about the longevity of kingship and the nature of identity in the four kingdoms of the British Isles (Colley, 1992: 195-236; Morris, 1998: 56-78). Many existing studies of the British/English radical tradition point out these notions of patriotism, loyalty, and allegiance to monarchy but take a

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"British exceptionalism" perspective, placing the monarchy at the heart of the British constitutional experience, and proving overly attentive to the supporters and exponents of monarchical institutions (Cunningham, 1981: 8-33; Pickering, 2003: 227-248). This "loyalist" aspect of popular politics that privileges defenders, rather than critics, of the monarchy has often overpowered the narratives of those who questioned the hereditary institutions of the state, pushing sceptical views to the margins. This article provides a new view of this prevailing narrative. Whilst episodes of open republicanism had a distinct presence on the radical platform and have attracted a literature of their own, often overlooked are those currents of opinion that expressed doubt about monarchs, their finances, their private lives, their public conduct, and the courtly institutions that sustained royal rule, but stopped short of a dedicated constitutional plan to overthrow the ruling house. In this sense, anti-monarchism is as much about tone, style, reflexive body language and the rhetorical flourishes that channelled feelings about inequality and social injustice as about political programmes *per se*. This broader assessment of the critique of monarchy demonstrates the potency of popular opposition to hereditary institutions and, whilst not discounting the ability of reformers to differentiate between the talents and personalities of individual monarchs (and even to have their personal favourites amongst them), takes the topic of opposition to the throne away from arguments about "constitutional" monarchies and "veiled" republics. It situates the anti-monarchist impulse, instead, more deeply within currents of reform in which hereditary rule is contested and challenged as part of radical debate and discussion. In this sense, anti-monarchism is also an integral part of British responses to the monarchy (Taylor, 2023: 84-87). This aspect of British radicalism has often been overlooked or marginalised in favour of a more openly expressed and evolved "republican" position.

British traditions of opposition to the monarchy date back to the eighteenth-century. Inspired by the model of the French Revolution in the 1790s, British radical Thomas Paine envisaged the complete overhaul of all court patronage in Britain entwined in the person of the monarch, and recommended a clearing out of the titled pensioners, sinecurists, placemen and family retainers who comprised a system deemed "old corruption" by reformers. He advocated instead the drafting of a written constitution, the abolition of the crown and the royal court, the dismantling of the Church of England and the reform of aristocratic land ownership (Dinwiddy, 1992: 207-228). Whilst offering a pungent critique of the monarchy and all it stood for, Paine's ideas garnered little public support in Britain. They stand at the theoretical end of the republican spectrum, had little grounding in popular and public attitudes towards the monarchy, and gained most attention when they traded in a rhetorical anti-monarchist approach (Royle, 1980: 10-35; Bush, 1-40). The highpoint of republican opposition to the monarchy, when Britain experienced its most lively period of republican activity, was in the years 1871-72 when Paine's ideas were very largely in abeyance.

Moreover, responses to his ideas were very often shaped by his opponents, both within and outside the radical community, discrediting the "republican" platform for many contemporaries. Overall, contemporaries noted the difficulty apparent amongst republicans of creating successive generations of adherents to the republican doctrine from the days of Oliver Cromwell onwards ("J.V", 1875: 411-436). More typical of opposition to the monarchy in Britain was the tradition of anti-monarchism. Sometimes called "vulgar" or "crude" republicanism it focussed on the moral failings and character flaws and deficiencies of individual royals. It flourished particularly at the time of Queen Victoria's seclusion from public life following the death of Prince Albert and found a target in Prince Albert Edward (later Edward VII)—the heir to the throne. Above all, anti-monarchism highlighted the moral shortcomings of the royal family. At a time when Queen Victoria was in effect an absentee monarch and Albert Edward's infidelities, his escapades with actresses and prostitutes, and his excessive gambling were well known, anti-monarchism drew on a vein of ribald and often obscene abuse that depicted society's leaders as morally wanting. Queen Victoria herself did not escape such scrutiny, and rumours circulated widely about alleged intimacies between herself and her ghillie, John Brown, during these years (Thompson, 1990: 61-86).

Anti-Monarchism and Popular Politics, 1870-1950

Between 1871 and 1872 there was a surge in opposition to the monarchy (or "anti-monarchism") driven largely by concerns about the increasing expense of royalty, and especially over the cost of civil list payments paid from the public purse to support the royal children when they came of age (Williams, 1997: 31-61). At a time when Queen Victoria was still in mourning for her husband, Prince Albert, and refused to fulfil her public duties, including the state opening of parliament, royal absenteeism sparked a hectic public discussion about whether the royal family provided value for money (Arnstein, 1990: 178-189; Cowen, 1876: 3-10). Dubbed "the cost of the crown" debate, this period represented an anti-monarchist moment, when disquiet with the monarchy manifested itself in the formation of radical clubs (by some estimates over a hundred of them) explicitly devoted to the abolition of the throne (Rumsey, 2000: 100-102); but also in parliamentary debates about the grants made to the royal children in the House of Commons; and in opposition to the expense of royal weddings charged to tax payers. During these years there were a series of public meetings that descended into battles between republicans and loyalists (Nicholls, 1995: 47-66). In the short term, the illness of Prince Edward and his recovery from typhoid in 1872, stimulated a wave of public sympathy for the royal family dubbed "typhoid loyalism" (Taylor, 1999: 80-109). Nevertheless, the very public nature of the

"cost of the crown" debate moulded the contours of future discussion about the responsibilities of the crown and set out the terms in which criticism of the throne continued to be expressed into the twentieth century. In the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, petitions against civil list payments to members of the royal family became commonplace. This established a precedent for petitioning against grants and civil list payments to royal offspring, creating a narrative of "royal paupers" and "beggars" extracting money from the public purse, and represented the image of the court as one tarnished by the presence of indolent royal relatives, aspirational courtiers, amoral decadents, and hangers-on, supported by the sweat of the brows of the working poor (Taylor, 1996: 167-169).

For many contemporaries the issue of sinecurists and placement gathered around the throne, extracting revenues from the royal house, was compounded by the alien character of the throne. Overt republican Charles Bradlaugh (1875: 130), fulminated against the German presence at the court: "I hate these small, German breast bestarred wanderers […]. In their own land they vegetate and wither unnoticed; here we pay them highly to marry and perpetuate a pauper prince-race". The Chartist, George Julian Harney, also regularly highlighted the German antecedence of the royal family, christening William IV "Mr Guelph" and his wife, Queen Adelaide as "Madame Guelph" (Martin, 1962: 29). In 1917 such criticisms remained sufficiently strong for the royal family to change its name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor as a result of anti-German sentiment during the Great War. Where anti-monarchism could depict the royal house as opulent, venal and openly indulgent of, and pandering to, the lavish lifestyles of *arrivistes*, foreign princelings and the British aristocracy, it did so, tainting the institution of monarchy by association with a landed elite seen as a felonious class, covetous of the land of the people (Taylor, 2007: 188-219; Taylor, 2004: 30-48). By the late 1940s, one example of royalty's attempts to modernise in response to such criticisms was by distancing themselves from the circuit of entertainment and dinner parties that distinguished the social context of the great houses of the shires (Fulford, 1949: 15).

For proponents of the anti-monarchist platform, periods of virtue in British history were identifiable with the rule of democrats and Commonwealthmen, not kings. This rhetoric was not just a pallid reflection of European republican projects, as some authors have contended, but had precedents deep in the entrails of British historical memory (Harrison, 1965: 210). Freethinker and republican Charles Bradlaugh was explicit in seeing Cromwell's Commonwealth as an interlude of unalloyed good in a pageant of morally suspect kings and queens. He declared: "Because he was loyal to England, to the England of Hampden, of Milton, of Cromwell; to the true England of patriots and freemen, he would not be loyal to this German royalty" (Bradlaugh, 1874: 197). Here, the British radical tradition is conventionally seen as tied in with a narrative account of historical injustices and wrongs, or as a colourful history lesson, one that the Bradlaughite

view on the misdeeds of individual monarchs harmonised with more effectively than Paine's theoretically expressed opposition to hereditary institutions. A parade of opponents of the monarchy featured in radical denunciations of the crown, creating an oppositional genealogy as a counter to the royal bloodline: "Milton, Bunyan, Shelley, Blake, Thackeray, Dilke, Russell, Harrison—not all of these were Republicans *tout court* but all were prepared to denounce a monarch or to satirise the institution" wrote Christopher Hitchens (1992: 37). The subversive aspect of an unofficial history of England remained in the commemorations of the heroes of the Commonwealth, which drew on a narrative of a repressed but resilient Englishness, depicted as driven underground, but able to express itself in a rebellious mindset; even defenders of a conservative Englishness conceded its sometimes "dissenting message" (Colls, 2002: 248-257; Scruton, 2000: 18). For some, an expatriate Englishness in the American colonies, created an insubordinate attitude, which gave vent to a revolutionary separatist impulse (Aughey, 2007: 104-106). This view drew on the rehabilitation of movements seen as expressing political reform agendas during the civil war, notably the Levellers (Worden, 2002: 316-338). In 1993, the dedication, by Corpus Christi College Oxford and Oxford City Council, of a plaque to the Roundhead officer and regicide, Colonel Harry Marten, a "republican and wit," followed by a toast with a cask of "Leveller Bitter" during the Mayor's Reception, still caused unease in Oxford ("Old republicans remembered," 1993: 2). More recently, this vision of a non or anti-royal inheritance has paved the way for an insurgent Englishness, shorn of its royal accretions and typified by Billy Bragg's remarks:

> At school I had been taught that our history composed little more than kings, queens and princes supported by a cast of aristocratic admirals and generals […]. I learned that the freedom which I enjoyed had had to be fought for, from the Peasants' Revolt to the Diggers and Levellers, from Captain Swing and Ned Ludd to the Chartists and the Suffragettes (Bragg, 2006: 14).

In line with these views, current disquiet with the monarchy has led to a revival of interest in the Commonwealth period and the reasons for the failure of a national strand of British republicanism as opposed to the successes of loyalism (Keay, 2022: 22-53).

Despite the perceived excesses and expense of the royal family, and the antecedence of labourism in the traditions of radical protest that were formative for anti-monarchist sentiment, anti-monarchism as a platform has made little headway in Britain. Many of the founders of the Labour party expressed strong opinions on the monarchy consonant with an established strain of opposition to the throne: complaints about the cost of royal ceremonial, elaborate christenings, marriage rituals and coronations remained commonplace. There was unease

about the excesses of Edward VII's coronation ceremonial in 1911, and there were always those in the party who yearned for a crowning of the people, not the king. Keir Hardie (1916: 61-63, 106-110), one of the key architects of the Labour party, was a well-known critic of royalty, eschewing royal ceremonial and pageantry altogether. Drawing on the outdoor tradition of the political platform in Britain, but espousing a stance tempered by the necessity of gaining and retaining power, open expressions of opposition to the crown and the role of the monarch as head of state remained muted within the party. Labour considered the issue of the monarchy, albeit briefly, at its party conference in 1923, and "Red Clydeside" Scottish Labour MPs tabled an amendment to the abdication bill in parliament urging Britain to become "one of the republican nations" at the time of the abdication crisis in 1936 (Nairn, 1988: 340-341; "Cant and Humbug," 1936: 2). Thereafter, Labour's instinctive caution on issues of constitutional reform, its adoption of pragmatic gradualist programmes that appealed across society and worked with the grain of established institutions like the civil service and the monarchy as dictated by existing constitutional practice, and the necessity for the party to garner votes from an electoral middle ground held back scrutiny of the issue of royal privilege (Taylor, 2000: 151-180; Barnett, 1996: 20-21). Moreover, as Martin Pugh (2010: 11-36) has noted, Labour's not inconsiderable debt to ideas and opinions recruited from popular Toryism, meant that it retained a loyalist adherence to the ideas of the established church, the flag and a hereditary head of state. Potential plans for Labour governments often outlined blueprints for reform, or even abolition, of the House of Lords, but left the monarchy fundamentally unchanged (Mitchison, 1934: 42-44, 55-57). Even displays of partisan politics, notably George VI's refusal to countenance Hugh Dalton as foreign secretary in the post-1945 Labour government, failed to ignite residual embers of republicanism in the party (Pimlott, 1985: 414-417). In line with the party's conservatism on royal matters, the Fabian Society advocated relatively timid reforms around reduction in the frequency of the state openings of parliament in a report on the future of the monarchy in 2003, recommending making royal finances more transparent, introducing a more secular coronation oath, and reducing civil list payments for "peripheral" members of the family (*The Future of the Monarchy*, 2003: 58-59, 78, 130-146). Overall, critics of royalty, like Communist MP Willie Gallagher and the radical leftist Tony Benn, remained isolated presences in the Labour party in parliament. Without an effective vehicle within representative institutions, British republicanism was reduced to impotence as a voice for redressing issues of inequality and injustice flowing from the role of a hereditary monarch as head of state (Powell, 2003: 5-6, 14-17; Hamilton, 1975: 96-118). Tom Nairn (1988: 326) saw it as mere gesture politics: "little more than this vandalising impulse, taboo-shrunk to mere naughtiness, unable to upset the landscape, rebels are reduced to stealing Papa's stamp-album or carving their initials in the ancestral furniture". Consigned to the margins,

political anti-monarchism flourished only amongst dissident socialist groups (Morgan, 2011: 147-159). Anti-monarchism remained an instinctive impulse amongst members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, for example, but, given the party's peripheral status, the notion proved insufficiently rigorous to develop or refine its platform as an effective programme for action, although Communist publications routinely reviled the "lickspittle idolator of Royalty" (Jackson, 1935: 9).

"Naïve" Monarchism and Pretenders, 1950-2024

From the latter part of Queen Victoria's reign onwards, there was increased emphasis on all members of the royal family taking up public duties and officiating at civic and public ceremonial. The period of disquiet with the monarchy that characterised the 1870s dissipated when Queen Victoria resumed her public role, becoming more visible in the public sphere while taking up the position of patron to numerous charities and philanthropic endeavours. The result was a public service ethos, sometimes called a "welfare monarchy" that was, in part, key to the recovery and success of the public function of the British crown into the twentieth century (Prochaska, 1992: 67-135). It did much to roll back the tide of opposition to the monarchy in the later part of the nineteenth century which emerged with the socialist debates of the 1880s. Writing at the time of King George VI's death in 1952, royal historian Arthur Bryant (1952: 139) stated that the role of the monarch was to "lay aside all self and to be that and only that which the people would have their king be […]. His sovereign supremacy was not political. It was something far higher; it was moral". Under Queen Elizabeth II, the role of the royal household as an institution characterised by a vigorous sense of public duty and high moral worth was restated in the documentary "Royal Family" in 1969 which also highlighted the monarchy's strong family bonds. More recent studies of royalty have seen these elements of duty and family obligation placed at the heart of the institution of the monarchy in Britain and as integral to its longevity (Williamson, 2007: 223-231). Writing in 1969, at the highpoint of the successful post-war British monarchy, and drawing on the French example, G.W. Higgins (1969: 88), the former editor of *Paris-Match*, wrote that "nowhere in England does one sense an anti-monarchist current […] There are isolated gestures, but these have no deep significance".

The emphasis on family, duty and moral rectitude carried with it potential dangers if the monarchy failed to meet public expectations and fell from grace. Some authors detected a *longue durée* in royal fortunes, based around indiscretions on the part of some members of the royal family or the expense of the throne, and traceable back to divided opinions about the royal jubilee in 1977 (Ziegler, 1978: 165-193; Weight, 2002: 545-553). Frequently the royal family has proved

vulnerable when it fails to live up to expectations of public probity, particularly at the time of the exposure of the rift between Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1991 and in the newspaper coverage of Charles's relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles in 1993 (Weight, 2002: 674-690). Issues of venality returned with revelations about Queen Elizabeth II's privileged financial position, the crown's apparent avoidance of its contributions to the national tax bill, and the royal family's reluctance to pay for the renovation of the royal apartments at Windsor Castle after a damaging fire in 1992 (Hall, 1992: 233-238). Despite the turmoil around marital fidelity, morality and the finances of the royal house, absent from the British equation was the emergence of a republican movement that matched similar models for non-royal constitutions elsewhere. Historian David Caute (1989: 12) hoped for a revival of interest in Paine against the background of the Soviet empire's fall and a turn towards religious fundamentalism across the Middle East. Despite a Charter 88 conference on the future of the monarchy in 1993 and academic debate relating to the position of the crown, commentators, though, stigmatised republicanism as the dog that did not bark in the debates around the royal finances in the early 1990s (Baxter, 1992: 20; Haseler, 1993: 172-190).

In contrast, the somewhat ill-formed and inchoate nature of British anti-monarchism allowed for the emergence of a sentimentalisation of the monarchy, separating out "good" and "bad" monarchs, even by those who were critics of the institution of the throne itself. K.O. Morgan (2011: 149-150) has noted the ability of some anti-monarchists, like George Lansbury, to develop cordial personal relations with the reigning monarch, in his case the avuncular George V, allowing the two to establish relations that transcended their marked differences in outlook and class background. Such attitudes also featured in the report on modernising the monarchy issued by the centre-left think tank, Demos, in 1998. This suggested an affirmative referendum on any royal heir succeeding to the throne, thereby reviving the notion of an "elective" monarchy, sometimes associated with Anglo-Saxon kingship, but, whilst allowing for public scepticism of individual potential heirs, it stopped well-short of republicanism (Hames & Leonard, 1998: 22-23; Leonard & Hames, 1998: 25). In the nineteen-eighties, there was a tendency on the part of the non-Labour left to see the royal family as anti-Conservative in orientation and, occasionally, as a potent source of opposition to Thatcherism at a time when the Labour party appeared impotent in opposing the electoral successes of Conservatism. These ideas gained ground against a background in which Labour party leaders often enjoyed better personal relations with Queen Elizabeth II than the Conservatives. Queen Elizabeth II's personal dislike of Margaret Thatcher was well-known and Prince Charles's acts of public benevolence and support for London's Black community in the aftermath of the Brixton riots of 1981 were perceived as placing him on a spectrum of left opinion (Wright, 2009: 297-300, 301-310; Campbell, 1998: 161-163). During this period, opposition to

the throne was generated as much by the free market, anti-institutional right, and Thatcherite attacks on deference to established institutions (Vallance, 2009, 18-19) as by a narrative of class rhetoric embraced by the left. Ben Pimlott, Queen Elizabeth II's biographer, commented:

> Thatcherism […] drew its vigour from the lower-middle class work ethic. It regarded aristocracy as decadent and—a Thatcher word—"wet" and tended to see the royal family as composed of, and advised by, upper class people who were unproductively wealthy. The objection, indeed, was remarkably similar to that of the traditional left since the nineteenth century (Pimlott, 1996: 18-19).

Norman Tebbit's observation that as a member of the unemployed Charles was well-equipped to understand those who had no jobs, captured Thatcherism's contempt for feudal and inherited wealth. In a 1991 article, *Marxism Today* satirised the tendency of the left to over-indulge the monarchy as a feature of its own impotence: "thanks to the left's failure to react to new realities, the royal family was for much of the 80s the only realistic alternative to Thatcherism. The Queen became an emblematic figure of polar opposition to the spirit of selfishness and the untrammelled market" (Bedell, 1991: 31). For an earlier edition of the magazine, Prince Charles's stewardship of the land gave him a significant role as an exponent of a new green consciousness, elevating him to the status of a leader of a civil society renewed around environmental agendas and a return to high standards of organic husbandry in farming. His membership of the Soil Association, however, led some critics to see him as unhealthily preoccupied with "muck and mysticism" (Wright, 1993: 3). More recently, discussion of Charles's curatorship of established rural communities in Romania and resurrection of traditional environmentally-friendly farming methods there have suggested a fusion of political opinions crossing and superseding the ideological divide: "To the left, he sounded like some purple-faced country buffer, to the right he sounded like a hippie academic moping in *The Guardian*" (Mulgan, 1990: 22; Lloyd, 2023: 22).

Princess Diana, especially after her death, evolved into the embodiment of a "good" monarch, imbued with the features of caring queenship and with an appeal that overlapped with celebrity culture. There was an element of "naïve" monarchism here, identified by scholars of the peasant revolt tradition, in which imagined and virtuous monarchs, apparently misled by advisers and courtiers, but invested in the common good, and advocating the curtailment of courtly and seigneurial rights, might place themselves at the head of popular insurgencies against ruthless retainers and court advisers (Blum, 1978: 333-336). This perspective drew on an outlook willing to differentiate between "just" monarchs,

like Queen Caroline and the youthful Victoria, who were seen as willing to address the ills of the people, as opposed to corrupt, lecherous and amoral male rulers like George IV. "Like Caroline, Diana was the emblem of 'us' in the face of 'them'" wrote political columnist Andrew Adonis (Adonis, 1997: 8; Clark, 1990: 47-51). In her empathetic relationship with the crowd, charitable works, sympathy for the excluded, and her role as the victim of both the hereditary succession and tabloid intrusion, Diana took up this position of a "just" ruler, whose presence highlighted the injustices and inequities of the existing monarchical system. This view is not entirely absent from the agenda of critics of the throne and situated her appeal within a context of anti-monarchist sentiment, where she became a vehicle for opinions that underscored the outmoded, old fashioned and antiquated aspects of the throne and the court whilst allowing for a pretender's role which promoted a more inclusive attitude across diverse constituencies of support (Thompson, 1998: 33-39). This view allows for the emergence of a "liberal" monarchical outlook, coloured by the attitudes of a leftish populism that brought together those disenchanted by the monarchy, and, sometimes, established political parties as well (Hey, 1999: 60-76). In the proliferation of floral tributes to Diana's memory, restive displays of crowd politics and elaborate expressions of mourning following her death, contemporaries discerned echoes of the "people power" that had demolished the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Campbell, 1998: 237-239). For playwright David Edgar (1997: 17), the social and cultural turbulence that surrounded Diana's death amounted to a "floral revolution" (a term first coined by the former editor of *Marxism Today*, Martin Jacques) in which there were echoes of the everyday objects and tributes left by protestors at fences at Greenham Common, and a particular "visibility of women, Afro-Caribbeans, Asians and gay men," constituencies excluded from the narrative of the Thatcher years. Others commented on the rejection which the movement implied of establishment Conservatism and on the significance for this debate of the traditionally disparaging male view of the princess, previously expressed by courtiers and senior Conservative politicians like Sir Patrick Cormack and John Marshall (Gray, 1997: 15; Hill, Singer & Temple, 1996: 3).

Royal Revelations and Exposures

Salacious exposures, gossip from insiders and palace employees as well as "tell-all" biographies of individual monarchs fed a culture of scepticism about the royals' behaviour that featured prominently in anti-monarchical discourse. Memoirs by former employees that subverted the master-servant relationship, revealed lurid details of court life, and highlighted the foibles of revered public figures, have become a component aspect of such revelations. Even relatively innocent recollections, like those of former royal nanny Marion Crawford, were

seen as damaging for their potential to reveal intimate and secret details of royal personages' personal lives (Olechnowicz, 2007: 10-11). In the nineteen-nineties, popular authors, like Kitty Kelley (2010: 2-3, 23-24), kept up a damaging stream of revelations relating to historical transgressions and misdemeanours on the part of individual monarchs that reminded the public of the royal family's shortcomings. Andrew Morton's biography of Princess Diana, written with her collaboration, was the most iconoclastic of these works, bearing the stamp of authenticity, and shining a light on the inner workings of the court and the royal mindset (Morton, 1992: 1-30). *The Republic*, journal of the pressure group Republic which campaigns for an elected head of state, commented on the impact of Morton's book:

> There is truth in the claim that he has succeeded where Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon, Mrs Wallace Simpson and Willy Hamilton failed in desanctifying the British royal system. This is because the well documented daylight he sheds reaches parts of the British psyche that, notoriously, republican logic and sentiment do not ("Checkbook republicanism," 1992: 2).

Prince Harry's ghost-written memoir, *Spare*, broke new ground in this regard, coming, as it did, not from a relation by marriage, but from the mouth of a royal heir, linked directly to the line of succession to the throne. Taking on a tone of irreverence to royal personalities throughout, Harry presents the image of an arid, joyless, court, built around the reiteration of tedious, elongated and repetitive rituals. Compulsory genuflection in front of a statue of Queen Victoria at Balmoral, the over-sentimentalisation of ritual and tradition, and a lack of warmth towards family members at Christmas and on family birthdays are reported as a routine part of his upbringing (Harry, 2023: 14, 17, 73-74). The royal family's members he describes are insular, detached, cold and unwilling to express their feelings beyond the emphasis on the necessity to continue with their duties. He also captures the sense of a family that felt itself to be embattled, subject to the vagaries of public opinion, and fearful of the future and potential demands for an end to the institution of monarchy itself: "The family was feeling the tremors of global change, hearing the cries of critics who said the monarchy was outdated, costly" (Harry, 2023: 237). Harry continues the persona of the "good" monarch in exile adopted by his mother, serving the country in a military role, and, whilst protesting his loyalty to throne and country, in the tradition of Diana, expresses sympathy for the underdog, visiting the same hospitals and embracing the same causes, as well as expressing dislike of media press barons like Rupert Murdoch (Harry, 2023: 52-54, 199, 229-230, 253-254, 353-354, 385-386). Culturally attuned to popular pastimes, Harry (2023: 251-252) emphasises his everyman attributes, shopping at T.K. Maxx, in the manner of his mother, finding companionship

with servants and royal retainers, and, in an assertion of his pretender's status, defending a cashier abused by customers. Examining his blood in a blood test as publicity for World AIDS Day, he reflects: "My family always said it was blue because it was special […]. Watching the nurse channel my blood into a test tube, I thought, Red, just like everybody else's" (Harry, 2023: 303).

Unwittingly, Harry (2023: 101-106) revives disquiet about the royal family's German antecedence and its imperial lineage by donning a German Afrika Korps uniform at a fancy-dress party with a "cringy" theme: "natives and colonials," although he notes that Prince William's similar "Out of Africa"-themed party garnered no public attention. Thereafter, to the usual anti-monarchist charge sheet, he adds allegations of racism deriving from imperial attitudes; the memoirs are attuned, throughout, to the imperial sub-text of the British monarchy and the mixed memories of empire surrounding the central position of the crown in the Commonwealth of Nations (Ward, 2023: 164). The memoir emphasises the monarchy's tendency to explicitly indulge imperial themes in many of its rituals, whilst making little or no attempt to indigenise or reform its appeal in its Commonwealth manifestations, a point echoed by commentators in Australia (Turnbull, 1993: 91-92). Harry also points out the presence of the Koh-i-Nor diamond on the Queen Mother's coffin at her funeral in 2002. On a visit to Natal in South Africa in 1997 he describes the stark processes of empire: "imperialism, colonialism, nationalism – in short, theft. Great Britain was trespassing, invading a sovereign nation, and trying to steal it…" (Harry, 2023: 33, 75). The memoir is unflinching in its description of the racism unleashed against Meghan Markle for marrying into the royal family and reveals debates in the inner circle of the court about whether Britain was "ready" for a dual-heritage heir to the throne, as well as citing condemnation of the "colonial undertones" on display in press attitudes towards Meghan's background (Harry, 2023: 322, 342, 372). The vision of the British monarchy that emerges overall from the memoir is one of an institution held prisoner by its history, weighed down by symbolism, struggling to adapt and reform, and uncertain about its future: in his conclusions, Harry (2023: 399) depicts the British monarchy as a "death cult," overwhelmed by the burden of the past.

Reviewing *Spare*, Tanya Gold (2023: 40-42) comments that the memoir is "an act of transgression," but notes that Harry "is only half emancipated" saying little about class or social injustice. Andrew O'Hagan (2023: 10) asserts, that, nevertheless, Harry has a "republican heart". Drawing on tropes that maligned, exposed, or denigrated leading members of the royal family, the volume presents the vision of an institution characterised by enormous privilege, but decadent and outmoded in many of its attitudes. Its distance from reality is characterised by the image of King Charles, still carrying with him everywhere the teddy bear that had provided him with comfort when he was bullied at Gordonstoun school (Harry, 2023: 40). Discussion of Harry's memoirs coincided with a period of

rapid change in the fortunes of the royal house following Queen Elizabeth II's death, and debate about the ability of King Charles's coronation to act as a solvent of national attitudes and opinions (Percy, 2023: 39). Placed in context, Harry's memoir navigates a period of flux in Britain's post-war history with implications for the monarchy and the ways in which it is perceived. It touches on the end of empire, apparent in the transition towards republics in Barbados and potentially Jamaica too, where republicanism has been inflamed by revelations about the royal family's links to slavery and the treatment of Meghan Markle (Gilmore, 2022: 90; Conn, 2023: 13). It also engages with sentiments of imperial nostalgia present in the backwash from the 2016 Brexit referendum, the loosening of the bonds of Britishness, and the emergence of a distinctive sense of English identity, less tethered to the institutions and rituals of the imperial state than formerly – all of which attitudes carry implications for the fortunes of the British monarchy (Ward, 2023: 129-158). As Bridget Byrne (2007: 148-149) points out, the emergence of a debate about Englishness has provided an opportunity to disavow the excesses of the Victorian monarchy, reviving public interest in the "English" dynasty of the Tudors, perceived as less entangled in the complexities of empire than the Victorians. The memoir also harmonises with the changing ethos of Britain, at a time when a younger segment of the population is prepared to contemplate the unthinkable and imagine a republic. Here Meghan and Harry have taken on a "celebrity" feel within youth culture. Moreover, the memoir presents a paradigm shift in attitudes, mooring anti-monarchism more emphatically in the mainstream. Above all, it demonstrates a rejection of some of the more established aspects of royal ritual, reveals clashes and tensions between a younger and older generation of royals, and highlights the suspicion of pluralism and diversity at the heart of the royal court.

Conclusions: the end of the House of Windsor?

In 2023, Britain still lacks a programmatic constitutional reform agenda, supported by a mainstream political party, which tackles head on issues of royal privilege. When the Labour party wins elections in Britain, it does so by taking a "one nation" patriotic position. This has retarded its ability to develop a republican agenda. The Scottish National party's ambivalence on the position of the British monarchy reflects something of the crown's residual power and emotional appeal, even for a potentially independent Scotland (Jackson, 2020: 128-160). Despite the existence of parties that advocate the dissolution of the United Kingdom, there is currently no major UK-wide political party that openly advocates the end of the monarchy. The marginal nature of overt republican ideas in Britain is confirmed by the summary arrest of a handful of protestors during King Charles III's coronation ceremony (Hattenstone, 2023: 18-19). Critics of the

monarchy in Britain have, therefore, struggled to imagine a country without the House of Windsor, or to foresee a clear path to such an outcome. In the nineteen-sixties republican Labour MP Emrys Hughes (1969: 61) accurately envisaged a long reign by Elizabeth II, speculating that "the Prince will not become King Charles the Third until the two thousand and twenties," but did not anticipate a "revolutionary upheaval". Visions of abdications, fractures in the royal household and the rise of ambitious popular politicians with anti-monarchist agendas have often been identified as routes to a non-royal head of state (Tonkin, 1994: 29; Hodges, 2009: 21). The Monarchy in Britain, however, is impossible to understand without the accompanying phenomenon of anti-monarchism. Usually ignited by individual episodes of royal transgression that inflame public opinion, the very amorphousness of the concept of anti-monarchism has deterred study of this style of oppositional politics: it remains neglected in histories of British radicalism. A broad phenomenon, critical and intolerant of royal misbehaviour, the personalities of individual royals, financial mismanagement and irregularities, favouritism, and the excesses of the court, anti-monarchism often transcends positions both on the political left, or on the political right, absorbing a range of attitudes and opinions critical of the monarchy, and, sometimes, of individual rulers. Capacious in its ability to draw on different traditions, anti-monarchism in Britain has found itself able to accommodate overt republicans, disillusioned loyalists and traditionalists, free market opponents of feudal values, pretenders and renegade royals who seek a less constrained, more liberal monarchy, and regional nationalists and leftist intellectuals at a time of dwindling adherence to Britishness across the former colonies of settlement. Unable, or unwilling, to construct a viable or coherent alternative to royal rule, anti-monarchism focusses on the theatre of complaint and the narrative of grievance; it remains, in some senses, a form of outsider politics suited to the protestations of marginalised insiders, like Princess Diana and Prince Harry. The monarchy might well square the circle on attitudes to royalty by reform, by the pruning of the civil list grant, confining it to a small group of active, core royals, or by reducing the scale of ceremonial attached to the royal house. Without root and branch change, however, the royal family is likely to remain an expression of "the glamour of backwardness" in Tom Nairn's words (1988: 213).

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