

Britain: Prince Charles bemoans “child-centred” education

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“One of the strongest natural proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings, is, that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an ass for a lion” (from *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine).

His Royal Highness Prince Charles Philip Arthur George, Prince of Wales, KG, KT, GCB, OM, AK, QSO, PC, ADC, Earl of Chester, Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles and Prince and Great Steward of Scotland has once again proved the veracity of Tom Paine’s words.

The Prince’s “Edwardian views” were exposed for public scrutiny at a recent employment tribunal. In a handwritten note quoted at the tribunal, the Prince complains, “What is wrong with people nowadays? Why do they all seem to think they are qualified to do things far above their capabilities?”

“This is all to do with the learning culture in schools. It is a consequence of a child-centred education system which tells people they can become pop stars, high court judges or brilliant TV presenters or infinitely more competent heads of state without ever putting in the necessary work or having the natural ability.

“It is a result of social utopianism which believes humanity can be genetically engineered to contradict the lessons of history.”

That the heir to the throne holds reactionary views on education should hardly come as a surprise. The young Prince was educated at a string of expensive private schools—obliquely called “Public Schools” in Britain—beginning with Hill House school in west London (fees today £6,525-£7,980 a year), followed by Cheam School in Berkshire (£6,855-£11,985) and then Gordonstoun, near Elgin in Scotland (£20,739-£22,062). However, the expensive tutoring

did not produce academic success. After completing his secondary education with barely average grades, the Prince scraped through his undergraduate studies at Trinity College Cambridge, where he managed to obtain a second-class degree in history.

But like those he now rails against, this does not seem to have held him back from seeking a position as future head of state.

The note exposing Prince Charles’s views came into the public domain on the third day of an employment tribunal brought by Elaine Day, a former personal assistant on the Prince’s staff at Clarence House. Ms. Day had resigned in April after five years’ service, accusing Prince Charles’s household of sexual harassment and unfair dismissal.

She told the tribunal her formal grievance filed in 2002 had been regarded as “rocking the boat.”

What had really invoked the Prince’s ire was a memo Day wrote questioning the career structure for those working in his household, asking whether more junior staff such as secretaries and personal assistants might one day aspire to become private secretaries or even senior advisers. His handwritten note is believed to be in response to this.

News of Prince Charles’s note provided an easy opportunity for New Labour to masquerade as the defenders of progressive education policies. Those who commented included Education Secretary Charles Clarke and Health Secretary John Reid (both members of the Privy Council, who have sworn a solemn oath to “bear Faith and Allegiance to the Queen’s Majesty”).

Speaking on the “Today” programme, Clarke said, “I don’t want to get in a tangle with the Prince of Wales but, to be quite frank, I think he is very old-fashioned and out of time and doesn’t actually understand what is going on in the British education system.” He advised

the Prince to “think carefully” before speaking out publicly.

Clarke’s comments were supported by Reid, who said, “I think he [the Prince] is wrong on this one as well. I’m a meritocrat.”

The debate between the Prince and Labour politicians was false to the core. The young Prince, in fact, benefited from a type of “child-centred” education: going to a series of private schools, which enjoy far more resources and cater to just 7 percent of the school population—those with parents wealthy enough to afford the fees. And the Labour government has done more to destroy what child-centred education remains in the public sector than any previous administration.

Under the banner of “meritocracy,” New Labour has rejected socially progressive concepts such as comprehensive education. It advocates a market-based approach and a process of selection and “streaming” at every major state of a child’s education based on exam performance. In this way, not only are vast swathes of the state education sector to be privatised, but schooling is subordinated to the ethos of competition. “League tables” based on pupil exam results then pit school against school in the struggle for ever-scarcer resources.

The Prince responded to his critics by leaking the text of a speech to be made in the following days, defending his views, in which he said, “I have been around long enough to see what were at the time thought of as old-fashioned ideas now come into vogue....

“In my view it is just as great an achievement to be a plumber or a bricklayer as it is to be a lawyer or a doctor. Not everyone has the same talents or abilities.”

Throughout his adult life, the Prince has been prone to make public utterances on topics he knows little about, from architecture to nanotechnology—each time exposing his extremely limited intellectual horizons. But more recently, he is said to have held a series of meetings with David Lorimer, a former Winchester College teacher, who heads the Scientific and Medical Network group, which have informed his thinking. The group describes its mission as “to challenge the adequacy of scientific materialism as an explanation of reality”. The group publishes pseudoscientific articles, such as “Minds Beyond Brains,” claiming to explain telepathy and other supposed parapsychological phenomena.

Traditionally, cabinet ministers refrain from public criticism of the Royal Family. But the Labour government gets uncomfortable when the reactionary traditions at the heart of British “democracy” are exposed too publicly. Prince Charles’s gaffes are usually passed over quickly, marked perhaps by a few mildly satirical comments in the press, but without questioning too seriously the position of the monarchy in British society.

As an op-ed piece in the *Observer* correctly noted, “A moment of ministerial crossness is a batsqueak of protest, not the onslaught the Windsors deserve and half expect.” However, entitled “Time to curb the crown,” the article itself merely called for some mild restraints to be placed upon the monarchy, to “disentangle parliament from ancient privilege.”

Even now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, no section of the political establishment or media seriously advocates the abolition of the monarchy and the creation of a republic; for to do so would mean to question the whole basis of capitalist rule in Britain. Instead, the ramblings of a right royal idiot can still become an occasion for a major debate on whether education or natural talent determines where someone ends up in society’s pecking order. Begging his Highness’s pardon, but might one politely suggest that it is more a case of who your parents are?



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