

Britain: Prince Harry and the “P” word

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With Prince Harry again embroiled in controversy over his latest "unroyal" behaviour—referring to a fellow Sandhurst cadet as a "Paki"—politicians, army brass and the media lined up to draw a line under the unsavoury affair.

On Sunday, a *News of the World* exclusive contained video footage, shot by the prince himself three years ago as he waited with fellow cadets for their return flight from Cyprus to the UK.

In the video, the prince pans his camera around the departure lounge before focussing on one unsuspecting cadet, Ahmed Raza Khan. "Ah, our little Paki friend Ahmed," Harry quietly intones.

Another clip of a fellow cadet wearing a camouflage hood has Harry exclaiming, "It's Dan the Man...you look like a raghead."

The political establishment was quick to respond. Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat spokesmen said that the prince's language was "offensive" and "unacceptable," while the army promised he will face what was described as a dressing-down "without coffee."

Clarence House issued an apology. The prince "is extremely sorry for any offence his words might cause. There is no question that Prince Harry was in any way seeking to insult his friend," it stated.

It continued, "It's a feature of the Prince's life that nothing is really ever private. He has had to learn the hard way. It was unwisely spoken but not malicious."

Prime Minister Gordon Brown concurred. The prince was not racist, the prime minister said, and should be given "the benefit of the doubt."

Notwithstanding objections to the prince's choice of words, the media has been overwhelmingly sympathetic to the young royal. The argument is that Harry, fulfilling the thankless role of the "spare heir," had sought to validate himself by adapting to the

normal stuff of military discourse and/or acting like "one of the lads."

Numerous articles have appeared explaining that "Paki" is a descriptive term, not dissimilar to the use of Taffy or Jock to describe a Welshman or Scot. Unfortunately for the prince, it is suggested, his role means that he cannot slip into such supposedly everyday, jocular idioms.

These are spurious claims. The term "Paki" is firmly associated with the right-wing skinhead movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Then, it was not only a term of abuse, but was invariably accompanied by physical violence, summed up in the activity of "Paki-bashing."

That the palace and bourgeois politicians should defend the prince is no surprise. Apparently, republican-leaning commentators have been only a little more sophisticated in their efforts. Thus, Peter Preston wrote in the *Observer*, "The trouble with a hereditary monarchy is that you get what you're given: in this case, a third-in-line to the throne of no great intellectual acuity."

"What does a Harry figure—almost devoid of exam pass marks—do with the rest of his life?" he continued. "Sandhurst [officer training school] wasn't the answer because he wasn't qualified to go there, and because the Ministry of Defence wanted to use him as a recruiting tool cum status symbol."

In the hands of Preston, an undoubted truism—that the hereditary principle is not only inherently undemocratic but also damaging to the personalities of those directly involved—becomes an apologia for the institution of monarchy.

"Monarchs need respect and a tad of affection to get them through to the next generation: and they only exist one generation at a time," he counsels.

There is no question a psychologist would find much in Harry's personal and familial profile to account for

his behaviour. For a person's future prospects to be dependent on the death of his father and elder brother must be personally debilitating. Then there is the death of his mother in a car crash when he was age 12; the public mourning in a manner befitting a potential king—i.e., without apparent emotion—and the constant speculation on Harry's parentage that calls into question his right to ever inherit the throne.

But more than personal psychology is involved here. Harry has form. In 2002, he had to apologise after wearing a swastika armband and a German Afrika Korps outfit to a fancy dress party. If he is acting out the behaviour of a "lad," it is one with right-wing proclivities.

The prince is not alone in the Royal Family in his prejudices. The Queen Mother's sympathy for Nazism is a matter of record, as are Prince Philip's numerous racist outbursts. (On Tuesday, it was revealed that Prince Charles uses the name "Sooty" to address one of his polo-playing friends, Punjabi-born property developer Kolin Dhillon.)

It would appear that Harry's personal psychology makes him more amenable to expressing broader social, political and class shifts and moods that others would rather remained concealed.

The last decade has seen an explosion of British imperialism as it seeks to reassert its neo-colonial interests on the coattails of its more powerful US ally. In the last period, Prince Harry has been the poster boy for this turn to aggressive militarism, with tales of his derring-do regularly featured in the media. Harry, now training with the Army Air Corps to be a helicopter pilot, won kudos for his 10-week stint in southern Afghanistan and he has been held up as an important role model for Britain's youth.

But a role model for what? Pre-emptive war, the occupation and suppression of countries and peoples whose geo-political location and resources make them vital for the British ruling elite, the revival of imperialist arrogance and chauvinism.

"All is good in the empire," Harry is heard to remark on several occasions during the video clips.

When Harry refers to "Pakis" and "ragheads" he is expressing the real outlook of the powers-that-be that lurk beneath the public protestations that the UK is spearheading the fight for "democracy" and "civilisation."

It is the potential damage that Harry has caused to that cultivated veneer that has landed him in trouble. The *Times* complained that Harry's "Paki" reference had undermined Army efforts to "recruit more black and Asian soldiers" and was "bad for the image of the Service."

One should also note the significance of efforts to make a distinction between the terms "Paki" and "raghead." The use of the latter term has provoked no controversy. On the contrary, Murad Ahmed, writing in the *Times*, explained that while "the use of the word Paki is offensive, taken in context, his use of the word 'raghead'—referring to Arabs—is not."

Ahmed argues this is because "Raghead is commonly used in the Armed Forces, to refer to the enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan. If someone is shooting at you, it's understandable that you might come up with a term for them that is less than flattering. Like no other place, the battlefield really is a 'them and us' situation, where politeness and racial sensitivities are not high on the agenda."

In contrast, the young cadet abused by Harry, Ahmed Raza Khan, is the son of a Pakistani banking executive. Considered the best young foreign officer cadet of his intake at Sandhurst, he is now a captain in the Pakistani Army, where he is said to be playing a key role in the "war on terror."

"Paki" is out because Pakistan is a UK ally, one of "us." "Raghead" is another matter, however, because it is supposedly a legitimate reference to the "enemy." Similarly, the Clarence House statement that Harry used the term "raghead" to mean "Taliban" passed without comment.



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