

The Diamond Jubilee: A glorification of wealth and privilege

Robert Stevens
6 June 2012

For days, the British public has been subjected to saturation coverage of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

This diet of carefully choreographed royal propaganda, which included minute-by-minute coverage of Sunday's 1,000-boat pageant on London's river Thames and an official pop concert at Buckingham Palace, ensured that any serious news was all but excised.

The mounting economic crisis in Europe, the death of another British soldier in Afghanistan (the 417th to have died since the 2001 invasion), were reduced to footnotes.

The tens of millions of pounds spent on the Royal Jubilee is in stark contrast to the demands of the ruling elite that working people—the target of the most severe austerity measures since the 1930s—must make “sacrifices” for the good of the nation. It is estimated that the cost of the celebrations, including the extra public Bank Holiday, will be around £1.2 billion.

Much of the expense has been on ensuring a security lockdown of the capital. For the Thames Pageant event alone, 13,000 security forces were mobilised, including members of the Royal Navy and Marines, as well as police officers.

Over the past month, London's 40 square miles have been systematically swept by security forces, including police frogmen carrying out an underwater search of the Thames, to counter the so-called “terrorist threat”. This is on top of the biggest mobilisation of the armed forces in London since the Second World War, already in place in the run-up to the Olympic Games.

The pop concert organised outside Buckingham Palace plumbed new depths of sycophancy and deference. Performing alongside a number of tired, multi-millionaire musicians including Paul McCartney,

Elton John and Stevie Wonder, were a host of manufactured reality TV show creations. Just what is one to make of Prince Charles giving thanks to one Gary Barlow, lead singer in the 1990s boy-band, Take That, for organising the event?

In the process of these celebrations, all manner of the crimes of British imperialism were brushed under the carpet. In May, the Queen hosted a tea party of international Sovereign Monarchs to celebrate her Jubilee. Amongst the attendees were the rulers of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, fresh from their bloody repression of opposition protests in Bahrain.

At the May 23 Royal Academy “Celebration of the Arts” event to commemorate the Jubilee, Bono, lead singer of rock band U2, thanked the Queen for her reign and visit to Ireland last year. This is the band whose 1982 recording “Sunday Bloody Sunday” song—about the slaughter of 13 innocent people in Derry in 1972 by the occupying British army—is rated as one of the best political protest songs of all time.

What exactly is being celebrated here? According to a recent Brand Finance report, the tangible assets of the royal family, including the Duchy of Cornwall with around 133,658 acres, over 23 counties, are worth an estimated £18 billion.

Today, the financial and social gulf between the UK's rich and the rest of the population is at record levels. The *Sunday Times* Rich List, which tracks the wealth of Britain's richest 1,000 people, records their combined wealth at £414 billion. The Queen herself is worth more than £300 million (a vast underestimation).

The *Financial Times* was forced to note in a comment that since the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, “society has become far more unequal. After tax, the richest 1 per cent now have 9 per cent of all income, compared with 3 per cent in 1977.”

Now the social position of the working class is being subjected to an even sharper decline as a result of the government's austerity measures. Millions are without work. Pay cuts and freezes are the norm, while the destruction of social provision—implemented to fund the multi-billion-pound bailout of Britain's banks in 2008—means many being denied their right to health care, education and social benefits.

In the capital, soup kitchens now feed thousands of people every day, including emaciated and starving children.

Despite the media's best efforts to present the population of the UK "as all being in it together", a single episode from the Jubilee made plain the real state of class relations.

On Monday the *Guardian* reported that a group of long-term unemployed people from Bristol, Bath and Plymouth had been bussed into London and forced to work as unpaid stewards during the Jubilee, as part of the government's Work Programme.

Up to 30 people on unemployment benefit and another 50 people on apprentice wages were taken to London by Close Protection UK, which had won a stewarding contract for the Jubilee. Given no accommodation, they were told to sleep overnight in freezing cold conditions under London Bridge before being sent to steward the river pageant the following day. The 50 apprentices were paid just £2.80 an hour while in London.

The *Guardian*, based on accounts from two of the people, reported, "They had to change into security gear in public, had no access to toilets for 24 hours, and were taken to a swampy campsite outside London after working a 14-hour shift in the pouring rain on the banks of the Thames on Sunday."

One of the females employed as a steward said, "London was supposed to be a nice experience, but they left us in the rain. They couldn't give a crap ... No one is supposed to be treated like that, [working] for free. I don't want to be treated where I have to sleep under a bridge and wait for food."

Despite being forced into calling an "investigation", Close Protection UK managing director Molly Prince defended the use of unpaid workers, claiming, "The only ones that won't be paid are because they don't want to be paid. They want to do this voluntarily, [to] get the work experience."

In truth, many unemployed workers are now being forced into such miserable schemes under the Work Programme, as a means of throwing them off unemployment benefit. Up to 270 voluntary organisations and charities have signed up to the programme.

The pouring of vast political, financial and human resources into the Jubilee celebrations takes place at a time of widespread alienation amongst the mass of working people and youth from the political parties and state institutions.

Support for all the three main political parties has collapsed, while much of Britain's ruling elite—along with the police—have been exposed through their relations with financial oligarchs, such as Rupert Murdoch, as deeply corrupt.

No doubt the promotion of the monarchy as an institution supposedly above all this stench is intended to remedy this situation. Instead, the glorification of wealth and privilege only proves just how far removed the bourgeoisie is from the concerns and sentiments of millions and brings to mind nothing so much as the final days of the French aristocracy.



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