

Prince Charles and William granted access to top secret UK documents

Margot Miller**28 December 2015**

Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, has had access for more than two decades to top secret government papers, investigative work by the anti-monarchy Republic organization has shown. So has his son Prince William, second in line to the throne. The princes were given access to the papers even though they are otherwise considered too sensitive even for the eyes of middle ranking ministers.

The secret documents have also been routinely circulated to the queen, along with top government ministers, including all members of the cabinet, government ministers in charge of departments, the Attorney General, Chief Whip of the House of Commons and Leader of the Opposition.

The secret documents are contained in the so-called "Precedent Book." They include all proposals for new legislation as well as records of internal government discussions. While they have been freely handed to Britain's remaining feudal lords, the government insists that they not be released to the public for at least three decades after publication.

The documents were uncovered only after an extended legal battle led by Republic, which campaigns for the abolition of the British monarchy.

The government fought tooth and nail to block the release of the documents, insisting that they are "highly confidential." Nonetheless, his Honour Judge Shanks ruled in favour of the release of four chapters of the book during a Freedom of Information (FOI) tribunal in June.

Shanks ordered that a fifth chapter, pertaining to the queen and entitled "Relations with Buckingham Palace," be kept secret.

The Precedent Book has traditionally been kept in a locked cupboard, within a locked office in a secured corridor inside the Cabinet Office. The newly released

documents make clear that both Prince Charles and his chief private secretary, Clive Anderton, have enjoyed unfettered access to the top secret room.

Charles, who has proudly dubbed himself "the meddling prince," has enjoyed easy access to government secrets to the point where he is "essentially a minister," Republic's chief executive Graham Smith noted in response to the exposure.

Charles' meddling was previously exposed by a 2010 FOI battle spearheaded by *Guardian* journalist Rob Evans, which secured the release of some thirty letters exchanged by the Prince and the government from 2004-2005.

Most of the letters written by Charles to ministers will never be seen, as a result of amendments to the FOI legislation rammed through by the Blair Labour government in 1997. Blair later expressed regret that the Freedom of Information Act had been allowed to pass into law under his tenure, underscoring the hypocrisy of Labour's claims to have fought for greater government transparency and accountability.

These revelations have exploded official claims that the royals have no political affiliation or influence under the UK's parliamentary democracy.

Charles and the queen have enjoyed secret, extra-legal powers that enable them to influence the legislative process, including bills that determine British imperialism's war policy, documents secured by a 2013 FOI case have already confirmed.

The documents, released over the staunch opposition of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, revealed that the queen's consent has been required for passage of major social legislation, including the Civil Partnership Act of 2014, and other legislation relating to higher education, paternity pay, identity cards and child maintenance. Parliamentary bills under

consideration are regularly passed to the monarchy to secure consent before being confirmed, the 2013 case showed.

These procedures are far from merely ceremonial, according to John Kirkhope, the legal scholar who led the fight to secure the release of the documents. Far from rubber-stamping legislation with their “Royal Assent”, senior royals exercise “real influence and real power,” according to Kirkhope.

“There has been an implication that these prerogative powers are quaint and sweet, but actually there is real influence and real power, albeit unaccountable,” Kirkhope said.

In one instance exposed by the documents, a parliamentary council warned that without royal consent, a “major plank” of the bill in question would have to be axed.

In 1999, the queen exercised her royal veto to reject the “Military Action Against Iraq” legislation, which contained provisions that would have limited the monarchy’s veto power over war policy.

The monarchy also has power of veto over bills concerning their own hereditary income and personal property. According to the *Sunday Times Rich List*, the queen has a fortune of £340 million, an increase of £10 million from last year, while Charles is worth over £140 million.

Last year, Charles earned £18 million from the Duchy of Cornwall estates. A spokesman for Buckingham Palace said the prince has never refused consent on legislation concerning his personal wealth “unless advised by ministers.” This begs the question: in which cases did Charles on the advice of ministers veto legislation which would affect his income?

The disclosure of the monarchy’s full access to the Precedent Papers has met with a muted response from the supine media and politicians of all stripes.

Under its new leader, the declared Republican Jeremy Corbyn, Labour has refused to even question why the unelected monarch and her heirs can peruse Cabinet papers or veto bills. Labour merely called for a review into Charles’ access to the papers.

Clive Lewis, Labor’s shadow energy and climate change minister, commented meekly in response to the revelations that, “There needs to be more transparency about his powers and his access to confidential briefings.”

Such calls for “transparency” are an attempt by Labour to whitewash the undemocratic practices that are normally well hidden from the public gaze.

Last year the monarchy cost the British taxpayer £334 million. In the same period, 2.3 million UK children languished in poverty, and three million UK residents were either suffering from malnutrition, or in danger of it.

Despite doing away with the absolute powers of the monarch with the beheading of Charles I during their own revolution in 1649, the British bourgeoisie later restored and maintained the institution as the living embodiment of inherited privilege, social inequality, nationalism and political stability. The monarch rests on a system whose social relations are based on class exploitation and the capitalist nation state system, based on private ownership of the means of production and production for profit.

“Her Majesty’s Most Honourable Privy Council” is central to the maintenance of highly classified state secrets. The Privy Council, a body of advisers to the sovereign, comprises mainly senior politicians, including the Leader of the Opposition. All members swear a ritual allegiance to “not know or understand of any manner of thing to be attempted, done or spoken against Her Majesty’s Person, Honour, Crown or Dignity Royal,” without informing the Council and to “keep secret all matters committed and revealed unto you...”

As the release of the Precedent Papers shows, the monarchy takes an active and influential role in defending the interests of the bourgeoisie, alongside parliament, the secret service and the army. It stands at the very apex of these constitutional mechanisms of class rule.



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