

British Queen appeals for national unity across an unbridgeable class divide

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On Sunday night, an estimated 28 million people watched a prerecorded speech by British monarch Queen Elizabeth II on the coronavirus pandemic.

The four-minute speech, broadcast on BBC One, ITV, Channel 5, Channel 4, Sky News and the BBC News Channel, was the Royal Family's appeal to "Keep Calm and Carry On" faced with a global social crisis ravaging millions.

Speaking from Windsor Castle, amid the gilt rococo surrounds of the White Drawing Room, the stony faced and immaculately coiffed 93-year-old monarch invoked a mythical spirit of shared sacrifice. The personal embodiment of hereditary privilege and obscene wealth—who is "worth" an estimated £1.6 billion—lectured working people on the need for "national unity," "self-discipline" and "restraint."

Queen Elizabeth, who decamped from London weeks ago with Prince Phillip to the Berkshire countryside, surrounded by a retinue of servants in the world's largest occupied castle, described the pandemic as, "A time of disruption in the life of our country: a disruption that has brought grief to some, financial difficulties to many, and enormous changes to the daily lives of us all."

Her speech sought to paper over the explosive social divide revealed by the pandemic—a truly impossible task. Carefully crafted, her address featured cut-away shots of National Health Service (NHS) nurses, doctors and paramedics, supermarket warehouse staff, and construction workers building the NHS Nightingale field hospital in London's Docklands which may soon hold thousands of patients.

"Together we are tackling this disease, and I want to reassure you that if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it," she declared.

Expunged from the Queen's narrative was any hint of the mounting public fury over horrific conditions endured by NHS staff—deprived of masks, gloves and other

essential personal protective clothing, and of ventilators to treat the dying. Of bus and train drivers, warehouse and delivery workers, whose lives have been needlessly sacrificed to the criminal incompetence, negligence and greed of the political and financial elite.

Instead, the Queen sought refuge behind the outpouring of public support for the NHS, claiming, "The moments when the United Kingdom has come together to applaud its care and essential workers will be remembered as an expression of our national spirit; and its symbol will be the rainbows drawn by children."

Not since Margaret Thatcher invoked St Francis of Assisi on the steps of Number 10 in 1979 has there been such a cynical invocation of social harmony. In reality, the only "symbols" remembered by millions in the months and years ahead will be of body bags, doctors and nurses forced to wear bin liners and homemade goggles while intubating patients lucky enough to access a ventilator, empty supermarket shelves, and graphs charting the daily rise of pandemic victims. While the Queen's 71-year-old son Prince Charles received immediate testing and the very best treatment imaginable for "mild symptoms" of coronavirus, NHS doctors and nurses in repeated contact with those wracked with disease have been denied testing and succumbed themselves—to date at least a dozen have died.

These are the symbols of an entirely preventable global pandemic, repeated across Europe, the United States and Asia.

Notably, the Queen made no reference in her speech to the Prime Minister. Like his mentor Donald Trump, Boris Johnson personifies the ignorance, incompetence and indifference to human life of the capitalist class. He has now been hospitalised, a victim of his own reactionary policies of "herd immunity."

According to BBC royal correspondent Nicholas Witchell, the Queen's decision to deliver Sunday's

address was made “in close consultation with Downing Street.” *The Guardian* reported, “A senior No 10 official said the palace and the prime minister, Boris Johnson, ‘have been speaking throughout’ about the timing.” Just one hour after the Queen’s speech, Number 10 announced that Johnson had been admitted to hospital after being diagnosed with coronavirus 10 days previously and showing signs of worsening health.

The entire media was on hand to promote the Queen’s call for national unity. The night before, Channel 5 televised “The Queen Mother’s Blitz,” a documentary showing “The Queen Mother’s efforts to improve the British people’s morale during the Second World War” and “how her personality and determination made a remarkable difference to the war effort.” Needless to say, the BBC omitted any reference to the royal family’s support for Hitler.

By Monday morning, Britain’s media had declared with one voice that the Queen’s speech was an historic masterstroke. “‘We will meet again’: Queen urges Britons to stay strong” (*Guardian*); “Queen’s coronavirus speech: ‘Ambitious’ words ‘to reassure and inspire’” (BBC); “‘Better days will return. We will meet again’” (*Telegraph*); “The Queen’s address has lifted our spirits” (*Telegraph*); “As ‘mother of the nation’ her words spoke volumes” (*Telegraph*); “Brits unite in awe of Queen’s speech: ‘Nobody could have rallied the country, the world the way she did’” (*Evening Standard*).

Why is this nauseating blanket of sycophancy necessary? In the face of a crisis of the entire social order, the political and moral authority and legitimacy of capitalism has been shattered. Yesterday’s *Financial Times* editorial warned of “social unrest” unless governments act quickly to reduce the death toll from coronavirus, introduce widespread testing and containment, and provide hospitals with resources to deal with the surge in patients.

The Queen, who has weathered nearly a century of global class struggle as a conscious representative of the oldest and most experienced ruling class on the planet, sought to preempt an emerging social eruption. BBC royal correspondent Jonny Dymond noted, “There was no talk of fighting, of struggle, of conflict. Instead she spoke of more peaceful national traits—‘self-discipline,’ ‘quiet, good-humoured resolve’ and ‘fellow-feeling.’”

Standing at the apex of the British state, the Queen was issuing orders to its underlings—the working class, the producers of all wealth—that it must do as it is told, accept the situation and above all not question the existing social

order. She even suggested that self-isolation was “an opportunity to slow down, pause and reflect, in prayer or meditation”!

This message was warmly endorsed by Labour’s new leader, Sir Keir Starmer, who tweeted Sunday night, “The Queen speaks for the whole country and our determination to defeat coronavirus.”

Starmer’s Twitter account was immediately inundated with angry replies. “Being ‘holed up’ at Windsor Castle with hundreds of rooms and acres galore and not having to worry about running out of loo paper or vital supplies doesn’t really speak for me!” wrote Julie Ambrose.

“Did she give up the crown jewels to benefit the food banks? Did she open up Buckingham Palace to the homeless to be safe whilst on her isolation trip? No, I didn’t think so,” wrote Stevelkeys. “Did she mention if she too has been forced to sign a DNR [Do Not Resuscitate] order, like others her age?” wrote another.

Social reality cannot be fixed by a royal sticking plaster, even one administered by the Queen herself. Her desiccated nationalist appeals to the memory of the Blitz and the “British spirit” are a ridiculous anachronism and pure political fiction. The coronavirus pandemic is a global crisis and requires a global solution, based on the unification of the world’s working class in the struggle for socialism, i.e., a social and economic order that prioritises human need not private profit.

The concluding lines of the Queen’s speech invoked the lyrics of Vera Lynn’s World War II song, “We’ll Meet Again,” which promised soldiers a future “sunny day.” In her own speech on Sunday, the Queen also told working people, “We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return.”

Better days for whom? The working class should reject the Queen’s demands for endurance, delivered in the lap of luxury. One day the film of her speech will be a museum exhibit—demonstrating to future generations the stupidity, irrationality and hypocrisy of the Royal Family and all it represents.



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