

UK Royal household workers threatened with job losses

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Hundreds of employees of the Royal Collection Trust (RCT) have been offered a voluntary redundancy scheme, ahead of what is expected to be a severe cut in the workforce of royal employees.

The July 7 announcement, impacting on 650 workers, followed reports of the crisis facing the royal budget.

On May 18, the *Sun* broke the story of an email sent by the Lord Chamberlain Earl Peel to staff, warning of a £17.8 million shortfall—about one-third of annual royal revenues. Citing the effects of the coronavirus on the activities of the Royal Household and the closure of royal palaces and collections, he warned, “There are undoubtedly difficult times ahead and we realise many of you will be concerned ... The Royal Household, like many organisations, is not immune to the impact of the pandemic on our financial position. Many projects have been halted and all but essential expenditure has been suspended. A recruitment freeze has been implemented and no new posts will be appointed unless a very clear business case exists. This year’s annual pay review has also been paused.”

One source observed, “Many staff are loyal and will do what they do for a pay cut. But the email went down like a lead balloon.”

The Royal household is very much not like “most organisations.” Its funding stems from the institution of the Sovereign Grant in 2011. Prior to this, funding for the senior royals came from line items on the Chancellor’s annual budget. The grant is a complicated mix of public and private sources of income, partially dependent on tourist revenues to fund staffing and other costs of the royals in the course of their duties.

Its size is also dependent on how much money is brought in by earnings from the Crown Estate, a huge real estate portfolio. The *Sunday Times* annual Rich List shows the Queen lost £20 million since last year, owing to upkeep expenses on properties and the decline of her

British blue-chip holdings on the falling stock market.

Monies brought in by tourism are expected to fall drastically due to the pandemic. Last year, the royals brought in £70 million from ticket and souvenir sales. These included Buckingham Palace (£12 million), Windsor Castle (£25 million), Holyrood Palace (£5.6 million), the Royal Mews (£1.6 million), the Queen’s Gallery (£1.6 million), the Queen’s Gallery at Holyrood (£400,000) and Clarence House (£132,000).

There is growing speculation that Buckingham Palace may never be occupied by a reigning monarch again. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Queen and Prince Phillip left for Windsor Castle, where they are expected to remain before they leave for their annual summer stay at Balmoral. They have announced that when they return from Scotland they will continue to reside at Windsor.

A royal source observed, “The future is so uncertain ... Buckingham Palace is so large, with so many people, there is no saying when it will ever be safe for her and the Duke of Edinburgh again.” Princess Anne, Prince Edward and the Countess of Wessex have been living at their country estates in Gloucestershire and Surrey during lockdown.

Prince Charles has made it clear that he has no intention of living at the Palace if he becomes king. When French President Macron visited in June, Charles welcomed him at Clarence House, his residence on The Mall. Sources claim he planned to retain Buckingham Palace for use as offices and as a state building for royal and national events. One observed, “It is fantastically expensive to run as a home, not just for a sovereign, but for their children and then, of course, all the staff who live there too.”

Whatever the outcome of the crisis, it will not be paid by the parasitic royals but by their employees. It seems inevitable that the slimmed-down monarchy envisaged by Charles will nevertheless become reality.

Official accounts place royal expenditures in

Buckingham Palace alone near £27 million. A spokesman commented in exasperated tones, “That’s just the salaries, expenses and pensions. On top of that are contributions to grace and favour, homes for the staff and household, taking care of their health, feeding them ... it never ends.”

Far more massive expenditures concern building renovation. The Palace is currently undergoing the first stages of a £369 million repair—paid for by working people through their taxes. Photographs show the complete restructuring of plumbing, heating and electric systems, stemming from the 1950s. Asbestos will be removed and lifts installed. No expense is being spared. Handmade 19th century wallpaper in the “Yellow Dining Room” is being carefully removed piece by piece in case it is damaged by the work’s vibrations.

Frogmore Cottage, the residence near Windsor Palace that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle moved into when they were married, cost the public £2.4 million to refurbish. After the two moved to the United States upon their departure as “working Royals,” Harry is understood to have agreed, according to the *Mirror*, a “rental-plus” deal, “above market rate, to keep Frogmore as their official UK base.”

More jobs are threatened at other royal residences. On July 23, Windsor Castle and Holyrood Palace will reopen, along with the London and Edinburgh Queen’s Galleries and the Royal Mews. However, an email sent to staff by Vice Admiral Tony Johnstone-Burt, master of the household, warned that “visitor numbers are expected to be significantly below” their usual levels. “While we have taken out a £22 million loan to enable us to continue to operate in the near future, we need to do so with a lower cost base to recover our financial position. Inevitably this must include a reduction in staff costs, which is our greatest single expense.”

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Workers from the Royal Collections Trust (RCT), along with their counterparts in Tate Enterprise and Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), face significant job losses. Tate employees have been left with statutory redundancy of little more than a month’s pay, and there are reports that HRP workers are seriously considering voluntary redundancy, fearing that a compulsory scheme would be worse.

A Palace insider confided, “These redundancies are just the beginning. We expect when the full financial fallout is revealed later this year there will be mass redundancies and a scaling down of operations.”

According to the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), “the Royal Households announced that in the Royal Collections Trust they want to reduce the wage bill by 20 percent and cut employer’s pensions contributions from 15 percent to eight percent. This will mean significant job cuts, as well as reduced pensions for PCS members.”

The British Monarchy is a feudal relic, but also a slick 21st century capitalist operation. Over the last decade, the working class has suffered a massive destruction in living standards. In contrast, the enormous wealth held by the royals remains staggering. The Monarchy is said to be worth £72.5 billion, with the Queen’s personal fortune at £350 million. Her stamp collection alone is valued at £100 million. The Royal Collection, managed by the Royal Collection Trust, is priceless and believed to be the largest private art collection in the world.

Other estimates place Prince Phillip at \$30 million, Prince Charles anything from \$100 million to \$400 million, Princess Anne at \$30 million, Prince Andrew at \$45 million, Prince William at \$40 million and Prince Harry at \$25 million. Yet their drain on the public purse is never ending.

The employees of the royals, like millions of other workers, are being made to suffer the consequences of a crisis that is the responsibility of the capitalist class. On Tuesday, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicted that 4 million people could be on the dole queue by next year.

Many royal household staff are PCS members. Yet again the union has done nothing. It wrote June 30 urging that “The Royal Family and Government intervene to make sure this group of workers do not pay the price for the pandemic.”



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