

Harry and Meghan fire their latest broadside against the House of Windsor

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Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* ends with its protagonist, Kurtz, declaring, "The horror! The horror!", as his verdict on all that he has done and seen, and on the general devastation wrought by imperialism on the African continent.

One wonders what enduring phrase Conrad would have employed to summarise the terrible suffering inflicted upon Meghan Markle by Britain's Royal Family? Possibly, "The banality! The self-pity!"

Markle and her husband, Harry, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, spoke to Oprah Winfrey, net worth \$2.7 billion. She began by asking what their \$14.5 million home near Santa Barbara, California means to them as part of their new life after withdrawing from Royal duties.

"Peace," Markle replied. One might add that it is just one of the benefits of having an awful lot of money.

The interview cum promotional video, which has already earned over \$9 million for Winfrey's production company from CBS and £1 million from ITV, was a much-anticipated takedown of "The Firm", a suitably disparaging term for the House of Windsor, and the latest stage in a bitter factional conflict rocking the Royal Family to its foundations.

Harry and Meghan's catalogue of complaints was thin gruel. Meghan said that she had been driven to the point that she "didn't want to be alive anymore" but cited only one example of ostensibly genuine racism by a member of the Royal Family, an allegedly racist motive regarding bestowing the title of prince on her son, and the cold indifference to her suffering at the hands of the venal British media.

Harry played on comparisons between the mistreatment of his wife and the tragic fate of his mother, Princess Diana, made a swipe at his father, Prince Charles, for abandoning him, and at the royals for closing the purse strings after the couple made clear they wanted out.

Markle portrayed herself as a naïf, who believed her marriage to Harry would be the stuff of a Disney movie, only to discover the racism in the British media and a belief in the royal household that she and Harry were upstaging the

heir to the throne, Prince William, and his wife Kate.

Of the accusations made, the supposedly most explosive were "several conversations" about how "dark" Meghan's baby's "skin might be when he was born"—relayed to Meghan by Harry. "At the time it was awkward, I was a bit shocked," he explained. Really? Someone who grew up with Prince Philip as his grandfather, and whose idea of fun as a young man was to dress up as a Nazi? Both refused to say which royal said it, but they asked Winfrey to stress that it was neither the queen nor Philip—which eliminates at least one notorious racist.

The account was meant to reinforce Markle's assertion of a racist motive for not making her son Archie a prince, "which would be different from protocol, and that he wasn't going to receive security". Citing royal protocol was not a suitable explanation, she insisted. It was particularly concerning that "the first member of colour in this family isn't being titled in the same way as other grandchildren would be."

This is nonsense, as royal protocol does specify that Archie would not get a title at birth as he is only the son of the second son of Charles, the Prince of Wales. Had Meghan been minded to hang around for more than two years, Archie would have been made a prince once Charles ascended to the throne.

The only other accounts of royal skulduggery and abuse related to Winfrey were that a row over her flower girl wedding dresses was reported as having reduced Kate to tears, when in fact it was Meghan who ended up crying; Prince Charles not taking Harry's calls after he stepped down; and the two being cut off financially in the first quarter of 2020. Had he not had the money left him by his mother, the revenues from his father's estate, and the ability to rely on American billionaire media mogul Tyler Perry, they would have been in a truly dreadful situation.

Whatever event or combination of events convinced the Sussexes that they no longer wanted to play their part in the front ranks of the monarchy, the most important deciding factor was that they could make far more money once they

were free operators. Both wanted Harry to retain the title His Royal Highness (HRH) while being freed from mundane royal duties.

In January last year the couple declared on their website, sussexroyal.com, their intention to “carve out a progressive new role within this [Royal] institution,” including becoming “financially independent.” This meant not making claims on the Sovereign Grant provided by the state to the top royals, which they complained only covered “five percent of costs for The Duke and Duchess” anyway. They would, however, still claim £5 million from Charles’s Duchy of Cornwall, which represented the remaining 95 percent of their income, Frogmore Cottage in Windsor as a UK base, and wanted British taxpayers to pick up their security and travel tab at a cost of over £1 million per year.

Alas this was not to be, as the monarchy instructed the pair to stop using HRH and get on with their money-grubbing without invoking the royal title. This was not much of a hit for the pair to suffer. The money has rolled in as they both knew it would, including a deal with the streaming service Netflix worth £100 million and a podcast deal with Spotify worth around £30 million. More money will flow their way after Sunday’s interview painting Meghan as a martyr.

It is hard not to experience a twinge of feeling for the queen, faced with such self-serving nonsense that risks undermining the institution she has spent decades buttressing. But we must resist. This is a fight between two factions for which there can be no sympathy, other than to acknowledge that their deeply flawed personalities are the product of an institution and a social milieu that does great damage to all involved.

The British press was largely sympathetic to Elizabeth and hostile towards the Sussexes, though the *Guardian* was firmly in the Meghan camp. Leading up to the interview, the *Times* ran allegations citing “Royal aides” that Markle was abusive and bullying towards palace staff, leading to resignations, while the *Sun* cited “insiders” calling Harry “the hostage” to a fiancé and wife “always looking for drama”. “There is an active role that the firm is playing in perpetuating falsehoods about us,” Markle told Winfrey.

Yesterday, the *Telegraph*’s Anna Pasternack compared Harry and Meghan unfavourably to the fascist sympathisers Edward VIII and “another American divorcee [who] captured the heart of a British prince”, Wallis Simpson, who both “despite being banished, were dutiful and patriotic to the end.”

There were no editorials, however, likely due to widespread concern that further mudslinging risks permanent damage to the monarchy, at a time when Prince Andrew stands accused of sex with underage prostitutes paid for by the deceased sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and Prince

Philip is at death’s door after heart surgery.

Once again, tensions and crisis risk tearing apart the Royal Family. This cannot be explained at the level of personal motives, even though these stretch as far back as the 1980s, above all to Princess Diana’s death in 1997. They are rooted in a general crisis of every major institution of the British state, provoked by the impact of globalisation.

The marriage of Charles and Diana ended in divorce rather than resigned unhappiness because she was adopted as a cause célèbre by the newly dominant super-rich layers of the financial oligarchy who supported her challenge to a monarchy embodying the hereditary privilege of layers they viewed as has-beens and virtual paupers. Every effort to resuscitate the monarchy’s public standing has involved taking a distance from the celebrity and open displays of wealth and excess associated with Diana, while appropriating her pose as a “people’s princess” supposedly in tune with “ordinary” working people. William married the “commoner” Kate Middleton in 2011. Harry went one better in 2017 by marrying a black actress, combining glamour with a progressive anti-racism and modernising message.

But nothing has worked in the long-term. On the day of the Winfrey interview, the queen gave a Commonwealth Day speech praising “selfless dedication to duty” and the importance of “friendship and unity”, speaking alongside Charles, his second wife Camilla and William and Kate. Unfortunately for her, the lure of wealth has again determined events—with Meghan winning Harry to a life of global celebrity over the spirit of duty in the interests of British imperialism that she demanded of him.

The gap between the fabulously wealthy elite and the broad mass of the population grows more acute by the day. Ultimately, the undermining of the monarchy, the prime symbol of national unity in the UK, is the harbinger of social conflicts far more fundamental than the spats within the ruling elite exercising the world’s media while millions face desperate hardship and threats to their health and lives during the pandemic.



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