

Crisis of monarchy over Harry and Meghan dominates UK media

Chris Marsden
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“The whole family is saddened to learn the full extent of how challenging the last few years have been for Harry and Meghan.

“The issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning. Whilst some recollections may vary, they are taken very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately.

“Harry, Meghan and Archie will always be much loved family members.”

This was the brief statement issued by Buckingham Palace on March 9, around 40 hours after Oprah Winfrey’s interview with Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and his wife, Meghan Markle, was broadcast on CNN. It combines expressions of sympathy for the couple and an oblique reference to the issue of race with an insistence that these matters should be addressed privately and the caveat that “some recollections” of events “may vary.”

This failed to dampen a media-driven “debate” on the future of the monarchy, centring on whether it can still be reformed to reflect modern cultural norms or should be abolished. It is hard to give the full flavour of how pathetic and out of touch with social and political realities are the statements made on both sides.

Politicians and celebrities in the US, including tennis star Serena Williams, Beyoncé and lesser-known figures, lined up to express their disappointment that Meghan was not welcomed by the House of Windsor—as if a black princess would prove that an institution rooted in hereditary and class privilege and imperial subjugation was fit for the 21st century. Their every stupid comment was presented as of immense interest.

US first National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman declared pathetically, “Meghan was the Crown’s greatest opportunity for change, regeneration, and reconciliation in a new era. They didn’t just maltreat her light—they missed out on it.” It was, she added, “Unclear if this will change the royal family, but Meghan’s strength will certainly

redefine family elsewhere.”

US President Joe Biden limited himself to a statement by his press secretary, Jen Psaki, praising Meghan as someone who came forward to speak about her “struggles with mental health and tell their own personal story, that takes courage and that’s certainly something the president believes.”

Easily the most nauseating statement came from Hillary Clinton, who found the interview “heart-rending to watch.” It was also “heartbreaking to see the two of them sitting there having to describe how difficult it was to be accepted, to be integrated, not just into the royal family as they described, but more painfully into the larger societies whose narrative is driven by tabloids that are living in the past.”

This is said during the tenth anniversary of the Libyan war, which saw an eight-month bombardment by the US that left the country in ruins. When then Secretary of State Clinton was told of the torture and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, this supposedly sensitive soul, who cannot bear the suffering inflicted on the Duke and Duchess, laughed and said, “We came, we saw, he died.”

Open calls for abolishing the monarchy have been very rare and most often equally delusional. The *Guardian*, for example, featured an opinion piece by Nylah Burton, a “lifestyle writer” at *Bustle* magazine, that combined fawning on Harry and Meghan with a supposedly radical message. She wrote, “Lashing out at the Windsors is the appropriate response, but it’s my hope that those who were outraged at hearing how Meghan was treated will further interrogate the nature of this institution, and become radicalized into being anti-monarchists and anti-imperialists.”

Burton felt compelled to clarify that “these aren’t the Sussexes’ political stances... there is nothing to indicate that they’d like to abolish the system.” Nevertheless, “If that interview chilled us, we should examine whether we

believe a monarchy can or should exist in a just world... we don't need them to be radicalized for us to use this moment to question everything we thought we knew about this elitist system."

In the real world, the response of those in power was far more cautious regarding an institution that still occupies a central role in British constitutional and political life.

Internationally, accusations of racism were decried as a political blow to "brand Britain", especially in the 54 Commonwealth countries, of which Queen Elizabeth is the head of state of 16, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. But the response was mainly limited to calls for carefully calibrated changes only after the queen steps down.

Former Australian prime minister and leader of the Australian Republican Movement, Malcolm Turnbull, said the interview bolstered his case for breaking away from the British monarchy. But he told ABC, "After the end of the Queen's reign, that is the time for us to say, 'OK, we've passed that watershed.'"

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern put her republican posturing to one side and said there was no likelihood of a break from the British monarchy in the near future. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the interview should not have a bearing on Canada's constitutional status.

Domestically, things were also muted. The *Guardian's* editorial, "Heavy is the head that wears the crown", made the only hint of constitutional change, meekly suggesting, "Whether a hereditary head of state is required today ought to be considered in a programme of reform that the British state clearly—and urgently—needs."

Elsewhere, *Good Morning Britain* news presenter Piers Morgan was forced to resign after saying he "didn't believe a word" Meghan said in her interview.

Ian Murray, executive director of the Society of Editors, was also forced to resign after organising an open letter stating that Harry's description of some British tabloids as "racist" and "bigoted" and a "large part" of why he and his wife had left the UK was "not acceptable" without providing evidence.

Labour MP for Halifax Holly Lynch is one of a number reported to have made preliminary enquiries to see if a House of Commons debate could be held on racism in the media, the mental health strains of persistent press coverage and on further press regulation.

While the media focuses on blanket coverage of the doings of the "royals" at Buckingham Palace and Montecito California, Britain is in the grip of a social and

economic crisis of unprecedented dimensions. Figures published by the UK's statistics agencies for deaths where COVID-19 has been mentioned on the death certificate show there have now been over 144,000 deaths involving coronavirus in the UK. Over 4 million have been infected, often with serious and long-term consequences.

Fully 1.3 million children under the age of five are living in poverty. The number of people on Universal Credit benefits has doubled in just a few months to 5.7 million. Another 2 million are still waiting to get on the list.

Payroll numbers have already dropped as much as 5.5 percent in London. Going forward, 274,720 jobs are at risk of being lost following the end of the furlough scheme, according to insolvency analysts. A survey by the Office for National Statistics found that 15 percent of businesses that had not stopped permanently trading had little or no confidence that their business would survive the next three months. That figure rises to 53 per cent in the hospitality sector.

At such a point in history, there is nothing "radical" whatsoever about calls for an end to the monarchy when not framed within a call to mobilise the working class against capitalism and for socialism. Policed and safely presented by the mass media, they act as one of many mechanisms through which social and political discontent is directed into safe political channels that do not threaten the ruling class and the profit system. As the saga is played out to mind-numbing effect, ever more people will see through this bogus "debate".



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