

Prince Andrew and a monarchy in crisis

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The British royal family has been cultivated for centuries as a constitutional monarchy, providing a critical pillar and head of the bourgeois state. As such, a major royal crisis always indicates a sharpening crisis of bourgeois rule.

It is not accidental that the current royal debacle centred on Prince Andrew unfolds under conditions of factional warfare within the Conservative Party, the pre-eminent parliamentary vehicle of the bourgeoisie, and another over the leadership of the Metropolitan Police, Britain's largest force.

Prince Andrew's settlement of up to £12 million to Virginia Giuffre was intended to draw a line under his connection with the sex trafficking of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. But it has only bought a brief period of silence from Giuffre, who has agreed not to tell her story until after the queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations this summer.

The 95-year-old Queen Elizabeth II, who has just been reported as infected with COVID-19, was looking to restore some stability to the institution, making efforts to minimise the possible reign of the heir to the throne, Prince Charles. Her illness points not only to the lie that the pandemic is over, but also emphasises the precarious position of the monarchy as an institution. Her successor Charles is widely seen as a pampered buffoon, whose ecological posturing cannot hide a sense of entitlement built on a declared belief in the feudal Divine Right of Kings that led his namesake, Charles I, to lose his head.

The settlement not only failed to lift the taint of scandal from Andrew, but also triggered questions about who will be footing the bill. Reports are that the queen and Charles have made bridging loans, under conditions where nearly a fifth of British workers are already living in poverty.

The royal family have sought to distance themselves from Andrew, the queen's second son, but the rot is widespread. A charity set up by Charles is enmeshed in a police inquiry into "cash for honours" also involving Charles's younger son, Prince Harry. Harry's own ongoing dispute with the monarchy has now reached a

court appeal over allowing him to provide his own private security during visits to Britain.

Giuffre accused Andrew of sexually abusing her when she was 17 years old. The prince's statement admitted no liability but announced "a substantial donation" to her charity for the victims of sex trafficking. This led to the filing of a stipulated dismissal of the suit against him, keeping Andrew off the stand over details of his interactions with Giuffre at Epstein's properties in 2000-2001, again covering up Epstein's activities.

Andrew had sought to have the case dismissed, claiming no recollection of meeting Giuffre and suggesting a widely circulated photograph of them together was faked. His attempts at public rebuttal backfired spectacularly.

A BBC interview, intended to clear his name, generated ridicule and criticism. Andrew told journalist Emily Maitlis, "If push came to shove and the legal advice was to do so, then I would be duty bound" to testify or give a statement under oath.

He evidently did not expect to be held to that. As soon as it became clear he could not prevent the case proceeding, Andrew moved to an out-of-court settlement. He has been spared a court appearance, but he will not be returning to royal duty. He was stripped of royal titles and patronages last month.

His settlement statement referred cynically to a commitment to "fight against the evils of sex trafficking," in response to which lawyer Nick Goldstone told the *Telegraph* Andrew "is toxic, and this settlement will not have changed the verdict of the court of public opinion."

Andrew expected his defence to be accepted on the basis of privilege alone, which proved a wild misjudgement. Robert Lewis, attorney for another of Epstein's victims, attributed the delay in settling the case to Andrew's "arrogance." Epstein, Maxwell, Andrew, the Catholic Church, said Lewis, "all think the law on some level applies only to everybody else."

A monarchy that used to provide bourgeois rule with an appearance of stability in times of crisis is now itself in freefall.

The overthrow and then execution of Charles I in 1649 marked the birth of bourgeois rule out of feudalism. The restoration of his son Charles II as constitutional monarch eleven years later was aimed at safeguarding the world's first state based on bourgeois rule through a political compromise enshrining the hereditary principle on which both the old feudal aristocracy and the newly emerging capitalist class, in their own way, depended against the re-emergence of popular opposition.

The monarchy became the most bourgeois institution imaginable: the head of state during the explosive growth of the British Empire, a symbol of the nation in two world wars, and later a tool of global realpolitik in the complex relations with US imperialism, Britain's other imperialist rivals and the newly independent states across the Commonwealth. Elizabeth has done the bourgeoisie sterling service in this regard.

But the declining international position of the British bourgeoisie has gone hand in hand with an embrace of the naked speculation of financial parasitism. The monarchy has tried to court this layer, while being forced to streamline its own activities in line with its social decline.

Charles's former wife, Diana, Princess of Wales, blazed the trail in forming close links with the yuppie layers of the super-rich who emerged with the speculative boom of the 1980s. Following her acrimonious divorce, she aimed to shift the succession to her son William, second in line to the throne, rather than Charles.

William, groomed as a popular traditionalist who combines Elizabeth's sense of duty with his mother's facility with the newer layers of the elite and her "popular touch", has stepped into this role. He is the great white hope of the monarchy, provided any reign of Charles III can be kept as brief as possible.

Faced with an efficiency drive to keep the monarchy functional as a pillar of state, those royals outside the line of succession, like Andrew, deeply resent not being as rich as the people they are courting. The richest royal, the queen, does not even make the top 300 wealthy individuals in the UK.

But the lifestyles of the lesser royals are no less lavish for that and are a major focus of public anger and loathing. Questions over how Andrew will scabble together his £12 million come at a time when an estimated half a million people are being driven into poverty by the cut of just £20 a week from the Universal Credit social security benefit.

Andrew's own courting of financial layers was seen in the sale in 2007 of his former home to Timor Kulibayev,

son-in-law of the president of Kazakhstan. The country house in Berkshire was sold for £15 million, £3 million above the asking price. Kulibayev's spokesman insisted this was a "commercial arm's length transaction" using "entirely legitimate" funds.

But Andrew is now down to his last chalet as he sells off his assets. This is on the market for £17 million but is understood to be heavily mortgaged and unlikely to cover the costs of his settlement. Meanwhile, rising fuel prices this April are expected to see one fifth of British households experiencing fuel poverty.

Charles's charity, the Prince's Foundation, is meanwhile being investigated over allegations that it helped secure a CBE award and British citizenship for one of its donors, billionaire Saudi businessman Mahfouz Marei Mubarak bin Mahfouz.

Mahfouz also donated to a charity run by Harry, Charles's younger son. Harry and his wife Meghan Markle have been a consistent PR thorn in the side for the Windsors. Similarly groomed to make the family appear modern, they calculated that, being some way from the line of succession, they could make considerably more money based in the US as free market operators with royal associations.

There is an air of desperation among royalists. After Andrew's settlement and the Prince's Foundation investigation, the *Sun* reported Elizabeth's now clearly postponed return to public activity with the headline, "Thank God for the Queen." But what do they have beyond that?

The pivotal places of Charles I and II at critical moments of bourgeois rule are known—what place is left for Charles III? The crisis of the monarchy points to the festering rotteness of bourgeois rule. It is falling to pieces, with a ruling class in crisis escalating its social plunder and devastation. It must be swept away. That is the task of the working class in the struggle for socialism.



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