

King Charles addresses UK parliament as workers are subjected to propaganda barrage

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King Charles III attended a special meeting of both houses of parliament held at Westminster Hall Monday. He was greeted with fawning speeches from Lords Speaker, Baron John McFall, and Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle, both former Labour MPs.

They delivered a “humble address” agreed by each of the houses of parliament while Charles sat on a raised podium surrounded by assorted figures in outlandish costumes, including the King’s Body Guard of the Yeomen of the Guard and the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms.

The ceremony was meant to sanctify “our constitutional monarchy”, as “a symbol of stability in an ever-changing world”, in Hoyle’s words. He noted that the late queen had visited Westminster Hall many times to mark historic occasions, including the 300th anniversary of the “Glorious Revolution”. In an example of the rampant cynicism of the event, Hoyle commented, “It is perhaps very British to celebrate revolutions by presenting an address to Her Majesty, but those revolutions led to our constitutional freedoms.”

Like most of the historical references thrown around in the days following the queen’s death last week, it is best for the ruling class that they remain vague. The Glorious Revolution refers to the 1688 war of succession that began with an invasion of England by William of Orange and which deposed the Catholic James II, after which the protestant King William III and Queen Mary swore an oath to uphold the laws made in parliament.

What was therefore being celebrated at Westminster Hall is the ability of Britain’s imperialist bourgeoisie to utilise the monarchy as a means of sanctifying and reinforcing its own power.

This is the essential function of all the daily rituals surrounding the queen’s death that have been given saturation coverage by Britain’s media, presented always in solemn tones no matter how ludicrous the events being

reported.

Two days before Charles spoke in parliament, the Accession Council was filmed for the first time, during which a gathering of 200 selected Privy Council members and other notables gathered at St James’s Palace to sign the proclamation noting that Charles was king, under his own signature.

Commentators solemnly referenced the “thousand-year-old” English monarchy and the centuries-old origin of the proclamation, as if Charles III was the latest in a line of peaceful transitions since King Athelstan—ignoring the blood spilled over this question in 1066, the Wars of the Roses and the Glorious Revolution.

The proclamation was signed by Liz Truss and former prime ministers John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson, as well as Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn absented himself to avoid political embarrassment, but made sure to attend Monday’s events in Westminster Hall.

The proclamation is largely drawn from that recognising James VI of Scotland as James I of England and therefore King of Great Britain in 1604. It beseeches god, “by whom Kings and Queens do reign”, in an assertion of the Divine Right of Kings that was decisively repudiated in practice with the beheading of Charles I, during the genuinely revolutionary events of the English Civil War of 1642-51, led by Oliver Cromwell. The proclamation was only reinstated along with the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660.

The Civil War is one event that no one will reference during the endless round of pageantry, even though Charles III addressed parliament in the very Westminster Hall where Charles I was tried and then condemned to death in January 1649.

What is being conveyed in the endless pomp and ceremony is the might of the state, the pre-eminence of

the nation, and the supposed permanence of an existing social order characterised by vast inequalities where everyone must show the necessary deference and respect to “tradition” and the ruling elite that embodies these traditions.

Trotsky wrote most powerfully of the use of the monarchy and the symbols of the old feudal order by the British bourgeoisie. Noting Britain’s position as “the first country to take the road of capitalist development,” and its securing “hegemony of the world market in the nineteenth century,” he observed that this enabled it to “create a privileged position for the upper strata of the British working class and thereby to blunt class antagonisms,” thus holding back the development of the British proletariat.

Turning to the bourgeoisie’s relations with its feudal past, Trotsky observed:

“The British bourgeoisie developed under the protection of ancient institutions, on the one hand adapting itself to them and on the other subjecting them to itself, gradually, organically, ‘in an evolutionary way’. The revolutionary upheavals of the 17th century were profoundly forgotten. In this consists what is called the British tradition. Its basic feature is conservatism. More than anything else the British bourgeoisie is proud that it has not destroyed old buildings and old beliefs, but has gradually adapted the old royal and noble castle to the requirements of the business firm. In this castle, in the corners of it, there were its icons, its symbols, its fetishes, and the bourgeoisie did not remove them. It made use of them to consecrate its own rule. And it laid down from above upon its proletariat the heavy lid of cultural conservatism.” (Trotsky, “Through What Stage Are We Passing? The Strength of the Communist Party and the Level of Culture in a Country”, *Fourth International* magazine, New Park, London, summer 1964.)

This historic appraisal was unintentionally confirmed in a September 10 *Telegraph* column by right-wing Conservative Daniel Hannan in a single sentence, asserting that “a constitutional monarchy is there to legitimise the government, to elevate and ennoble the state’s core functions and, in the last analysis, to forestall the possibility of civil war.”

When dissent is expressed nevertheless, then deliberate intimidation gives way to censorship and repression. Every public expression of widely held anti-royal, socialist and republican sentiment has been silenced by the police.

In Edinburgh, a woman was arrested “in connection

with a breach of the peace” for holding up a sign saying, “Fuck imperialism, abolish monarchy” outside St. Giles’ Cathedral where the Queen’s coffin was due to arrive. A 74-year-old was also charged for the same “offence”, and a younger man arrested for calling, “[Prince] Andrew, you’re a sick old man” during the royal procession. In Oxford, a man, Symon Hill, was arrested and handcuffed for “disorderly conduct” after shouting “Who elected him?” during a reading of Charles’s proclamation. A woman was led away from parliament in London for holding up a sign reading “Not my king” while Charles addressed MPs.

Indicative of the underlying concerns is the media’s denunciation of popular Scottish comedian Kevin Bridges for his accurate comment regarding the queen that “she’s not going to be the only old woman to die this winter.”

Bridges’ comment points to why—despite the best efforts of the Tory government, a Labour Party busy grovelling at Charles’s feet, trade unions including the RMT rail union and the CWU post and telecoms union calling off strikes as a show of “respect”, and saturation coverage by the media—the tidal wave of pro-royal propaganda will not succeed in drowning popular opposition to the ruling class and its system.

In the same 1921 speech, Trotsky observed that “human consciousness, taken on the scale of society, is fearfully conservative and slow-moving... We speak frankly if we say that classes and peoples have hitherto not shown decisive initiative except when history has thrashed them with its heavy crop.”

The working class is today being driven towards decisive initiative by the heavy crop of the raging cost-of-living crisis that is threatening millions with destitution and which has already provoked the biggest strike wave in the UK in almost four decades. The longer the celebration of deference towards the ultimate representatives of fabulous and unearned wealth continues, the more it will clash with the growing struggle of millions of working people against capitalism and for a socialist society in which no one is denied a decent job, education, health care and the necessities of life.



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