

The coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla: The terminal crisis of the British monarchy

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5 May 2023

The lavish coronation ceremony for King Charles III and Queen Camilla, accompanied by saturation media coverage and the bestowing of a one-day bank holiday, is advanced as a unifying moment for the nation. It is nothing of the sort.

The display of inherited privilege and wealth, the rampant militarism and glorification of British imperialism, including its flaunting of massive gems looted and incorporated into various crowns, sceptres and staffs, plus the £250 million bill for the tax payers, are obscene—a tone deaf insult to millions of struggling workers and their families.

Far from offering the chance for a renewal of the monarchy, restoring its popularity, the coronation will confirm the decline in support for this rotten institution, especially among the younger generation, marking its terminal crisis.

Charles is crowned aged 74, Britain's oldest monarch, after decades in the shadow of his mother. Not only does he enjoy none of the popular affection in which Queen Elizabeth II was held, he is widely regarded as a ludicrous figure. King Charles is a mystic who has long promoted pseudo-science and quack therapies, including homeopathy, spiritual “self-healing” and treating cancer with fruit juice and coffee. He stands at the head of a venal, money-grubbing and deeply corrupt family freed from the restraining hand and political shield provided by their matriarch.

On the death of the queen, the WSWWS commented:

Her death occurs at a time of acute economic, social and political crisis for British imperialism, including the deepest collapse of living standards since the Great Depression, a NATO proxy war against Russia waged on mainland Europe, and a rising wave of class struggle that threatens to erupt into a general strike.

The ruling class now faces this perfect storm without its popular representative of state on which it has relied to project the myth of national unity and suppress social conflict... Today, the earnest hope of the ruling class is that Charles' time on the throne is short so that the carefully groomed and prepared Prince William can have a chance to restore a much-reduced monarchy's public standing.

Events have confirmed this appraisal, proving that Charles becoming king and head of state not only comes at a moment of acute crisis for British imperialism, but acts as a focus for and accelerant of a historic social dénouement.

Damage limitations have been employed in the ceremony to mitigate problems, historic and recent. Acting as head of the Church of England, which now is followed by just 16 percent of the population and with 40

percent saying they have no religion, Charles will not refer to himself as “Defender of the Faith”. The ceremony will instead involve leaders from the Jewish, Sunni and Shia Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths. In addition, only Prince William will perform the grotesquely-named “Homage of Royal Blood”—pledging loyalty to the king. The participation, as is usual, of the royal dukes, would necessarily involve the scandal-ridden Prince Andrew and renegade Prince Harry. Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, will remain in California.

Given the coronation's exorbitant cost, there have been extraordinary efforts to stress its “modest” character—at least in comparison with Elizabeth's in 1953—while boasting nonetheless of its pomp and pageantry.

As proof of Britain's military might, for example, more than 6,000 members of the armed forces will take part, with prominent roles for Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, chief of the defence staff, and General Sir Patrick Sanders, chief of the general staff, with a flypast by 68 aircraft from all three of the Armed Forces. But royal commentators have contrasted this display to the 600 RAF and Commonwealth planes which took to the skies for Elizabeth. The coronation will be attended by 2,000 guests compared with Elizabeth's more than 8,000. “The King is acutely aware of the cost of living crisis and just how many people are struggling,” a royal source told the *Daily Mirror*.

Such schizophrenic efforts reflect huge nervousness in ruling circles, with public support for the monarchy at an all-time low. Only 29 percent of Britons describe the monarchy as “very important”, while 25 percent say it is “not at all important” and should be abolished. Among young people, 78 percent are not interested in the monarchy and 38 percent want it abolished.

52 percent of readers polled by the *Daily Mirror* thought Charles should pay for his own coronation. This followed a widely reported investigation into Charles's fabulous personal wealth by the *Guardian*, finding it had risen to almost £2 billion—said to be a conservative estimate—after tax free inheritances from the queen.

Public opposition to the coronation has been met with state measures to suppress anticipated protests. More than 11,500 police will be on duty with the first use of powers contained in the recently enacted Public Order Bill, including 12-month sentences for blocking roads and railways and six-month sentences and unlimited fines for “locking on” to buildings or objects. The Home Office has sent threatening messages to the group Republic.

The coronation's order of service—the recognition; the oath; the anointing; the investiture and crowning; and the enthronement and homage, as well as the Queen Consort's coronation—is so ludicrous that its strategic importance for British imperialism can be underestimated.

The ceremony invokes one thousand years of history, employing such

devices as the *Stone of Destiny*, the *Sword of State*, the *Sword of Offering*, the *Sword of Mercy*, the *Bracelets of Sincerity and Wisdom*, and items of dress including the *Robe of Righteousness*, and so on. There is in addition the linking of the English Crown to the biblical kings Saul, David and Solomon, through Charles's anointing with oil pressed from Israeli olives—to stress that he too is a representative of God on earth.

Reference to the “divine right of kings” is still a feature of state rule in the United Kingdom, 374 years after Charles I was executed for High Treason in the aftermath of the English Civil War for insisting on this principle. It was reaffirmed with the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660, but henceforth monarchs ruled under the sufferance of parliament as the political instrument of the rising bourgeoisie—codified following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when King William III and Queen Mary swore an oath to uphold the laws made in parliament.

In the centuries which followed, the monarchy and other trappings of feudalism were placed in service to bourgeois rule. As the WSWS commented on Charles III's first major public engagement as monarch in September last year:

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.

Perhaps the most extraordinary element of Charles's coronation ceremony, therefore, is the decision to strengthen and make open, rather than downplay, the position of the king as head of state. To great fanfare, Lambeth Palace, representing the Archbishop of Canterbury, in discussion with Charles and the Sunak government, has unveiled “The Homage of The People.” Replacing the “Homage of the Peers”, 150 million citizens of the UK and the 15 Commonwealth states are being asked to take part in a “great cry”, pledging their allegiance to the Crown.

The order of service will read: “All who so desire, in the abbey, and elsewhere, say together: ‘All: I swear that I will pay true allegiance to your majesty, and to your heirs and successors according to law. So help me God.’”

This obscenity, invoking the subordination of the people to hereditary privilege and an unelected head of state, is being hailed as an example of “modernisation” by bootlickers, including Shabana Mahmood MP, Labour's national campaign coordinator, who described it as “a wonderful way to bring the ceremony and the monarchy closer to the people.”

What is at stake is not personal loyalty to the king, but to the capitalist state apparatus which he heads. The coronation is conceived as an appeal for national unity at a time of rising social tensions and class conflict and with war having already erupted on European soil. It occurs amid a strike wave in Britain and mass protests across the English Channel in France against Macron's dictatorial imposition of pension reform, the largest strike and protest movement there since May-June 1968. Indeed, a planned visit by King Charles to France less than six weeks ago was hurriedly cancelled, with Britain's former ambassador, Peter Ricketts, warning that a banquet planned by Charles at the Palace of Versailles could have “echoes” of the French Revolution.

From Queen Elizabeth II to Charles III

Queen Elizabeth II was a student of Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (published as a book in 1867), taught to her during twice-weekly private lessons at Eton College in 1938. The then-12-year-old princess, who became heir to the throne after her uncle Edward's abdication in 1936, came to embody Bagehot's description of the essential function of the constitutional monarch.

Bagehot's essays articulated the central fears of the British ruling class following the Chartist movement, the 1848 revolutions and the American Civil War. A full-throated warning of the dangers posed by democratic, egalitarian, republican and socialist doctrines, Bagehot's work expressed the fear and hatred of the British ruling class toward the working class—the “Vox diaboli” (voice of the Devil).

He wrote that to prevent a “political combination of the lower classes... an evil of the first magnitude,” a means had to be found of exerting control over the “crowds of people scarcely more civilised than the majority of two thousand years ago.” This was the essential “theatrical” element of the state's constitution represented by the monarchy, which “strengthens our Government with the strength of religion.”

He continued: “The elements which excite the most easy reverence will be the THEATRICAL elements—those which appeal to the senses, which claim to be embodiments of the greatest human ideas, which boast in some cases of far more than human origin. That which is mystic in its claims; that which is occult in its mode of action; that which is brilliant to the eye; that which is seen vividly for a moment, and then is seen no more; that which is hidden and unhidden; that which is specious, and yet interesting, palpable in its seeming, and yet professing to be more than palpable in its results...”

Elizabeth II played her allotted role as a bulwark of wealth and privilege supremely well, abiding by Bagehot's instruction that the monarch must “not be touched. It should be evident that he does no wrong. He should not be brought too closely to real measurement. He should be aloof and solitary... a visible symbol of unity to those still so imperfectly educated as to need a symbol.”

The monarch's fundamental purpose was to conceal from the working class the class nature of the state. Bagehot wrote, “constitutional royalty has the function which I insisted on at length in my last essay, and which, though it is by far the greatest, I need not now enlarge upon again. It acts as a DISGUISE. It enables our real rulers to change without heedless people knowing it. The masses of Englishmen are not fit for an elective government; if they knew how near they were to it, they would be surprised, and almost tremble.”

Bagehot had warned that the supremacy of the “lower classes” could be averted only “by the greatest wisdom and the greatest foresight in the higher classes.” But the coronation of such a deeply unpopular figure as Charles—described by his own friends as an “Olympian whinger”—cripples the monarchy's ability to act as a unifying force. Bagehot had emphasised that “a royal family sweetens politics by the seasonable addition of nice and pretty events. It introduces irrelevant facts into the business of government, but they are facts which speak to ‘men's bosoms’ and employ their thoughts.” But the stench surrounding Prince Andrew's relations with Jeffrey Epstein and the tawdry infighting between Prince Harry, Charles, Camilla and William are “facts” which point to the scale of the present crisis. The population's support for the royal family is unravelling amid the deepest economic, social and political impasse facing British capitalism since the 1930s.

In his 1925 work, “Where is Britain Going?”, Trotsky wrote essential passages on the role of the British monarchy generally, and particularly at times of acute crisis, presenting a devastating critique of the unprincipled attitude of the Labour Party leaders toward it, including their reactionary empirical, gradualist and ahistorical philosophy.

“Royalty, they declare, ‘does not hinder’ the country's progress and works out cheaper than a president if you count all the expense of

elections, and so on and so forth. Such speeches by Labour leaders typify a facet of their 'idiosyncrasies' which cannot be called anything other than conservative block-headedness."

Trotsky countered, "Royalty is weak as long as the bourgeois parliament is the instrument of bourgeois rule and as long as the bourgeoisie has no need of extra-parliamentary methods. But the bourgeoisie can if necessary use royalty as the focus of all extra-parliamentary, i.e., real forces directed against the working class."

The British monarchy possesses enormous power. Under normal conditions, the monarch's role as head of state, including the requirement of royal assent for legislation, and the fact that politicians and generals swear allegiance to the king, appears antiquated, vestigial and ceremonial. But when class antagonisms grow to a point of open conflict, democracy must give way to dictatorship and the "symbolic" powers of the monarch, including the king's role as commander in chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force, become real, and defying them an act of treason.

With this understanding, Trotsky concluded:

For a socialist the question of the monarchy is not decided by today's book-keeping, especially when the books are cooked. It is a matter of the complete overturn of society and of purging it of all elements of oppression. Such a task, both politically and psychologically, excludes any conciliation with the monarchy.

The working class is today being thrust into conflict with the entire bourgeois order, its parties, its state apparatus—and with the monarchy. At a time when workers are being driven by necessity to bring an end to class oppression, poverty and war, the political imbecile in Buckingham Palace, the third King Charles, could well prove to be the last.



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