

Charles III in Washington: Monarchy, oligarchy and the repudiation of 1776

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On the eve of the 250th anniversary of American independence, the British monarch, Charles III, addressed a joint session of the United States Congress on Tuesday. Charles, the great-great-great-great-great-grandson of King George III, against whom the American Revolution was fought, was received with full ceremonial honors by the ruling class and its two political parties.

The White House, summarizing the attitude and aspirations of Trump, posted a photo of Trump and Charles together Saturday afternoon, under the caption, “TWO KINGS.”

The spectacle began Tuesday morning at the White House, where Charles was feted with a 21-gun salute and participated with Trump in the “reviewing of the troops,” the highest diplomatic honor for a visiting head of state. After a private Oval Office meeting, Charles proceeded to Capitol Hill, becoming only the second British monarch ever to address a joint session of Congress.

In the evening, the king and Queen Camilla were honored at a white-tie banquet in the White House State Dining Room, with a guest list personally curated by Trump and populated by the oligarchs whose wealth and power constitute the real monarchy in America. Among those attending were Paramount CEO David Ellison, Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, Apple’s Tim Cook, and Nvidia’s Jensen Huang. They dined on Dover sole and spring herbed ravioli alongside Trump’s fascist cabinet members and a host of right-wing media personalities and venture capitalists.

From the standpoint of British imperialism, the visit was aimed at shoring up the somewhat strained “special relationship” between the US and UK. Charles’s address to Congress was packaged in the usual royal idiom of empty homilies about “peace” and “friendship,” anchored in the “Christian faith,” the wrapping for the real concern transmitted through the 77-year-old monarch: war.

Charles boasted of the “biggest sustained increase” in British military spending since the Cold War and made a specific point of encouraging the continued commitment of the United States to the conflict against Russia in Ukraine. The same Democrats who tweeted their insincere support for “No Kings” rose to applaud a real king the moment he spoke of war. Charles devoted some time in referencing the “shared bond” of the two countries expressed in the production of fighter jets, submarines

and other instruments of destruction.

Trotsky once observed that the British bourgeoisie had adapted “the old royal and noble castle to the requirements of the business firm”—a description that retains all its force today. The monarchy functions as an ideological prop of British capitalism, even as the royal household is steeped in corruption and scandal.

Charles’s brother and Trump’s friend, Prince Andrew, has been directly implicated in the Epstein sexual abuse network and forced out of public duties, while the disclosures surrounding Epstein have exposed the international network of wealth and criminality that links monarchy, finance, intelligence agencies and the global ruling elite. Charles declined to attend a meeting with survivors of Epstein held by Democratic Representative Ro Khanna, though this did not prevent Khanna from joining his fellow Democrats, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez among them, in paying tribute to the king.

But the more fundamental significance of Charles’s visit lies in the American context. The grotesque spectacle exposes the relationship of the American ruling class to the revolutionary traditions it has long since repudiated.

The American Revolution established the world’s first major bourgeois democratic republic on the basis of Enlightenment principles. The Constitution’s prohibition on titles of nobility, contained in Article I, Sections 9 and 10, was a conscious rejection of the social principle that birth confers authority and that the masses must bow before dynastic power.

Thomas Paine, whose *Common Sense* helped give political form to the American Revolution, poured scorn on hereditary monarchy. “One of the strongest NATURAL proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings,” he wrote, “is, that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an ASS FOR A LION”—an appropriate future epitaph for both the honoree and the host of yesterday’s events.

The visit of this representative of the British monarchy takes place under an administration that has repudiated, in word and deed, the democratic principles of 1776. The Bill of Rights has been trampled underfoot, and the grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence against King George III read like

a rap sheet for the present occupant of the White House.

Trump has mobilized the cultural sensibilities of the criminal underworld to the task of remaking the institutions of power based on the monarchical principle. He has demolished the East Wing of the White House to make way for a 90,000-square-foot Versailles-style ballroom, a monument to personal rule. He has sought to stamp his signature on the dollar bill, place his profile on a gold coin, rename the Kennedy Center, and convert every institution of the state into an instrument of personal glorification.

Trump, however, speaks and acts not just for himself, but as the representative of an oligarchy that regards constitutional restraints and democratic rights as intolerable obstacles to the defense of its wealth.

This is evident in the official response to Charles's visit. The media fawned over the monarch, treating his banalities as a profound statement of democratic principle. The Democratic Party and the liberal press have spent years, through the *New York Times*' 1619 Project and related efforts, depicting Jefferson, Washington and Lincoln as little more than racial villains. Yet they now bow before the living embodiment of hereditary privilege. Their problem was never with oppression as such, but with the revolutionary traditions that might inspire opposition to the present order.

Mamdani, the Democratic Socialists of America mayor of New York, is playing his assigned role as well, appearing with Charles today at a commemoration of the September 11 attacks.

The Democrats do not oppose dictatorship because they defend the same class interests that are driving the turn to authoritarianism.

In his work *The Persistence of the Old Regime*, historian Arno Mayer described the way in which European society before 1914 fused bourgeois wealth with monarchical, aristocratic and ecclesiastical forms. The bourgeoisie adapted itself to the old regime, even as it transformed the economic foundations beneath it. This alliance was ruptured only by the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary upheavals that followed.

A similar dynamic prevails today, in somewhat different form. The American oligarchy has accumulated wealth on a scale without precedent in human history. Its central political preoccupation is how this wealth will be defended—legally, ideologically and physically—against the social opposition generated by its own accumulation.

The result is the revival of aristocratic forms. The oligarchs want deference. They want immunity. They want the masses to know their place, to bow and scrape when in the presence of their betters. They want inherited wealth and dynastic privilege to be recognized not only in fact, but in social practice and political culture. The constitutional prohibition on titles of nobility is being prepared for repudiation in practice, even if not yet in text.

When Trump posts “TWO KINGS,” he is absolutely serious. It is a declaration of intent by a president and the social forces behind him, which are seeking to establish the principles of hereditary rule and untrammled executive power, enforced through the paramilitary police agencies of the state and the mobilization of fascistic gangs.

Behind Trump stands Elon Musk, Larry Ellison, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, the Wall Street financiers, the tech monopolists and the private equity barons whose wealth dwarfs that of any historical monarch. Their fortunes are measured not in palaces, estates and crown jewels, but in hundreds of billions of dollars, vast corporate empires, control over communications systems, military contracts, artificial intelligence, logistics, finance and the commanding heights of social life.

The “No Kings” demonstrations of June and October 2025 and March 2026—the last drawing some 8 million participants—expressed, however inchoately, mass opposition to the revival of monarchical and dictatorial forms. But these mobilizations cannot be left in the hands of the Democrats, who seek to channel popular anger back into the framework of capitalist politics. The danger is not merely Trump as an individual. It is the oligarchic order that produced him.

Charles declared in his address that the Anglo-American relationship is “a partnership born out of dispute.” In this way, he sought to reduce what was a revolutionary struggle against monarchy to a minor episode in the general triumph of reaction. But masses of people, in the United States and internationally, will draw very different conclusions and inspiration from this history.

The defense of the democratic principles proclaimed in 1776 is impossible today outside of the fight for socialism. In the 18th century, the struggle against monarchy was bound up with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the creation of the democratic republic. In the 21st century, the defense and extension of democracy requires the expropriation of the financial oligarchy and the socialist reorganization of society on the basis of human need, not private profit.

The revolutionary-democratic principles of 1776 can be defended only by carrying them beyond the limits of bourgeois society. Today, Charles III is applauded in the Capitol. Two hundred and fifty-one years ago, at Lexington and Concord, ordinary people took up arms against the principle he embodies. The principles fought for then have not been extinguished. They live in the developing struggles of the international working class, which must now take conscious political form in the fight for socialism.



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