

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Great Britain & Northern Ireland (Europe) > Monarchy (UK) > **Monarchy (Britain): Neither Meghan nor the Royals but for a Republic**

Monarchy (Britain): Neither Meghan nor the Royals but for a Republic

Wednesday 10 March 2021, by [KELLAWAY Dave](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2021).

Dave Kellaway sits down with a cup of tea to watch the latest Royal saga play out in the Press.

Contents

- [Royal Racism and Sexism](#)
- [Royals don't talk about \(...\)](#)
- [Deference](#)
- [Distraction](#)
- [Labour's craven pro-monarchy](#)

“Meghan said that, when she was pregnant with Archie, an unnamed member of the royal family had raised “concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he’s born”. Asked whether there were concerns that her child would be “too brown” and that would be a problem, Meghan said: “If that is the assumption you are making, that is a pretty safe one”
(The Guardian 8 March 2021)

Royal Racism and Sexism

Racism is alive and well in the royal family. There no reason to disbelieve Meghan Markle’s testimony on the Oprah Winfrey show broadcast yesterday. Prince Philip’s lifelong racist and colonial views have always been treated with kid gloves by the media, as a bit of banter. The mass media and many pundits have presented a narrative of British racist attitudes that suggests it is most prevalent among the left behind working class who voted Brexit in the Red Wall seats.

Although not all Brexit voters were racists, nearly all racists did vote Brexit, including a majority in the tory voting middle classes of suburban, small-town, and rural England. It may be less strident and sometimes more discreet but racism is widespread in the educated middle and upper classes. Even before the latest revelations, Meghan was abused in the British tabloid press. One radio presenter questioned whether she was really black since he just saw her as an ‘attractive woman’. Beauty and blackness could not go together with that man’s prejudiced mind.

Natasha Mulengna, a writer and host of the podcast, a Soulful Storm, nailed the issue:

“I think a big part of why Meghan is not liked is that she’s not a weak-willed woman. I think she almost embodies the black woman that they fear. The black woman who uses her own voice and the black woman who takes control of her own narrative.”

(quoted in an article by Aamna Mohdin in *Observer* 7th March)

The racism was compounded by the Royal Family's difficulty in integrating powerful, career women into their 'Firm'. Worse still she was an actress and an American. Royal women have to produce heirs, look pretty, and know their place. Telling some of the truth about Charles and going off with an Arab man meant Diana was marginalised. The double standard of course is that men like Charles who had an affair with Camilla or worse the alleged abuse of underage women by Prince Andrew are tolerated inside the family. No titles lost there.

Royals don't talk about mental health

After experiencing all the unpleasantness from the media and from inside the 'firm' Meghan asked for help since she was having mental health problems. The response appears to have been the good old British stiff upper lip. Just as the Queen responded to Diana's tragic death in a very cool, restrained way the palace just did not take this American outsider's illness very seriously at all. You could say to a degree this reflects the English upper class's emotional frigidity. Children are sent away from an early age to private school.

Emotional empathy comes well below a sense of entitlement to power. Even many businesses take their employees' mental health more seriously than the royals who seem stuck in the 1950s when you just did not talk about this sort of thing. Another reason is the supposed aura of the royal role. As a ruler anointed by God and your bloodline you have to be above the emotions of the common people. You have to remain cool, aloof, and contained so that you retain your rarefied distance.

Should people on the left care about Meghan and her tiff with the royals?

Insofar as her treatment as a black person and a woman exemplifies the racism and sexism in our society we have to at least share in condemnation of it. It also highlights the dysfunctionality and callousness of the royal family and so it could damage its credibility in the eyes of the British people. Anything that weakens such a reactionary institution is a good thing.

But on another level the whole spectacle can be examined to show how the royal soap opera is an important part of ruling ideology. Creating a shared common sense of, who we all are and belong to, is part of how capitalism as a system is kept going. The royal family speaks for the nation, for the national family. It is rolled out in crises such as when the Queen did a one-off broadcast during the pandemic. Even if greater openness has led to a more soap opera feel to this story it is still broadly accepted as part of 'our nation's story'. People accept that today family relations are messier and less stable so they are not necessarily alienated from a royal family which experiences the same difficulties.

Consequently, the Meghan/Harry affair just adds more colour to the soap opera rather than eroding support.

Deference

Although its constitutional role is limited since it does not go against the majority government's policy it could play a role if political institutions broke down, in a very deep crisis. The Queen is the head of armed forces, not the Prime Minister. Its continuity reinforces a sense that Britain is not a place where radical change takes place. Deference among working people to their rulers is exemplified by the majority's acceptance of the monarchy. In surveys, the monarchy usually comes out better than politicians whose status has declined. The mass media continually perpetuates myths about the wisdom of the Queen who has seen out so many Prime Ministers and gives her advice in

weekly meetings. A civil list budget paid from our taxes is justified by how hard they all work and how it pays for itself with the tourists who come to Britain. A veil is drawn over the huge private wealth of the royal family.

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How often have we heard the phrase it's is unfair to attack them because 'they can't answer back can they'. It is another defence of their role above and beyond politics. In reality, the palace has quite a sophisticated press and PR operation which does answer back. It put out the story about the alleged bullying of palace staff by Meghan just before the Oprah interview and laid on coverage of the Queen celebrating a multi-racial Commonwealth fighting together against the global pandemic.

Distraction

The mass media has a symbiotic relationship with the Royal Family. It helps create the soap opera but also feeds off it as stories about them sell newspapers and receive millions of clicks. Royalty is a fully paid-up member of celebrity culture alongside the TV, Film, Sports, fashion leaders, and rich society that fill the mass media. Of course, there are no contradictions in the seamless spectacle so the media can simultaneously boost the royal family and take it down. So the same and different newspapers can take up different positions all at the same time on Meghan and Harry. The bottom line is that the institution is always defended as vital to our society.

Along with deference, the soap opera produces a distraction every day for working people who are fed a superficial diet of celebrity and royal stories. All of it deflects people from gaining any real understanding of the class dynamics and inequality of our society. Unfortunately, Graeme Smith, from the Republic group is inaccurate when he is quoted on the *Guardian's* live blog (8th March):

‘Most people in the UK don't give a second thought to the royals. They're just not that interested. The monarchy is tolerated because of a carefully managed but dishonest image that's been created over the past few decades’

Labour's craven pro-monarchy policy

Although younger people are less interested and more critical I am not sure that generally, people are just not interested. Support for the monarchy is very deep based in our culture and politics so it is not just the carefully managed campaign of the press and palace that keeps it going. Labour has never provided even the semblance of an alternative that has contributed to this level of consciousness.

The Labour Party has never really questioned the monarchy and nearly always tried to outshine the Tories in supporting it. That is quite logical given one of social democracy's defining features is support for Britain as a nation of all classes together. Hence Labour's support for nearly all Britain's wars and for the present union and against even the right for a Scottish vote on independence. Labour education shadow minister, Kate Green's intervention into the Meghan affair, is a call for the palace to carry out an inquiry into the racism allegations. No real questioning of the institution at all, let's just clear out a few bad eggs.

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about both.”

Comparing how the mainstream media treated Corbyn and Meghan is illustrative. There were lies about both. The Daily Mail ran a story “How Meghan’s favourite avocado snack...is fuelling human rights abuses, drought, and murder”. However, when the Mail stole private correspondence to her father it was forced by legal action to publish a front-page apology.

Despite media lies, Meghan had the wealth and power to fight back. Unlike Corbyn, she also remains the gift that keeps giving so they have no interest in losing links with her.

Some commentators, particularly in the US, are exaggerating the risks the monarchy is running with this affair, suggesting it is a domino that could lead to a later collapse. Meghan herself is careful not to name names and made sure she effusively praised the Queen. So people supporting Meghan are not being led any further than some tweaking of how the royals operate.

We condemn racism and sexism while keeping a sense of perspective on the extent to which Meghan and Harry have suffered and how far any solidarity can be expressed. Her problems are much less than those experienced by black women during the pandemic for instance. They have died often alone with no publicity simply because this incompetent and vicious government could not protect its poorest citizens. Other Black and Asian people have been distressed not just by racist remarks but have been physically attacked.

Above all, they have not been able to fall back on the considerable wealth and privilege that Meghan and Harry possess. They are not friends with Oprah Winfrey either. Indeed if you were being cynical you could argue that all this controversy has done no harm when Meghan and Harry have been negotiating their lucrative new contracts with Netflix.

We can hand the final word to Zarah Sultana, a Black woman Labour MP who tweeted:

It’s interesting how much of the British Establishment seems to have a bigger problem with Meghan Markle than Prince Andrew.

Dave Kellaway

P.S.

• Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 9 March 2021:

<https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/neither-meghan-nor-the-royals-but-for-a-republic>