

1. Monarchy and the Establishment

The British monarchy is the only one on the grand imperial scale left in a world full of republics. Only a few “bicycle monarchies” remain elsewhere. It is at the *apex of British society. The monarchy is embedded in the traditional core of the *Establishment: the Church of England, the Lords, the landowners, the top military men and the very wealthy.

The monarchy belongs to the dignified part of the British Constitution together with the House of Lords, as opposed to the efficient parts, that is the Cabinet, the Prime Minister and the House of Commons. Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State and the Head of the Commonwealth. She has performed official duties since 1952. To mark 60 years of Queen Elizabeth II's reign, the Diamond Jubilee will take place in 2012. The only other British monarch to celebrate a Diamond Jubilee was Queen Victoria in 1897.

The British monarchy is symbolic not only of British national identity but of the British class system and in recent years certain royal advisers have wanted the monarchy to become less *aloof, more open and more in touch with the people. What does this plan to modernise the British monarchy consist in? Has it hastened a process towards a more Scandinavian monarchy, one symbolising a much more classless society?

In 1992, the Queen created the Way Ahead Group to update the monarchy. When he became Prime Minister in 1997, Tony Blair put an end to some of the privileges of the monarchy, refusing to replace the Royal Yacht Britannia in October 1997.

The historical background

The *Crown is an element of stability and of social unity and the monarch is an element of continuity; it is a way of linking the past, the present and the future. The monarchy dates back to the 9th century and the continuity was broken only once during the period of rule by the council of state and Oliver Cromwell (1649-1660). The line of succession was broken with the execution of Charles I in 1649 but was restored with Charles II.

The monarchy and its associated activities provide a symbol for nation and state. The monarch is a *figurehead at the apex of society. The monarch is a unifier above the *party fray. All British citizens are subjects of the Queen. The symbolic power of *royalty is enormous. It sells magic, history, state, nation, but also some attractive notions, like class, privilege and social unreality. Ritual is a way of consolidating the institution and ceremonies such as the Coronation, the State Opening of Parliament, royal marriages and jubilees are means of increasing the popularity of the monarch.

The remaining constitutional powers of the monarch

The monarchy has lost some of its powers but it still provides an essential constitutional mechanism in the formation and dissolution of governments. So far, the functions of the monarch are legally the following. The Monarch *summons, *prorogues and dissolves Parliament. The Queen opens Parliament with a Speech which is written by

the Prime Minister and outlines the Government's programme. In theory, Parliament draws its existence from the Monarch. The Monarch has the right to be consulted, to encourage and to warn. No bills passed by Parliament can become law without the Royal Assent. But the Monarch has not refused a bill that has passed through the House since 1707 and the role of the Sovereign in the enactment of legislation is today purely formal.

The Monarch is the Fountain of Justice. In the United Kingdom, all jurisdiction derives from the Crown, but the Monarch acts on the advice of the Ministers. On the one hand, the Queen can pardon or show mercy to those convicted of crimes. On the other hand, the Queen can do no wrong and cannot be sued in a court of law.

The Queen appoints the Prime Minister and makes appointments to many important state offices, on the advice of the Prime Minister. She appoints and dismisses government ministers, judges and members of the diplomatic corps. As the Head of the Army, the Monarch alone can declare war and peace on the advice of responsible Ministers and appoint officers and as the Head of the established Church of England, she is the Defender of the Faith and appoints bishops on the advice of the Prime Minister. Besides, the Monarch is the Fountain of Honour and confers life peerages, knighthoods and other honours, such as the Order of the Garter, the Order of the Thistle, the Order of Merit and the Royal Victorian Order.

Reforms of the monarchy

Most of the powers of the Monarch have already been transferred to the Prime Minister and Parliament,

but other proposals to modernise the Monarchy included transfers of powers to the Speaker of the House of Commons. Yet the monarch would remain Head of the Army and Head of the judicial system.

Among the constitutional reforms of the monarchy, the question of succession has been raised. The sons of the sovereign and their descendants have precedence over daughters in succeeding to the throne. Former PM Gordon Brown made it clear in 2010 that he wished to change this rule of primogeniture, as well as setting in motion changes to the Act of Settlement (1701) which prevents Roman Catholics ascending to the throne.

The sovereign succeeds to the throne on the death of his or her predecessor. This automatic succession is summed up in the phrase "the King is dead; long live the King!" So the Coronation follows the accession.

Moreover, the Monarch has been governor of the Church of England since 1543. It is worth noting that it is true only of England. The Queen is linked to the Church of England and promises to maintain it in the Coronation Oath. There could also be a disestablishment of the Church of England as the state's official religion and a removal of the monarch's position as the head of that church.

The modernisation of the monarchy includes bringing it closer to the people. The Windsors have often been said to be manacled by protocol and tradition. Reformers want the monarchy to be closer to the people instead of being out of touch. They want the Crown to come down from the apex of the establishment pinnacle. They argue that education of the Royal Family should be in touch with the age and the royal children

should go to state schools instead of Eton and Gordonstoun. Reformers in favour of a 'bicycle monarchy' want the royal family to be more approachable like the monarchy in the Netherlands. But this raises the question of the mystique of the monarchy. The monarchy is magic because it displays great wealth and aristocratic connections, but also precisely because it is set apart from its subjects.

The monarchy has to adapt if the institution wants to survive

Even though the monarchy is still arguably the most revered of the British institutions, its image and that of individual members of the Royal Family has been seriously damaged in recent years and profound changes are going on. Tony Blair saved the monarchy at the time of the tragic death of Princess Diana on 31 August 1997. He managed to find the right words in his tribute to "the Princess of the people", encouraging the Queen to make a public statement and advising her to organise a state funeral.

Despite numerous problems for the Royal Family over the past three decades, the proportion in favour of a monarchy rather than some form of presidential system has remained stable at four in five of the public. In 2007, only 17% of the British public said they would like to see the monarchy abolished, according to a MORI poll. The people appear

not to be interested in the labour of administration – but are fascinated by the magic and the *pageantry.

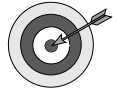
But there is talk of cutting down on the expenses of the monarchy. It started with the reform of the Civil List which currently stands at £7.9 million a year. There has not been any increase for 20 years, not even an inflationary increase. The Civil List remains frozen with the consent of the Queen, who has accepted to pay *income tax since 1993. The Queen *funded the restoration of Windsor Castle and opened up the royal finances to public scrutiny.

The institution might be reformed, as it has been throughout history, according to changed circumstances. It might also be abolished, in which case there is a need to consider what might replace it in the constitution. The obvious alternative to hereditary monarchy which would satisfy the requirement for a democratic head of state is an elective presidency. The main objection is that an elected president would inevitably be a politician. There is no good reason to believe that an elective presidency would have serious disadvantages, either of efficiency or of dignity over hereditary monarchy. But the Monarch is independent and holds a reserve power to control politicians' behaviour. Unlike politicians who are chosen at random, the monarch is above politics and can be admired as an abstraction.



VOCABULARY

aloof	hautain
apex	sommet
benefit (to)	convenir
convicted	accusé
coronation oath	serment du couronnement
Court of Appeals	cour d'appel
crown, Crown	couronne, Couronne, Reine
decay	décadence, déclin
dismiss (to)	renvoyer
enactment	application
Establishment	pouvoirs établis
figurehead	figure de proue
franchise	droit de vote
fund (to)	subventionner
honour system	décorations
income tax	impôt sur le revenu
judiciary	pouvoir judiciaire
knighthood	chevalerie
legislature	corps législatif
manacled	emprisonné
mercy	miséricorde, grâce
mores	mœurs
Order of the Garter	Ordre de la Jarretière
Order of the Thistle	Ordre du Chardon
pageantry	apparat, pompe
party fray	mêlée des partis politiques
peerage	pairie
peer (life/hereditary)	pair à vie ; pair héréditaire
press (to) ahead	faire avancer
prevail over (to)	surpasser, l'emporter sur
prorogue (to)	proroger
ranking	classement
rebalanced	rééquilibré
royalty	la famille royale
scrutiny	contrôle
shorn of	dépouillé de
be sued (to)	être poursuivi
summon (to)	convoquer
tramlines of policy	les voies de la politique



◆ Quotations

Walter Bagehot on the monarchy

“To state the matter shortly, the sovereign has, under a constitutional monarchy such as ours, three rights – the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn. [...] The characteristic advantage of a constitutional king is the permanence of his place. This gives him the opportunity of acquiring a consecutive knowledge of complex transactions, but it gives only an opportunity. The king must use it.” (*The English Constitution*, Hammersmith: Fontana Press, 1867)

Kingsley Martin on the Establishment

“Probably the best definition of the Establishment is that it is that part of our government that has not been subjected to democratic control. It is the combined influence of persons who play a part in public life, though they have not been appointed on any public test of merit or election. More important still, they are not subject to dismissal by democratic process. They uphold a tradition and form a core of continuity in our institutions. They are privileged persons and their positions are not as a rule affected by changes of government.”

(*The Crown and the Establishment*, London: Hutchinson, 1962)

◆ The class structure

Three elements make up class:

- Class is shaped by history.
- Class has a very strong subjective element.
- There are areas of inequality in power, authority, wealth, income, job situation, material conditions and lifestyles. There are wide differences between “them” and “us” in lifestyles, attitudes and customs.

From 1942 to 1990, the elites still composed a unitary dominant class and had a continuing hold on political power, even though the homogeneity of the Establishment was being questioned. At the top, to belong to the upper classes still offered disproportionate access to positions of power. More than one third of the Labour Cabinet of 1964 were traditional upper-class figures and six members were the products of the most exclusive public schools.

The class of origin still remains an important factor in recruitment to higher status occupations. The children of middle-class parents dominate the best-paid professions while many of the children of the poor are trapped

in poverty for life. White middle-class men are the ones who do best in terms of education, healthcare and life chances.

A London School of Economics report in 2007 concluded that the UK's social mobility has not improved in 30 years. In 2009, 50% of the population were in non-manual occupations. The size of the working class has declined in Britain and class considerations may be less important but income inequality has become greater. Over the last decade, wealth and power have been consolidated in a tiny new class at the top. Britain now has 5 distinct classes: the poor, those with median income, the comfortably-off managerial and professional class, a rich class and a distinct 'mega-rich' class which has now developed at the very top end of the income scale. As recently as August 2010, the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg declared that Britain was "socially segregated".



Commentaire pour l'Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, décembre 2010

“A crazed zeal for inheritance and fame” by Steve Richards (*The Independent*, 18 November 2010)

Before the 1997 election two senior shadow cabinet members, Mo Mowlam and Jack Straw, argued publicly for a more limited monarchy, with Mowlam focusing on the ceremonial glitz and Straw on the monarch's constitutional powers. This was a profound shift compared with the previous unquestioning deference of both Labour and Conservative administrations.

At least as important were Labour's constitutional reforms that coincidentally accompanied the shift. Its plans to abolish hereditary peers left the monarch deeply exposed. As the Queen opened Parliament each year she was the only figure in the House of Lords that the government was not proposing to abolish on grounds of the hereditary principle. When Gladstone was contemplating a similar constitutional change in the 1880s Queen Victoria wrote to him warning that the policy “threatened the very existence of the monarchy”. The letter is published in Roy Jenkins' biography. Gladstone did not go ahead with his plans.

More than a hundred years later, while a less deferential government embarked on its reforms the royal family was falling apart for entirely separate reasons, with various princes and princesses getting divorced as often as Zsa Zsa Gabor. Diana was the great humanising force. Her Panorama interview is still a shocking stunner whenever it is repeated. Merely giving the interview was a revolutionary act, ending the mystique that near media silence bestows on the famous.

In the mid-1990s an important cultural shift followed these events. After the Dunblane massacre in 1996, the ceremonial visitors were the Prime Minister, John Major and Tony Blair. They played the role that royals used to perform alone. Later the Blair family, while the leader still walked on water, replaced the collapsing royal alternative as the one photographed together on their summer holidays. Briefly Britain appeared to be moving on from antiquated, irrational deference.

The moment passed. As the coverage of this week's announcement demonstrates, the country has returned to primitive hysteria with endless celebratory, banal media coverage and senior politicians having to pretend how thrilled they are (although in David Cameron's case his excitement seems to be genuine). Let us hope there is no equivalent to Drumcree in the next few years, but if there is, the survivors will yearn for a visit from Prince William and his new wife rather than that other more worn double act, Cameron and Clegg. The Royal Family is back and elected political leaders are out of fashion.

Why did the moment pass and does it matter? The death of Diana was a key moment. The car crash was an accident, but her demise removed an explosive

bundle of charismatic energy. The subsequent build up to her funeral was portrayed at the time as a threat to the Royal Family, who spent much of the week in Balmoral away from the growing hysteria. This was a misreading. The mad mourners in London wanted their Queen to be with them.

Her absence was the sole cause of anger. They were not republicans, but ardent royalists reasserting control after a dodgy period. Another pivotal event was the Queen Mother's death. At first the BBC reported the death of a very old woman with a dignified sense of proportion. The Daily Mail went bonkers with anger and the BBC responded timidly by broadcasting wall to wall coverage for days.

Now politicians do not dare to discuss whether or not the monarchy should be modernised, let alone scrapped. With a bullying swagger, Conservative Central Office tweeted yesterday in relation to Harriet Harman and her husband: "Will Harriet and Jack be celebrating? For Charles and Di's wedding they went on 'Republican awayday' in France." Their intimidating message was clear. Celebration is compulsory, or watch out.

I have no idea, but I cannot believe that Ed Miliband is remotely excited about this wedding. He will have to pretend to be so. I was pleased that at Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday Harman spent only a single sentence on the wedding, rather than affect an excitement that she is too intelligent to feel. Still her sentence was required.

This is one of the reasons why the lost moment does matter. There is something inherently wrong about the need for elected politicians to act against their instincts. Of course politicians cannot speak their mind on a range of issues, but the issue of the monarchy is almost unique in compelling declarations of dutiful worship that are at odds with private indifference, doubt or opposition. Nuance is not allowed.

There is also the concern expressed by Victoria more than a century ago. On what basis are inherited power and wealth celebrated when even Lords have to be selected and might, at some point, be elected? Next summer will be curious. It will begin with a referendum on electoral reform, arguably an attempt to modernise Britain's political arrangements. Then, soon afterwards, and with a much greater sense of eager anticipation, there will be a wedding of two non-elected people that will show how slowly Britain changes.

Symbolism is not as powerful as policies that change people's lives, but the message will be clear and damaging. A non-elected family is back in business, ready to reign over us and enough of 'us' are so ecstatic that even contemplating an alternative is taboo. If only...

In this article published in The Independent, after the announcement of Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton, Steve Richards underlines the importance of the monarchy which belongs to the dignified part of the Constitution. After the Lords' reform implemented by the Blair government, the British Royal Family seems to be more popular than ever whereas politicians have been tarnished by the cash for peerages furore and the MPs' expenses scandal. The monarchy offers magic to the people and is above political parties. The British worship the Queen whereas they distrust elected politicians. The Royal wedding is a symbol of hope in harsh times.