



A LIBERTARIAN DEFENCE OF MONARCHY

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Over the past year or so, coinciding with the much-publicised divorce of the Prince and Princess of Wales, there has been a sustained propaganda assault on the institution of the British monarchy. Opinion polls demonstrate that, while the majority of the British people favour the permanent retention of the monarchy, a substantial minority wants Britain to become a republic after the death of the present Queen. Both Antoine Clarke and Roderick Moore have already written for the Libertarian Alliance calling for the abolition of the monarchy. In the present paper, I would like to present libertarian arguments in defence of the institution of monarchy not only in Britain, but in other nations as well.

As an abstract philosophical ideal, of course, I would favour the abolition of the state altogether and its replacement by anarcho-capitalism. Given that the state does, however, exist, and shows no immediate signs of disappearing, it is worth examining whether individual liberty, the maintenance of property rights, the rule of law and the values of a free society would be strengthened or weakened by the replacement of the monarchy with a republic. Many years ago, I borrowed a book from the Wolverhampton Public Library — which possesses a remarkable collection of obscure books on political subjects by little-known publishers — entitled *The Social Order of Tomorrow*. It was written by Count Otto von Habsburg, of the great Austro-Hungarian imperial family, who is today a member of the “European Parliament”, and published by the Exposition Press of London in 1958. Unfortunately, in writing the present piece, I have been unable to locate a copy of this interesting book, which has been out of print for many years, and will have to rely on memory to summarise its arguments.

Count von Habsburg argues for the institution of monarchy as a universal principle. He points out that the monarch is the highest judge in the land, and by virtue of his or her inherited status is free from prejudice in carrying out the provisions of the law. The monarch represents a continuity of tradition, and, being above party or faction, is a powerful symbol for all his or her subjects, making for social cohesion, the administration of justice, the maintenance of laws and customs, and national identity. The spread of the principle of monarchy, so he argues, would be of value to peoples throughout the world.

Whether or not Count von Habsburg is right in saying that every country would benefit from the introduction of monarchical institutions, it is certainly true that Britain and its people have done so. The institution of the British monarchy has been, and is, an essential bulwark in defence of freedom, and the defence of the monarchy should be an important part of the libertarian position in the UK.

THE BIRTH OF MONARCHY

The concept of “monarchy”, as it is generally understood today, emerged in Europe in the centuries which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West in the fifth century AD. This period is commonly known as the “Dark Ages”, although archaeological and historical research in recent decades has demonstrated that it was actually a period of remarkable development in all areas of civilisation and scholars now prefer the term “late antiquity”. The barbarian tribes which overran the Roman Empire adopted many of the features of its civilisation, and in addition developed new political institutions suited to the immediate circumstances. The American historian Professor Carroll Quigley explains:

In the West, the Roman Empire (which continued in the East as the Byzantine Empire) disappeared in 476; and, although many efforts were made to revive it, there was clearly a period, about 900, when there was no empire, no state, and no public authority in the West. The state disappeared, yet society continued. So also, religious and economic life continued. This clearly showed that the state and society were not the same thing, that society was the basic entity, and that the state was a crowning, but not essential, cap to the social structure. This experience had revolutionary effects. It was discovered that man can live without a state; this became the basis of Western liberalism. It was discovered that the state, if it exists, must serve man and that it is incorrect to believe that the purpose of men is to serve the state. It was discovered that economic life, religious life, law, and private property can all exist and function effectively without a state. From this emerged *laissez-faire*, separation of Church and State, rule of law, and the sanctity of private property. In Rome, in Byzantium, and in Russia, law was regarded as an enactment of a supreme power. In the West, where no supreme power existed, it was discovered that law still existed as the body of rules which govern social life. Thus law was found by observation in the West, not enacted by autocracy as in the East. This meant that authority was established by law and under the law in the West, while authority was established by power and above the law in the East. The West felt that the rules of economic life were found and not enacted; that individuals had rights independent of, and even opposed to, public authority; that groups could exist, as the Church existed, by right and not by privilege, and without the need to have any charter of incorporation entitling them to exist as a group or act as a group; that groups or individuals could own property as a right and not as a privilege and that such property could not be taken by force but must be taken by established process of law. It was emphasized in the West that the way a thing was done was more important than what was done, while in the East what was done was far more significant than the way in which it was done.¹

The institution of monarchy, as understood in the Western world, emerged within this historical context. Although the situation inevitably varied somewhat from one place to another, typically, a number of tribal chieftains would select one of their number to become the king, who would be *primus inter pares* among them. The king had the duty of upholding the law in an objective fashion, without favouritism to any party. At a time



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when it was difficult to maintain authority from the centre over a large kingdom, he had to rule in a way that was acceptable to his subjects, and uphold the rights and liberties that they considered to be rightfully theirs. In time of armed conflict, it was the king's duty to act as military leader and effectively defend or extend the realm. If the king failed to fulfil these tasks, he could be deposed by the chieftains who had elected him. In short, monarchy emerged as a means of defending a legal and social order in which rights existed independently of the state. Originally, when a king died, or was killed or deposed, the tribal chieftains would elect another of their number to replace him as king. However, this inevitably led to violent conflict between rival claimants to the throne, and gradually the concept that one of the dead king's relatives should succeed him took hold. In many places (though not all) the concept of primogeniture became predominant. If the law was that the king's oldest son should succeed him, then conflicts over the succession could be avoided and the peace of the realm maintained.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMBOLS

Monarchy, in this context, proved a highly successful form of government, and became predominant throughout Europe. It is true that the institution incorporated religious, symbolic and "mystical" features. The king was "the Lord's anointed", or "the doctor of his people", in theory appointed by God to administer over his subjects. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that the kings had the power to heal scrofula and other diseases purely by the power of touch. Sick people would visit the king for the "touching of the king's evil" as a means of curing their ailments. The coronation, the crown, sceptre and orb, the royal coat of arms, the throne, the king's standard, his seal, his very person, all contained powerful symbolic meanings which strengthened the prestige of the monarchy among the people. Some libertarians who have a strictly atheistic, rationalist and materialist world-view may scoff at what they are likely to consider to be mere superstitions. Yet the fact is that symbols are an essential way of making sense of the world, and fundamental to the human psyche. According to the great Swiss psychologist Dr Carl Jung,

a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider "unconscious" aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason. The wheel may lead our thoughts toward the concept of a "divine" sun, but at this point reason must admit its incompetence; man is unable to define a "divine" being. When, with all our intellectual limitations, we call something "divine," we have merely given it a name, which may be based on a creed, but never on factual evidence.

Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot fully define or fully comprehend. This is one reason why all religions employ symbolic language or image. But this conscious use of symbols is only one aspect of a psychological fact of great importance: Man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously, in the form of dreams.

It is not easy to grasp this point. But the point must be grasped if we are to know more about the ways in which the human mind works.²

(Objectivists will doubtless be reaching for their smelling-salts on reading this passage.)

In precisely this manner, the monarchy becomes a symbol of the continuity of certain values. As because it developed at a time when state power had collapsed and people became aware that

they enjoyed freedoms which existed separately from the state, as described above by Professor Quigley, the monarchy became, among other things, a symbol of the continuity of that freedom within the law.

The fact is that societies require the "irrationality" of symbols in order to survive. After the French revolution, whose leaders prided themselves on their glorification of Reason, a whore was crowned "goddess of reason" in a bizarre ceremony in the cathedral at Notre Dame. In this century, communist regimes, which prided themselves on their "scientific" outlook, developed such features as the "cult of personality", in which the people were taught to venerate the leader. Professor Robert Conquest describes the most notorious example, that of Stalin:

it is hardly possible to convey by mere quotation and example the overwhelming pervasiveness of the hysterical and obsequious outpourings which increasingly accompanied all reference to Stalin.

'Leader of Genius of the Proletarian Revolution', 'Inspirer and Organizer of the Victory of Socialism', 'Supreme Genius of Humanity', 'Experienced Proletarian Commander', 'Theoretician of Genius and Organizer of Collective Farm Construction', 'Leader of Genius of the Toilers of the Whole World' (from a single speech, if by a particularly servile local secretary) ... People said, and wrote, that they had fainted, or gone into ecstasy, on seeing or hearing Stalin ...

Quite early on Alexei Tolstoy was naturally writing such stuff as 'Thou, bright sun of the nations / The unsinking sun of our times / And more than the sun, for the sun lacks wisdom.' The proletarian writer Alexander Avdeyenko, after a reprimand for having inadequately praised Stalin in a speech to the Writers' Union, felt obliged, the next time he spoke, to conclude, 'When a son is born to me, when he learns to speak the first word he utters will be "Stalin".' ...

In film after film, Stalin's role before, during and after the Revolution was fictionalized. Paintings showed him leading strikes, or advising a complaisant Lenin. Almost every office or workshop, and many private houses, had idealized portraits of the Leader hanging prominently — as icons, less prominently, had done in the past. A recent Soviet article shows a deluded citizen of the period pressing kisses on such a picture out in a public park. Fly-pasts of fighter planes, parades of gymnasts, were deployed to form the name Stalin ...

At a provincial meeting there was an ovation when Stalin's name was mentioned and no one dared to be the first to sit down. When, finally, an old man who could stand no longer took his seat, his name was noted and he was arrested next day. When one speech of Stalin's was published on gramophone records, the eighth side was devoted entirely to applause.³

MONARCHY IN BRITAIN

After the departure of the Romans from Britain, the country was invaded by Angles, Saxons and Jutes. Recent historical research has demolished the traditional view that these newcomers came in vast numbers and slaughtered the native British or drove them to the west. In fact, no more than 50-100,000 Anglo-Saxons arrived, against a native population of over a million, and these generally displaced the British warrior-leaders and became the ruling class over the British peasantry. They established the several separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms which were eventually unified into the kingdom of England under King Egbert in the 10th century. The separate kingdoms north of Hadrian's Wall were united into the kingdom of Scotland under King Duncan in the 11th century. In 1603, James VI of

Scotland also became king of England, although the two kingdoms were not united until 1707.

The political history of England from Magna Carta to the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 is very largely the history of the struggle between the king and his subjects over the laws of the realm. After the Norman conquest, the Norman kings accepted the traditional laws of England, and, especially under Henry I and Henry II, these laws were written down and enforced on a systematic basis. King John seriously encroached on the rights of his subjects, and in 1215 the barons, clergy, and knights of the realm forced him to sign Magna Carta as a comprehensive statement of the rights of free individuals and communities within the realm. In putting the royal seal to Magna Carta, John was not granting any rights, but was rather recognising existing rights which belonged to the individuals and communities within the realm. In the centuries after Magna Carta, Parliament developed as a means of defending the rights of individuals against illegal encroachments by royal authority, and of imposing limits on the taxes and other levies the king could raise for such purposes as waging war. In short, the king’s authority was accountable, and the loyalty owed by subjects to the king was dependent on the latter’s observance and defence of their legitimate rights.

In the 17th century, of course, civil war broke out between Parliamentary and royalist forces, and finally Parliament tried and executed Charles I in 1649. The conflicts of that century ended with the victory of William of Orange over James II in 1688-9, and the constitutional settlement which recognised the sovereignty of Parliament within a constitutional monarchy. Over the next few centuries, Britain experienced the world’s longest-running example of a free society. This came to an end only in 1972, when the traitor, Heath, surrendered the rule of the monarch, the sovereignty of Parliament and the freedoms of the British people, to the rule of an alien power and alien laws for the first time since the legions of imperial Rome departed from these shores. In 1894, *The Forum*, an American magazine, wrote:

It should never be forgotten, even by the most ardent enemies of an aristocracy, that England is to-day the most democratic country of the universe, the country in which the rights of the individual are most respected, and in which the individual possesses the most liberty.⁴

In short, the British constitution, which the monarchy at its head, provided, and to some extent continues to provide, a context in which individuals have in practice enjoyed real freedom in the real world for centuries. And now there are people in this country arguing that these arrangements must be given up and replaced by constitutional arrangements which exist only in their minds and of which nobody can possibly predict the outcome. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Major changes to the British constitution are likely to disrupt it further and thus permanently damage British freedom. The proposals by Tony Blair, Leader of the Opposition, to remove the voting rights of hereditary members of the House of Lords, and to introduce separate Parliaments for Scotland and Wales are almost potentially as dangerous to that constitution as his promises to surrender even more British sovereignty to the European Union.

Support for the tradition of the British constitution implies the defence of the Union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of course, ideally one would like to see the abolition of the state, but in the absence of such an immediate prospect, libertarians must oppose the separation of the United Kingdom into separate countries. Northern Ireland shall be an integral part of the United Kingdom now and forever, in accordance with the wishes of the majority of its people. So too will Scotland and Wales. Contrary to the claims of Scots and Welsh nationalists, the British people are one distinct historical entity,

and the crystallisation of the British people into three separate kingdoms during the “Dark Ages” does not alter that fact. The tradition of individual liberty is just as strong — in some respects even stronger — north of the border than in England. While nobody would deny to the English, Welsh or Scots their right to their own distinct identity and culture, it is nevertheless true that they are all one nation. Any attempt to create a semi-socialist Scotland or Wales in opposition to that must be opposed by libertarians. The Queen is a powerful symbol of the unity of the entire British people.

THE ROYAL FAMILY PROTECTS FREEDOM

It is, as Marxists used to say, no coincidence that the present attack on the monarchy is taking place at a time when the enemies of freedom are attempting to drive the people of this country (and 14 other nations) ever deeper into the clutches of the totalitarian slave-empire based at Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. In some cases, both campaigns involve the same individual. Professor Stephen Haseler, of London Guildhall University, is both one of the nation’s leading enthusiasts for increasing the powers of the European Union over the British people and head of a pressure group called Republic, which campaigns for the abolition of the monarchy.

Quite apart from the constitutional position of the monarchy, the social status of the royal family enables it to have beneficial influence on behalf of individual liberty. For instance, the Queen and the Prince of Wales, in particular, have long been known as strong opponents of racial prejudice and for their concern that members of ethnic minorities are fully accepted as members of British society. Their well-known activities in this area have almost certainly contributed to the good state of race relations in this country and to the sense that most Afro-Caribbean and Asian people have of being just as British as anybody else. It was noteworthy that in a recent television debate on the monarchy, many of the most articulate supporters of Her Majesty were black people. The attitude of members of the royal family in this area has undoubtedly undercut a great deal of support from movements such as the National Front and the British National Party, which purport to be “patriotic” but are in fact attempting to introduce Continental racist and fascist ideologies into Britain.

Another example is the Duke of Edinburgh’s recent comments on firearms ownership in a radio interview, in which His Royal Highness defended the legitimacy of private gun ownership for sporting purposes and implicitly repudiated the hysteria which has led to the present Firearms (Amendment) Bill. The Duke’s sensible and wise comments on this subject were entirely appropriate as a way of defending individual liberty against Tory tyranny — precisely the role of royalty at its best.

The Queen is also head of state in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, a fact which maintains some link between Britain and these countries which share the British tradition of freedom and the rule of law. When Britain withdraws from the European Union, this fact will doubtless be valuable in re-establishing those ties with these countries which were disrupted by Heath’s treason in 1972. Members of the British armed forces and the police swear an oath of loyalty to Her Majesty, thus strengthening the likelihood that they will be never be used against the British people, but only to protect them from violence. And if British freedom should be threatened with permanent annihilation, for example via the European Union, one hopes that British officers would recognise their loyalty to the Queen, rather than to party politicians or a foreign power, and act accordingly to restore the traditional constitution, freedom and law of the British people, if necessary in violation of treasonable actions by “democratically-elected” politicians.

MONARCHY VERSUS TOTALITARIANISM

Other Western countries, of course, have had different histories from Britain, and their experiences of monarchy will not necessarily be the same. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that monarchy is in many cases a bulwark against arbitrary tyranny, and a valuable means of uniting the people in times of crisis. The Bourbon regime in France immediately before the Revolution was certainly in need of considerable reform, and this could have been achieved by operating within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. Instead, the Revolution aimed to destroy everything that had gone before, and led to a bloodbath after the Jacobins launched their reign of terror. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were only two among hundreds of thousands — possibly as many as a million — victims of the revolutionary terror. Only after Napoleon established himself as emperor of France did the nation once again achieve unity and peace.

The United States might have avoided the conflict of 1861-65 (known, somewhat inaccurately, as the “American civil war” — Southern War for Independence is a more accurate name) if a monarch had seen the direction the union was headed and intervened to prevent the situation which led to the secession of the Southern states. As it was, the election of Abraham Lincoln, a known opponent of the Southern states, to the presidency in 1860 led to the secession of these states and the conflict which thus arose.

In the twentieth century, monarchy has acted as a bulwark against totalitarianism. As a result of the “revolution” of 1905, the Russian tsar, Nikolai II, was transformed from being “the autocrat of all the Russias” into a constitutional monarch, accountable to the elected Duma. In February 1917, the overthrow of the tsar did not lead to a government which was able to maintain its rule against the Bolsheviks, and in October 1917 the Bolsheviks were able to capture power and impose what was probably the most murderous regime the world has ever seen. In 1918 the Bolsheviks murdered the entire imperial family in order to prevent them becoming a focus for opposition to their rule.

One of the worst mistakes made by the Allies when they presented the Germans with the Armistice in 1918 was to demand the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the establishment of a republic. The institutions of the Weimar Republic failed to gain the sustained loyalty of the German people. As a result of the severe crisis of 1930-33, Adolf Hitler achieved power. Many thought that he would restore the monarchy; in fact, of course, this would have created an alternative focus of loyalty for the Germans which would have been disastrous for the National Socialist regime. A restored Kaiser could have used his prestige to prevent the worst aspects of Hitler’s rule.

Mussolini’s regime, by contrast, operated within the framework of a monarchy, and was far less repressive than Hitler’s. In 1943 the king, Vittorio Emmanuel III, assisted Marshal Badoglio in overthrowing Mussolini. The Italian Social Republic, better known as the Republic of Sàlo, which was set up by Mussolini in northern Italy in 1943, was considered to be a return to pure fascist and totalitarian principles, free of compromise with the monarchy and other non-fascist institutions. It is highly significant that the Sàlo regime carried out far more murders and acts of tyranny in the two years of its existence (1943-45) than the previous fascist dictatorship had carried out in 22 (1922-43).

In inter-war Romania, the monarchy, in the person of King Carol, opposed both the fascist Legion of the Archangel Saint Michael (generally known as the Iron Guard, although this was technically only the name of its “stormtrooper” section) and the alliance with National Socialist Germany. In 1947, the communist regime deposed King Michael while he was attending the wedding of the present Queen of Britain. As a result, the

Romanians suffered the horrific tyranny of Ceausescu, probably the vilest communist regime in the Soviet bloc. Fortunately, King Michael recently returned to his homeland, where he was greeted as a hero by tens of thousands of his compatriots, pleading with him to become king once more.

In 1931, the Spanish monarchy was overthrown and replaced by a republic that failed to gain the support of large sections of the Spanish people. From 1936 to 1939, Spain was wracked with a civil war that involved the deaths of almost a million Spaniards, with horrific atrocities and destruction on both sides. This was followed by the authoritarian dictatorship of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. (Contrary to socialist mythology, Franco’s regime was never, strictly speaking, fascist: although the fascist Falangist Party was part of the governing coalition, its importance was downgraded from 1944 onwards.) After the death of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in 1975, the monarchy was restored, and King Juan Carlos became head of state. In 1981, a group of Falangist army officers attempted a military coup which came very close to success. The conspirators seized the Spanish parliament and announced the establishment of a military-fascist dictatorship. The king, however, used his prestige with the armed forces and the people to appeal to them not to support the coup and to support the existing constitutional arrangements. Almost entirely as a result of the king’s action, the coup was defeated and the leading conspirators imprisoned.

Nobody would make the claim that monarchy is a panacea. Of course far more is needed to maintain a free society. But given a choice between monarchical institutions which have stood the test of time and the establishment of a republic thought up by political fanatics, the monarchy is far more likely to provide a comparatively free, stable and peaceful society. One only needs to look at the position in Europe to confirm this. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Belgium — all monarchies — have been comparatively stable and pluralist societies for centuries. Greece, which abolished its monarchy in the 1970s, has become a corrupt and repressive swamp. Italy, which abolished its monarchy after a referendum in 1947, is virtually run by the Mafia, is in a perpetual state of crisis, and is on the verge of splitting apart. France has suffered two centuries of instability, violent revolutions, massacre and upheaval since the execution of Louis XVI. After the abolition of its monarchy in 1918 Germany suffered the continuing crises of the Weimar Republic and the horrors of National Socialism, war and defeat.

Of course this is by no means the whole picture. Each of these national situations is vastly more complex than the question of its form of government. Nevertheless, I hope I have written enough to indicate that, all other things being equal, it is better, on libertarian grounds, to keep a monarchy than to replace it with a republic. Libertarians should, in my opinion, support the maintenance of the British monarchy and oppose the campaign for its replacement with a republic. Let us express the hope that the Queen will be succeeded by Prince Charles, then by Prince William, and that the British people will retain the monarchy as a symbol of their ancient liberty now and forever. In the current struggle for the restoration of British sovereignty and freedom from the European Union, let us claim the Queen as a powerful symbol of that sovereignty and freedom.

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