

Visit of King George V by James Connolly (1910)

We include this historical piece from the great Irish revolutionary socialist, James Connolly, on the visit of King George V to Ireland not only for its inherent historical interest but because it contains several principled objects to the institution of monarchy. Connolly's article is a damning critique of the ideological content of monarchism, celebrating as it does the existence of privilege and the idea of deference. In the current economic climate, we need to shed these ideas and embrace ones of equality, solidarity and self-assertive independence if we are ever to put an end to 'austerity' and fight for a better society.

Fellow-Workers,

As you are aware from reading the daily and weekly newspapers, we are about to be blessed with a visit from King George V.

Knowing from previous experience of Royal Visits, as well as from the Coronation orgies of the past few weeks, that the occasion will be utilised to make propaganda on behalf of royalty and aristocracy against the oncoming forces of democracy and National freedom, we desire to place before you some few reasons why you should unanimously refuse to countenance this visit, or to recognise it by your presence at its attendant processions or demonstrations. We appeal to you as workers, speaking to workers, whether your work be that of the brain or of the hand – manual or mental toil – it is of you and your children we are thinking; it is your cause we wish to safeguard and foster.

The future of the working class requires that all political and social positions should be open to all men and women; that all privileges of birth or wealth be abolished, and that every man or woman born into this land should have an equal opportunity to attain to the proudest position in the land. The Socialist demands that the only birthright necessary to qualify for public office should be the birthright of our common humanity.

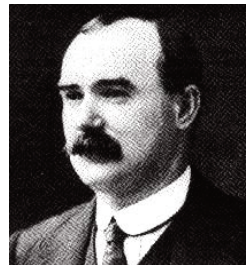
Believing as we do that there is nothing on earth more sacred than humanity, we deny all allegiance to this institution of royalty, and hence we can only regard the visit of the King as adding fresh fuel to the fire of hatred with which we regard the

plundering institutions of which he is the representative. Let the capitalist and landlord class flock to exalt him; he is theirs; in him they see embodied the idea of caste and class; they glorify him and exalt his importance that they might familiarise the public mind with the conception of political inequality, knowing well that a people mentally poisoned by the adulation of royalty can never attain to that spirit of self-reliant democracy necessary for the attainment of social freedom. The mind accustomed to political kings can easily be reconciled to social kings – capitalist kings of the workshop, the mill, the railway, the ships and the docks. Thus coronation and king's visits are by our astute neversleeping masters made into huge Imperialist propagandist campaigns in favour of political and social schemes against democracy. But if our masters and rulers are sleepless in their schemes against us, so we, rebels against their rule, must never sleep in our appeal to our fellows to maintain as publicly our belief in the dignity of our class – in the ultimate sovereignty of those who labour.

What is monarchy? From whence does it derive its sanction? What has been its gift to humanity? Monarchy is a survival of the tyranny imposed by the hand of greed and treachery upon the human race in the darkest and most ignorant days of our history. It derives its only sanction from the sword of the marauder, and the helplessness of the producer, and its gifts to humanity are unknown, save as they can be measured in the pernicious examples of triumphant and shameless iniquities.

Every class in society save royalty, and especially British royalty, has through some of its members contributed something to the elevation of the race. But neither in science, nor in art, nor in literature, nor in exploration, nor in mechanical invention, nor in humanising of laws, nor in any sphere of human activity has a representative of British royalty helped forward the moral, intellectual or material improvement of mankind. But that royal family has opposed every forward move, fought every reform, persecuted every patriot, and intrigued against every good cause. Slandering every friend of the people, it has befriended every oppressor. Eulogised today by misguided clerics, it has been notorious in history for the revolting nature of its crimes. Murder, treachery, adultery, incest, theft, perjury – every crime known to man has been committed by some one or other of the race of monarchs from whom King George is proud to trace his descent.

We will not blame him for the crimes of his ancestors if he



relinquishes the royal rights of his ancestors; but as long as he claims their rights, by virtue of descent, then, by virtue of descent, he must shoulder the responsibility for their crimes.

Fellow-workers, stand by the dignity of your class. All these parading royalties, all this insolent aristocracy, all these grovelling, dirt-eating capitalist traitors, all these are but signs of disease in any social state – diseases which a royal visit brings to a head and spews in all its nastiness before our horrified eyes. But as the recognition of the disease is the first stage towards its cure, so that we may rid our social state of its political and social diseases, we must recognise the elements of corruption. Hence, in bringing them all together and exposing their unity, even a royal visit may help us to understand and understanding, help us to know how to destroy the royal, aristocratic and capitalistic classes who live upon our labour. Their workshops, their lands, their mills, their factories, their ships, their railways must be voted into our hands who alone use them, public ownership must take the place of capitalist ownership, social democracy replace political and social inequality, the sovereignty of labour must supersede and destroy the sovereignty of birth and the monarchy of capitalism.

Ours be the task to enlighten the ignorant among our class, to dissipate and destroy the political and social superstitions of the enslaved masses and to hasten the coming day when, in the words of Joseph Brenan, the fearless patriot of '48, all the world will maintain

"The Right Divine of Labour
To be first of earthly things;
That the Thinker and the Worker
Are Manhood's only Kings."

For more on James Connolly see:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly>

<http://tinyurl.com/jconnolly>

<http://tinyurl.com/jconnolly2>

THE ICONOCLAST

'I OPPOSED THE ICONOCLAST TO THE ICON.' JOHN MILTON



ABOLISH THE MONARCHY! UP THE REPUBLIC!

Abolish the monarchy! Up the Republic!

More than £10 million will come straight out of the public purse to fund the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations, along with millions more from private sponsors.

That's money for pompous pageantry to celebrate an accident of birth, and an institution that more civilised countries than ours abolished centuries ago.

Even when they're being rammed down our throat by the media and political establishment, there's a temptation to dismiss the monarchy as an irritating quirk, a relic, but ultimately one that has no real grip on or connection to actual politics.

But the rogues' gallery of despots that came together for the Queen's Jubilee lunch shows how the British monarchy is still part of a network of reaction that includes people engaged in far worse crimes than the odd bigoted gaffe.

Attendees included:

Mswati III, the King of Swaziland who, in 2000, proposed the branding and sterilisation of HIV-positive people as a response to the AIDS epidemic, and who spends tens of millions of dollars on private jets and Maybach cars while "his" people starve.

Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was there, a representative of the monarchy of Saudi Arabia which maintains theocratic gender apartheid.

The King of Bahrain attended, presumably on a day off from overseeing the murderous repression of the pro-democracy movement in that country.

The "King of Romania", the "King of Bulgarians", and the "King of the Hellenes" also came along for the day, even though Romania has been a republic since 1947, Bulgaria since 1946, and Greece since 1973.

The Queen's Jubilee gives political legitimacy and cover not only to "monarchs" whose power and position has been abolished decades ago, but to currently-reigning despots and autocrats whose subjects would love the luxury of dismissing them as irrelevant hangovers from a bygone age.

Civil Liberties

The lengths to which the British state is now prepared to go to protect the monarchy, and its self-promoting public celebrations, from criticism was shown last year, when dozens of people were rounded up and arrested in a police operation based on pre-emptive political arrests.

Arrestees included 10 socialists and anarchist republicans, arrested to "prevent a potential breach of their peace" while committing the heinous crime of standing outside a train station... on the day of the Royal Wedding.

They, along with several other arrestees, commence a Judicial Review against the Metropolitan Police on Monday 28 May. If the Review finds the police's actions to have been unlawful, republicans should press their advantage by organising the biggest possible republican presence at the Jubilee celebrations.

Tourism?

The "but-they-bring-in-tourist-money" argument for the continued existence of the monarchy hardly stands up to scrutiny when one looks 20 miles across the Channel to France, whose tourist industry does not appear to have suffered much since its monarchy was abolished for the last time in 1870. People still visit the Palace of Versailles even though it is uninhabited. Although Britain's monarchy has not invoked its powers of royal veto and dismissal since 1975, when its representative in Australia dissolved a Labor Party government, the very existence of those powers — and of the monarchy itself — is an affront to democracy.

The monarchy is a financial drain, a political cover for violent reaction, and a reservoir of immense wealth and power obtained solely through accidents of birth.

Its abolition is not something to be put off until some revolutionary future, but a key democratic demand to be fought for now. We can start on Jubilee weekend.

Rogues Gallery



Mswati III, King of Swaziland



King of Bahrain with Prince Charles

The monarchy versus democracy

In the 1640s the English people made a revolution for rule by an elected parliament rather than an unelected king or queen. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and a counterbalancing mini-revolution in 1688, the ruling class agreed a compromise. The unelected monarchy would stay, but Parliament would have priority.

The monarchy gradually withdrew from day-to-day government, but only all the better to sustain its "dignity" and its reserve power to intervene in a crisis. In the late 19th century, politicians like the Tory prime minister Benjamin Disraeli "reinvented" the monarchy as a symbolic centre for the British Empire. The business of Jubilees started with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

The working class organised and agitated, from the 1830s, for democracy - one man one vote, and later one person one vote; annual elections to Parliament. We won, or seemed to win, some of our demands.

In numbers:

£202.4m

Estimated annual cost of monarchy to taxpayers

9,560

The number of nurses who could be employed with the above figure

94%

Real-term increase in Civil List expenditure over the 2 decades

112

The number of times the monarchy is more expensive than the Irish President

Figures from Republic.org.uk

From 1867 growing sections of the working class won the vote. By 1929 we had one person one vote. But while workers won the vote, the ruling class diminished the power of the vote. From 1867 onwards the ruling class shifted real power from Parliament to the Cabinet, and then to the Prime Minister and a swelling unelected permanent bureaucracy.

Much law is made by administrative decree. The permanent civil service decides much of public policy, and ensures its continuity whoever wins elections. The Labour left-winger Tony Benn, when a government Minister, once received a civil service brief marked, "For the new Minister, if not Mr Benn".

The Queen, not Parliament, chooses the Prime Minister. In normal, quiet conditions the Prime Minister is the leader of the biggest party. If the trade unions should come to reassert some control over the Labour Party, and a left Labour majority which the ruling class saw as dangerous were elected to Parliament, the Queen could quite easily choose a Labour right-winger for Prime Minister and enable that Prime Minister to construct a majority from sections of Labour, Lib Dems, nationalists and maybe even some Tories, thwarting the voters' choice.

In 1975, the Queen's representative in Australia, Governor-General John Kerr, sacked that country's reforming Labour government on the pretext of its difficulties in getting its Budget approved by the Upper House. Kerr installed the Tory opposition to rule instead, called a general election, rode out a big wave of protest strikes, and saw the exultant Tories win the election. The Queen could do the same in a political crisis in Britain.

The armed forces, too, still swear allegiance to the Crown and not to the elected government. The former Chief of the General Staff, Michael Carver, publicly admitted that in

February 1974, when a Labour government was returned amidst massive industrial struggles, "fairly senior officers were ill-advised enough to make suggestions that, perhaps, if things got terribly bad, the army would have to do something about it". The top brass squashed the coup plans - that time.

In 1981 Tony Benn painted the same picture. He wrote a book summing up lessons from 11 years as a member of Labour governments in the 1960s and 70s. What would happen, he asked, to "a government elected by a clear majority on a mandate of reform?... The Lords veto, the prerogative of the Crown to dismiss and dissolve, and the loyalties of the courts and the services to adjudicate upon legitimacy and to enforce those judgments might all be used to defend the status quo against a parliamentary majority elected to transform it".

That is the serious business behind the Jubilee farce. The ruling class keeps the monarchy out of ordinary politics in order to have it in reserve for extraordinary politics.

Enjoyed this pamphlet?

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