

The King's behaviour already suggests that we need an...

Published: January 14, 2026, 12:28 pm

We learned two things about our new king yesterday.

The first is that Saturday's rather unseemly indecent in which he angrily demanded that pens and inkwells be removed from the table where he was signing documents was not just caused by the stress of the moment, as I had hoped.

He repeated his stress with a pen yesterday, angrily thrusting a pen that had leaked to his wife to sort out. It was as if all such issues were beneath him and anything going wrong was someone else's fault when it was very hard to see why he could not have taken his own pen, filled with suitable ink. I should think he can afford a Mont Blanc. But worse, it showed him as a man who treated his wife like a subservient, and that she was obviously wearily tolerant of this behaviour, suggesting it habitual. It was unbecoming at best.

Worse was to follow. During the course of yet another church memorial service for the Queen, Charles as the employer of staff at Clarence House, which has been his London home and office, made one hundred of his those employees redundant. He did so as he now inherits the staff at Buckingham Palace. The range of duties of those now redundant is wide, from domestic staff to his finance team.

Staggeringly, during a week when we are, at the request of the government and royal family, officially in mourning and when much normal activity, from cancer treatments onwards, is being cancelled, Charles III found time amongst his own grieving to dispense with the services of staff, some of whom have apparently been in his employment for decades. Three myths were shattered as a result.

The first was that Charles cares.

The second is that he has the judgement to be king.

The third is that he is learned anything about the importance of timing behaviour to manage media consequences.

Having at least the appearance of those three abilities matters to be monarch, when the only real requirement of that role is to be popular. The Queen managed that, presumably with the support of aides. If those same aides have advised Charles now they have failed him spectacularly. If he acted on his own, the situation is worse.

Whichever it was, the absurd and sycophantic goodwill so far seem this week is going to be, at the very least, tainted by this.

Letting Andrew appear in military uniform today will only do further harm. The re-assimilation of him is really not wise.

And Harry remains looking like a time bomb of relative sanity within the sea of royal make believe just waiting to go off.

I understand that many want to grieve the Queen. I think they should have given the chance to do so, although how a hearse can require continual television coverage baffles me as a source of entertainment. But that is not the issue I am focussed on.

As I said when talking on BBC 5 Live yesterday, amongst the many abuses of human rights implicit in the monarchy is the abuse of the royal family by placing on its members demands that it is not reasonable they should suffer by reason of their birth, and which they might not either wish for or have the suitability to endure, but from which they are not, apparently, permitted to escape. I think we are seeing the clearest possible evidence that those demands can produce behaviour that is quite unsuited to fit the myth of modern royalty.

This is not the primary reason why I wish to dispense with a constitutional monarchy and the role of all those with hereditary authority within our government. The best interests of democracy are what requires that. But, the very obvious stresses and emerging inabilities of those in the royal household to understand just what is expected of them now will provide the background to what I suspect will be the growth in a rapid disenchantment with monarchy in the UK.

We all know the media can turn on royalty. Papers who were once singing a royal personage's praises can very soon thereafter become immensely hostile. Charles is setting himself up for this, already. I have already suggested this week that this might take only a matter of months, which is why, I am sure, this accession tour was promoted with such vigour, knowing that the likelihood of backlash was high. I suspect it will happen rather sooner now.

What does this mean? I cannot be sure. We could just endure a bad king, who we have long anticipated. I might also be wrong in my reading of the runes. And there again, it may be this might lead to call for change more quickly than anyone expected, with Prince William no saviour in the wings, I suggest.

To put it another way, the need to discuss the alternatives is with us. I suggested an Irish style presidency on the BBC yesterday. I stick with that suggestion. We need it.