

“Silence is no longer neutrality” : On the monarchy...

Published: February 20, 2026, 7:35 am

The reported arrest of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor as part of an investigation into alleged misconduct in public office is not just another royal scandal. It is a constitutional moment. It forces us to confront a question that Britain has avoided for decades: can an unelected institution, funded by public money, continue to rely on secrecy in a democracy that demands accountability?

For most of its modern history, the Royal Family has survived by saying little. Its maxim of *"don't complain, don't explain"* was once politically effective. It allowed the monarchy to remain distant from controversy and above party politics. It worked when Britain was deferential, when inequality was accepted as natural, and when the media cooperated in preserving myth.

That world has gone.

We now live in a country where people are angry. They are angry about housing they cannot afford, social security they fear losing, wages that stagnate, public services that fail, and a tax system that too often favours wealth over work. These are themes I address repeatedly on Funding the Future. They are the economic roots of the political anger that is pushing some towards the far-right and others towards despair.

In that context, the spectacle of a publicly funded institution remaining insulated from scrutiny is no longer tolerable. Silence no longer looks dignified. It looks like evasion or responsibility and accountability.

This matters because the monarchy is not just a family. It is part of the state. Royal duties are public duties. Royal finances are public finances. Royal influence is political influence, whether acknowledged or not. If a member of that institution is accused of misconduct in public office, the issue is not entirely a private matter, because the office they held was a part of the royal family. No suggestion is made here about culpability. That would be inappropriate. But there are questions of public accountability, and the royal family cannot avoid those now.

The first obvious point to make is that the law must apply equally. That is the bedrock of democracy. If there is evidence of wrongdoing, it must be tested openly and fairly. If there is none, that must be made clear. But the institution cannot retreat into ambiguity and expect trust to remain intact. And that challenges the King most of all. It is suggested that he is above the law and cannot be prosecuted, as prosecutions are brought in his name. The law is not, then, in fact, applied equally. That is why the monarchy has to be radically reformed, or go if it refuses to change as required. Unless it is utterly reformed, losing all its power, inequality will still be symbolised by this fact of the monarch being above the law.

That is the issue that cannot be avoided now. Trust is fragile in Britain today. Decades of neoliberal policy, which I call the politics of destruction, have left communities hollowed out. They have concentrated wealth, weakened labour, and stripped resilience from our public realm. When people see privilege protected while their own lives become precarious, they conclude that the system is rigged.

That perception is what is politically explosive in our country at present. It feeds resentment, conspiracy, and the appeal of authoritarian answers. It is one reason why the politics of hate finds an audience.

At the very least, if the monarchy wishes to survive, the condition must be that it is seen to stand for something different. It must embody the politics of care, including fairness, honesty, responsibility, and service. That also means it subjects itself to rigorous transparency.

The Royal Household should be accountable. Parliament should hold the monarchy and its finances to account. The legal status of royal roles should be clarified. Tax arrangements should be open. Security costs should be debated. In short, the monarchy must accept the scrutiny that every publicly funded institution faces.

None of this is revolutionary. It is a normal democratic practice.

The alternative is drift with the monarchy relying on silence as scandal follows scandal and each episode erodes legitimacy a little more until support ebbs, and one day the institution finds it has lost the consent on which it depends.

I have never been a supporter of a monarchy. I have always believed that inherited privilege sits uneasily and incompatibly with democratic values. But the issue now is not ideology. It is institutional credibility. Britain must decide what kind of state it wants. Is it one where tradition excuses opacity, or one where accountability applies to all?

There are only three realistic futures for the monarchy. It can radically reform and survive as a transparent and entirely ceremonial institution. Alternatively, it can drift and decline as trust evaporates until the whole edifice is swept away. Or it is

constitutionally replaced by an elected head of state.

I am aware that at present the choice will not lie with republicans like me. Right now, it does, in fact, lie with the Royal Family itself. If it clings to secrecy, it will undermine its own position. If it embraces openness, a loss of its power, and a purely symbolic role, it might yet justify its continuing ceremonial, but not constitutional, existence in a modern democracy.

What is clear, though, is that the maxim *don't complain, don't explain* belonged to another century. In a politics of care, institutions explain because they respect the people they serve. Continued royal silence is, then, no longer dignity. It would be denial, and denial is not a foundation on which any constitutional order can stand.

The conclusion is clear. The monarchy is either radically reformed and lose all of its supposed constitutional power, or it must be gone. Those are the only cards left on the table.