

Why have we got a monarchy?

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We are being asked whether Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor should be eighth in line to the throne. That is the wrong question.

The real issue is simple: why do we have a monarchy at all in a modern democracy?

No one should be born to rule. No one should inherit political authority. And public services belong to us, and not to a king.

In this video, I explain why monarchy contradicts equality, distorts politics, and blocks constitutional reform, and why a politics of care demands an elected head of state, a written constitution, and real democratic accountability.

This is not about individuals. It is about institutions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VQEwiEvfTY?si=VCQpy0kGFkx04BCg>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=huctm-1a52c80-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

We are being asked whether Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor should be eighth in line to the throne. There's lots of debate about it, but my point is quite simple: that is the wrong question. The real question we need to ask is, why do we have a monarchy at all? After all, no one in a modern society should be born to rule. It's time we had a head of state chosen by democracy.

Let me make it clear. I'm not discussing Andrew as a person here. I'm not discussing anyone as a person here, and I'm most certainly not discussing any allegations or an individual's suitability to be in line to the throne or not. What I'm asking is a straightforward, constitutional question.

- * Why should we have a monarch who has to approve our legislation?
- * Why do we have a monarch who can describe the government as his own?
- * Why do we have a Monarch who has weekly audiences with the Prime Minister, as if their opinion matters?

What is this all about? is my question.

My suggestion is that in a modern democracy, why should anyone be head of state by birth, and why should public life be imposed by inheritance? After all, I think this system is as unfair to those who are in the royal family as it is to us.

Why should power flow through family lines is the actual ultimate question to ask? And my answer is, of course, it shouldn't.

I believe three very simple things. They're all principles of equality.

- * No one is born to be superior to anyone else.
- * No one should be forced into public life by reason of birth.
- * And no one should inherit political authority.

I think those are unassailable democratic fundamentals, and yet monarchy denies them all.

Monarchy harms everyone involved. It imposes public scrutiny on individuals without their consent, and that has proved to be deeply detrimental in many cases, as we have seen.

It creates expectations that are now frankly impossible for anyone to meet.

And it turns families into institutions, and there is no family in the country that could survive that level of scrutiny.

This is unfair on the royal family, and it's wrong for us as a society.

We are told monarchy is symbolic, though symbols do matter, and I'm making that point specifically. I'm saying that the messages from monarchy are wrong.

- * Class hierarchy is not natural.
- * Privilege is unacceptable as a basis for ruling.
- * Power should not belong to families.
- * Power should belong to those with the ability to use it fairly on behalf of everyone.

But whilst monarchy survives, it is assumed that class hierarchy is natural and the privilege is acceptable, and the power does belong to families, and that then shapes culture, law, and politics.

We even see this in the naming of our public services.

- * We have HM Government: His Majesty's Government.
- * We have HM Revenue and Customs as if all the taxes we pay belong to the Crown.
- * And we have HM Prison Service. If you are detained, it is at His Majesty's pleasure.

But these services do not belong to the king, this king, any king, any queen or whatever to come; they belong to us. Public services must serve the public, and not reinforce hierarchy.

And let's also be honest, public services should not be associated with wealth and privilege, and the monarchy does hold enormous wealth. That wealth exists because of the institution, land, property, prestige, and networks. All accumulate to the power of the monarch. This is inherited power in economic form. It contradicts all economic justice. It makes a mockery of those who think that we should live in a world where people are more, and not less, equal.

The head of state then must be chosen. In other words, we must elect them democratically. Legitimacy matters, and if citizens cannot imagine themselves as head of state, we do not have a democracy, and right now, no one, apart from the Royal Family, can imagine themselves as head of state, so we don't have a democracy. This, as a matter of fact, is true. We have class rule in the UK.

This is unacceptable, and other countries do, of course, manage without it. Look at Ireland. Ireland made the transition from being part of the UK to being an independent country with an elected head of state. Now you can argue that they just have a ceremonial role that is above party politics. I would argue that that is important. I think the fact that they are above politics is precisely why the Irish situation works so well.

But the point is, they have found a role model for a head of state who attracts attention, who can speak on behalf of the country, who can deal with crises, and yet is democratically elected. So, then, could we.

The role should, in fact, be based on public service. We don't necessarily need someone who's been a politician to become head of state. We certainly do not need that person chosen by reason of their birthright, or their wealth, or their connections. Instead, they must have a record of service to the public in some form or other, but not necessarily by any means in the political sphere. They must have a record of integrity, and they must have a record of commitment. That would help us literally create a politics of care because what these people will have evidenced is that they do care, and that will be the criterion for selection: why somebody should get on the ballot in the first place.

And this idea that we reform the monarchy should be part of a wider constitutional reform. This is about much more than monarchy, in fact, because we also need a written constitution. We are playing, too often, with our rights at present. There are politicians who clearly wish to undermine them. That is precisely why we need them written down in a way that is very hard to change.

We also need proportional representation. We need a democracy that actually does really represent us; that is what a democracy should do. And yet too many people at present are denied the chance to ever elect a member of Parliament who might share their views in any remote way. So we need PR so that we have a greater diversity of politics represented in Parliament, but that's important because we are a diverse nation. We shouldn't pretend otherwise if our democracy is to work.

We also need an elected second chamber, and I stress here that it is very important that this elected second chamber should, rather like whoever might be our elected head of state, represent wise opinion and strong commitment to service rather than political interest. This second chamber would not be creating legislation. It would instead be acting as a sounding board for our elected politicians, many of whom seem to need such a thing, and it would be saying, "Are you sure you've got this right? Are you sure you are being wise? Do you want to have a second look at this?" That is the role of a good second chamber, and it needs to exist, but it needs to exist in a way that is distinct from party politics. So people elected for significant periods, ten plus years, but then expected to stand down, and no silly titles going with it.

We also need to reform our party political system. There should be no chance of it being corrupted by corporate donations; they should be banned. There should be strict limits on how much any individual can give as well. We need a state-funded political system to avoid the risk of corruption, and all of this would help create real democratic accountability, and that is fundamental to our future.

If we keep the monarchy, we keep class hierarchy, hidden power networks, cultural deference, and a lack of accountability. All of these distort politics. That's why they

need to go. They block reform as things stand, and that is unacceptable.

They also undermine public services by defending privilege, and in that sense, they also deny the need for a social safety net by suggesting falling through the gaps is somehow natural because there is a hierarchy, and therefore someone has got to be at the bottom and uncared for, in effect, and that to me is unacceptable.

We need an end to monarchy. Equality must become real. Citizens must gain ownership of the state. Politics must become about public service, and the politics of care must replace the politics of privilege. This is cultural change as much as it is constitutional change.

We need to do this now. The latest debate over particular members of the royal family shows something, and that is not that they might or might not have done anything wrong, but that we obsess over individuals because we avoid questioning institutions. That is the key point about what is happening at present. That questioning of individuals protects power as a whole, and the problem is power is corrupted.

This is what we need to look at. We are being distracted from structural reform by, well, literally looking at individuals and whether they've done right or wrong. So, actually, what I'm saying is that royalty is not, I stress, about that issue. It is instead about the structure.

So the issue with royalty is not about any one person. The issue is monarchy itself. No one should rule by right of birth, and no one should inherit political authority. That is my point. Democracy requires equality. What can you offer to counter that argument when it seems so fundamentally true?

If we want a politics for people, we need to debate a written constitution, demand an elected head of state, remove inherited privilege, reform political funding, and put public services under democratic ownership. This is part of the politics of care. A modern society celebrates the best of us, not the accident of birth. It's time to move on now.

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below.

Poll

[poll id="332"]