

The Queen is dead

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

14 September 2022

The Queen of England (as well as of Australia, Canada and numerous other former British colonies) has died. Mass media have suspended normal programming to talk about nothing else and their actions can best be described as competitive hagiography, not only of the Queen herself, but even of the Empire she represented.

Behind the non-stop coverage there is a real anxiety. The death of a monarch has always been a moment of crisis, and when the dead monarch has had an exceptionally long reign the crisis is especially acute. In days when the monarch wielded political power (which is still the case in some countries), it could open windows of opportunity for struggle, and even for power to change hands (a potential which was sometimes realised). Today, under capitalism, 'constitutional monarchies' are nationalist spectacles for the masses, so the crisis is different. It is the end of one show and the beginning of another. Will it rate as well? How will people feel about the new star? How should the new show be promoted? Will it help to perpetuate subservience to tradition, the manufactured image of a unified nation, and a seemingly unchangeable 'natural order'?

For us, the death of the monarch raises a few different issues. Firstly, there is the question of inherited privilege: Elizabeth's eldest son is due to take the throne as Charles III, but how did he acquire that right? He hasn't been voted in, he didn't top the class in a competitive examination, and he wasn't subjected to a process of interviews and submission of references. He became heir to the throne by, as some would say, choosing his parents carefully.

As the epitome of inherited privilege, monarchy is an affront to every libertarian and egalitarian sensibility. Once upon a time, the emerging capitalist class was enthusiastic about abolishing monarchies, seeking to replace them with democratic republics based on a formal recognition of equal rights. It was promised (with varying levels of sincerity and radicalism) that a system of private property, operating in a competitive market, would create equality of opportunity – a level playing field, where wealth could be earned through hard work, thrift and enterprise. Revolutions were made under this banner and a particularly recalcitrant French king lost his head over the matter.

Things are different today. The ideology of capitalism still requires the pretence that wealth is earned, but faces the problem of capital's inherent tendency towards concentration, as well as the earnest desire of each successive generation of capitalists to pass their fortunes on to their descendants. Inherited wealth can certainly be secure under a republican system of government,

but the privilege of inheritance has, over centuries, given the bourgeoisie a natural affinity for hereditary power.

Australia provides an illuminating example. There has been a campaign for an Australian republic for about thirty years, but the argument advanced for it is that the monarch is English and, as Australia is now a grown-up country, Australia's head of state should be Australian. It is an argument that would simply not apply if the debate was being had in England. As a result, public support for a republic is tepid and far weaker than the full-throated defence of tradition on the part of social reactionaries. The 'progressive' case for a republic offers no benefits other than the elimination of a relic so antiquated it should be embarrassing.

Replacing the monarchy with an Australian republic would not necessarily address Australia's original sin: colonisation and the dispossession of the Aboriginal people that followed. The current republican movement would definitely not address it, given its determination that the one and only change to the Constitution would be to create an Australian head of state. Meanwhile, the movement supporting Aboriginal sovereignty grows yearly, demanding a reckoning with dispossession and genocide. One movement is based on a pretended national unity, while the other is based on resistance to a real and monstrous injustice.

Still, clearly some capitalists fear that making a democratic, rather than nationalist, argument for a republic calls into question all other inherited privileges, including those of far more significance than a symbolic head-of-state. It would be to declare that James Packer, Lachlan Murdoch, Anthony Pratt, Gina Rinehart and Ryan Stokes have no right to the billions they inherited or stand to inherit, and which will serve as the basis for their continued exploitation of the working class. And this is only the tip of the iceberg. The old money of Sydney and Melbourne, built on the foundations of genocide, and originally accumulated by bloodthirsty squatters, or by shysters who gouged gullible miners during the Gold Rush, has been laundered by a succession of heirs before reaching its present hands.

We are members of the working class. We have no great fortunes to defend. Instead, the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group raises the banner of liberty, equality and solidarity. These principles, as promised by the foundation of liberal, democratic republics, can only be made real when there are no more bosses, or governments, or the threat of poverty hanging over our heads. Such a society, based on libertarian communism, will be freer than any democracy, be more equal than any capitalist republic, and unleash a solidarity unknown to the capitalist class and which can never exist between classes. The new world will relegate monarchy, along with every other form of government, to the history books – and King Charles III will be known, we hope, as Charles the Last.

DOWN WITH THE KING!

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