

A Knavish Trick

The foolish suggestion that Britons swear allegiance to King Charles can only serve to foster growing anti-monarchism.



by Theodore Dalrymple

Some ideas are so bad that only stupidity or malice can explain them. Among them is the proposal that Britons

should [swear allegiance to King Charles](#) at home while they watch his coronation on television this Saturday, just as they shout and punch the air when their favorite team scores a goal in a football match. No such oath has ever been asked before.

This kitschy idea is a gift to, if not actually the product of, the anti-monarchist intelligentsia, which is increasingly agitating in Britain for the abolition of the monarchy. And as we have seen, what the intelligentsia wants, it eventually gets, because agitating is the whole purpose of its existence.

The main argument against the monarchy in Britain is easy to understand and expressible in a soundbite: it is undemocratic. Such an abstract argument is more important to the intelligentsia than any pragmatic consideration—for example, that the monarchy in practice is much less likely, and has much less power, to oppress you than your local, democratically elected town council, to say nothing of central government, which is incomparably more bullying than the monarchy has been for centuries.

There is no real problem facing Britain—and it has many and deep real problems—that the abolition of the monarchy would solve, and extra ones that it would create, among them enormous social conflict. The intelligentsia would rather sing the “Marseillaise” than “God Save the King,” because the former supposedly represents the sovereignty of the people while the latter is inherently aristocratic. A comparison of the lyrics at their most virulent is instructive. First, “God Save the King”:

*O Lord our God arise,
Scatters our enemies,
And make them fall!
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,
On Thee our hopes we fix,
God save us all!*

Not very distinguished poetry, it can be conceded, but not very blood-curdling, either. Now for the “Marseillaise”:

*To arms, citizens,
Form your battalions,
Let us march! Let us march!
Let an impure blood
Swamp our furrows!*

This, of course, is preferable, morally, because it is democratic in sentiment.

The growing anti-monarchism in Britain, which the proposed oath can only serve to foster, is to the country’s politics what displacement activity is to mice when confronted by a cat: they wash their paws because there is nothing else that they can do, as the problems are too great for any mouse to think of.

The pursuit of abstractions is always more gratifying to the intelligentsia than real solutions to intractable problems—for example, the poor productivity of the British economy, the degradation of Britain’s health care, and the very low educational level of so much of the population despite unprecedented expenditure on it.

Aux armes, citoyens!

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