

Royal Conflict between London and Los Angeles

by Michael Curtis



It is an ironic twist of history that two American women, divorces, outsiders, chic, attractive, should have been the cause of political crises in Britain, and led to concern that they might affect the powers and even the very existence of the monarchy if not the battle for the throne. In the 1930s the Prince of Wales, to become Edward VIII, fell in love with Wallis Simpson while she was still married to someone else. In his chatty memoirs, recently republished, Henry, Chips, Channon wrote on December 5, 1936 that “the King, like the poor Tsar and Louis XVI will listen to no advice and is running straight to his doom.”

Eighty years later, another playful prince, Harry, fell in love with Meghan Markle, a strong woman, who is determined to continue, as she sees it, “building compassion around the world, and will keep striving to set an example for doing what is right and what is good.” Though her main complaint has been

of lack of support by the Royal Family, lack of respect, and even of some "plotting" her downfall, the Duchess of Sussex has benefited from a lavish life style and public funding including a wedding that cost \$42 million in 2018.

There is of course no exact comparison between the two American women, one a socialite and the other a biracial, independent, moderately successful actress. Both left Britain for different reasons, the Duchess of Windsor for Canada and Europe, and the Duchess of Sussex for Canada and California. Yet in spite of the differences, the fear is that Sussex may be as destructive as Windsor.

Skirmishes and heated exchanges have been occurring during the last year, but a more pointed war is now escalating between the rival powers in London and Los Angeles, starting with an event expected to be explosive. On Sunday March 7, 2021 a highly anticipated two hour program is to be broadcast on CBS Primetime Special. Oprah Winfrey will interview Prince Harry, still Duke of Sussex and Meghan, still Duchess of Sussex, sitting in a garden in California in the sunlight, not in the London lockdown in winter suffering from Covid-19. Winfrey is a recent but now close friend and neighbor of Sussex and had attended their wedding. Some fear the interview will be the latest version of the TV Horror Show. It certainly appears at an inopportune moment, since Philip, Duke of Edinburgh had a procedure for a pre-existing heart condition on March 3, and remains in hospital.

Prince Harry is a complex man, seemingly with a strong sense of natural justice and capable of acts of compassion, but also prone to unpredictable behavior and actions that suggest self-destruction and self-pity. Sometimes he feels like a motherless child, a long way from home. It is likely that he still blames the Palace and the media for the death of his mother Diana. Little, except snippets, has yet been revealed of the contents of the Winfrey interview, but Harry has informed us that he is happy to be talking on it with his wife

by his side. Without precision, he asserted that “it’s been unbelievably tough for the two of us, but at least we have each other.” Equally puzzling is his explanation of why exactly he left his royal duties in the UK: “It was never walking away. It was stepping back, rather than stepping down.”

Harry has acknowledged his problem with mental health after the death of Diana, his mother, and the difficulty of growing up in the media spotlight. It may be false psychanalysis to suggest that Harry has been looking for a substitute for his mother, but he has compared his own problem with the fate of Diana going through a similar process all those years ago. Indeed, the Winfrey interview can be seen as akin to the famous, or infamous, bombshell program on November 20, 1995 when a journalist Martin Bashir interviewed the emotionally fragile Diana. She spoke of her problems, eating disorders, media attention that led to a lot of jealousy and complicated situations, but above all of the hostility of the Palace toward her, and the unhappiness of her marriage. Her frank words, “There were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded,” led to Queen Elizabeth insisting on divorce.

Will the Winfrey interview be as potent as that of Diana’s? For some, the story of Megan, Duchess of Sussex, is comparable to that of Diana, who was stripped of the Her Royal Highness title after the divorce in 1996, as has Meghan who has also lost the two royal patronages she had been given, though she is still a Duchess. Megan has accused the Royal Family of perpetrating falsehoods about Sussex. In addition, she held that the major newspaper *The Times* was being used by Buckingham Palace to peddle a wholly false narrative based on misleading and harmful misinformation. This being the case, “I don’t know how people would expect we would still just be silent if there is an active role that the Firm is playing in perpetrating falsehoods about us.”

Two comments are pertinent. Whatever else might be said of her

no one can fault her of previous “silence” or believe she has been censored. On the contrary, she has been articulate in expressing her views and has mastered the art of backing into the limelight. The other remark is that Megan used the term the Firm in speaking of the Royal Family. This term was coined by Prince Philip, in jocular fashion, on his marriage to Elizabeth. But since then, it has had negative Mafia-like connotations. It is unclear at the moment whether Meghan’s use of the term refers to the monarchy, Buckingham Palace, and what she calls the men and women in “gray suits,” or to particular individuals.

The Sussex duo face two problems; counter-allegations of improper behavior and false assertions; and criticism of her lavish life style since marriage which includes wearing at a dinner in Fiji diamond earrings which were a wedding gift from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, MBS.

The criticism of behavior is largely based on an email written in October 2018 by Jason Knauf, then communications secretary to Sussex and now chief executive of the Royal Foundation, a charitable group, to Simon Case, then private secretary to Prince William, and now head of the British civil service. Knauf wrote, “I am very concerned that the Duchess was able to bully two PAs out of the household in the past year. The treatment of X (name redacted) was totally unacceptable.”

No investigation took place at that time, and Harry was pleased that Knauf was not pursuing the matter. But the situation changed as Knauf, like others, have become aware that Sussex have accused almost everyone with whom they have come in contact of leaking false stories of them, and were bullying their staff. Knauf, an American from Texas who had worked as a crisis management expert for the Royal Bank of Scotland, commented that the Duchess seemed intent “on always having someone in her sights.” Simon Case at 41 is the youngest head of the civil service. He left the intrigues of

Palace politics for the quiet bliss of Cabinet discussions. The Knauf memo was leaked to *The Times* which published an article with the gist of the allegations by Knauf.

The Duchess retorted to the bombshell email by calling it “a calculated smear campaign based on misleading and harmful information.” But the Palace was now aware of the email and was very concerned about the allegations and said it would look into the matter, and would invite those who left the Sussex household to participate. The Royal Family has a Dignity of Work policy and does not and will not tolerate bullying or harassment in the workplace.

The allegations that Sussex have bullied their staff and inflicted emotional cruelty on their aides now require examination. The charge is that it is the former staff not Sussex who are the victims, and at least ten of them are preparing to testify. Those former aides are members of the Sussex Survivors Club, all of whom worked for Sussex, and claim to have suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. A number of women have been mentioned: they include Sara Latham, who formerly worked for Presidents Clinton and Obama before Sussex, and now advises the Queen on projects; Samantha Cohen, Australian, private secretary to Sussex; Samantha Carruthers who had previously worked for De Beers and Lazard bank, and now works for Elizabeth Murdoch, the media executive, and Melissa Touabti, French woman who had once worked for Madonna, was a personal assistant and had played an important role in the Sussex wedding in May 2018 but quit after six months.

The question is open. Did the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, who are not likely to return to UK as working royals, bully their staff?