

The British Royal Farce

by Michael Curtis



Where are the clowns? Send in the clowns. Don't bother they're here.

For some years Britain has been struggling with the still unresolved issue of Brexit. Now the country is disturbed and confused by the problem of *Megxit*. A dramatic illustration of this is that the wax figures of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, were immediately removed from their place in the royal set at Madame Tussauds museum in London after their startling and surprising announcement on January 8, 2020. The announcement is written in English but its import with its enigmatic nature is not immediately obvious. The decision of the important tourist museum, however, sharply depicted the reality, the fall from grace and the decline of popularity of the royal couple.

Anyone who has watched the various episodes of the British TV series, *The Crown*, must appreciate that the members of the British Royal Family, the Firm, have what can be considered a

trade off, privileges and a high life style, if not one of riches, in return for performance of national duties. On constant display, it is not an easy life for members of the Firm who need a thick skin, as well as an ability to give an elegant wave in public. The Crown is aware of the formality of their behavior, the sense of duty, the limits on personal action, the scrutiny and expectations of royals by the press and the public. Those who act improperly in their private life, such as the Earl and Countess of Wessex, Prince Michael of Kent, the Duchess of York, are cast into the wilderness.

The Sussex announcement of January 8 reflects the dilemma experienced by the Royal Family, adherence to duty and established rules, and desire for personal expression and independence.

The announcement by Prince Harry, 35 years old and sixth in line to the throne, and the 38 year old Duchess, Meghan Markle, stated that they intended to step back as senior members of the royal family and work to become financially independent, while continuing to fully support Her Majesty the Queen. The couple proposes to balance their time between the UK and North America, and to continue to honor their duty to the Queen, the Commonwealth, and their patronages. This would enable their family, the double pair and their infant son, Archie, to focus "on the next chapter, including the launch of our new charitable entity." The terse reply from stunned blindsided personnel at Buckingham Palace was that these are complicated issues and that will take time to work through.

The issue raises problems for the Royal Family, already troubled by the failings of Andrew, Duke of York, the former associate of Jeffrey Epstein and involved in the sex-trafficking scandal. He will step down from public duties for the foreseeable future, and will lose his income from the Sovereign Grant, though he will keep his grace and favor home in Windsor. In addition, a number of public companies have severed ties with charities and organizations linked to

Andrew.

Problems in the Royal Family have become familiar. The tension and rivalry between Queen Elizabeth and her younger sister Margaret is legendary. Over 28 years ago Princess Diana separated from her husband Charles, and said she would be an independent member of the royal family. She also became a global star. Most important was the crisis, a real constitutional crisis, caused in December 1936 by King Edward VIII's insistence to marry Wallis Simpson, a divorced American socialite, despite the opposition of the UK and Commonwealth governments to her becoming queen. Edward's obdurate attitude led to his abdication, the only voluntary abdication in British history. At present, Meghan, another divorced American, a modern diva and strong woman, who is regarded by some critics as a manipulative social climber, has stated she wants "her own agenda," whatever that means.

Megxit is a problem, a drama, for the royal family but it is not a constitutional crisis for the monarchy. It is a drama of friction between two brothers and their wives for reasons not made public, but probably over differences over the haste of Harry's marriage to Meghan. Harry has said, without explanation, he was on a completely different path from his brother William, which was physically manifested by the separation of the brothers from Kensington Palace. The path is also shown in other ways: Harry's sense of entitlement, by plea of victim status while enjoying privileges, his hypocrisy in pontificating about climate change while travelling by private jet planes that emit vast amounts of CO₂, by expressions of self-pity by both he and Meghan. Unlike the usual style of the royal family, Harry and Meghan have been petulant and notable for putting on the glitz.

The winter of discontent with the Sussex pair has lasted for about a year and continues. It is worth examining the life style of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex now that will be a "minor royal." They have received funding for a variety of

activities: wedding, home, office, staff, tours, and gifts of money. Father Prince Charles pays for almost all their office expenditure. Harry had inherited 20 million pounds from mother Diana, and 7 million from the Queen Mother, his great grandmother. Meghan had previously earned an estimated \$350,000 from her theater work, \$37,000 for each episode of the show *Suits*. Their wedding, costing \$3 million, was a lavish affair, to which celebrities, the George Cloonies, David Beckhams, and Oprah Winfrey were invited and at which Elton John performed at a lunch time reception. Meghan's wardrobe in 2018 is said to have cost about 500,000 pounds, her baby shower in New York cost \$500,000. They spent \$3 million renovating their home Frogmore Cottage in Windsor, a gift to them by Queen Elizabeth.

It has been clear for sometime that the behavior and exploits of Prince Harry have been less than perfect. Those exploits, including drunken escapades, wearing a Nazi uniform at a party, playing strip billiards in Las Vegas, his lavish, happy go lucky life style, were highly publicized. This, and other incidents, led Harry to attack the press over the public scrutiny he and his wife were getting. He has often highlighted the fact that the death of his mother Princess Diana had affected him. In response to the press coverage of their activities he said, "I will not be bullied into playing a game that killed my mum." Diana had in fact died with her lover Dodi Fayed on August 31, 1997 in a car crash in Paris when pursued by paparazzi.

No doubt Harry was affected by the loss of his mother when he was only 12, but many youngsters have suffered the early death of a parent without dwelling on self-pity. It is almost as if there were a double tendency: imaginary conspiracies against him, and determination, sincere or otherwise, to use Diana as a prop. Harry began legal action in 2019 against the British *Daily Mail* for what he called its ruthless campaign, its breach of privacy, infringement of copyright, and false

and deliberate derogatory stories, about their private lives. Paradoxically, this onslaught on the press appeared at the same time as the couple got very favorable coverage of Meghan's South African tour.

Nevertheless, Harry's internal drama persisted: "My deepest fear is history repeating itself...I've seen what happens when someone I love is commoditized (sic) to the point that they are no longer treated or seen as a real person. I will not be bullied into playing a game that killed my mum." It is not unfair to suggest that both Diana and Meghan share a facility for backing into the limelight and taking front stage. It is relevant that Diana herself is reputed to have said, "William is deep like his father. Harry is an airhead like me."

The couple have chosen to make to make a new role for themselves. The Initial problem is that of financial independence and practical issues. A few questions. Will the couple still get some form of allowance from the Sovereign Grant? Will they be able to live in Frogmore Cottage, free, as their English home? Who will pay for their security, travel, staff, child care? Will they retain police protection by the Metropolitan Police wherever they go? Will Meghan return to her acting career, in Canada or Hollywood?

Above all, what does it mean to balance their time between the UK and North America, and to "continue to honor our duty to the Queen, the commonwealth, and our patronages?" What does a limited number of royal duties mean? Who will pay for their private secretaries, personal assistant, nanny, and housekeeper.

More recently they have engaged in business, and in March 2019 formed Sussex Royal, an Instagram account. They began trademarking their royal brand, a copyright stamp, on more than 100 items, t-shirts, books, clothing, merchandise, and employed a PR firm, Sunshine Sachs, which once represented Harvey Weinstein.

While discussions are continuing in Buckingham Palace to find a solution to the drama, the central figure, Meghan, without Harry, quietly left the country on January 9 for Vancouver Island where her son Archie has been left with his nanny at a secluded luxury home.

This does not bode well. One can conclude that unless some acceptable compromise is worked out, the Sussex couple should be deprived of their royal titles, they should not be given public funds, they should repay the public money, estimated at 2.4 million pounds, spent on renovating Frogmore Cottage. They should not be given publicly funded police protection. In fact, they should be treated as "real persons" which Harry wants.