

## **Johann Hari - Charles as President? Not in my name**

*Even if the heir to the throne was a genius, I'd still oppose his right to unelected leadership*

***The Independent - Thursday 20 November 2008***

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-charles-as-president-not-in-my-name-1026170.html>

So the British people are going to get a President after all. He will "speak for the nation and to the nation". He will rule over us with his "knowledge and contacts and unique ability." How do we know? Because Charles Windsor has just announced – via his biographer, Jonathan Dimbleby – that he is seizing the role for himself, without an election. Explicitly citing the Presidencies of Ireland and Germany, Dimbleby says Charles intends to be a "political" King. It will be "a seismic shift in the role of the sovereign," he says, with "the potential to be politically and constitutionally explosive."

Sing it, sister. This is the best news we Republicans have had for years – and finally throws up a vision of how the rusty British monarchy will fall.

Charles says the "responsibility and authority of his position" – and the "wisdom" it entails – requires him to "speak out" and "pressure" our elected representatives. A bevy of fawning pundits have responded by crying – yes! Speak for us, oh sovereign! We commoners cannot produce one as wise as you! So I have to start with a point so obvious that it seems odd even to state it in 2008.

Charles's position stems from one thing and one thing only: he emerged from Elizabeth Windsor's womb 60 years ago. That's it. He has no "responsibility." He has no legitimate "authority." He has no more right to "speak for the nation and to the nation" – and pocket £7m a year for the bother – than you, me, or the next person you see at the bus stop.

If not for that fortuitous journey through a royal womb, Charles Windsor's "wise" arguments would be gathering dust in the reject bin at certain newspapers' letters pages. If his advocates didn't keep praising him as "a public intellectual" I wouldn't be rude enough to point it out, but Charles Windsor is a strikingly stupid man. Every time he has been put into a competitive situation where he is judged according to objective criteria, he has been a disaster.

Despite the most expensive education money can buy, he managed only to scrape a B and a C in his A-Levels. Despite this, he was admitted to Cambridge University, where he failed again, barely scraping a 2:2. When he was ushered into the Navy, he was so inept at navigation he kept crashing. Anybody else would have been court-martialled, but instead the Navy gave him one-on-one tuition for years. And still he failed.

And what of his arguments? They are garbled, uninformed, cliché-ridden repetitions of what the last person who spoke to him said. His very sympathetic biographer Dimbleby admits that his staff "were uncomfortable with his tendency to reach instant conclusions on the basis of insufficient thought". Edward Adeane, Charles' private secretary for many years, was disturbed by the fact that "Charles was extraordinarily easy to lead by the nose".

What do these "interventions" really consist of? Charles Windsor scorns modern science, attacking it for its "lack of soul" and for "playing God". So he uses his position to attack

qualified life-saving professionals who earned their position, like the General Medical Council – and says he knows better.

He demands that the NHS pay for "spiritual, alternative medicine", and has been a key player in ensuring the NHS now spends £200m a year on it. But as Professor Richard Dawkins explains, there is no such thing as "alternative" medicine. If a treatment works in clinical trials, it ceases to be "alternative": it is classified as medicine and prescribed by doctors. So "alternative medicine" is – by definition – medicine that doesn't work in clinical trials. It is not medicine at all.

Charles's other arguments have just as much merit. Even on the (rare) occasions when he is right, Charles wrecks it with rancid hypocrisy. His claims to be opposed to global warming would be more persuasive if he were not one of the worst personal polluters in Britain, using a private jet for the most trivial of trips. His claims to be concerned for the poor would be more persuasive if he did not claim more than £300m of public land that should be used to pay for schools and hospitals to fund his own shocking decadence.

But even if Charles Windsor was a genius who represented a political agenda I totally agreed with, I would still oppose his "right" to be an unelected Head of State. In a democracy, power should stem from voting lines, not blood-lines. Yet Charles has shown a willingness to use his unearned position to bully elected representatives for decades now. One former minister, Peter Morrison, has recounted how Charles called him into Kensington Palace and screamed and shouted and banged his fist on the table when Morrison wouldn't accept his arguments about the national curriculum.

It's easy to assume that as monarch Charles would have no powers – but it's untrue. The monarch gets an hour of face-time with the Prime Minister every week, has access to all government papers, and – in a tie-break election – gets to pick the Prime Minister. This isn't a fantasy-scenario: it happened as recently as 1974, and it will happen again.

To be fair, we should blame ourselves as much as Charles. Monarchy inevitably warps the personality of the people at its heart, because from childhood they hear nothing but sycophancy. One of Charles' ex-girlfriends said: "He lives in an isolation ward of flattery. He goes to Hollywood and is told he's handsome. He swaps jokes with a comic genius like Peter Sellers, and they fall down laughing. He boffs a woman once, and she tells him he's the greatest lover she's ever had." It is this system that made this dim-witted mediocrity believe he has a womb-given right to be our President. We made it. We created the monster.

So what happens when this man accedes to the throne and pretends to be our President? In Spain, Sophia Frederica, the "Queen", has begun to speak out – and support for the monarchy has withered.

So let Charles speak. Let him grab the reins of power. Let him spew his ignorant babble from his many golden palaces. Charles Windsor will – in an unprecedented moment of efficiency – lead us at last into the Republic of Great Britain.