



## Life and death in Ruritania

**LAST WEEK** we learned that the seventeen-month-old boy known as *Baby P* had been slaughtered because of the negligence of the London Borough of Haringey's lawyers and social workers. Their reluctance to take the child *into care* was being blamed for the toddler's death. This was the response by all and sundry – ministers, charities and the national press. It nicely drew attention away from reflection upon the trio of degenerates, the child's mother, her boyfriend and his mate who, through a combination of beatings and neglect, killed *Baby P*. Surely the nature of these people and their lives should tell us much more about why the child died than the failure of child protection procedures in Haringey? Why not dwell for some time upon the poverty of aspiration, the squalor, the neglect, and fecklessness *that produced the actual killers*? But this is probably too much to ask from a public opinion organized around the search for *procedural culprits* and *bureaucratic solutions*, a public opinion with which the television and the press colludes and conspires rather than challenges and debates.

This shiftless idleness – the sheer irresponsibility of the mass media in Britain contributes to a deep-seated inability to discuss critically our social problems, the nature of our institutions or our political life. It probably also explains why the birthday celebrations of the United Kingdom's *Crown Prince*

took place last week without criticism or debate; our journalists, columnists, politicians, and other public figures felt unable to criticise the Prince, his hereditary role, or his interventions into public life.

Charles Phillip Arthur George, Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron Renfrew, Earl of Chester, Lord of the Isles, Prince and Great Steward of Scotland, commonly known as the Prince of Wales reached his sixtieth birthday on November 14<sup>th</sup>. It was an occasion for much feasting and self-congratulation by the Royal Family who continue to enjoy the support of eighty per cent of the British people who think the Queen and her immediate family, *are a thoroughly good thing*.

This is of a piece with our critical superiority towards those unfortunate enough to be foreigners; particularly those terrible Americans with their Red States strewn with Baptists and down-home ignoramuses who know nothing of the world, culture, or democracy. Here we are *Athens* to their *Rome*, saturated with old world charm and wisdom, with our National Health Service which, despite being the envy of the world, not a single country on the planet has bothered to emulate. However, despite this international failure of imagination we continue to be the envy of the world with our failing inner-city schools, lousy public transport and filthy streets, our parliament half appointed by birth or patronage – stuffed with Bishops and the friends and relations of the kings, queens and prime ministers of yesteryear. The mass media, leading sportsmen, famous actors, popular singers, musicians and successful comedians, all collude with these widespread conceits, only too pleased to curry favour with both the public and the Palace.

Not for us, those demeaning senate races and tiresome presidential elections (where even a Roman Catholic or a black man with a Muslim name might win), we are glad to be subjects of Her Britannic Majesty, Elizabeth Windsor and her brood. Glad to live in a country where the population is entirely ignorant of how it is that most of our judges continue to come

from a privately educated elite – the old boys of Eton and Harrow, Shrewsbury, Westminster and St Pauls, which in our wacky *old-world manner* we like to call *public* schools. These wealthy white men, for they are, usually, wealthy white men, are appointed by the Queen on the advice of Lord Chancellor who gets a list of suitable legal-eagles from the “independent” *Judicial Appointments Commission* which is appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Lord Chancellor. If you think that this is a bewildering and somewhat circular procedure it just shows how dumb you really are because, of course, all reforms must chase after the *separation of powers* knowing that the prize will always be denied by the Royal Prerogative.

We arrived at this *radically modernised and reformed system* a couple of years ago after 900 years, much heart-searching, and grave deliberation. This is because our politicians love to hide behind the monarchy; they would rather tie themselves in knots attempting to democratise the *appearance* of our monarchical state than . . . even for one moment . . . contemplate a parliamentary republic where the executive would be open to scrutiny and thoroughly accountable to the electorate.

So we are stuck with Crown Prince Charles, an authority on gardening, architecture, organic farming, factory farming, nano-technology, the genetic modification of crops, saving the rain forests, helping the less fortunate members of our society, and the ecumenical defence of “Faith”, which appears to be something to do with *simultaneously* defending radically contradictory conceptions of God, Gods and miscellaneous forms of transcendentalism. With six O-Levels, two A-Levels, and his Second-Class degree in history, Charles has indeed become something of a *Renaissance Man*. He seems to know as much as Fidel Castro or the Dear Leader Kim Jong-il. Though mercifully he makes much shorter speeches and has very much less power.

He does, however, have a penchant for uniforms, medals and decorations conferred upon him by his

mother, Queen Elizabeth II. This thoroughly modern man decided to issue a state portrait of himself on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday sitting in a throne adorned with gilded lions in the scarlet and gold ceremonial uniform of the Welsh Guards of which he is the Colonel, answerable only to the Colonel-in-Chief who is, of course, his mother. He is close to his mother; he lives a few doors down The Mall from Buckingham Palace at Clarence House, the palace that fell vacant on the death of his grandmother, the last Empress of India. He does have other palaces, notably Highgrove in Gloucestershire and Birkhall in Scotland. He also has privileged access to the Castle of Mey in Caithness, Holyroodhouse, and Sandringham, so it is fortunate that he is a keen gardener.

Last week I discovered that he doesn't like most of his job. I was surprised because I wasn't aware that he had a job. But apparently he thinks he has, it is collecting rents, "convening power" – which means having meetings with worthies who agree with his expert opinions on a host of different subjects, opening things, promoting small business and enterprise, and contributing to something called "continuity" which he thinks is so "terribly, terribly important". This is because although Castro will die and Kim Jong-il's regime will collapse, Charles' role as the august and mystical camouflage for the patronage and arbitrary powers of British prime ministers will go on and on.