

Lorne Gunter: It's time for Canada to break ties with the British



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Phil Noble/Reuters

Prince Charles hasn't met a lefty cause he didn't like.

Max Hastings, the noted British journalist and popular historian, is lucky he doesn't live in Elizabethan times. If he did, he might suffer the fate of John Stubbs, a pamphleteer who opposed Elizabeth I's marriage to a French noble. Stubbs was found guilty of "seditious writing" for describing the potential coupling as an "immoral union." As punishment, he had his right hand placed on an anvil and chopped off at the wrist with a chisel and a mallet.

Had he lived in such times, Hastings might have ended up with his typing fingers severed at the top knuckles. In the Monday edition of Britain's *Daily Mail*, [Hastings wrote](#) that Prince Charles is "not a bad man," but "a very dangerous one for the monarchy, if allowed to ascend the throne."

Hastings argued that the true brilliance of Charles's mother, Elizabeth II, has been her public silence on issues of the day. We "have been denied the slightest clue as to what she thinks about anything but dogs and horses. Her passivity has been inspired ... She has never said a word to raise a hackle."

Charles, on the other hand, "insists upon addressing a range of issues wider and deeper than any mortal man — unless he has a mind of genius, as the Prince certainly does not — can sensibly encompass." If he is to preserve respect for the monarchy, the Prince must be prepared suddenly to clam up on these subjects once he is crowned king. But Charles's close friends explain (according to Hastings) that he has convinced himself Britain "is ready for a visionary monarchy." If anything, he plans to speak out even more once he is king.

Hastings has engaged in all this frank criticism because he wants the British throne to survive and thrive; he sees Charles as a wrecking ball, damaging the House of Windsor

irreparably should he be intent on “using the position [of king] to promote his dotty causes.”

I repeat Hastings’ criticisms here because I am a republican and I think the ascension to the throne of such a potty, lefty activist offers an excellent excuse for Canada to break ties with the British monarchy.

Oh, I know, it is Canada’s monarchy, too. But it is seen by Canadians — and rightly so — as increasingly irrelevant. Charles, as king, would only accelerate the drift apart.

The value of a constitutional monarchy is in the institution, not the individual. As Hastings correctly points out, monarchs are valuable for who they are, not what they do.

The institution of the monarchy has the power to connect us to our past and our traditions, while also giving us a unifying symbol in the present that is above the daily political fray. If the monarch suddenly starts taking strong positions on contentious issues, then he becomes just another divisive political actor. Indeed, a “visionary monarch” might be even more divisive than an ordinary partisan politician because he would be operating from a position without any democratic mandate or legitimacy — and there would be no way to unseat him.

Charles has shown himself, again and again, to be a New Age flake. He has railed against industrialization and modern architecture, romanticized the spirituality and Earth-wisdom of aboriginal peoples, advocated coffee bean enemas and carrot juice cocktails for battling cancer, brow-beaten the British government into funding holistic medical treatments at the expense of scientific medicine, spoken of religious and social multiculturalism with a dewy-eyed naiveté and parroted nearly every fashionable environmental cause that has come along.

A king or queen has to be someone the people — right, left or indifferent — can turn to when they tire of squabbles over such matters. If Charles insists on becoming yet another lightning rod on these issues, the people will quickly lose interest and turn away.

Before that day arrives, it would be smart of us to debate a made-in-Canada alternative.

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