

Harry and Meghan “Exit”: The Royal Family Propaganda Machine

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Royal gossip is worth its weight in gold on the British media circuit. Buckingham Palace knows that, and seeks to control, as much as it can, the way that gold is distributed.

The recent fuss over the premature retirement, or redirection, of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex Prince Harry and Meghan Markle has stirred the hornet’s nest amongst self-harming Royal watchers. Sky News [suggested](#) with profound exaggeration that the announcement that the couple would move to Canada “shocked the UK and the world.” Disgraceful and unacceptable, went such papers as *The Sun*. The *Evening Standard* ran with the headline, “Harry arrives to face the royal music”, going on to say that he was facing “showdown talks with the Queen, his father Prince Charles and his brother Prince William over his plans to stand down as a senior royal.”

Harry had effectively resigned from public duties, [intent on becoming](#) “financially independent” (such terms are obscene in Palace land) and spending more time in North America. “We intend 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 intention of spending time between the UK and North America will enable the couple to raise their son “with an appreciation for the royal tradition into which he was born, while also providing our family with the space to focus on the next chapter, including the launch of our new charitable entity.”

Something of a war has broken out between the couple and the press, leading to an information tussle. The couple have adopted [a new communications strategy](#) that involves providing “access to credible media outlets focused on objective news reporting to cover key moments and events.” On the legal front, the duchess has initiated proceedings against the *Daily Mail* for breach of privacy; the duke sued two papers in October claiming phone hacking. The National Union of Journalists has [expressed concern](#) that the couple’s removal from the “royal rota” of coverage will lead to greater control exercised over coverage of their affairs.

The palace machine has been [icy in response](#) to the decision to withdraw, taking a harsh lecturing tone to the couple. Discussions were, went a statement from the Palace, “at an early stage”. “We understand their desire to take a different approach, but these are complicated issues that will take time to work through.”

The palace stooges are out aplenty, helped along by the *Daily Mail*’s enthusiastic antipathy against the duchess, never seen as a worthy fit. The treatment afforded Markle has been

[strikingly different](#) to that of Kate Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge, who is, in the true royal tradition, a functionary and incubator for heirs. An apt [illustration of this](#) can be gathered from the *Mail*'s respective descriptions of the pregnancies of both Middleton and Markle, the former "tenderly" cradling "her bump while wrapping up her royal duties ahead of maternity leave", the latter incapable of keeping "her hands off her bump". Was it "pride, vanity, acting – or a new age bonding technique?"

Middleton does not question; she adjusts, amends her positions, adapts her being. When novelist Hilary Mantel [made the astute observation](#) that Middleton was really a "show-window mannequin" of machine like quality, "without the risk of the emergence of character", [shrieks and howls followed](#). This ignored the obvious point that higher aristocracy have always been pieces of strategy and durability rather than people, always the behest of a higher command and duty to procreate. Real estate, babies and legacies – that's the show.

Markle is no such product. Her US birth, with an African-American mother, and her self-made standing as an actor (leaving aside the quality of that acting), were already awkward jabs at the pattern of royal propriety. Last June, the sense of independence (the British press prefer the term "divergence") became evident when the couple decided to go into the charitable pursuit separate from the royal family. This has led to Markle being subject to what royal historian Marlene Koenig [claims](#) is "a pile-on".

Markle has been attacked for her luxuriant baby shower last February, dubbed Showergate, [accused](#) by Prince Diana's former private secretary Patrick Jephson for being indiscreet and vulgar. Despite dealing with it with her own funds, "Favours must be returned, obligations quickly multiply and pretty soon royal free-riders are handing over their most precious assets: credibility and dignity, if not, please God, their lives."

Markle has also been said to be a handful for her staff, the Duchess Difficult of the royal set. The signs of Palace sabotage and disruption are suggested; Markle [seems to be rather well-liked](#), and depending on which royal source you tap, you are bound to find the appropriate slant.

Added to this the less than becoming aspect of the duke's brother, Prince William, and we are left with a true plate of grist. One flavoured morsel doing the rounds is the suggestion that the exit of the Sussexes has much to do with the extra-marital conduct of the Duke of Cambridge as with anything else. *The Sun*, doing its bit to go through the trash cans, [suggests](#) that William is "incandescent with rage" at the suggestion. The *Times*, not wanting to be left out in the cold, fronts its own royal source alleging that William [is prone to bullying](#) and has estranged his brother.

Enough has been [floating around](#) that Wills can barely contain himself and is keeping up the royal front of bed hopping, notably with Rose Hanbury, the Marchioness of Cholmondeley. The palace eagles are duly floating around to ensure that no press outlet will publish such speculation without threatened sanction, and royal watchers such as Phil Dampier are already [dousing the flames](#). "Whatever the truth of William's closeness to Rose, who is a mum of three, Kate has obviously decided she doesn't want any lasting bitterness or tension."

For republicans, none of the above should matter, except that the royals remain some of the

most privileged spongers of Britain and the Commonwealth. Their extra-marital trysts are subsidised; their efforts to be celebrity puffs are also greased by the tax payer. In Canada, the security tab will be picked up by local security. Though the Sussexes have made it clear they do not intend to rely on the British public purse, the question remains unresolved. What remains striking, however, is the way the palace machinery has strutted its plumage, giving the impression that the Sussex situation was a scandal unique and deserving of attention.

In the end, it was left to the Queen to exert some authority [via a statement](#). "My family and I are entirely supportive of Harry and Meghan's desire to create a new life as a young family. Although we would have preferred them to remain full-time working Members of the Royal Family, we respect and understand their wish to live a more independent life as a family while remaining a valued part of my family." In what must count as a polished way of saying "bugger", the Queen promises "a period of transition which the Sussexes will spend time in Canada and the UK."

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Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

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