

# Golden Farce: Windsor Cuckoo Clock Ticks On

by Alan Clayton

There are few events that more starkly emphasize the disunity of the United Kingdom than royal events, such as the stage-managed international spectacular of the Queen's Golden Jubilee, commemorating 50 years on the throne.

The Scottish writer Tom Nairn, who gave the United Kingdom the derisory name of "Ukania," and who authored such powerful examinations of the Windsor state, and Windsor power and influence, as *The Enchanted Glass*, and *After Britain*, issued a public warning to republicans and nationalists to have their "crosses and silver bullets at the ready."

The tinsel, the Union flags, the mugshot tea and coffee mugs, and all the paraphernalia of the Windsor state have been freely distributed through schools, supermarkets, gas stations, and even at church services, at enormous public expense. It has all been to little or no avail in Scotland, where the two weeks of celebrations started.

At the opening service for the Queen's Scottish visit, for example, the crowd outside Glasgow Cathedral during the "Service of Thanksgiving," waiting for an awe-inspiring glimpse at Britannia's Holy Family, consisted not of 25,000, 2,500 or even 250, but the daunting number of 25, and even that consisting substantially of kids whom some local wag had convinced that Her Majesty was going to throw gold coins into the crowd when departing the Service. There were slightly more people in Glasgow's George Square later in the day, perhaps about 2,500, but that must be held in contrast to the 250,000 who came out in Glasgow when the same Elizabeth visited the city after her coronation in 1953.

On the very day of the "million subject march" in London, while the Concorde and the Red Arrows flew overhead and the whole publicly financed spectacular was under way, there were riots, shootings, and deaths in that other restless part part of Ukania, Northern Ireland. This was well air-brushed off the front pages, lest anyone—particularly the Americans, who obligingly lit up the Empire State Building, to the chagrin, it must be said, of republicans on Manhattan Island—for one moment were to imagine the all the Queen's horses and all the Queen's men could not put Ukania together again.

It was all very different 50 years ago, when the young Elizabeth, on "holiday" (how that word, so unfamiliar to Americans, hangs in total comfort with "Windsor," since much of their life is a permanent vacation) in South Africa, was informed of the death of her father. One of her close friends gave her an embrace of sympathy; then as if to empha-



*Fifty years of a mad Queen in Cloud-Cuckoo Land is about enough for some people—especially in Scotland.*

size the absurd feudal pantomime of royalty, knelt down before her and kissed her hand, as she was now Queen.

She came to the throne amidst medieval pageantry in a Britain utterly exhausted by war, and before a population demoralised by its aftermath, particularly continuing food rationing. Her reign was said to be the "new Elizabethan age"—a reference to the first Elizabeth of England, Elizabeth Tudor. However, it was there already that the internal tensions which will in the end destroy Ukania quickly emerged, for her crowning as "Elizabeth II" enraged many Scots: There had never been a monarch of that name since the Union of the English and Scottish Crowns in 1603.

## What the Royals Know How To Do

So, what was it all about? Even living in Scotland it was hard to escape the Golden Jubilee extravaganza. There were Prince Charles and Andrew, winking at each other laddishly at the bare flesh and erotic imagery of the carnival that took over the Mall. There was David Dimbleby doing a passable imitation of the Duke of Edinburgh at his most blimpish: "I say, what a sight. . . . What are those chaps there doing? They seem to be wearing onions on their heads" Onions! They were minarets. The dress was meant to symbolise Britain's Islamic community.

It has to be said that the Royals do this kind of thing very well, or at least, the palace impresarios do. This theme of the multi-ethnic British family was a powerful one, even though it is hard to imagine the royal family ever becoming a part of it. Could a Royal marry a black or Asian? The case of Lady Diana springs to mind in answer to that one. This is the same family, after all, which once held one-quarter of the world, and Africa and India especially, under military subjugation. Yet here, only a century after the death of Queen Victoria, Empress of India, were the Royals being entertained by a

carnival which in so many words said: "Look, this is our country now. We have taken over your old white Britain and turned it into a gorgeous festival of colour and race."

They nearly lost it in another sense entirely after the death of Diana in the "accident" in Paris in 1997. The Queen's refusal to accord Diana, Princess of Wales, full royal dignity in her lying in state, plus the funeral diatribe of Diana's brother, nearly unleashed a latent republicanism among Eastenders' Britain. If this was supposed to be the ideal family, embodying the norms and values of the nation, then we didn't want it. The royal family seemed like dessicated protocol junkies, tight-lipped and tight-assed, who couldn't loosen up to express their grief. They survived all that, of course, thanks in no small part to Tony Blair, and the Labour spin machine, which was put at the Royals' disposal.

The Jubilee has bought a little time for the House of Windsor, yet despite the mammoth pantomime, the fault lines in the royal family are bigger than ever. The former Tory Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, who got to know the Queen very well when he was a cabinet minister, has commented that Elizabeth's "constitutional machinery" is in tip-top shape, but her "emotional machinery" is almost entirely out of order. The monarchy, not some inbuilt defect, had made her this way.

Lord Charteris, Elizabeth's former private secretary (a man who spent every working day with her for over a decade), said that the key to the Queen's character is that she is "afraid of her emotions." This, he confirms, is a product of her job. One of her most senior ladies-in-waiting told *Daily Telegraph* journalist Graham Turner that "the Queen does not like emotion, and for very good reasons." She went on to explain that, if you showed your emotions, this might spill over into your constitutional role. So, as Hurd, who accompanied Elizabeth on many state visits, explains: "She has almost trained feelings out of herself."

We can reasonably conclude that this is an inhuman and cruel job that should go the way of child chimney-sweeps. It should be abolished to preserve the mental health of those involved.

The institution of monarchy directly turned Elizabeth into a bad mother. As Anthony Jay, who scripted the documentary "Elizabeth R," explains: "She's one of those people who is deeply unemotional. . . . For people who are emotionally detached in that way, institutions become more important than families. The Queen's children were handed over to nannies, and a kind of emotional cauterisation took place. Something was sealed off very early. For her, that is a strength. If she were emotionally involved, she couldn't do her job."

Some would argue that her job is some compensation. While it is true that she enjoys considerable and real powers, former leader of the Labour Party Neil Kinnock, who as leader of the opposition for over a decade saw Elizabeth's work at close hand, gives a sense of how mind-numbingly boring this work is. He observed that "the great skill the Queen has acquired over the years is to use the word 'fascinating' in

about five different tones. What she's developed over the years is the technique of giving evidence of really rapt interest and attention, whilst at the same time being able to slip her mind into neutral."

It is a miserable existence. Too emotionally crippled to form relationships with her own children, too infused with the arid notion of "duty" to question a marriage that is widely believed to be unsatisfactory, too numbed with boredom to rebel. Looking at Elizabeth Windsor during her Golden Jubilee celebrations, one feels neither pride, nor even red-blooded republican hatred, but pity.

## The World Goes On

The Ukanian Cloud-Cuckoo Land got through the week wondering if the Wizard of Oz or some such creature would take away the world which threatened its fairyland. However little can take away from the fact that there is an international crisis, a mobilisation of armies, a deployment of nuclear weapons, a testing of missiles. Please remain calm, however, a British foreign secretary will be along in a minute. Like Robin Cook before him, Jack Straw traverses the globe, begging for peace and goodwill between men. Tony Blair demands that India and Pakistan "pause and reflect." One marvels at the politeness with which this is received, and wonders what reception would be given to an Indian minister who jetted into London and Dublin to "assist" with Ulster, or to a Pakistani minister who told Mr. Blair to "pause and reflect" before bombing Belgrade. The Ukanian Cloud-Cuckoo Land and its mad Queen sometimes seem too unreal to be even vaguely true.

If British ministers fancy themselves as peacemakers, they should start in London, not in Delhi or Islamabad. In 2000 alone, they approved nearly 700 export licenses to India and Pakistan, worth £64 million. For several months, they have been hustling to complete a deal to sell 66 Hawk fighter-bombers to India at a cost of £1 billion. Reports that, in view of the present crisis, the deal had been stopped, proved to be premature.

We are told that if we do not sell arms, other people will do so—an argument that, if taken to its logical conclusion, would lead ministers to sell their children into prostitution. Britain, after the United States, is the world's second-largest arms supplier, and its customers include Sierra Leone, Indonesia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Turkey, China, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and that well-known member of the axis of evil, Iran. There can be no guarantee that weapons sold elsewhere do not eventually find their way to Iraq. Nor can there be any guarantee that even the defensive arms we sell do not, in the weasel words of the EU code of conduct, "provoke or prolong armed conflict."

The ugly reality of the British state continues beneath the thin façade of monarchy. Indeed, it is the Windsor monarchy that is its essence. Despite the Golden Jubilee, the cuckoo clock ticks faster than ever for the House of Windsor.