

## Defund the Monarchy

The UK can be said to have a Constitution only in the broad sense of a system of laws, customs and conventions which define the form of the state. This constitution is opaque, anachronistic, and while it contains normative principles like Parliamentary Sovereignty, the monarchy still has undue influence on the running of the state.

This power exerted by the monarchy over parliament can best be seen in their rising cost to the public, and it is this cost which should be highlighted at a time when public sector workers, especially in the NHS are being offered insultingly low wages and thousands are losing their jobs.

What is called 'The Crown' is effectively the British state. Wikipedia's article on the [Constitution of the United Kingdom](#) says "The monarch in their public capacity, known as the Crown, embodies the State". We may not be living in the *Ancien Régime*, but nevertheless, in 21st century Britain, 'L'État, c'est moi'.

This link in Britain's unwritten constitution is the source of a number of problems. The term 'The Crown' is legally vague, as it can refer to the monarch themselves, the rule of law, or the functions of government and civil service. This opacity hides some of the monarchy's political power.

Such is the case with the Crown Estate, a body that manages Crown lands given up by George III in 1760. George didn't want to bear the costs of paying for the increasingly expensive civil government as the British Empire grew, so he gave up most of his lands in exchange for a fixed income in return, and kept the income from the Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster, which were negligible at the time.

Following the [Sovereign Grant Act](#) (2011), the annual direct subsidy paid to the monarchy a year was fixed at 15%-25% of profits from the Crown Estate lands. This currently stands at £70 million a year, while the total cost of the monarchy to the public is [estimated](#) at £345 million a year by campaign group Republic.

## The Growing Cost of the Royal Family to UK Taxpayers

Total cost of the UK's Royal Family by year (millions)\*



\* Financial year ends March 31. Converted from GBP to USD on March 09, 2021.  
Source: Royal Household



statista

<https://www.statista.com/chart/18569/total-cost-of-the-uks-royal-family-by-year/>  
title="Infographic: The Growing Cost of the Royal Family to UK Taxpayers | Statista"></a> You will find more infographics at <a  
href="https://www.statista.com/chartoftheday/">Statista</a>

As well as the direct Sovereign Grant, the public also bears the cost of security for the Royal Family (over £100 million a year), and then there are the profits from the Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster. Like the Crown Estate, these Duchies are also the property of 'the Crown'.

## THE BREAKDOWN COUNTING THE COST

	Cost £m	
Sovereign Grant	76.1	a
Annuity for Duke of Edinburgh	0.4	a
State buildings used by royal family	30.0	b
Duchy of Cornwall profits/gains – lost	25.8	c
Duchy of Lancaster profits/gains – lost	68.7	d
Royal Collection net surplus – lost	2.6	e
Cost to local councils	22.2	f
Royal Household Pension Scheme	2.3	g
Security	106.0	h
Costs met by Government Departments and the Crown Estate	3.8	i
Cost of Lord Lieutenants	2.2	j
Bona vacantia proceeds – Duchy of Cornwall	0.1	c
Bona vacantia proceeds – Duchy of Lancaster	5.0	d
Civil list pensions	0.1	k
<b>Total</b>	<b>£345.3</b>	

Republic's estimate of Royal expenses from a [2017 report](#).

This confusion between the Crown as state and Crown as monarch is at the heart of this problem. Even the Taxpayers' Alliance (TPA), that infamous Tufton Street outfit, note [on their website](#) that "The Crown Estate is not the private property of the Queen, instead it belongs to the Crown - a legal embodiment of the state and therefore entrusted and governed by Parliament."

The TPA are annoyed about the clause in the Sovereign Grant Act 2011 which links the Sovereign Grant to a percentage of surplus revenue from the Crown Estate. The grant can rise if the Estate's profits rise, but does not fall if they fall - the TPA estimate that the Crown Estate's profits took a £500 million hit as a result of the pandemic. "This is patently not acceptable at a time of national economic calamity", the TPA says.

Although the disgraced Prince Andrew is no longer receiving his £250,000 salary as a 'working royal', according to [the Express](#) he is still getting handouts from the Queen via the Duchy of Lancaster, which as I've already mentioned, is the property of the Crown, not the Queen as a private citizen. So Andrew is still receiving state funding. The monarchist Max Hastings, writing in [the Times](#) agrees that "Andrew must be permanently removed from the family's books."

It is a mark of the anachronistic and informal British constitutional arrangement that the Crown Estate has remained essentially unreformed for the past 281 years. As Graham Smith, CEO of Republic, pointed out to me, there's actually no link between the profits of the Crown Estate and the Sovereign Grant Fund. It is merely a normative principle of the unwritten constitution that the government subsidises the monarchy.

The UK's [GDP shrank](#) by 9.9% in 2020, and 700,000 people have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, with government borrowing soaring. The Chancellor has said he doesn't

want to return to austerity, but it is hard to escape the feeling that this is what will end up happening anyway.

In his recent [budget speech](#), Sunak announced no income tax rises, only an increase in corporation tax to 25% to begin in 2023. The Institute of Fiscal Studies [says that](#) Sunak plans to implement £17 billion of annual spending cuts by 2025, and that there will be further real terms cuts to justice and local government budgets in 2022-23.

If there is more austerity on the way, isn't it time that the Royal Family, who, let us not forget, are the 'embodiment of the state', lead the way in tightening their belts? In the Netherlands, the Dutch government has [agreed to review](#) the cost of their Royal Family, even though the number of Dutch royals subsidised by the state is far less than in the UK.

It's time to stop subsidising the royal family. These are not people in need of welfare, and the welfare they receive takes away from the support the state can offer to those who really need it. I recognise that the abolition of the monarchy isn't going to happen tomorrow; public support for a republic is now at 34%, according to a [Survation poll](#), so there's some way to go to convince the public that reform is necessary.

But nationalising Crown lands and removing them from any kind of monarchical ownership would be a step along the way to reforming the UK's unwritten constitution, and pave the way for abolishing the monarchy if public opinion favoured it.

Abolishing the Sovereign Grant Fund would necessitate legislation that would have to be signed by the monarch. Such a law would be a reckoning with the lobbying power of the monarchy, who are known to [privately vet many laws](#) before they go to Parliament. Such a direct challenge to the monarchy could expose the subtle, institutional power that they retain, allowing us to see how undemocratic Britain's constitution remains.

A constitutional reckoning is long overdue. The Crown Estate lands, and the Duchies, should be the property of the state, not a vague and legally opaque '[corporation sole](#)' of the reigning monarch, and their profits are desperately needed for better causes than subsidising a family that's worth [around £20 billion](#).