

This house would rather have a queen than a president - opposition

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I'd like to begin with a story from the turn of the 19th century. In those days the culture of western art music was such that aristocrats held all the power and musicians were practically skilled servants. One of the foremost patrons of the arts was the Austrian Prince Lichnowsky, who was a great admirer of the young Ludwig van Beethoven. But, despite generous funding, Beethoven couldn't deal with being wheeled out to perform for guests at the Prince's whim and their relationship completely broke down. They parted with Beethoven bellowing the words "prince, what you are you are by accident of birth. What I am, I am of myself. There are and there will be thousands of princes. There is only one Beethoven."

Therein lies the fundamental reason we should oppose all notion of monarchy on principle. Each and every one of us here today had to earn our way here. Now, I'm not saying meritocracy cannot be compromised by the differing wealths of parents and so on, but we did have to work hard. We didn't get special treatment. We didn't grow up in palaces. Each and every one of us has a unique vision for how we want to shape our careers, our university and indeed our whole community. But, the kings and queens of our world, they don't have any of that. They're just random people, given extraordinary privilege simply by birth or marriage and forced into our democracy to fulfil nothing but an antiquated and bizarre ceremonial role. It's utter madness. This is your country. It's time for you to take it back.

Now, people often endorse the status quo - and the proposition may do so too - because of uncertainty about the alternative. One of the common takeaways from the failed republican referendum in Australia in 1999, the aftermath of the Brexit referendum or even the Scottish independence referendum is that people can only make informed, sensible choices in a referendum if they have some concreteness and certainty about the consequences. So, to critically discuss this motion, we must examine the role of a president too. Often, when discussing a republic, one points to America and asks "you want us, to be more like them?" I think it's fair to say a majority of us don't want that and we definitely don't want the merry-go-round between the President and Congress that we have in America. But, there are other, better models that allow us to allocate executive power in a more sensible manner. The way I see it, the purpose of the president is to be an office vested in the bare minimum reserve powers which can be exercised in the rare times of constitutional crisis or to seek working majorities in the Commons in the event of a hung parliament. The prime minister would still run the government in the traditional Westminster cabinet style.

Abolishing the monarchy also gives the UK a rare opportunity to finally codify the vast array of conventions that I believe are too important not to be enshrined in a written constitution. Again, this gives people certainty and concreteness that they really don't have right now. Given the rather non-political nature of the role I'm proposing, I believe rather than an American style direct election, a better model is indirect election by a meeting of state and federal parliaments or parliamentary representatives. Variations of this model already exist in Germany, Italy, Israel, India and others just to name a few.

Writing a constitution is no easy task. If we embark on this process of reform, there is another serious structural issue we can fix on the way - and that's the House of Lords. The very same nonsense about tradition and nobility that preserves the existence of the royal family also leads to a corrupted notion of democracy in the House of Lords. While the royal family can be argued to not affect most people's lives in any great way, that argument cannot be extended to the House of Lords. Right now, in the House of Lords there are still 92 hereditary peers. These people need to do nothing to join a select group of 800 or so people eligible for election to these 92 seats. Furthermore, they're so representative of the population that the number with a political affiliation is fixed and all 92 are men. But the crazy, accountability-free transfer of power inherent in monarchy goes beyond that. The House of Lords also enshrines the power of the Church of England. I, for one, cannot see how a nation can have true, practical freedom of religion while one religion - or indeed just one sect in this case - is treated differently to another. Our political bodies must be secular. But really, the entire House of Lords is a sham. These people wield

serious legislative power - not as serious as upper houses in many other countries, but serious nonetheless. Yet, there are no elections, no accountability and no term limits. It is exactly this kind of structure that undermines democracy the most. To me, the biggest symbol of undemocratic rule in the world is the queen of England. It is from there, that all the other undemocratic structures I've outlined follow. So, I hope the house will agree with me in saying that we would rather not have a queen than a president. But, I'd like to finish this speech by going back to Beethoven and to the story of his Sinfonia Eroica - the heroic symphony. The symphony was originally dedicated to Napoleon, who Beethoven admired greatly. But when Beethoven discovered that Napoleon had declared himself as emperor, he went into a rage and tore the dedication page to shreds. These days, this work is no longer dedicated to Napoleon per se, but merely to the "memory of a great man." If the UK wishes to be more than just the memory of a great nation, the memory of a heroic nation, the memory of a nation that's "victorious, happy and glorious," then it could do worse than to start by opposing this motion, abolishing the monarchy and finally, becoming a republic.