The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we’ve been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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The Final Straw Radio
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currently thinking, what on earth am I going to write about Ukraine? Because that is obviously going to—it has already impacted British politics. What a devastating situation that is. I haven’t quite formulated all my thoughts yet. I try to broaden things out a little bit when I can onto other issues, too.

TFSR: Thank you so much, again, for this conversation and for the research that you put in.

JB: Thank you.
their own alternative street party because people were encouraged to have street parties across the country. Things like that are important alternatives. That was actually quite a mild event and frustratingly so. It still had the Union Flag bunting and flags out. It was basically “We’re going to do the same thing but we’re not doing it in support of the monarchy” kind of thing. I think you need to be more creative than that. But that action isn’t worthless, I think how you pitch it is important. We need to build something up, I think, and that will take time, but there will be opportunities. Absolutely. You know at some of the figures in this family, and the things that they’ve done and the things that they will do. I know that that’s going to produce opportunities. Definitely.

**TFSR:** And if power corrupts, and such absolutist power corrupts so absolutely, divest some of that power, and let them be regular folks who can’t wield quite as much power over other people.

**JB:** Is it absolute power? It is absolute comfort, isn’t it? She’s got absolute comfort. And she’s and that is perhaps something that she can feel secure in. But actually, she won’t be that comfortable forever. And whoever comes along after her, whether it’s Charles or William, they won’t feel comfortable all their lives either.

**TFSR:** Jon, thank you so much for this conversation. Are there any things that I didn’t ask about that you wanted to put in?

**JB:** No, I don’t think so. I think it’s been a really interesting discussion. I wish I could announce to the world that there was more happening to oppose this institution. But I think it’s important to have discussions like this when you want more to be happening as well. And maybe one day we can discuss it again and talk about it in a different light. That’d be great.

**TFSR:** In the past tense. Once the UK has been abolished and the US has been abolished.

So people can find your writing at jonbigger.uk. You’ve got a Twitter account. Are there any other places that people can find you? Freedom?

**JB:** Yeah. They can search for me at Freedom News, and see what I’ve written about in the past. That is primarily about British politics. But I’m

This week, you’ll hear my chat with Jon Bigger about the status of the monarchy in the UK, the power it wields, the interventions it makes into parliamentary procedure and where we might see hopes of challenging it from an anarchist approach. Jon is an anarchist who is involved with the Anarchism Research Group, writes a column on UK politics at Freedom News and has been involved in the project Class War. You can find him online at twitter and at his website, jonbigger.uk

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TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself to the audience with any name, preferred gender pronouns, affiliations and location info that could help the audience?

Jon Bigger: Sure, I am Jon Bigger, I write about anarchism and British politics for Freedom News — the world's longest-running anarchist newspaper. I think I might be the only person writing a regular column on British politics from an anarchist perspective. Not much of a boast, but that is my boast, at least. I'm part of the British anarchist group Class War. I'm also a member of the Anarchism Research Group, which is based at Loughborough University in central England, and I also live in that town. I've got a collection of my writing at the website jonbigger.uk. And I'm talking today in a personal capacity about my absolute hatred of the British monarchy.

TFSR: Thanks a lot for taking the time to do this interview. You mentioned that Freedom is the longest-running English-language anarchist publication. As well, it runs a bookstore and a publishing house. Kropotkin participated in it, among many others, Colin Ward, and tons of other amazing luminaries over the years. Could you say a few things about that?

JB: It's something that I found out about when I was a teenager, I was born in a place called Lincoln in England, and I went off to university in London, and found out that my university building was right around the corner from where the book shop's based. And at that stage, I probably thought of myself as a Marxist, I think, and I wasn't quite sure about my politics, my politics were still developing. But I used to go in there and think what it would be like to be a bit more involved and whether I could write for them and things like that. I was interested in being a writer even then. But actually, what I ended up doing, after leaving university, was becoming a civil servant and working for the British government. And my political involvement with anything obviously had to go down, I couldn't be quite so politically active. In the UK, people working for the government are supposed to be politically neutral. And so it wasn't until I got sacked from that for organizing strikes that I started to get a bit more political. That was around 2013 and shortly after that, I started thinking, maybe I could write for them. I started getting interested in that. I did a few pieces, I think, in 2014. And then this idea of a regular column came

TFSR: I'd say the Democrats are drifting around the center. And the Republicans are going WAY over here...

JB: So if we see them as being fixed, we are getting further away, but not necessarily moving to the left themselves.

TFSR: Do you have any suggestions for what might be good moves towards an anti-monarchist class-based, anti-authoritarian, anti-nationalist struggle against the Royal family? Are there any things in the past that have specifically piqued your interest towards a material struggle in that way?

JB: I certainly can't speak for anybody else. And I can't say that this action or this lack of action is happening because anybody else is at fault. We've got to take responsibility. And just as an anarchist in Britain. I'm just as responsible for the lack of activity on all of this. But I am certainly not going to go to speak for anarchists or groups in other countries. Definitely. The things that I'm attracted to are performative actions that get attention and force people to think, and sometimes that means repelling people. I don't think we should shy away from that. I think we should do elaborate, interesting performative actions that are confrontational, if necessary, mildly confrontational, I don't mind how confrontational it is, at least challenging. It should be led by action. What that action should be, I haven't got a list. But there are so many issues to do and so many failings to do with the monarchy, that you pick something and run with it. I'd encourage people to think creatively really, and that should be with everything they do. I think everything anarchists should do should be creative in some way. And it will be difficult to build up a movement, but I remain positive about this. I think that the monarchy's popularity is transitory, it's not set in stone, it is going to ebb and flow, there will be moments of extreme dislike amongst the people of the monarchy.

They're going to be really important, but it's also important to stand up and be counted at times when they are enjoying popularity. In fact, I went to a Republic event, I went to an event they organized in London on the day that William and Kate got married. They organized
people do at least have some say over it. I nearly started to debate about the Electoral College there. But I’ll stop with that.

TFSR: I don’t think there would be a debate here.

JB: People dead against it.

TFSR: No, there are a lot of people, anyone who believes that more democracy is better rather than representatives choosing representatives choosing representatives. It’s actually been a big point, it’s been brought up in the last five years, more than it has been in my lifetime, although, even around the 2000 election, I remember that being a major sticking point when Gore, (actually it was the Supreme Court that gave the presidency to Bush) but people more and more have been recognizing and talking at least in liberal and progressive media circles, and pushing towards abolition.

JB: I think some states have moved to have legislation that would abolish it if a certain number of states take on the same legislation, and therefore, you don’t need a constitutional amendment, which would obviously fail because the Constitution is incredibly hard to change, isn’t it? So it’d be interesting to see if that threshold of States is ever reached, and then people can stop worrying about what number of Electoral College votes the President is going to get. And it will just come down to the popular vote. I guess that will be progress. I hope people will like it if it happens. It won’t solve the world’s problems, will it?

TFSR: No. And maybe it doesn’t have to, but I think this last few years, it was able to be brought up along with the surge of discussion around abolition, as a holdover from slave ownership and slave owners having a certain higher percentage of votes per them. Interestingly, it was in that context, and for years, it was being pushed as being removed because it is such an impediment to even an indirect representative democracy. So maybe it takes more emotional discourse around the historical implications of that and then tying that to the taking away of the vote of populations of color and other populations that are disenfranchised in the US system. I’m not sure.

upon me. Because I thought in the past, Freedom used to comment much more on politics and the events that were going on in the country and it stopped doing that to a certain extent. I thought maybe I could offer this as an idea. If people like it, they like it, if they don’t, they don’t. That’s how I got involved, I’m really proud of it. Under its current editor, it just goes from strength to strength: it’s fact-based, it’s really good reporting and I think it’s fantastic. And the fact that it covers the fullest range of anarchism is really, really important. I think a lot of us are involved because we’re Class Struggle anarchists, but it doesn’t shy away from the idea that it should be covering anarchism in its broadest sense, which I think is fantastic.

TFSR: Yeah, that’s awesome. I do want to ask about Class War for a little bit, which you’ve done some speaking and did a recent interview on Dissident Island Radio about. But were there any specific moments or experiences that brought you from that Marxism that you were experiencing when you were in college to identifying as an anarchist?

JB: I think I slowly began to realize that. Let me go further back to why I liked Marxism to begin with. I was studying sociology, and there’s an awful lot of Marxism in that. When I was 18, and discovering Marx had this critique of capitalism, I thought, “Oh, right, okay, someone’s done this work, and they can explain why capitalism is so terrible”. I have always had this hunch that it was awful. And suddenly, there’s this ready-made framework, and it’s nice, it’s lovely, that you’ve got this framework to go to, and everything is nicely ordered. There’s going to be modes of production, and there’s a view of history and we know exactly what’s inevitably going to happen. It’s almost like it’s a religion, right? So it appealed to me because it gave me the answers.

And then, as I was growing up a little bit more...a lot of Marxists like to think that anarchism is for immature people. I absolutely reject that. Marxism is for the immature. Anarchism is for people who have grown up a little bit and aren’t naive about the world. And what I realized was that one of the naiveties of Marxism is this idea of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. I thought this is horrific. What an absolutely terrible idea. And I suppose I was in my mid-20s when I found out that, I’m now in my mid-40s. So at that stage, I thought, “No, I don’t favor a dictatorship, I don’t care what you call it, I’m not favoring a dictatorship.” I realized that my socialism was in a different direction. And at that point, all of the
glances that I’d had at anarchism, turned into proper looks at anarchism. And it really appealed to me.

Then we fast forward to me getting sacked from the British government. When I was a little bit older, back in 2013, it coincided just a few weeks after that, with one of the founders of Class War called Ian Bone— I don’t know if you’ve heard of Ian over the years. He put on his blog that they wanted candidates to stand in the general election of 2015. I’d heard about Class War at the same time that I’d learned Marxism way back when I was in my late teens. And I’d always wondered where they’d gone in a way because I’d looked for their newspapers and never really found them. After all, they’d gone into a bit of a decline in the 1990s when I reached London, and suddenly there they were wanting to stand candidates. I thought, well, when someone’s worked for the government for 13 years, and they’ve got sacked for their trade union activities, what’s the next thing to do with your life? Stand for Parliament as an anarchist candidate? Why the hell not? Well, there are lots of reasons why not, obviously. But I decided to embrace that idea and see what I could do with it. So that’s how I got involved with them. And as that developed and my involvement developed, I managed to turn that into a research project and turn it into a Ph.D. Which is basically how I spent my time and how I came to Loughborough was researching that from the inside and writing about it, and interviewing everybody who was involved with it. It was a really interesting project to stand anarchist candidates not to get elected, but to subvert the system, to get into spaces where anarchists aren’t normally allowed to get to. And just to cause a little bit of trouble, really.

TFSR: So at this time, there were a lot of anarchists that were— Listeners in the United States are going to be familiar with the Anarchists for Bernie phenomenon from 2016. There were the Anarchists for Corbyn that were happening around a similar time in the UK. I know that there were a lot of debates about whether anarchism should participate in electoral politics, how they should participate, and what efficacy they could have. You mentioned that you weren’t standing for the point of actually getting into office, but to trouble the waters a bit and get anarchist perspectives a little bit further into people’s minds. Can you talk about how that was received in the anarchist community, the participation, and also what effects of it, whether it was you or other people that were standing for parliament?

been there all their lives, and it seems that it can be presented very easily as a nasty thing to do and an unpleasant thing to do. “How can you hate these people, they’re only doing their job?” You can find yourself in a situation, which is quite tricky like that.

But the way that institution works is very interesting because we’re talking about an institution that is supported when the people involved in it are liked. It ebbs and flows. It’s not like the political cycle, the electoral cycle, where the moment somebody gets elected, they become the most unpopular president ever. Then election time comes along, they’re the incumbent and they get elected again. It doesn’t ever flow in that way, ebbs and flows along decades. It takes a long time to pan out this stuff. And that is what gives it that air of permanence and that feeling that you are helpless against it.

TFSR: That seems like the root of the problem right there, is that it’s the emotional response to it is, “But we’ve seen whoever grow up since they were a child. Can you look at this baby photo? Look at how cute they are in their golden bassinet. Isn’t that perfect? They look like baby Jesus.” That’s not the question at hand here. The question is their bassinets made of gold while there are still colonies, and people are being extracted more and more day to day under austerity measures and the government? They still have their huge palace over there and they get to own countries and islands. It’s not about them as people, that needs to be extracted from them as being people.

JB: First of all, babies, the cute babies always looked like Churchill, no matter what.

TFSR: All the babies look like Churchill.

JB: But in terms of thinking about what change might look like, what you end up with is people saying, “If we had a republic, then we’d be like America’. Do you want Trump to be elected here as president? Would you want that?” It doesn’t matter who it is. They will say, “Would you want Obama? Would you want Bush? Would you want Biden?” Because that is automatically seen as worse than someone born into position, which is odd, at least you’ve got the chance of getting rid of those people at some point. I’m not advocating Representative Democracy. But I am saying it’s an improvement on someone being born into a position, that ordinary
JB: Yeah, I would say most of it goes under trying to get a republic. And the arguments around that are really complex. Do you have an elected president who does exactly the same as the current monarch? Or do you have an elected president with some power that transforms the British political system in a completely different direction? The former seems to be the easier of the options, so that is what people tend to campaign for. Like I said earlier, I think that would be progress in a way but we’re not really anywhere near that at the moment.

In terms of anarchist approaches, there have been a few over the years. It all comes down from the principle that this is wrong. Monarchical power is wrong. I think there’s a link to capitalism there. Because actually, although we might not have people formally born into positions of power and wealth, widespread in society, we do, people are inheriting huge amounts of wealth and using it to their advantage. There have been some interesting campaigns over the year. I might be going back at least 20 years, there was one called Moon Against the Monarchy, where people went outside Buckingham Palace and dropped their trousers and wave their bums in the air. Some of that has been performative and interesting in that way. But we’re not talking about huge amounts of people here, we’re talking about fringe elements, people that can be easily dismissed as freaks on the television news, like most of us are, really. This isn’t really sustained and serious. Part of that might be that a lot of anarchist action is about what’s happening locally, what’s happening in your workplace, what’s happening in your community. Anarchism doesn’t necessarily have to be a national movement, does it? So it might be connected to that.

It’s ripe for change, I think there is something here that can get going really and improved upon. But of course, it doesn’t require the time and the inclination to do something about it. When you see a really popular family, it becomes a little bit tricky. Where do you start? How do you build momentum when you know most people aren’t gonna listen to you? Maybe the time and the conditions will come around where it’s easier.

TFSR: Yeah, it’s hard to ask people to take part in large-scale politics when they’re just being extracted from all the time by capitalism, let alone living during a pandemic when they’re trying to just figure out how to live day to day.

JB: Also, this can look nasty, this can look personal. Because you’ve got this institution, which is made up of real people who have been there, and

TFSR: Yeah, for what it’s worth, I think that there’s a huge difference in political debate culture between the UK and the US.
JB: Ours is a very entertaining Parliament, and largely distracting as well. There is some serious work that goes on there too, where they actually listen to one another. But on the whole, the bits that get televised, are the bits that are not where people are listening to one another, they are shouting at each other, it’s like a bear pit. And to be honest, we used that culture to our advantage, we turned our debates into confrontational spaces, really. This is the state’s Big Day Out on election. This is where they prove their worth and say, “This is why we’re valid”. And certainly, my Class War supporters at my debate just started shouting murderer at the Conservative candidate, because austerity policies at the time were ripping through public services, and people were dying as a result. And he found that really difficult, he wasn’t expecting to turn up and have that barrage of—

TFSR: And there’s an expectation of respectability from the other standing candidates, right? I mean, they’re mostly of the same class...

JB: Well, that’s true. But also, if you go back further in time, back to the time when working-class people didn’t have the vote. These kinds of debates were like that. Working-class people were allowed in to shout stuff like that. Candidates were judged on how well they handled it. We’ve lost that now, because politics is largely polite, although what you’ve highlighted about the House of Commons is correct. But on the whole, politics is a polite event, where people are respectful because they’re all trying to run the country. And we’ve lost that edge in the UK. But we tried to bring it back. And I think we succeeded in some ways.

TFSR: Could you also describe a little bit more about Class War as a group? You mentioned Ian Bone, back in the 80s, there was a newspaper that was published regularly. There are the Poor Doors as the other thing that I can think of about the group. Where’s it at, and what sort of things does it do?

JB: Poor Doors is wonderful, I can talk about that a lot because I went to a lot of those demonstrations. Back in the 1980s. When I was a child, I wasn’t involved in Class War, obviously. It was started by Ian and some others, really, they were a bunch of punk rockers who were fed up with the non-combative nature of British anarchism at the time. And what I think they wanted was to bring that anger back to anarchism in the UK and to build a social movement based on that, based on working-class

gland, nobody pays that any attention whatsoever. Even the people who are Church of England, go to such churches every week, are doing it more for social reasons, I think, rather than spiritual ones. If she genuinely believes that she’s been put here by the gift of some god, I feel sorry for her in a way, because that’s obviously not what’s happening. But it’s difficult to say how much of that really matters. Symbolically, occasionally, but again, part of it is about her, I think, the fact that she’s well respected, the fact that she’s loved by large sections of the population is part of this story. She isn’t going to be there for long, she’s probably not going to be there for much longer, to be honest. The person coming along behind her is not that popular. In a way, there are a lot of people who love the monarchy were hoping it might skip a generation and just go to William and Kate next because Charles is not popular. That again offers up some opportunities for building alliances and trying to achieve something new.

Also, I just wanted to mention, because I’m not sure how much people are aware of this, but we’ve also had a situation where the monarchy has actually lost some power recently because Barbados recently ditched the monarchy, peacefully, and moved towards a republic and is now a republic. I am taking the opinion that this house of cards will have some more people take their card away, as it were, if I can stretch the metaphor to beyond meaningfulness. But I have a feeling that when Charles comes along, there will be other countries that take a look at their relationship and think, “Actually, we’re going to change this now”.

Back in the 1990s, Australia was always talked about as a potential country to become a republic. That seems to have died down a little bit. At least, that’s my impression of it in the UK. It might be that there are people there who can tell you much more about that. But the fact that we’ve now got one country that has left in the last few months and ditched the monarchy gives me some hope.

TFSR: You’ve talked about a little bit of the opposition to the monarchy, that’s been coming from a Republican aim. But can you talk about just the opposition to the monarchy more widely, not just necessarily in one moment when the sovereign or the royal family is coming under fire in the media, but more generally, ideologically? What are some anarchist approaches? What do they look like? Or does the opposition all fall under this more Republican representative democracy-type umbrella?

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way. We don’t have to all accept that— We’re not all facing the same past from it or future from it but we can all at least, perhaps work together to try to end it.

TFSR: Like radical disinvestment from the monarchy and redistribution of what’s been skimmed off the top back to the former colonies or existing colonies of the monarchy might be a good discussion. I’m sure that there are tons of people, especially in those countries, or people who are from those countries or have heritages from those countries in the UK that are probably pushing for that thing.

JB: Yeah, absolutely. The figure that I got regarding the sovereign grant for last year was 86 million pounds. Well, the 70 million people in this country. It’s a sizable amount of money when you think about how those resources could be divided up and how they could be used and what causes they could be used for, rather than just one person’s satisfaction that they’ve been born.

TFSR: We talked about this already a little bit. But in terms of the symbolic power of the “sovereign”, I imagine that folks will throw punches or insults over party membership or which football club they support or what class they were born into and identify with, but that the role filled by the Windsors, it seems to really help to create this umbrella that can act to subsume those other conflicts. Would you talk a bit more about the role of unifying the domain spiritually and symbolically under the House of Windsor?

JB: Yeah, it’s difficult to know exactly how powerful this is. I don’t know what to say about it, to be honest, because I’ve already presented them as a house of cards, it could blow over at any moment. But there is something in the idea that they are a unifying force. And I think it probably ebbs and flows. And I think it probably depends on the circumstance.

During COVID times, there was a moment where the monarchy was focused on and at the moment, actually, she has COVID-19. And so there will be people who think, “Well, she’s got it, it can happen to anybody. She’s old, and we got to look after her.” She’s one of us, along with 86 million quid a year. At least, who knows how much it is really. There will be a sense of that —

Spiritually, that’s a tricky word, isn’t it? We’ve got a Church of En-

people rising up as much as they possibly could. And the newspaper was a big part of that, it was a propaganda tool, it was darkly humorous, it used violent language. It was confrontational. It was designed to horrify certain types of people and for others to embrace it. And it was very, very divisive in that way and in that way, they attracted the people that they wanted. So they took the newspaper to peace rallies and sold it to people at peace rallies and disrupted those sorts of events to get people to do things differently. There’s an argument to be said here that by the end of the 1990’s, Class War had achieved or helped to achieve exactly what it set out to do, that there was an angry anarchist culture out there. The anti-globalization movement was a big thing around the end of the 90’s. It was really engaging in an awful lot of Class War tactics. Class War got involved with theatrical protests as well, which leads me to Poor Doors.

Poor doors was this idea of socially segregated housing that rich people get their own door into a building, a block of flats, and the poor people in the block of flats get a separate entrance around the corner, with separate provisions, and so on and so forth. I think it first emerged in New York from memory. And it was publicized quite a lot in the summer of 2014, I’m thinking was about right. And immediately Class War hit upon this and wanted to do a regular protest. We were looking for a regular protest anyway because we wanted to meet up and build on this momentum running up to the election. So there was an idea here that we could get involved with something weekly, that would draw people together and we could do some election planning at the same time. We started a protest outside this building in London that was doing Poor Doors. And we made it our focus, very symbolic because it wasn’t the only building doing it. But we targeted that building week on week. As we did so, the protest grew, everybody knew what time it was going to start, what day of the week it was going to start. We got a lot of press coverage. We had occasional events like the London Anarchist Bookfair that took place in the October of 2014. We encouraged people to go from that to the building to have a protest there.

It was absolutely glorious times, to be honest. We got close to actually getting that building rearranged. We entered into negotiations, which I’m not sure it’s a good idea, to be honest. But we did enter into negotiations with the management of that building. And ultimately, we didn’t succeed, but we managed to highlight the issue. And for that, I’m pleased. It became quite a spectacle. Each week, we had musicians coming to it. It was something performative about those protests, there were few
arrests as well. At times there was a heavy police presence, at times, there was no police presence. I remember an occasion where we actually got into the building. And Ian managed to knock over a vase with his walking stick, he's got a walking stick these days. And he ended up being arrested for that. There are just all sorts of fun and games, it was really enjoyable. To be honest, it was just a really good time. Felt like we were getting somewhere.

TFSR: That's awesome. Because you mentioned it, I'd love to hear a few words about the Anarchist Research Group and the work that you do. This is a very long introduction, and I hope that that's okay for your timeframe, because I do want to talk about the royalty in the UK and everything.

JB: It is the Anarchism Research Group, because you don't need to be an anarchist to be researching anarchism. Basically, it is a group of academics, scholars researching different parts of anarchism, and people can search for them online, there's podcast series, there are videos out there. And it just is really a way of promoting anarchism in the academic world. And it's just amazing, the number of different interests that anarchist scholars have. It's the full range. Exactly what you'd expect, I guess, but it never ceases to amaze me how much is going on and how much it differs, once you get to that level of research at a university and universities. What you've got is people delving into such a niche subject, their own little area, and that can only be a good thing in terms of understanding anarchism, promoting it. I think what's great about the Anarchism Research Group is that the people making sure that it all takes along and are really active on social media, getting some of this stuff out there as well in really good forms in terms of podcasts and videos.

TFSR: News over the last few months, possibly longer, has been peppered with concerns about Elizabeth Alexandra Mary aka Elizabeth II Queen of the United Kingdom and 14 other Commonwealth realms, following in the regal footsteps of her late husband, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, or stories about payouts that princes and other royals have made about sexual assaults on minors in relation to Jeffrey Epstein's network, or biopics on the long-dead Princess Diana, or pomp of a state wedding or funeral, or slow-motion train wrecks of the public discussion of how anti-black the Windsor house is in rela-

you that this is a smoke and mirrors operation, it's magic. This money appears, and it could be yours, or it could be theirs, who cares, it's going to them anyway.

On top of the sovereign grant, the monarch does own land, and lots of it. So one such example is the Duchy of Lancaster. That is worth around 22 million pounds a year for Elizabeth Windsor at the moment. That is money she's making from that estate — 22 million pounds a year. But this is just in the UK that she's doing this. Then on top of that — this makes it even more complex and difficult — the security bill for the royal family is picked up by the Metropolitan Police in London, and no figures around that are made available on the pretense that it could risk the security being given to them. We don't know how much that is costing, that is obviously going to be money coming directly from the taxpayer. I don't know whether that will be just taxpayers in London or wherever that's across the UK. I'm not sure.

You mentioned so-called Canada. Elizabeth Windsor is head of state there represented by an appointed governor general who serves for five-year terms. And the governor general is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces there. Figures I got for Canada from the Business Insider website suggested 50.5 million Canadian dollars a year, figures for New Zealand — 18.6 million New Zealand dollars per year. And they only tried to do a few countries because they found it so difficult to find accurate figures. We are talking about an insanely wealthy woman with an insanely wealthy family, not just from one country, but from 15.

TFSR: Yeah, and I remember her name coming up in the Pandora Papers too. There have been these large exposes where private real estate deals that haven't been listed on the official receipts in the UK have come up and it turns out they're doing real estate deals with the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev that landed a $42 million profit. There's so much obfuscation, it seems, as you pointed too, with all of this, as you say, abusive-

JB: Yeah, it is abusive. That legacy of Empire isn't something that we just need to look back on, we can also see it's stretching into the future of this arrangement, can't we? It is something that we have to oppose. I would say that there's a chance here for struggles across borders and across countries because this is something that is affecting multiple groups of people. That gives a glimmer of hope that we can oppose it collectively, in some
talk a bit about what economic power the family wields -or what’s known — either in terms of what stipend they get from the British government, in terms of what holdings they have domestically? And also, indigenous activists and so-called Canada that we’ve had on the show before have described the Canadian government as an extractive corporation serving the pleasure of the Crown. Does that hold more than a symbolic resonance in the situation?

JB: I love the description. I think that’s right. It alludes to the fact that we’ve got a hierarchy. And every bit of taxation that we pay in the UK, and indeed, 14 other Commonwealth countries, a portion of it will go to this family. Anything happening within the capitalist system, within those countries is contributing to this system. All of the horrors of capitalism and the Empire can be connected in some way to the monarchy and this particular family.

In terms of the finances, that pressure group Republic that I mentioned earlier, estimates that the royal family is getting something like 350 million pounds a year from the public. I’m not sure how they’re making their figures. And one of the problems they have — and I have — is that it’s incredibly difficult to find out. The information is hidden. What I found was actually this is true across all of the countries where Elizabeth Windsor is the Head of State. They’re all incredibly secretive about what money she actually gets. So in the UK, though, what I can say is that Windsor is paid what they call a Sovereign Grant by the government. And last year, this was around 86 million pounds. That money is made through the land that the monarchy owns. That’s known as the Crown Estate. And when I say the monarchy owns it, I mean, the monarchy as an institution owns it. It is not owned by her personally. What she’s getting at the moment amounts to something like 25% of the revenue that estate earns. What happens with the rest of the money I’ve no idea.

It is a really confusing situation. Let me tell you what the UK Government website says about the sovereign grant. Because this is an interesting set of words. So this is a quote: “The profit of the Crown Estate is a reference point for the calculation of sovereign grant. The Crown Estate does not pay the sovereign grant to the monarch directly, it makes a payment each year to the consolidated fund. And Her Majesty’s Treasury pays the sovereign grant to the monarch”. It’s wonderful bureaucratic language to say. Does anybody know where this money is coming from? It’s just some civil servant had fun writing that circular nonsense. But it shows

TFSR: It extends, obviously, beyond the realities of the royal family in the UK or other countries that still have monarchies. In the West, there’s not a lot of celebration of monarchies in Saudi Arabia, for instance, yet we support them with arms [weapons].

JB: Absolutely, yeah. Isn’t that ironic? Certainly in the UK, Elizabeth Windsor is called The Queen, not just a queen, she’s The Queen. That tells us a lot about the mindset of the nation that I’ve grown up in. It is a mindset that doesn’t often question its own faults and failures, I’m afraid, and that historically, it’s not a country that has accounted for or even begun to question in any real sense the legacy of empire and what happened in the name of the monarch, of course. So I sometimes think I’m living in a place where you can scratch the surface and there’s a lot underneath really.

TFSR: I feel you there for sure. Being from the US, everywhere has its own legacy of terror and mythos that they carry, that is not to say that they’re all the same.

Can you give us something of grounding details about the position of the monarchy in the UK, its history and its role, and how it shifted over the years?
JB: Yeah, sure. We could go all the way back to 1215 here and the Magna Carta, how about that? That’s a document that a lot of people around the world will have at least heard of, as well. That is where things started to shift. So a long way back, it was an absolute monarchy, and in 1215, the Magna Carta pegged the power of the monarch back a little bit. But the history of the monarch’s power being pegged back is not a history of the people rising up to stop the monarchy from being powerful. It is a history of other aristocrats and other elites taking power, and putting up with the monarchy, on the basis that they will not interfere with politics. That starts in 1215 and the monarchy becomes a constitutional monarchy more in the 1600s and the 1700s, where its power is really pegged back by Parliament. And then we reach a period where Britain becomes more democratic.

Incidentally, we still have a second chamber in parliament that is not elected. There are some hereditary Lords born into the position, and the others are appointed. So our parliament is not entirely democratic. Also, I think the only other country to do this is Iran. We have clerics in our House of Lords — Church of England bishops — because we have an official church, because of course, God has decided that the monarch is in power, or is on the throne or whatever. So we have this strange hybrid between a fully feudal country and a modern liberal democracy. It’s taken a long time to get here, but it’s happened, it’s happened gradually because the Constitution isn’t fixed. It’s not written down in one document. It’s not entrenched in— not the one that you’ve got. It can be changed with the Act of Parliament. Any government can come along and change the constitutional framework of the UK. But what we’ve settled on is the idea that the monarch can stay in power — and power is perhaps the wrong word — as long as they do not interfere in politics. That is the basic principle, that parliament is sovereign, we have what we call the Sovereignty of Parliament. That suggests that the monarch isn’t the sovereign, and that Parliament is. There is an interesting relationship between the two.

What you end up with in a constitutional monarchy is the idea that the nation is embodied by this family. So there is a unifying aspect to this, it’s designed for us to get behind and be satisfied with. And obviously, we’re now in a situation where Elizabeth Windsor has been on the throne for 70 years. We’re encouraged to applaud that and “isn’t she a nice old lady who’s being devoted to her duty” and all that stuff? It’s just a really odd situation. But that makes her quite a powerful figure, really, in terms of the psyche of the country. Because if you attack the monarchy, And it turns out she has been doing this. There’s a whole section on the Guardian website of things they think she’s been interfering with.

That suggests to me that if you go down the line of argument that the current monarch is fantastic because she’s devoted to duty, I say, no! What she’s devoted to, is increasing her own assets at the expense of everybody else. This is the most corrupt, hierarchical practice you can imagine. Monarchy is essentially a form of abuse against the rest of us. And here she is actively doing it all the time. And she’s been doing it from the moment she had the opportunity. It’s disgraceful. It’s disgusting.

TFSR: The Guardian newspaper does have exactly some examples of what they think that she’s been applying. But because there’s a lack of transparency, they might not actually know. But in the UK libel laws are very heavy. If they’re making a claim, they likely feel that they can back it up in court, and it’s not just hearsay.

JB: Absolutely. So some of the examples would seem quite minor. The one that I can think of off the top of my head is that the Queen objected to an introduction of ensuring that everybody should wear seatbelts, and she had it so written into law, that that did not apply to the royal estates. It gives us a hint about her view of freedom. We could say, “Well, so what big deal?”; but that’s the information they aren’t willing to give out to us. What are they hiding from us? Are notes even being taken of what she’s objected to? What has she been objecting to financially? Most of that is hidden.

Buckingham Palace has accepted that Queen’s Consent exists? And what they have gone down the line of is saying that she’s never opposed an entire bill. Well, I say, put up the information, show us what she has opposed, let’s have this out in the open. Let’s have a proper public debate about it. Let’s see if some MP’s might be interested in this. Because she’s doing this against Parliament. If the constitutional arrangement is that Parliament is sovereign, then what is this one person doing by stopping things being debated by Parliament?

TFSR: That’s a very good point and the devils in the detail, and if they’re not going to give out the details, then what does that say about that devil?

You alluded that the sovereign or that the royal family might have been making some of these Queen’s Consent decisions concerning economic investments of the royal family of the Queen. Can you
First of all, let’s talk about Charles Windsor, heir to the throne. He has a large piece of land in Cornwall, the Duchy of Cornwall. He is, of course, the Duke of Cornwall. He’s got a series of farmlands and all sorts of estates going on there. And he has a real vested interest in making sure that he can make money out of that duchy. And there is evidence of him writing regularly to government departments, to senior officials, and members of the Cabinet to press forward the regulations that he wants or doesn’t want to affect his financial status. What influence he’s had is difficult to tell, because… To be honest, people have been requesting the memos that he’s written, which are called the “spider memos”, because his handwriting is so terrible, apparently. The Guardian newspaper took a court case out asking for the “spider memos” to be released, and a few were, but not all of them. Her Majesty’s courts have hidden the information from the public. So we don’t actually know what influence he has had. But we know that he’s tried to influence politics. And of course, he’s the heir to the throne so he’s supposed to not be doing that. He’s not supposed to do it before he becomes the monarch and he is certainly not supposed to do it afterwards.

However, let’s move to his mother because she has been up to her neck in interfering all of her working life — which is the wrong phrase, as she hasn’t actually got a job, it’s a role. There is this little-known procedure called Queen’s Consent. And very few people have looked into it. Again, The Guardian newspaper has done some really good work on this to find out what it is. And what it amounts to, is a provision in government, whereby possible draft legislation has to be passed by the monarch first before it reaches parliament, if there’s a chance that legislation will impact the royal family and its interests. That’s a broad description. There is evidence to show — now that they’ve done some digging — that Elizabeth Windsor has raised a number of objections over her reign. At legislation that could potentially harm her interest or legislation that she just doesn’t like. Now, what Buckingham Palace says about this, is that at no stages, she blocked legislation. Well, that could be true. Let’s take them at face value. So she’s never blocked legislation. What they haven’t told us is what bits of legislation she’s asked to be changed. Remember, this is happening before it ever reaches parliament, so she’s not interfering with things once they’ve gone through Parliament or while they’re going through Parliament. This is before anybody’s ever read it. This is stuff that has been sent to her for approval, because she might have an interest and she might well have said, “No, I don’t like that bit, or I don’t like that bit”.

or you attack things she’s done, you’re attacking an old lady. That’s quite powerful. Why would anyone do that? It makes it quite, quite tricky. I don’t think me coming on you is treasonable. I don’t think I’m gonna be dragged to the Tower [of London] or anything. But people listening to this will be horrified, I’m sure, some people, if they hear it, will be horrified. Others will think, “Well, thank God someone’s saying it”.

TFSR: I think a little iconoclasm is required in an anarchist discussion? I listened to this pretty in-depth and amazing podcast called Revolutions. And they did this 30-part series on the English Civil War. And one of the characters — and I’ve seen this covered in British publications, I think in the 80s and 90s mostly — the Levellers, they seem like one example of a commoner movement to undo the concept of the monarchy and bring about direct democracy, get rid of aristocratic titles. But they also seem like a splinter fringe Anabaptist movement that split out of the New Model Army. Could you talk a little bit about them?

JB: I’m certainly not an expert in them. We’re going back hundreds of years as well again. We’re going back to pre-anarchism, really, but we’re talking about peasants, largely. And also it might coincide or combine with a discussion about the Peasants’ Revolt, which was brutally struck down, as well. There is a rich history of revolt. And in the UK, from what we might call ordinary people, not from elites. But actually, at every stage, what happens is that the elite takes over eventually, and it brutally crushes things. These events, perhaps aren’t as significant as they now appear because what they have never managed, of course, is a full-on revolution.

We can get a little bit misty-eyed about these things as well. Oh, wasn’t this amazing? It was happening hundreds of years ago, what people were saying. Yeah, people were talking about direct democracy thousands of years ago. It’s tricky. We can’t avoid the fact that monarchy is, bizarrely, an idea that has persevered and I regularly think to myself, “My goodness, it’s amazing. I actually live in a monarchy”. I think that’s astonishing that that is even possible in the 21st century. It just amazes me and when I look back to growing up and knowing the problems that the monarchy has had, I’m surprised that it survived because right now it looks really solid.

Elizabeth Windsor is very popular. There is no real movement to get rid of her. There is some reformist organization called Republic, which is arguing for a democratically elected head of state that has the same
powers as the current monarch. And therefore it’s not a great big change, to be honest. It would be an improvement to have someone elected doing it, but it’s not the change that I really want. And they’re also interested in doing things like making sure that the finances of the monarchy are more transparent and things like that because they know that their campaign to actually get rid of the monarchy is stalling and not really getting anywhere. So there isn’t a groundswell of opinion that is against the monarchy. If I go back to the 1990’s, it was very different. Before the death of Diana in 1997, you had a period during which Charles and Diana got divorced. Andrew and Sarah Ferguson got divorced, nobody knew what Edward was going to do with his life. It came across as shambolic. The newspapers were after them. They were doing secret recordings of things they were saying. And the monarchy was at an all-time low. And people were saying, “How is it going to continue? How is it going to survive this?” There was a fire at Windsor Castle and John Major, the prime minister at the time, announced that the British public was going to fund the refurbishment, and the British public was up in arms. And suddenly, the money had to come from the royal family themselves. We’ve changed a lot since then.

I would say that the turning point in the popularity of the monarchy came after the death of Diana. As you can probably tell from the outpouring of emotion from people at the time, large sections of the population absolutely loved her. And they suddenly saw a monarchy, and particularly a monarch, who couldn’t show emotion, because that’s not what the monarchy does, or historically, and they requested change. And actually, the savior of the monarchy at that moment was the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, who encouraged Elizabeth Windsor to do a live TV speech where she did show some emotion. From that moment on, the British public forgave her for that. Things moved on quite dramatically. And now the monarchy just seems like it will always be there. I don’t believe that’s the case. I think, actually, what this shows us is that it’s a house of cards. I think it could blow over any moment if the circumstances are right. There’s an obligation on anarchists to try to get ready for that moment, if it comes, and try to influence such a moment. Because whilst it might look permanent secure, I’m not buying it, I don’t think so. There’s no justification for it that makes any sense whatsoever. It’s just wrong in principle, to have a monarchy. It’s just dead-easy to argue against. When you look at the arguments for it taking place and existing, most monarchs rely on the idea that it brings tourists to the UK. That is pretty much their argument.

**TFSR: Not the unifying cultural principle?**

**JB:** No! People might rely on that, but the one that comes to the fore nearly every single time, that’s really prominent is just how much money comes to the UK. As if we can’t open those palaces to the tourists anyway. Other countries have royal palaces that are raking in a lot more actually. It’s a ridiculous argument. They could be making me 1 million pounds sterling year for myself, and I’d still say as well.

**TFSR: Yeah, couldn’t they just replace them with some animatronics, which is moved from room to room and do their waves and just have the House open? That seems amazing. Seems like you’ve saved a lot of money.**

**JB:** How do we know that’s not happening already?

**TFSR: That’s true... Clones...**

You’ve mentioned the House of Lords and appointments. And you’ve talked about the deep pockets of the House of Windsor. Can you talk a little bit about what political and economic position—What power does the family actually wield within the kingdom and also within the Commonwealth?

**JB:** Let’s talk about political power, first of all, because it’s easiest, as I found out trying to do a little bit of research for this today. Finding out where they get their money from is really hard. But we’ll come to that in a moment. Pretty much everything politically happens in the monarch’s name. But that does not mean that they wield the power directly. There are an awful lot of powers that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet have in this country that are called royal prerogative powers. And they are powers that have passed from the absolute monarchy days to a more democratic situation. Whoever gets to be Prime Minister gets to wield those sorts of powers. An example of it would be the ability to move armed forces and wage war. It’s passed on the monitor to the Prime Minister.

The constitutional arrangement is that they can be the figurehead of the country, but they can’t affect politics. This is really interesting because once you scratch the surface there are lots of examples where they’re trying to influence politics, and some where they are succeeding in really serious ways, that a lot of people in the UK don’t even know about.