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CONTRIBUTORS

Opinion | I voted for Mark Carney hoping he'd lead a strong, sovereign Canada. This first big gesture is not what I had in mind

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King Charles III meets with Prime Minister Mark Carney at Buckingham Palace, in London, on March 17, 2025.

Aaron Chown for The Associated Press

By Janice Kennedy, Contributor

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Nothing says “strong sovereign nation” like a foreign figurehead presiding over a government’s launch party.

But there it is. Prime Minister Mark Carney has invited King Charles III to deliver the new Parliament’s throne speech. Apparently, the honour of the monarch’s attendance sends a message about Canadian sovereignty.

How disappointing.

Constitutionally (and regrettably), Charles is indeed Canada’s king. But ill-informed people across the globe, including the world’s foremost Ignoramus-in-Chief, may well be wondering why the “King of England” is kick-starting Carney’s new government.

A Bloc Québécois statement, surprisingly, nailed it: “Mark Carney, in order to embody the attributes of Canadian sovereignty, is inviting a foreign monarch to inaugurate the legislature of which he will be prime minister.”

With a heart full of hope, I voted for the Carney Liberals. I want our new prime minister to fulfil all the weighty hopes of millions of Canadians, and I maintain my optimism, especially after last week's stellar press conference. But this surprising ignorance of Canadian feelings has admittedly been discouraging.

Two years ago, Angus Reid pollsters reported that a majority of Canadians don't want the country to continue as a constitutional monarchy, and 60 per cent actually “oppose recognizing Charles as King and all that entails.”

The figure may be even higher now, after the King's serene silence in the face of Trumpian threats to Canadian sovereignty. (Apparently, one mustn't be “political.”) The subsequent royal invitation to the U.S. president — Do drop by for a nice state visit, won't you? — might have sealed the deal.

Which makes you wonder: What's the point of having a king if he throws you under the bus? What's the point of having a king at all?

Apart from the fact that the inherently anti-democratic nature of monarchy is a poor fit for any self-respecting democracy, there is in Canada the colonial whiff.

We do have a British past, among other legacies, but we have grown mightily over our 158 officially Canadian years. We have evolved into a complex celebration of diversity that is light-years beyond the British colony we once were.

And yet we remain saddled with this monarchical relic of our colonial past, thanks to our 1982 Constitution. The achievement and otherwise brilliant legacy of Pierre Trudeau, it boasts an amending formula that makes it virtually impossible to dump the relic. So our head of state, our “Canadian monarch,” remains a Brit, currently Charles Windsor.

This person, born in England and resident there his entire ultra-privileged life, who wears the purple not because of anything he's done but because he was born to it — this person is our figurehead, the representative of who and what the Canadian people are.

As constitutional realities stand, there isn't a worthy Canadian alive eligible for that role: no intellectual, diplomat, politician, scientist, writer, business titan, philanthropist. No one. No Canadian can be the Canadian head of state. But Charles, that Hogarthian eccentric and occasional visitor, is.

Canadian monarchists insist that the institution's significance lies in the symbolic power of the Crown (although they can never seem to explain why “The People of Canada” could not exert the same power).

Symbols are indeed important. But if their meaning doesn't fit their material representation, the effect is jarring and dysfunctional. It's as if there were a Nobel Prize for Intellectual Achievement, and it went to Donald Trump.

The royals will remain a fixture for the Brits, even those would-be republicans who recognize the monarchy for the heinous insult to democracy it is. But at least it's a homegrown grotesquerie and, better still, a tourist magnet.

That's not our reality.

I forgave Trudeau the amending-formula mess he left us, because he also fried more important fish. I'll forgive Carney for the same reason. Even lifelong anti-monarchists know this is not the time for our federal government to open Pandora's constitutional box. The prime minister has promised some serious nation-building, and I remain optimistic that his energies will be directed to that end. Some other gutsy leader down the road will help Canada rid itself of the royal albatross.

Meanwhile, there is this reality: our new prime minister has looked into the face of Canadian sovereignty and seen Britain's Charles Windsor. That remains deeply disappointing.

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