

- A. Grace, I haven't seen you for years! You were working in IT in Australia. What are you doing here in London?
- B. Nice to see you again, Sean. For more than ten years now I've been working for an organisation called 'Republic'. We believe that the monarchy in Britain has to be abolished. Having a hereditary head of state goes against every democratic principle, and we advocate having a republic instead.
- A. But surely you must see how popular the monarchy is in Britain? Remember Harry and Megan's wedding? British people love the royal family!
- B. But the royal family is very expensive. All the 18 working royals cost the taxpayer an average of £19 million a year. Another example – the Duchy of Cornwall, Prince Charles' private organisation, is exempt from most taxes. The Prince is a very rich man! Why should taxpayers support wealthy people?
- A. It's not just a question of money. Our current monarch, Queen Elizabeth, represents centuries of British tradition, our historical heritage. She gives a living feeling of historical continuity. She has no active involvement in politics, so can represent the whole nation in a way which no politician could ever do. Politicians come and go. The monarchy is always there.
- B. The problem is that the monarchy is unaccountable and secretive. Actually, I believe the monarchy is corrupt.
- A. What – you're accusing the Queen of corruption?
- B. No, not directly. But if you define corruption as the abuse of public office for personal gain, then that is what the monarchy does. It's routine, it's built into the system.
- A. What would you like to see instead?
- B. My organisation, Republic, would like an elected head of state, similar to the one they have in the Republic of Ireland, where the role is largely ceremonial and apolitical, but where the President can speak at times of national crisis or uncertainty. An example would be after the Brexit referendum, when Britain had no political leadership for several weeks. Brexit of course has been very divisive in the UK. It needed a head of state to speak to the country at that time and reassure people – but there was a political vacuum which the Queen was unable to fill.
- A. I think you are overlooking the fact that there is a real emotional bond between the British people and the monarchy. It dropped a bit after the death of Lady Diana, Princess of Wales, and then again with the remarriage of Prince Charles, but people are still in favour of monarchy.
- B. That's true, but support for the monarchy is quite a bit less among younger people. And when people were asked about their opinions when Prince Harry was engaged to Megan, more than half said they were indifferent. Things may be changing. Remember it took the suffragettes a long time to persuade the British government to give votes for women. I think republicanism is also making progress.
- A. The royal family give so much to the country. The Queen is the head of the Commonwealth, which is a totally inter-ethnic world organisation of 53 countries. She is hugely respected on the international stage. She, and other members of the royal family, give their time and energy to an enormous number of charitable and humanitarian organisations. And let me add too that the monarchy is a huge tourist attraction for Britain which brings in millions for the national economy!
- B. I think tourists come to Britain for our museums, our scenery, our shopping, our culture, and our historical monuments – not just to hope they meet a royal one day. The monarchy represents the massive gap between the rich and the poor – it's ridiculous in our modern world to have an unelected head of state. Why should Prince Charles become King just because he happens to be someone's eldest son? And the Queen is the head of the Church of England – is that an appropriate role for a monarch in twenty first century Britain?
- A. But British people don't want a republic. We will always want to sing "God save the Queen"!
- Outline: The dialogue is between a leader of the 'Republic' movement, which is campaigning for the abolition of the monarchy in Britain and its replacement by a republic, and a monarchist. The context is the recent wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle. The republican argues that the monarchy is expensive, anachronistic and undemocratic, and would like an elected president. The monarchist points out that the monarchy represents British history and traditions, is active in many charitable and humanitarian movements, and most of all, is widely supported by the British public.
1. Questions: Is a monarchy – even a constitutional monarchy like Britain – an out-of-date concept?
 2. Is it preferable that the Head of State be directly elected with full powers, as in the US or in France, or better that the Head of State has a limited and ceremonial role, as in Ireland?
 3. Would you agree that the monarchy is good for the British tourist industry?
 4. Do you think that the campaign group 'Republic' will change public opinion like the suffragettes did over votes for women?