

tax on the “border” between Serbia and Kosovo. Immediately, violent protests exploded, organized by Kosovo’s remaining Serbians, mostly crowded into the northern city of Mitrovica. They claimed that only a sovereign state can levy taxes, and that, according to the United Nations, Kosovo is still part of Yugoslavia. In the Kosovo capital, Pristina, a bomb exploded in the offices of the Yugoslav government. One Yugoslav official was killed, and others were injured. It was the third fatal bombing since last August.

In Macedonia, the apparent calm that followed the resolute Army action against the Kosovo Liberation Army aggression from Kosovo, is considered by all informed sources to be temporary. Macedonia’s capital, Skopje, became the meeting point for some of the most powerful Western leaders, including British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. All had words of great praise for Macedonia. However, according to reliable local sources, the “smile offensive” hides one purpose: to make Macedonia accept a territorial division into two “ethnically pure” areas.

Among the many letters of protest against Lord Owen’s commentary that the *Wall Street Journal* received, one read in part: “Too bad [Lord Owen] forgets (or hopes everybody else forgets) that it has been exactly the British penchant for redrawing maps of other people’s territories that created the conditions for so far the most violent century in European history (and elsewhere).”

The Cracks Get Wider In Windsors’ Britain

by Alan Clayton

The British state has once again been rocked to its royal foundations by yet another royal wife whom the Windsors deem to be of “questionable” background, showing an ability to get things as dramatically “wrong” as did the unfortunate Princess Diana before her. The wife of the Queen’s youngest son, Prince Edward, known by the royal title of “Sophie of Wessex,” in a deliberate attempt to move away from the open use of the “Royal Highness” appellation, which has become very unpopular, was the subject of a tabloid “sting” operation in which she made a range of highly indiscreet remarks about politicians and some of the royal family themselves.

The newspaper in question was a Sunday tabloid, *News of the World*. Known colloquially throughout the island as the “Screws of the World,” the paper is a very old scandal sheet which reveals the peccadillos of the great and the small with equal fervor and determination, and covers all its revelations with a traditional and highly effective legitimizing rhetoric of disapprobation—in order that the voyeurs can pretend they are really opposed to and appalled by voyeurism. In recent times, its influence and networking have been so widespread that some have felt there is an MI5 and MI6 connection.

The sting involved an interview with an alleged Arab dignitary ostensibly known as Sheikh Mohammed, who purported to be interested in using Sophie’s public relations company, RJH (the initials stand for Sophie’s maiden name, Rhys-Jones, and that of her business partner, Murray Harkin), for some of his business operations. Judging from the direction of the conversation, the initial motivation of *News of the World* was to ascertain whether, in fact, Prince Edward were gay and his marriage just a convenient sham.

In the event, it came out that the 37-year-old Harkin was not only gay, but also, in the words of the *News of the World*, a “cocaine-sniffing, promiscuous homosexual with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the world’s most notorious gay pickup spots.” Harkin was once hired to promote an X-rated video, which included scenes of simulated rape, group sex, and bondage. The 60-minute “adult” video, entitled “Fantasy Sex,” was so explicit that it had to be modified, before it could be sold in video outlets.

It also emerged that Sophie quite blatantly uses her royal status to obtain business for her struggling company. Prince Edward owns a filmmaking company which loses substantial sums annually, and has to be regularly bailed out by the

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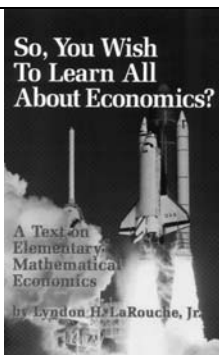
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Scandal over Sophie Rhys-Jones, Countess of Wessex, is rocking Britain, as commentators point out that the royals have always been “a bit bonkers.”

Queen, making minor if extremely reluctant inroads into her vast fortune.

The ‘Wessex’ Paradox

There is paradox in this whole affair, as Sophie was to be the model of a royal princess, in the way that both Diana Princess of Wales, and Sarah Ferguson Duchess of Windsor, were not. Sophie’s family background was considered by the Queen to be a virtue. Unlike the aristocratic Lady Diana Spencer and Sarah Ferguson, whose troubled family histories the Windsors blamed for their elder sons’ failed marriages, Edward’s new companion, though middle class, came from an unbroken home. Sophie Helen Rhys-Jones was born in Oxford on Jan. 20, 1965 to Christopher Bourmes Rhys-Jones, a salesman of car tires, and Mary O’Sullivan, a charity worker.

Four years earlier, her father Christopher had added a certain refinement to the family name by adding a hyphen. The Rhys-Joneses were no strangers to royal life, as Sophie’s mother had, as a young woman, danced with Prince Philip at a society ball, something profoundly status-bestowing within the class-ridden and quintessentially pathetic British system. The couple settled with their daughter Sophie and her elder brother David at Homestead Farmhouse, a thatched, four-bedroom, 17th-Century cottage in Brenchley, Kent. Now in their sixties and still happily married, they continue to reside there.

The marriage to the Queen’s youngest son, Prince Edward, in July 1999 was surrounded with fail-safe systems to ensure that the new wife could never, ever threaten the succession and the very throne itself in the way that Princess Diana had done, and only close observers of the *modus operandi* of the Windsor state noted its significance: The “Wessex” title does not represent any currently existing geographical-political entity. The non-territorial aspect of the title incensed the prominent historian Dr. David Starkey, who sug-

gested that the title was a disgrace, if not an actual humiliation to the young couple.

There was worse than that, as the choice of the title “Wessex” has a “Brigadoon” character, whose use in this context could only have been the work of the ultimate power-broker and evil genius of the Windsor state, Prince Philip himself.

The name “Wessex” was resurrected by the author Thomas Hardy in his 19th-Century novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*. This Romantic novel was about the common folk of an imaginary English county. Prince Philip’s message could not have been more poignant for those few prepared to listen to what was really happening behind the pageantry of state. Nonetheless, caveats have been included in terms of a reward for good behavior, and Prince Philip has promised to his younger son his own “real” title of Duke of Edinburgh upon his, Philip’s, death. It is no insignificant promise, because within the context of the constitutional changes that now threaten to break up the United Kingdom, the titles of Duke of Edinburgh and Prince of Wales could ensure a House of Windsor presence within whatever emerges from the current constitutional maelstrom.

Blair and ‘Fool Britannia’

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Tony Blair, still very much against the ropes in a hoof-and-mouth crisis that refuses to go away, has been making frantic efforts to crisis-manage the situation. He has distanced himself from comments on what have become known as the Sophie-gate tapes (endless variations of the “Watergate” appellation are still in constant use by the U.K. media) by Consumer Affairs Minister Dr. Kim Howells, in which he claimed that the royals are “a bit bonkers.” Howells also called for restrictions on the use of taxpayers’ money to fund royal activities. Blair made clear that Howells’s comments were his own, not government policy.

However Howells’s intervention has caused further dismay at the Palace, which now sees itself under siege by the media. Howells said: “I’ve never understood the attraction of royalty. This isn’t the first generation. They’re all bonkers. Think of George III, they even made a film about it [‘The Madness of King George’]. They choose very strange partners, they’re not managing the modern world very well.” On the Prince of Wales, Howells, who is the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Pontypridd in Wales, said: “We don’t see him in Wales very much.”

The British state now has all the very apparent characteristics of the last days of Empire, and the House of Windsor of the last days of the dynasty which sustains it. Those associated with the family are once again shown to be motivated by a lust for power, possession, and greed. In the midst of the very literal funeral pyres, which symbolize Britain to the world, its Prime Minister continues in his toffee apple “virtual reality” Cloud-Cuckoo Land. His “Cool Britannia” has well and truly become Fool Britannia.