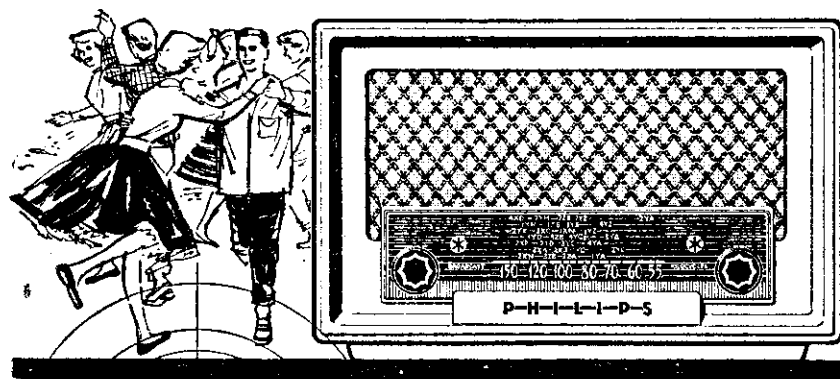


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**AUGUST 30, 1957**

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## The Queen's Loyal Subjects

IN his *Lookout* talk of August 10, printed on page 5, R. M. Hutton-Potts handled a delicate subject with firmness and discretion. The comments of Lord Altrincham were deliberately provocative, and a great many people were accordingly provoked, some of them to the edge of violence. Mr Hutton-Potts examined the affair dispassionately and explained its connection with some very real facts in the present situation of the British Commonwealth. He also pointed out that Lord Altrincham was repeating criticisms which his father had made before him. Criticism of the Monarch and the Royal Household has indeed been a recurring and influential factor in the evolution of British democracy. It is only in recent times that the Crown has been given an aura of inviolability, though in England the questioning voices have never been entirely stilled. Readers of such journals as *Punch* and *The New Statesman* will know that Lord Altrincham merely echoed, with personal bluntness, comments that have been widely published in the past few years.

No British country can ignore these symptoms. But the first point to be made is that they are not symptoms of disease. Loyalty to the Crown is compatible with decided views on its functions. These functions must in some ways be modified as the Commonwealth grows and changes. If no discussion is thought to be necessary or desirable there may be one or two assumptions. The first is that the Commonwealth has reached a final and perfect stage, in which loyalty should be given unquestioningly to the status quo. But a static condition in human affairs can only be a momentary and illusory balance between growth and decay. Mr Hutton-Potts has shown that the Commonwealth is under strain; it cannot survive merely because large numbers of people in its different countries have a mystical conception of its destiny. The second assumption is that members of the Royal House-

hold who serve and advise the Queen are infallible in their judgment of what her duties should be in the second half of the 20th century. Both these assumptions are demonstrably false. They lead to a sort of archaism, a worship of the past by people who remain imaginatively in an Empire with late-Victorian power and splendour. The hard facts of these times are ignored or glossed over, and critics who disturb the dream are feared and hated.

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh are held in great respect and affection. They are above politics; the robust criticism which surrounded the Throne in earlier times, while the long struggle with Parliament was still going forward, would be absurd as well as offensive now that Parliament is supreme. The position today is that not one Parliament but several, and the diverse peoples behind them, must be taken into account, and the question to be decided is what the relationship should be between the Sovereign and the changing Commonwealth. No criticism can be effective unless it begins with public attitudes. And the attitudes that are most influential are those of the English people. The Royal Family has been subjected in England to a merciless publicity. The fawning and avid attentions of popular newspapers have surrounded Royal persons with an artificial glamour. Nor can it be said that radio, cinema and television are guiltless. Every Royal occasion becomes a spectacle, and every small event a sensation. Far more impertinent than the comments of Lord Altrincham are the cameras which follow Princess Margaret, and the endless gossip and speculation about her private life. The Queen and her husband bear themselves with dignity in their difficult situation. It is in the minds of the people that the true obstacle to progress may be found; and sooner or later, among ideas which leave loyalty untouched, the issue must be debated.

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 30, 1957.