

The Mountbattens in the 'Mob of Royalty'

by Mary Burdman

Prince Philip, A Critical Biography

by John Parker

Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1990
208 pages, hardbound, £15.95

Edwina Mountbatten, A Life of Her Own

by Janet Morgan

HarperCollins, London, 1991
509 pages, hardbound, £20

These two books provide some insight into how the British monarchy was shaped in this century for its current role as the filthy-rich patron of pagan ecogicism, by telling about the Mountbatten clan—Lord Louis, his wife Edwina, and nephew Philip, now the Royal Consort—who helped direct its modern development.

Information on this subject is certainly timely. In Europe, even as walls and communist governments fell in the past two years, royals in retreat since 1918 are looking east to step forward again. The princes of Yugoslavia and Romania, both cousins to Philip through his uncle, King Constantine I of Greece, are being touted to re-take thrones vacated as World War II broke out. There are even rumblings around those other cousins of the "Windsors," the remnants of Russia's Romanov dynasty.

Not that the books reviewed here appear intended to combat the royalist campaign. Janet Morgan's gossipy biography of Edwina Mountbatten is being promoted for its account, taken mostly from letters, of Edwina's relationship to Jawaharlal Nehru. It is timed to coincide with nasty attacks on Nehru's legacy as a leader of Indian Independence. As last Viceroy and Vicereine of India, the Mountbattens, who—by their own claims at least—between them made the final decision to partition India, and persuaded Nehru to agree to it over Mahatma Gandhi's total opposition, contributed much to the terrible tragedy of the migration in 1947 and the ongoing crisis in the Subcontinent.

In this century, the British "Royals" and their extended family reign as the *primus inter pares* of the European Protes-

tant-Orthodox oligarchy. "Englishness" is only a veneer added during the last two generations. In 1956, the British courts upheld an old statute from 1705, which provides that every Protestant "Royal" in Europe is entitled to British nationality, as a means to guarantee that no Catholic will ever take the throne.

The House of Windsor's origins in the House of Hanover almost 300 years ago are not the source of the problem. For generations, the family that took over the British throne married back into what Queen Victoria called "that Mob of Royalty." This was the great, incestuous family comprising the royal and ducal families of Britain, Russia, Germany, and Scandinavia, with an occasional foray into Spain and tentacles into the Balkan royalty of Romania, Yugoslavia, and Greece. All were multiply related to each other on paternal and maternal sides, witness the famous picture of Britain's George V and Czar Nicholas II of Russia side by side, looking more alike than most brothers.

John Parker requires three complicated genealogy charts to depict Philip's place in the oligarchical pecking order: one for the Danish-"Greek" and Russian line of his father, one for the Hessian ancestry of his mother and her brother Louis Mountbatten, and a third for his place in the British royal family. Philip's mother and Mountbatten were great-grandchildren of Queen Victoria.

The Windsor wealth

The royal wealth was built up only in the 20th century. Queen Victoria inherited debt when she took the throne. It was Edwina Mountbatten's grandfather, Sir Ernest Cassel, who managed the affairs of Victoria's son, King Edward VIII, so well that Edward ascended the throne free of debt.

Relatively little of the royal wealth comes directly from the publicly disputed Civil Lists provided by taxpayers. George V and his Queen Mary built a vast jewel collection, both from wedding gifts from Britain and the colonies, and later, by driving hard bargains to buy the jewels smuggled out of Russia by their Russian cousins who survived the Revolution. Elizabeth and Philip followed suit, acquiring jewels and racehorses from oil-rich Arabs.

Parker's is not much of a "critical" biography. The World Wide Fund for Nature, the platform from which Philip has pronounced his malthusian views for 30 years, in his capacity as WWF international president, is given little attention. Nor is the fact that Philip, educated only at the elite cult schools of Salem and Gordonstoun and in the Royal Navy, has no scientific credentials for his arrogant opinions.

Morgan's book is openly sycophantic. Edwina Mountbatten is the black sheep-turned-heroine of the British aristocracy, transformed by the war from her selfish, promiscuous (within upper class bounds) youth to the "healer" and tireless social worker who finally finds true love in her (properly platonic) adoration of Nehru. No plausible explanation is given for this supposed transformation.