Reflections on the Impact of the Death of Diana on the Monarchy

Contributed by Ipsos MORI
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After Diana's death "the Monarchy realized that it stands or falls on public opinion" I was quoted as saying in the recent cover story in Time Magazine .

The measure of public opinion to the Monarchy is the most stable measure of public opinion that exists in this country. The late Henry Luce III, then London bureau chief of Time, wrote an article in 1969 extolling the institution of the Monarchy saying that "most startling to an American visitor is the discovery that about a sixth of the British people think they would like to see the Monarchy abolished." So it was then, so it is today, nearly forty years on. It was 18% in 1969; it is 18% in 2007.

There was a brief moment, a snapshot at a point in time, ten years ago immediately following the untimely death of Diana, Princess of Wales, now immortalised in the turning point in the film 'The Queen', when a MORI poll for ABC News (no British media having commissioned any measure of British public opinion during the biggest demonstration of public opinion in any of our lives) found that nearly one person in four thought the country would better off without the Monarchy.

In the film, when the Prime Minister passed word of the results of our poll to the Queen's private secretary, and the private secretary passed this information to Her Majesty, the look on her face, Helen Mirren's face of course, said it all. At that moment, the Queen realised that her perception of British public opinion was out of date, and that action was needed to stem the tide so telegraphically represented by the sea of flowers filling the Victoria circle at the gates of Buckingham Palace.

The Royal Family reacted on the Friday following Diana's death with a walkabout outside the Palace. Saturday was Diana's funeral, with thousands surrounding Westminster Cathedral and millions around the globe watching the ceremony. The following week, the Sun newspaper commissioned us to measure the public mood again. The Royal Family had responded to public opinion, and was rewarded by seeing support for a republic cut in half. A month later, it returned to its normal level of around 18%, where it has steadily remained over the past decade since her death.

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