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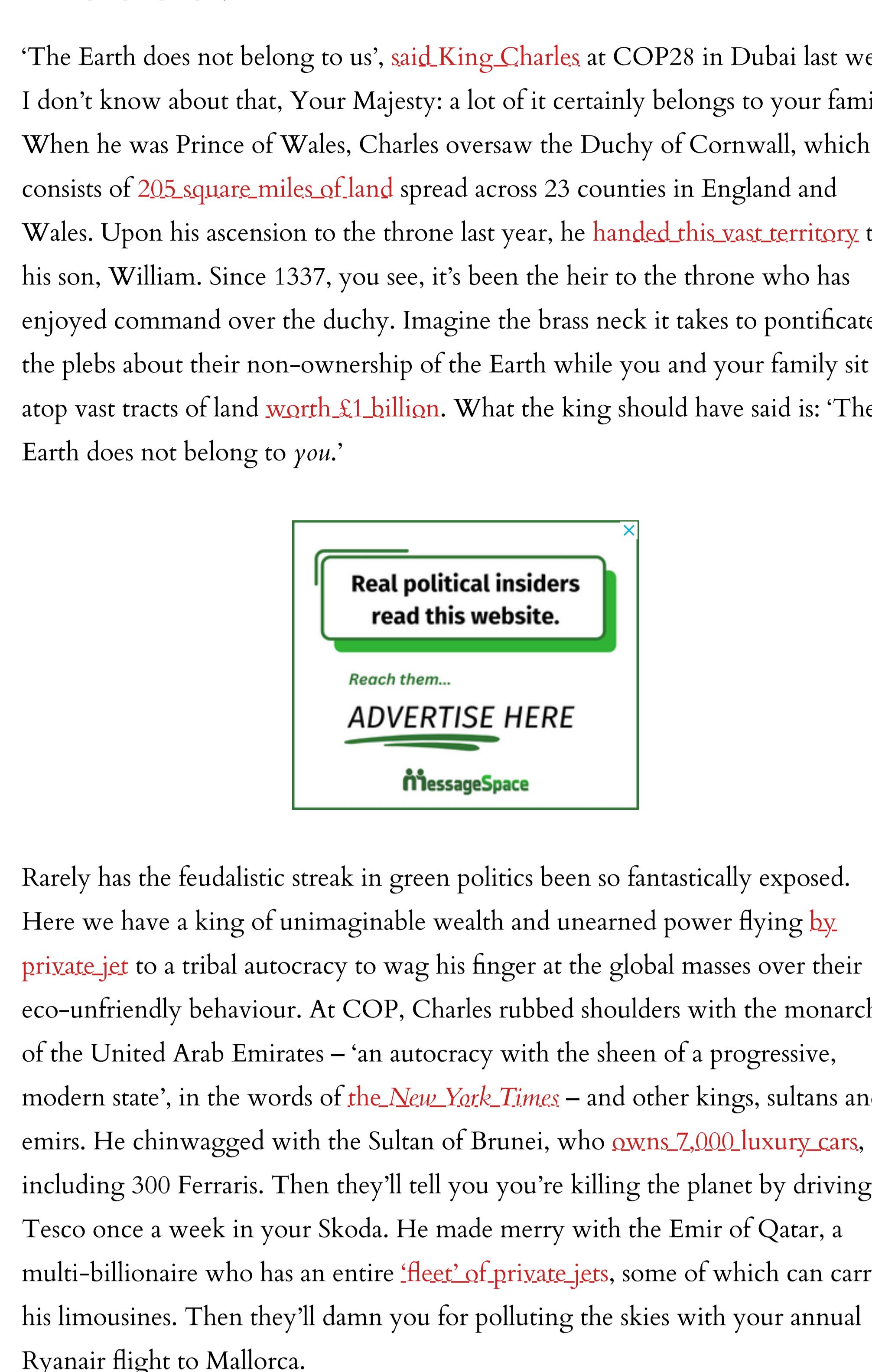
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BRENDAN O'NEILL  
CHIEF POLITICAL WRITER

4th December 2023



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'The Earth does not belong to us', said King Charles at COP28 in Dubai last week. I don't know about that, Your Majesty: a lot of it certainly belongs to your family. When he was Prince of Wales, Charles oversaw the Duchy of Cornwall, which consists of 205 square miles of land spread across 23 counties in England and Wales. Upon his ascension to the throne last year, he handed this vast territory to his son, William. Since 1337, you see, it's been the heir to the throne who has enjoyed command over the duchy. Imagine the brass neck it takes to pontificate to the plebs about their non-ownership of the Earth while you and your family sit atop vast tracts of land worth £1 billion. What the king should have said is: 'The Earth does not belong to *you*.'

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Rarely has the feudalistic streak in green politics been so fantastically exposed. Here we have a king of unimaginable wealth and unearned power flying by private jet to a tribal autocracy to wag his finger at the global masses over their eco-unfriendly behaviour. At COP, Charles rubbed shoulders with the monarchs of the United Arab Emirates – 'an autocracy with the sheen of a progressive, modern state', in the words of *The New York Times* – and other kings, sultans and emirs. He chinwagged with the Sultan of Brunei, who owns 7,000 luxury cars, including 300 Ferraris. Then they'll tell you you're killing the planet by driving to Tesco once a week in your Skoda. He made merry with the Emir of Qatar, a multi-billionaire who has an entire fleet of private jets, some of which can carry his limousines. Then they'll damn you for polluting the skies with your annual Ryanair flight to Mallorca.

So many monarchs, billionaires, CEOs, celebs and climate-change windbags are flocking to Dubai for COP that the carbon footprint of the blasted event is expected to be stratospheric. For some perspective, COP26, held in Glasgow in 2021, had over 38,000 delegates and together they pumped out a whopping 102,500 tonnes of CO2 – the same amount produced by 8,000 Britons in a year. The Dubai COP has more than double that number of delegates (97,000), many of whom are rocking up in a flurry of private jets and some of whom will mingle in the freshly built Leadership Pavilion, with its 'shades of cream and gold', 'designer lighting' and general vibe of a luxury car dealership', where the strictly non-alcoholic tipplers include 'iced Americanos' made with a 'gem of a bean from the Kaw Kaw Mountain in Papua New Guinea'. Then they'll tell you to turn off the heating in your terraced house to 'save the planet'.

And who built the facilities in which this gold-collared superclass will gather to bemoan the perils of modernity? Poor Africans and Asians, of course. In October, it was revealed that migrant workers were toiling in perilous heat to construct the luxury buildings in which His Majesty and others would be holding forth on the world's end. Human-rights researchers even found evidence of migrants working during the 'midday ban' – a UAE law that forbids outdoor labour during the hottest hours of the summer months in order to protect workers from potentially fatal heat exposure. 'I get headaches and feel dizzy', said one worker. 'I thought I would die every second we were outside', said another. Pipe down, peasants – the King of England has virtue to signal.

Let's be frank: this year's COP is a grotesque spectacle. On the backs of badly paid workers, the insanely wealthy will gather to lament the industrial world. In a monarchical statelet made filthy rich by oil, global influencers will lecture us little people about why it's better to cycle than to drive. A sultan who reportedly has gold-plated toilet brushes will catch up with a magnate who's richer than 40 countries (Bill Gates), all with an eye for working out how to phase out fossil fuels, the stuff that dragged the rest of us from pre-modern penury into something like a good life. A king and friends will tell us we're responsible for this heating planet as they luxuriate in air-conditioned facilities built by migrants who feared they would die in the heat.

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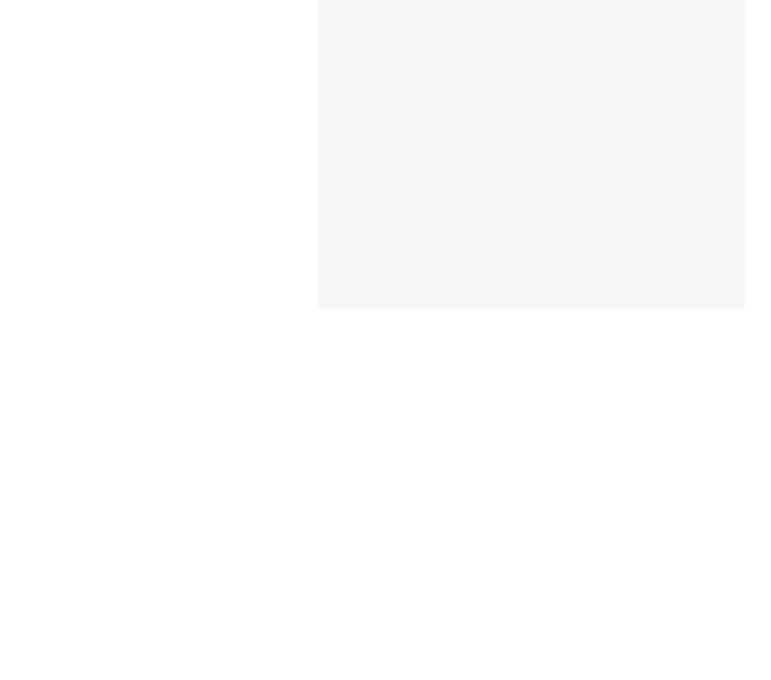
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Imagine going back in time and telling Cromwell there's another King of England called Charles and this time he's not only lording it over the peasantry of the British Isles but the peasantry of the entire Earth. Charles told COP he has seen the impact of climate change 'across the Commonwealth and beyond' (my italics). And that's why he's demanding 'real action' to avoid the 'alarming tipping points' of climate change. Let's leave to one side that this is the man who said we have 100 months to save the planet 176 months ago – that 'alarming tipping point' didn't turn out to be so alarming, did it? The more worrying thing is his allusions to the world 'beyond' his Commonwealth, where he imagines his eco-wisdom is sorely needed. Through climate change, he's positioning himself not only as King of the United Kingdom but also king of a dying world: an activist monarch who must save all humanity from its industrial hubris.

Is it just me or does environmentalism increasingly feel like the revenge of the feudalists? It is actually not surprising the king is drawn to a cause that demonises modernity and fantasises that things were better before those cursed spinning jenny's started spinning. The Industrial Revolution was a sucker blow to aristocrats. Its violent shifting of Britain from an agricultural economy to an industrial one robbed the old blue bloods of much of their economic advantage and everyday clout. There's a reason British environmentalism is overrun by angry posh people. By plummy youths called Indigo and Edred. By 'Econians', as Harry Mount calls them, in a green spin on 'Etonians'. A survey of 6,000 Extinction Rebellion activists found they were overwhelmingly middle-class [and] highly educated'. Of course they were: eco-hysteria is aristocratic rage against progress.

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