

Queen Elizabeth the Faithful

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She would have seen herself as a constant amongst the fluctuations at home and around the world. Before it became Zimbabwe, at the unrecognised unilateral declaration of independence in 1965, Southern Rhodesia proclaimed allegiance to her as Queen of Rhodesia: she declined to accept the role or the title.

Prime ministers provide the political leadership. Our forms of constitutional monarchy and flexible parliamentary democracy have evolved in ways which allow all kinds of things to happen although not anything.

Since the complicated times of King Charles the First, the supremacy of the House of Commons has been generally accepted, under the law. Historians will explain the significance of the Supreme Court decision published on 24 September 2019 that the apparent Prorogation of Parliament had not happened.

The democratic roadblock over the EU was cleared by the subsequent general election. In different ways and with a change of government, the general election in February 1974 allowed a way forward when the then prime minister Edward Heath asked: 'Who rules the country'? In effect the voters replied: 'We do not know but it is not you'. Conservatives gained more votes; Labour gained more MPs and formed a minority government in my first unsuccessful national election.

The world joined the Lying in State and observed the State Funeral. Kings and Queens, Presidents and Heads of State filed in from the North Door and Transept of Westminster Abbey. Many living holders of the Victoria Cross and the George Cross (and George Medal) came the other way.

I sat by Labour's David Lammy MP, the first Lords' Speaker Baroness Helene Hayman and Sir Tim Barrow, the National Security Adviser, across the aisle from women government whips who had to leave sharply to follow the Gun Carriage and the Queen's coffin to the Wellington Arch. I felt I was representing Worthing West, West Sussex and Sussex as a whole.

On Sunday evening, I was present at the short Service recognising the 20 years Elizabeth was Queen of Ceylon. This was followed by the Dinner in honour of the president of Sri Lanka. Baroness Patricia Scotland, secretary-general of the Commonwealth spoke; David Cameron and I did not.

During interviews with overseas television stations, they showed me with the stream of people walking along the Thames bank towards Lambeth bridge and the last two hours in Victoria Tower Gardens before passing through Westminster Hall to pay respectful tribute.

I was in touch with a number of long-distance walkers, including Vino Vijayakumar, who for a variety of good reasons is one of Worthing's best-known residents. His journey took under eight hours. Another, a physiotherapist, said she proceeded with a trainee minister of religion who kept her going by giving a series of addresses for most of their 12 hours of propinquity. The kiss she received at the end seemed rather familiar after their short acquaintance. She and I have known each other for decades and we have not yet become so close.

Answering questions for foreign viewers and listeners, I said we have kept the monarchy because we want to. We brought it back after the Cromwells. Revolution or parliamentary votes could change the system if we choose.

King Charles, with his family, is now the focus of the civil, military and police services and the inspirer of so many voluntary organisations. He gives leadership for the best of all our purposes. Long may he reign.