



By: *Catriona M. Munro, TA Editor in Chief*

# Who wants to be a Tsar or a Czar? Everyone!



People love titles and designations. I'm focusing on the Anglo Saxon world here. Whether inherited or merited, earned or won, nobody can take your title away unless you have committed some egregious sin leaving you in shame, and returned you to the ranks of the hoi polloi.

Without your title, you are back to square one. The person who used to be ennobled, as "the artist who used to be called Prince" might have said.

Royal and official titles are many and varied, from Emperor, President, Chancellor, Grand Duke Lord/Lady, Duke/Duchess, Count/Countess, etc. ad nauseum. "But Tsar"

Perhaps it was a political decision to change a four letter word into "Czar" due to the word "Tsar's obvious connotations." I'm referring obviously to the Tsars of all the Russias, who rarely fared well, apart from Peter and subsequently Catherine, who both achieved the suffix "Great".

Most of the rest of the tempestuous lineage of Russian Tsars were either fake, false, corrupt or assassinated.

If none of these criteria finished them off, Queen Victoria's fecundity spread haemophilia throughout the European monarchical dynasties, and the Bolsheviks finally saw off the Romanovs forever.

## Who are Tsars and what do they do?

In the late 1990s, the UK and US decided "Czars" were the way ahead for the purpose of good governance.

They are politically independent policy advisers, usually with a background of specialisation which provides them with expertise to finesse and formulate government policy.

These tsars have a lot of privileges: there are

no established rules or procedures, and they decide on action and terms and conditions with their relevant government ministers.

Experts are necessary in any government of integrity, but it is difficult to assess how the UK is benefiting from the 300-plus "Tsars" appointed in the UK since the Blair government of 1997.

There has been cynicism and opposition; predominantly from the political right. Lord Hunt, a former part of the long ago Thatcherite government of the 1980s, commented cynically that he himself "might be a fallen star".

The right-wing Daily Telegraph suggested that the reveal all British model Jordan should become "the tsarina of women's issues". Nobody wants a profiteer who swans around the halls of the United Nations rather than tackle issues at home.

The UK and US are not alone in looking towards specialised knowledge. The Soviet Union got a man into space before any Western power, which suggests that even an autocracy demanding full political allegiance is obliged to make use of expert knowledge.

**In a political utopia, Tsars should break down barriers and highlight priorities for government ministers**

The COVID-19 pandemic and government policy was an example of the need for genuine expert assistance from professionals who featured on the political landscape, and according to the independent Institute of Government (IOG), a number of rapid appointments focused on crucial areas of required action on an emergency footing.

These appointments were described by the IOG as "Tsars" ("Czars" appear to have been kicked into the long grass).

In a political utopia, Tsars should break down barriers and highlight priorities for

government ministers.

It is no secret that our UK health service, while noble and financially super fair, is too fragmented and understaffed to resolve a national health emergency.

I would argue that the status of Tsars is too nebulous, and requires a tad of regulation and a more formulaic way of operating.

We have to bear in mind that the point is that they are not civil servants, spin doctors or political advisers; how are they publicly and professionally accountable? There needs to be a method or system to measure the success of their performance.

The IOG report reveals that 3 of the Tsars appointed during COVID were married to Conservative MPs. The last thing we need is accusations of cronyism; the public needs to be reassured and confident that guidance is in genuine hands.

Are you aware of the 7 principles of British public life? Here goes:

- selflessness
- integrity
- objectivity
- accountability
- openness
- honesty
- leadership

Time for a code of practice, Tsars, You probably deserve your existence, but you need to follow rules like everyone else in government. You would be well advised to steer away from the fate of your similarly-named royal antecedents.