

International criticism of 'stupid, insensitive' Prince grows louder

By Terry Kirby, Chief Reporter, 14 January 2005

In one of the most embarrassing incidents to face the Royal Family, Prince Harry was under mounting pressure last night to make an unprecedented° apology in person for wearing a Nazi uniform, complete with swastika armband, at a fancy-dress party.



Michael Howard, the Conservative Party leader, condemned his actions and said the two-sentence apology issued by Clarence House° was insufficient recompense° for the offence he caused.

The Prince's gaffe° not only provoked widespread anger among politicians, anti-fascist groups and Jewish organisations, but also led to international criticism from Israel's Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom, and the EU's external affairs chief, Javier Solana.

The timing for the Prince, 20, who is third in line to the throne, of being pictured in the uniform of Rommel's Afrika Corps on the front page of *The Sun* could not have been worse. Later this month, his grandmother, the Queen, is to meet Holocaust survivors to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In May, he is due to start a course at Sandhurst.°

The issue is especially sensitive for the Royal Family, which is closely associated with the defence of

Britain during the Second World War. Harry's father, Prince Charles, prides himself on his relationship with Jewish groups. It also serves as a reminder of the historical links between the Windsors, Germany and the Nazis, and the infamous meeting between the Duke of Windsor and Adolf Hitler.

The affair follows a series of incidents involving the party-loving Prince. Palace aides have tried to improve his image by stressing his charity work.

In a statement issued by Clarence House, the Prince said: "I am very sorry if I caused any offence or embarrassment to anyone. It was a poor choice of costume and I apologise." Clarence House said there were no plans for him to say anything further.

Mr Howard said many people would be offended by the photograph, adding that the Prince should "tell us himself how contrite° he now is".

Charles Kennedy, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, told the BBC that Prince Harry had "let himself down".

The Simon Wiesenthal Centre, one of the largest international Jewish human rights groups, urged the Prince to visit Auschwitz, as his uncle, Prince Edward, will do on the anniversary. Rabbi Marvin Hier, the centre's founder, said: "This was a shameful act displaying insensitivity for the victims, not just for those soldiers who gave their lives to defeat Nazism, but to the victims of the Holocaust."

Lord Janner, a former president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, said: "What Harry did was both stupid and evil. The time has come for him to make a public apology. I would send him in to the Army as fast as possible. I hope that would teach him not to behave like that."

Stephen Smith, the chair-designate of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, said the incident served as a reminder of the importance of Holocaust education for the young. The Anti-Nazi League said the outfit was "grossly° insensitive".

Doug Henderson, the Labour backbencher° and former armed forces minister, argued that the incident demonstrated Harry was unfit to go to Sandhurst.

In Israel, Mr Shalom added that the use of Nazi symbols was "intolerable". He said: "Anybody who tries to pass it off as bad taste must be made aware this can encourage others to think perhaps that period was not as bad as we teach the young generation in the free world."

Mr Solana said: "It's not an appropriate thing to do."

German social democratic MP Ursula Mogg said: "From a German point of view, it is hard to understand that there can be any circumstance to wear that kind of uniform."

The photograph was taken in secret during a private party in Wiltshire at the weekend to celebrate the 22nd birthday of one of the Prince's friends, Harry Meade, son of Richard Meade, the Olympic medal-winning horseman. It was attended by many of the wealthy young people who form the so-called Highgrove° set.

The picture was sent to *The Sun* by a reader who alerted the newspaper to the sight of Prince William in a leopard-skin outfit. But staff decided that his brother's choice of costume was more newsworthy. It was reported last night that Prince William was present when his brother chose his costume.

WERE YOU OFFENDED BY HARRY WEARING THE ARMBAND?

Leon Greenman, 94, is author of 'An Englishman in Auschwitz'. His wife and children died in the concentration camp.

The swastika is an old symbol, but Hitler used it. Whenever survivors of the camps see that it gives a little shock thinking about a deeply painful past. I wish I could take [the Prince] to Auschwitz and show him what went on. If you start taking it lightly, there is always the chance it could happen again.

Simon Weston, Falklands veteran

I understand why the Jewish community should be offended. But people are being very, very pious^o because he is an easy target. He didn't set out to cause offence. He might not be the most thoughtful human being, but there aren't many people who haven't done something stupid at 20. The reaction of the press is over the top. He has already apologised.

Gisela Stuart, Labour MP for Edgbaston (German by birth)

It was very silly, but he is a particular position and ought to be more aware of the implications^o than any other lad his age. What it also shows is that the average 20-year-old does not understand what these uniforms stand for. But in his case, what you can't separate is who he is. I think in Germany there would have been more of an awareness, for very good reasons.

Lord Janner of Braunstone, former war crimes investigator and chairman of the Holocaust educational trust

It is utterly offensive to soldiers who fought the Nazis and people like myself whose family was killed by the Nazis. I hope that he would not have done this had he known the kind of offence this would have caused. He should come out as a man in public and apologise, not send a statement.

Anthony Beevor, historian

It was stupid, and obviously he's going to have to apologise. The whole thing should not be taken out of proportion.^o It was a private party, a photograph was taken secretly and then sold, and the media exploited the opportunity. Any comparison with the Duke of Windsor is preposterous.^o What is far more shocking is that 50 per cent of people in this country have never heard of Auschwitz.

Zeddy Lawrence, editor, 'Jewish News'

We're disappointed more than outraged. We think it's very sad. The Holocaust attacked Jewish people, so naturally we are more sensitive, but we should remember that it wasn't just Jews. We would invite him to join us on a trip to Auschwitz. It would be courteous^o and right of him to investigate further what happened to the Jews in the Second World War.

Nick Hornby, novelist

The main point about this is Prince Harry's stupidity. He is not in a position where he is allowed to be juvenile.^o If there is any point to having a Royal Family, it demands being more intelligent. I think some kind of public reaction is required. It would be pretty tragic if no one spoke out against public figures parading as Nazis. The swastika never meant anything other than evil, it cannot be reclaimed.^o

Katharine Hamnett, fashion designer

He is at an age when people make stupid mistakes. Unfortunately for the Royal Family, it turned out to be a huge mistake. People are still shocked by the swastika because of everything it represents. He is an idiot, but surely he has been chastised^o enough. He must be deeply sorry already, and you can't let this turn into a witchhunt.^o

Vocabulary

unprecedented beispielslos

Clarence House is The Prince of Wales's official London residence.

recompense Entschädigung

gaffe Ausrutscher

Sandhurst Royal Military Academy

contrite reuevoll

grossly in grober Weise

backbencher Parlamentarier

Highgrove House in Gloucestershire has been the private residence of The Prince of Wales since 1980.

pious fromm

implications Verwicklungen

to take out of proportion in einem falschen Verhältnis sehen

preposterous absurd, lächerlich

courteous zuvorkommend

juvenile jugendlich, unreif

to reclaim zurückgewinnen

chastised gestraft

witchhunt Hexenjagd, Hatz

Questions

What was Harry's mistake?

What do *you* think about the incident?

Choose one statement on the left which best represents your own opinion about the incident.