

Clean for the Queen: Sweep, Peasants, Sweep

Litter initiative hypocritical and condescending

By [Richard Crawshaw](#)

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Image: Clean for the Queen

Clean for The Queen is the latest campaign by Keep Britain Tidy. The aim is simple, recruit volunteers to clean the most neglected streets of Britain. The reason; to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday. What's wrong with that you ask?

It's not the aim, that's noble enough. We should keep our streets clean and tidy. We shouldn't live in squalor and we shouldn't litter. More concerning is the reason and the messaging. A master class in pompous paternalistic patriotism. The campaign demands 'CLEAN FOR THE QUEEN. VACUUM YOUR VILLAGES. SPRUCE UP YOUR CITIES. DE-LITTER THE LAND.' Don't clean the streets for your local community. Don't do it out of good nature. Don't do it to brighten up your local area.

No, instead, Clean for The Queen. A national figure who, wherever she goes, has freshly swept streets, a red carpet and an extensive barrier between her and the 'riff raff'. The slogans are a reminder that some in society pride themselves on being subjects rather than citizens. Clean for The Queen. It's a tag line which could only be more patronising if it was 'Sweep the streets peasants'.

Now, you could throw out my arguments as the moanings of a disgruntled republican, so bitter about the Monarchy that I'd rubbish a suggested street cleaning, and you might be partly right.

However, you'd be missing a more important point. Clean for The Queen highlights growing litter, graffiti and vandalism in some of the UK's most deprived areas: a problem that the government has failed to tackle and in some cases have exacerbated. Freedom of Information requests to 326 councils in England have found that, on average, local council budgets have been cut by 16 per cent since 2010. Street cleaning budgets in many councils had been cut by up to 80 per cent.

On top of the statistics on broader cuts, the most reductions in local government have hit the most deprived areas. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the poorest English authorities had seen reductions of £182 per head more than the most affluent councils. It's not a case that Britain has become more prone to litter, it's that local authorities have fewer and fewer resources to combat dirt and to sweep streets.

Here is where the hypocrisy of politicians backing this campaign is exposed. The hypocrisy of the 100 odd MPs who have backed the campaign and urged their constituents to grab a bin bag and sweep the streets, while implementing widespread cuts. In an age of austerity, we're being told by leading politicians such as Michael Gove and Boris Johnson to Clean for The Queen while council budgets are being cut.

Further hypocrisy can be seen when you look at the major sponsors of the event. McDonalds, Greggs and Costa Coffee, whose products can frequently be found among the litter. Is it really right that companies whose produce litters the street are asking good natured volunteers to clean up on their behalf? All masked in a cloak of patriotism?

Clean for The Queen's aims are noble, but its reasoning is wrong and its messaging is rooted in a

pompous patronising form of patriotism. We should clean the streets, we should keep our villages and cities clean, but not for the Queen, for ourselves, our communities and neighbours. We must also confront the bigger issue. The litter and dirtiness of British streets is partly related to deep spending cuts to local councils which have fallen on the poorest areas of the UK.



One comment

Sheila White

8 Mar '16 at 1:39 pm

A positive contribution to the litter problem would be to cast attention not to city's cleaning up, but people not throwing down and picking up for themselves. Sounds like the writer here could use some enlightening about littering. <http://www.litterpreventionprogram.com/current-edition.html>

 Report

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