

Republic debate ignited by PM

PRIME MINISTER Helen Clark's support for a republic on Waitangi Day has reinforced republicanism's broad-based appeal.

She is the third prime minister to support a republic in the last ten years, following in the footsteps of Labour's Mike Moore and National's Jim Bolger.

Other MPs immediately rallied to Clark's support, led by new Attorney-General and Treaty Negotiations minister Margaret Wilson.

The Republican Movement would accept Clark's challenge, said president Dave Guerin.

"We look forward to other political leaders and ordinary New Zealanders joining the debate. We know that many MPs support republicanism, as do many Kiwis throughout the country. That support can only grow.

"Waitangi Day is the right day to lay down this challenge, because we need to build consensus about the Treaty as we move towards a republic."

The monarch's Treaty role, while never legally significant, was valued by Maori for its symbolism, Guerin said. "Maori have to be convinced that a republic will not diminish the Treaty's place. However we shouldn't forget that Maori support for a republic is already higher than that of Pakeha."

A 1996 survey showed the monarchy had only 35 per cent support among Maori, compared to 55 per cent among Pakeha.

Advisory panel to address Treaty

THE CHALLENGE that ended last month's political forum at Waitangi Marae was to consider a republic as an answer to Treaty of Waitangi concerns.

Waitangi Day has always been an opportunity for debating constitutional change and Maori have long been discussing republicanism as a way forward into the 21st century for Maori and Pakeha. A republic, confirmation of our coming of age as a Pacific nation, would emphasise that power should come from the people – a philosophy in alignment with tikanga Maori.

The Republican Movement has taken a step to move the debate from hui, cafes and pubs into a wider forum.

It is convening an independent advisory panel of leading Maori and Pakeha constitutional experts to address the social, legal and political matters relating to the establishment of a republic. And the panel's first priority will be to advise on how the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's foremost founding document, ties in with the establishment of that republic.

The Movement, by presenting reliable and relevant information verified by experienced independent experts, will encourage the development of an informed debate.

Responsibility for Queen Victoria's side of the Treaty has been transferred to a construct called "the Crown in New Zealand". In plain English, the English have washed their hands of the Treaty, Maori, and New Zealand as a whole.

Panel members may not support republicanism or the Republican Movement — but they can ensure that a New Zealand republic takes over where Britain left off. A New Zealand republic cannot do other than take on full responsibility for the Treaty, and for the peoples of this country.

spoken

"I mean, we're 12,000 miles away from where the head of state resides. How does any of that make sense?"

— Helen Clark

"I think almost inevitably the movement is to repatriate powers back home and I guess sometime in the future, New Zealand may well decide that it no longer wishes to retain links with the monarchy and I wouldn't resist that."

— Sir Paul Reeves

"I am one who believes the time has come to bring our constitutional arrangements into line with our growing sense of identity as a people who owe much to many cultures, but who are forging a unique culture that can stand proudly alone."

— Margaret Wilson

"The question is not whether the monarchy has a lot of power over us. In practice it doesn't. The problem is that bowing before the British Queen reflects a colonial mentality."

— Keith Locke

"The problem for us is summoning the courage as a society to take the next step in the evolution of our national identity and propelling Parliament to act."

— Chris Laidlaw

"We bend the knee to nobody in the world — except the British royal family. This is not just silly, it is demeaning. It cuts brutally across the egalitarian and self-reliant grain of our culture."

— Sunday Star-Times



Australians want change, but vote 'no'

AUSTRALIANS, republican at heart, were uncertain whether to vote "yes" in their republican model and chose to be safe. The lack of public information was exploited by the PM, John Howard, and monarchist groups who both used scare tactics liberally.

The resulting "no" vote was nearly 55 per cent in Australia's republic referendum in November, with the republic proposal winning a majority only in the Australian Capital Territory.

The "yes" vote was strongest in the big cities and amongst the better-educated groups in the population. It was lost in the rural areas, in the less-educated or poorer groups.

Republican Movement president Dave Guerin visited the Australian Republican Movement later in November. The data he was provided showed that Australians wanted to elect a president by popular vote, and that was a stumbling block for the referendum.

Most voters thought it would avoid a politician getting the job, but leading politicians all thought that a directly elected president would be a party nominee.

"But Australians overwhelmingly want a republic — only 9 per cent of them voted 'No' because they wanted to keep the Queen. They just want to be sure of the deal offered to them," Mr Guerin said. "We could beat them to a republic, though, and that might be one extra motivation for New Zealanders."

"Australian republican leader Tom Keneally, the author of the book that inspired *Schindler's List*, said a few years ago that nothing scared Australian republicans more than New Zealand beating them to a republic. So let's give the Aussies a run for their money."

The Australian Republican Movement is now regrouping, with a leadership and constitution change. Wider progress is not expected until there is a new PM.

the way forward

Dave Guerin

THE Republican Movement is riding a wave. Interest has been piqued in political and media circles.

The issue is now on their radar horizon and my recent contacts with them have been very positive.

Our next boost will come with the *Building the Constitution* conference in April. The list of speakers is star-studded, so Treaty and republican issues will make a big splash in the media.

But we also have to work hard on public engagement and education too. One project in the works is an annual essay and multimedia competition for students. Their infusion of new ideas and enthusiasm will be a great boost.

Hulme leads campaign launch

IN A high-profile campaign launch, the Republican Movement called for the support of all New Zealanders who believe that there is something special, something unique about this country.

"The time is right. New Zealand must look to the new millennium with a fresh face, reflecting the many different people that make up a distinct New Zealand identity."

In an open letter to all New Zealanders as Movement patron, Booker Prize-winning author Keri Hulme described monarchy as "a hadit idea": "There is much to discuss, to talk to one another about how our islands should venture into the 2000s. We need to korero about history and laws and relationships and future paths. But there is no doubt in my mind that the **best** way we can head into the future is as a republic."

Dave Guerin commented on the recently released Third New Zealand Study of Values, which showed that support for a republic had more than doubled in the last ten years to 32.2 per cent. "I am confident that republican support will double again in the next five years. Indeed, the Republican Movement is committed to a schedule that would culminate in New Zealanders voting to create a republic in the year 2005.

"New Zealand should be led by a New Zealander -- someone who knows what it is to sit on a sunny beach under a pohutukawa tree at Christmas, someone who cheered for the All Blacks in the World Cup."

Republican Movement on the phone and the Internet

The Republican Movement has launched an extensive new Internet site at www.republic.org.nz — New Zealand's best republican information resource. It explains why we want a republic and examines key issues in the debate such as democratic election, New Zealand's distinct character, and the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Movement can now be phoned or faxed on 04-8018199.

New Zealanders who want to join or support the Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand can also write to PO Box 24-194, Wellington.

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