

Dame Silvia welcomed to 'uniquely NZ' role

PRIME MINISTER Helen Clark welcomed Dame Silvia Cartwright as joining a distinguished line of eminent New Zealanders in a "uniquely New Zealand" role as the Queen's representative, at her swearing in this month.

"Those appointed as governors-general are now always New Zealanders and represent the finest qualities of New Zealanders," Clark said, in a thinly-veiled reference to New Zealand's increasingly rapid move to an indigenous sense of nationhood.

Republican Movement president Dave Guerin also paid tribute to Dame Silvia, but suggested she was "probably the last governor-general in New Zealand".

"With support increasing every year, the majority of New Zealanders will support a republic within two or three years," he said.

"When that happens, we will be able to choose talented New Zealanders, such as Dame Silvia, for our top job."

He pointed to NZ Herald/Digipoll polling in December showing that support for a republic had risen to 40 per cent of New Zealanders, while support for the monarchy had dropped to 47 per cent.

"Sir Michael Hardie Boys admitted a couple of weeks ago that 'the governor-general makes his own decisions without asking permission from Buckingham Palace'. If that's true, what's the point of keeping the monarchy?"

The first verse of God Save the Queen, as one of New Zealand's two national anthems, was played by the airforce band at Dame Silvia's swearing in at Parliament. And the swearing of her oaths of office and allegiance to the Queen were followed by a shout of "God save the Queen" from the Herald at Arms.

But Guerin suggested that only a fraction of New Zealanders aged under 40 would even know the words to God Save the Queen.

After the pomp of the swearing-in ceremony, Dame Silvia headed up the steps of Parliament to a state reception.

Little-noticed amid the hubbub, Cabinet Office official Barbara Lewis fought her way through the crowd to the door of the Beehive, returning the oaths and the two gold pens to the vault until the next swearing-in — in five years, if ever.

Commonwealth scorns monarchy

COMMONWEALTH Secretary-General Don McKinnon, a New Zealander, stirred up a storm when he pointed out that Prince Charles would not automatically succeed Queen Elizabeth as head of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Republican Movement president Dave Guerin told the New Zealand Herald that the leader should be chosen on the basis of merit, not archaic ties.

"Prince Charles might be that person, but out of the two billion people in the Commonwealth we can probably find someone who can do a better job," he said.

And Prime Minister Helen Clark joined a chorus of voices around the world arguing that someone like former South African president Nelson Mandela might be more appropriate as a successor, when the Queen dies.

spoken

"I am prepared to say Her Majesty will remain head of the Commonwealth for as long as she's there. Now what happens after that, well, is ultimately up to the heads of the Commonwealth."

— Commonwealth Secretary-General
Don McKinnon

"The Commonwealth's origins lie in the British Empire and the symbolic head of that empire was always the Queen. It remains appropriate that she should remain the symbolic head of the Commonwealth."

— Monarchist League of New
Zealand chairman Noel Cox

"New Zealand is a small but important member of the United Nations and of the Commonwealth. It has often had an impact in excess of its geopolitical significance, and therefore has a responsibility to continue to use its influence for the good of all."

— new Governor-General
Dame Silvia Cartwright

"I am hopeful, but you won't satisfy everybody, you never will."

— retiring Governor-General
Sir Michael Hardie Boys on resolving
New Zealand's sovereignty issues

"Sir Michael also escaped the public furnace that would surely have resulted from being forced to use his mysterious reserve powers, acting without ministerial advice."

— Dominion journalist Val Aldridge

"The fact that she [the Queen] has any role at all in our democracy is, to be frank, an international embarrassment."

— The Sun



Sophie's gaffe stirs up British republicans

BUCKINGHAM PALACE is drawing up new guidelines for the Royal Family's behaviour following the Countess of Wessex's embarrassingly indiscreet comments about the Queen.

Sophie resigned as chairperson of her public relations firm after confiding to a journalist, posing as a client, that Queen Elizabeth was too controlling.

She also revealed political sympathy for the Conservative Party, described Labour's budget as "a load of pap", and indicated that having a royal doing public relations would give the fake sheikh credibility.

The transcript was published by the News of the World and by broadsheet newspapers.

Buckingham Palace promptly announced it would lay down new guidelines for Royals to avoid "conflicts of interest".

Edward, the Earl of Wessex, has also been embroiled in controversy over his ailing television company Ardent Productions' questionable efforts to raise funds by using his royal profile

And the Duchess of York has used "HRH" to endorse American products including Weight Watchers, Wedgwood, Ocean spray cranberry juice, and Dutch Internet company World Online.

Prince Charles has been criticised

for phoning Government ministers' direct to lobby them about farming, and environment and Europe.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has remained quiet despite anger among his ministers about the Royals trading off the monarchy, and Sophie's right-wing comments.

According to The Times, most ministers support a debate about the monarchy's future before Prince Charles succeeds his mother as monarch.

The Guardian newspaper is taking the monarchy to the High Court over succession rules that discriminate against women and Catholics, while the Sun tabloid called for a reform of the monarchy last month.

In New Zealand, Republican Movement president Dave Guerin said the debate should be about the principles behind republicanism, not about Royal personalities.

But he said it was inappropriate for the Royal Family to trade commercially off their status or to intervene in politics.

"I am certainly concerned at reports of both the Countess of Wessex and Prince Charles, first in line to the throne, making known their political leanings."

But Monarchist League of New

Zealand chairman Noel Cox downplayed Sophie's comments.

"So she made — or is reported as making — comments which were undiplomatic. Does it really matter?," he asked.

"Continued coverage merely promotes the false impression that this is some form of scandal or sensation."

the way forward

by Dave Guerin

The minor Royals seem pretty distant to me — I usually only see them on the covers of magazines at the gym.

I hardly ever think of them in a republican context, as our concern is largely with the Queen herself.

Sophie Wessex's recent travail with the fake sheikh created some interest for me though, when it touched a nerve in the British media.

The affair gave them a chance to comment on the abuse of the royal position for commercial gain and the intensely political nature of the royal family.

While Sophie Wessex has commented on Blair and Hague, Prince Charles comments on a whole range of political issues.

This is quite different from New Zealand.

Sir Michael Hardie Boys recently commented that he didn't know if he could get Helen Clark on the line to talk, as he had never tried!

That's one of the reasons why the republic seems closer. Not only has our society grown more distant from the royal family, but so has our constitutional practice.

If our government no longer involves the monarchy or the governor-general in any substantive fashion, and our society has moved on, what's the point of the monarchy?

Royal Overseas League the 'last bastion' against republicanism

INVERCARGILL'S Royal Overseas League describes itself as the last bastion for the monarchy in New Zealand.

Nearly 40 members of the league's Southland branch met for dinner in Invercargill last month, to commemorate Commonwealth Day.

They stated they were against New Zealand becoming a republic.

And though they were disappointed in the younger royals they were loyal to the Queen, whom they say has never lost her dignity.

Former league president Mervyn

Hughes said the group was the last bastion against New Zealand becoming a republic.

"Heaven help us if we do," he said.

Australian High Commissioner Robert Cotton was a guest at the dinner.

He said such groups were an important reminder of the fundamental values of the Commonwealth such as equality of opportunity and democratic rights.

"When societies lose their way it's important to have these to take them back towards it," he said.