

Britain to take fresh look at royal succession

REELECTED British Prime Minister Tony Blair has promised to reconsider the 300-year old law banning Roman Catholics and other non-Protestants from the British throne.

Mr Blair said the 1701 Act of Settlement, a cornerstone of the British constitution, was "plainly discriminatory".

"Obviously, in principle, it can't be right that Catholics are unable to succeed, so we will examine it again," he told Glasgow's Herald newspaper.

His turnaround follows:

- a unanimous motion from the Scottish Parliament for the Act to go;
- The Guardian newspaper's upcoming court case against the Act under European human rights law;
- the Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand's announcement of a Human Rights Commission complaint about succession law.

Mr Blair has acknowledged difficulties in removing the Act of Settlement from the statute books, including the possibility that it could result in the disestablishment of the Church of England if not done carefully.

But a secret opinion poll conducted for the royal family shows that the majority of Britons see the monarchy as unimportant and poor value for money, the Daily Mail said.

Republican Movement president Dave Guerin welcomed Mr Blair's undertaking, but some New Zealand commentators greeted it cynically.

Listener columnist Matt Philp suggested the Guardian case and Republican Movement Human Rights Commission complaint could mean "our constitutional machine seizes up". "Ministers could not be removed, or war declared. We would be left with an indissoluble parliament, an uninterrupted parliament, a bearpit trapped in Groundhog Day."

Guerin said Philp must have his tongue planted firmly in cheek. "Opening up and modernising bigoted succession rules does not mean closing down Government House. It is simply a chance to move the monarchy into at least the 20th century — and then the next step is to move it into the 21st century by removing it altogether."

National Party loosens ties with monarchy

NATIONAL leader Jenny Shipley is encouraging the party to seriously consider a referendum on the monarchy's future on Queen Elizabeth's death.

The proposal, in a discussion paper emanating from a working group chaired by former attorney-general Sir Douglas Graham, has been welcomed by other republicans in Parliament like current Attorney-General Margaret Wilson and Green MP Keith Locke.

But Prime Minister Helen Clark, understood to be privately even more supportive of a republic than is reflected in her positive public statements, was still unwilling to enthuse about a National Party initiative.

"I'm on the public record as saying I think inevitably one day New Zealand will become a republic but I've taken no steps to speed it up," she said.

The discussion paper, still to be finally voted on by National members, says the Justice Ministry should be instructed to start preparing and disseminating apolitical material explaining what a change would mean and how it would be done.

spoken

"In 2001, our constitutional set-up is still built around a distant dysfunctional family."

— *Listener columnist Matt Philp*

"19,000 kilometres from the source, the tweedmen, beardies and blue-rinsers of the New Zealand Monarchist League are in thrall to that same Ruritanian fantasy life."

— *Matt Philp again*

"We appreciate the adoption of such a position will cause concern to some National Party supporters. Many are staunch monarchists. Their dismay might be assuaged by the acknowledgement that there would be no move until the death of the present Queen."

— *National Party discussion paper*

"I don't see why the referendum needs to wait for the death of the Queen as suggested in the report. A large number of New Zealanders, particularly young people, support a move to a republic."

— *Green MP Keith Locke*

"If [my] betters have decided that the game is up and it's time to change the crest on the letterhead at Government House (not to forget asking NZ Woman's Weekly to leave Prince William alone and start doing more profiles on Ben and Anna Shipley) they should spell out just what's inevitable about republicanism."

— *former National MP Simon Upton*

"Let's have a debate ... but let it be free of emotional republican twaddle or, however unconscious or masked, anti-English racial hatred."

— *correspondent N James*



Law Journal nails colours to Union Jack mast

NEW ZEALAND cannot produce judges of a quality comparable to the Privy Council, the Law Journal says.

Journal editor Bernard Robertson has come out in opposition to abolishing the right of appeal to the Privy Council.

"It takes five million Britons to produce one Law Lord," he said.

"That single sentence should give pause to those who believe that New Zealand with 3.8 million can produce an

indigenous Court of consistently equal quality."

Mr Robertson's editorial was prompted by Attorney-General Margaret Wilson issuing a discussion paper on options for replacing the Privy Council with an indigenous court of final appeal.

"In fact there are only two jurisdictions which have severed appeals to London worth considering, namely Canada and Australia," he said.

"The remainder are mostly tin-pot dictatorships.

"Canada and Australia have populations ten times our own and hence find it ten times easier to assemble seven or so judges of reasonable quality."

Chief Justice Dame Sian Elias has attacked the Privy Council as New Zealand's final court of appeal, calling it expensive and anomalous.

the way forward

by Dave Guerin

THE enthusiasm with which the public and media adopted our proposed Republic Day is something we'll build on in the next few years.

Republic Day, known anachronistically till now as Queen's Birthday, will be celebrated on the first Monday of June each year.

We looked around at all the existing holidays and saw they had a special meaning, like ANZAC Day or Waitangi Day.

Then we saw Queen's Birthday and realised it was perfect for Republic Day.

No one celebrates Queen's Birthday at the moment. It's just a day off for most people, perhaps coming in handy when the ski-fields open early.

Queen's Birthday is not even the Queen's birthday. That's almost as ridiculous as taking a day off to celebrate an aristocrat's birthday in the first place.

The media loved Republic Day, but it is more than a stunt. It is a serious chance for Kiwis to remember where we've come from, and where we're going.

So hasta la Republic Day, and the official name-change for the day when New Zealand actually makes that change.

Canada mature enough for own head of state – foreign minister

CANADIAN foreign minister John Manley says the country is mature enough for a "truly Canadian" head of state.

His comments came at the start of the Victoria Day long weekend, the day after Prime Minister Jean Chretien expressed his affection for the royal family on national television.

Mr Manley said there was a lot of support for the monarchy, but Canada had reached sufficient maturity to move on.

"Having the oldest son inherit the responsibility of being head of state, that is just not something in the 21st

century that we ought to be entertaining."

Canadian monarchists were outraged, saying Mr Manley was not giving sufficient credit to the work of the royal family.

Monarchist League chairman John Aimers said it was "bizarre that Mr Chretien, who otherwise runs a pretty disciplined Cabinet and caucus, allows people to ruminate on this.

"A leading member of the Cabinet, rather than leading us in celebrating the reality of our heritage and history, is attacking one of our fundamental institutions."

Australia's republican Governor-General

NEW Australian Governor-General Peter Hollingworth is discreetly sidestepping comment on the implications of his republican leanings.

Anglican Archbishop Hollingworth expressed his republican views on appointment to Prime Minister John Howard's constitutional convention on a republic in 1998.

"I don't think you can actually typecast what my view is on the republic," he said this month.

"At this stage I am very happy with the present arrangements ... You make changes when you are confident that what you have in front of you will be better than what you had."

Royal Spanish fling scares monarchists

SPAIN'S monarchists fear their Crown Prince's relationship with a commoner will bring the royalty into disrepute.

Prince Felipe, 33, has been seen frequently with Norwegian fashion model Eva Sannum, 26, dining, skiing, and walking arm in arm in India.

An engagement is rumoured to be imminent, scaring monarchists who believe that an overseas commoner is not proper Spanish queen material.

"I would consider a grave error a wedding which put us on a level with the English and which perhaps would make me consider the advantages of a republic," said Jose Luis de Vilallonga, the official royal biographer.