

Constitutional Inquiry?

PRIME Minister Helen Clark proposed a constitutional inquiry in mid-March but the scope of that inquiry is still unclear. It may focus mainly on the Treaty of Waitangi, or it may be broadened to include issues such as republicanism.

The Justice and Electoral Committee recommended an inquiry into constitutional issues after its consideration of last year's Supreme Court Bill, but the issue was stalled for various reasons, including the Government's concern at dredging up complex issues.

Things changed in March and the latest proposal has been perceived by many as a response to the gains in poll support for National, with the inquiry being seen as a useful way to quarantine contentious issues until they lose some of their public interest. On the other hand, it may provide a useful way to work through some contentious issues in more depth.

69% of the public supported the inquiry, according to a March Colmar Brunton poll, but with all the confusion about the inquiry's content, it is hard to assess the result.

Peter Dunne, the United Future leader, has urged the PM to include issues such as republicanism and a written constitution. "I don't think it [an inquiry] can look at anything in isolation. It has to take a total approach", he said.

Labour Minister Pete Hodgson poured cold water on a broader inquiry, stating "An inquiry into the future of race relations in New Zealand cannot become a wider debate on the constitution or whether or not we should become a republic".

NZ First leader Winston Peters was sceptical initially that anyone could be found to sit on a commission of inquiry, but by the end of March he had conditionally agreed with Labour to an inquiry, along with United Future and the Greens. National and Act continue to oppose the inquiry.

Nothing has happened since the end of March, but it seems likely that the Government will support a limited Treaty-focused inquiry if it does anything.

Republican Bill in Ballot

GREEN MP Keith Locke has put up a private member's bill for New Zealand to become a republic. His Head of State Referenda Bill is currently in the ballot for private member's bills, from which some are drawn regularly.

The Bill would require one or two referenda to be held. In the first referendum, voters would be given three options: the status quo; a head of state elected by voters; or a head of state elected by a 75% majority of Parliament. If any option secured a majority, it would be implemented (or continued, in the case of the monarchy).

If no option secured a majority, the two highest polling options would be run off against each other in a second referendum, to be held within 12 months. If a change was agreed, then the Governor-General would become the interim head of state.

Under the direct election system, people would have to be nominated by 500 electors and then a Single Transferable Vote election would take place. Under the parliamentary election system, only MPs could nominate people. The lowest polling nominee would drop out and a fresh vote held until someone gained a 75% majority.

The Republican Movement has placed a copy of Keith Locke's bill on our website at www.republic.org.nz – you will find a link in the What's New section.

spoken

"Why Clark would want to let even a hint of the republic bogey get out of the bag when her Government is already under enough pressure is especially puzzling."

—*Herald Columnist, John Armstrong*

"Suffice to say there's quite a lot of interest in how the issues might be moved forward in a constructive way"

—*Prime Minister, Helen Clark*

"This idea is designed to close down the debate on race relations until after the election"

—*National Dep Ldr, Gerry Brownlee*

"Many New Zealanders now believe this Government doesn't even want the people involved - a prospect I find personally offensive."

—*United Future Ldr, Peter Dunne*

"We peasants are going to be very disappointed if the prime minister's promise of an inevitable republic goes down under a voter backlash."

—*letter to the Timaru Herald, Michael J Setterfield*

"The oath of allegiance was simplified in 1979, and remains a short and dignified statement of loyalty to the constitutional order."

—*Monarchist League Chr, Noel Cox*

"In the past few weeks the Treaty has gone on trial-by-sound-bite. (Our) proposal...puts the people in charge of an inquiry and ensures they have the resources, time and information to do the job"

—*Greens Co-Leader, Jeanette Fitzsimons*



A checklist for the republic

WHEN the Republican Movement was started in the mid 1990s, we developed a list of some of the things that might need to be done to become a republic, besides choosing our own head of state. Looking back, it is amazing how many changes have been made, so this month we do a stocktake of progress.

Since we made up our list:

- the honours system has been changed to a NZ honours system and, more recently, knighthoods and damehoods have been abolished;

- the right of appeal to the Privy Council has been abolished;
- the Queen's Counsel designation is being reviewed and should be replaced by the Senior Counsel term; and
- the Oaths of Allegiance are being reviewed, with an eye to removing oaths to the Queen.

Of course, when we drew up the list above, many changes had already been made. New Zealanders:

- took full control of their own laws and adopted New Zealand

citizenship in the 1940s; and

- adopted their own national anthem in the late 1970s.

It is important to keep track of progress on the road to a republic. Each of the changes listed above reflect NZers taking greater control of their own affairs, and have also reduced the hurdle of republicanism. We should not underestimate the importance of making small steps before making big ones. If you have a chance to influence the removal of a symbolic link to our monarchy, such as the oaths of allegiance, make the effort.

A Kiwi for G-G

by guest writer Lewis Holden

WHILE republicans bear no animosity towards Prince Edward or any other member of the Royal family, appointing him as New Zealand's Governor-General would be a retrograde step.

It was once common that New Zealand's G-G came from the British aristocracy, and it has only been since 1967 that we have appointed New Zealanders. Many upstanding and successful New Zealanders have held the position since then - an Olympian and Rhodes scholar, a national representative cricketer, a champion of disadvantaged children and sports administrator, patrons of the arts, and judges.

Appointing Prince Edward as our G-G would see New Zealand breaking this tradition for no good reason. Most importantly, the suggestion that the Prince deprive Kiwis of even holding the office of *representative* of our Head of State is ridiculous.

There is no shortage of kiwis deserving of being G-G, and any contrary suggestion is mischievous. In this instance, it has backfired on Richard Worth, with everyone else taking the mickey out of him, rather than offering support.

Prince Edward as the G-G?

NATIONAL MP Richard Worth suggested in April that Prince Edward could be our next Governor-General.

After asking Helen Clark in a Parliamentary written question whether she was considering appointing the prince as our next G-G (she said no), Richard Worth went on to say he was not touting Prince Edward for the position but he was an outstanding person with a close, continuing interest in New Zealand. Others considered for the position should be prominent sportswomen and sportsmen, he said.

"I don't particularly want her (PM Helen Clark) casting a shadow on New Zealand by leaving behind, when there's a change of government in 2005, a militant feminist, but would she?", said Mr Worth.

The Republican Movement replied strongly, with Dave Guerin saying that "Richard Worth's promotion of Prince Edward as our next Governor-General is simply surreal, replacing a long-term tradition of appointing New Zealanders as Governor-General. I am surprised that he hasn't started to scratch around the English countryside for other minor royals and aristocrats who could 'set an example' for us".

The Waikato Times editorial on April 16 was just as clear. "On face value it is difficult to come up with one good reason to bestow such a prestigious position on such an unremarkable prince; on reflection it is even harder."

The NZ Herald's Reality Check column commented: "surely we want New Zealanders in the top job as has been the case since Sir Arthur Porritt's term began in 1967. And we think most of the country's men have coped with just two of them having been well-qualified women."

Australian Progress

REPUBLICANISM has had a few good wins recently in Australia. Mark Latham, the Labour leader, has revived the idea of a new referendum on a republic, while the Senate inquiry into a republic has continued its work (see link below).

www.republic.org.au/ARM-2001/republic/senateinquiry.htm

The Latham announcement is probably the better one for New Zealanders as debates across the Tasman can help to heighten awareness of issues in New Zealand - although with a constitutional inquiry and the oaths and affirmations review, we have enough to keep us busy!

