

Positive poll results

SUPPORT for the monarchy is at an all-time low, according to one of New Zealand's biggest and most authoritative political polls – and another puts support for a republic on a high. The recently published New Zealand Election Study (NZES) 2005 also found that the trend of support for a republic is gradually upward. This comprehensive study of 2,762 New Zealand voters at the 2005 election found that only 48% of New Zealanders supported the status quo. 34% of New Zealanders said they supported a republic. The NZES results are interesting because while support for the monarchy has fallen from 62% in 1999, support for a republic has only slightly increased, if at all.

These results should serve as a warning for both sides of the debate. On the one hand the public are more apathetic to the monarchy; on the other they aren't increasingly enthusiastic for a republic either. Perhaps most importantly it's the band in the middle – the "don't knows" who now hold the balance between the republic and the monarchy. The "don't knows" have greatly increased in numbers since 1999 from 9.7% to 17.1% in 2005 – which could simply be a reflection of the lack of debate on the issue of a republic.

The second poll was a TNS survey of 1,000 voters for TV3, and was published on 5 February, the day before Waitangi Day. It found that 39% of New Zealanders supported a republic, with 53% supporting the status quo. Lewis Holden, President of the Republican Movement said, "Waitangi Day is a day to reflect on where we're going as a nation. While these polls are indicative only, the Republican Movement encourages all New Zealanders to get involved in the debate on the future of our Head of state at this important time of the year".

> See *The Way Forward* on page two for further analysis of these results.

Knight wants Knighthoods

HE'S a Knight, and he wants everyone else to have the same chance - but why is a republican law lecturer advocating a return to the feudal titles of 'Sir' and 'Dame'? Hot on the heels of the Government's creation of four further members of the Order of New Zealand on Waitangi Day - instead of the usual Queen's Birthday - Dean Knight, a prominent blogger and law lecturer at Victoria University, has drafted a Bill to restore Knighthoods and Damehoods for New Zealanders being awarded the Order of New Zealand.

Knight believes that the changes made by the current Labour-led government in abolishing the titular honours were a backward step – and points out that ever time a new ONZ is created, the honour is usually reported as being "equivalent to a Knighthood". Knight stresses his commitment to a New Zealand republic and the New Zealand Order of Merit, but argues that despite this New Zealand should recognise its British roots in our honours system.

Knight's Bill would also create Maori versions of the titular honours, "Tā" (Sir) and "Kahurangi" (Dame). The Bill is "free to a good home", or any MP seeking a ready-drafted members' Bill. A poll undertaken by the *National Business Review* in February 2000 before the Government abolished titular honours found that 54% of the 750 people surveyed supported the abolition of such honours, with 37% of New Zealanders wanting to keep them. No other polls have been taken since abolition of the titles.



The Republican Movement
of Aotearoa New Zealand

spoken

"When the current Queen goes, we should be ready to sever our ties to the monarchy and appoint or elect our own head of state. Stay within the Commonwealth, but have our own people running all of our affairs."

- Media commentator John Bishop

"We can also incorporate an element in [the New Zealand honours] system that reflects our British origins - a fusion of historic and indigenous traditions."

- VUW lecturer Dean Knight on his Bill to restore Titular Honours.

"Over time, I believe we will make greater changes and we will have a new flag, a new constitution and a republican form of government."

- United Future leader Peter Dunne's rounds up Waitangi Day

"Republicans claim that the idea of sovereignty residing with the people is in direct conflict with the idea of sovereignty residing with the Queen. This is to create a conflict where none should exist. These definitions of sovereignty are not opposing concepts."

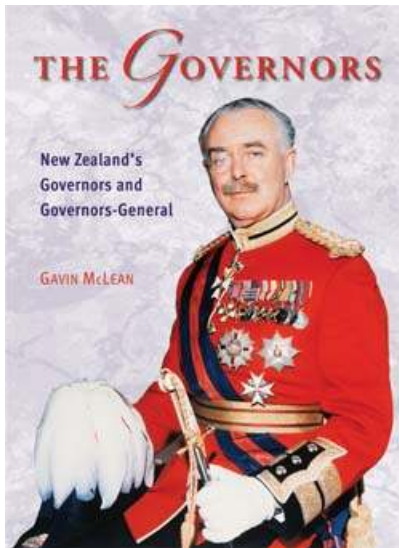
- Monarchist Brian Anderton opines on sovereignty



The Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand

PAGE TWO

New book on NZ's Governors



THE GOVERNORS by Gavin MacLean is an excellent book on the little known office of Governor and Governor-General in New Zealand.

The recently released book is well researched, and covers the history of the office right from the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, when Hobson was declared Lieutenant-Governor of Britain's newest colony, to the most recent appointment of Anand Satyanand as Governor-General of the Realm of New Zealand.

MacLean balances commentary on each of the lives of Governors and Governors-General of New Zealand with constitutional developments during their terms, visits by the Queen and other useful information. Most interesting for the republic debate is the gradual development of the office from the enforcer of Colonial Office policy to de facto Heads of state (MacLean calls the Governor-General a "virtual head of state").

The only disappointing part of the book is MacLean's fleeting analysis of the republic debate. MacLean states that support for a republic in New Zealand is in decline, but can only cite on study to back his claim, despite a number of polls and surveys showing otherwise. Further, he quotes the poor performance of "The Republic of New Zealand Party" (a small party that officially embraces republicanism) at the 2005 general election as proof that New Zealanders don't support republicanism. This one flaw lets down an otherwise very good book.

Putting the case for a republic

It's crucial that republicans articulate why a republic is the way forward for New Zealand. So we're starting a monthly column in Republic putting the case for a republic. This month, we'll look at the myth that the monarch is a constitutional backstop.

OVER 14,000 miles separate the Queen from New Zealand – which is probably why the monarchists often say that our head of state is indisputably "above politics". Yet at the same time they argue that the monarchy "is one of the protections of liberty" and that the usefulness of the Queen is that she "denies ultimate power" to the Prime Minister and Cabinet. These two arguments are inconsistent. If the Queen protects our liberties, how exactly can she do so by staying "above politics"? The answer is that Her Majesty cannot, and the two arguments are contradictory.

By convention, the monarch must always act on the advice of their Prime Minister. Sir Kenneth Keith neatly put it in the introduction to the *Cabinet Manual*: "The Queen reigns, but the government rules, so long as it has the support of the House of Representatives". This means that the Prime Minister is really not denied any power, and holds most of the powers attributed to the Monarch, except where the Prime Minister loses the confidence of Parliament. However, even then the Queen wouldn't intervene. The Queen refused to intervene in the Australian Governor-General's dismissal of Gough Whitlam's Labor government in 1975; endless petitions and delegations by Maori to the Queen have been met with nothing other than rebukes by Buckingham Palace.

The reason why is simple: the Queen remains above politics because intervention in it would be partisan and therefore would make the monarchy controversial, something the Queen is understandably very careful not to do. Even when the confidence in the Prime Minister is disputed, the Queen will not intervene. The Queen is not an effective constitutional backstop; neither is the Governor-General – but we will save that one for next time.

The Way Forward

by Lewis Holden

Growing numbers of New Zealanders who are undecided about a republic provide both the greatest hope for republicanism – and its greatest threat. Sure, both of the polls on page one are positive results for a republic – but we need to look at their underlying message.

The undecided show that there is clearly a need for supporters of a republic to articulate our position and to make that position clear in the minds of those sitting on the fence. We need to give them compelling reasons to support a republic.

This means that the ideas and arguments we often take for granted as republicans need to be repeated, and often. We can't afford to assume the New Zealand public knows our cases as well as we do. We need to continually put the case for a republic, refine it, update it, and make it relevant to the public.

By doing this, we may (with a bit of luck) preclude the sort of absurd arguments that plagued republicans across the Tasman during the 1990s. There, monarchists preyed on fear, misinformation and outright scares to finally defeat the republic at the 1999 referendum.

We must learn from that experience.

