

## **Canada needs to explore future options for head of state**

By Barbara Yaffe, Vancouver Sun July 15, 2010

A new poll reveals unequivocally that Canadians do not want Prince Charles to succeed the Queen as their head of state.

Which poses the question: What is Ottawa doing to prepare for the succession issue?

Make no mistake, Charles, Prince of Wales, is heir apparent.

He has never spoken of any desire to transfer his inheritance to son William (which would not be in his purview in any case).

And no one will get a vote when he and his unpopular wife, Camilla, begin their reign.

In fact, the instant the 84-year-old Elizabeth dies or abdicates, Charles automatically becomes king. A coronation ceremony takes place after a period of mourning, but it's not a requirement for the succession.

Unless Charles, 61, dies before the Queen or suddenly opts to become a Catholic, he will be Canada's head of state.

An Angus Reid poll this week, conducted following a successful tour to Canada by the popular Queen and her consort Prince Philip, shows that a scant 18 per cent of Canadians favour this scenario.

In Quebec, support drops to 10 per cent.

Charles's wife, Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, is particularly unloved, with nearly half of Canadians holding a "mostly unfavourable" opinion about her.

(Life certainly is capricious; Camilla is in line to become Queen while, in Iran, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani recently was sentenced to be stoned to death for her adultery.)

Clearly Charles's long-standing affair, leading to a divorce from the late Diana, has irreparably damaged the would-be king's reputation.

A head of state, above all, must be admired and trusted and Charles does not score highly on either front.

While the matter should not come down to individual personalities, it's a fact that more and more Canadians have expressed a wish to have a resident and relevant head of state.

As thorny a constitutional matter as this notion presents, the Harper government should be exploring options.

To date, Conservatives have chosen to do nothing, doubtless out of respect for Elizabeth. This, despite the fact that the Conservative voters who responded to the Reid poll are particularly loath to have Charles succeed Elizabeth.

Fully 73 per cent of them said either there should be no monarch after Elizabeth or William should succeed the Queen.

Increasingly in Canada, the country's governors general have assumed relevance and importance as stand-ins for the head of state.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has just announced the appointment of David Johnson as Canada's next governor-general.

He follows two high-profile and flamboyant appointees: Michaëlle Jean and Adrienne Clarkson, both widely admired for the way they carried out the role.

Harper used an eminent person's panel to select Johnston and specifically instructed that the appointee not be partisan.

His actions reflect an improvement on past practice, which had past prime ministers simply making a personal decision about who should be governor-general.

Regardless of the diminishing role for the British monarchy in this country -- all the monarchs do here is engage in royal visits -- it's essential that respect be maintained for Canadian institutions.

The head of state, the monarch, is one of those institutions.

With Canadians feeling so negatively about the future king and expressing a growing fondness for the made-in-Canada governors general, Ottawa ought to be exploring options, however quietly and respectfully.

Elizabeth is not going to give two years notice of her death.

Harper should name a panel of constitutional advisers to provide advice on future options for the head of state.

And, if ever the next monarch, King Charles III, and his consort wish to do a royal visit to Canada, that would still be fine. On their own dime.