

Question:

Is Canada a colony or a country?

Answer:

To answer fully, one must acknowledge that every democratic nation in the world has a head of state - usually a president or monarch - and a head of government - usually a prime minister. Occasionally, one person even holds the same position. Regardless, it's widely recognized that one true measure of a nation's independence is if both of these positions are occupied by resident citizens of that nation. That's not the case in Canada. Despite being well into the twenty-first century, our constitutional head of state is still the reigning monarch of the United Kingdom - our former colonizer.

The assumption is that Canada is a country, an independent nation. But are we really? Many say that status eludes us until we shed our last colonial link with Britain and attain the constitutional right to select one of our own citizens as head of state.

Other reasons why the monarchy has to go:

Our head of state lives in a castle on another continent and visits only occasionally, roughly 200 days in fifty years. Don't we deserve one who lives here all the time?

The monarchy is a limiting factor on our national identity and one of the reasons the question of what it means to be a Canadian continues to be an issue.

Our head of state should be a true representative of the People of Canada. On the contrary, Queen Elizabeth II does not represent Canada or its interests when she travels abroad,

she represents the United Kingdom.

Canada's head of state should not be above our laws. Presently, a British act of parliament, the Act of Settlement of 1701, constitutionally bans Roman Catholics from becoming head of state of Canada and 15 other members of the Commonwealth. That person must also be required to hold the position of Supreme Governor of The Church of England, thereby preventing, Jews, Hindus, Muslims or anyone not a member of that Christian sect from becoming head of state. Contradicting this, Section 15(1) of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms expressly forbids discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic origin or religion.

Monarchy and inherited rights in government, symbolic or otherwise, is a concept incompatible with Canadian values of egalitarianism.

The monarchy is one of the irritants that contributes to the national unity tension that exists between Anglophone and Francophone Canada. In fact, ending the monarchy in Canada, according to a 2002 poll, garnered the support of an amazing 76% of Quebecers! Canadianizing our head of state could – in one mark of a pen – decimate one major fuel for Quebec separatism.

But doesn't the monarchy help define us as different from Americans?

If being '*different*' means '*culturally insecure*,' then, maybe it does. However, we can do much better than rely on an imported icon to define us. We have our own home-grown symbols, institutions and heroes. By celebrating them, we enhance our confidence and uniqueness as a people and a nation, not just on this continent, but in the world.

What is a republic?

By definition, a republic is a state in which:

- 1) the supreme power rests in the body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by its elected representatives.
- 2) the head of government is elected, and
- 3) the head of state is not a monarch.

Of these, only number 3 does not apply to Canada. When it does, we'll be a republic, the final symbolic step in our nation's path to independence.

And, it can all be done fairly easily, because we have all the materials for change already at our disposal. Just like the parliamentary republics of Ireland, Austria, Iceland, Germany and India, to name a few, their ceremonial presidential heads of state do pretty well the same job as our governor general, who, at present, is Canada's representative of the Queen. All we have to do is democratize that office's selection process and properly define the role - which can all be done without constitutional amendment. Then, one step would remain, constitutionally severing the position from the British monarchy. Once that's done, we'd be a republic. We'd still have a head of government, the Prime Minister. Canada would still have the same excellent relations with the United Kingdom and could continue with its leadership role in the Commonwealth, of which the Queen is presently the head. There's also absolutely no reason why Canadians could not still celebrate its historic link to the monarchy. It is, after all, part of our history.

Canada needs this final step in its colonial evolution in order to take its place as a fully independent nation among nations.

Isn't it time?