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Monarchy in Canada: Its Rise, Evolution and Future

Abstract

Since 2006, the Conservative federal government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been trying to turn the clock back and revive monarchical sentiments in Canada. As part of a larger political agenda, the Harper administration have recently put an emphasis on Canada's glorious monarchical past, holding a series of pompous ceremonies celebrating the War of 1812, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and royal visits. All this has been accompanied by further reaching actions of restoring the prefix "Royal" to the names of the air force and the navy and Harper's insistence on Queen's portraits being prominently displayed in the public lobbies of Canadian Foreign Affairs headquarters and Canadian embassies. The paper discusses the relevance and effectiveness of such initiatives, presenting them both in historical and contemporary contexts. The article also provides an overview of the evolution and recent developments in the monarchical system of government in Canada, as well as presents possible scenarios for its future.

Résumé

Depuis l'an 2006 le gouvernement fédéral conservateur sous le premier ministre Stephen Harper a essayé de faire revenir le passé et revivre les sentiments monarchiques au Canada. Faisant partie d'une agenda politique plus ample, l'administration de Harper a mis en relief tout récemment le passé monarchique du Canada glorieux avec toute une série de ceremonies pompeuses pour commémorer la Guerre de 1812, l'anniversaire de diamants de la Reine ainsi que les visites royales. Tout cela avec des actions qui allaient plus loin dans le sens de restaurer le préfixe "royal" devant les noms des forces armées aériennes et maritimes. Monsieur Harper a en plus insisté qu'on devait mettre en vue des portraits de la reine dans des lieux visibles et notamment dans les couloirs des sièges des Offices des Affaires Etrangères et ceux des ambassades du Canada à l'étranger. Cet article repasse en revue la rélevance et les effets possibles de ce type d'initiatives en les présentant tant du point de vue historique, comme celui du contexte contemporain. On y présente également une revue de l'évolution et les faits courants au sein du système monarchique du gouvernement au Canada ainsi que des scénarios pour le future possibles.

Canada has extensive and long-standing ties to monarchy. The beginnings of monarchical tradition in Canada can be traced back to the 15th and 16th centuries, when the first European explorers (after the Vikings), John Cabot in 1497 and Jacques Cartier in 1534, arrived in what today is Canada and declared vast portions of newly discovered lands as possessions of their respective monarchs (Henry VII of England and Francis I of France). From then on Canadian political system evolved under a continuous succession of kings and queens of France (1534–

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1763) and England (1497–1707). After England and Scotland merged to form the United Kingdom in 1707, Canada was placed under the governance of the British monarchs. Finally, through the provisions of the Statute of Westminster of 1931, Canadian monarchy became fully ‘Canadianized’, receiving legally distinct and separate status from the British monarchy. Obviously, with the transition of Canada’s political status, the role and actual power of monarchical institutions have greatly diminished. Since the European conquest, however, Canada has never been anything but a monarchy and, as one Canadian historian stated, the very continuity of monarchical tradition makes monarchy one of the few institutions that survived in Canada “through uninterrupted inheritance from beginnings that are older than our Canadian institution itself” (Monet 8). Some prominent Canadian politicians would even look beyond North American history and seek the roots of Canadian monarchical tradition as far as in the medieval England. The Crown, in the opinion of Stephen Harper, the incumbent Canadian Prime Minister, is what links Canadians

with the majestic past that takes us back to the Tudors, the Plantagenets, the Magna Carta, *habeas corpus*, petition of rights, and English common law ..., all those massive stepping stones which the people of the British race shaped and forged to the joy, and peace, and glory of mankind. (Canada, Dept. of Canadian Heritage)

With its monarchical institutions Canada today is no exception. It remains one of the forty-four countries in the modern world which continue to retain a monarch as the head of state (Gimpel 12). Like all western monarchies, Canada is a constitutional, parliamentary monarchy, with a monarchical head of state who practically serves as a symbolic, ceremonial figurehead, having no actual influence on day-to-day politics. The use of formerly vast monarchical powers had long in Canada been limited by constitutional conventions, with most of the royal prerogatives having been transferred to democratically elected institutions – to the parliament responsible to the electorate and the cabinets responsible to elected legislatures. Canada, along with fifteen other states, is also a Commonwealth realm. The very term ‘Commonwealth realm’ was coined after World War II to refer to those former British colonies and now fully sovereign countries and members of the Commonwealth of Nations, which voluntarily remain in personal union with the United Kingdom and recognize Queen Elizabeth II as their head of state. Apart from equally sharing the same sovereign, all sixteen monarchies are formally and legally separate from one another (Coates 142–143).

As already mentioned above, the present independent status of Canadian monarchy was introduced in 1931 by the Statute of Westminster. With the passage of the statute by the British Parliament, Canada as well as five other British dominions at the time (i.e. Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, and Newfoundland) formally ceased to function as British colonies and were granted full independence in foreign and internal affairs,¹ or – to be more precise – they were rather given an opportunity of exercising full sovereignty from Britain,

1) Section 2 of the Statute of Westminster guaranteed that “no law and no provision of any law made ... by the Parliament of a Dominion shall be void or inoperative on the ground that it is repugnant to the law of England, or to the provisions of any existing or future Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom,” while Section 3 “declared and enacted that the Parliament of a Dominion has full power to make laws having extra-territorial operation” (Statute of Westminster).



the opportunity that not all the dominions were willing to grab fully and immediately. In Canada, for instance, constitutional amendments continued to require legislation of the British Parliament until the patriation of the constitution in 1982. Nevertheless, it was not the arrangement resulting from the reluctance of the British to renounce interference in Canadian politics, but rather the effect of disagreements between Canadian provinces and the federal government over how the new, fully 'Canadianized' constitution should be amended (Buurman 29). Thus it is no overstatement to say that limitations to full political sovereignty from Britain remained in Canada after 1931 only at Canada's consent or even at clearly expressed Canadian request.

As for the monarchy itself, the Statute of Westminster considerably changed the structure of monarchical links between the UK and the aforementioned dominions. Prior to 1931, the monarchy throughout the British Empire had been based on the principles of a real monarchical union – British sovereigns served as monarchs in colonies such as Canada simply by virtue of being kings or queens of the United Kingdom. With the enactment of the Statute of Westminster, and in accordance with the provisions of preceding and subsequent laws passed by both the British and Canadian parliaments (i.e. Royal and Parliamentary Titles Act of 1927 and Royal Style and Titles Act of 1953), the real union was replaced by personal unions and the monarch is now designated as King or Queen of Canada as a separate monarchy. As a result of such modifications, the monarch now is obliged by convention to hold unique Canadian titles and use distinctly Canadian national symbols whenever (s)he performs the duties of the head of Canada (Coates 142–143). Also, whenever the Queen represents Canada publicly, she will use the Canadian Maple Leaf flag instead of the UK's Union Jack as well as the typically Canadian royal and heraldic symbols.²

Having reformed the structure of monarchical ties with Britain in the 1930s, some more efforts were made by successive Canadian governments to modernize monarchical institutions in order to make them more reflective of postwar Canadian democratic and social values. The changes were mostly noticeable in the evolution of the nomination procedures applied while appointing Governors General. Before 1931 Governors General served most of all as personal representatives of the monarch, carrying out all the political and ceremonial prerogatives in the monarch's stead. But also they played a role of emissaries or envoys of the British government, since it was the UK Prime Minister whose advice the monarch followed while announcing appointments of viceroys. Since 1931 the system has evolved and now Governors General are appointed solely on the advice of Canadian Prime Minister, with the monarch being obliged by convention to nominate as (s)he has been suggested (Riddell 132). As a result, starting in the 1950s, only Canadian nationals are appointed for the position of Governor General. Nominations reflect Canadian bilingualism (there's a rotation of French- and English-speaking Governors General), multiculturalism, and policies of gender equality (women and representatives of visible minorities started to be appointed – the appointments of Adrienne Clarkson in 1999 and Michaëlle Jean in 2005 were the most evident examples of the changes).

2) The example of the latter is the Royal Standard of Canada, informally called the Queen's Personal Canadian Flag, which the Queen has been using since its adoption in 1962. The flag is by default displayed on buildings or transportation to mark the monarch's presence therein. It differs considerably from the personal flag the Queen would use in her capacity of the British monarch (Bousfield and Toffoli 119).



Despite these reforming modifications, starting in the 1960s successive Canadian governments undertook various initiatives aimed at reducing the visibility and prominence of monarchy in Canadian public life. At least three major reasons explaining such policies can be presented.

One was the emergence of Quebec separatism as an important political and social force in the 1960s. For separatists, monarchical institutions symbolized little more than a continuation of the Anglophone dominance over Francophones and favouritism to British-Canadian heritage. Quebec separatists, however, should not be overstated as key opponents of the monarchy. For them, monarchical institutions have never served as the main political enemy. Neither have anti-monarchical slogans constituted the core of separatist political agenda. The ultimate goal for *souverainistes* has always been Quebec's separate nationhood and independence from the federal government of Canada (whether it will be monarchical or republican has never really mattered). Nevertheless, separatists incidentally showed their disrespect towards the Queen and monarchical institutions.³ Also, anti-monarchists expressed their vociferous objections to anachronistic laws regulating succession to the throne (Bill of Rights of 1688, Act of Settlement of 1700), discriminatory against non-Anglicans and female descendants of the ruling monarchs. Monarchy in the rhetoric of the Canadian republican movement seemed and still appears to be an outdated system of government, inconsistent with the multicultural nature of Canadian society ("Changes"). Diminishing the public role of monarchy was thus the federal government's method of appeasing Quebec separatism and republicanism.

The second reason was the adoption of multiculturalism as an official Canadian policy in 1971. This was preceded by the introduction of new immigration laws, which changed the structure of immigration to Canada. The immigrants mostly arriving from Asia and Africa were not interested so much as English Canadians in monarchical heritage and remained largely indifferent to monarchical tradition. Also, some of the newcomers arrived in Canada from the countries which had had traumatic experience with British colonial rule and for them, just as for some Quebec separatists, monarchy symbolized British abuses of colonial era (Bousfield and Toffoli 138).⁴

Last but not least, the rise of Canada as an independent actor on the postwar international scene was also an important factor which diminished the role of the monarchy in Canadian public life. Through its separate membership in the UN and the NATO, Canada gained a new international status. However, this status was not reflected in the national symbols Canada

- 3) During Elizabeth II's Canadian visit in 1964, for instance, some Quebecers turned their backs on the Queen and jeered at her while her cavalcade was passing through Quebec City (Palmer 199).
- 4) Therefore, Canadian ethnic communities' support would largely go to those political parties which presented a distanced attitude to British monarchical heritage. The Liberal Party of Canada benefited most, while Canadian Conservatives, who for decades had been promoting British-Canadian connections (during the Diefenbaker era, for instance), found it very difficult to attract visible minorities' votes. Only recently (in the 2006 and 2011 federal elections) have Canadian Tories been able to reverse this trend and win a large share of the ethnic vote. The one who is frequently credited with this success is Jason Kenney, immigration minister in the Harper government. Kenney came to understand that the very future of Canadian Tories depended on "building a trusting relationship" between immigrant communities and his party. His campaign rhetoric, as well as the rhetoric of the whole party, focused not so much on the issues that could alienate ethnic voters, but rather on the values immigrants and Conservatives shared: "family, a strong work ethic, the fight against criminality" (Castonguay).



used internationally to identify itself. The British Union Jack was still a part of the Canadian Red Ensign, which had unofficially been used as the country's flag since the end of the 19th century; 'God Save the Queen' continued to be sung as the national anthem. In the 1960s it was decided within the governmental ranks in Ottawa that the visibility of monarchy and British symbols on Canadian identifiers conveyed a confusing image of Canada as a country somehow subservient to the British rule. As a consequence, monarchical references and symbols started to be removed from public view as improper and unjustified vestiges of bygone colonial days (Buckner 86–87). Remarkably Canadian identifiers took their place – the Maple Leaf flag replaced the Red Ensign in 1965, and the bilingual 'O Canada' was introduced as a new national anthem in 1980.

The process of removing monarchical symbols from public view intensified during the premiership of Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1968–84). His term of office was marked by the implementation of numerous initiatives and programs which in a relatively short time 'neutralized' monarchy and its stature in public life. One of them was the Federal Identity Program (FIP), whose primary goal was to create a standardized corporate identification for the federal government of Canada in order to make the federal initiatives clearly recognizable by Canadians. As a result of the program, several dozens of federally administered or funded institutions and corporations (including, *inter alia*, Air Canada or CBC) are today mandated to mark their premises, publications, websites, or other sorts of products (co-)sponsored by the government with visual identifiers established by the FIP (so called 'Canada wordmark' or 'Canadian corporate signatures') (Canada, Treasury Board of Canada). Although the FIP was not officially designed as a counterweight to monarchical symbols, it adopted corporate governmental identifiers which had no references to Canada as a monarchy and contributed immensely to the process of replacing monarchical symbols with clearly Canadian, monarchy-free symbolism.

It was also during Trudeau's premiership when the prefix "Royal" began to disappear from the names of important public institutions. The Royal Mail, for instance, was given the new name of Canada Post, while the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the land army merged to form the Canadian Armed Forces. Both changes were introduced in 1968 (Buckner, *Canada and the British Empire* 124–125). These moves were accompanied by the gradual disappearance of the monarch's portraits from ministerial buildings, public schools or Canadian embassies and consulates.

On top of all those actions, Prime Minister Trudeau became notorious for his frequent breaches of royal etiquette and diplomatic protocol. On a few occasions, he happened to be photographed while presenting a very distanced, most disrespectful attitude to monarchical code of conduct (the internet sources hold a fair-sized collection of photos depicting the Prime Minister turning pirouettes just behind the Queen's back in 1977) ("Trudeau's"). Such examples of misbehaviour led the most vocal pro-monarchists to popularize suspicions that Trudeau yielded to republican notions and was planning to abolish the monarchy in Canada and replace it with the republican system of government. Far from the truth as those suspicions were, even the Queen herself was said to have worried that monarchy "had little meaning" for Trudeau and found him rather a disappointing politician (Schmidt). Also, in order to protect the monarchy from the interference of Trudeau and Trudeau-like politicians, the Monarchist League of Canada was established in 1970. The organization is still operative and remains the



strongest advocacy group promoting the continuity of constitutional monarchy in Canada.

The process of eliminating monarchical references and symbols from the public eye continued uninterrupted until recently. This led to the present situation, in which contemporary Canadians have a poor understanding of the role, responsibilities or even of the very existence of monarchical institutions. As recent polls show, a large number of Canadians remain unfamiliar with the intricacies of Canadian monarchical system of government. According to the survey carried out by Ipsos Reid in 2008, less than a quarter of respondents were able to rightly point out to the Queen as the head of state of Canada (“In Wake”). Newcomers or foreign visitors might also find it hard to realize that Canada is a monarchy, since monarchy’s public presence is today mostly restricted to geographical or topographical names or some visual images (monarchical symbols incorporated into some of the provincial flags or the effigies of the Queen on Canadian coinage, artworks and monuments).

The monarchy’s marginalization continued until 2006 when Conservatives led by Stephen Harper won their first federal election in almost 20 years. From the very start of his premiership, Mr. Harper has proven to be a very consistent promoter of monarchy, not to say a staunch monarchist, which is reflected in numerous statements and speeches he has delivered publicly. In the opening sentence of his very first parliamentary address he delivered as Prime Minister, Stephen Harper paid tribute to the “head of state, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, whose lifelong dedication to duty and self-sacrifice have been a source of inspiration and encouragement to the many countries that make up the Commonwealth and to the people of Canada” (qtd. in Smith). A year later he wrote a letter to new Canadian citizens, explaining them that Canadian “rights and freedoms flow from the thousand-year-old legal and parliamentary traditions, ... [which] are embodied in Canada’s Sovereign, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II” (“Memorable”).

However, only after 2011, when Conservatives won an overall majority in the House of Commons, were they able to increase efforts to turn the clock and history back and, as it soon turned out, to embrace monarchy on an unparalleled scale in recent Canadian past. Among other initiatives undertaken recently, the Harper administration has launched an active campaign promoting Canadian monarchical links and tradition with the goal of bringing the monarchy closer to Canadians, restoring public interest in the monarchy and reviving Canadians’ respect for monarchical heritage and monarchical institutions. This large-scale promotional enterprise seems to be a part of a wider strategy of fostering national pride by emphasizing the glorious Canadian monarchical past or, as some pundits claim, it is an important element of “creating a conservative version of Canadian patriotism” (McQuigge). As for the practical side of Harper’s new historical and cultural agenda, there have been a series of pompous monarchical celebrations held across Canada over the recent several months, most of them lavishly subsidized by the federal government.

The events that got a lot of publicity both in Canada and abroad were the celebrations of the sixtieth anniversary of Elizabeth II’s reign. Although the central part of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations (attended by the Canadian Prime Minister) took place in London in June 2012, countless festivities, exhibitions and ceremonial visits were held in Canada in the first half of 2012. The most important of them was the royal visit of an heir apparent, Prince Charles and his wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, in May 2012.



At the same time the Harper government assigned \$28 million to fund celebrations of the bicentennial anniversary of the War of 1812. The whole undertaking was designed to remind Canadians of their own glorious history. The goals of celebrations were clear: to emphasize the positive impact the monarchy had on the nation building processes in Canada and to generate a feeling of Canadian national pride. According to James Moore, Canadian Heritage Minister, War shaped “the Canada we know today: an independent and free country with a constitutional monarchy and its own distinct parliamentary system”; the celebrations were thus “an opportunity for all of us to take pride in our history.” The British traditions “helped protect this land from invading forces” and still serve Canada today, added Peter MacKay, Canadian Defense Minister (qtd. in “Harper”). Since the events celebrating the War coincided with Prince Charles’s visit to Canada, he was encouraged by the Prime Minister to mark the anniversary at a military ceremony in Toronto wearing the uniform of a lieutenant-general of the Canadian Army. Such a huge spending on celebrations, however, was met with strong opposition. As some critics sarcastically commented, with such “bread-and-circuses” celebrations Canada spent millions of dollars on the war fought 200 years ago (Fitzpatrick).

In August 2011, Stephen Harper’s Conservative government made a decision to bring back, after over four decades, the traditional prefix “Royal” in front of the names of Canadian air force and navy. According to Peter MacKay, Defence Minister of Canada, the change will help reunite present members of the Canadian Armed Forces with the proud Canadian military traditions:

A country forgets its past at its own peril [said MacKay]. From Vimy Ridge to the Battle of the Atlantic and from Korea to the defence of Europe during the Cold War, the proud legacy of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army, and the Royal Canadian Air Force will once again serve as a timeless link between our veterans and serving soldiers, sailors and air personnel. (Canada, Dept. of National Defence)

However, opponents of the change in military nomenclature tend to emphasize that such moves are backward initiatives, reversing Canada to colonial status. These concerns are most clearly expressed in the statement given to press by Tom Freda, a spokesman for Citizens for a Canadian Republic, the largest institution openly calling for the abolition of the monarchy in Canada, who said: “This isn’t the 1950s, nor do we have 1950s values; Canada has been accustomed to moving away from colonialist symbols, not toward them” (Restoring). It must be noted, however, that some observers of Canadian politics interpret the Conservative move to restore the “Royal” prefix not so much as a sign of monarchist tendencies, but rather as a wider political strategy aimed at erasing “the Liberal narrative” about Canada. Embracing the monarchy is just a part of this strategy:

Stephen Harper is working to recast the Canadian identity, undoing 40 years of a Liberal narrative and instead creating a new patriotism viewed through a conservative lens. Restoring the “royal” prefix to the navy and air force this week is just part of the Prime Minister’s attempt at “creating a new frame” for Canada and Canadians. The Liberals embraced the Charter, the flag, peacekeeping and multiculturalism. Now, the Harper Tories are pursuing symbols and areas ignored by the Grits – the



Arctic, the military, national sports and especially the monarchy. ... This is about restoring Canada's national identity which has been "lost." (Taber)

Also, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs instructed all Canadian diplomatic missions abroad to reinstate and prominently display the portraits of the reigning monarch in the public lobbies. The portraits, according to the instruction, were to be installed by September 15, 2011. For federal government officials the move is natural and provokes no controversy. As a spokesman for Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister said, Canada behaves "like virtually every other country in the world who display pictures of their head of state in their missions" ("Embassies"). However, the comments published in some Canadian newspapers accused the Harper government of showing too much fealty to British monarchy. As one of the newspapers wrote, "for as long as the Tories remain in power in Ottawa, the sun will never set on the British empire" (Madsen).

Finally, on September 24, 2012, foreign ministers of Canada and the United Kingdom (John Baird and William Hague) announced in Ottawa a formalized bilateral agreement, according to which Canada and Britain were going "to share buildings [embassies] and offer consular services to each other's nationals in countries where only one government has a mission" ("Diplomacy"). For the beginning, the British embassy in Burma was to offer Canadians its hospitality, with Canada reciprocating the similar favour to Britons in Haiti. The venture was presented by both ministers as a common sense, a cheap solution and an important initiative in times of austerity and economic crisis. The opposition, however, approached the news with skepticism or even mockery. Thomas Mulcair, the leader of the New Democratic Party – the largest parliamentary opposition to Harper's Conservatives, ironically enquired, "Why stop at the embassies? ... Why not merge the Senate with the House of Lords? It is the same difference. Why not a united Olympic team?" (Wherry).

Obviously, a relevant question which needs to be asked in the context of Conservative's policies promoting monarchy is whether such policies are efficient and effective. In a short-term perspective Harper seems to be quite a successful politician in reviving monarchical sentiments. The latest polls indicate a rise in support for Canada's monarchical links. The Harris-Decima survey, conducted in May 2012, shows that 51% of Canadians (rise by 6% if compared to similar survey carried out in 2009) that the monarchy is an important part of Canadian history and political culture and as such it should be preserved. However, in Quebec, where Harper is extremely unpopular, support for the monarchy decreased by 6 percentage points to only 24 per cent ("Desire"). On the other hand, it is not so obvious that the surge in support for the monarchy results from the federal Conservatives' policies. Some reasonably argue that successful royal visits (in particular the visit of Prince William and his wife Kate in the summer 2011⁵) should be credited for strengthening the popularity of monarchical institutions. In Australia, where support for the monarchy is usually lower than in any other Commonwealth realm (Australian monarchists narrowly escaped defeat in the 1999 national referendum on

5) William and Kate's tour of Canada turned out to be incredibly popular, especially amongst English Canadians. It was the first international trip the royal couple made after being wed and presented monarchy in a more positive light (Blizzard 7).



cutting ties to the crown), a large shift in opinion with regards to monarchy also occurred after royal visits in 2011. Opinion polls released at the height of the Queen's tour revealed that 55 percent of Australians supported monarchy (4 percent more than in Canada), while support for the republic dropped to 34 percent, the lowest level in over two decades (Perry).

In the longer perspective it is hard to predict the outcomes of Harper's policies. On the one hand, his strategy of reviving monarchical sentiments seems to be working, i.e. the awareness and popularity of the monarchy rises. On the other hand, now that the monarchy is put to the front of a political debate, the relevance of the monarchical system of government might be more often discussed and disputed. Such debates may even bring the outcome not expected by Harper, i.e. the paradoxical increase of the number of anti-monarchists. It is a highly possible perspective given the fact that Harper's new approach to monarchy is met with harsh criticism or scorn from anti-monarchists, Quebecers and opposition parties. And even if the arguments of these groups suggesting that Harper is trying to turn Canada back to colonial status or rebuild the British Empire are much exaggerated, they may still resonate with many of those Canadians for whom Prime Minister is already an extremely unpopular political figure.

Any scenario, however, in which the monarchical system of government could be abolished in Canada in the nearest future, appears to be implausible. One particular reason is Canadian public opinion's indifference to the monarchical debate. Admittedly, the monarchy raises more and more interest among Canadians, mainly due to pro-monarchical Harper's policies and numerous royal visits to Canada that have taken place over the last several months. However, the majority of Canadians are still not involved in the debate over monarchy. This rather involves academic circles, monarchist and anti-monarchist organizations and, less frequently, parliamentarians or high-profile politicians. Since the two institutions most engaged in the public discussion of the future of monarchy, i.e. the Monarchist League of Canada and the Citizens for Canadian Republic, are small-membership organizations, the debate over monarchy is rather niche and marginal.

Another factor which possibly prevents monarchy from being discontinued in Canada is Queen Elizabeth II's high popularity. The incumbent sovereign, especially when compared to some of her closest relatives, seems to be an uncontroversial, even dull figure, which for a constitutional monarch is a somewhat complimentary remark. The Queen successfully avoids expressing her political opinions and keeps out of day-to-day political scrambles. Besides, she is the second-longest reigning monarch in the history of the British Empire and the Commonwealth of Nations (after her great-great-grandmother, Queen Victoria) and the most travelled head of state in the history of mankind, with Canada being the place the Queen has visited most frequently (Canada, Government of Canada). All these, along with the successful celebrations of Queen's Diamond Jubilee, boosts Elizabeth II's popularity, especially among English Canadians.

Also, any alterations in the way the monarchy functions would require the application of very complex procedures. Since the sovereign is equally shared by sixteen Commonwealth realms, the removal of monarchical links in Canada would have to be consulted, by convention, with fifteen other countries. Furthermore, if the monarchy is to be replaced by the republican system of government, the change has to be introduced by proper amendments to Canadian constitution. Since such amendments would affect the basics of Canadian political



system, the unanimous consent of twelve Canadian legislatures is constitutionally required, i.e. of two chambers of the federal parliament and of all ten provincial legislatures (Constitution Act 41). The debate over the amending provisions would inevitably revive old political disputes and conflicts between the federal and provincial authorities over the division of powers. Given the long-lasting and largely inconclusive effects of the constitutional conferences preceding the patriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982 (Quebec has not ratified the constitution until today), such debate is rather to be avoided, as it is not in the interest of any major Canadian political party.

Some crucial reforms, however, designed to modernize the monarchy are possible, seem inevitable, and will probably be implemented in near future. The most obvious is the alteration of the succession law, now regulated by the two acts passed by the English parliament over 300 years ago: the Bill of Rights of 1688 and the Act of Settlement of 1700. Both laws contain discriminatory, sexist provisions against females, based on the principles of male primogeniture. They allow the eldest daughter of the reigning sovereign to ascend the throne only if she has no male siblings. Also, as it is stated in the Act of Settlement, all candidates to the throne who

should be reconciled to or shall hold Communion with the See or Church of Rome or should profess the Popish Religion or marry a Papist should be excluded and are by that Act made for ever [incapable] to inherit, possess, or enjoy the Crown and Government of this Realm, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging. (Act of Settlement I)

Important efforts, though, have already been made to change the rules of succession. During the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, held in October 2011 in Perth, Australia, the prime ministers of all sixteen Commonwealth realms agreed to replace the male preference primogeniture with a system of absolute primogeniture, under which the throne is inherited by the oldest surviving descendant, no matter if female or male. Now, that the news has been announced that Prince William (second in line of succession) and his wife Catherine Middleton are expecting a baby, the change is more imminent. If the baby is a girl and is to be a beneficiary of the reformed law, the alteration must be implemented before the baby is born. This would require a hasty ratification process in all sixteen Commonwealth realm parliaments. For the time being (as of December 2012), the governments of all Commonwealth realms “have confirmed they will be able to take the necessary measures in their own countries before the UK legislation comes into effect” (Consent). However, experts in the constitutional law point to potential obstacles the change might face, particularly in Quebec, where, as it was stated in the written evidence submitted to the UK’s House of Commons by one of professors of constitutional law, the issue could be used by some individuals as “a political opportunity to cause difficulties for the Government, using the occasion to provoke a wider debate about monarchy and the case for Quebec separatism” (United Kingdom, Parliament).



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