

CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE L1 - CONTROLE CONTINU AVRIL 2012

Let's be fair to the monarch - and fair to ourselves

- Dawn Oliver
- The Guardian, Wednesday 16 July 2003

The Queen, as head of state, should be neutral and above politics. The trouble with our present arrangements is that they are not neutral and they are full of discrimination. As things stand, the Queen would have to choose whom to invite to form a government in the event of a hung parliament. That decision would, of course, expose the Queen to criticism of political bias by disappointed parties.

It is surely preferable for MPs themselves to take responsibility for deciding who should be prime minister, by electing one shortly after the election. This is what happens in the Scottish parliament and in the Irish dail and I think it is high time that this procedure was used at Westminster.

It is not fair on the monarch that many vitally important and often politically controversial "royal prerogative" powers [...] should appear to be in her grasp when in fact they are exercised by ministers, who are often barely accountable¹ to parliament. It is too easy for politicians to hide behind this royal smokescreen.

These powers should be renamed executive powers or parliamentary powers, they should be formally removed from the monarch and placed where parliament thinks each power should best lie, whether with ministers or parliament itself or some other body.

Turning to discrimination, first there is the preference for male over female heirs. The Queen is a dedicated and much loved head of state. It surely cannot be said that a male heir would have been preferable. This discrimination should be abolished now, while there is no heir to be disadvantaged by a change.

Religion is another area of discrimination. It is surely wrong that the head of state should be unable to decide his or her own religion, and in particular that he or she should be disqualified from being or marrying a Roman Catholic. This is an infringement of the monarch's own freedom of religion. It also quite wrongly implies that there is something improper with being a Catholic.

The discrimination goes further, to the requirement that the monarch be the supreme governor of the Church of England and defender of the faith. Many people living in England overlook the fact that the UK includes Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Why should they have to have a member of the Church of England as their head of state? Why should those of us who are not members of the Church of England have to have as our head of state the supreme governor of that church? [...]

Only the most reactionary people would consider our proposals to be radical. They are sensible and principled. Many of them could be implemented without legislation. I fear however that partisanship and shortsightedness will be stronger impulses than consensus and common sense. That would not be good for the future of the monarchy, which needs to be helped to adjust to changing times.

¹ To be accountable to = to be responsible of one's actions.

1. Introducing the text

Write an introduction to a commentary which contains all the usual elements (date, source, summary, etc).

2. The Facts

Answer the following questions by giving as detailed answers as possible.

- a. What are the Queen's Prerogative Powers?
- b. When did it become constitutionally impossible for a British monarch to marry a Roman Catholic?
- c. What is the name of the process which made a "Scottish Parliament" and an "Irish dail" possible?
- d. What is a hung parliament?

3. The Issues

Explain the following statements by writing a short paragraph for each.

- a. "ministers, who are often barely accountable to parliament".
- b. "the monarchy, which needs to be helped to adjust to changing times.

4. The Journalist's opinion

Write a detailed paragraph on the author's proposals. Pay attention to the source and the date of the document. Are those proposals still relevant in 2012?