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Monarchy or republic? [1]

Written by **Dr Madsen Pirie** [2] | Monday 18 April 2011

Camden Council has effectively banned a street party [3] planned by republicans to coincide with the royal wedding. This is a shame, since those opposed to the monarchic principle should be allowed to express their views. It is not as if they were trying to occupy part of a public space in perpetuity; it was just a day's party they planned.

It does highlight the debate between those who support our constitutional monarchy and those who favour replacing it by a republic with an elected head of state. To those of a libertarian bent, what matters is not how democratic or representative is either form of government, but how friendly they are to liberty.

On an empirical level, constitutional monarchies have been quite friendly to liberty. A monarch who inherits the office feels no popular mandate to impose their views on everyone else. They did not have to claw their way to the top, but simply inherited it, and are conscious of the limitations this implies.

Our constitutional monarch occupies the top slots, not only as head of state, but as head of the armed forces and the judiciary. As such, they deny these posts to ambitious self-seekers who might wish to use them to promote an agenda. A monarch who simply inherits the position can act as a focus for the nation more easily than someone elected as head of state via partisan politics.

Many, if not most, of the theoretical arguments would win the case against a head of state who came from a family that had emerged by the blood and chance of history to occupy that position from birth alone. Yet in practice the record of modern constitutional monarchies has been a good one for tolerance, for the rights of dissenting minorities to do their own thing, and for upholding the rule of law and the rights of free speech.

I am reminded of President Reagan's remark to his economic advisors: "Yes, gentlemen, that is fine in practice, but how would it work in theory?" On the whole, in constitutional monarchy I think the practice has it.

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