

Republicans claim support before Royal Wedding

As royal wedding fever mounts, the voice of Republican Britain is also getting louder. They don't want kings and queens. So what do they want?



CITIZENSHIP HISTORY & POLITICS

It was Thomas Paine – American revolutionary but born in Britain – who argued that a hereditary ruler makes no more sense than a hereditary dentist. And three centuries on, despite – or because of – endless news coverage of the royal wedding, plenty of British citizens agree.

In a recent poll, a quarter of Britons (26%) said they opposed monarchy; while only 37% say they are genuinely interested in the wedding, with 46% definitely not.

In many ways, the marriage of Kate and Wills has been a gift to *Republic*, the leading campaign group calling for the end of the monarchy.

Seven years ago, it had only 300 members. But support has been growing and in the last six months, people have been signing up in droves according to its Director, Graham Smith.

'In November, when the royal engagement was announced, we almost doubled

in size,' he says. 'It's been a sudden, substantial shift.' Their Facebook page currently has 7462 members.

'We are a broad church,' he continues, 'We don't exclude people – we have Tories, Liberals, Labour, Greens and Scottish and Welsh nationalists, all under one roof.'

And what do Republicans believe? Their core principle is that the British people should choose their own head of state, as do the citizens of most democracies around the world.

'Everyone is free to flourish and rise regardless of the circumstances of their birth,' said Nick Clegg, who with all the party leaders is a champion of meritocracy in Britain.

Yet at the wedding on Friday, which they will all attend, they'll celebrate the opposite principle: the marriage of a man born to be king, quite regardless of any personal merit.

Republicans also believe a monarchy is

incompatible with true citizenship. How are we true citizens, they say, if we cannot elect our head of state?

An impossible marriage

Republicans are in a difficult position. They are against the monarchy but in favour of democracy – and polls reveal Britain to be a nation of moderate monarchists.

A large majority think the monarchy is still relevant to national life, makes Britain more respected around the world and is better than any alternative.

But the same polls give hope to republicans. The keenest supporters of the monarchy are pensioners, with young people less so. Among 19-24s, 37% think Britain would be better off without the monarchy, 10 points higher than the average.

In the meantime, republicans are clear: meritocracy and monarchy is one marriage that just doesn't work.

Q & A

Q The royal wedding is a global event. We should be proud, surely?

A Maybe. But Professor Stephen Haseler isn't so sure. He believes we're just a 'fantasy island' that Americans and other nations like to look in on occasionally as a diversion.

Q What's a meritocracy?

A A society in which people make their way

purely on the basis of their gifts. In a meritocracy, the head of state would have got there because of their abilities. Not because they were born into a particular family.

Q But isn't it good to have a head of state above the stupid political battles?

A A neutral status is preserved only by ensuring they have no practical role at all. It was the cabinet secretary who handled the



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READING HOMEWORK

1. What impression do the polls mentioned throughout the article give you about British people's attitudes towards the monarchy? Explain using evidence.

2. Why do you think the older generation are more supportive of the royal family than the younger generation?
