

Article for *Monarchy Canada* submitted by Noel Cox, Vice Chairman, The Monarchist League of New Zealand, Inc.

On 23 January 1995, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Right Honourable Jim Bolger, established an Advisory Committee on the Royal Honours system. This was widely seen as being part of his personal campaign for New Zealand to become a republic.

The terms of reference for the Committee, which was accountable only to the Prime Minister, were:

“to consider and present options and suggestions on the structure of a New Zealand Royal Honours System in New Zealand, which is designed to recognise meritorious service, gallantry and bravery and long service”.

Specifically, the Committee was to review:

“the purpose and coverage of the current honours system; the appropriateness of the current system of a mix of traditional (sometimes called British or Imperial) and indigenous Royal Honours; whether new honours and awards should be instituted and whether either or both of the existing indigenous Orders (the Order of New Zealand and the Queen’s Service Order) should be modified; whether certain honours should or should not be titular, ie carry the appellation of “Sir” or “Dame”, or some other appellation; and other significant aspects of the honours system, for example, timing, frequency, nominations for and number of awards”.

Matters regarded as being within the exclusive prerogative of The Queen were not to be considered.

Although it had been suggested that the Committee would comprise a group of experts, in the event this was not the case. A number of those appointed openly shared the known preference of the Prime Minister for radical change. The Chairman was the Honourable Philip Burdon, Minister for Trade Negotiation, and the leading supporter in Parliament of the Prime Minister’s republican campaign.

Other members of the Committee were the Right Honourable Jonathan Hunt, MP, Senior Opposition Whip; James Belich, historian and author; Sharon Crosbie, OBE, the Chief Executive of New Zealand Public Radio Ltd; Dame Miriam Dell, ONZ DBE, Past President of the National Council of Women, and of the International Council of Women; Mrs Areta Koopu, CBE, President of the Maori Women’s Welfare League, and community worker; Dr James Ng, CNZM MBE, medical practitioner, historian, and community worker; and Belinda Vernon, financial controller and company secretary (and now a National Party Member of Parliament).

The Prime Minister’s Advisory Committee on the Royal Honours system also included several ex officio members. These were Marie Shroff, CVO, Secretary of the Cabinet, and Clerk of the Executive Council, and Phillip O’Shea, LVO, the Executive Officer (Honours), in the Cabinet Office, and New Zealand Herald of Arms Extraordinary to The Queen. Mrs Alison Quentin-Baxter, QSO, lately Director of the New Zealand Law Commission, was also

an ex officio member of the Committee. However, she resigned on 30 June 1995, on appointment as Legal Counsel to the Fiji Constitution Review Commission. Gordon Parkinson, Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was the Secretary of the Committee.

The Committee met on ten occasions, from 22 February to 25 August 1995, and considered 259 written and 25 oral submissions. It reported privately to the Prime Minister on 31 August, and on 21 September 1995 publicly released its report, entitled *The New Zealand Royal Honours System*. It was particularly significant that The Queen, although font of honour, was not consulted until after the committee had completed its task and had publicly released its recommendations.

Commenting on the report, the Prime Minister said that it “could be” a further step on the road to republicanism, but not necessarily so. The Honourable Philip Burton observed that a large number of the written submissions held that a British-based honours system was an anachronism, and that the Committee had unanimously recommended a move to a distinctive New Zealand system.

The Committee recommended that existing British awards be replaced by a New Zealand Order of Merit. No titles would be conferred under the Order. The only British awards which it recommended should continue would be those which the Queen awards personally. These include the Order of the Garter, which was awarded to Sir Edmund Hillary, KG ONZ KBE, on 23 April 1995.

The public response to the Report of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Committee on Honours was mixed. Whilst there may have been a general agreement that some of the proposed changes were appropriate, the public was not convinced of the need to abandon titles. The decision to end the conferment of all British Orders, decorations and medals (apart from those few which are conferred solely on the initiative of the Queen, and the Order of St John), was also opposed by many. To date, approximately half of all appointments had been of New Zealand awards, in the Order of New Zealand (ONZ), and the Queen’s Service Order (QSO).

Knighthood is a status which is not dependent on membership of an order, nor is its retention dependent upon keeping Imperial orders. Although, for political reasons, Canada ceased recommending the creation of any new Canadian knights after 1919 (except for the period 1933-35), and South Africa followed in 1924, Australia retained its own order of knighthood until 1986. In 1980 Barbados created a new honours system including Knights and Dames of St Andrew. All other realms continue to bestow knighthoods, however infrequently.

Never before had one of the Queen’s realms abandoned ‘Imperial’ honours in favour of its own system in one sweeping move. Canada ceased to recommend awards of these honours in 1946 (although they were not replaced by the Order of Canada until 1967). However, even Canada continued bestowing Imperial bravery awards, until a range of specifically Canadian civilian bravery awards was introduced in 1972.

The Australian Federal Government ceased recommending the award of Imperial honours in 1983, and all the Australian states had followed its lead by 1989. In the Caribbean, Jamaica created its own honours system in 1969, and Barbados in 1980. In both cases, and in all other

realms except Australia and Canada, Imperial honours continued to be bestowed, alongside the local awards.

An honours system must be developed gradually. Honours systems are by their very nature evolutionary. As it had been eight years since the Order of New Zealand was created, it was perhaps not premature to establish a third New Zealand order. However, any awards introduced as a result of the Committee's deliberations would be seen by many as the creation of a political party, and tainted accordingly.

The choice of title "New Zealand Order of Merit" is not inspiring, and the Order is liable to be confused with the Order of Merit, which is to be retained as it is awarded by The Queen personally. A better solution might have been to expand the existing the Order of New Zealand, established in 1987, and so avoiding the need for the creation of a new order altogether.

The Committee proposed that New Zealand should abandon all British gallantry and bravery awards, and replace them with a new New Zealand Cross, and a Victoria Cross for New Zealand respectively, each with four levels.

Military gallantry awards have been the subject of much ill-considered comment in recent years. The report of the Committee implied that military gallantry medals recognise rank rather than gallantry. This impression is simply not correct. Gallantry awards by their very nature recognise gallantry, not rank. Different medals might have been awarded to officers and other ranks, but they were very definitely of equal status. In any event, the awarding of different medals for officers and other ranks, formerly found in all awards except the Victoria Cross, had already ended.

The cost of introducing a separate system of gallantry and bravery awards is hardly justified. At least so far as the military awards are concerned, they would be very infrequently awarded. It took Canada, a vastly more populous country than New Zealand, until 1972 to introduce its own civilian bravery system, and a military gallantry system did not follow until 1993. They however still retained the Victoria Cross, as does the new Australian system. No Realm has adopted anything similar to the frankly bizarre idea of a Victoria Cross for New Zealand in four grades.

Submissions were not specifically called for on the report of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on Honours. There was a tendency on the part of the news media to assume that the recommendations of the Committee would be automatically implemented.

All matters relating to honours are governed by the royal prerogative, exercised through responsible Ministers.

The Prime Minister enjoys the right to advise the Crown on matters relating to honours generally, and was entitled to advise Her Majesty The Queen to create a new New Zealand Order. Equally, he was entitled to announce that he would no longer recommend the award of British honours, but only those which are conferred upon the advice of the Prime Minister. Other Ministers of the Crown, particularly the Minister of Defence, have the right to advise the Crown on specific honours.

Parliament itself has no role in honours, but the members of Parliament belonging to the National Party were involved by Cabinet in supporting the recommendations of the advisory committee, so as to suggest a broader political acceptance.

However, attempts were made by many people, including National Party members of Parliament, to prevent the full implementation of the Committee's recommendations. The Honourable Simon Upton, Minister for the Environment, who was opposed to the wholesale rejection of British Orders, proposed the conversion of some British orders into New Zealand orders. He also supported the creation of the proposed New Zealand Order of Merit.

A technical paper on how this conversion might be achieved was written by the author of this article. This paper was seriously explored by the Minister of Justice, the Honourable Doug Graham, and Mr Upton. The proposal received some support from their Caucus colleagues, but not enough for it to be adopted by the Government. The opponents of radical change had to fall back to supporting the more simplistic, and less colourful, solution which was adopted.

The National Party Caucus accepted the report of the Committee on 15 February 1996. However, they opted to retain titles. This was a compromise between some senior cabinet figures who wanted an end to all honours, including personal orders of the Queen, and others who favoured a more traditional system. The majority of the caucus were opposed to the abolition of knighthoods.

Knighthoods and damehoods were opposed by Mr Bolger, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Don McKinnon, the Minister for Trade Negotiation, the Honourable Philip Burdon, Minister of Broadcasting, the Honourable Maurice Williamson, and the Minister of Employment, the Honourable Wyatt Creech. Supporters of traditional honours included Mr Graham, Mr Upton, the Honourable John Banks, and the Honourable Jenny Shipley.

Mr Bolger indicated that fewer titles would be bestowed in future. He himself has indicated that he would not accept a knighthood, and claims that the decision by Caucus to adopt the recommendations of the committee was "a mark in the ground of the independence of New Zealand".

On 2 May 1996 the Prime Minister issued a Press Statement announcing details of the New Zealand Order of Merit, the principal element of the new New Zealand based honours system. Mr Bolger described it as "a major step in the development of a distinctly New Zealand honours system which reflects our national identity".

The New Zealand Royal Honours System would in future be made up of the Order of New Zealand (ONZ), which remains the highest honour, the Queen's Service Order (QSO) and its associated Medal (QSM), and the new New Zealand Order of Merit. Existing holders of British honours would continue to enjoy their privileges within the New Zealand Royal Honours system. A new system of gallantry and bravery awards for the military and civilians remains to be developed.

The Prime Minister announced that Her Majesty The Queen had approved the institution of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

The new Order consists of the Sovereign, a Chancellor (the Governor-General), and five levels of membership – Knights and Dames Grand Companion (GNZM); Knights and Dames Companions (KNZM, DNZM); Companions (CNZM), Officers (ONZM) and Members (MNZM).

Those appointed to the first and second levels of the Order, except honorary appointments, will be entitled to be called “Sir”, in the case of a man, and “Dame”, in the case of a woman, before their forenames. The chosen style Knight Grand Companion is unusual, that of Knight Grand Cross being more usual, or Knight Grand Commander, which was adopted for the predominantly non-Christian Orders of the Indian Empire and the Star of India. The style of Knight Companions for the second grade is also unusual, Knight Commander being more usual.

The Queen had also approved a new order of wear, with the insignia of a Member of the Order of New Zealand (ONZ) now worn immediately after that of Knights and Dames Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath (GCB) and the Order of Merit (OM), and before Knights and Dames Grand Companions of the New Zealand Order of Merit (GNZM) and Knights and Dames Grand Cross of British Orders of Chivalry.

The insignia of the New Zealand Order of Merit blends traditional Maori and British designs, colours and symbolism. It was designed by Phillip O’Shea LVO, who also designed the insignia of the ONZ, QSO and QSM and a number of other official medals.

The Badge of the Order is a cross with the New Zealand Coat of Arms in the centre encircled by the motto “For Merit” in English and “Tohu Hiranga” in Maori (literally translated as “to achieve excellence”) and set in green enamel, representing the highly prized pounamu or New Zealand greenstone. The badge is similar to the Canadian Order of Military Merit or Royal Victorian Order.

The Breast Star is based on a stylised representation of the head or crown of the ponga or silver fern tree, a national emblem of New Zealand, and is similar to that of the Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order.

The insignia will include a Lapel Badge for every-day wear by members of the various levels of the Order, and miniatures for evening wear. A Lapel Badge was introduced for the ONZ in 1990, and will be introduced, as soon as possible, for holders of the QSO and QSM.

The ribbon of the Order is red ochre (“kokowai”). The same colour is used in the ribbons of both the ONZ and the QSO.

The Warrant establishing the Order and the Warrants of Appointment issued to members of the various levels of the Order will be in English and Maori. The Warrants of Appointment for the ONZ are in English and Maori, and in due course the Warrants of Appointment for the QSO will also be issued in English and Maori.

A special Chain is to be worn by the Sovereign and the Chancellor, and is composed of links of the central medallion of the Badge and gold Koru (in the form of the letter S) with, in the centre, a representation of the New Zealand Coat of Arms from which the Badge of the Order hangs. The Koru is a stylised representation of a fern frond and may symbolise new birth,

growth, vitality, strength and achievement. Details of the design are derived from the chain of the Order of St Michael and St George.

Knights and Dames Grand Companions (GNZM) wear a Badge, in the form of a cross, in white enamel set in gold with, in the centre, a medallion bearing the Arms of New Zealand within a circle of green enamel bearing the motto of the Order. The Badge is worn from a red ochre sash worn over the right shoulder and resting on the left hip. The Breast Star is of eight points, each arm bearing a stylised representation of a fern frond, in gold, with a smaller representation of the Badge of the Order in the centre. Insignia is worn after the ONZ and before other Knights and Dames Grand Cross (GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE) and the CH.

Knights and Dames Companions (KNZM, DNZM) wear a Badge and Breast Star similar to that prescribed for Knights and Dames Grand Companions except that the Badge is worn from either the neck or from a bow on the left shoulder. The Breast Star is in silver, with the Badge of the Order in the centre. Insignia is worn after that of Knights and Dames Grand Cross and the CH and before other Knights and Dames Commander (KCB/DCB, KCMG/DCMG, KCVO/DCVO) and Knights Bachelor.

Companions (CNZM) wear a Badge similar to that prescribed for Knights and Dames Companions. Insignia is worn after that of Knights and Dames Commander and Knights Bachelor and before other Companions and Commanders (CB, CMG, CVO, CBE).

Officers (ONZM) wear, on the left breast, a smaller representation of the Badge of the Order, in gold, with the motto set in green enamel. Insignia is worn immediately after the QSO and before the OBE.

Members (MNZM) wear a Badge similar to that prescribed for Officers, except that it is in silver and green enamel. Insignia is worn immediately before the MBE.

The first appointments to the new Order were announced on 3 June 1996, the New Zealand observance of the Queen's Birthday. These included one GNZM (the new Governor-General, His Excellency the Right Honourable Sir Michael Hardie-Boys, GCMG); one KNZM (Sir Robert Mahuta); one DNZM (Dame Kate Harcourt); 13 CNZM; 21 ONZM; and 39 MNZM.

The Prime Minister has announced that The Queen had agreed that there should continue to be two regular honours lists a year. These would be at the New Year (announced 30/31 December) and on the New Zealand observance of the Queen's Birthday, the first Monday in June. In addition, there would continue to be special lists from time to time, as for bravery or for military campaigns.

Whilst the motive for introducing the new honours system was his avowed republicanism, the end product is not as bad as might have been feared.

Much of the debate had focused on knighthoods. The style and title of a knight is independent of any jurisdictional difficulties, not being dependent on membership of a British Order of Chivalry, and is a unique and valuable survival whose retention is welcome.

As for any suggestions that honours generally are contrary to the supposedly egalitarian New Zealand society, the point need only be made that if this argument were followed the whole honours system would have to go. The Soviets were particularly keen on Honours.

The decision that New Zealand is to abandon all British awards, apart from the very few royal awards, is to be regretted, especially in the field of honours for bravery and gallantry. The lesson which is yet to be learned is that gradual change is best for an honours system, as it is for the monarchy itself. Radical changes are rarely desirable, nor necessary. Changes introduced for political motives are generally the least successful.