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EDITORIAL

All the hoo-ha that is going on at the moment about England's Royal Family is leaving most of us Swiss rather cold. There are two good reasons for this:

The first is that we have very little affinity with royalty in general and with the Queen of England and her family in particular. For most of us who have dual nationality, it must have come as a bit of a surprise when, upon becoming a New Zealand citizen, we had to pledge allegiance to the Queen.

In this day and age where, from the economical point of view, the only logical moves are for Great Britain to integrate into Europe and for New Zealand to get closer to the Pacific and Asia markets, the interests of these two countries, geographically set at opposite ends of the world, are growing so far apart that it is an anachronism today for New Zealand to still have as head of state a queen who is hardly ever seen in New Zealand.

So for most of us, and this goes for all other non-British migrants as well, the Queen means very little to us. Furthermore the antics of some members of her family, profusely reported throughout the world in all medias from TV to the cheapest boulevard magazine, do not help the cause of the British monarchy. And amongst all this mayhem that is going on in her family and her duties as Head of State of Great Britain and a few other countries throughout the world, how much time has the Queen left to concern herself with New Zealand? Not a lot if any at all.

The second reason is that the Swiss in general do not go for the personality

cult. In this respect we are quite different from most other nations. Admittedly we do have some national heroes such as William Tell, Winkelried, Zwingli, Pestalozzi, Henri Dunand and General Guisan to name just a few, but they are all dead. We do not go for living idols to act as role-models for our lives.

But most other countries seem to need such a figurehead, a charismatic person who, for a time, becomes the symbol of the nation. A typical example is the Queen of England. Having been put in this exalted position, on some sort of pedestal, high above the rest of the mortals, the Queen's life has become a matter of daily consumption for the nation. Every move, every word she speaks, every gesture, the colour of her hat, the size and shape of her handbag, the height of her hemline, everything is observed, recorded, noted, analysed and discussed. The whole nation seems to live by its Queen. A happy Queen lifts the morale of the country, a sad Queen depresses the whole nation.

The President of the USA is another example of how a nation lives by one single person. Elected to the highest office in the USA, each President is considered, at the beginning of his term at least, as some sort of semi-god who is going to solve all the nation's problems. Every aspect of life in the USA revolves around the President. If he falls ill, the stockmarket tumbles. If he goes jogging, the whole nation jogs with him. No US citizen could imagine life without a President, so much so that if a President dies in office, the next must be elected within the hour otherwise the country would be in instant chaos.

New Zealand too could scarcely exist without a Leader. Here this charismatic figure comes in the form of a Prime Minister. He is the leader of his political Party, leader of the Government and leader of the nation. Nevermind that invariably the majority of New Zealanders believe that they are being led in the wrong direction, the country still needs and will always want a Leader.

One thing that the Queen, the US President, our Prime Minister and for that matter leaders of all other nations have in common: They are all supposed to be everything to everyone. They are expected to have an opinion on every conceivable subject under the sun and not only to have the right answer to every problem, but more importantly, an answer that appeals to everybody as well.

Having put their leaders on a high pedestal and treated them as some semi-gods, the nations expect them to perform the miracles they are supposed to produce. These nations should remember the old saying: "The higher a monkey climbs a tree, the more you see his bum" and you could add to that "the less the monkey sees what is happening on the ground". The people should realise that these leaders, high above the rest of the world, are still only human beings and that it is an absolute impossibility for them to do it right for everyone. Nevertheless, these nations carry on their love/hate charade with their leaders, election after election. A leader is elected with great expectations simply to be discarded a few years later as totally incompetent and the process starts all over again with a new leader.

In this respect, the Queen is better off as she is there for life (or at least as long as she wants to) and not directly involved in politics. But she has to contend with her family who is up there on the pedestal with her and therefore subject to the same intense scrutiny as herself.

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DELEGATE: Jürg Stucki, 46 The Crescent, Roseneath, Wellington

DEPUTY DELEGATE: Marie-Therese Melville-Schöpfer, P.O. Box 79-294, Royal Heights, Auckland 1230, Phone 833-4029

EDITOR: Henry Sigerist, Travelair, P.O. Box 37-335, Parnell, Auckland, Phone: 377-3285 (bus.) or 473-9011 (home), FAX 302-1099 (bus.)

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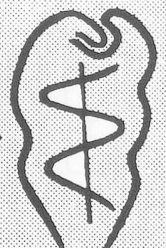
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