Long live the monarchy! by Lionel Toady

Given the enormous number of social changes that have taken place in Europe over the last sixty years, it seems remarkable that an institution such as the monarchy, where power and privilege are inherited, should continue to be popular. Yet, in the UK at least, that is the case. Since Queen Elizabeth II ascended the throne in 1953, opinion polls have fairly consistently shown that over three quarters of the British population support the royal family. They enjoy a high level of popularity and, whatever republicans might think, there are excellent reasons why the Brits love their royals.
Many people argue that Britain’s democracy would be weaker without the monarch as the head of state. In a modern Europe, in which freedoms and human rights are protected, the suggestion that Britain could not get rid of the monarchy and become a republic without seriously undermining its democracy is certainly unfounded. However, it is surely the case that if the institution of monarchy were lost, the nation’s identity would be undermined. The monarchy is an age-old institution which has shaped the destiny of the nation for over a thousand years and its existence helps to unify the country and its people.

More than any other country in Europe, Britain has come to be defined by its monarchy. On important ceremonial occasions and at times of crisis or national mourning, the monarch is there to support and uphold the traditional and moral values which define Britain. This is the real power of a monarch. When, in 2012, the British had street parties on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee (celebrating her sixty years on the throne), and when, in 2013, everybody was excited about the birth of Prince George, the Queen’s great-grandchild, what people were really celebrating was their shared experience of being British, of feeling a part of the fabric of British national life.
Down with the monarchy!
by Ivor Scorn

The monarchy has no place in a modern European democracy such as Britain. Nations are defined by their values, and a democratic country which is supposed to believe in equal opportunities, an egalitarian distribution of wealth, and an elected government, should have no place for a head of state whose position and power are purely a result of their birth. (1)

Monarchists argue that a king or queen is somehow good for our democracy because he or she is a ‘figurehead’, with no powers, who allows the government of the day to go about its business, relieving it from the necessity of taking care of the symbolic duties of a head of state. (2) The idea that the monarch is powerless and merely ornamental is a myth.

The British monarchy has more influence on British politics than any other pressure group. It defends its own privilege and wealth fiercely, lobbying ministers to act in its interests. The monarchy is, in many ways, above the law. (3) The monarch has a private weekly meeting with the Prime Minister, and, therefore, a unique opportunity to express the royal family’s views and influence the government. Nobody can argue that the British monarch has no power.
There are other ways in which the monarchy wields power. Its ability to promote itself in a positive light through the media, using celebrations such as the Jubilee or carefully choreographed photo sessions, is actually a means of preventing debate about its function and relevance. By linking itself to flag-waving ceremonies, it makes people feel that the monarchy is the nation, and that republicans are unpatriotic. (4)

The debate about whether Britain should have a monarchy is not about whether the Queen or King is popular, or hard-working, or good value, or whether the royal family attracts American tourists. (5) Currently, that point is not being addressed.