

—BOOK NOTE—

Peter Boyce, *The Queen's Other Realms: The Crown and Its Legacy in Australia, Canada and New Zealand* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2009), pp v, 290.

One of the greatest political and constitutional developments over the past century has been the maturing of the British Empire into the Commonwealth, and the concomitant emergence of the realms. The remaining fifteen realms and the United Kingdom share the same sovereign, and the consequences of this political phenomenon are the subject of this fascinating book. Peter Boyce¹ examines the ongoing evolution of the Crown in the realms. He does so through focusing upon the older realms of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and the patriation or nationalization of the Crown in those countries—particularly through the development of the office of Governor General. Boyce's particular contribution is that he does not limit his scope to one realm.

Boyce questions whether the Governors General, Australian Governors, and Canadian Lieutenant-Governors can successfully unite and inspire the public, and act as credible constitutional watchdogs in the face of growing republicanism. Whereas once the threat of republicanism was grounded in symbolism and nationalism, it is now strengthened by more fundamental concerns of governance.² A watchdog, to be effective, must have teeth. This means that there must be a willingness to bite when necessary—witness the Sir John Kerr and Gough Whitlam crisis in 1970s Australia.³ Such actions risk inciting controversy, however, and expose the Governor General—or even the Queen herself—to criticism, thus presenting inherent difficulties for an impartial and nonpolitical head of state.

One of the strengths of Boyce's book is its breadth, covering Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. But its span is also a potential weakness, however, since it presupposes knowledge of the role of the Crown in each realm. It is additionally subject to the complexity of comparative politics. But Boyce, as a scholar of international relations before he began studying the Crown, handles this complexity well. This book is an important contribution to the literature of both history and politics, at a time when an understanding of the Crown is especially important.

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² See Peter Boyce, *The Queen's Other Realms: The Crown and Its Legacy in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Sydney, AU: Federation Press, 2008) at 216.

³ *Ibid* at 59.

A brief overview of what the book covers is as follows. Chapters 1 and 2 concern the survival of the monarchy in the “Old Commonwealth”, and the surviving family of the Crown. In a sense these chapters set the stage, recounting how the once single imperial Crown divided. Simultaneously, this evolution also led to significant subnational Crowns evolving in Canada and Australia—points picked up in chapters 4 and 5, as well as 6 and 7, respectively. Vice-regal powers and influence, and successful governorship are discussed in chapters 3 and 9. New Zealand, as the one unitary state to be considered, is the subject of chapter 8. Chapters 10 and 11 include a discussion of republicanism and the choice of reform as opposed to republicanism. The latter is crucially important. In the absence of reforms to the institution of monarchy in the Queen’s other realms, it may well be that symbolic republicanism will outlive constitutional republicanism. The difficulty of developing a republican model that enjoys wide acceptance, and the apparent and real problems with republican government, may mean that the greatest legacy of the Crown in the realms is a heritage of the rule of law and a concept of a permanent Crown as its upholder, as well as the distinctive symbol of best practice government in the Commonwealth.

This book is a major contribution to a sorely neglected field of study, one that incites much additional thought on the history it contains. Each of the “old dominions” enjoys extensive coverage in this book. If a criticism could be levelled at the coverage, it would be that there is little consideration of how—if at all—the historic and cultural identity of these settled states affected their development, and how the role of the Queen in the newer realms may have differed from that in the older ones. This omission is, however, scarcely surprising given the difficulty of evaluating even the small group of states chosen.

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