THE REPUBLICAN OPTION IN CANADA, PAST AND PRESENT by David E. Smith, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1999)

David E. Smith, a well-known historian of Western Canadian politics and an interpreter of the present-day constitutional landscape, casts both a wide and a narrow net in this book.[1] The wider aspect is a broad reflection on the issues of governance, legitimacy, and federalism, well informed by a comparison of the Canadian experience with that of a variety of core countries and post-colonial states. Especially in a fine essay on the evolution of concepts of citizenship,[2] Smith marshals a wealth of historical evidence to illustrate the complexity of Canada's political identities, both inherited and home-grown. Since the 1940s, government-guided ideas of citizenship have, in Smith's view, still left the question, "Can Canadians be a sovereign people?" significantly unanswered.[3] Like many other Canadian intellectuals, Smith clearly wants to see a more informed citizenry, awakened — somehow — from its present state of constitutional fatigue. But he takes the unique tack of offering his analysis as a sustained discussion of a single issue that might hypothetically galvanize constitutional debate beyond Quebec: the real or imagined "republican option" for Canadians.

Smith's research on the question is obviously inspired by his acute observations of the Australian experience of the 1990s, and it is perhaps unfortunate that the book went to press before the deflating collapse of the "republican option" at the hands of Australian voters during the referendum of December, 1999. An Epilogue takes the story down to the Canberra Convention of 1998, where key details that would sink the republican ship (like Canadian-style recognition of the "original occupancy and custodianship" of Aboriginal peoples) were hammered out. Smith acknowledges the difficulties involved in the erasure of a constitutional monarchy, even under relatively favourable conditions such as late 20th century Australia, and knows perfectly well that an Australian-style debate over the monarchy in Canada must begin from a virtual ground zero. An Internet search for republicans in Canada, for example, typically turns up nothing except links to the Irish Republican Army (descendants of the Fenian raiders who helped cement the distinguishing link between monarchism and Canadian independence during the era of Confederation).

A recent poll conducted by the Association for Canadian Studies (June 2000) showed that support for the monarchy is weakening, especially among Canadian youth.[4] Republicanism, however, is in no sense an organized movement. The radical republican moment of the pre-confederation era is but dimly remembered — it is characteristically understated in Professor Smith's account of "Why Is There No Republicanism in Canada"[5] — and the only pro-republican party that has ever really flourished in Canada is the Parti Quebecois (PQ). PQ republicanism, in turn, does little or nothing

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1 D.E. Smith, *The Republican Option in Canada, Past and Present* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1999).

2 *Ibid.* at c. 7.

3 *Ibid.* at 196.

4 "Monarchy losing appeal among youth, poll finds" *The Vancouver Sun* (29 June 2000) A4.

5 Smith, *supra* note 1 at c. 1.

to aid the cause of the "republican option" writ large, since it excludes 75 percent of the Canadian population from its constitutional vision. Smith draws attention to the fact that the PQ's republican option is not well thought out: an independent Quebec would have a separately elected head of state "who is at the same time responsible to the executive authority."[6] But this is only an incidental point. The Queen has already recognized Quebec's distinctiveness by the simple expedient of staying out of the province: a status quo that is likely to last as long as the constitutional deadlock — perhaps forever.[7] There is no evidence of any specially keen antagonism towards the monarchy in Quebec (pre-1964, the Royals were positively welcomed there) and no reason to believe that an anti-monarchist platform, if adopted by Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats, or Canadian Alliance activists, would do anything at all to blunt Quebec separatism. Simply gone are the days when it could be credibly argued that a republican option should be entertained "for the sake of keeping Quebec in Canada and for the sake of [a more] just and egalitarian society."[8] Journalistic holdovers from the 1960s (Alan Fotheringham is a good example) still beat the anti-monarchist drum, but the republican project arguably missed its chance in Canada during the Pearson and early Trudeau years.

Smith is not as clear as he might have been about the more contemporary history involved in explaining republicanism's absence from the pan-Canadian political scene. He fails to mention the role of the Monarchist League of Canada (founded in 1970), for example, which has been as successful as any other extra-parliamentary lobby group on its own chosen terrain that one might care to name. Universal approval is not necessary for the maintenance of peculiar institutions and one must ask how the admittedly sagging legitimacy of the monarchy measures up against other "non-egalitarian" elements of the actually-existing constitution, like hereditary leadership among certain of the (generally pro-monarchist) First Nations. The author claims that a debate over a republican future for Canada is "as close to being inevitable as anything in politics is likely to be"[9] but one suspects that Canadians will continue to drift on the issue for a long time to come. With the Australian Republican Movement in disarray, British public opinion, meanwhile, will be the driving force behind efforts to reform or abolish this lasting remaining link to our imperial past.

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6 *Ibid.* at 173. (My translation from the statute cited at page 173 of Smith's book.)

7 Since these words were written, a junior Royal (Prince Edward) has made a successful foray into Montreal.

8 *Ibid.* at 231. (The quotation is from Walter Tarnopolsky.)

9 *Ibid.* at 4.