

Claire Hoy ? Immigration is a good thing

Every country in the world, of course, has certain rules which newcomers must follow if they want to become full-fledged citizens. No doubt people hoping for citizenship aren't completely in accord with all the rules, but they know that there is a reason for the rules, usually based on a country's history and traditions, and the country isn't likely to change them just to accommodate personal likes and dislikes.

As these things go, Canada is one of the world's most generous countries, inviting more immigrants to our shores on a per capita basis than anybody else.

To me, that's a good thing.

All of which brings us to a challenge in Ontario Superior Court Friday by three applicants for citizenship who claim that they have legitimate religious and conscientious objections to taking the mandatory declaration of allegiance to the Queen before citizenship can be granted.

Former journalist Michael McAteer ? who came to Canada from Ireland several decades ago and is one of the three applicants in the case, complained that, ?The idea we're being asked to swear allegiance to an ... offshore Queen ? I just couldn't do it,? adding that to him the Monarchy ?is the antithesis of everything I see a democracy should be.?

Peter Rosenthal, the lead lawyer for the applicants, said, ?New Canadians who feel that there should not be a monarchy and who feel it repugnant to take an oath of allegiance to a monarch should be allowed to become citizens anyway. These people really do want to be Canadians.?

Perhaps. But not until we change our rules to accommodate their biases.

And Simone Topey, 46, a Rastafarian who emigrated here from Jamaica in 1978, said it would ?deeply violate? her religious views to take an oath to the Queen.

Fair enough. Then don't take the oath. But don't expect Canada to forget its own culture and history just because you don't like the Queen.

No other country in the world would jump through hoops to cater to somebody's personal views in this way. There is no reason Canada should either.

Like it or not, the Queen represents our shared history, something I'm sure all these people knew long before they moved here.

According to a story in the National Post, Justice Edward Morgan ? who is expected to take several weeks to make his decision -told the applicants that the Queen is not only our head of state, she is also a symbol of the political system and the state itself.

That being said, however, he added that even after you take the oath, Canadians are freely allowed to criticize the Queen if they feel that way. ?You swear an oath to the monarch, but that doesn't stop you from speaking against the monarchy the next minute,? he said.

This whole case began 20 years ago when the late activist lawyer Charles Roach ? who saw racism everywhere ? challenged the citizenship law in the Federal Court. He lost there, but undeterred, he went to the Ontario Superior Court in 2005, but he died in 2012 and the three current applicants picked up the case on his behalf.

So now we wait.

No doubt a good many Canadians wouldn't be unhappy if Canada cut its official ties to the Queen, although a poll last year found that 46 percent of respondents were in favor of Canada remaining a constitutional monarchy, a full 10 percentage points ahead of those who opposed it.

There was also a story on the weekend from former Liberal citizenship minister Sergio Marchi saying that he was prepared to drop the oath of allegiance and, for a time, had support from then prime minister Jean Chr tien. But when it came time to act, Marchi says, Chr tien decided the timing wasn't right, so the idea was scrapped.

Even if there was a groundswell to drop the oath of allegiance ? and there clearly is not ? our complicated constitutional amending formula makes it close to impossible anyway.

I have no problem at all with people who think we should not be a constitutional monarchy, just as I have no problem with people who are unhappy with the results of the last election. That's fair enough.

But being unhappy with something is hardly reason for everybody else to turn their backs on the history of our country.

If these applicants ? and any others ? don't want to take the oath of allegiance to the Queen, the solution is quite simple ? don't take it.

But, as in all stands of true ?principle,? be prepared to pay the price, i.e. forget about getting your citizenship papers.

