

British Columbians outraged at Manley

'I continue to think that for Canada after Queen Elizabeth it should be time to consider a different institution for us, and personally I would prefer a wholly Canadian institution' . . . John Manley, speaking on Friday

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The Province; with News Services

Sunday, October 06, 2002

Outraged British Columbians are demanding the Prime Minister's Office rein in deputy PM John Manley after anti-monarchist remarks made on the eve of the Queen's 12-day visit to Canada.

Politicians, monarchists and regular folk called for Manley, dubbed the poster boy for republicanism in Canada, to apologize to the Queen for saying she should be the nation's last monarch. Moreover, they're demanding that Prime Minister Jean Chretien remove his deputy from the royal welcoming committee.

Manley said: "I've always said that I have a lot of respect for Queen Elizabeth II. But I continue to think that for Canada after Queen Elizabeth, it should be time to consider a different institution for us, and personally I would prefer a wholly Canadian institution."

Bruce Hallsor, chairman of the Victoria branch of the Monarchist League of Canada, called Manley's comments "a disgrace." "I think it's pretty distasteful that he [Manley] would choose the occasion of the Queen's Golden Jubilee visit to Canada to make any kind of public speech on that subject," Hallsor told The Province. "It's in poor taste."

John Reynolds, opposition MP for West Vancouver and Sunshine Coast, was irate and accused Manley -- a possible candidate for the upcoming Liberal leadership race -- of political opportunism.

"I can't believe this guy . . . it borders on the idiotic and is so rude. What an insult," Reynolds said. "If he wants to use the Queen to get some political mileage and gain votes from the young Liberals, he can do that when the leadership race is on . . . not when the Queen comes to visit. The PM should withdraw him from being on the official welcoming committee."

Veteran royal-watcher Peter Archer, of the British Press Association, described the comments as surprising, saying they have "maximum impact to capitalize on the political climate."

"It is particularly surprising because he is hosting the Queen," Archer said. "The Queen will cope with this and you can expect some kind of veiled reference to the comments from the royal household."

Archer added: "She is above politics and handles these kinds of things well. She will say that it is up to Canadians if they want her or not. The officials do not normally comment directly on this kind of thing . . . they are very good at keeping their own counsel on these matters.



Canadian Finance Minister John Manley answers a question during a news conference in this recent file photo. (CP Archive/Andre Forget)

"But one thing I can tell you is that the Queen will be around much longer than Mr. Manley."

Fans of the monarchy were further incensed when Manley flippantly suggested Canada replace the Queen with Quebecois pop diva Celine Dion.

Manley said it could be "a Canadian as king or queen" and tossed out Dion's name.

"It could be as simple as the continuation of the governor-general as head of state for Canada," added Manley, who is also the finance minister. "But it's not necessary for Canada, I believe, to continue with the monarchy as it is."

With Manley scheduled to squire the Queen around during her four-day visit to Ottawa, royalists called for Chretien to dump Manley, not the Queen.

Manley is slated to be the Queen's "minister-in-attendance." He will welcome her at Ottawa airport on Oct. 12 and -- along with his wife Judith -- accompany the royal couple to Rideau Hall.

The Ottawa South MP will also usher the monarch to and from the governor-general's residence. And he'll be standing at the foot of the airport ramp when she departs.

"I think it is completely inappropriate for him to be welcoming the Queen, and as a patriotic Canadian I would hope that he [will] not," Hallsor said. "The Queen has been our monarch for 50 years and she has met and conferred with world leaders from Winston Churchill to Leonid Brezhnev to Nelson Mandela and she will certainly be capable of riding in a car with John Manley and being very civil.

"I think that it's John Manley who should feel uncomfortable and he should be ashamed of his behaviour."

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