

ANOTHER KING? UNFAIR TO GIRLS!?

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(following the birth on 21st June 1982 of Prince William, the first son and heir to Prince Charles and Lady Diana, I wrote this article for publication: not published: 14 JULY 1982)

Questions: Which important State position has been held down more often by a woman? and Which post has rules which deliberately favour men? The answer in both cases is, of course, the monarchy. Over the centuries, there have been many reigning Queens - Mary, Elizabeth, Anne, Victoria. In comparison the roll-call of women Chancellors Prime Ministers, Secretaries of State is disappointingly short

This contrast is all the more surprising when you consider the rules of the game. Democracy gives everyone, women and men alike, an equal vote. Women voters outnumber men. Yet a 'filtering' process ensures that very few women reach the higher levels of Government. The filter in Democracy is the process of choosing, on merit, the best man for the job. Although there is no bar to women (or blacks or the disabled for that matter) the safe easy middle course is usually taken: Choose the moderate middle-aged white Man.

In contrast, the rules for choosing a monarch are brutally undemocratic. The first born son of the Monarch will inherit the Crown; only if no son is available will the daughter succeed. Not only undemocratic, but sexist too! Yet this is a job that has been held by more women, foreigners, divorcees, members of unapproved religions, even by more minors and oldsters, than any other. Despite its undemocratic origins, is not the Monarchy the most representative Institution in the Land?

There is I believe, a wider lesson to be drawn from all this. Democracy has been described as 'the Tyranny of the Majority'. Becoming a Monarch is 'an Accident of Birth'. A method of choosing rulers which sets out to be fair, ends up being discriminatory; a method using Random Chance (accident of birth), gives results that are truly representative.

Could this principle of Random Selection be extended to advantage in other situations? In a recent Education Guardian article (15/6/82), the failure of women to obtain a fair share of the senior teaching posts was described in graphic detail. The best that could be offered to rectify this imbalance, was to try and make the selection process more fair, to give women a better chance.

To make an inherently discriminatory process slightly less unfair, would have only a marginal impact. A real alternative to present methods of selecting by 'merit' could be arranged as in the following Example: A Headteacher is required. The selection Committee lays down, IN ADVANCE, the minimum essential requirements for the job. Applications, when received, are checked to ensure that they meet these requirements. The names of all remaining candidates are put in a hat; the successful candidate is drawn out (by the husband of the chairperson?).

A random method of selection, such as described here will certainly produce a Head-teacher no worse than those who have been selected by conventional methods.(Look around) It will also produce a much closer representation of the proportions of women to be found on staffs generally. It will also give a better balance of other minorities, without having to introduce special rules in their favour. Of course the white middle aged men will find all sorts of grounds to oppose such a scheme of random selection. Any entrenched minority seeks to defend its privileged position. But unless and until the disadvantaged demand a MECHANISM of selection which produces *fair* results, the situation will remain unchanged. Opportunity alone *is* not enough.

Midsummer's day's happy accident of birth has ensured that the next two Monarchs will be men. But it also shows a way in which women can get a genuinely equal 'chance' (pun intended).