

Appendix II

Invitation letter of 5 May, 1992

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70 Gipps Street

East Melbourne, Vic. 3002

5 May, 1992

Dear

You will have noticed the emergence over the past year or so of a view among the chattering classes that Australia's Constitution is "badly in need of reform". It is said that, as we approach the Centenary of the foundation of our Federation, Australians should embark upon a large-scale process of Constitutional reconsideration and review.

We would probably all agree that, as to detail, Australians generally are deplorably ignorant of their Constitution. From that viewpoint, a broadening of public understanding of it could only be welcomed. However, before we too quickly embrace the cause of those sponsoring this process, it may be as well to ask whether that, in itself innocent motive is all that is involved.

In considering that question we might cast our minds back to a decade or so ago, when the Australian Bicentennial Authority was initially established with seemingly good intentions to prepare the not dissimilar celebration of Australia's bicentenary in 1988. That body initially set out - before the Government was forced to intervene to reshape it - to make 1988 a year of national shame, when Australians were to be enjoined to acknowledge the guilt of 200 years of European settlement, and expiate our sins rather than celebrate our achievements as a nation.

Some will recall also the establishment in 1985 by the then Attorney-General, Mr Lionel Bowen, of the Constitutional Commission, a body clearly intended to pave the way for a major process of constitutional change directed, in particular, to centralising power in Canberra even further.

The work of that body was, happily, aborted by Mr Bowen himself when in 1988 he set in train four national referenda on specific topics arising from its then almost concluded report. The overwhelming defeat of those referenda in every case, and in every State of the Commonwealth, put an end (temporarily) to those endeavours; but I believe that we would be wrong, as well as over-complacent, if we were to assume that the same forces then backing those 1985-1988 developments have abandoned their objectives.

In any case, if the reform of the Constitution is to be undertaken, it is desirable that the widest range of thought and opinion should be canvassed before any conclusions are reached. It is important that those who, while recognising that some amendments would be desirable, do not favour an approach mainly to expand Commonwealth power, should have an opportunity to make their voices heard.

Against that background, I let you know of the formation of The Samuel Griffith Society, whose charter is briefly set out in an attachment to this letter. The Society's objectives in defence of our existing Constitution will, I think, be evident from that charter, and I shall therefore not repeat them here.

In the light of events since its formation, however, I should perhaps note that the Society was formed before the recent rash of public agitation by the so-called Republican "movement", and the not unassociated controversy about our national flag. Although therefore the Society was not,

by definition, formed to combat either of those developments (the second of which is not, strictly speaking, a Constitutional issue in any case), I have little doubt that the first of them, at least, may come to figure in its deliberations. That, however, is for the future, and I say no more about it here.

The Samuel Griffith Society has been incorporated, on and from 2 January, 1992 as an incorporated association under the Victorian Associations Incorporation Act 1981. The previous Chief Justice of Australia, Sir Harry Gibbs, has agreed to serve as the Society's President, and Sir Bruce Watson, until recently Chairman of M.I.M. Holdings and a highly respected member of Australia's business community, has accepted the position of Vice-President. The other members of the Board of the Society are:

Treasurer: Mr Ray Evans

Secretary: Dr Nancy Stone

Members: Mr Hugh Morgan

Mr John Stone.

Pursuant to the foregoing, the specific purpose of this letter is to inform you that the Society proposes to hold its inaugural Conference in Melbourne on the weekend of 25-26 July, 1992 commencing with a dinner, including a Launching Address, on the evening of Friday 24 July. The venue has yet to be determined, and will obviously depend upon the degree of response to this letter, which I am addressing to a number of people who, like yourself, I judge may perhaps be interested.

Accordingly, I draw your attention to the two other enclosures with this letter. The first is a form of Application for Membership of the Society which I recommend for your consideration. Should you wish to become a member, please complete the upper portion of the form and return it to the Secretary of the Society at this address.

On your acceptance as a member, an entrance fee of \$20.00 and an annual subscription of \$50.00, covering the year 1992-93, will become payable and you will be billed accordingly.

Secondly, I refer to the form relating to our proposed Inaugural Conference. In order that we may settle upon a venue of appropriate size and facilities, we need to know by (say) end-May at the latest, the approximate number of those who will be attending. I hope very much that you may be among them. Would you please therefore give this particular question your urgent attention, and return this form as soon as possible, indicating (one way or the other) your response on that point.

Meanwhile, my personal good wishes, on behalf of the Society.

Yours sincerely,

(JOHN STONE)

Conference Convenor