

Chapter Ten

Fantasies and Furfies: The Australian Republican Agenda

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In the most recent issue of *Quadrant*, John Hirst of La Trobe University sets out cogently and convincingly the reasons why we should take care to study and keep in mind the British origins of Australian society, and that we should beware of those who think that to establish Australian independence it is necessary to deny our British heritage. At the end of the article however he surprises his readers by saying that he is a republican and does not believe that it is necessary to maintain the Queen in order to preserve our political and cultural heritage. John Hirst's views on the subject of republicanism were set out at some length in an earlier issue of the same journal. In all essential respects they were emulated yesterday by Frank Devine, and I have to say that they are the only statements of a republican case which seem to me to be at all convincing. I don't say they do convince me, but they are far from contemptible.

Hirst is the Victorian convenor of the Australian Republican Movement (ARM). His "conservative case for a republic" is a sophisticated argument, turning chiefly on the situation created by "multi-culturalism". I find myself in a difficulty with it, because I agree in pretty well every respect with J. Hirst's unease about multiculturalism. With one of his assessments however I must fundamentally differ. It is precisely the notion that the Australian version of constitutional monarchy is so far bereft of authority and influence that our only hope of reviving a convincing civic spirit is to replace it with a newly minted republic. In Hirst's view, this would enable the divisive consequences of multiculturalism to be overcome by a new focus of loyalty. Frank Devine yesterday suggested that the Australia Act, 1986 had deprived the Queen of any function in Australia, and that her residence at such a distance, surrounded by a host of odd relatives – he seemed to find more than I ever imagined! – rendered her increasingly alien to Australians. He therefore doubts, not perhaps without regret, whether the monarchy can survive. What he omitted to mention was the earnest and sustained efforts of ARM and their ilk to "educate" the Australian people in such an opinion, by providing for them a barrage of what I have called (in the title of this paper) fantasies and furfies. One such furphy is, of course, the existence of the extended royal family, whose vagaries are only tangentially associated with the institution of monarchy and whose costs (something which anti-monarchists in Britain at least make much of) have no impact whatever on Australia.

My paper, then, is not friendly to the advocates of an Australian republic or to their arguments. I believe that in general they do us a disservice, not by raising the question – for discussion and debate never ultimately does harm in a society such as ours (or so I have always supposed) – but by making out that the establishment of a republic is essential to the future stature and fortunes of this country. I happen to believe that, if anything, precisely the opposite is the case, and I'll be having something to say to that effect. They typically argue also that their case is "logical" and that opposition to it is based, not on reason but emotion. To this also there is an answer.

So I must enter the caveat that I don't for one moment question the authenticity of republican sentiments. It is easy – and, to a large extent, I suspect accurate – to assume that Mr Keating has rather more than philosophical conviction in his mind to inform his various republican and quasi-republican utterances over the last few months. But it won't do to dismiss the Australian

Republican Movement simply in such terms. It has a long ancestry, and republicanism has its claim to moments of distinction, even triumph. One of its most spectacular failures however happens to be in this country. It has never got within "coo-ee" of success, unless – if one could be permitted a touch of pessimism – one were to say that its chances seem at present to have picked up.

But this leads of course to a significant criticism of the ARM. It claims to be a response to present and future conditions. In fact, it is much more like a conglomerate of long-standing notions of civil government and national destiny, which are not called into existence by our present condition, but the proponents of which see our present condition as offering them an unprecedented opportunity. The aims and arguments should be recognised in these terms. At best they might be considered an intellectual indulgence which, as much as anything, represents an attempt to impose on us all a view of history which has much to do with "what might have been". There are less reputable possibilities which I'll come to in due course.

Let me then suggest first of all what I see as the chief antecedents of contemporary republicanism, for this authenticity deserves to be made clear. One would hardly suggest that there is a consistent or uniform philosophy or idea – witness the article on the rival republican movements which appeared in the newspaper this very day – but it would be surprising if the chief movers were not conscious of being able to claim a descent from the mid-seventeenth century. The conflict between Crown and Parliament at that time issued in civil war, at the end of which was established a regicide Commonwealth. It had its apologists, and its legacy was considerable, not least in the contribution it made, via the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689, to the ideology of the American Revolution. That in turn stood before the British mind, metropolitan and colonial, as a demonstration of what, perhaps, might be the destiny of colonies. Equally however our republicans must be aware of the French Revolution as perhaps the greatest single influence on the course of modern European political history. Its murderous tendencies are well known, and the execution of Louis XVI in 1793 declared more emphatically than almost anything could that kings and their appurtenances were dispensable.

It is of course a mistake to suppose that the French Revolution was without an effect in England and on English radical opinion. Tom Paine, author of *The Rights of Man* in 1792 was but the most obvious of those who celebrated what the French had done and sought to translate it to English circumstances. I'll mention this again later in a different context, but the important thing to observe is that republicanism became well and truly entrenched as an English phenomenon, albeit driven underground for most of the time. Philosophically, again, one of the most potent intellectual influences on our modern society and government was Jeremy Bentham, whose devotion to law "reform" predicated a political constitution in which the monarchy had no place. His eminent disciple, James Mill, imbued Utilitarianism with, surprisingly enough, a more tolerant approach: to him, as to his more famous son, John Stuart Mill, it was of no consequence whether an improved society were a monarchy or a republic. But it is clear that the climate of ideas to which such writers contributed was less and less sympathetic to what could, not least in the early and middle nineteenth century, be regarded as a survival from an age which was, happily, past. The personal characters and behaviour of King George IV and even the fairly harmless William IV were no help to their order. Even Queen Victoria, the paradigm of virtuous monarchs, encouraged the prejudices of an increasingly secular age by her self-imposed seclusion for a decade after the death of the Prince Consort. The result was that probably the high point of English republican tendencies was reached in about 1870.

We should note that this was the very period in which the greater British colonies were reaching a high point of independent confidence. It is true that the business which completed the creation of the Dominion of Canada gave much cause for optimism, but, in contrast, relations between the

British government and the Australian colonies were unprecedentedly troubled. Probably it is not too much to say that there was a crisis of empire – and thus of constitutions – short of rebellion, but more serious otherwise than anything which had occurred since the American war of 1776-83. Opinion in these colonies was fed by various streams: emigrant Chartists from Britain, Irish malcontents, American gold diggers, and so on. The termagant Dr J D Lang, intent on recreating something like a Calvinist paradise in these parts, had written his *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia* as early as 1849 (I think!); and, though he contributed much to the life of New South Wales and Queensland, he missed the offer of a knighthood in the Order of St. Michael and St. George by publishing his *The Coming Event* in 1871, just when the British government was intent on avoiding the appearance of giving approval to colonists who appeared to advocate the dissolution of the empire.

Republicanism was undoubtedly in the soil of Australia at this time. The surprising thing is that it failed to flourish, even under the stimulus of journalistic and literary encouragement in the last twenty years of the century, when incipient isolationism and Utopianism – not to mention the narcissism which is surfacing in these days – were exemplars of the true "tyranny of distance". A view was forming that the maturity and potential of Australia, before and after federation, was inhibited or compromised by the lack of what its proponents would be pleased to call "independence". By this is meant the fact that the Australian colonies and the Commonwealth of Australia did not separate themselves from the empire and achieve, under the auspices of a republican form of government, the Utopia which "might have been": which might, one could say, be exemplified by the starry-eyed characters who set out in the last decade of last century to establish their ideal in Paraguay. It is a tribute, I suggest, to the remarkably outward-looking character of the Australian populations that the phenomenon was driven to cover by the recognition of Australia's place in the world, exemplified by participation in the Boer war – which was not the unnatural role which "Breaker Morant", that epitome of cinematographic dishonesty, would have us believe – and World War I. This does not, of course, overcome or eliminate, or suggest that there does not exist, a view of the monarchy which is not based in isolationism, chauvinism or narcissism, but in the older radical tradition held in common with republicans elsewhere.

The republican aspect of the "Australian Legend", in its contemporary implementation, might turn out – for whoever can tell? – to be vindicated eventually. I must urge however that it can be answered.

There is a view of the development of our parliamentary institutions which I'd urge our republicans to consider. It sustains a "logic" for the maintenance of constitutional monarchy in Australia just as valid as that which insists, for example, that because the Queen is not "Australian", so also the institution is not "Australian", and that, because Britain is increasingly dissociated from this country, so the monarchy becomes "irrelevant". It runs as follows – and I must ask indulgence for the compression which time imposes, and the crudities which are its consequence. In our case, continuous with that of Great Britain, the Crown has been integral to the process, so that parliamentary government is synonymous with constitutional monarchy. I must emphasise the "our". Colonial "responsible government", the basis and pattern of our present system, was not some sort of alien imposition on post-1788 Australians. On the contrary, emergent indeed from the common stock of British colonial experience, it was sought by ambitious colonists and, once established, was self-developed over a period of some 150 years by constant and creative interaction of local with imperial factors. Yet to hear some republicans, it would seem that we were a race subjected by invaders – and I am conscious that the cruel resonances which this must have for Aborigines are outside the scope of the present discussion – and held down by force or guile.

This is a possible self-image, however misleading, for some present day societies, but emphatically not for us. My view, as an historian and as an individual, is that we can do ourselves no better service than to remember that the colonisation of Australia, in its political dimension especially, has absolutely nothing in common with the experience of countries in Asia and Africa which in the second half of this century have enjoyed the dubious benefits of "de-colonisation". We are the beneficiaries of "colonialism", not its victims: indeed, we are the colonisers, and little purpose is served by concealing or ignoring the fact, or, for that matter, wallowing in guilt on account of it. Less obviously, but perhaps even more importantly, our experience has very little to do with what shaped the character and destiny of those English colonies which became the United States.

I've been intrigued in this connection by David Neal's recent book, *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony. Law and Power in Early New South Wales*. His main theme is that the inhabitants of New South Wales, practically from Day One, applied to their new circumstances a political-cum-legal view of society which derived directly from a central, perhaps dominant, feature of the eighteenth century English mainstream: i.e., the Rule of Law and all that it implies. This accords with my argument entirely. Neal's book helps to confirm that the origins of the Australian polity are to be found in continuous association with the institutions, as well as the ideas and practice, of Great Britain. The French and American examples which were available by the end of the eighteenth century, were – as it would seem – deliberately avoided, by convicts, ex-convicts, and free settlers alike. I suggest that it is wholly inappropriate to try to create in the present day a quasi-revolutionary tradition which has little or no authentic ancestry in the formative years of European Australia. To say this is by no means to abandon either logic or reason, but to build on a properly sustainable view of our history.

The European intrusion into this continent was naturally accompanied by certain governmental structures and modes of exercising authority. They were at all times liable to be modified by transmission from the metropolitan political culture which produced them, and in response to colonial necessities. After 1815 – and even more after 1819 – it was inevitable that they would be. Especially, the immense constitutional and political changes in Britain during the 1830s, the consciousness of these in New South Wales (not to mention Canada), and the changing economic and demographic circumstances of the colony, pretty well determined the direction which would be taken.

The result by the mid-1850s was the establishment of parliamentary government, not without some hesitation on the part of those in England who had responsibility for monitoring the affairs of colonies. And the new system was entirely under local control, save, of course, for anything which smacked of extra-territoriality. It at once exhibited local peculiarities. But let us be clear. Here was an authentic case of institutional transference and adaptation. The agents of the British constitutional monarchy had been governing British subjects in New South Wales. Now that monarchy itself was, willy-nilly, established there in a form which the colonists themselves essentially devised. It was a modified version of that "disguised republic" which Walter Bagehot classically described for Britain – which he recognised as having been adapted for colonial use – and in which he discerned an indispensable role for the Crown's "dignified" functions. The colonial governments of the nineteenth century, thus understood, were also part of a process which recognised the essential independence of the colonies. Our present system and status stem directly from this. I have to suggest that it is incomprehensible without the monarchy as both the originating element and the enabler of continuing political and constitutional development. It was integral to the formation of the Australian political character and – to use the word so much bandied about in this context – image. The empire and the monarchy were as much part of the "real" Australia as the bush and bushmen.

More, by adopting the Crown in both its symbolical and its residual practical capacity—a practical capacity perhaps much more considerable in the colonies than in Britain, as Bagehot, once again, observed—the Australian colonies provided themselves with a mechanism which had, unpredictably enough, enabled the conflict of opinions and parties embodied in the British parliamentary system to be moderated and civilized to an extent unknown almost anywhere else. This was what had been so much admired and envied by Montesquieu and others in the declining years of the ancien régime in France. To alter the metaphor, the Crown by the 1850s, because of the properties acquired over a long period of turbulent uncertainty, was able to act as a catalyst in that spectacular transition from aristocratic government to democracy which was one of the leading features of nineteenth century British history. Ironically, this transition occurred, or began to occur, earlier in the colonies than in Britain. But in each case, it was because of the Crown's function of appointing ministers according to the expectations of the most modern political behaviour, that we were enabled to dispense with serious ructions.

Let us by all means recognise that not everything was clear-cut or without difficulty. The Canadian crisis of 1849; the chaos of Victoria in the 1860s and 1870s; the Reform bill crisis of 1831-2 and the 1909-11 People's Budget/Parliament Act episode in Britain: in every case the survival of the constitution, of the political system altogether, was at risk. In every case catastrophe was averted with the aid of the role which the sovereign or the sovereign's representative was able to play. The individuals concerned hesitated, or were inept, even (in the case of a governor) had to be removed, before a result was obtained. But the institution was of such strength and yet flexibility that reasonable outcomes eventuated. I see no reason to suppose that it has lost these qualities. But we cannot know unless circumstances put it to the test.

Inevitably, someone will say the terrible words, "nineteen seventy five", in the Australian context. Sir David Smith, whose polished and insightful contribution to the republican debate we heard last night, was in attendance upon the principal players. From evidence such as his we are able to begin to piece together a version of the episode which is somewhat superior to what was portrayed in the television show a few years since called "The Dismissal"—not to mention other sources which pretend to be fact, not fiction. But I believe that we can invest "1975" with a significance which, as far as I am aware, has been missed. Mr Whitlam and his friends would have us believe that it showed what immense and extraordinary powers belong to the "undemocratic", "appointed official"—powers "greater than those of the Queen"; powers which "no British monarch has exercised since Queen Anne". Let me leave aside the historical inaccuracy of the last allegation: I seem to hear the ghost of George III protesting vigorously, and that of William IV muttering somewhat. But we had best stick to the present (or rather the recent past).

It seems to me that two large truths were demonstrated during our 1975 drama, in relation to the role of the Crown in the Constitution. One was the capacity of the governor-generalship to absorb the odium which undoubtedly and inevitably was visited upon the particular holder of the office. It is doubtful whether anyone outside the aggrieved Whitlamites is now particularly disturbed by the fact that a distinguished if pretentious Prime Minister was removed from office precipitately by an "unelected official". But even that is not the main point.

The 1975 crisis showed as clearly as anything could, that the Governor-General could not aspire to political eminence or power. He removed, it is true, the power of a political office holder. But in order for the government of the country to be carried on, he assumed as a matter of course that he must secure the services of a replacement in that same office. The Governor-General himself had no possibility of undertaking personal government. His function began and ended with the removal of one minister, and the appointment of another, subject to the condition that parliament

would be dissolved and the new minister submit himself and his colleagues to the judgment of the electorate.

Pace John Hirst and others, I cannot believe that any newly invented President would be merely a Governor-General renamed, an officer appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister. It is impossible to suppose that a presidency would not be made, in some way, an elective office. And I have the utmost scepticism for any claim that such a President, however cleverly constructed may be the definition of the powers of the office, would not be liable to feel called upon to assume government in person in circumstances as palpably chaotic as those of November 1975. Given an office not imbued with the mystique and the inherited inhibitions of constitutional monarchy—the product indeed of the deliberate rejection of the institution—it requires no stretch of the imagination to see that its holder could claim a necessary personal authority to establish a new political pattern.

I contend, in short, that while our present system is not so well provided with safeguards as to render impossible a tyranny constructed by a ministry with a secure majority in parliament and a party discipline of the order of those now existing, it most certainly ensures that the Head of State both is unable to establish such a tyranny and has the distinct option of frustrating the untoward or illegal intentions of an "elected minister". And, in passing, I should say that I believe we would do well to consider whether the present mode of nomination to the Governor-Generalship (and State governorships) ought not to be changed. It is no reflection on the actual performance of various holders of the office to say that it should not be liable to doubts raised by what are only too easily perceived as self-serving political motives on the part of ministers whose privilege it is to recommend a name (or names, as it ought to be) to the sovereign. One's mind turns to a device on the lines of the Council of the Order of Australia, whose function it could be to provide the Prime Minister with names from which, say, three might be selected for recommendation.

We need not however confine ourselves to such severely practical—or potentially practical—dimensions. In the minds of republicans the monarchy is usually identified with Australia's relationship with Great Britain. This indeed is how it should be! The disquiet I experience is to do with the destruction they wish to wreak on the one in order to be rid of the other. John Hirst, in the article I mentioned at the start, is I think extraordinarily optimistic as to the likelihood of consciousness of British heritage not being jettisoned with the monarchy. It is an aspect of the republican agenda which can truly be called "hidden", but which is given away by the utterances of Mr Keating as much as any. Too many republicans wish to achieve, in other words, not merely an institutional discontinuity but an historical one as well. They are of the ilk which would either expunge our British connection from our learning and our memories, or represent it in such a way as to make it encompass the major part of any demonology which might be desired.

It seems to me further that the present time requires us to consider more carefully than perhaps ever before the question to which persons such as Mr Keating have given what I consider to be an unacceptable answer. We are instructed by him and others to forget our links with Britain in particular, and Europe in general—except, of course, to the extent that such links might serve the purposes of "multi-culturalism"!—and to regard ourselves as unequivocally part of Asia (or, sometimes, the Pacific). It is as though cartography, masquerading as geography, is to become the ultimate cultural and political determinant. One of the obvious ways to achieve this would be to do precisely what John Hirst has argued against—to eliminate those aspects of our history which demonstrate as clearly as any such things can do, that our origins are thoroughly, if not wholly, European and, in particular, British. And what better way to begin the great work than by

setting about an institution, to abolish which would be a remarkably dramatic way of exhibiting disregard for our history and character?

We should observe one of the most recurrent arguments of the present republicans, which the Prime Minister has taken specially to his heart. It is that we cannot be respected or understood in our "region" if we continue to exhibit symbols and institutions which indicate a particular association with Britain. In order to obtain the proper recognition of Indonesia (which seems to be most in mind), or Korea, or wherever, we must make obeisance to the god of decolonisation. We must seem to acknowledge that we are what we were not: artificially incorporated in an empire which is no more. We must (if I may adapt a well-known expression forming part of one of the more substantial republican furrphies) cringe to the political and racial ideas of others. Worse in a sense, we must assume that our immediate neighbours are incapable of understanding that which might not be immediately evident to them; and rather than try to explain ourselves in terms of our own integrity, we should take such steps as will at once placate prejudices and eliminate evident differences. Quite apart from the issue of whether such an attitude is consistent with self-respect, it seems to me clear that to maintain our present constitutional monarchy is the first item in retaining a significant, even massive, link to a Europe of which we ought remain a part. In *The Age*, 23 July, Mr Justice Kirby of N.S.W. was reported—briefly and perhaps reluctantly, given that newspaper's editorial commitment—as having said something to this effect. As far as I am aware he is not known for his obscurantist attachment to past irrelevancies. The task before us, in short, is that of rejuvenating that which has been artificially debilitated.

Yet ARM claim to be in tune with the present and future! It is legitimate to ask by what supernatural power our republicans see into the future. We are bidden to understand that we can produce a new "image" of ourselves for consumption abroad, but also within the country. This might well be the case. Tom Paine made the point in 1792 in the aftermath of the French Revolution: he insisted on the need for "regeneration", taking the French as a model. Well, destruction is as capable of creating change as anything else. But to what purpose or actual effect? What can in fact be predicted about such a theoretical proposition?

Our republicans would of course make public enemies of themselves if they suggested that we need or ought to accept a "French Revolution". But it is all, of course, "in the mind". What they wish to do is to partake intellectually of the revolution mentalit,. Unlike many other countries of the New World, Australia does not owe its identity or character to rejection or rebellion, let alone revolution. Apparently this is a matter for regret to our republicans. Since it is hardly conceivable that they can, or even feel they ought to, arrange for barricades and blood on the streets, they must needs resort to the institutional discontinuity which I've already mentioned: a kind of substitute for a revolution. We might not have a Bastille, and we can hardly hope to have the House of Windsor guillotined, but they envisage that we can, by the sort of Act of Parliament which Thomas Carlyle so scathingly put in its place in the 1830s, remove its baleful influence.

To the suggestions of those of us who don't relish such discontinuity, they offer assurances that the "real" essence of our political system—parliamentary government, the rule of law, etc—will not be affected. Here is a furrphy which arises out of the fantasy. Some of what I have said above relates to it. But there is more, and it deserves attention in terms of the objects of The Samuel Griffith Society. It seems to me that the minds which propose this kind of radical change are unlikely to be satisfied with just the one, however complicated. The mere business of coming to some agreement, between political parties, between classes and groups in the community, between groups of experts, would be difficult enough. What though of the various implications which someone or other would be bound to read into the situation? It is a destabilised situation. Who can tell what extravagances might suggest themselves to the imaginations of persons who are so capable of promising all things, when they have no certain knowledge of what exactly

they can deliver? It would provide the perfect occasion for a complete re-writing of the Constitution.

There is another disturbing problem in the proposed process. Thomas Keneally is the high priest of ARM as far as I understand. Senator Schacht is an acolyte, and I had the misfortune to encounter one of his utterances recently, inevitably incorporating bon mots from Keneally. It was a brief article purporting to put the case of the republicans for public debate based on "fact not emotion". Most of it was devoted to cataloguing the features of, or associated with, the British monarchy which would be most likely to offend or repel certain groups. One was Roman Catholics (there would seem to be, amongst other things, an arriŠre pens,e that a substantial segment of the population is to be issued with a separate agenda by those who assume that being Irish brings with it a birthright of attitudes so well expressed by the late Edward Kelly, of Jerilderie, Glenrowan and the Old Melbourne Jail); another was "the young" (who are assumed, of course, to be manipulable, and contemptuous of things traditional or dignified); and, lastly, more or less recently arrived immigrants from elsewhere than the British Isles.

The last group—recently arrived immigrants—deserve special notice. ARM hopes to extract much mileage from "demographic changes". They urge that recently arrived immigrants from Europe and Asia cannot be expected to understand, let alone find acceptable, the condition by which Australia acknowledges a sovereign who not only is "not Australian" (in the crude sense meant by Messrs Schacht & co.) but resides in a country 19,000 kms distant. It is emphasised that most recent immigrants are not of British origin. We are assured that many actively dislike "the British" or, coming perhaps from republics of recent creation, verily resent the existence of a monarch. This is touted as "new". Yet lack of affection for the monarchy or its government, or for the mother country, was hardly unknown amongst some British immigrants since the beginning of settlement; and such sentiments have been much cultivated in this century by what might be called a Sinn Fein element amongst us. But of what validity is this line of argument? Doubtless a considerable number of adult immigrants experience an initial difficulty with the subtlety and complexity of our constitutional system. Why, though, must they be supposed to remain puzzled? It is true that no effort is made to enlighten them, while their children at school will look in vain for a curriculum which makes sense of such aspects of Australian history and government. But they have a right to feel more than a little insulted to have it asserted or implied that they are incapable of acquiring an understanding of this one of the peculiarities of their adopted country.

We do not know how numerous are Anglophobe immigrants. Such as they are, they will doubtless support ARM. That their opinions and their existence should be elicited as a reason for others to give a like support is palpably out of order. Apart from the fact that most people presumably choose to come to Australia to enjoy the benefits associated with institutions which are essentially British in origin, it is quite extraordinary that the preferences or prejudices of immigrants to a country should be cited as, in themselves, reasons for changing the constitutional and political structure of that country. The respect paid to them by our republicans is uncomfortably akin to their sensitivity to alleged "regional" expressions of contemptuous disbelief that we have not jettisoned our "colonial" monarchy.

Some at least of republicans must be assumed to have a real concern that immigrants be not required to abjure their former countries. This leads to some consideration of "the oath", which has been made into a fantasy and a furphy at once. Both J Hirst and the Prime Minister assume convenient objections to swearing allegiance to the sovereign. But the value of allegiance to a sovereign is that it implies—symbolises—not something to be taken quite literally, except to some extent in the case of military officers and civil servants—but as nothing else can, a personal obligation to obey laws, respect institutions, and adopt values without having all or some of them

shoved down one's throat. At the same time it leaves interpretation to individuals and to the common behaviour of the community. The limitation is that they must obey the laws: and for this the oath taken by new citizens amply provides. Inevitably immigrants must, if they are to be Australian citizens (and subjects), renounce obedience to the governments from whose jurisdictions they have removed themselves. But if they are required to swear allegiance to a sovereign, in a form which indicates personal obligation, they are far from having to suggest that they no longer have any feeling for their old countries. But, of course, this is not something which seems to occur to our republicans. It does not accord with their "logic".

J Hirst urges that the oath of allegiance is an "empty ritual". I cannot myself see how his suggested replacement is any less empty. Most people, he says, cannot understand personal allegiance. Do they any more understand the motherhood phrases of proposed replacements? How many are prepared to admit that they represent the values which they most desire? Unless the list is utterly comprehensive—and the mind boggles at the length it would have to go to, not to mention the need to provide for "strike out if not applicable"—it is far closer to being empty than is the catchall of allegiance to a "mean-anything" sovereign. Hirst also urges that the pledges he would exact constitute a training in citizenship. He has, I fear, more confidence than most sensible people in the general capacity or willingness of oath-takers to be significantly instructed by the words they utter. On the other hand, an oath which excludes reference to the allegiance due from a subject to his or her sovereign is probably as solid a contribution as could be wished to the business of rendering nugatory that which republicans have targeted.

I end with a revisitation of my opening reference. John Hirst, who has given the only reputable conservative argument for a republic, believes that the civic unity of this country would be revived by such an innovation. He has no confidence in the functionality of our existing arrangement. Our only option, under this view, is to make the change. It seems to me a proposition which is at once over-clever and yet naive. There are absolutely no grounds for supposing that any institution invented here and now will achieve anything like the result he predicts. A speculative outcome so uncertain, so unlikely, surely should persuade us to avoid experimentation. Worse, in order to implement it a referendum must be held for an amendment or amendments to the Constitution—indeed, for a reconstruction of the Constitution. Is there reason to believe that it would be unopposed, a bi-partisan undertaking? A deeply divisive issue would become the subject of a bitter campaign. If the republican case were won it would not be by the overwhelming margin of votes or unanimity amongst the States which alone could vindicate it. The result either way would leave a substantial minority of the population with a feeling of deep dissatisfaction and resentment. No argument so far heard is sufficient to justify such an outcome.

With some reason John Hirst seems to be sceptical of the respect in which the political institutions of this country are held. But why should he single out the least "political" institution as the weakest component? More, there is an intimate and inescapable connection between the "dignified" and "efficient" parts of the constitution (to adapt Bagehot's expressions). To assert the poverty of the monarchy cannot be confined to the Crown itself. All parts of our constitutional structure suffer the disrespect which Hirst laments. Time after time we are regaled with reports and opinions, sometimes based on "polls", which show how "politicians" are held in exceedingly low esteem in public estimation. This is not because they are part of a monarchical system. It is because they seem unable to conduct their part in that system with sufficient decorum, public spirit, effectiveness, or freedom from the tyranny, not of a monarch or her representative, but of their party machines. If rigorous logic is to be employed, we should be mainly troubled by the behaviour of those machines and of the M.P.s which they produce: we should, in fact, be troubled by the consequences of democracy! But that is to verge on reductio

ad absurdum and might furnish a warning against assuming that there is only one standard or mode of "logic".