

## Republicanism and the Repudiation of post-1788 Australia

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### Dr Geoffrey Partington

Malcolm Turnbull has asserted on behalf of his fellow republicans:

“We believe that there is so little that can be rationally be stated in favour of the retention of the British monarchy in Australia that the more the monarchist case is heard, the more republicans there will be”.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Hughes agreed with this judgment by his friend who, he claimed, has shown “how threadbare and even comic the monarchist opposition’s case has turned out to be”.<sup>2</sup>

Republican concern that arguments for constitutional monarchy should be widely heard would be highly praiseworthy, especially given the persecution some republicans claim to have suffered. Al Grassby has claimed, “Monarchist thuggery persists in Australia against those who dare to question Imperial decisions”.<sup>3</sup>

Wayne Hudson and David Carter, the editors of the book in which Malcolm Turnbull urged wider public airing of the case for constitutional monarchy, advised their readers:

“While our editing of the book represents an argument for republicanism as a fruitful context for the reformulation of notions of citizenship, statehood and nationhood in Australia, we hope, through the diversity of the essays which follow, to give the contemporary republicanism debate a depth and complexity it has not often shown”.<sup>4</sup>

In the event, however, their book, *The Republicanism Debate*, devoted only 24 out of 165 pages to arguments in favour of the retention of Australia’s constitutional monarchy; but Hudson and Carter may subsequently have felt that 24 pages for the opposition were far too many, particularly since they included half a page each by Sir Harry Gibbs and Sir David Smith. I was reminded of Dai Jones, a Welsh bass with a passion for Handel. Dai went to heaven and was invited by St Peter to join the heavenly choir. Dai was surprised to find that there were ten thousand sopranos, ten thousand altos, ten thousand tenors and himself, the only bass. The first anthem of the day was the Hallelujah Chorus. After the final strains died away, St Peter congratulated the choir on a wonderful rendition. “Only one slight problem”, the saint remarked, “A bit too much bass, Dai Jones”. Wayne Hudson and David Carter should perhaps have contented themselves with half a page from either Sir David or Sir Harry, since each produces quite a deal of bass, not from both of them.

### Republicans and Australian history

Malcolm Turnbull has proclaimed that:

“The lie that the Crown is an Australian institution is, of course, the ‘big lie’ of the whole monarchist cause, although it is often repeated”.<sup>5</sup>

Turnbull has repeated variations of this charge on many occasions. It seems strange that a successful Australian lawyer should not bear in mind that since 1788 all property rights in Australia have derived from the Crown, all criminal prosecutions have been carried out in the name of the Crown, and until very recently all oaths of allegiance by office bearers both military and civil have been to the Crown as the symbol of a unified national authority. Indeed, it seems downright perverse to conceive of Australian history since 1788 without both the Crown and the pervasive influence of Great Britain.

James Cook wrote in his journal on 22 August, 1770:

“Notwithstand[ing] I had in the Name of His Majesty taken possession of several places

along this coast, I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of his Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast...”

When Captain Arthur Phillip took a party ashore at Sydney Cove on 26 January, 1788, he and his officers drank the health of the King and the Royal family and the success of the new colony. Many convicts showed strong loyalty to the Crown which had sentenced them. When, in 1800, there seemed to be a danger of French invasion, many emancipists volunteered to join a loyal association of militia to defend the colony. Patriotic occasions, especially the King’s Birthday, and that of the Queen, aroused enthusiastic expressions of devotion to King and Country among many convicts, although free grog and a day off work may have been even more effective than patriotic zeal in producing this effect.<sup>6</sup> The first poems published in Australia were odes written by Michael Massey Robinson for recitation on the King’s and Queen’s birthdays. Republicanism was then unpopularly associated in Australian minds with the French Revolution, and by the more historically minded with Oliver Cromwell and standing armies.

Zeal for the Crown was, of course, found less among Australians of Irish Catholic descent than among Protestants from Great Britain and Ireland, but Thomas Keneally’s stereotype of Australian history as one of continual cantankerous sectarian strife is crude and false. Keneally claimed that his grandfather believed Queen Victoria was syphilitic and “had to wear high collars to hide the sores on her neck”, but any past follies and bigotries of the Keneally family were no more typical of Australians of Irish Catholic descent than are those of republican Tom today.

There was great enthusiasm in 1868 when Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, visited Australia, one result being the naming of Prince Alfred College in Adelaide; and considerable distress when a Fenian tried to assassinate the Prince and succeeded in wounding him badly. This distress was shared by many Irish-Australians. A leading Sydney layman, J Edward Kelly claimed, “Irish nationality stinks in the nostrils of the ‘respectable’ community, even though they glory in being Catholic and loyal to their Queen”.<sup>7</sup> During a fund raising visit for the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1895, Michael Davitt noted in many homes of Australian Catholics what to him was a strange combination of portraits: three heroes of Irish nationalism, Parnell, Dillon and O’Brien, together with Gladstone and Queen Victoria.

William Bede Dalley, the first Roman Catholic Premier of New South Wales, raised Volunteers for the Sudan Campaign of 1885. In later years he taunted Orangemen:

“Fancy, after all these years they have been calling us plotting papists and Fenian rebels, the first men ... to serve the Queen ... are being sent by a Paddy and a Holy Roman”.<sup>8</sup>

When Edward William O’Sullivan first entered the Parliament of New South Wales, he wrote an article entitled “The Coming Republic”, which advocated that Britain and the United States should form a federal republic. However, by the 1890s O’Sullivan decided that the existing British Constitution, although imperfect, was the instrument most “conducive to liberty, to the maintenance of the rights of the people and of freedom of speech”.<sup>9</sup> O’Sullivan told the Irish-Australian readership of the *Freeman’s Journal*, “There has never been a civilizer like the British Empire”.<sup>10</sup> He told them to consider the British Empire as “theirs, because they have helped to build it, and to establish the high form of civilization which it confers”.<sup>11</sup>

Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran, the first Irish-born Archbishop of Sydney and a leading figure in the federation movement during the 1890s, recognised that in Britain and Australia

basic freedom and equality had been achieved by the Catholic Church, whose position in many states with an overwhelmingly Catholic population was much worse. When he accepted the freedom of the city in Dublin in 1888, Moran declared:

“And whilst the Australians are thus one in heart and one in hand with their brothers of the dear mother country, [Ireland] we are not the less loyal to the empire of which we are proud to form part”<sup>12</sup>

Moran wrote that he regarded:

“.....our colonial Administration, linked as it is to the Crown of Great Britain, as the most perfect form of republican government. It has all the freedom which a republican government imparts, and it is free from the many unpleasant influences to which, as in the United States, an elected head of a republic is subject”.

The radical Protestant Ulsterman George Higinbotham, who dominated Victorian politics during the third quarter of the nineteenth Century, was a persistent critic of existing constitutional arrangements, but he acknowledged that it was:

“.....the honest and ardent desire of ninety-nine men and women out of every hundred in this colony, that the connection which now exists – the formal connection, and even more the real and substantial connection – between Great Britain and her colonies should continue for an indefinite length of time to come”.

Although he declined a knighthood, Higinbotham described Queen Victoria as “the best constitutional sovereign that has ever sat on the throne of England”, and said he was “glad the colony bore her name”. Higinbotham told a Melbourne meeting in 1887 that there was in Victoria an “almost unanimous” feeling of “great attachment and loving gratitude” towards the Queen. He picked out for especial praise the Queen’s attachment to her constitutional obligations, “the high standard of purity and honour” she had always set, and the way her example had “benefited and advanced the position of women, and increased the respect for them among men”<sup>13</sup>

Henry Parkes, an artisan in his native Birmingham, had republican sympathies in the heady revolutionary atmosphere of 1848 but, like many former Chartists in Britain, he became increasingly attached to British constitutional traditions. Parkes told an audience on a return visit to England:

“If people liked to stay in England, all he had to say was God bless them in the dear old country. He was just as much an Englishman as any man present. The people in Australia were as thoroughly English as the people of the mother-country; they had forfeited nothing by going to a distance of 14,000 miles. Shakespeare and Milton belonged as much to them as to the people of England; they possessed by right of inheritance an equal share in the grand traditions, the old military renown, the splendour of scientific discovery, and the wealth of literature, which had made England the great civilising power of the world”<sup>14</sup>

In 1890 Parkes urged delegates to the Australasian Federation confederation in Melbourne:

“Make yourselves a united people, appear before the world as one, and the dream of ‘going home’ would die away. We should create an Australian home ... We should have ‘home’ within our own shores; ‘home’ ...”<sup>15</sup>

Yet, as Parkes called for “one nation, one destiny”, he also planted an English oak as a symbol of ongoing attachment to Britain and “the crimson thread of kinship” which, he believed, would continue to link Australia’s destiny to that of Britain, as well as uniting the Australian colonies.

It was shared Britishness as much as shared Australianness which enabled a federal

Australian Commonwealth incorporating the entire land mass of the continent, together with Tasmania, to be created peacefully. Until well into the twentieth Century more Western Australians and South Australians had visited Britain than had visited New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria or Tasmania. Similarly, more of the population of that second group of colonies had visited Britain than South Australia or Western Australia. Substantial percentages within each colony, especially Victoria and South Australia, were born in Great Britain and Ireland. Throughout the nineteenth Century and well into the twentieth, links with London were more important for each colonial and State capital city than those with cities within Australia. The near identity in patterns of political culture, religious beliefs, family structures, sports and pastimes in each colony or State was ensured as much by the continued links of each with Britain as by frequent intercourse between the colonies themselves.

A specifically “pro-British” party never developed in Australia, but this was because there was no need for such an organisation, since British immigrants quickly became unhyphenated Australians. “New-chum” separatism was strongly discouraged by London. Gladstone, for example, warned: “To attempt to create a Crown influence, to rally a British party, and to make attachment to Britain a watchword in political strife, would recoil”, and the result would be that the national government “would be allied to something of distaste for the introduction or continuance of British institutions altogether”.<sup>16</sup>

Our contemporary Australian republicans generally have difficulty with their nineteenth Century forerunners, small in number as they were, as well as with the large majority of Australians who supported the Crown and every other tie with Britain. On nearly every issue on which there was a clear division of opinion between nineteenth Century Australian republicans and the British Ministers of the Crown, republicans today, if they faced the matter openly, would be forced to concede that they themselves consider that London was in the right.

Take first Aboriginal policy. One historian highly favoured by republicans today is Henry Reynolds. Reynolds has oscillated between arguing that racism had prevented any acknowledgement of Aboriginal native title in Australian law before the *Mabo* judgments of 1992, and claiming that Aboriginal native title had always been recognised by the Crown, so that there was nothing revolutionary about the *Mabo* cases. Every bit of evidence advanced by Reynolds for the second proposition is derived from arguments made by British politicians such as Earl Grey and British jurists such as James Stephen, Pemberton, Burge, Follet and Lushington. These humanitarians did not propose land rights in the *Mabo* sense, but they urged the colonial governments to exercise the Crown’s powers of discretion generously so as to ensure Aboriginal welfare. It was, no doubt, easier to advocate generosity at a distance of 14,000 miles than it was in the Outback, but it cannot be denied that advice offered from London was more favourable to Aborigines than were the policies adopted by colonial governments.

Take next the White Australia policy, which had no more fervent advocates than Australia’s republicans, whereas the chief opposition to it came from London. On matters of race and colour British colonists, whether in Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, were, like those before them in the American colonies, much more exclusive than Westminster and Whitehall. Joseph Chamberlain, often denounced as an arch-imperialist, made it clear when he was Colonial Secretary that the Crown would disallow colonial legislation which explicitly used race or colour as a basis for exclusion or discrimination.

Joseph Furphy ('Tom Collins'), for many years a favourite figure with Australian republicans and the Left as a whole, was a typical committed "White-Australian". Close to death, he restated, "There is nothing else I am so thankful for as for the White Australia". Furphy was not a racist in the worst sense of that term. His basic political aim was a socialist republic of "mates": people who shared common values and would back each other up in times of trouble, but who were autonomous individuals. As Furphy saw it, Chinese immigrants to the goldfields had come in gangs subject to the control of a boss, had no experience of free institutions, and seemed unlikely to acquire it.

William Guthrie Spence boasted that the Australian Workers' Union which he founded "ignored all class or sex distinctions, and admitted all who had no other union they could conveniently join", but he added that it barred from membership, "Chinese, Japanese, Kanakas, or Afghans or coloured aliens other than Maoris, American negroes, and children of mixed parentage born in Australia".<sup>17</sup> The exclusions were clearly based on Spence's beliefs about cultural compatibility, not genetic inheritance.

Other republicans a century ago were racist in the worst sense. John Archibald's *Bulletin* asserted in 1890:

"The citizens of Sydney respectfully but firmly declines to be a brother by Act of Parliament to the Hindoo, or to become related to the Hottentot and the Egyptian merely out of regard for the murderous traditions of England, for under a system of Imperial Federation some 270,000,000 cheap Indians and innumerable myriads of still cheaper Chinese would have the run of this Continent".<sup>18</sup>

Henry Lawson warned against "the reeking crowds of Chinamen and their wretched European women", and endorsed the misquoted verse:

"Rule, Britannia! Britannia rule the waves!

No more Chinamen will enter New South Wales".

Such sentiments make it difficult for our contemporary republicans to identify closely with their predecessors. There is embarrassment, too, among many republicans in 1999 that a century ago Australian colonial governments were often much more aggressive in foreign policy than British governments. During the 1890s the New South Wales government drew up a list of territories it wanted Britain to annex, including New Guinea, the New Hebrides, the Bougainville Islands and the Marshall, Ellice and Gilbert Islands. The Queensland government threatened to go it alone against Wilhelmine Germany in New Guinea. The Victorian government proclaimed the "manifest destiny of Australia to be the controlling Power in the Southern Pacific" and asserted a need to annex Samoa.<sup>19</sup> Yet Victoria had recently found it difficult to raise enough armed force to subdue the Kelly gang, let alone the isles of the Pacific.

The rise of Japanese power led many Australians to criticise Britain, not for being bellicose, but as lacking the will to take a firm stand in the Pacific. Henry Lawson tried to revive a martial spirit among the British as well as Australians. The English figure he came to admire most was the stern Oliver Cromwell who, when ruling England, "thrashed her enemies at home/ And crushed her foes abroad". In "The King of our Republic", Lawson called for an Australian Cromwell:

"If you find him stern, unyielding, where his living task is set,

I have told you that a tyrant should uplift the nation yet;

He will place his country's welfare over all and everything,

Shall the King of our Republic, and the man that we call King".

Perhaps we shall have a “King of our Republic”, but he may have been named, not after Oliver Cromwell, but Malcolm Canmore, the founder of a famous Scottish dynasty.

Australian history before 1914 is clearly an embarrassment for many republicans today.

How much easier simply to dismiss it, with Sir William Deane and Justice Gaudron, as:

“.....the conflagration of oppression and conflict which was, over the century, to spread across the continent to dispossess, degrade and devastate the Aboriginal people and leave a national legacy of unutterable shame”.

However, some republicans still try to make political capital from the First World War. It began badly from their viewpoint, since when war came in Europe in 1914 Australia’s Liberal Prime Minister Joseph Cook declared, “all our resources in Australia are ... for the preservation and the security of the Empire”. Worse still, Cook was backed by Andrew Fisher, leader of the Australian Labor Party, who stated: “Australia will stand beside our own to help defend her to our last man and our last shilling”. During the war there were, of course, legitimate Australian criticisms of the effectiveness of some British military commanders, both in the Dardanelles and on the Western Front, but these criticisms were little different from those made in Britain.

Overall, the sufferings of war brought the two countries even closer together than in the past. The friendship to Britain and loyalty to the Monarchy of most Australians who had personal experience of the fighting has frequently been attested to by Australian republicans, such as Robert Hughes, who castigated “the fiercely reactionary role” played by the Returned Services League.<sup>20</sup> With Peter Weir’s monstrous *Gallipoli* in the van, however, recent republicans have tried to convert the Anzac experience from Australia’s greatest time of solidarity with Britain to a source of suspicion and hatred.

A typical example is a recent attack by a regular columnist in the Adelaide Newscorp paper *The Sunday Mail*, Peter Goers, who repeated Weir’s slurs on British troops at Gallipoli. My mother’s eldest brother, Arthur Banks, a coal miner aged 18 in Atherton, just outside Manchester, was one of fifteen young men, who had been at school together and worked down the same pit, who volunteered as soon as war broke out. Eleven of them were killed on April 25, the first day of the landings at Gallipoli, as part of the 1st Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers. Goers also contrasted the craven English with Simpson, the heroic water-carrier at whose grave Goers claimed he placed sunflowers, yet Simpson was a recent English immigrant, as were many of the first ANZAC volunteers in 1914-15. In the 46 years I lived in England I never heard or read a word which was disrespectful of the contribution to the allied war efforts made by Australians and New Zealanders. Far from it – the Anzacs were among the heroes of my childhood education. Until recent years Australian schools and media also respected the efforts of the English and the other peoples of the British Isles in two World Wars.

Goers managed to add a new dimension of republican hatred for Britain. He claimed that “Turks tell Australians and New Zealanders that ‘the Anzacs were not our enemy. The English were our enemy’ ”.<sup>21</sup> Goers endorsed this alleged Turkish belief and claimed that in 1914 “the English used us to invade” Turkey. Yet without provocation Turkey entered the war on the German side on 29 October, 1914, when its fleet, commanded by the German Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, bombarded Odessa, Sevastopol, Theodosia and Novorossisk, and sank as many Russian ships as possible in the Black Sea, before actually declaring war. During the months the Gallipoli campaign was being waged, the Turkish government of Enver Pasha deported its entire Armenian population, some 1,750,000 in total, from

Anatolia to Syria and Palestine, then parts of the Turkish empire. About 600, 000 Armenians died in this process, many brutally massacred. This is almost exactly the same number of casualties suffered by armed forces at Gallipoli: between 250, 000 and 350, 000 on the Turkish side, and about 270, 000 on the allied side. Some republicans find strange allies when they embrace the enemies of their British enemy.

HV Evatt is rarely praised at our meetings, but we would surely agree with his argument in his 1935 work *The King and His Ministers* that:

“The Crown might do quite different jobs at the same time. It might be a means of unity among nations which had emerged from the old empire, and at the same time it might be a symbol of the independence of each one...there was only one monarch living in Britain, but the full monarchical authority might be invested in several governments at once”.<sup>22</sup>

Republican Malcolm Booker admitted that “the idea of a republic barely surfaced between the two world wars”. Booker noted that, as “the British Empire was gradually transformed into the British Commonwealth of Nations and the self-governing colonies into dominions”, so “the argument that the link with the Crown endangered Australian interests became less credible. There was, on the contrary, a widespread feeling that ‘the mother country’ was in need of help and that it was the duty of Australians to give it”.<sup>23</sup>

Republican and veteran Marxist Robin Gollan has offered an interesting explanation why Australian republicanism was weak during the late 1930s. In Gollan’s account, “all the effort” of “the far Left, particularly the Communist Party and those influenced by its ideas”, was “put into building an anti-fascist front to force conservative governments to pursue the policy of collective security”.<sup>24</sup> Gollan did not remind his readers that those anti-fascists of the Australian Left opposed rearmament before 1939, and that between 1939 and Hitler’s invasion of the USSR they denounced the war as an imperialist conflict of no concern to the Australian people.

On 3 September, 1939, Prime Minister Robert Menzies told the Australian people, “Great Britain has declared war and as a result Australia is also at war”. As leader of the ALP before war began, John Curtin displayed little interest in resisting Hitler and the Nazi threat, declaring as late as August, 1938:

“He would be a bold man who would commit the Commonwealth and the lives of Australians as a pawn in a European conflict. For my part, I say that the safety of the Australian people impels us to recognise our inability to send Australians overseas to participate in a European war”.

Curtin argued then that “the wars of Europe are a quagmire in which we should not allow our resources, our strength, our vitality to be sunk”, but he subsequently rose to meet the challenge of the times. On 8 December, 1941 he responded to the entry of Japan into the Second World War with these words:

“We here, in this spacious land where, for more than 150 years, peace and security have prevailed, are now called upon to meet the external aggressor .... We Australians have imperishable traditions. We shall maintain them. We shall vindicate them”.

As he urged renewed efforts to win the war, Curtin told the nation:

“Australians, you are the sons and daughters of Britishers. You came from England and Scotland and Ireland and Wales”.

Curtin was well aware in 1941 that British conscripts were fighting on fronts much closer to Australia than to Britain, whereas Australian conscripts were confined to home duties, later extended to include New Guinea, and only volunteers went overseas. Curtin appreciated

that Churchill made desperate efforts to save Singapore, including sending to their destruction the battleships *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, both sunk in December, 1941, with six hundred drowned. This understanding had disappeared from the minds of many Australian republicans by the 1990s. In his first major assault on Britain and its links with Australia, Paul Keating accused his Liberal opponents of:

“.....cultural cringe to a country which decided not to defend the Malay peninsula, not to worry about Singapore, not to give us our troops back to keep ourselves free from Japanese domination. That was the country you wedded yourselves to”.

During the Second World War, Australia's greatest historian of his generation, WK Hancock, described the monarchy as “a living and popular institution” in Australia. He admonished some American commentators as follows:

“I understand very well that the American people found their freedom by repudiating the British monarchy. I respect their republican symbolism. Won't they understand that the British people, and the Canadian people, and the Australian people, and many other peoples, have found or are finding their freedom by adapting the flexible institution of the British monarchy to their own special needs and purposes? Won't they respect our monarchical symbolism?”.<sup>25</sup>

Sir Keith Hancock had no need to address such an admonition to Australians in 1943.

Malcolm Turnbull conceded in 1993 that:

“Fifty years ago the patriotic ideas of Australia were not distinct from those of Great Britain. Public and political meetings in those days would have seen the platform festooned with Union Jacks”.<sup>26</sup>

According to Turnbull, “all political parties, including Labor” were “effusively pro-British in the 1950s”.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Herbert Evatt claimed in the 1953 debate on the *Royal Style and Titles Act*:

“The word British means as much to us as it does to the people of the United Kingdom itself and of New Zealand and Canada. To all of us it means the British tradition of Government under which every member of this Parliament pledges his faith and allegiance to the monarch”.<sup>28</sup>

In Robert Hughes' words:

“The cause of republicanism was so feeble in 1954, so tied to old socialist dreams of the late nineteenth Century, that it seemed to middle-class Australians merely an obsolete rhetorical idea, fatally contaminated by its left-wing origins”.<sup>29</sup>

Hughes admitted with regret that for people like him, born in or around 1938, “the sacramental mana of royalty was still in place and wholly intact”, and “...it seemed entirely natural and inevitable that we should have a Head of State, with power to dissolve our governments and repeal our laws, who was not a citizen of our country and lived 14,000 miles away”. Such sentiments were, in Hughes' view, even stronger after the Second World War.<sup>30</sup>

Peter Spearitt wrote in 1993 of Australians then over the age of forty:

“Australians of this vintage saw the Monarch almost every day of their lives. The Monarch's portrait was to be found in court houses and police stations, town, shire and scout and guide halls, all State schools and even some Catholic schools. Banks, building societies, stock and station agents proudly hung Her Majesty's portrait in their offices. Almost all offices displayed a royal presence ... Charities, hobbyists, sporting organisations and professional bodies sought the ultimate seal of approval by adding 'Royal' to their



names”.<sup>31</sup>

Spearitt recalled:

“I spent most of my school holidays with my maternal grandmother, a stalwart of the Country Women’s Association and a committee royalist. Illustrated books on royalty figured prominently in her library. My grandmother often talked of the Coronation and the 1954 Royal Tour as if they were the most important events of this Century. In the semi-tropical climate of the ancestral home in Queensland all this royal paraphernalia impressed itself on my psyche”.<sup>32</sup>

For several generations the tyranny of distance limited visits of the Royal family to Australia, but there was great enthusiasm when the Duke and Duchess of York and Cornwall (later George V and Queen Mary) were present for the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament in 1901, and when Parliament first met in Canberra in 1927. The 1954 Royal Tour outdistanced anything before it. Jane Connors, Executive Producer of Radio National’s Social History Unit, estimates that “approximately seven million Australians, out of a population of nine million, managed to get themselves in front of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at some point during their eight-week tour”.<sup>33</sup> The Queen presided over the Cook Bicentenary in 1970, the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1973, and the New Parliament House in 1988.

In 1999 two Australian States, Victoria and Queensland, are still named after our Queen’s great-great grandmother. I live in a city which still bears the name of another English Queen, and its main street is still named after her husband, William IV. My suburb is Malvern, and my street and all its neighbours (Cheltenham, Winchester, Eton, Rugby, Harrow, Marlborough, Oxford and Cambridge) are still named after famous English schools and universities. The colours of Sturt Football Club are still the Double Blue, light and dark, of Oxford and Cambridge. My Australian university shares with an Australian island, river and mountain range the name of Matthew Flinders, the Lincolnshire sailor who gave Australia its name.

These tangible links with Britain annoy many republicans. Geoffrey Dutton lampooned Sir Alick Downer, father of our Foreign Minister, because he “built a fake Georgian mansion, bulldozed all the Australian trees, and planted a little England of oaks, ash, elms and so on”.<sup>34</sup> If only Downer had built a genuine humpy instead of a fake Georgian mansion!

Malcolm Turnbull seethed when recalling 1988, because:

“That Bicentennial year was a year of shame. Every major event was presided over by a member of the British royal family .... [the eyes of the world] saw Prince Charles and Diana in centre stage on Australia Day”.<sup>35</sup>

Turnbull ought to understand that hating the past is one thing, but pretending that it never existed is quite another.

Donald Horne has wondered, “How can we understand the older generations in Australia without taking the Empire and the belief in ‘Britishness’ into account?”. Horne admitted that “the similarities between Britain and Australia seem obvious to people who have matured in a different kind of society”.<sup>36</sup> Horne recalled, too, how he had been brought up to respect “hard work, perseverance, team spirit, temperance, plenty of fresh air and cricket”, which in those days “were believed to be the middle class virtues that won the empire and kept it great”.<sup>37</sup> That upbringing failed to have much influence on Horne, but it did have a beneficial effect on the lives of thousands of other Australians, many of whom he openly despises. Horne wrote that “some of the older people seemed to be too stupid even

to have withdrawal symptoms” in face of the “collapse of Empire”.<sup>38</sup> Bob Hawke had, of course, a pithy expression for inadequate elderly Australians. In a process Freudians term projection or transference, Horne claimed that:

“The old Empire loyalist habit of despising one’s ordinary countrymen has increased and it has spread far beyond the ranks of the old loyalists”.<sup>39</sup>

Disparaging attitudes towards older Australians, especially those of British origins, are found in many political circles. In May this year Federal Health Minister Michael Wooldridge lost his temper after receiving what was no doubt a provocative and unprovoked letter. Dr Wooldridge tried to ring its author to express his annoyance, but on finding himself speaking to the man’s wife, he abused her instead. Once he was again cool, calm and collected, Dr Wooldridge decided to apologise. He said:

“Look, it wasn’t my best of performances. Of course, when you saw him on telly, he’s a puffed up little Pom with a permed hair-do. And again I’m sorry for doing that to his wife”.

Can one doubt that Dr Wooldridge would have lost his ministerial office had he spoken of “a puffed up little Chink with lank hair” or “a puffed up little Abo”?

1975 was the critical year for some republicans, but here Morton’s Fork came fully into play. Recalling the events of 1975, Robert Hughes maintained that:

“The fact, suddenly made concrete, that any elected Prime Minister could be dismissed at the royal pleasure brought all Australians up with a jerk, regardless of their political loyalties”.<sup>40</sup>

For other republicans, however, it was not the Queen’s alleged intervention into the 1975 crisis that proved their moment of conversion, but her failure to intervene. Al Grassby claimed that “Queen Elizabeth in effect abdicated her responsibilities” in a letter dated 14 November, 1975 from Buckingham Palace which stated *inter alia*:

“The written Constitution and accepted constitutional conventions preclude the Queen from intervening personally in those functions once the Governor-General has been appointed or from interfering with His Excellency’s tenure of office except upon advice from the Australian Prime Minister. The present political problems are watched by the Queen with the greatest concern but they can only be and doubtless will be resolved by the exercise in Australia of the proper political process”.

That proper political process was, of course, to call a General Election, which is precisely what happened, and which enabled the decisive majority of Australian voters to endorse the dismissal of the Whitlam Government.

Al Grassby has not been alone in expressing shock at the failure of the Queen to sort out Australia’s constitutional deadlock according to her personal views. On 26 May, 1999 *The Australian* shared with its readers the thoughts of Greg Barnes, described as “a long time Liberal staffer” and “a senior adviser to John Howard”. Mr Barnes had come across a letter from the Personal Secretary to the Queen written in reply to a complaint about the conduct of Sir John Kerr. The Australian complainant was told that in all such matters the Queen would “take the advice of her Australian Ministers”. This convinced Mr Barnes that the monarchy was “irrelevant” to Australia. Apparently it did not occur to him that the Governor-General also acts on the advice of the Australian Ministers and that, at least under the “minimalist” republican proposals, so would any future President.

### **Australia’s ethnic composition and the Monarchy**

Republicans often claim that our constitutional monarchy is alien and irrelevant to ethnic groups which have entered Australia in large numbers since the end of the Second World War. Paul Keating argued that:

“The people of modern Australia are drawn from virtually every country in the world. It is no reflection on the loyalty of a great many of them to say that the British monarchy is a remote and inadequate symbol of their affections for Australia”.<sup>41</sup>

Malcolm Turnbull claimed that:

“The dual identity – the sense of being British as well as Australian – is very hard for young Australians to understand in the 1990s”.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, many republicans deny that it is difficult for, say, young Greek-Australians to have a dual identity, apart, that is, from difficulties created by our having a monarchy.

Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner, Irene Moss, conceded in 1994 that:

“Less than 50 years ago, Australia was very secure in its national identity, and had been so for some time. The population was homogenous, mainly Australian-born of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic stock. At the time of the Second World War only two per cent of Australia was of non-English speaking background”.<sup>43</sup>

Although this was hotly denied at the time, and continues to be denied in respect of prospective immigration, Moss’s clear implication was that large scale non-British immigration had rendered Australia’s national identity insecure. Malcolm Booker was explicit on this point, and claimed:

“We have become a multi-racial society ... We need symbols that look not to the past but the future”.<sup>44</sup>

Always excepting, of course, symbols relating to the past of Aborigines and to their ongoing custodianship of Australia.

Al Grassby believes:

“It is the experience of Aboriginal Australians which lends a timeless dimension to the Australian Republic. Using the accepted definition of a republic – that supreme power rests in the people and not in an hereditary monarchy – it can be demonstrated that the Aboriginal peoples achieved a high sophistication in the administration of their affairs which constitutes a challenge to allow us to do as well ... Black Australia was a republic which resolved disputes and tended the land for the common weal through a sophisticated system of consultation and ritual shows of strength”.

Indeed, “Black Australia” was even more admirable than that, since it consisted of several hundred such sophisticated republics and, according to Al Grassby:

“The boundaries of the Australian nations were more important than any other national frontiers on earth because the division of land had been made by divine law”.

It may be outmoded superstition to believe that the Lord God gave Canaan to Abraham as a promised land, but it is up-to-the-minute republican insight to believe that Dreamtime Spirits fixed the boundaries of Aboriginal clans for all time. The British ended this exemplary political system, but only after “the British Army saw more action in Australia than in any other English colony with the exception of southern Africa”.<sup>45</sup> Historians in Washington, New Delhi and Islamabad should hasten to sit at Al Grassby’s feet.

Malcolm Booker made the incredible claim:

“The Union Jack is a symbol of imperial rule and oppression, especially among people in our own Asia-Pacific region. The present flag gives this symbol pride of place, and it cannot

be expected to win the devotion of all those people and their descendants who have come to this country to find freedom from domination and exploitation".<sup>46</sup>

Tens of thousands of people have defied their own governments, pirates and sharks in and out of the water, to get away from their "own Asia-Pacific region" and to reach lands where the Union Jack is part of the national flag.

### **Republican feminists**

Feminist republicans wonder how to attract more women to the cause. Helen Irving has alleged that for constitutional monarchists:

"Part of the problem is that Queen Elizabeth remains in the mould of her great-great-grandmother. She is the prototypical bourgeois matron, respectable and virtuous, mother of a large(ish) family, church going, herself a little stout and 'cross-looking' these days, silent on almost everything that seems now to matter, including the marital disasters of her own offspring".<sup>47</sup>

If we have a female President of Australia in the near future, one or two candidates come to mind who cannot be accused of being overly respectable and virtuous, and one or two others who are not very stout, although inclined to look cross at times. Malcolm Turnbull suggested that under his new republic a drover's wife such as Susan Bradley, who then ran a cattle station near Kunmurra, could readily become President.<sup>48</sup> So far, however, no woman has yet become President of the ARM. Turnbull claimed that "the Monarchy is the ultimate sexist institution",<sup>49</sup> although in 107 of the 162 years between 1837 and 1999 Australia has had a female Monarch, and in 107 out of 211 years since 1788. This proportion somewhat exceeds that of any republic, even including those in "our region" such as People's China.

When Malcolm Turnbull began to plan a final break with Britain, that country had a female head of government as well as Head of State. However, Chilla Bulbeck suggests that:

"The long prime ministership of the 'iron maiden', Margaret Thatcher, reminded the world that the best imperial show Britain can manage is to wrest back the Falklands from Argentina".<sup>50</sup>

A Newscorp republican columnist, Bruce Wilson of the *Adelaide Advertiser*, abused the Prince of Wales for the following words he addressed to Argentinians when on a recent state visit:

"My hope is that the people of modern democratic Argentina, with their passionate attachment to their national traditions, will in the future be able to live amicably alongside the people of another modern – if rather smaller – democracy, lying a few hundred miles off your coast".

Wilson commented that "poor bloody Charles" had unnecessarily affronted Argentinian national feelings on behalf of a "bunch of rather backward outlanders living in what can only be called a British colony".<sup>51</sup>

In fact, the Falkland Islanders have had every opportunity to exercise self-determination and, like the presumably similarly backward people of Gibraltar, overwhelmingly want to stay with Britain. Just imagine the outcry if a Newscorp journalist described Aborigines as rather backward, so that their expressions of intent might be ignored, or suggested that the people of East Timor were rather backward, so that they had better stay under Indonesian rule!

Cheryl Kernot wrote:

"As a long time advocate of Australia becoming a republic,

it is a source of regret to me that this important debate has largely failed to capture the imagination of the women of Australia”.

She added that, since “the Australian Constitution was written by economically privileged, white Christian men” and “written nearly a century ago”, then “it becomes fairly obvious that the document’s relevance to Australian women in the 1990s is questionable”.<sup>52</sup>

A huge amount of history would have to be classified as irrelevant to Australian women in the 1990s on the basis of Cheryl Kernot’s criteria. Not much literature would remain either.

At least Cheryl Kernot ought to feel some satisfaction that Australia’s educational system has been reconstructed to ensure that neither young females nor males now know much history and literature relating to dead white Christian males, nor indeed to non-white, non-Christian females. A group of university students thought it a hoax when I gave them the words of the now discarded third and fourth verses of *Advance Australia Fair* by Peter Dodds McCormick, an emigrant from Port Glasgow:

“When Gallant Cook from Albion sailed  
To trace wide oceans o’er,  
True British courage bore him on  
Till he landed on our shore.  
Then here he raised old England’s flag,  
The standard of the brave.  
With all her faults we love her still.  
Britannia rules the waves.

“Britannia then shall surely know  
Beyond wide ocean’s roll,  
Her sons in fair Australia’s land  
Still keep a British soul”.

Tim Fischer has recently suggested that “Waltzing Matilda” should be our national anthem, but with different words. I doubt, however, whether Mr Fischer will wish to restore earlier words to that tune the English brought out to New South Wales. The chorus began in the eighteenth Century with, “Who’ll come a soldiering for Marlborough with me?”, and had probably been sung to similar words long before the time of the Great Duke and the War of the Spanish Succession.

Australian feminists face problems when they try to assess the value of writings by women during the century following 1788. They want to celebrate women’s writings, and complain about past ‘marginalisation’, but they find that nearly all the women novelists during those generations, such as ‘Tasma’ (Jessie Couvreur), Rosa Praed, Ada Cambridge, Mary Fortune and Catherine Martin, revered the close ties between Australia and Britain. A frequent *motif* in novels by and for Australian women was growing romantic attachment, despite misunderstandings and accidents, between two potential lovers, one native born and the other straight from Britain. Even women writers most favoured by radical feminists in Australia today, such as Catherine Helen Spence, usually fail to come up to republican scratch. Spence was a doughty pioneer of women’s rights, but she came to see great virtues in the British constitutional tradition. She wrote after visits to the United States and Britain in 1894:

“Socially I liked the atmosphere of America better than that of England, but politically

England was infinitely more advanced. Steadily and surely a safer democracy seems to be evolving in the old country than in the Transatlantic Republic".<sup>53</sup>

On matters of law, especially affecting women, as on those relating to Aborigines, our contemporary republican feminists are often disconcerted to find that the gubernatorial representatives of the Crown were generally in the right if and when they disagreed with radical opinion in the Australian colonies.

Take, for example, the horrific pack rape case in 1886, when a 16 year-old domestic servant, Mary Jane Hicks, was repeatedly raped by four larrikins who also mutilated her and left her to die, although she managed to survive. *The Bulletin's* editor, the leading republican John Archibald, and one of its most prominent contributors, the republican Henry Lawson, conducted a persistent defence of the convicted rapists. The conviction of the Mount Rennie larrikins was likened by *The Bulletin* to British oppression during "the darkest pages of Irish history". When Lord Carrington, who as Governor of New South Wales confirmed the death sentence passed by judge and jury on the Mount Rennie rapists, unveiled a statue to Queen Victoria in Sydney, he claimed that the citizens of that State:

".....recognise that under a constitutional monarchy we have been able to obtain the greatest amount of freedom which a country has ever enjoyed, with the certainty that the weakest of us will be protected, and that justice will be meted out to all alike".

This was intended, as and understood as, a reference to the trial of Mary Jane Hicks's rapists and mutilators. *The Bulletin* accused Carrington of "dragging from the grave the skeletons of the poor wretched ignorant boys whom he sent to the gallows in deference to the laws of a convict colony that has not even yet emerged from beneath the shadow of the gaol wall".<sup>54</sup>

However, some parts of the past remain relevant to women today in the eyes of Australian republican feminists. Elizabeth Gertsakis, Curator and Collections Manager of the National Philatelic Archives of Australia, has shared with us the thought that:

"Marxist political idealism pervaded and perforated modernist thinking throughout the twentieth Century in unparalleled degrees of influence. If Marxist theology caught the imagination, it did so because of its essential humanism".<sup>55</sup>

Marx, of course, was not a Christian, and was dark enough to be nicknamed "the Moor" by his few intimate friends, so he has some chance of retaining relevance. Elizabeth Gertsakis also commended Charlotte Corday who, in killing Marat, "was doing precisely what the Republic expected of her". The philatelic curator did not go on to nominate any Australian politician as a proper target for assassination, perhaps because those closest in sympathies to Marat are to be found among the republicans, not among their foes.

## Republicanism and the Repudiation of post-1788 Australia (Continued)

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### Dr Geoffrey Partington

#### The relevance of the past

Many of our leading republicans are determined that not only must the constitutional monarchy be destroyed but much else together with it. Cheryl Saunders has denounced “the outmoded symbolism of a 26th January Australia Day”. She added that:

“It is hard to discard the myths: that Parliament is sovereign; that it securely safeguards rights; that it decides whether to incorporate or not to incorporate international obligations; that the hostile cut and thrust between Government and official Opposition is the only way to settle public policy”.<sup>56</sup>

Professor Saunders holds a Personal Chair in the Faculty of Law in the University of Melbourne, is Director of the Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies, and conducted the inquiry into Women’s Business in Hindmarsh Island appointed by Mr Tickner when he was Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. One suspects that, if she had her way, there would soon be an end to hostility to government policies by an official Opposition, providing, of course, that her friends formed the Government.

Malcolm Turnbull asserted that, “Far from being the birth certificate of a nation, our Constitution is rather the cook book for a colony”.<sup>57</sup> Alison Broinowski, in 1994 the Regional Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Chair of the Melbourne Writers’ Festival, argued that:

“Republicanism implies much more than replacing a monarch with a president: it implies extirpating from our society all the symbolic expressions of hereditary class values”.<sup>58</sup>

Except, of course, when related to Aboriginal heredity, or fathers and grandfathers in the ALP or the trade union movement.

Sandra Phillips states:

“I am not proud of mainstream Australia. I hold little respect for its political and legal institutions. I hold only derision for its flag”.<sup>59</sup>

Phillips, who was “raised in her mother’s country of the Wakka Wakka”, and who “uses her skills in social research, organising, teaching and writing in many settings”, was advancing what is termed in the technical literature of the trade the “process of reconciliation”.

Paul Keating was in one sense right when he claimed that:

“The fact is that, if the plans for our nationhood were being drawn up now, by this generation of Australians and not those of a century ago, it is beyond question that we would make our Head of State an Australian”.<sup>60</sup>

So was Malcolm Turnbull when he maintained that:

“Her Majesty is Queen of Australia simply because, at the time our Constitution was enacted, Australia was a colony of Great Britain”.<sup>61</sup>

Who can doubt that, if the colonies which formed the Commonwealth of Australia had not been British, the Queen of England would not be Head of State in Australia today. Nor would English be the national language, nor would games such as cricket, rugby or bowls be played, etcetera, etcetera. But “the fact is”, to use Paul Keating’s expression, that Australia has had the history it has had. There is no justification for ignoring or rejecting that history, especially since it is not one of shame, but one of the most successful stories of

national advancement ever known.

Paul Keating was absolutely right when he noted in 1995 that Australians “are not as we once were, in a parent-child relationship”. He added that:

“Nothing in the creation of an Australian republic will alter the facts of our heritage and our affections .... We are friends with separate destinies to carve out in the world”.<sup>62</sup>

Yet he surely must recognise that, when children achieve full independence of their parents, as all sensible parents hope and pray will happen at some time or the other, those children are still the offspring of their parents, and filial obligations and decencies remain which are of a different order from those of even the closest friendship. To acknowledge and value these is not to become “a political or cultural appendage to another country’s past”, as Keating claimed.

I doubt whether any organisation has done more than The Samuel Griffith Society to demonstrate the value to Australia of its constitutional monarchy, and to show that this has become legally and effectively an Australian and not a British monarchy. Nevertheless, I very much doubt whether these arguments will suffice to ensure the continuance of the system we have inherited. Men and women are affected by sentiments deeper than those of utility and interest. Australia is, as Keating and Turnbull maintain, a constitutional monarchy because Britain was a constitutional monarchy and because modern Australia is an offspring of Britain. Yet most of the organisations which defend constitutional monarchy in Australia seem terrified of republican scorn if they dwell upon its British origins. The case for the continuation of an Australian constitutional monarchy has been detached by many constitutional monarchists from Australia’s British past, and all the emphasis is often placed upon the practical utility of our current constitutional conventions.

Our own frequent failure to assert the ongoing value to Australia of its British origins and connections, and of the personal embodiment in our Queen of our constitutional inheritance, may itself have contributed to the belief expressed earlier in this conference by Greg Craven that constitutional monarchy is now dead within the hearts of the Australian people. I believe that Greg is mistaken, but if parent and child have irretrievably ended family ties, and if Britain is merely a foreign country as Thailand or Mexico are foreign countries , I fear that all efforts to preserve for Australia one of the best systems of government in the world may be in vain. I hope that such fears will prove unfounded.

#### **Endnotes:**

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