THE CASE FOR AUSTRALIA BECOMING A REPUBLIC

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Republicanism, as a concept, is quite difficult to define as it means different things to different people. Avowed Republicans disagree as to definition, but essentially, model Republican systems of Government entail the election, by the people of the country concerned, of all political representatives including the Head or Heads of State

This is not the case in Australia. Our system is a Constitutional Monarchy. Our Head of State is jointly the British Monarch and at this juncture she is Queen Elizabeth the Second. Between visits of Her Majesty to Australia she is represented, on all official occasions, by the Governor-General. The former is an anointed and hereditary position whilst the latter is an appointed position. The Australian people have absolutely no say in the matter whatsoever

The Queen of Australia is a most intelligent, charming and proper person and a lot of Australians regard her with much affection, as they are happy she is the country's monarch. However, the fact is: she is foreign, i.e. of another nationality. She pays no taxes into the Australian Consolidated Revenue and by virtue of her birthright and status, she alienates hundreds of thousands of true Australian citizens whether they be native-born or naturalised.

Retention of the British Monarch in our system of government maintains Britishness to a great degree. The English language dominates but therewith also does the British culture. This, in many ways, denies the multicultural strands and componetry of the country. Further, it fails to allow the natural percolation and blending of the multifarious ethnicity.

Multiculturalism and republicanism have always walked hand in hand in Australia's short 200 years of history of European settlement. Australia has always been multicultural from the time of the First Fleet. Latest confirmation of this historical fact comes from the Hon. Barrie Unsworth, Premier of New South Wales, on 29th October 1987 when he said to a reception of members of the Croatian community: "Could we have finished the Snowy Mountains Scheme without those of Croatian background? Would Broken Hill still have been the national asset it became without your assistance? No, Australia has always been multicultural, from the days of the First Fleet"

This admitted historical truth sits very uneasily with the misinformation deliberately propagated by those groups whose interest was, and is, to make Australia look British. "Australia is 98% British" screamed the headlines in 1937, the 150th anniversary of European settlement in Australia. One need not dig very deep to find those groups whose interests lie in making Australia look a pro-British establishment: obviously they are those who came, in the first instance, themselves or their parents or grandparents, from where the British establishment prevailed, mainly from the United Kingdom. It is not very difficult to see the reason behind this attitude either. Membership of the British establishment entitles a member to a privileged position in society, in politics, in the public service, in the judiciary, in the armed forces, in the diplomatic corps, and so on, where identification with the ruling interests becomes important. A secured good life for a privileged group and their descendants is a distortion of history

The obvious consequence of what has just been said is, that in order to maintain this privileged position, a way must be found somehow to keep this group homogeneous and their position unassailable. The method employed is the creation of a state culture based on the British monarchy and Anglo-Celtic culture but excluding any other culture or segment of society.

This situation is very capably described by Mr. J.V. D'Cruz, Senior Lecturer in Education at La Trobe University in his essay "Public Culture, Multiculture"

"Let us not kid ourselves that Australia constitutes an undifferentiated cultural whole and, at the most, with parts shaded in barely distinguishable hues; that never was the situation and is not so now. Multiculturalism, in Australia, has to be viewed from a different angle and its constituent elements, those of ethnicity and the public culture in Australia, have to be more clearly distinguished. Ethnicity, like class and gender, is beginning to represent a significant challenge to the increasing dominance of a bureaucratising and homogenising public culture. i.e. the scrubbed-up and abstracted version of the older Anglo-Australian culture. Indeed, as the numerically ethnic component of the Anglo culture shrinks in Australia, its values have metamorphosised and found a new lease of life in and through the bureaucratic public culture, thus giving the Australian public culture a particular, ethnically partisan, Anglo character, which is why the Australian public culture is not equivalent to the more inclusive notion of multicultural-ism. And a challenge has arisen because, with the decline of bodies like the institutionalised churches and the unions, ethnic groups, especially those which are also strong faith-communities, still act as life-sustaining reservoirs of significant meaning for people"

'Like it nor not, Australia is a bundle of 'wholes': the public culture represents the whole which is the nation-state, while the ethnic groups in Australia represent the cultural wholes of their respective members. The public culture emphasises the wider associational grid and some of the processes of living in the Australian nation-state based on the values, such as equality, autonomy, democracy, of a reincarnated 'Skippy' Culture, namely the Anglo-Celtic-but-more-Anglo-than-Celtic ethnic culture, which, in its finest moments, has historically welcomed to its shores (given the right pigmentation, at times) the later voluntary and involuntary immigrants, asking only that they respect the rights of others in the exercise of their own. Ethnicity refers to distinctive groups in a nation-state which emphasise transgenerational commonalities of symbolic meanings that are kept alive by self-sustaining social actions. Not surprisingly, ethnic groups are highly insulted when they are referred to as mere parts of another whole, namely as parts of the public culture"

The issue of monarchy has an opposite interpretation in the Anglo-Celtic state culture compared with the ethnic cultures: in the state culture the monarch, as personified by the British monarch, is seen as a non-political, unifying institution, just as it was, allegedly, in the days of the British Empire: in the ethnic cultures the British monarch in Australia is seen as the symbol of divisiveness, a symbol and mainstay of the privileged establishment. Statistical figures indicate that 75% of Australians born in the U.K. are in favour of the monarchy with a Governor-General, while only 30% of Australians born in Europe favour the monarchy (page 17 Monarchy to Republic by George Winterton) and fully two-thirds of non-British European migrants favoured a republic (page 14 Monarchy to Republic by George Winterton).

To justify a republican movement and to look at the social forces maintaining such a movement and their future, another quotation is offered from "Public Culture, Multiculture"

'The hope that ethnicity would cease being a 'divisive' influence within the nation-state by a merger with the more generalised Anglo-Australian 'Skippy' culture as one follows the history of parallel ethnic groups in North America which have refused to be generalised or merged or assimilated or absorbed or melted down. Before public culture was, ethnic cultures are; as indeed, before church and nation-state were, the family is"

"If the emergence of what Professor Brien Crittenden refers to as "a common distinctive Australian culture" is both desirable and possible to achieve, indeed it would have to be broader than the minimalist public culture on which the cohesion of the political order depends, and, further, through a process spanning generations, it would have to constitute an amalgam of the ways of life of the indigenous Aboriginal peoples, the earlier ethnic groups of Anglo-Celtic origins as well as their more recent metamorphosised bureaucratic form, and those ethnic groups, which at later dates, gravitated to Australia in numbers from Asia, the South Pacific Islands, the Americas, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The omissions of any significant one or a number of those groupings would raise the question of how truly distinctive, common and Australian would be the residual cultural mix"

The Constitutional Monarchy patently denies the obvious and prevents Australia developing, in this particular region of the world, as a mature, independent country. Indeed, many of our immediate trading partners, consider Australia to be an inferior even colonialised nation as we seem, to them, ill-prepared or non-prepared to "stand on our own collective two feet", as it were. This then can be clearly limiting in terms of Australia realising its economic export potential, as well.

What is lamentable is the knowledge that we don't have a discernible Australian identity. This would, over time, evolve under a Republican system.

Many thinking Australians (monarchists included) believe that Australia inevitably will become a Republic. It is therefore a matter of when not if. It follows that Australia and Australians should be starting to address the issue of the appropriate model or form of the Australian Republican system. For, in a world of Republics, there are many different types of Republican structures

The R.P.A. and the N.A.R.P. believe that possibly a system which comprises many of the aspects of the American, French and Swiss Republican systems would be close to Australia's requirements.

Many monarchists maintain that retention of the British Monarch has a unifying and stabilising influence on us. What happened in the British Constitutional Monarchy of Fiji in 1987 gives the lie to this view. Many Australian historians now allude to the Constitutional Crisis in Australia here in November 1975 and refer to the resolution of the crisis, per se, as by "constitutional coup d'etat"

Another argument that monarchists bandy about is how much the British Monarch does for Australia. Well, arguably, she promotes British industry, trade and tourism but she does none of these things for Australia. A little known fact is just how much it actually costs Australians to maintain the anachronistic links with the British Crown currently, it amounts to $225 million, per annum.

Additionally, it is advanced by Royalists that Q.E.II is "above the vagaries of politics" The known differences between the British Monarch and the British Prime Minister over British Foreign policy, as expressed through the Buckingham Palace Press Office indirectly, indicate that Her Majesty is a very political person unequivocally

It is long overdue this need in Australia to remove the Constitutional Monarchy and replace it with a Constitutional Republic. At the very least, the issue should, in a fully-fledged way, be put to a referendum at the first opportunity, by the Australian Government.

A Short Reading and Reference List
Encounters with the Australian Constitution, by Michael Coper (CCH Australia Ltd)

Monarchy to Republic: Australian Republican Government, by George Winterton (Oxford University Press)

The End of Kings: A History of Republics and Republicans, by William R. Everdell (The Free Press MacMillan Inc.)

The Australians: In Search of an Identity, by Ross Terrill (Bantam Press)

Princess Di: The National Dish, by Diana Simmonds (Pluto Press)

Australia and Argentina: On Parallel Paths, by Tim Duncan and John Fogarty (Melbourne University Press)

Public Culture, Multiculture, by J.V d'Cruz (Hawthorn Press)

Towards Constitutional Reform and 1988, an audiocassette kit dealing with all aspects of Australian Republicanism, by Peter Consandine, Compiler, Moderator and Producer for Exec Tape Productions this kit is available through the R.P.A. at $29 (sales tax excluded) plus postage and handling.

Australian Republicansim, an audio-visual kit, complete with documentation, on Multicultural and Republican Australia by the Coalition of Republican Organisations in Australia available from the R.P.A. at $25 (sales tax excluded) plus postage and handling.

From State to Free-State: The Meaning of the Word 'Republic' in Western Europe and America from Jean Bodin to John Adams, a treatise on the whole concept of "republicanism" by William R Everdell available from the R.P.A. at $12 plus postage.

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