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CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

WAGGA WAGGA, NEW SOUTH WALES

TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER 1993

FIFTH WILLIAM MERRYLEES MEMORIAL LECTURE

KEEPING CALM ABOUT THE CROWN

AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE OF THE REPUBLICAN "DEBATE"

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The Hon Michael Kirby*

WILLIAM MERRYLEES REMEMBERED

I come to Wagga Wagga as the fifth lecturer in a series to honour the memory of William Merrylees. As Dr Merrylees died in August 1969, it must be assumed that, with each passing year, fewer who attend these lectures will remember him from personal acquaintance. So it is with me. I did not know him. But his urgent, dynamic, determined spirit leaps from the pages of the books which describe him. He was a great advocate of this district of Australia and an evangelist for the cause of tertiary education.

As a young man, in the 1920s, he studied philosophy in the University of Melbourne. Originally, he had planned to enter the Methodist ministry. But he found in his philosophical studies a substitute for orthodox religious belief. According to a biographer, he found in those studies an affirmation of the reality and importance of Idealism and of the obligation of the intellectual, not only to aspire to ideals but to uphold them in the wider community by good works.¹

He won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University. There he was reinforced in his Idealist philosophy. And he also came away with a great admiration for the collegiate university and for England and its great liberal intellectual tradition. Having taken his degree, he never returned to Oxford. But he retained, to the end, a nostalgic memory of the community of scholars. He was determined to transplant this ideal to his own environment for the benefit of his own people. In this translation of the best of the ideas of England to the great southern continent, Merrylees was following a course which has marked 205 years of the unbroken influence of the rain-swept northern islands off the coast of Europe upon the vast continent on the opposite side of the world.

Merrylees was determined to establish a university college in the Riverina. In February 1952, the very month in which Queen Elizabeth II succeeded King George VI as Queen, he gathered together representatives of a group of nineteen local councils of this region. He was then a councillor from the Carrathool Shire. He put forward the idea of a university college, affiliated to the University of Sydney. To support this idea, he printed a vast number of publications, over seventeen years, directed to the decision-makers of the democracy within which he operated. Under the aegis of the Riverina Councils' University League he became a "formidable controversialist". He targeted not only government but "a well-informed public opinion" which, he believed, would support his idea.² He had faith in the people. And not least in the rural people of Australia. He believed that, presented with the arguments, they would, in the end, make the right decisions.

Mr Menzies, then at the beginning of his long period as Prime Minister, resisted the idea of a country university upon the basis that the experience of Armidale had shown the comparative costliness of a university college established in the country. But despite a haemorrhaging ulcer in 1956³, Merrylees kept up a cracking pace. He never gave up. He even attempted to get his League mentioned by Gwen Meredith in the radio programme "Blue Hills".⁴ He distributed his pamphlets throughout the country:

*"I get very few replies", he lamented ... after distributing four thousand copies ... One of the few, from a New South Wales judge, I cannot read."*⁵

At least my text will be typed. Merrylees lived long enough to see the idea of a College of Advanced Education established. But he was not content. He attacked the neglect of the future of rural Australia. He was impatient with what he saw as the retardation of the development of an Australian national culture. He ascribed this fact to the separation of:

*"The intellectual leaders, who must stimulate and guide that development, from the mass of the people from whom it must spring."*⁶

In short, Merrylees objected to the way in which the big decisions about Australia were made in the board rooms and party cabals of Melbourne and in Sydney and in the lobbies and media offices of Canberra. His faith rested upon the wisdom of the people - including those stalwarts scattered in the rural districts of this vast land, with their own special perspectives and opinions about the character of Australia and its history and culture.

In due course of time, after Merrylees' death, the College became the Charles Sturt University. In 1981 the library was named in his honour. His life shows how ideas matter. Sometimes they come to fruit in time for us to see them. Sometimes they are planted and take decades to be achieved. To take root and flower important ideas must be supported by the people. And that includes people beyond the cities and suburbs of Australia. People in the vast inland. People who know more of the true character of the brooding sunsets and red middays than the metropolitan people can even imagine.

KEEPING CALM ABOUT THE CROWN

So far as I know, Dr Merrylees wrote and said nothing about republicanism in Australia. Why should he have done so? His life coincided with a high measure of unthinking satisfaction with at least that feature of our constitutional government which is symbolised by the Crown. He lived his life through the reigns of three dutiful monarchs: George V, George VI and Elizabeth II. Their stable, familiar, unobtrusive service as the Head of State of Australia caused neither undue alarm nor undue excitement. The closest that alarm was ever reached was in the brief reign of King Edward VIII, whose departure from the throne was in part explained to the British Parliament by the assertion that the Dominions would not accept a morganatic marriage to a twice divorced commoner. The closest that excitement came was in the Queen's first visit to Australia in 1954. Only once, since then, have I seen such crowds on the streets of Sydney, packing every vantage point and with similar expressions of revelry. That was in February this year when, for the first time, I watched the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney which brought nearly a million people together in February heat, unrelieved by rain despite the earnest prayers of some of the sombre critics.

For the most part, Dr Merrylees, like you and me and most ordinary Australians, got through his life without a great deal of thought about the Crown. The Queen, the Queen Mother and other members of the Royal Family would visit every now and again. They are such familiar figures that we were fascinated to observe them. But for most of our days we got by giving little thought to the constitutional arrangement which the Queen symbolises. It is a very healthy democracy that does not give too much attention to its Head of State. Things start to go bad when attention becomes necessary. I shall develop this theme.

In the mid-1960s, when Dr Merrylees was at his busiest, the Commonwealth of Nations - successor to the British Empire - seemed to be buffeted from crisis to crisis. Many of the crises concerned Southern Africa. Commentators kept predicting the end of the Commonwealth and the finish of its global perspectives. It was at about this

time, in 1965, that Dr Trevor Reese, a distinguished historian, wrote an essay titled "Keeping Calm About the Commonwealth".⁷ In the essay, he explained the gradual and spontaneous evolution of the modern Commonwealth from the old Empire. He articulated the contemporary value of a free community of nations held together by nothing more than language, history and institutions. He suggested that reports of the death of the Commonwealth were, like Mark Twain's, premature. Because of its flexible and informal nature he predicted that the Commonwealth would survive, partly because it was useful and partly because the chief alternative (dissolution and severance) seemed thoroughly unattractive. He opposed suggestions of artificial schemes to bolster the Commonwealth. He objected to ideas designed to give it "new life" or a "new rôle". In short, he suggested that the best thing we could do about the Commonwealth was not to worry too much. We should keep calm about the Commonwealth and it would just go on, boringly enough, taking its own practical and historical course.

More recently, Mr D J Markwell, a tutor in politics at Merrylees' beloved Oxford University, gave the fourth in a series of lectures dedicated to the memory of Trevor Reese. He urged that Australians should keep calm about the Crown and calm about their constitution. This is what he said:

"The links between the Crown and Australia - which plays some part in the bonds of Commonwealth - has evolved over time, adjusting to Australia's changing circumstances and developing in this century an increasingly Australian identity as Australia has developed as a nation. The monarchy - a constitutional monarchy - plays a valuable role in the Australian constitutional system.... In short, I suggest that Australians should keep calm about the Crown and calm about their constitution."⁸

Since Markwell's lecture was given, the republican debate in Australia has been notched up a peg or two. The Australian Labor Party agreed (although by all reports without debate or much enthusiasm) to accept as part of its Platform a commitment to public discussion of constitutional reform leading to a referendum about an Australian

republic to coincide with the centenary of the Constitution in the year 2001. Later, the Prime Minister (Mr Keating) embraced the republican cause. It was mentioned, but not given prominence, in his policy speech before the last Federal election. Of far greater symbolic value was the banishment from the stage on that occasion (as earlier from the Prime Ministerial car) of the flag of this country which carries in the top quarter the Union flag of the United Kingdom. Mr Keating has made it plain that he favours a new flag and new constitutional arrangements for the Head of State. Upon re-election to Government, he established the Republic Advisory Committee to provide advice on:

"The minimum constitutional changes necessary to achieve a viable Federal Republic of Australia, maintaining the effect of our current conventions and principles of government".⁹

The terms of reference for the committee made it plain:

"There is no intention that the committee should examine any options which would otherwise change our structure of government, including the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States. Even with this limited purpose, however, it will be necessary to examine a variety of practical possibilities and to consult widely with the community."

In the light of the terms of reference, the committee was instructed to address, amongst other things, the following matters:

1. The removal of all references to the Monarch in the Constitution;
2. In the light of this, the need for, and creation of a new office of Head of State and consideration of what that office might be called; and
3. The provision for the appointment and termination of appointment of the Head of State ...

As we all know, the Committee produced a report. It stated as the "primary question":

*"Whether Australia should have an Australian citizen chosen by Australians as its Head of State, or whether it should retain as its Head of State a person who is a Monarch of the United Kingdom. This is an issue on which the views of Australians differ and on which the debate is likely to continue. It is not one which this committee has been asked to consider, and the Report does not do so."*¹⁰

Before and after the report was published, there has been a great deal of discussion. With one conclusion of the Republic Advisory Committee I entirely agree. In the past, people have not known a great deal about their Constitution. The republican debate has certainly focussed attention upon the Constitution. It has caused many Australians, for the first time, to consider what a constitution is for, what a Head of State does and what, if anything, we in Australia should do to change our present arrangements.

I have attempted, on a couple of occasions, to contribute my own thoughts to this debate. In these remarks I wish to do so again.

I have taken an Oath of Allegiance to the Queen of Australia several times in my life, with each succeeding commission I have received. Sometimes, I have done so publicly, as is the convention of the judiciary of this State. Sometimes I have done so privately, as when I was sworn nearly twenty years ago as a Judge of the Arbitration Commission and ten years ago as a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia. Most recently I did so when sworn as Acting Chief Justice of this State in October. The oaths administered to me, of allegiance, are personal oaths to the Sovereign and to Her Heirs and Successors according to law. Similar oaths are administered to all of the Queen's Ministers, Federal and State, to Defence service personnel, police officers, customs and other officials high and low across this country. Until recently, similar oaths were taken to the Queen of Australia by new migrant citizens. Thus, millions of Australians have taken an oath of allegiance to the Queen of Australia established as our Head of State by the Constitution we Australians designed, adopted and have kept.

Do these oaths mean nothing? Is allegiance so lightly given and taken away in this changing world? Is loyalty such a plaything of passing fad and fancy? Does the reciprocal oath which the Queen took at her Coronation forty years ago, to serve the people of Australia, weigh as lightly upon Her conscience? I doubt it.

Of course, oaths can be released. But at least in the history of English speaking people, the Oath of Allegiance has usually been taken with a measure of seriousness. Not only are we the beneficiaries of the great constitutional struggles of the British Isles. We inherit the ideas of freedom that come with the English language. The notions of individual dignity and worth that come with the English common law. And the very essence of our culture that is marked upon us indelibly by our literature and poetry.

In earlier times the oath meant much. William Shakespeare put these words upon the lips of King Richard II:

*"What must the king do now?
The king shall do it: must he be depos'd?
The king shall be contended: must he lose
The name of king? o' God's name, let it go:
I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an alms-man's gown,
My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,
My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little little grave, an obscure grave; -
Or I'll be buried in the king's highway,
Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;"*

I cannot now resist the closing words of Richard:

*"Now mark me, how I will undo myself: -
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart:
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous rites:
All pomp and majesty I do forswear:
All manors, rents, revenues, I forego;
My acts, decrees, and statutes, I deny:
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee!"*

In that last couplet, Shakespeare expresses the peril of a change of allegiance. It is not easily accomplished because it is, for many, a thing of the heart. It is a thing of the spirit. It is a thing that runs deep and about which people feel. If an Oath of Allegiance to the Queen of Australia means nothing and is to be regarded as a trivial thing, what of the oaths that are "made to thee" - what of the oaths that follow to the Constitution, to the laws, to the people, to Australia? Will this oath too be such a light and flimsy thing that it can be changed, just as easily, at some future time?

I do not speak here of the formal things: the formal oaths and declarations. I speak of the commitment of part of the spirit of a people to the constitution they have, to its provision for a Head of State, to the Head of State they have and to the respect that many deeply feel for that Head of State. It is something that transcends political party. I also believe that it transcends ethnicity. It is not just another issue for a referendum, or for party strife. This is not an issue which is one for the 50.1% of votes. This is not a cause for a passing majority. This is an issue about the very loyalty of a country and its people. It is an issue to be handled with delicacy - not bullied forward to a bare majority. Sentiments of the spirit are rarely susceptible to an exclusively logical treatment. Mr Hawke, in his recent intervention, speaking to a

thousand students at Oxford University where, like Merrylees, he was once a student, was surely right to say:

"Australians have a considerable respect and affection for the Queen."

And why should we not have such a respect for our Head of State who has seen through such a long parade of Prime Ministers and Premiers in forty-one years of service? Here is the continuous, historical, permanent symbol of our constitutional government. In a time when so much is changing, there is a value in the symbolism of such permanence. It is a value that we should not lightly throw away. Before we do so, we should be very sure that we have something better, but just as safe, to put in its place.

The notion that we should change our Constitution and replace our dutiful Head of State to fit in with the time-table of a sporting jamboree or to pander to millennial madness is unworthy of serious contemplation. The Olympic Games will come and go. The century will turn. The centenary of the Constitution will pass. Heady though all of these events will doubtless be, they are not the occasion for needless change to our Constitution, to meet somebody else's agenda or to soften the false pride of those whose minds are locked into the nationalistic vision of the nineteenth century and must have a local, and none other, to be their Leader. To them I say: Grow up! Look about you to see the curse that nationalism has caused the world. Look about to understand how internationalism and regionalism is the movement of the next millennium. Instead of looking backwards to nationalism look forward, at least to regionalism. One of the links we enjoy in our region is the common Head of State which Australia, Papua-New Guinea and New Zealand share in the Queen. We should be enhancing these links, not destroying them.

MANIPULATION BY THE FOURTH POWER

One of the saddest features of the so-called "debate" on the republic in Australia has been the resistance of many of the proponents of the republic to permit a true national discussion of the merits and demerits of our present constitutional system. Whilst a large sum (reputedly more than half a million dollars) has been spent on the Republic Advisory Committee, a request for a subvention to put the other point of view was rejected by Canberra. Is this really the "debate" about our constitutional future that was contemplated when the Platform was accepted by the Australian Labor Party?

The Labor Party has traditionally been a champion of the underdog, for the worker, for the disadvantaged. In many respects it is still such. It fought valiantly against the tide that sought to champion the "inevitable" amendment to the Australian Constitution in 1951 to provide the Federal Parliament with powers to ban the Communist Party and legislate against communism and communists. In my view, this was the finest hour of the Australian Labor Party in peacetime, as it stood for freedom and diversity of opinion. Not so admirable was the Party vote in Sydney earlier this year when not a single voice could be heard against republicanism. No old-fashioned sentimentalist. No ancient Anglophile. No silly old duffer willing to defend the Australian Constitution. What a contrast is there between the mighty and courageous struggle for diversity of opinion in 1951 and the single minded adherence to the "Party line" in 1993. This is a very worrying development. But, as John Button has recently pointed out, it is one likely to doom the republican cause to failure as the "Welcome Stranger gold nugget" of republicanism is dropped into the "murky waters of acrimonious partisan politics."¹¹

Another distressing feature of the so-called republican "debate" is the highly partisan and biased reporting that we have seen about it in the Australian media. How can there be a "debate" if the other point of view will not be tolerated? How can there be a "debate" if the other point of view is dismissed with contempt and its proponents always described as "old" or stereotyped as political conservatives and Colonel Blimp

types who wrap themselves each night in the Union Jack and pray for King and country before they lull themselves off to sleep to the strains of "Land of Hope and Glory". Most people who like our Constitution the way it is are just ordinary decent fellow Australians, with as much right to hold an opinion as any other citizen. And a right to have it heard and understood.

There are rational people who defend our present constitutional arrangements as protective of the people's liberties. Yet their chance of getting a fair hearing in the current "debate" in Australia is virtually nil. A clear instance of what happens I can give from personal knowledge. The leading body of opponents to the push for a republic is Australians for Constitutional Monarchy (ACM). It is a rum mixture of Australians with differing politics, religions, ethnicity, ages and viewpoints. I imagine that the members would probably see eye to eye on virtually nothing other than the merits of preserving, at least for the time being, the constitutional monarchy established by the Australian Constitution. Some are true-blue royalists. Some are monarchists who want to keep politicians out of the top job. Some are Australian patriots. Some merely admire the Queen of Australia. But they all come together to defend the Constitution and the rôle of the Queen in it.

They launched their branch in Melbourne on 25 August 1993. The launch took place at the Town Hall. Hundreds of citizens attended - some estimates said a thousand. The ABC sent a film crew. But instead of running that story and their film in their evening news, the ABC felt compelled that evening to present a long and scarcely urgent news item on Easter Island!

The Chairman of the ABC (Professor Mark Armstrong) has acknowledged to me that the decision of the national broadcaster not to include the item against the republic, at least in Victoria, was an error of judgment. Those who made the decision were, it is said, reprimanded. Perhaps their copies of "Blinky Bill" were confiscated. But once again political orthodoxy had won the day in our country. The contrary point of view was not broadcast. I ask you to watch closely the unbalanced reportage of the republican issue. Some newspapers (such as the *Australian*) have openly

acknowledged a pro-republican editorial line. Other media outlets simply portray their bias by the ill-balance of their reporting and by the insulting and condescending way in which they seek to manipulate popular opinion. A good example was a heading in the *Sunday Telegraph* of 10 October:

*"Betty Windsor is a decent sort of woman. But King Charles?
Never."*

Just as important to the future health of our democracy as the form of the Constitution and the position of the Head of State is the power of the media (the fourth power). When you are not close to an issue, there is a tendency to accept as reasonably accurate, fair and balanced the reportage of an issue in the national and local media - especially the ABC. It is only when you become closer to an issue that you see the way campaigns are orchestrated and popular opinion manipulated by the so-called free media of Australia. It is a depressing discovery. I can offer no solution to this manipulation except the realisation that it exists. And protest whenever it is perceived. If we are alert to it and vigilant against its erosion of our true ideas and values, we may yet build our democracy upon the people's will, as it existed before it was distorted by patent media bias.

CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY - A RADICAL PERSPECTIVE

Let me, therefore, offer my perspective in support of constitutional monarchy. This is not the perspective of Colonel Blimp draped in the Union Jack. Nor is it the text for those who see the Queen of Australia as our ultimate guardian against the politicians, the media and others with their "knavish tricks" who would mislead and manipulate us. I do not see the Queen, nor do I want to have her, in that rôle. I see myself as a reformer but a realistic one.

It is probably true to say that a constitutional committee in 1993, starting afresh, would not invent the constitutional monarchy as it works under the Australian Constitution. However, the fact remains that the system works rather well. We all

know that. When you look around the world at the countries which seem the most stable, liberal in their laws and tolerant of diverse opinions, overwhelmingly those countries tend to be constitutional monarchies. The Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Why should this be so? It cannot be an entire coincidence that so many of the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are constitutional monarchies. The advanced, democratic, rule of law societies with the best economic records tend to be constitutional monarchies, although the world is full of countless republics which do not make the grade. Is this just chance? Or is it something to do with checks on unbridled power and reminders of the historical perspective in the holding of office which constitutional monarchy constantly provides?

It might be said that Australia would remain stable and tolerant as a republic, with its own local Head of State. So indeed it might. But before we change, we have to weigh up the risks:

- * Having as a Head of State a person chosen by accident of birth means that politicians cannot aspire to the number one job. In this sense, the Queen of Australia keeps out of the top position the pushing and shoving types who are vitally necessary for our democracy, but who do not always engender universal respect, affection and trust;
- * In the case of Australia, the monarch is not ever present as a local Head of State would certainly be. We have the Governor-General and Governors, it is true. Henceforth they will always be Australians. But because the Governor-General is the representative of our normally absent Head of State, this puts a limitation on Head of State protections. Not for us the stretch-limmo, the First Lady and the schoolchildren pressed into dutiful flag waving. With an ever-present republican Head of State, we would surely go down the road of pretension. Anyone in doubt about this should observe what happens when there is a

change. In South Africa, the President was soon unsatisfied with that title. He quickly became the "State President". Very soon after he sprouted an orange sash. This is worn everywhere important. When you replace a monarch there is a mighty void. And especially if the monarch is as long serving, professional and dutiful as Queen Elizabeth II;

* The republicans want the "minimalist" Head of State to be appointed like the Governor-General by the politicians in power. But whereas that will do for a Governor-General, representing a monarch who has a link with a thousand years of history, it will not, I am afraid, satisfy the Australian people if they are to have a President of their own. They will (as repeated opinion polls show) insist in that case upon a President elected by them. Yet as every politician knows, if you elect the President you give him or her a legitimacy which may imperil the stability of our Parliamentary democracy. The President may claim a mandate and a legitimacy for that office. Unless you wrap up and throw away the reserve powers, the President may just be tempted to use the powers to sack the Prime Minister. Look what has happened in Pakistan twice in recent years. Look even at the recent strife in Russia;

* Then there is the very fact that we are all - judges, ministers, politicians, police, defence forces, cast by our system into the state of mind that we are all but temporary office-holders *under* the Crown. In a sense this involves personal allegiance. But in a larger sense it involves a self-conception (and a conception of our offices) which puts a break on delusions of grandeur and a check on arbitrary power. The very fact that the Head of State serves, here as elsewhere, in a line which can be traced back a thousand years, puts a brake upon the temptation to a *coup d'état* or to a breach of valid constitutional conventions. This safety might, or might not, pass to a new republic. But the very continuity of constitutional monarchy, in a country like Australia, is a symbolic assurance against the brutal assertion of oppressive power. It thus provides one ingredient for tolerance and diversity where the symbols of a

republic may fall into the trap of democratic majoritarianism. Constitutional monarchy, of its nature, demands careful checks;

- * To the suggestion that we must have in Australia a home grown President and that the Queen is a foreigner, I say: Tell that again to the Scots and the Welsh and the Northern Irish and all the other people who accept Queen Elizabeth as their Head of State. In an internationalist age we should regard this common link as a bonus. And reject the call back into the bosom of primitive South Seas nationalism. It is so passé;
- * To the complaint that the Queen is not, when overseas, seen as a representative of Australia, a ready answer may be given: The Prime Minister should be the main representative of Australia overseas. We can survive the shame of a 19 gun salute. Our system is Parliamentary. That means a Prime Minister. Let him or her be Australia's representative overseas. And in the unlikely event that the people of Asia, or anywhere else, care the slightest about our constitutional arrangements, let them mind their own business. Just as we mind ours in relation to their constitutions. Such things are the product of history and sentiment and are not always susceptible to easy explication to neighbours;
- * To the complaint that the Queen is not always amidst us, I say: This is actually a positive advantage of our system. Basically, we have the perfect blend of a monarchy and a republic. The people have the ultimate say. Great power is divided as befits a republic. But the Crown, as the symbol of continuity, is there. All of us serve it and, through it, the people - beyond our partisan causes. That is the strength of our historical monarchy. The Queen comes when she is invited. But not too rarely or too often. We basically we get by *without* a Head of State and with the Governor-General and Governors doing those modest functions which we think necessary to us. We have so many politicians this is at least one way we can save money. All this may seem, to some, an anarchist's view of the Constitution. But, to the extent that a President has power and legitimacy, the Prime Minister must watch out.¹² For

we then run the risk of tension at the top. At the moment there is no such risk. The Prime Minister is the undisputed top dog in power. But he or she is deprived of the symbols of ultimate power and this to remind him or her of the temporary hold enjoyed upon it. I hope I may say, without offence, that this is a reminder which some, at least, of the incumbents of the highest office in recent years have needed, occasionally, to receive;

To the suggestion that the Asian and Arab, the Latin-American and the Islander people of Australia have no affinity with the Queen of Australia I would say: They probably think as little about her as the Australians of Anglo-Celtic stock. It is the system of stable democracy and parliamentary government that is, to them, one of the chief attractions of this country. A system that puts a brake on extremes and keeps all in their respective place has rational advantages which may not be fully understood, but is instinctively felt. And will be reflected in safety if a vote comes;

And to the assertion that the republic is inevitable and that we should therefore lie back and accept it, I would answer in the words of John Maynard Keynes:

*"The inevitable never happens. It is the unexpected always."*¹³

The passage of the communism referendum, in the frenzy of the Cold War, was inevitable; but it was lost. The bicentennial referenda were inevitable but were lost, overwhelmingly. The only referenda that have succeeded in recent years in Australia have enjoyed bipartisan support and carried not the slightest risk of affording significant new powers to politicians. So when I hear the assertion of "inevitably" I spare a thought for history and reach for a pinch of salt. There is a certain impatience in some Australians who resent the constitutional conservatism of their fellow citizens. It is unfashionable just now in Australia to support the Constitution. But as its centenary approaches, I hope and expect

that, as a people, we will come to reflect upon and appreciate the blessings we have enjoyed, living under it.

The Australian Constitution of 1901 - one of the oldest of this unstable world - has assured us of stable parliamentary democracy. We have avoided civil wars. We have defended ourselves in war and peace. Governments have changed without bloodshed. The law has been administered in tranquillity. If you doubt that these are great achievements by the world standards, look around.

The Constitution has itself changed over the century, mainly by court decisions. Our relationship with the Crown has changed. The Queen herself has adapted and changed the royal rôle during her long reign. Indeed, in many ways the monarchy has changed most of all amongst the elements of Australia's government over the century past.

These elements of our Constitution are appreciated by many of our fellow citizens, in all parts of Australia. But they are most appreciated in the less populous States and in the country towns and districts. It is here, in the heartland of Australia, that the republicans must carry their cause or lose their battle. Or worse still, win it at the price of shattering the unity of the continent in this Federal Commonwealth under the Crown.

The evidence does not suggest that the republicans have made any headway in the less populous States or in the country districts of Australia. There, the merits of our Constitution are clearly seen. The dangers of changing its fundamental character are feared.

Just as William Merrylees was suspicious of the city dwellers and intensely critical of their lack of real interest in the needs of education in the country so, today, many country people throughout Australia - and especially in the less populous States and country towns - wonder what on earth is behind the republican push.

We have so many other real challenges in Australia to which we could be called as a united people, that the question must go out: Why divide us unnecessarily,

as divide us you will, upon the one feature of the Constitution that shows no urgent need of change? Lead us instead to an attack on the problems of the long-term unemployed. Lead us to a new reconciliation with the indigenous peoples of this continent: the Aboriginals and the Torres Strait Islanders. Lead us to solutions to the urgent needs of our internal waterways. Lead us to a new relationship with Asia and the Pacific and the Indian Ocean states so that we come to terms with our geography and make the most of its opportunities. Lead us to better health services, educational opportunities and employment prospects for our people. Lead us to a better understanding of the causes of drug dependence and a more effective response to HIV/AIDS. Lead us to a more tolerant society, respectful of minorities and determined to break the stereotypes which have limited women and other disadvantaged groups. Lead us, if you will, to an honest and open debate about our Constitution when *all* cards are on the table and the fundamental character of the compact can, if necessary, be re-negotiated from scratch.

But in the meantime, leave the Constitution, the flag and the Queen alone. Because we, ordinary Australians, rather like all of them. They are matters of our spirit.

FOOTNOTES

- * Member, Foundation Council, Australians for Constitutional Monarchy.
Personal views.
1. D Boadle, "Selling the Rural University" - W A Merrylees' Writings for the Riverina University League, Riverina-Murray Institute for Higher Education, 4.
 2. *Ibid*, 1.
 3. *Id*, 10.
 4. *Id*, 3.
 5. *Id*, 2.
 6. *Id*, 4.
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