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FEB 2009

Brian Wimborne

(Ph.D., B.Sc., B.Econ.)

2 February, 2009

The Secretary
The Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission concerning the Australian Republic Plebiscite Bill 2008

I oppose this Bill for the reasons set out below:

- 1) Unless it can be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that a Republic would result in an improved system of government for Australia, there is no valid reason for holding a plebiscite to change from a Constitutional Monarchy;
 - before the issue is put to the electorate, it is essential that republicans demonstrate the superiority of a Republic over the present system. It will not be sufficient for them to claim that Australians will be no worse off under a Republic than under a Constitutional Monarchy;
 - on the other hand, people who favour the present system need prove nothing regarding the benefits of Australia's Constitutional Monarchy which stands on its own successful record;

2) Republican systems of government throughout the world are more numerous than any other. Most, however, are not democracies and few are stable. There are no democratic republics in South America, the Middle East (with the exception of Israel), Africa (with the possible exception of South Africa) and few in Asia. Many of those in Europe, including France and Italy, frequently verge on instability. Certainly, the USA is a democratic republic, but it is one of the few successful examples in the world. By contrast, all Constitutional Monarchies are democracies;

- since the end of the Second World War thousands of migrants have fled to Australia from the oppression of Republican systems of government – none fled from repression experienced under Constitutional Monarchies;

3) Advocates of an Australian Republic do not define the type of Republic they have in mind. Will it be the Hitler or Stalin model? Or do they prefer that of Pol Pot or Castro? I am not meaning to be facetious when I say this. The point I want to make is that once we start tinkering with the present system, under which our democracy is preserved, what certainty is there that a Republic will not degenerate into the type of oppressive regime that has become the defining characteristic of so many republics?

4) Republicans frequently argue that Australia should not have a British head of state;

- I submit that, in fact, we do not have a British head of state except in a nominal sense. The Governor-General is the effective head of state and has a role to play in Australia's government. This was borne-out convincingly during the constitutional crisis of 1975 when the Queen (despite being asked) refused to become involved in Australian domestic politics, relying instead on the judgement of the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr;

- those who did not like his decision should look to changing the Constitutional powers of the Governor-General, not to eliminating the Constitutional Monarchy;

5) Underlying the republican movement is a strong anti-British sentiment. This is both childish and unfortunate since Australia's way of life and customs, from the sports we play to our essentially civil and courteous attitudes to one another, from our legal institutions to our sense of nationhood, are inherited from Britain;

- this is not to argue that we should retain a Constitutional Monarchical system of government out of sentiment, but rather that we should not reject it at the whim of those who are ashamed by Australia's British heritage.

6) Under the Keating government it was argued by republicans that Asians, with whom we have developed close ties, could not understand Australia's Constitutional Monarchy. This is a specious argument because:

- major Asian nations such as Japan and Thailand are constitutional monarchies which, as such, are not confusing to other Asian people ;
- whether or not Asians understand Australia's system of government is irrelevant to our dealings with them.

7) Lord Morrison of Lambeth, who was a minister in Britain's post-war Attlee government, argued that the importance of a constitutional monarch lay not in the power that the monarch held, but in the power that the monarch prevented others from holding. The subtlety of this assertion is often missed by republicans. Yet it is the diffusion of political power by this means that prevents prime ministers from becoming autocrats and governments from degenerating into repressive oligarchies. To tamper with Australia's present political system endangers democracy, itself.

I trust you will consider this submission with earnestness and good judgement.

Yours faithfully,

