

Re-Framing Australia

Barry Jones

The picture inside the frame

The Australian colonies began very unpromisingly as a convict society built on Aboriginal dispossession. Nevertheless, robust elected institutions soon developed. There was responsible government by the 1850s, full manhood suffrage by the 1860s, the secret ballot (a local invention) and payment of members. By the end of the 19th century, the Australian colonies had bustling cities, an early transition to a service economy, lengthening life expectancy (except for Aborigines), universal free primary education, and probably the highest per capita income in the world (challenged only by Argentina). Federation was achieved in 1901, without violence, after a Referendum endorsed a Constitution, and votes for women by 1902 (decades before Canada, Britain or the United States, although later than New Zealand). Political changes occurred rapidly and peacefully, although colonial Parliaments adopted a brutality in debate that became a fixture in our political tradition.

The treatment of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders by the white settlers (or invaders, depending on one's position in 'the History Wars'), in addition to dispossession from their land, ranged from murder, death by exposure to new diseases, the destruction of culture and language, condescension, the breaking up of families, marginalisation and neglect, and above it all, what the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner called, 'the great Australian silence', a form of cultural amnesia, buttressed by ignorance, an apartheid more psychological than physical or political.

However, Australians can claim to have been very successful in some areas. We have excelled at creating institutions: our Parliaments are freely elected, we have a commitment to the rule of law, our universities are internationally respected, we have achieved much in science, medicine, the creative arts and sport. In addition, Australia has produced a model (not perfect, but superior) of multiculturalism, at least in principle, while admitting that most Australians remain firmly monolingual.

Because of my long political involvement with the Australian Labor Party, including service as a parliamentarian, minister, and national president, it would be hypocritical for me to claim complete objectivity in my political judgments, although I can claim a stronger sense of historical detachment than many of my colleagues.

Major policies adopted by the Howard Government during its long period in office (1996–2007) seemed profoundly wrong to me:

- Failure to act on climate change.
- Foreign policy — including acquiescence in torture and the death penalty by our allies and neighbours
- Evading Aboriginal reconciliation
- Covert acquiescence in racism/ populism
- A harsh line in the history wars
- Treating refugees as law breakers
- Loss of transparency in Government— the problems of spin, ‘plausible deniability’, and the co-option of public servants to political ends
- De-railing the Republic
- Displacement/suspicion of expertise and the rise of managerialism.

‘Re-framing Australia’ will need to address these divisive issues.

2007–2008 as turning points?

The years 2007 to 2008 may be viewed by historians as turning points marked by an almost unprecedented series of interna-

tional changes in a brief period, forcing Australians, whether as global citizens or protectors of their own patch, whether old or young, to rethink, or re-frame, what the future holds. Recent publications predicting the future development of Australia, the United States or China, based on presumptions of increased consumption in perpetuity, and that the economy is a self-regulating mechanism, are already irrelevant.

Kevin Rudd's election as Prime Minister of Australia in November 2007 followed John Howard's 11-year tenure, and Barack Obama's election as President of the United States in November 2008, marking a repudiation of the eight-year presidency of George W. Bush, with its emphasis on American exceptionalism and unilateralism, and refusal to address the climate-change issue, represent profound changes in direction, optimistic, long-term and reflective, rather than pessimistic, short-term and instinctive.

The great challenges that both Obama and Rudd face — in common with other leaders in the G8 or the G20 Summits — are climate change, the global financial crisis, global poverty, tribalism and terrorism, probably in that order.

Australia has some specific issues of its own, including water, the next stage in Aboriginal reconciliation, the Republic, transparency in government and rethinking patriotism. Each subject deserves a book of its own, but in this essay I will be selective and brief.

Climate change

I began talking and writing about the challenge of climate change/global warming in 1984 and can safely claim to have been the first Australian politician to have addressed the issue. This claim is less audacious than it sounds. For some years I was the only competitor in the race, and a fat lot of good it did me, politically. In the United States James Hansen of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had drawn President Carter's attention to climate change (without much success) in 1979. In the 1980s, Al Gore took up the issue seriously.

In 1824, the French mathematician Joseph Fourier had anticipated the greenhouse effect by proposing that surface heat on Earth was maintained by the atmosphere — otherwise the Earth's orbit was too remote from the Sun for a temperature that could support life.

In 1859, the Irish physicist John Tyndall identified the role of water vapour, CO₂ and methane as key factors in maintaining atmospheric temperature.

The Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius named the 'greenhouse effect' in 1896 and calculated the relationship between CO₂ levels and atmospheric temperature with astonishing accuracy.

The prodigious American statistician Alfred James Lotka coined the term 'anthropogenic climate change' in 1924, just a century after Fourier's work.

Geologists now talk of a new era — the Anthropocene, in which human activity changes the climate. Addressing the implications of anthropogenic climate change may become the greatest moral issue of our time.

Atmospheric CO₂ was stable in the period before the Industrial Revolution at 280 parts per million and has now risen to 385 ppm — tiny proportions, but, it appears, with very significant impact, and the risk that if recent rates of increase continue the figure could reach 500 ppm before 2020, with the prospect of compromising, for example, the Antarctic ice shelf. Jim Hansen argues that governments should aim at stabilising CO₂ at 350 ppm, while others see the goal as unattainable and would settle for 450 ppm.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988. In its fourth report (2007) the IPCC argued that 'the post-industrial rise in greenhouse gases does not stem from natural mechanisms. In other words this is anthropogenic climate change and significant increases in ... greenhouse gases are the result of human activity'. The report stated:

The most potent of the greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). Alarmingly, these are a result of anthropogenic climate change, and the gases are at the highest levels for over 650,000 years.

The conclusions of the IPCC, inevitably conservative because based on consensus, are not exactly new. What is unprecedented is the rate of increase in greenhouse gases and its impact on natural systems. Humans are used to living with dramatic changes in temperature. (Melbourne itself has a temperature range of almost 30 degrees in most years.) But nature is not. Species and an environment may be extremely vulnerable to what seem trivial temperature variations (2–3 °C) to humans. The mean temperature increase since the last great ice age, 20,000 years ago, has been 5 °C.

On global warming/climate change there has been an unprecedented convergence of observation and theorising in a variety of disciplines, including zoology, botany, physics, chemistry, oceanography, glaciology, polar science, geology, epidemiology, population health, and ecology.

There is overwhelming scientific consensus on many issues involved in climate change/global warming, but there are some areas of denial or skepticism on specific points of detail. A distinction can be made between sceptics who are open to persuasion, contrarians who object on some points of detail, and denialists, who act on ideological conviction, and may not be open to proof.

Oddly, dissidents rarely refer to observed phenomena (disappearance of Arctic ice, thinning of Greenland's glaciers, fractures at the edge of the West Antarctic ice shelf, thawing of Siberian tundra, changes in bird migration, early flowering of plants) — and there is generally no analysis of risk either.

The dichotomy is essentially between observed phenomena and ideological conviction (or vested interest).

Contrarians achieved a major success with the US media in the climate-change debate (as they did with creationism vs. evolution) in ensuring, in the interest of 'fairness', or 'balance', that for every spokesperson who argued the climate change position, a denier had to be given equal time. This created the illusion that a 90/10 (or even 95/5) division of expert opinion was more like a 50/50 division, and that the question was still an open one.

Because of Australia's huge coal deposits and the low cost of energy, we think inevitably of Australia as a raw-materials based economy. Decades of prevarication and obfuscation by effective lobbyists and vested interests have meant that Australia has made only minor efforts to promote renewable energy sources (other than hydro in Tasmania), even less on energy efficiency, reorganising our cities for the post-carbon era, and using our scientific and engineering skills to put Australia into a leadership position, rather than limiting ourselves to being a raw materials supplier for China and India.

The Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change was formulated in 1997, coming into force in 2005. Only four Western nations refused to ratify Kyoto — the United States and Australia, joined by the micro-States of Liechtenstein and Monaco.

After the Rudd Government was elected in November 2007, its first executive act was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Guy Pearse in his *High & Dry* (Viking, 2007), subtitled *John Howard, Climate Change and the Selling of Australia's Future*, gave a powerful, even sinister, account of the effectiveness of the fossil fuel lobby and its allies and its decisive influence on government policy on greenhouse issues until November 2007.

My approach to climate change and the environmental issues adopts the words of Tim Wirth, former US Congressman and Senator from Colorado, now President of the United Nations Foundation: 'The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, and not the other way round'.

The environment is the totality of all there is in our world — the planet itself, soil, air, water, biota and minerals. Environmental concerns cannot be regarded as mere discretionary matters to be addressed after the economy has had its whack. One of the greatest moral and intellectual challenges is to persuade political leaders, both here and overseas, that the environment and the economy are inextricably linked. If the environment collapses, all is lost.

On global warming, as Prime Minister, John Howard simply didn't get it. He saw 'environment' and 'economy' as competing interests — strengthen one and you weaken the other — and

ethics simply did not come into it. He failed to grasp the total integration and mutual interdependence of environment and economy. A wrecked environment must inevitably wreck the economy. Mr Howard seemed to be gripped by some bizarre notion of quarantine, as if the global interest could suffer but Australia could sail unscathed through it all.

Each tonne of coal produces three tonnes of CO₂ on burning. At present, the consumer pays for the coal, but takes no responsibility for the cost of disposing of the exponentially increased residue: as Nicholas Stern pointed out in his review for the British Government, *The Economics of Climate Change* (2006), this is treated as a free good by the purchaser/user, a spectacular example of market failure. The downstream impact of consumption of coal and oil, dug up from underground and put into the air, is a long term contribution to atmospheric pollution taking decades (perhaps centuries — the issue is deeply controversial) to disperse.

The reaction of the fossil fuel and minerals lobby was essentially a cry for protection, exactly as the motor and textile manufacturers had called for decades early, with the familiar cries of woe and desolation at the prospect of any change (“We’ll all be rooned”, said Hanrahan’) turned into an art form.

Large-scale coal-producing nations, such as Australia, are putting huge faith in the largely untried technique of carbon capture and storage (CCS) as a major instrument to achieve greenhouse gas abatement. A few small pilot projects are being developed internationally. One wishes them well. The technique involves a process of controlled burning, capturing the effluent, compressing it, and transmitting it (whether by pipe, train or truck) to secure underground storage such as disused mines (in effect returning the coal byproduct to where the coal came from). The technique will be expensive, complex, requiring a huge infrastructure investment: the necessary energy for capture, compression, transport and sequestration might require a 30% increase in total coal use — that is, 130 tonnes of coal (= 390 tonnes of CO₂) would be needed for the equivalent of 100 tonnes (= 300 tonnes of CO₂) in net sequestration.

The impact of climate change poses unprecedented challenges not only to the environment, but to democratic practice and the pluralist values. Political and psychological factors are paralysing the will to act to slow down global warming, leading to denial, prevarication, crude appeals by vested interests, and a growing, but unspoken realisation that the climate system may have passed a 'tipping point' and moved into an irreversible crisis.

The Garnaut Climate Change Review, presented in October 2008 to the Australian government, raises the question of how far a single nation/economy that happens to be a prodigious emitter should be prepared to act unilaterally ('Australian exceptionalism'), attempting to lead other nations by setting a moral example and by working towards a new economic base, less dependent on exporting raw materials.

While Prof. Garnaut described climate change as a 'diabolical' problem with profound moral implications, his recommendations for change were ultra-cautious. He thought that Australia should seek international agreement on stabilising the atmosphere at 450 ppm, but if this was not achievable, try to settle on a goal of 550 ppm by 2020:

If there were no comprehensive global agreement at Copenhagen, Australia, in the context of an agreement among developed countries only, should commit to a reduction in emissions entitlements by 5 per cent from 2000 levels by 2020 (25 per cent per capita) or 13 per cent from Kyoto compliance in 2008–12. This would be Australia's unconditional offer.

Prof. Garnaut concluded his report: 'On the balance of probabilities, the failure of our generation [to solve the climate change problem] would lead to consequences that would haunt humanity until the end of time'.

I have little doubt that he is correct, but will he persuade leaders to take up the moral implication of his judgment? Will we change patterns of consumption? Will we promote energy efficiency? Will we exercise restraint? Will we think globally? Will we act to promote intergenerational equity?

My concern is that there may be no change in political attitudes unless and until a catastrophe occurs.

The timing of Treasury's paper 'Australia's Low Pollution Future: The Economics of Climate Change Mitigation' (October 2008) could not have been worse, coinciding with the global financial meltdown.

The Rudd Government has adopted the mantra 'Carbon Pollution Reduction' or CPR (not to be confused with cardiopulmonary resuscitation), and is committed to an emissions trading scheme (ETS) to be introduced by 2010. This will be a 'cap and trade' scheme in which a 'cap' will be set for major polluters, such as electricity generators, by requiring them to adopt emissions-abatement schemes. The right to emit will have a value and becomes, itself, a tradeable good. Investment in activities that absorb atmospheric carbon, such as forestry, will lead to an entitlement to credits.

Australia has declined to take a leadership role in setting international targets for Greenhouse gas emissions. The starting carbon price was set at \$25 per tonne.

In December 2008, Prime Minister Rudd set a modest target that Australia would cut emissions, unconditionally, by 5% of 2000 levels by 2020, but offered to make a cut of up to 15% if other nations adopted stronger reductions. He said, 'Australia is today the biggest carbon polluter in the developed world on a per capita basis', but provided no figures to demonstrate. In 2006 the European Union emitted 10.4 tonnes of emissions per capita each year, Australia 26.1 tonnes. If Australia cuts, it does so from a very high base. However, he went on, 'For the first time in history, we will begin to include the cost of carbon pollution in the price of goods and services'. He said that the primary objective was 'to set in place a scheme that reduces carbon pollution and supports economic growth'. That sounds like an inherent contradiction — that Australia can reduce emissions while preserving the jobs which create the emissions. This sounds like prescribing a diet to simultaneously gain and lose weight.

Polluting industries that are 'emissions-intensive and trade-exposed — such as aluminium smelting and integrated

iron and steel production — will be given ‘free permits’, effectively a subsidy. Free permits would be given for five years to ‘the most emissions-intensive coal-fired electricity generators’. There was modest encouragement for renewable energy and three sentences mentioned energy efficiency. He set the goal of 20% of Australia’s electricity to be derived from renewables by 2020, but also invested faith (and money) into carbon capture and storage (CCS). I could find no reference to transport or car-dependent cities in his text. There was recognition that the problem was huge, but that the appropriate response was tiny, determinedly anti-Churchillian, painless, without risk, sacrifice or the need to change behaviour or patterns of consumption. This lacked conviction and might cripple psychological carrying power in the community. However, he stuck to his commitment to an early starting date (2010).

Paul Kelly described the speech in *The Australian* (17 December 2008) as a ‘work of political genius that would make [John] Howard proud’. I assume this was intended as a compliment.

During the 2008 Presidential election, the then Senator Obama committed to an 80% reduction below 1990 levels of carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. (Garnaut recommended a 90% reduction for Australia by 2050 ‘in the context of an international agreement’).

The European Union adopted higher targets for greenhouse gas reductions and these were easier to achieve because of stable population, heavy reliance on nuclear power and compact cities which were less car dependent.

GFC versus CC (and can we deal with both?)

What became known as ‘the global financial crisis’ (GFC) was triggered off in the United States by the collapse of the ‘sub-prime’ mortgage market, followed in September by the fall of venerable Wall Street institutions, and growing recognition that the US dollar was substantially underwritten by overseas borrowing, largely from China, needed to cover the heavy costs of two prolonged wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) and loss of revenue due to major, unaffordable tax cuts. After the

Presidential election of 2008 came official confirmation of what had long been suspected — that the United States had been in recession from December 2007. The GFC soon had global implications, ranging from Ireland, through Britain, through China, most of Europe and, particularly, Iceland. A \$US700 billion bail-out of financial institutions repudiated the central mantra of the economic theory promoted by President Ronald Reagan and the ‘Chicago school’ — that the economy was a self-regulating mechanism and government should abandon any thought of Keynesian interventionism.

Australia, which had retained some regulatory mechanisms, was better placed than most to survive the GFC, and hoped that recession might be avoided in 2009.

Preoccupation with the GFC inevitably pushed climate change (CC) down the international priority list.

The Roy Morgan Poll (November 2008) suggests that 37% of Australians polled regard the economy as ‘the single most important problem facing the world’, followed by 26% for the environment and 9% technology and security. It is true that finding a fix for the GFC will be easier and quicker, while protecting the environment is far more complex and inevitably longer term. But it would be risky to suggest that we can choose one priority and disregard the other, like offering a respondent a choice between eating or breathing. The two elements are inextricably linked.

Some commentators say, ‘We should not attempt a major change when economic activity is low’. I take a contrary view. The best possible time for change may well be when the world is looking for original solutions to desperate problems.

By December in the United States, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler all faced bankruptcy. All three emphasise that there is nothing wrong with their product other than consumer resistance.

The motor industry is a sensitive, volatile and strategic factor in the economies of all Western nations, central to urbanisation, technological innovation, lifestyle, patterns of consumption, fashion, psychology/confidence. Relations between necessity (‘I must have a new vehicle’) and elective

choice ('I want to buy a new car') depend on confidence and optimism. Levels of production and consumption are based more on psychological factors than on economic necessity, becoming ends in themselves, not responses to human needs but goals to be achieved. Motor manufacturing then becomes, at least in part, a form of welfare, and if the market won't support it, government must. It would be easy to envisage a situation where Australians of driving age decided to squeeze one more year of life from their 15 million vehicles, thereby increasing personal savings significantly. But a year without the purchase of a single vehicle would have a serious national impact, devastating regional economies (Dandenong, Geelong, Broadmeadows) and retailing generally.

Political leaders must make a fundamental choice: should priority be given to restoring an unsustainable economic model which has clearly broken down (an approach urged by existing industries and their workforces? Or should priority be given to creating new, sustainable, non-polluting approaches to transport, energy generation and energy efficiency? It is essentially a choice between preserving the old, essentially heritage industries, or creating new ones. Failure to act appears to favour the present, but it certainly prejudices the future. Political leaders found it hard to recognise a new paradigm. As the French diplomat Talleyrand acutely observed 200 years ago, 'Not to choose is to choose'.

Australia refuses to face a post-carbon future. The moral implications have been marginalised. I like Elizabeth Farrelly's coinages 'climate morality' and 'carbon ethics'.

The price of oil has gone through extraordinary changes in a few months. Falling prices may actually discourage looking for alternative, non-polluting, fuels for the long term. The price of a barrel of oil reached \$US145 in July 2008, with dire forecasts that as the phenomenon of 'peak oil' took hold, with reduced prospects for future supplies, the price might pass \$US200. Following the impact of the GFC, with reduced confidence and demand, the price of a barrel fell to \$US40.81 by 6 December 2008, with some forecasts that it could fall to \$US30–40.

Australia's mining magnate Andrew Forrest of Fortescue Metals has seen his notional fortune drop from \$A12.8 billion in June 2008 to \$A1.3 billion in November 2008, due to uncertainty about China's orders of raw materials.

Displacement/suspicion and managerialism

We live in the age of the Information Revolution, but it is also the age of the cult of management. Education (like health, sport, the environment, law, even politics) is often treated as a subset of management, with appeals to naked self interest and protecting the bottom line. At its most brutal the argument was put that there were no health, education, transport, environment, or media problems, only management problems: get the management right, and all the other problems would disappear. Coupled with the managerial dogma was the reluctance of senior officials to give what used to be called 'frank and fearless' advice — and replacing it with what is now called 'a whole of government' approach. This is not telling Ministers what they want to hear — it is actually far worse, a pernicious form of spin-doctoring that says: 'Minister, there are matters on which it is better that you not be informed about, which enables you to engage in plausible deniability'.

Paradoxically, the age of the Information Revolution, which should have been an instrument of personal liberation and an explosion of creativity, has been characterised by domination of public policy by managerialism, replacement of 'the public good' by 'private benefit', the decline of sustained critical debate on issues leading to gross oversimplification, the relentless 'dumbing down' of mass media, linked with the cult of celebrity, substance abuse and retreat into the realm of the personal, and the rise of fundamentalism and an assault on reason. The Knowledge Revolution ought to have been a countervailing force: in practice it has been the vector of change.

The cult of management became a dominant factor in public life, exactly as James Burnham had predicted in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), a book long ahead of its time. In Britain in the Thatcher era, and in Australia after 1983, there was a growing conviction that relying on specialist knowledge

and experience might create serious distortions in policy-making, and that generic managers, usually accountants, or economists, would provide a more detached view. As a result, expertise was fragmented, otherwise, health specialists would push health issues, educators education, scientists science, and so on. It is striking that of eight current Directors-General/CEOs of Education in Australia, judging from their *Who's Who in Australia* entries, only two (in the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory) admit to having had any teaching experience or qualifications.

The inexorable march of the MBAs (Masters of Business Administration) since the 1980s has had a tremendous impact inside government and corporations, leading to decisions on vital matters being determined by a managerial mindset and experience, rather than by professional expertise in relevant subject matter. It may be significant that George W. Bush was the first US President with a MBA (from Harvard).

The rise and rise of managerialism has led to hugely inflated remuneration for CEOs who insist that they are strengthened by their lack of professional experience, unlike physicians, teachers, scientists or journalists. A striking recent example was the furore provoked by huge bonuses paid to the CEO of Fairfax Media Limited when journalists were being sacked as a cost-cutting exercise — conveying the curious message that newspapers relied on managerial rather than journalistic skills.

The Rudd Government's decision to close the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) in December 2008 was a powerful illustration of a clash between managerialism and expertise. The bureaucrats, presumably tone-deaf, who recommended closure to the Minister for the Arts kept insisting, 'Where are your KPIs? Your governance model is defective', while ANAM's leaders responded, 'We are producing Australia's finest young musicians'. It was a dialogue of the deaf.

Departments contract out important elements of their core business to consultants. A consultant has been defined as somebody to whom you lend your watch, then ask him to tell you the time. Consultants, eager for repeat business, provide

government with exactly the answers that they want to receive. Lobbyists, many of them former politicians or bureaucrats, are part of the decision-making inner circle.

Generic managers promoted the use of ‘management-speak’, a coded alternative to natural language, only understood by insiders, exactly as George Orwell had predicted. There was a sustained attack on professional (in distinct to managerial) expertise; for example, hollowing out of Arab speakers or Middle East experts in the CIA, or people with agricultural expertise or experience in the British Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The managerial revolution involves a covert attack on democratic processes, because many important decisions are made without public debate, community knowledge or parliamentary scrutiny. A significant recent example is the process of ‘public-private partnerships’, known by the acronym ‘PPP’ or ‘P3’, which began in the United Kingdom in 1992 under John Major and was soon adopted by Australian States. It has had a substantial, but poorly understood, impact on public policy. With PPPs, instead of the cost of a major public work (say, \$100 million) being treated as capital investment with a Budget outlay which reduced the notional surplus for the construction period, the work is contracted out to a private partner and then paid off by the community or government by a \$15 million rental for 20 years (totaling \$300 million). However, the process is far from transparent because most PPPs are deemed ‘commercial-in-confidence’ and subjected to limited legislative scrutiny.

From Monarchy to Republic

The Republican question, more symbolic rather than substantive, is nevertheless an important element in re-framing Australia.

The Monarchy to Republic impasse following the failed Constitutional Referendum of 1999 is a revealing metaphor for Australia’s incapacity to address and resolve complex subjects, relying on a long tradition of procrastination for issues that do

not present as a crisis. In politics, the urgent often displaces the important.

If I was trying to explain to a student, a foreign visitor, or even an alien, how Australia's political system works, I would not start with the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. Reading the Constitution literally would provide a grossly misleading account.

The major dichotomy in the Referendum debate was not so much between Republicans and Monarchists, but between *optimists* and *pessimists*. The pessimists concede that our great-great-grandfathers (only a few great-great-grandmothers in South Australia and Western Australia) were right to set up the Commonwealth of Australia, even with a flawed document — but that we have learned nothing from a century of experience. If we tried something new, we'd muck it up. In this view, our institutions are seen as being very fragile, hanging by a thread, and requiring external validation.

Two of the major arguments put by defenders of the status quo are: 'It's essential that we keep the existing Constitutional arrangements — but they are totally irrelevant at the same time ...' and 'The Constitution operates well in practice so long as we don't actually follow it ...'. These two propositions seem absurd.

I have a particular objection to the proposition that Australia's transition to a republic should be determined by an external event over which we have no control — namely, the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Kevin Rudd seems to have made a suggestion along these lines during a visit to Britain, but he may not have thought through all the implications. It reinforces my concern that the centre of our Constitutional sovereignty is not located here — it moves around, generally in England or Scotland.

I am uneasy about direct election of a President, but would support it (reluctantly) if it was the only model on offer. It has worked reasonably well in the Irish Republic — where there is a mixture of direct and indirect processes. (A direct election takes place only if the Parliament — the Dáil Eireann, is unable to agree on a consensus candidate.)

Robert French, now Chief Justice of the High Court, commented in May 2008:

It is unacceptable in contemporary Australia that the legal head of the Australian state, under present constitutional arrangements, can never be chosen by the people or their representatives, cannot be other than a member of the Anglican Church, can never be other than British and can never be an Indigenous person.

I find it hard to improve on that.

Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Republic are inextricably linked. The Monarchist cause is essentially the last expression of White Australia, associated with the flag of White Australia, its rhetoric, culture, politics, and the habit of deference. It is a static, essentially nostalgic, position in a society which, although dynamic in some ways, is uncertain how to express itself. It is the politics of amnesia.

The Republican cause is essentially multicultural, pluralistic, independent and irreverent — in a word, Australian. I freely concede that it is not yet a cause that excites mass support, for example in traditional blue-collar Labor electorates.

The Republican and Reconciliation causes have been profoundly divisive. The Rudd Government took an important first step on 13 February, 2008 with its ‘Sorry’ Day. On the Republic issue, national unity could only be achieved around some, as yet undetermined, republican model. It would be impossible to achieve national unity around some revamped monarchical model. It seemed bizarre that during Queen Elizabeth’s last visit to Australia it was the Republicans who kept insisting that she is our Head of State, while the Monarchists insisted that she was nothing of the kind: the Governor General was the Head of State and the Queen was wholly external (apart, of course, from the act of appointment).

Australia can regroup around its own historical experience or universal principles/practices, but not around nostalgia, a remote history, or external and particularist events, institutions or personalities.

Rethinking patriotism

It is axiomatic that American candidates say that theirs is the greatest nation on earth (and they may well be right) and they repeat it, over and over. An Australian leader who made the same claim might be treated with scepticism here, although John Howard came close in a Canberra speech on Australia Day 2007, in which he said of Australia, 'It's a wonderful nation. It's the greatest on earth. We think we're pretty good and we are'.

It is hard to imagine an Australian Prime Minister or Opposition Leader addressing a rally in which he/she begins: 'It is an honour to be in the great State of New South Wales, the foundation of our nation, where the Murrumbidgee flows (or used to) to the (once) mighty Murray, where the snow-capped peak of Kosciusko looks down on ...' — but I can hardly bear to continue!

As Mark McKenna wrote in his powerful essay 'Patriot Act' in *The Australian Literary Review* (June 6, 2007):

During the past 10 years a new form of Australian nationalism has emerged: unreflective, earnest and often sentimental. Patriotic display has become a civic virtue. Journalists and academics have commented on the new national mood — the flaunting of the flag, the commercialisation of feel-good patriotism ... Increasingly Australian society is characterised by the culture of public display: of patriotism and allegiance, of faith and of wealth.

Mounting anxieties in 2007–2008, marked by the election of the Rudd Government and the GFC, probably modified this position a little, but interest in World War I, Gallipoli and the Western Front still remains very high. I remain baffled about the high level of enthusiasm that Australians feel for World War I in 1914 and 1915.

What did the young men from Horsham and Williamstown and Benalla who volunteered for the AIF think that Australia's war aims were? The mantra 'For King and Country' was constantly invoked, but what did that mean in

practice? It was hard to reconcile with any sense of emerging Australian nationhood. The ‘Fourteen Points’ advanced in 1918 by President Wilson as the basis for peace, desirable in themselves, were not the subject of public debate in Australia. How many young men were fighting for an independent Poland, an independent Yugoslavia, or even for the restoration of Belgium?

In the past decade has Australia been passing through an uncritical burst of patriotic sentiment in which the horror and suffering of World War I diggers and a poorly understood combination of strategic misjudgement and utter recklessness with human life seemed to be inappropriate subjects of analysis or reflection? Even worse, was there a bipartisan consensus to resort to a respectful silence about our military history? It seemed to be the case. John Howard described the Anzac spirit as occupying ‘the eternal place in the Australian soul’. Strong parallels were drawn between Gallipoli in 1915 and Iraq in 2003 — but the wrong lessons may have been learned. The major similarity, for me, between Gallipoli and Iraq is that in each case a powerful ally/patron sought to invade a country to pursue a strategic objective of its own that had no priority for Australia other than to strengthen the bond with the United Kingdom and United States respectively.

Mark McKenna points out that as early as May 1915 ‘the ideal of blood sacrifice was [being promoted as] the sense of nationalism that existed at the time ... [and that] deaths on the battlefield’ were a certification of nationhood for Australia — that we had arrived.

It is remarkable how Australia, even in the period before Federation, felt an obligation to take up arms, perhaps to ensure that we were noticed, certainly not because we were threatened. Australians fought in the Maori Wars (1860), in the Sudan (1884), the Boer War (1899–1902), the Boxer Rebellion (1900–1901), and after Federation World War I (1914–1918), World War II (1939–1945), Korea (1950–1953), Vietnam (1962–1972), the Gulf War (1991), Afghanistan (2002–) and Iraq (2003–2009). When we fought the Turks on their own soil

in 1915, who made them our enemy, and why? What were we retaliating *about*?

Ten commandments: Setting priorities

- Renegotiate Australia's relations with the United States, the United Kingdom and other significant regional blocs, and provide strong support for the United Nations and its agencies.
- Australia to take a leading role in addressing climate change, accept the transition to a post-carbon world, and use its scientific and engineering skills to promote renewable energy capacity, improved energy efficiency, alternative power sources (wind, solar, geothermal) and reduced dependence on fossil fuels.
- Australia to take a leading role in the post-Kyoto period of setting international targets for reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Rethink Australia's use of premium water, and create infrastructure to promote water recycling for industry and sewerage.
- Revive the Republic issue as an example of how Australia's robust democratic systems can tackle and resolve complex issues.
- Rethink the relationship between managerialism and expertise.
- Greater transparency and openness in government.
- The next stage of Aboriginal reconciliation.
- Rethink patriotism.
- Maintain confidence that major problems can be addressed — and act accordingly.



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