

**Topic: *The Australian Monarchist League and ACM - facing republican challenges to the Australian Constitution***

May I say what a great honour it is to have been invited to speak with you this afternoon and I thank both Harold and John for their friendship and courtesies to me and also for the most generous hospitality.

It is also a tremendous pleasure to be here in such delightful surroundings so aptly named 'The Rose Cottage'.

It actually reminds me of Shakespeare's (or Bacon's, de Vere's, Marlowe's or Derby's) words *"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet"*

This was, of course, in the 1590s, nearly 400 years before mass production created roses more for their appearance than for their perfume. However, the meaning of those words suggest that it is not the name that matters but the essence or true nature of the person.

This is similar to the words used by Martin Luther King that in the future people *"will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."*

And, of course, this meaning has great relevance to our organisations, Australians for Constitutional Monarchy and the Australian Monarchist League.

I might mention that when I became involved in the debate in 1993 I met with the inaugural convener of ACM, Lloyd Waddy KC and we discussed the parameters of each organisation. It was agreed that ACM would concentrate on constitutional matters whereas AML would focus on the Queen and the Crown.

Both of our organisations, together with others, fought a republic in the 1990s, and it is important that our combined efforts continue to be directed towards ensuring that our Constitution, under the Crown, continues to be kept safe and secure.

If there is to be a second Albanese government intent on bringing about a republic, it is essential that we jointly work to continue to safeguard our freedoms under the Crown.

**AML - THE BEGINNING:**

It may surprise many to know that when I first became involved in the debate in 1993, I knew little about the constitution and even less about the republic debate. Of course, I had heard the ramblings of Keating but viewed him as a rascal and not worth bothering about.

In 1990, after Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, celebrated her 90th birthday, Prince Michael of Kent established a foundation to build a set of gates at Hyde Park opposite Apsley House in her honour. I was asked to coordinate the Appeal in Australia, and by 1993, Australia had raised more funds than any Commonwealth country excepting the UK.

It was whilst I was in London for the opening of the Gates by the two Queens, Her Majesty the Queen and Her Majesty the Queen Mother, that I was approached by certain people who indicated that they were extremely concerned that the Queen was coming under personal attack and there was no organisation or individual in Australia coming to her defence. They asked whether I could organise a counter offensive.

Thus began my involvement with the Australian Monarchist League along with a number of those who were personal friends or officials of the Queen, including Dame Pattie Menzies, widow of our longest serving and most famous Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, Rear Admiral Sir Joseph Henley, former Captain of the Britannia who had retired to Australia, Countess Mountbatten, cousin to the Queen, and a number of others, all sadly now past.

The Monarchist League was formed in the early 1940s mainly by British MPs aiming to support Churchill's vision of establishing constitutional monarchies in Central and Eastern Europe once freed from Nazi and Soviet rule, to act as a bulwark between Europe and Communist Russia.

However, Russia ultimately took over these countries and thus began the Cold War from which the World is still suffering.

Prior to the 1990s, the League in Australia had been a small historical type of royalist organisation.

In 1993, the then committee offered the organisation to me to act as a vehicle for the work that needed to be done. I converted it from a branch of the UK organisation to a totally Australian entity to fight the fight in Australia.

When some of the older members wanted to continue support for the crowned heads in exile, those very people that Churchill was keen to act as a bulwark against communism, I said to them "*what is the use of fighting for crowned heads in exile when we stand to lose our own Crown in Australia.*"

At the time, I was friendly with a number of the crowned heads, and still receive Christmas cards from some, and they all gave their support to me in establishing what was renamed 'The Australian Monarchist League' whose motto then became "To defend the honour of the Queen and the integrity of the Crown".

The team that I had formed around me agreed that we should establish a fighting force to attack anyone who attacked the Queen.

A leading politician had told me that the best way to get access would be to have our supporters to phone and fax (this was long before email and text) and block the lines of politicians and force them to come to the table.

Following the adoption of this tactic, we had unparalleled success and after 18 months or so, the republicans sent out a message asking their supporters not to attack the Queen but to attack the constitution instead.

It was thus that the Australian Monarchist League was established to defend '*The honour of the Queen and the integrity of the Crown*'. We attracted those patriots who upheld their oath of allegiance and who stood for Queen and country.

In the 1990s, times were different - most people, whether conservative or socialist, were loyal to the Queen.

Adults of that era, and even some today, recall their schooldays standing at morning assembly to pledge: "*I honour my God, I serve my Queen, I salute my flag*" - a far more honourable pledge than the factually untrue woke indoctrination schoolchildren now face.

The landscape in 2025 is vastly different. As technology advanced—through the Internet, computerisation, and now artificial intelligence—the Australian Monarchist League has embraced new tools to support our fight to retain our Constitutional Crown.

From being computerised in the early 1990s to adopting email soon after, and by 2008, joining Facebook and other social media platforms, we now even use TikTok in which our team posts popular graphics aimed at teenagers, despite these being seeming odd to those of my generation.

More recently we have employed a full-time worker on our social media and she is joined by others from her company to ensure that our coverage is complete.

Our social media reach is now over 100,000 and our email base is now nearing 20,000. These figures can be audited and are certainly not imaginative.

In numbers, we are accordingly one of Australia's larger voluntary organisations but we remain in a rather impecunious state because we are reliant upon the \$5 and the \$10 donations gratefully contributed by our supporters.

Unlike the Republican Movement, we have no major financial backers like James Packer or the tech-wizard billionaires who want to rid Australia and Australians of the Crown that protects us all from the excesses of politicians backed by big business, such as these people.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT**

In the 1990s, the Australian Republican Movement was a powerful well-funded organisation comprising not only Labor, but also Liberal and National Party members in substantial numbers.

However, after their 1999 referendum loss, ARM started to go into decline but this was reversed when, in 2015 the journalist Peter Fitzsimons became its chairman and was able to use his networking contacts to bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars which were used to reverse its declining fortunes.

Many of you will remember that, in 1999, former Liberal Party director and later Howard government minister, Andrew Robb formed "Conservatives for an Australian Head of State" with a number of well-known Australians including Malcolm Fraser and Doug Anthony both of whom betrayed the motto of their Companions of Honour awards by the Queen: *"In Action Faithful and in Honour Clear"*.

Around 20% of conservative MPs at the time supported a republic including Peter Costello and Joe Hockey, all contrary to their oaths of allegiance.

The Republican Movement campaigned strongly for the Voice referendum, and its massive rejection clearly confirmed, what we always knew, and that was that the people are wary of and mainly against any radical change to their Australian Constitution.

A later controversy between joint leaders Craig Foster and Nova Peris over Israel led to their resignations. The new leaders Esther Anatolitis, Editor of Meanjin, and Nathan Hansford, a management consultant, have made little impact.

Isaac Jeffrey, appointed ARM director and CEO in 2023, resigned in December 2024 after 18 months, not yet replaced, although the ARM remains active on social media and email.

We carefully scrutinise what they do, just as they would scrutinise what we do.

## **THE LABOR PARTY**

However, the Australian Republican Movement hardly needs to act whilst Anthony Albanese drives the republican agenda. Over the past three years, he has done more to erode the symbols, traditions, and institutions of the Crown than any previous Prime Minister.

Without any mandate, Albanese appointed the first-ever Minister for Republic immediately after taking office and allowed that very same minister and others to meet to plan a republic whilst Queen Elizabeth was still lying in state!

The person we call 'the Wrecking Ball Man', Anthony Albanese has, over the past three years, done more to bring about a republic, in stealth if not yet in fact, than any prime minister before him, including Whitlam and Keating combined.

Upon being sworn in, he cancelled Morrison government plans to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee (AML was a part of the advisory committee) and stripped royal insignia from government buildings.

In February 2023 he cancelled plans to replace the Queen's image with that of King Charles III on Australian banknotes sneakily ordering indigenous artwork to replace the monarch's image.

I say 'sneakily' because his thinking was that no one would dare oppose anything Aboriginal. However, AML produced a professional graphic clearly showing that both the King and indigenous artwork could easily be accommodated on the same note.

In any event, the first decimal banknote produced in Australia was the \$1 note issued in 1966 featuring the Queen together with representations of Aboriginal art.

Surely, since it has been done before, it can be done again and to remove the King's image is obviously republicanism by stealth by both Albanese and the Reserve Bank.

Unlike 1953, there were no formal celebrations for King Charles III's Coronation, although Albanese attended with a phalanx of woke republican supporters. He even arranged for a new Great Seal of Australia without the King's name on it and nominated a republican activist as Governor-General.

It is an utter disgrace that most of the Kings viceroys in Australia are republican, all nominated in an attempt to denigrate the office.

However, rest assured, we are organising ourselves for the likely onslaught on the Crown and Constitution by a second Albanese Republican government, this time potentially aligned with the Greens.

## **AML IS PREPARING**

The Australian Monarchist League is undergoing a metamorphosis and preparing for the future. We have a new Central Committee which includes former Senator Eric Abetz, now of the Tasmanian government, Ms Beverley McArthur, Victorian member of Parliament, Nick Minchin, former minister of the Howard and Abbott governments, Santo Santoro, former Queensland and federal minister and a number of senior lawyers including Neville Rochow KC.

Next month we will see the Australia-wide online election of our National Council and this year, hopefully, will soon see the appointment of a full-time national director.

We are fortunate to have the support of a large number of young people on both our database and social media platforms. Unfortunately, many are currently involved in the election campaign.

I have been the Chairman and voluntary full-time CEO of the Australian Monarchist League now for over 30 years during which there have been many heartaches but also many uplifting occasions, including being invited to address a number of meetings in the House of Lords as well as a talk on the Australian Constitution and Crown to the Crossbenches of peers which included several Law Lords and former private secretaries to the Queen.

Another such occasion was in 2002 when I was privileged to have been one of the select few to be invited to attend the Jubilee Presentation of Addresses to The Queen by the Lords and the Commons recognising Her Majesty's fifty years on the Throne. This took place in the historic Westminster Hall originally built nearly 1000 years ago.

One could never forget, whilst escorting the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to the front of the hall, the clinking of the guards' armour as they marched with such minute precision.

Then, 20 years later, we all experienced one of the saddest occasions not only monarchists but most people have ever known when the news filtered through, a sense of loss and bereftness hung over the nation, and indeed the Commonwealth, at the passing of a great lady who had not just been our Queen for over 70 years but had become our friend and mentor as she reached out to all those who cherished our democratic way of life.

However, life continues on. We have a new king, but unfortunately for how long we do not know, but then we have the new Wales's family that will follow on, which is what our system is all about.

### **CONTINUITY UNDER THE CROWN.**

If there is to be a hung parliament with negotiations going on for weeks, the system of governance will not be interrupted because it is based on the Crown not on the government of the day and that is one of the important aspects of our system of constitutional monarchy.

I would emphasise that our defence of the Crown is done, not just for monarch but more to preserve the democracy of this nation and the freedom of its people which is best protected by the system of constitutional monarchy which, if it does nothing else, keeps politicians from assuming absolute authority.

The main message that I wish to impart this afternoon is taken from Churchill's first speech as Prime Minister to the House of Commons which I believe is so very apt for all those who value our Constitution and our Crown given the potentially dire situation we will all be in should Anthony Albanese somehow win a second term: *"I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."*

Thank you.

Philip Benwell  
27 April 2025