

Vanquishing the Republic: Harry and Meghan in Australia

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Global Research, October 19, 2018

Region: [Oceania](#)

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“The establishment of a republic... means insurrectionary war, it means the desolation of a thousand households. When the question shall arise, it will be determined... by balls from cannon and from musket, by grape and shrapnel, by bayonet and by the sword.” — Sir Alfred Stephen, NSW Legislative Council , June 16, 1887

The republic has tended to be a dormant idea in Australian politics for decades. The *People’s Advocate*, a Sydney-based publication, was unduly [optimistic](#) in its June 17, 1854 note which spoke of, “The independence of the Australian colonies” being more than an “abstract idea. It is certainly approaching as it is the dawn of tomorrow’s sun.” Occasional flashes of republican sentiment can be found in the historical record, but these have been, in the main, suppressed in favour of a monarchy housed in residences ten thousand miles away.

In 1999, the Republic idea was essentially buried by vote, a feat not without some genius on the part of the then Prime Minister, John Howard. Sensing that more than a few Australians were keen to detach the British dominion from its monarchical moorings, Howard first initiated a “people’s convention” which, he sensed, would botch up any prospect of advancing a decent model to vote upon. The Republican grouping, distant and smug, was (and here, history is instructive) led by the now deposed Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Pro-monarchist groups such as Australians for Constitutional Monarchy pursue a line not merely paradoxical but absurd. The British Crown is raised to the level of sacrosanct mother, protector, and unifier. How this squares with sovereignty is a baffling exercise of self-delusion, but one happily embraced by such individuals as Gregory R. Copley, President of the International Strategic Studies Association based in Washington, D.C.

As the globe is fractured by bursts of populist dissatisfaction, [suggested](#) Copley at the Annual Conference of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy held at the New South Wales Parliament earlier this month, monarchy was indispensable. “It is an appropriate time, then to ask where Australia would be today, without the enduring presence of the Crown – our most visible icon of sovereignty and unity – in Australian life.” In a paean to monarchical systems of government, Copley goes dew-eyed at the fate of monarchies in the 20th century, whose collapse “was the precursor of today’s global framework.” This unfortunate turn of events left “a global strategic framework which was inherently fragile.”

The visit by Prince Harry and his new wife, Hollywood second (third?) tier actress Meghan Markle, Duke and Duchess of Sussex, has turned the Australian public – or a good part of it at least – to a grotesque, gibbering sight. This is not sovereignty extolled but emotional

slavery demonstrated, the psyche imprisoned in a historical, hereditary system of government. There have been scenes of imbecilic insensibility as the couple do the rounds. Young mothers, with their barely sentient offspring, have been waiting at strategic points for the young couple as they arrive at various venues. Bad weather has proven no deterrent.

People of all age groups have gathered, phones at the ready, to take those snaps that will be shared with the enthusiastic dissemination of a nymphomaniac with venereal disease. Hours have been expended in the hope to gain a fleeting glance of the royal candy. Even more unforgivably, nominally respectable journalists have taken to holding flags in anticipation, becoming the very spectacle they are covering.

The words of the Dubbo speech by Prince Harry have been poured over with a reverence befitting subjects rather than citizens, an immaturity that does much to dispel notions of a firm egalitarian sensibility. The prince was, after all, speaking to “the salt of the earth”, the “backbone of this country.” Harry had turned shrink – or at least a patient healed by one. The rural occupants of Australia’s farming communities, earth’s salt and national backbone, duly listened. “We know that suicide rates in rural and remote areas are greater than in urban populations and this may be especially true among young men in remote regions.” He [spoke](#) of “one huge community and with that comes an unparalleled internal support and understanding.”

The Duke and Duchess were being portrayed as the accessible royal couple, and those who dare venture into the outback. “The best part about visiting country Australia,” claimed the prince, “is the people.” Well and good, but Harry was merely following a scheduled pattern stretching back to 1954 when his grandmother made Dubbo a stopping point to visit her subjects, all part of visiting “her people”.

Former residents made their return just to see another royal visit. The Dubbo-born sisters Elizabeth Atkin and Sharon Askew (nee Hind) expressed their gushing desire to revisit some family folklore, given that their grandmother had been asked to prepare a posy of flowers for Queen Elizabeth on that Dubbo tour. “It’s because of this history and it is important to us,” [explained](#) Atkin, “it has become your family folk-law.” The *Daily Liberal*, one of the papers [covering](#) the events in Dubbo enticed readers to search through any pictures that might have been snapped of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex during their “Picnic in the Park”. “See if... you’re in our pictures.”

Some local must always be selected for the occasion, the point where the royal meets subject, and that subject, it so happens, was Luke Vincent of Buninyong Primary School. Of immediate interest to the child was the Prince’s beard – the royal facial hair within hand’s reach. Principal Anne van Dartell was beside herself in ecstatic observation; Luke’s mother, Danielle Sparrow, “just started crying and shaking” being “happy because that’s just Luke and the love he shows.” The lachrymose campaign had taken hold. “That’s our Lukey, the Lukey-love-effect, he’s just full of lots of love.”

The visit had brought out the obsessives, the surveillance vultures keen to capture every single moment of the tour. An Instagram [fan page](#) dedicated to the couple notes with somewhat creepy insistence each “special moment”, a “pretty much minute by minute” account on “cute” scenes. The vanquishing of any Australian republic, without bayonet, cannon or musket, has been assured, not merely because of a continued desire to see monarchy as the tit of reassurance, but its youth as modern celebrities of a social media world which has sacralised them as creatures to be revered rather than mocked.

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