

Submission to the Senate 'Inquiry into an Australian Republic'

31 March 2004

The Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT, 2600

Dear Senators,

I welcome this opportunity to present an alternative model for an Australian Republic to your Senate Committee.

The aim with this model is to keep the best of the constitutional monarchical system that we have, while devising a method that is both democratic and egalitarian for selecting an Australian to be the Head of State.

This model is truly minimal with regard to changing the existing Constitution. Yet the egalitarian provision to give all Australians the same chance of being nominated to run for the position of Head of State could be considered to be a democratic innovation. Australia has a history for initiating democratic reforms.

This submission follows the format of the Discussion Paper that was released in December 2003. It is a sketchy outline only, and if the Committee would like to further discuss this model, I would be happy to participate in person or in writing.

An appendix outlines an argument on how this model is related to the so-called war on terror. I feel that it is important to acknowledge this issue.

I think that public debate as to what we want in an Australian Republic is required before we launch into a series of plebiscites. How that is to be achieved is an open question.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Vogler

Terms of reference

A) the most appropriate process for moving towards the establishment of an Australian republic with an Australian Head of State; and

The *Discussion Paper for the Inquiry into an Australian Republic* lists a number of specific questions related to the transition from our Constitutional Monarchy into a Republic. Perhaps the approach of this Discussion Paper is too narrowly focused. It does not really take a big picture perspective and in failing to do so, may contribute to a transition into a second-rate republic. The political system we have now works remarkably well, but we can not simply take it for granted. Constitutional changes can have adverse as well as positive effects on our political institutions. The Australian Republic should, in my view anyway, build on the excellent system we have. To do that the public needs to be aware of how the system works in the first place, and understand the principles upon which it was built.

Some of these principles include:

- Constitutional government
- How Conventions evolve over time
- Federal structure
- Separation of powers: executive, legislative and judiciary
- Independence of the public service
- Ministers are publicly accountable for their departments
- Transparency of government
- How checks and balances are built into the system
- The role of the Senate as a House of Review
- Reasoned deliberative debate of policy
- Democratic processes
- The place of political discourse in civil society
- Free and open commentary on politics through the media
- The political party system
- Freedom: autonomy of the collectivity and autonomy of the individual (Todorov)
- Human rights and the Rule of Law

This list is not comprehensive by any means, and there are a myriad of ways that these different concepts are interrelated. The difficulty is in publicly discussing our political institutions and engaging people so that collectively we can arrive at a system where we all feel that we can all have a say if we want to. I assume that democracy is a good thing, and that 'people' are more than just a pile of ballot papers.

One way to view the development of our democracy is by contrasting different modes of government. A progression can be seen along the following lines:

- 1) Absolute monarchy - authoritarian
- 2) Constitutional monarchy – liberal democratic (where we are at present)
- 3) Republic – liberal democratic and egalitarian

In an absolute monarchy one person assumes authority to govern. He or she may delegate responsibility to people of his or her liking, yet the absolute monarch can rule like a tyrant. In modern times it was leaders such as Saddam Hussein who ruled in this manner. They can initiate police states and forcefully silence dissent, or any political debate for that matter. Should an Upper House in the government of such an authoritarian dare to disallow even as little as one or two percent of the volume of legislation to pass through their House, such a leader would act to neuter that liberty. Authoritarians also like to start wars, and any excuse will do.

Our political system is a liberal democracy. It is partially based on the classic republic of the United States, so it might be fair to call our constitutional monarchy a "Crowned Republic". The separation of powers is a central aspect for republics. The political system is structured so that no one person can be in a position to dominate. Power is shared over a number of institutions and ideally there is vigorous debate in the public sphere. One problem with this system is that it can be very difficult for an individual to participate, unless they conform to the given institutions.

An Australian Republic would ideally, in my view anyway, build on our liberal democracy in such a way that increases the autonomy of individuals, especially in the cultural realm. The way that social groups are conceptualised and represented can impact on how the state acts with regard to individuals typecast as belonging to those groups. By being able to contest the way social groups are conceptualised through cultural self-representations, individuals would ideally be in a better position to dialogue with institutions on equal terms and in their own voice. By celebrating cultural diversity the Australian Republic could be both liberal democratic and egalitarian.

Back to the question of the most appropriate process for moving towards the establishment of an Australian Republic. Obviously, a process that only engages people who are already involved in the political process is not going to have much of an impact in the general community. That's my opinion anyway. Somehow I think that the process has to involve people in terms that they can relate to. Before we talk about models and plebiscites it might be an idea to talk about the basics of liberal democracy first. That is not a radical proposition. An informed and engaged public is the best defense against ushering in a second-rate republic that might unwittingly lead to authoritarianism. We don't want the next step to be backwards. We need to beware of prospective republican models that in reality are just monarchical throwbacks gone feral.

How to initiate and sustain such a public debate is an open question.

- B) alternative models for an Australian republic, with specific reference to:
- i) the functions and powers of the Head of State
 - ii) the method of selection and removal of the Head of State, and
 - iii) the relationship of the Head of State with the executive, the parliament and the judiciary

Outline of an alternative model

A proposed model can be summarised as follows:

No changes are made within the current Australian Constitution as it is, except for a change to the second Covering Clause; “The provisions of the Act referring to the Queen shall extend to Her Majesty’s heirs and successors in the sovereignty of the United Kingdom.”

Additional sections are added to the Constitution to formalise a democratic and egalitarian method for selecting an Australian to act as the “Queen of Australia”. The process for selecting the Head of State would recur at regular time intervals always with new candidates, thus abandoning the hereditary origin of the office.

In an egalitarian process every citizen would have an equal chance to be nominated to run for the office of Head of State. The only way to do this is to restrict nominations to a small pool of people who are chosen at random from the whole population. The appropriate number of candidates is a topic that is open to debate; however, a number of the order of a couple of hundred people seems to be an appropriate starting figure.

The office of Head of State should also be something that an Australian could aspire to as a result of hard work and service to the community. One, and only one, special nominee could be chosen by the Prime Minister to run for office alongside the nominees who are chosen at random.

The final say as to who shall be elected to act as the “Queen of Australia” resides in the democratic will of the Australian people.

In a nutshell then, we keep the system as it is, Governor General and all, and elect an Australian to act as the “Queen of Australia”.

i) the functions and powers of the Head of State

Clearly in this model the functions and powers of the Head of State would be closely tied to the current functions and powers of Queen Elizabeth II. The Head of State would be bound to honour both the Constitution and the conventions that have developed since Federation. The Head of State has no power to initiate legislation.

ii) the method of selection and removal of the Head of State, and

The method of selection is outlined above. To remove the Head of State one suggestion is to ask the High Court to decide as to whether the Head of State is acting appropriately; following a formal request from the Prime Minister to review the behaviour of the Head of State. What is considered to be appropriate for a Head of State would be based on a complex number of factors and is subject to change over time. This approach would be flexible and impartial, and is likely to keep the Head of State's actions within reasonable and responsible bounds.

iii) the relationship of the Head of State with the executive, the parliament and the judiciary

The Head of State would be expected to act in a similar capacity as the current Queen of Australia. It is considered completely inappropriate for the Queen to interfere in the actions of the executive, the parliament and the judiciary. Even during the dismissal of 1975 the Queen refused to consult with the Governor General as to how he should act. The Head of State has no direct political role: so that the system is fair and equitable.

With this egalitarian republic model in mind, the questions listed in the Discussion Paper can be addressed, if only with brief comments.

Who is the current head of state?

The Queen of Australia

Is a separate head of state needed?

Yes. Nearly every modern nation has a Head of State, at least for symbolic purposes. A politically impartial Head of State can represent all Australians.

Question 1 Should Australia consider moving towards having a head of state who is also head of government?

The head of government, the Prime Minister, can usually only expect to have the willing support of a slim majority of Representatives in the Lower House. He or she can also count on hostile opposition. Government decisions are usually divisive and favour one section of the community over another. A Head of State would ideally be above politics so that all Australians can feel that the Australian State is there for the benefit of the whole community, not just a narrow sectional interest. It is essential that the head of government and head of state be separate, if we want a peaceful inclusive society.

Powers of the head of state

Question 2 What powers should be conferred on the head of state?

No extra powers. Section 59 provides the Queen with the power to disallow laws within the first year of being passed into law. This has never been exercised. This would be the one main power of the Head of State. Should this power be used inappropriately the Prime Minister could set in train the process to remove the Head of State, and then reintroduce that law a second time.

Question 3 What powers (if any) should be codified beyond those currently specified in the constitution?

None. This allows conventions to evolve as the need and circumstances may require. There is an argument that the Constitution was written for a nineteenth century world, and that it is grossly out of date now. That is true. Nevertheless conventions have evolved out of this Constitution and we now have effective modern democratic institutions. Some people argue that the constitution should match practice. Against this you could argue that an aim in republican political systems is to maintain effective checks and balances. The reliance on convention in our system could be seen as a hidden check on potential excesses of wayward Prime Ministers. Should a government disregard a substantial body of convention (perhaps by systematically

repressing free speech, politicising the public service or worse...) that government might find that some other conventions may lose their binding nature. Section 68: "The command in chief of the naval and military forces of the Commonwealth is vested in the Governor-General as the Queen's representative." Convention gives that role to the Minister of Defense and the Cabinet. No one would normally even consider the proposition that conventions act as a whole package, and with no training in law I could be (probably am) completely wrong. However, awareness of this possibility should temper a more radical Prime Minister's considerations.

Selection

Question 4 Should some form of campaign assistance be available to nominees, and if so, what assistance would be reasonable?

Yes. Don't know.

Question 5 Should/Can political parties be prevented from assisting or campaigning on behalf of nominees? If so, how?

No, but it wouldn't do the nominees or political parties too much good.

Question 6 If assistance is to be given, should this be administered by the Australian Electoral Commission or some other public body?

Yes, some impartial and publicly accountable body.

Question 7 If the Australian head of state is to be directly elected, what method of voting should be used?

First past the post. This is appropriate when there is a large number of possible candidates. Candidates should not be required to align themselves into factions, as they would have to in some of the other election methods.

Question 8 If direct election is the preferred method for election of a non-executive president, will this lead to a situation where the president becomes a rival centre of power to the Government? If so, is this acceptable or not? If not, can the office of head of state be designed so that this situation does not arise?

This is a complex question that will require a substantial answer (and discussion). The Head of State can not initiate legislation, and does not have power like the Government has.

The Head of State can act, however, to try to make political discourse fair and inclusive. This may involve helping disadvantaged sections of the community in expressing their concerns and participating in politics to further their own interests.

The Head of State and Government have different kinds of power, so they are not rivals in the conventional sense. Maybe the Head of State has authority by promoting inclusion, but no power and no right to interfere directly. By contrast the Government has power, but no authority if it is not sufficiently inclusive in its political processes. In this model there will definitely be a dynamic between the Government and Head of State, but they can not compete directly.

Nomination

Question 9 Who should be eligible to put forward nominations for an appointed head of state? For an elected head of state?

Nominees are to be picked at random from the population, with one special nominee forwarded by the Prime Minister

Question 10 Should there be any barriers to nomination, such as nominations from political parties, or candidates being current or former members of parliament?

No.

Question 11 Should there be a maximum and/or minimum number of candidates?

At the limit of no random nominees we have a variation on the Prime Ministerial appointment model. At the limit of including the whole population as possible nominees (ie the need to have a random sample is removed) we have a version of the classic direct election model. The problem with both the prime ministerial appointment model and classic direct election model is that both models will make the office of Head of State realistically accessible only to elites. The provision of restricting the pool of nominees to a small group of randomly selected people opens up the nomination process to the whole population. In this sense this model is realistically more inclusive and egalitarian than any other model. It may be a little more unwieldy, but a true democracy is always untidy and diverse.

In the earliest democracies of Ancient Greece there was a precedent of selecting certain officials by lot. The use of random processes in a democracy is not new and is not really radical. It takes the moderate middle ground between an appointed Head of State and a directly elected Head of State, in order to give everyone a chance to participate. But I could be biased in my view...

Question 12 Should there be a minimum number of nominators required for a nominee to become a candidate?

It should really be up to the nominee to decide whether he or she actually wants to be included as a candidate in the election for the Head of State.

Title of head of state

Question 13 What should the head of state be called, Governor-General, President of the Commonwealth of Australia, or some other title?

The “Queen of Australia”

Term of office

Question 14 What should be the length of a term of office for head of state?

Undecided: possibly two terms of Parliament (6-8 years)

To save money elections could be held simultaneously for the Lower House, Senate and Head of State. Issue of fixed terms for Parliament.

Question 15 Should a head of state be eligible for re-appointment/reelection?

I think not. This is about sharing power; not having someone, no matter how worthy, hanging around for as long as they can.

Question 16 Should there be a limit on the number of terms an individual may serve as head of state?

Yes, one.

Removal

Question 17 Who or what body should have the authority to remove the head of state from office?

See above.

The High Court only after the Prime Minister requests a review of the Head of State's behaviour.

Question 18 On what grounds should the removal from office of the head of state be justified? Should those grounds be spelt out?

It should be left to the majority judgement of the High Court, and the grounds should be left as wide as possible.

Casual Vacancy

Question 19 How should a casual vacancy be filled?

Open question – maybe the longest serving state Governor, until the next Federal election.

Eligibility/ disqualification

Question 20 What should the eligibility requirements be for the head of state?

That they command the respect of the Australian people. This criteria should be met by the person who receives the most votes.

Question 21 On what grounds should a person be disqualified from becoming head of state?

I think it is best to have faith in democracy and the judgement of the Australian people. As long as there is a wide enough field of candidates to chose from and the method is democratic, poor candidates will not have a hope of winning.

Relationship of head of state with executive, parliament and judiciary

Question 22 Should the head of state have power to appoint and remove federal judges?

No

Question 23 Should the head of state have the prerogative of mercy?

No – we have confidence in the justice system

Question 24 Should the head of state be free to seek constitutional advice from the judiciary and if so, under what circumstances?

I see no problem with this, but I don't really see that there could be a need to do so. Don't know.

Position of the states

Question 25 What is the best way to deal with the position of the states in a federal Australian republic?

Same as we do now.

A Process for moving towards an Australian republic

Question 26 Should there be an initial plebiscite to decide whether Australia should become a republic, without deciding on a model for that republic?

Question 27 Should there be more than one plebiscite to seek the views on broad models? If so, should the plebiscites be concurrent or separated?

Question 28 Should voting for a plebiscite be voluntary or compulsory?

Question 29 What is the best way to formulate the details of an appropriate model for a republic? A convention? A parliamentary inquiry? A Constitutional Council of experts?

Question 30 What is the preferred way for a process to move towards an Australian republic?

These are difficult questions.

Since this egalitarian republic model includes a novel approach to democracy it may be an idea to test this method first. Some states have suggested running a trial run of proposed methods for selecting a Head of State. There would need to be public debate as to the merits, or otherwise, of this model before it has any chance of being included as a possible model for an Australian Republic.

The best way forward is an open question.

Some Practical Problems with this model

Selecting people at random from the population and then placing them at the centre of the public stage could be likened to opening Pandora's box, if care is not taken. There is the danger that people could use this platform to promote divisive attitudes, and conversely, the people selected could run the risk of being harassed. The election campaign has to be structured so that the community is protected as well as the individuals who are to take part. There are a number of approaches that could help to keep this election process positive and constructive.

Monarchists will most likely find this point that I am going to make here ghastly and obscene. Republicans might think it equally absurd. Yet, pragmatically, why would you want to throw away that special aura that surrounds traditional royalty when it could be put to good use and can actually be justified? Time will show that people chosen at random from the population, potentially the people we walk past in the shopping mall, can match it with the best. Not everyone of course; but we can say the same for some of the members of royal families over the centuries.

Another point concerns how the nominees will express themselves. Usually we expect presidential candidates to give speeches about policy and things like that. But there

would be no point in our case; the Head of State can not initiate policy. Instead the nominees could be taught in how to make short films and then use these skills to share their experiences with the public. This will be a personal and creative way for the Australian public to reflect on our collective identity. Over time these films may well become a valuable record of our history and culture, provided of course that this model will be adopted.

Another potential problem is expense. The government could not really be expected to foot the whole bill for such an exercise. While some government funding is appropriate, in my view anyway, perhaps there could also be contributions from business and the community. How this is to be arranged can only be answered if and when such an election process is to take place. Contributions to such an election campaign would be helping to build positive social capital; there are substantial benefits that can outweigh the costs. Such a public process would also provide a very effective medium for commercial advertising, provided it was all done tastefully, and the advertising budgets could contribute to society in ways that are not possible with conventional advertising. Political funding could be towards the political process itself, not just towards special interest political parties. This egalitarian republic idea will work with the system as it is; its aim is to open up the process so that it is as inclusive and fair as possible.

One potential criticism that could be leveled at this model is that it could be seen to advocate an overwhelmingly populist public forum. I think this will not happen as long as the main content of the participant's presentations is expressed as narrative. If the nominees were simply asked to state their views on a number of topics then this process could lead to a lowest common denominator kind of populism. By contrast everyone has a unique life history and special perspective on the world. By sharing our stories we can see collectively how diverse our nation really is. Naturally there will be commentary on these presentations and this will ideally contribute to a fruitful dialogue within the community between people who would not normally interact. This process could help to build trust and understanding within our community, but we also need to be aware of how this process could fail and turn negative in order that this potential negativity can be avoided.

Such an election method might have effects on political parties and on how politics is conducted. It may well turn politics into a more deliberative practice that is conducted by politicians who possibly might have more of a glamorous public profile. Politicians may well be expected to express their personal views even while supporting the party line, which is not the case at present. I suspect that the Labor Party will be able to adapt; it has been around since before Federation and has repeatedly renewed itself to match the times. The conservative side of politics is less stable. When new historical circumstances arrive the conservatives have regenerated themselves usually by folding the old Party and forming a new one. Early into the Cold War Bob Menzies started the Liberal Party. Now that we are on the verge of a new era, it has become evident that conservatives need to reinvent themselves politically. Who will set the foundations for the Conservative Party in a Republic?

A symbol for the Republic: A proposed Flag

An outline for a flag:

Dimension of 2:3

National colours: Green background, gold stars

Two national symbols side by side: the Southern Cross and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms

The Southern Cross is in the same proportion as it is on the current flag.

The axis for the Southern Cross is one third along the length of the flag from the left edge.

The Coat of Arms is situated so that the centre of the Commonwealth Star (also called the Federation Star) is at the point of intersection of two (imaginary) lines. The horizontal line is (roughly) eleven thirty-sixths ($11/36$) of the width of the flag down from the top edge, and the vertical line is again eleven thirty-sixths ($11/36$) of the width of the flag in from the right edge of the flag.

This would place the Commonwealth Star in the top right corner of the flag.

It would also place the Commonwealth Star in line with two of the stars of the Southern Cross: Beta Crucis and Delta Crucis. The distance between Beta Crucis and Delta Crucis is the same as the distance between Delta Crucis and the Commonwealth Star. (The error is less than 0.3 percent, which makes for a very good fit).

This arrangement would symmetrically align the Southern Cross with the Coat of Arms.

The size and relative scale of the Coat of Arms could be based on a number of criteria: perhaps the horizontal length could be half the width of the flag; or perhaps the Coat of Arms could occupy the centre of the vertical line from the right edge; or perhaps it could be scaled to a size that most people find aesthetically pleasing.

An additional white band on the left edge of the flag, with a size of roughly 0.055 of the width of the flag would place the star Delta Crucis at the midpoint along the length of the extended flag. Many physical flags have such a white band on the left edge, but this is not usually considered in the design.

This flag is rich in symbolism and seems appropriate for an Australian Republic. It honours traditional symbols that are on our current flag and arranges them in relation to each other. To the left is the Southern Cross and to the right is the Coat of Arms. It takes the Commonwealth Star from the current position where it is subordinate to the Union Jack and places it in a more prominent location. This flag symbolises both respect for our past and faith in our future.

Appendix: This Egalitarian Republic Model and the War on Terror

How can this egalitarian republic idea help in the war against terror? In so many ways that I can only really make general hints within the time limit before this submission is due. I hope to have the opportunity to elaborate and debate the benefits of this model over the next few months.

I would like to put on the record that I totally support the efforts of the security organisations and their personnel in preventing acts of terror and politically motivated violence. This is a topic that requires strong tactical resources as well as long term strategies. They have my full support, and I hope that this republic model will contribute to a state of affairs where the threat of terrorism is no longer so pressing, and where people are free to pursue their own interests, whatever they may be.

The Howard government, however, seems obsessed with the so-called War on Terror. This government obviously thinks that by focusing on a topic such as terrorism it is on to a winner because no one can argue against trying to prevent acts of terror. I suspect, however, that for John Howard the issue of terrorism is politically charged and that he is being driven by his political considerations above what is best for the country and the people who live here. Howard's recent altercation with Mick Keelty is one example where honesty and truth were stamped upon for personal political gain. Howard's actions in this case were especially disgraceful, and this is a common view. It could be argued that John Howard's approach to terrorism is unbalanced.

The point I wish to make is that one of the aims in fighting terrorism is to strike the right balance. There are many issues to keep in balance. New invasive security measures need to be kept in balance with regard to civil liberties. Tactics need to be balanced against long term strategies. The need to protect intelligence secrets needs to be balanced against the need to be able to publicly debate what government is doing. We all know the saying "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".

To prevent John Howard from using terrorism as a lever to gain unfettered power the need to maintain balance is essential. Yesterday (29 March 2004), for example, in an interview with Catherine McGrath on AM Programme ABC Radio John Howard responded to questions about anti-terror laws with the following statement: "...I mean I suppose success or failure is ultimately determined by whether or not you prevent a terrorist attack occurring in this country or whether you prevent a number of attacks occurring, I mean the aim of all these things is to deter, part of deterrence is capturing people, part of deterrence is interrogating people, in getting further information. So all of these things coming together are all part of the fight." Last year John Howard took Australia into an invasion of Iraq on questionable grounds, namely to eliminate WMDs which were for the most part fictitious. How do we know that Howard would not use extended anti-terror laws to silence or intimidate political opponents and others on completely bogus suppositions? If he is willing to attack the Commissioner of the AFP for being honest, how can you believe that

Howard will use extended anti-terror laws responsibly? No matter how earnestly Howard may insist that two plus two makes five, its about time that we put two and two together with regard to Howard.

Having said that, I am not proposing to repeal the anti-terror laws that are already in place. Howard has made the likelihood of a terrorist attack in Australia almost a certainty, so we just have to live with it. To propose removing anti-terror laws would only leave that person open to take all the blame for anything that could subsequently happen. And then the reinstated anti-terror laws would be even more draconian. I would argue though, that we should exercise extreme caution in giving Howard any further anti-terror laws. Any proposed new laws need to be vigorously debated, with Howard and Ruddock's track records and characters as factors to take into consideration. Yes I can already hear the sincere exhortations on how honest and trustworthy these great defenders of liberty are. Yeah, sure. Whatever...

One more point, at pain of seeming a bore. In an article for the Wall Street Journal (26 March, 2004) John Howard states: "Words are weapons in the information age and there is a need for vigilance to ensure we are not signaling weakness in the face of this ongoing threat. There can be no excusing the inexcusable. The messages we send, whether as leaders of governments or leaders of opinion, must be that we will stay the course and finish the job." That is exactly what I intend doing here, but I do admit that exploring the meaning of democracy might make some leaders like John Howard uncomfortable. The decision to go to war in Iraq may not have been reasonable or justified. If the Prime Minister has a problem with what he has said was a reason for going to war, or any other topic that he feels he has no answer for, the fault is not with the messenger who points that out. Instead the problem is with a government that feels it does not have to justify its actions, nor seek advice from independent and experienced professionals and, notwithstanding such a lack of insight, goes ahead and does what it likes regardless. One of the differences between a vibrant democracy and terrorism is that in a democracy words have power while terrorists resort to violence and the threat of violence to enforce their political will. Yes "Words are weapons" and in a healthy democracy this is a good thing. A genuine liberal democratic leader would not lament this. To clarify a point, I agree with the Prime Minister that the troops should finish their job, but I object to him trying to tie this to the issue of free and open public debate on government policy.

This republic idea can help in countering terrorism in a tactical way. Any substantial terrorist attack involves a number of people. Should anyone with any inside knowledge feel that it might be wrong to kill innocent people at random, and report it, then that terror threat can effectively be neutralised by the authorities. It only takes a whisper, and its over. The election campaign in this model will take a random group of people, and for those who want to participate, these people will share their hopes and fears, their stories and histories. We will see that anyone we walk past, everyone we see is human just as we are. People at work, in nightclubs, on trains or anywhere are not in any way enemies. People who are caught up in ideologies might not see this. They possibly only see the labels that they place on others who they don't try to understand. Such an election campaign, with real people rather than polished

politicians, might induce some empathy in people with an ideological bent. To be sure there are some people who are fixed in their hatred of the West.

Strategically it is important over the long term to win people over so that they see the benefits of democracy. This is the complex issue of legitimacy. There is much more that can be said about this.

An egalitarian republic election campaign will be a way to balance the danger that the government might use anti-terror laws to undermine civil liberties. As security measures have become more high tech and sophisticated, such an election campaign will institute a correspondingly sophisticated dialogue in civil society that is open and free. Should the government try to abuse these anti-terror laws, the public will know about it and will be able to voice its concern and take appropriate nonviolent action. Australia's mass media is highly concentrated and this government has a history of harassing the more independent players such as the ABC. The proposed new measures to limit publications related to terrorism seem to me somewhat suspect.

John Howard wants us to stand firm against terror. Well that is exactly what this proposed egalitarian republic would do. We will stand firm against terrorists by showing the world that democracy is a good thing and that ordinary people are unique and special. We will also stand firm against the possibility of initiating a state of terror through the erosion of civil liberties. Both terrorists and authoritarian state leaders see people as numbers, as statistics. To overcome terror we need to stand firm against both these dangers to freedom. We need to strike the right balance, and it would be prudent to be cautious about this unbalanced Howard government and its lopsided approach to national security and terrorism. This is not appeasing terrorists. On the contrary, this is about giving a clear message to the world about the value of democracy and is a creative response against terrorism that we can all participate in. This egalitarian approach complements the tough counter-terrorism measures that are now in place.

I hope that this works as a circuit breaker to an escalating cycle of violence and as a catalyst for public debate on the meaning of democracy. It's time to take a wider historical perspective and to find a place for people in democracy.