

were pressing forward the republican idea. They had little real support until Mr Keating put his very considerable clout behind the idea. From there, with virtually unanimous media endorsement, the movement has acquired much strength. Whether it will be strong enough to change the Australian Constitution (so resistant to formal alteration) remains to be seen. In the place of the Finnean objections to monarchy that can be discerned, never far from the surface, in Dr McKenna's writing, there are now other voices. They urge that the severance of the link with the sovereign is but the natural outcome of historical, economic and legal forces which have been going on virtually since the establishment of the colony at Sydney Cove when the Union Jack was run up in 1788 and "God Save the King" was sung for the first time.

Dr McKenna writes with passion. His deep feeling on the issue of republicanism is clearly honest and true. His book is very nicely presented by Cambridge, although the inclusion of endnotes at the back of a book in the age of computer formatting seems tiresome and avoidable. The real hesitation I have about parts of the book concerns the apparent unwillingness of the author to accord respect to, or to seek to understand, the motivations of loyalty to the Crown which fuelled the sentiments of his compatriots in earlier decades. It would require a certain arrogance on the part of us who come later to ridicule or belittle the feelings of loyalty and affection which were undoubtedly expressed by ordinary Australians in past decades. We demean ourselves by refusing to understand and investigate those feelings, as true and honest to those who held them, as Dr McKenna's republicanism is to him today.

This said, the book is a treasury of the writings of Australian republicans. For most of the history of our country they were a minority, even a tiny minority. But that does not mean that they should be dismissed. Martin Luther, who nailed his protest on the door of a church, stood up against the power of organised Christendom for what he believed. Although he had some unlovely characteristics, this was his noblest virtue. So it is with the republican Australians in the times of monarchy whose sentiments Dr McKenna has searched out and recorded. So long as the reader keeps a sense of proportion up to the last pages and realises how few were the republican protesters in Australia for most of its modern existence, the book will be an important contribution to the republican debate.

In the end, Dunmore Lang, and not Parkes, may win this argument, but the princely statue atop the hospital in Sydney should remain as a record of an undoubted period of our nation's story. Furthermore, I think I detected on

the royal statue's visage a smile. If the republican system that is bequeathed to us is the 'minimalist' one, it will be that of a constitutional monarchy but without the monarch. In that way, the royal tradition of the British Crown may yet have the last laugh on Australia's republicans should the people of Australia decide to move from a republican monarchy to nothing more than a monarchical republic.

EXERCISING A FENIAN'S RIGHT OF REPLY: A RESPONSE TO THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE MICHAEL KIRBY'S REVIEW OF *THE CAPTIVE REPUBLIC*

AUTHORS are rarely afforded the opportunity to respond to reviews of their work. When they do so, it is usually because they are unhappy with the review. The result is a barnstorming letter to the editor. When I first read Justice Michael Kirby's review of *The Captive Republic*¹ I was unsure whether to laugh or cry. On one hand, the review was thoughtful, erudite and occasionally complimentary. On the other hand, it was critical and cautionary. After reading the review, colleagues told me I should not worry - to be reviewed by a High Court Judge was all that mattered. My name was in good company - the content of the review was irrelevant. "If Kirby has read your book," they said, "there is more chance of others thinking they should read it too." I was not persuaded.

There are two particular aspects of Justice Kirby's review to which I wish to respond. First, the manner in which his emotional commitment to the British monarchy sometimes hampers his capacity to be impartial, and second, his willingness to assume too readily that I am caused pain when confronted by certain historical facts.

Justice Kirby's ethnic background lies "in the tradition of Ulster Protestants". He is honest and forthright in this regard. My background is somewhat different. I come from working class Irish Catholic stock - "those who sucked disloyalty with their mother's milk" as he put it. Justice Kirby claims that "Finnean objections to monarchy ... can be discerned, never far from the surface" in *The Captive Republic*. This explains why he has imagined Siobhan McKenna, one of the book's

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¹ McKenna, *The Captive Republic. A History of Republicanism in Australia, 1788-1996* (CUP, Melbourne 1996). For the Honourable Justice Michael Kirby's review, see pp131-138 of this journal edition.

dedicatees, as a sledge hammer toting Fenian, who is intent on smashing the statue of "Prince Albert the Good" which hovers over Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney. I have since shown Justice Kirby a photograph of Siobhan, my two year old daughter. Night raids on the statue may be a possibility in her teenage years but she is still too young to wield a hammer. As parents of good Irish stock, we will ensure she learns. But the good prince need not be afraid. Like many Australians of her father's generation and especially her own, Siobhan will pass by the statues of royal figures unaware of their past significance. Like the pigeons, she will find them of passing interest only.

Ethnicity and the old fires of sectarianism may have played a role in the formation of Justice Kirby's position on the republican issue, but these factors do not explain my inability to "fully appreciate the strength of the sentiment of affection and loyalty which existed in Australia" over the last two hundred years, as Justice Kirby implies. Born in 1959, I arrived too late to experience the sectarian war. I was also bottle fed. My republican sympathies emerged in 1975, at the age of sixteen, after the dismissal of the Whitlam Government. My only exposure to the Irish republican tradition had occurred six years earlier, in 1969, when, serving as an altar boy in the parish of Toongabbie in western Sydney, I was forced to endure the fire and spittle of the sermons of Father Patrick O'Doherty. Like most altar boys, I did not pay attention to the sermon - my mind was on other things.

When Justice Kirby suggests that I have afforded too much space in *The Captive Republic* to those radical and minority nineteenth century journals which depicted the monarchy as "plunderers, imbeciles, tyrants, scoundrels, torturers, adulterers, bigots, and debauched, crooked, self willed, heartless liars," he accuses me of running the risk of distorting the understanding of the time as it really was. Yet the book does not claim that these views were those of mainstream Australia, and it is, after all, a history of republicanism. Perhaps the truth lies elsewhere. I suspect it is Justice Kirby's Ulster Protestant background which makes him slightly uncomfortable reading the writings of republicans, especially a two hundred year survey such as *The Captive Republic* .

Throughout *The Captive Republic* I have gone to great lengths to emphasise the duality of Australian nationalism in nineteenth and twentieth century Australia. I wanted to avoid the familiar representation of Australian nationalism as a child of the radical labour movement. For the majority of Australians, loyalty to Britain and her monarchy, and

loyalty to Australia, were not mutually exclusive. Justice Kirby claims that I find this reality "disappointing." He also alleges that I find the undoubted affection which many Irish-Australians have felt for the British Royal family "impossible to tolerate." I want to reassure him that I am not disappointed, nor am I concerned by the loyalty of most of my fellow Irish-Australians to the British Crown. On the contrary, I am only too pleased to help debunk the myth that republicanism in Australia has largely been the work of Irish rebels.

I have other disagreements with Justice Kirby's reading of *The Captive Republic*. Chief amongst them is his suggestion that I have characterised the move for self-government in the Australian colonies as one to "'shake off the yoke' of British rule." Yet at nearly every pivotal moment covered in the book, I stress that the threat of separation was little more than a rhetorical device. The colonists used the spectre of rebellion as a threat in a bid to guarantee the delivery of what they believed to be their birthright - a degree of self government.

To continue with my objections would be to quibble, after all, I do agree with Justice Kirby's compliments. Overall, I see the review as the most generous I am likely to receive from a constitutional monarchist. I am not disappointed. And I have a sneaking suspicion that behind the black robes there lies a person of truly radical republican temper who is more democratic, more genuine, and more willing to embrace constitutional reform in a variety of ways than many of the more fashionable republican celebrities of the present day. While Justice Kirby is committed emotionally to the British monarchy, his working life has been devoted to law reform and issues associated with the extension of human rights and freedoms. In my eyes, he is more of a republican than any minimalist. Perhaps one day, when his emotional attachment has been overwhelmed by the tide of change, we may see him speak on a republican platform. Stranger things have happened, even on the High Court.

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With the Centenary of Australian Federation rapidly approaching, Australians are reassessing their constitution and the significance of colonialism for the nation's future. Issues of republicanism, multiculturalism, gender equity and Aboriginal reconciliation are coming under scrutiny. These issues are not unique to Australia. The histories of imperial practices can be told throughout the world. Other former colonies are rethinking their imperialist tendencies; some new colonialist cultures are being created.

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