

1997

Olympic fever and national identity

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Recommended Citation

(1997) "Olympic fever and national identity," *The National Legal Eagle*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 9.
Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/nle/vol3/iss1/9>

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OLYMPIC FEVER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

WHEN THE ROAR GOES UP

In the year 2000 Australia will host the Olympic Games. Millions of Australians, along with many millions of people around the world will cheer at the moment of the official opening.

The opening ceremony of the Olympics has become as much of a spectacular event as the Games themselves. It is now viewed as an opportunity for the host country to display to the world the wonders of the culture, lifestyle, environment and so forth of their country.

The ceremony will be seen as a chance to make a statement of who and what we are, as a country, and to communicate this message for all to see and evaluate.

WHO WILL 'DO THE HONOURS'?

Traditionally, the head of state of a country has the honour of opening the Olympic Games.

As Australia is a constitutional monarchy, our head of state is the Queen who is also the monarch of the United Kingdom. It would then be a 'royal' event if she assumed an active role for this occasion.

However, the Queen is empowered by the Australian Constitution to appoint a Governor-General of Australia to act as her representative in Australia. Perhaps then, it may be the Governor-General who 'does the honours'.

In the light of present debate about whether or not Australia should become a Republic, if it did, and it did so by the year 2000, then the Republican head of state would be the 'person of the historical moment'.

RESEARCH EXERCISE

When were the last Olympic Games in Australia and who officially opened them?

A STATEMENT OF 'SELF-IDENTITY'

The way in which a country is governed and therefore its political structure, is a reflection of the way it is viewed and does view itself within the big picture of world politics.

At present Australia identifies itself as a nation with a monarchist background. It sees itself as legitimately tied to the historical context of its beginnings- the British monarchy.

As such, it is prepared, and constitutionally bound, to accept the British Queen as its head of state. Her role however, has become increasingly symbolic as Australia has become more and more a separate entity to the United Kingdom and in view of the fact that the Governor-General, her representative in Australia, is here to act on her behalf.

Supporters of the constitutional monarchy argue that this form of government has served us well, continues to serve us well and will continue to do so in the future.

Supporters of the notion that Australia should become a Republic argue that it is high time that we cut our ties to Britain and asserted ourselves in the eyes of the world as an individual entity. Thus, they argue, we should become a republic and choose our own head of state from Australian ranks. They maintain that this would then establish Australia as an individual entity in world politics, which is what we have become.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What process would be involved to change Australia from a constitutional monarchy to a republic?
2. What arguments, apart from those mentioned, have been put forward regarding Australia remaining a constitutional monarchy or becoming a republic?

RESEARCH EXERCISE

What powers does the Governor-General of Australia have?

Where are these powers defined?

Who is the Governor-General of Australia at present?

CHOOSING A HEAD OF STATE

Presently, the Governor-General is appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Australian Prime Minister.

Former Prime Minister Paul Keating, argued for parliamentary election of the head of state if Australia becomes a republic. This means that both houses of parliament would elect the head of state. There are arguments from other quarters that a head of state should be chosen 'directly'.

CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What are the arguments for and against choosing a head of state in the manner that Paul Keating envisages

CLASS EXERCISE

Consider the way in which heads of state are chosen in overseas jurisdiction such as Ireland, Germany, France, Italy and Austria and consider whether such processes are viable for Australia