ADR Bulletin
ADR Bulletin

Volume 10
Number 1 *Persuasion Part II*

Article 3

10-1-2007

Persuading Australians to actively support a Republic

John Warhurst

Recommended Citation
Warhurst, John (2007) "Persuading Australians to actively support a Republic," *ADR Bulletin*: Vol. 10: No. 1, Article 3.
Available at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol10/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you by ePublications@bond. It has been accepted for inclusion in ADR Bulletin by an authorized administrator of ePublications@bond. For more information, please contact Bond University's Repository Coordinator.

Persuasion in the Republic debate

Persuading Australians to actively support a Republic

John Warhurst

The case for an Australian Republic can be couched in many different ways depending on the audience and the format. It also depends on the response you are trying to elicit. That is, the case can be made in a campaign, like in 1999, in which a Yes vote is the desired response, or an out-of-campaign period in which the speaker is seeking active support of a more general kind.

I am concerned with the techniques that a single speaker, without aids such as film or music or other forms of accompaniment might use now, in an out-of-campaign period. I am not discussing campaign advertisements or other forms of communication.

These methods of persuasion combine rational argument and emotional appeal, often within the framework of a personal story.

The case can be positive or a negative attack on the status quo. It can emphasise symbolic or material benefits. It can be a rallying cry full of emotion or it can be a dry constitutional discourse. It can be impersonal or very personal.

The ethical aspects of this form of persuasion are those that arise in any political campaign. There are two, in particular: telling the truth and avoiding personal attack.

The 1999 official Yes case

To understand today's approach to seeking support for a Republic it is necessary to set out the key tenets of the Yes case at the 1999 constitutional referendum. It became a template for republican campaigners. These elements included a statement of the desired constitutional change and of what would not change. The case was a call to the future but involved respect for the past. The case also called on the authority of the Attorney-General and of a former Governor-General, among others, to bolster the case.

The first of the eight sections of the statement was headed 'An Australian Republic — it's all about our future'. This section was about evolution, maturity, pride, merit not privilege, independence and 'our uniquely Australian identity'.

The second section was 'Becoming a Republic simply means having an Australian as Head of State instead of the Queen'. This section proclaimed the British monarchy had served Australia well in the past but that 'Now we need someone who will proudly promote Australia and our interests — someone who is one of us'. The catchwords 'one of us' have become part of the republican lexicon.

'We should stand on our own two feet' was the third section. It emphasised progression, independence and growth and without using the word 'multiculturalism'. 'Only an Australian' can represent all Australians and becoming a Republic 'would confirm to the world "our true independence as a nation"'.

The fourth section, headed 'A small step, important and safe' cautiously outlined the limited change asked for and described the proposed constitutional change as 'a small but important symbolic step for all Australians'. This tactic of stressing only limited change (a minimalist Republic as it came to be called) has been much criticised since and may have been an error. In an effort to present as a so-called small target, perhaps republicans became too bland and cautious.

Then it spelled out, under the authority of the Attorney-General, all those things that would not change: the flag and the national anthem, the number of public holidays, our tradition of stable, parliamentary democracy, the day to day working of the Commonwealth Parliament, the powers of the new President compared to the existing powers of the Governor-General, and the expense and size of the President's office. It added friendly relations with Britain, membership of the Commonwealth and participation in the Commonwealth Games.

The fifth section, 'An Australian President', discussed how the new President would be chosen and described how this process had emerged from the Constitutional Convention. It emphasised that the new President would have 'the same job and the same powers as the Governor-General' and would be quite different, therefore, from the US President.

The central message of the sixth section, 'A President not a politician', tried to counter the slogan of the No case: 'Say No to the politician's Republic'. The process adopted 'means that our Australian President will *not* be a politician'.

The seventh section was entitled 'A stable parliamentary system'. It was here that authority was again called on, beginning with Sir Zelman Cowen and moving on to other 'well-respected Australians' including Malcolm Fraser, Gough Whitlam, Doug Anthony, Sir Anthony Mason and Sir Gerard Brennan. The use of authority figures has also been criticised and linked by anti-republicans to the allegedly elitist nature of the republican campaign.

The final message was 'It's a simple change but an important one': 'If you agree that, as we enter a new century, the time has come for an Australian to be our Head of State, please join with us and help make history on November 6'.

Dichotomies

Following the 1999 Referendum defeat the campaign continues, albeit rather more quietly. The case for a Republic has an intellectual and an emotional side as reflected in the Yes

Published by ePublications@bond, 2007

case. Both sides have a place in persuading an audience, but the balance differs according to the occasion. The case also contains other dichotomies: positive/negative; in principle/detailed model; and, symbolic/material.

The Australian Republican Movement (ARM) has always tried to avoid being too negative, unlike much general political advocacy. This means avoiding attacking the British Royal Family but emphasising the strengths of an Australian Republic. It would have been counter-productive to attack Queen Elizabeth herself anyway, though some of the other members of the Royal Family do leave themselves open to attack. We do, however, attack the institution of the monarchy.

The ARM has also concentrated on the symbolic reasons for a Republic and only occasionally attempted to point out the advantages in trade promotion and world affairs of having our own head of state to speak up for us.

At some presentations it is appropriate to debate the principle alone, but most audiences now also want some discussion of different types (models) of Republic as the debate has moved on.

Format

These presentations vary considerably according to the media (radio, television, press) and the purpose of the occasion. They may also vary according to whether the opposing case is being put at the same time. Debates about the Republic are a common format. So is a format in which an interviewer, more or less hostile or supportive, is firing questions at you.

There are at least four basic formats. The first is the stand-alone lecture or talk in which the speakers set their own terms. The second is the stand-alone interview. The third is the joint interview with an opponent. The fourth is the direct debate between opponents. Each of these formats is quite common.

Often the starting point can be inauspicious in that the opportunity to be persuasive only arises because of some event not of our own choosing. These might include the wedding of Charles and Camilla or a visit by Charles to Australia. In those circumstances the presentation of the case can easily be distorted.

Manner and tone of voice

Rather than being quiet and balanced, I wish that I was louder and more theatrical if it meant that I could convey my passion more effectively. The Yes case has generally positioned itself as calm and rational in comparison with those on the monarchist side who claim that the world as we know it will come to an end if Australia becomes a Republic. But it may mean that we have come across as not passionate enough.

adracadadra!

New and Expanding Networks

We are delighted with the initial success of our recent collaboration with **LEADR** and **ADRA** to broaden the readership for **ADR Bulletin** by bringing it to the attention of their members and offering first time subscribers an attractive discount.

We have recently concluded arrangements with **VADRA members** to make subscriptions available online to their members.

If you would like to explore developing similar relationships for your organisation please contact **Matthew Langman** our marketing guru at **langman7@bigpond.com**

My usual case

The case I put hasn't changed that much over the past 30 years, other than to incorporate issues that have arisen since (such as whether the Head of State is the Queen or the Governor-General).

I first place the idea of an Australian Republic in an historical context as a natural evolution in the process of Australian national identity. The move to a Republic then becomes, as the ARM slogan puts it, 'The next step'. In the course of this step the process has included constitutional steps, including the *Australia Act* and the Statute of Westminster, and non-constitutional steps such as the practice of having Australians as Governor-General, the introduction of a new national anthem, 'Advance Australia Fair', to replace 'God Save the Queen', and the introduction of the Order of Australia to replace imperial honours.

I then address some of the common fears and furphies, including the idea that Australia's social stability and economic growth are linked to the constitutional monarchy; and the idea that some things that Australians seem to hold dear, like the British Commonwealth, or the flag, will be taken away if Australia becomes a monarchy. Recently I have added the notion of a future King Charles of Australia (but not in too personal or negative a way).

The next step is to exhort the audience to do something about it by getting active. My task is to build urgency. I reject the idea that the Republic is inevitable and advance the proposition that it has to be worked for. It won't just happen. The idea of inevitability is a sop for weak republicans and a front for sneaky monarchists.

The final step is to talk about the details both of the process and of the particular proposal. The former involves discussing the idea of a plebiscite (or preliminary vote) prior to the referendum. The latter involves discussing the difference between direct and parliamentary election. Both involve some introduction of the constitutional status quo, including s 128 of the Constitution under which change takes place and the current role of the Governor-General.

Strengths and weaknesses

Part of putting a case is to recognise its weaknesses in the eyes of the audience. The weaknesses are as follows:

- '*Why bother?*' For many people, particularly young Australians, it is not a high priority issue. One of the problems is the view that 'well, it is only symbolic'. I must then appeal to other issues of symbolism, such as making the Governor-General an Australian.
- '*What will it do for me?*' The Republic is not a hip-pocket nerve issue in a positive sense. Furthermore the change to a Republic does cost money. My case has two parts. The first is democracy costs money so it should not be an issue. The second is that in foreign affairs and in world trade we need our own head of state working for us and *not* for Britain.

The issue of the British Royal Family is very sensitive. I tread very lightly. My case is about institutional change, not about personalities. It is certainly not an attack on the Queen. Furthermore, I say, all the evidence suggests that the Queen and Prince Charles recognise that this is a decision for Australians to make. They are sympathetic to and understand the republican case, if not to the cause. However, I must say that treading lightly misses many opportunities to trade on the antics of the younger members of the Royal family.

Telling my story

Some of these strengths and weaknesses can be addressed in a personal story-telling format. This is my closing point for this article. This approach enables me to speak about my own background as follows:

> I was part of a generation for whom the trappings of the British monarchy were intrusive enough to make me want to reject them. I am part of the generation, now well into their 50s, whose earliest memories include being paraded by our school teachers to see Queen Elizabeth on tour 'down under' in 1954, in my case at Adelaide's Queen Victoria racecourse.

One of the things I wanted to reject because it was foreign was 'God save the Queen', played in picture theatres as a matter of custom. It rankled with me, although I was embarrassed (I'm embarrassed now to say) when a girl friend who was made of sterner stuff refused to stand up for the national anthem with everyone else. I was too much of a conformist.

I was mildly offended too when I applied for my first passport in 1971 in order to leave Australia for the first time and discovered that I was still officially a British subject.

Just to recall those pin pricks gives me heart as an Australian republican because it shows just how far Australia has come and how much society has changed in such a relatively short time. South Australia's Premier, Sir Thomas Playford named Adelaide's new satellite city Elizabeth in the 1950s. Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies wanted to call Australia's new decimal currency 'the Royal' in the 1960s. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser floated the idea of Prince Charles as Governor-General in the late 1970s. We were British to the bootstraps in my recent memory.

The approach also enables me to introduce other Australian republican arguments from Geoffrey Dutton (*Australia and the Monarchy*) and Donald Horne (*The Lucky Country*) in the 1960s right through to Macgregor Duncan, Andrew Leigh, David Madden and Peter Tynan (*Imagining Australia*) in the 21st century.

This is a campaign for a change which will prevail. Time is on our side. How much time it will take depends in part upon the persuasion skills of those who take the message in its different guises to all the Australian audiences who must be persuaded that the time is right now, that there is no reason to delay. ●

John Warhurst is a Professor of Political Science at the ANU. He brings to the campaign for an Australian Republic a background in academia, political activism and the media. He has been an active republican since the mid-1970s when he started talking to Rotary Clubs, but especially since 1997 when he has played leading roles in the Australian Republican Movement. He has been a member of the national committee of the ARM since 2001 and he was ARM national chair from 2002–2005.