

## THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS – AN EXPENSIVE PROVINCIAL THEATRE

by George Venturini

*Vulgus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur.*

The masses want to be cheated, so let us cheat them

(attributed to Petronius, Roman satirist, 27-66 c.e.)

Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God Queen of the United Kingdom and Her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth, was in Australia between 19 and 29 October 2011.

Elizabeth II is also Queen of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu, in each of which she is represented by a Governor-General. Elizabeth II holds a variety of other positions, among them Supreme Governor of the Church of England, Duke of Normandy, Lord of Mann, and Paramount Chief of Fiji. Her Majesty is also styled Duke of Lancaster, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of many of her realms, Lord Admiral of the United Kingdom, Defender of the Faith in various realms for differing reasons - and Head of the Commonwealth.

Her Majesty ascended the throne in February 1952. Since 1947 the Queen has been married to Philip, born a prince of Greece and Denmark. The Royal Couple are second cousins once removed: they are both descended from Christian IX of Denmark - Elizabeth II is a great-great-granddaughter through her paternal great-grandmother Alexandra of Denmark, and the Duke is a great-grandson through his paternal grandfather George I of Greece. As well as second cousins once removed, the couple are third cousins: they share Queen Victoria as a great-great-grandmother. Elizabeth's great-grandfather was Edward VII, while Edward's sister Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse and by Rhine, was the Duke's great-grandmother. Prince Philip had renounced his claim to the Greek throne and was simply referred to as Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten before being made Duke of Edinburgh prior to their marriage. As a Greek royal, Philip was a member of the House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg, the Danish royal house and a line of the House of Oldenburg. He was transformed under the tutelage of the influential Lord Louis Mountbatten, Queen Victoria's great-grandson. He renounced his Greek titles. 'Mountbatten' was an Anglicisation of his mother's titular designation, Battenberg. The marriage was controversial; Philip was Greek Orthodox, had no

financial resources behind him, and had sisters who had married Nazi supporters. So: out went the Greek Orthodox religion, in came the Church of England. And, importantly, he learned to ride a horse. The Queen Mother was reported to have strongly opposed the marriage, even referring to Philip as ‘the Hun’. The Royal Couple have four children and several grandchildren.

Elizabeth II is currently one of the longest-reigning monarchs of the United Kingdom or any of its predecessor states, ranking behind Victoria - who reigned over the U.K. for sixty-three years, George III - who reigned over Great Britain and subsequently the U.K. for fifty-nine, James VI - who reigned over Scotland for fifty-seven, and Henry III - who reigned over England for fifty-six. Should she still be reigning on 9 September 2015, at the age of 89, her reign will surpass that of Queen Victoria and she will become the longest reigning monarch in British history. If she lives that long, and the Prince of Wales does also, he would be the oldest to succeed to the throne, surpassing William IV, who was 64.

The 16 countries of which Her Majesty is Queen are known as Commonwealth Realms; their combined population, including dependencies, is over 129 million. In theory Her powers are vast; in practice - officially and in accordance with convention - She Herself never intervenes in political matters. In the United Kingdom at least, however, the Queen is known to take an active behind-the-scenes interest in the affairs of state, meeting regularly to establish a working relationship with Her government ministers.

Her Majesty long reign has seen sweeping changes in her realms and the world at large, perhaps most notably the final dissolution of the former British Empire - a process which began in the last years of her father’s reign - and the consequent evolution of the modern Commonwealth of Nations.

The whole shebang of the Battenbergs goes back to Sophia of Hanover. Sophia of the Palatinate, Princess Palatine of the Rhine was the daughter of Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine, and commonly referred to as Sophia of Hanover (1630-1714). In 1658, at Heidelberg, she married Ernest Augustus, who in 1692 became the first Elector of Brunswick-Lüneburg. Ernst August was a second cousin of Sophia’s mother Elizabeth Stuart, as they were both great-grandchildren of Christian III of Denmark. Sophia became an heiress to the crowns of England and Ireland and later the crown of Great Britain. She was declared heiress presumptive by the *Act of Settlement* of 1701. Sophia, a granddaughter of James VI of Scotland and I of England, died less than two months before she would have become Queen. Her claim to the thrones passed on to her eldest son, George Louis, Elector of Hanover, who ascended them as George I on 1 August 1714. Such persistent in-breeding would go a long way in explaining the madness of George III, the depravity of George IV, and - more recently - the sexual preference/s of Edward VIII, the ‘lightness’ of Charles, the sexual

ambivalence of the new Edward, and the unmistakable summing up of all good qualities in the unlikely-Battenberg-looking young Harry the Nazi.

In 1917 the Hanover-Saxe-Coburg-Gotha turned themselves into Windsor, and in a 1960 Order-in-Council, it was decreed that those descendants of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip who were not Princes or Princesses of the United Kingdom should have the 'personal surname' Mountbatten-Windsor. In practice all of their children, in honour of their father, have used 'Mountbatten-Windsor' as their surname.

Since becoming Queen, Elizabeth has been spending an average of three hours every day 'doing the boxes' - reading state papers sent to her from her various departments, embassies, and government offices. She has, therefore, first hand information of trade and commerce. That places Her Majesty in an ideal position as a 'protected' insider trader.

The Queen's personal fortune has been the subject of speculation for many years. Sometimes estimated at US\$ 10 billion, recently 'Forbes' magazine conservatively estimated her fortune at around US\$ 500 million. This figure seems to agree with official Palace statements which called reports of the Queen's supposed multibillion-dollar wealth 'grossly over-exaggerated'; however, it conflicts with a total addition of the Queen's personal holdings. Her personal art collection is worth at least 10 billion English pounds, but is held in trust for the nation, and cannot be sold. The Queen also privately owns large amounts of property which have never been valued, including Balmoral Castle and Sandringham House. Press reports, upon the death of the Queen Mother, speculated that the Queen inherited estate worth around 70 million pounds. Furthermore the Queen owns of the Duchy of Lancaster, which is valued at 310 million pounds. The Queen technically owns the Crown Estate with holdings of 6 billion pounds; although the income of this is transferred to the Treasury in return for the civil list payments. About of all this matter of 'uncommon wealth' more will be said in the future.

The British Empire began its metamorphosis with the Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference of 1926, followed by the formalisation of the Declaration in the *Statute of Westminster* of 1931.

By the time of Elizabeth's accession in 1952, there was much talk of a 'new Elizabethan age'. Since then, one of the Queen's roles has been to preside over the United Kingdom as it has shared world economic and military power with a growing host of independent nations and principalities. As nations have developed economically and culturally, the Queen has witnessed, over the past 60 years, a gradual transformation of the British Empire into its modern successor, the Commonwealth of Nations.

The Commonwealth of Nations is not a political union, but an intergovernmental organisation through which fifty-four independent members state with diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds are regarded as equal in status. All but two of these countries - Mozambique, admitted in 1995 and Rwanda, admitted in 2009 - were formerly part of the British Empire. The Commonwealth is a forum collectively known as the Commonwealth Family, held together by a shared 'culture' which is expressed through political and legal practices, sports and literary heritage. Diplomatic missions between Commonwealth countries are designated as High Commissions rather than embassies.

In April 1949, following the London Declaration, the appellation 'British' was dropped from the title of the Commonwealth to reflect its changing nature. The London Declaration is often seen as marking the beginning of the modern Commonwealth. The Commonwealth's objectives were first outlined in the fourteen points of the Singapore Declaration of 1971, which committed the Commonwealth to the institution of world peace, promotion of representative democracy, good governance, the rule of law, human rights, individual liberty, the pursuit of equality, opposition to racism, the fight against poverty, ignorance, and disease, free trade and multilateralism. To these were added opposition to discrimination on the basis of gender by the Lusaka Declaration of 1979, and environmental sustainability by the Langkawi Declaration of 1989. These objectives were reinforced by the Harare Declaration of 1991. Half of Commonwealth countries have the 'Westminster System' of parliamentary democracy. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the supreme court of fourteen Commonwealth members.

The Commonwealth has long been distinctive as an international forum where developed economies - such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Singapore - and many of the world's poorer countries seek to reach agreement by consensus.

Under the formula of the London Declaration, Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of the Commonwealth, a title which is currently individually shared with that of the sixteen 'Commonwealth realms'. The majority of members, thirty-three, are republics, and a further five have monarchs of different royal houses.

The members have a combined population of 2.1 billion people, almost a third of the world population, of which 1.17 billion live in India and 94 per cent live in Asia and Africa combined. After India, the next-largest Commonwealth countries by population are Pakistan with 176 million, Bangladesh with 156 million, Nigeria with 154 million, the United Kingdom with 61 million and South Africa with 49 million. Tuvalu is the smallest member, with about 10,000 people. Algeria, Madagascar, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen have applied to join the Commonwealth. Of these five, Algeria and Madagascar were never British colonies or possessions.

In recent years, the Commonwealth has suspended several members 'from the Councils of the Commonwealth' for 'serious or persistent violations' of the Harare Declaration, particularly in abrogating their responsibility to have a democratic government. This was done by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group - CMAG, which meets regularly to address potential breaches of the Harare Declaration. Suspended members are not represented at meetings of Commonwealth leaders and ministers, although they remain members of the organisation. Currently, there is one suspended member: Fiji. Nigeria was suspended between November 1995 and May 1999. Pakistan was the second country to be suspended, in October 1999. The Commonwealth's longest suspension came to an end on 22 May 2004, when Pakistan's suspension was lifted following the restoration of the country's constitution. Pakistan was suspended for a second time, far more briefly, for six months in 2007-08. Zimbabwe was suspended in 2002; it withdrew from the organisation in 2003. Fiji was suspended several times before being 'fully suspended' on 1 September 2009.

The Commonwealth activities are carried out through the permanent Commonwealth Secretariat, established in 1965, and headed by the Secretary-General. The Secretariat has 13 divisions and units; currently it employs around 275 full time staff from around three quarters of its 54 member states. The Commonwealth is represented in the United Nations General Assembly by the Secretariat, as an observer.

The main decision-making forum of the organisation is the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting - CHOGM, where Commonwealth Heads of Government, including amongst others Prime Ministers and Presidents, assemble for several days to discuss matters of mutual interest.

The most recent CHOGM was held in Perth, Western Australia on 28-30 October 2011.

The head of government hosting the Heads of Government Meeting is called the Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office, and retains the position until the following CHOGM. After the Perth CHOGM, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard became Chairperson-in-Office.

In recent years, the Commonwealth has been accused of not being vocal enough on its core values. Allegations of a leaked memo from the Secretary-General instructing staff not to speak out on human rights were published in October 2010.

Criticisms have returned after the Perth Meeting. There the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2011 considered a report by an Eminent Persons Group panel which asserted that the organisation had lost its relevance and was decaying due the lack of a mechanism to censure member countries when they violated human rights or democratic norms. The panel made 106 'urgent'

recommendations including the adoption of a Charter of the Commonwealth, the creation of a new Commissioner on the rule of law, democracy and human rights to track persistent human rights abuses and allegations of political repression by Commonwealth member states, recommendations for the repeal of laws against homosexuality in 41 Commonwealth states and a ban on 'forced marriage.' The failure officially to release the report, or accept its recommendations for reforms in the area of human rights, democracy and the rule of law was decried as a "disgrace" by former British Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind, a member of the E.P.G., who told a press conference: "The Commonwealth faces a very significant problem. It is not a problem of hostility or antagonism, it is more of a problem of indifference. Its purpose is being questioned, its relevance is being questioned and part of that is because its commitment to enforce the values for which it stands is becoming ambiguous in the eyes of many member states. The Commonwealth is not a private club of the governments or the secretariat. It belongs to the people of the Commonwealth."

In the end, two-thirds of the E.P.G.'s 106 urgently recommended reforms were referred to study groups, an act described by one E.P.G. member as having them "kicked into the long grass." There was no agreement to set up the recommended position of Human Rights Commissioner, instead a ministerial management group was empowered with enforcement. However, the group includes human rights offenders such as Bangladesh. It was agreed to develop a Charter of values for the Commonwealth without any decision on how compliance with its principles would be enforced.

In Australia's case Commonwealth countries are an important part of the AusAID programme and AU\$ 10 million is provided annually to the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. In addition, Australia has paid the annual fees to CHOGM and the United Nations of some smaller states, including Nauru, when their budgets have been under strain. Occasionally, Australia has taken stands as well. Prime Ministers Robert Hawke and Malcolm Fraser played a major role in the expulsion of Ian Smith's Rhodesian regime from the Commonwealth and the subsequent inclusion of Zimbabwe. Hawke's and Fraser's Rhodesian stance would have outraged Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies who in an extraordinary comment said he did not take seriously "worldwide hysteria" about the Sharpeville massacre (March 1960) and the denunciation of South African racial policy.

Menzies believed that *Apartheid* was a domestic matter and that "we in other countries should not interfere." Menzies was quick to point out at Commonwealth conferences that although Australia had a racially discriminatory immigration policy he did tell his colleagues "We don't wish to see created in our country the tremendous racial concerns which you have to encounter." He then, disingenuously remarked, that "we have found no difficulty in receiving diplomats from Asian countries or on meeting them socially and otherwise on equal and friendly terms!"

As will be seen, Menzies was - amongst other things - an hallucinating monarchist.

The monarchy still epitomises conservative values and the *status quo*. It is a bastion against change, the living embodiment of a hierarchical society, reinforcing the notion that there is an established order: people should know their place and accept it.

The Battenberg-Windsor monarch dissolves Parliament, appoints and dismisses Prime Ministers - even through a C.I.A.-operated Governor-General's action, assents to legislation, signs treaties, declares war and appoints judges. These powers are generally exercised by the Prime Minister - under royal prerogative. Using this prerogative, a British Prime Minister can go to war without a debate in Parliament - as Blair and Howard did recently. Whole areas of secondary legislation are handled by the Privy Council - the members of which are appointed for life - and by Orders-in-Council, and never come before Parliament. Members of Parliament swear an oath of - or affirm - allegiance to the Queen, not to the people they represent. The monarch meets Her Prime Minister once a week. Britain's peoples - and so Australians - are not citizens but subjects. They have been conditioned from birth to accept that there is only one form of government, and that is a 'constitutional monarchy'.

The image presented is that the monarchy follows age-old tradition. In reality, 'The Firm' - as its members refer to it - is a very modern construct, dating back to Queen Victoria who ruled from 1837 to 1901. The death of the Queen Mother in 2002 marked the end of the physical connection between the present 'House of Windsor' and Victorian Britain and Empire.

Under Hanoverian rule - 1714-1836 - royalty became increasingly discredited, with American independence, the madness of George III - under which New Holland was invaded and a penal colony was established and genocide was unleashed, in time to become Australia, and the depravity of George IV. In the face of a strengthening republican mood, Victoria and Albert set about making the institution popular.

The opening of parliament was reinvented by Edward VII (1901-10). He introduced the theatrics of the Black Rod knocking on doors and the practice of courtiers walking backwards. Queen Elizabeth II, for her part, once curtailed the opening ceremony so she could enjoy a day at the races.

Edward VIII was a fascist sympathiser, and a trusted friend of Hitler. Several of Prince Philip's sisters married German aristocrats who collaborated with the Nazis.

In attempting to modernise the monarchy, 'The Firm' opened up to the outside world, at least to a limited extent. The Royals became a media commodity in a circulation and ratings-driven age. Its decadent, morally bankrupt and reactionary nature was exposed. The watershed year was 1992, described in the Queen's inimitable way as her *annus horribilis*. Few people had any idea what she

was talking about. Her use of arcane language reinforced how far removed she is from the real world. Tabloid newspapers had a field day. But it had been a bad year. A fire at Windsor Castle provoked widespread anger when it was revealed that the property was not insured and that 'The Firm' was about to present a repair bill for 40 million pounds to taxpayers. There was a series of domestic *faux pas*: photos of a topless Duchess of York with businessman John Bryan; Princess Anne divorcing and remarrying within six months; and the marriage between heir to the throne Prince Charles and Princess Diana collapsing amid bitter mutual recriminations.

In search of rehabilitation, the Royals 'went to the people', and visited pubs and Glaswegian council houses ! The royal yacht was decommissioned and 'The Palace' travel budget reduced. A fraction of the Queen's accounts was declared - reluctantly, and a very small amount of tax was paid - somewhat voluntarily.

Social attitudes had shifted significantly and the monarchy was struggling to keep up: in 1957 when a respected journalist had ventured to suggest Her Majesty's speaking style was a 'pain in the neck' he was mysteriously assaulted in the street. Deference was diminishing - and for some good, extended reason. Fergie won the new title of Duchess of Pork, Edward became Prince Plonker and Andrew was portrayed with topless models on holiday. The media attention courted by the Royals was undermining the institution's credibility. The low point was the death of the Princess of Wales in 1997 and the Royal Family's unfeeling reaction. Paradoxically, Princess Diana's death became the focus of anger against the monarchy. The question of its viability was posed starkly. Only the direct intervention of Tony Blair saved the day. His leading spin doctors were deployed to help rebuild the monarchy's crumbling reputation.

On the other hand, the Queen Mother's televised 100th birthday celebration in London on 19 July 2000 was seen by seven million people in Britain - nearly half of all viewers that night. An estimated quarter of a million people filed past her coffin in Westminster Hall and the funeral was watched by 300 million people worldwide. A highly successful historian put forward the thoroughly reactionary view that the ceremony demonstrated the "entirely instinctive emotional bond" between crown and country. Following this view, the monarchy and the class system it upholds is the 'natural order'. But there is nothing instinctive about the relationship between the Royal Family and its subjects. It has been systematically cultivated and conditioned, day in and day out fed to a telestupefied populace - some kind of cheap, modern-day mass-narcotic.

Princess Diana's death, and the incredible outpourings of emotion at the time, led to the monarchy fearing that in a massive show it could never live down being upstaged by the upstart Diana.



Support for the Royal Family is steadily declining, although it still commands respect from significant, though ageing, sections of the Commonwealth population - the greater the distance the stronger the addiction to 'news' as a filler of an empty inner life.

The monarchy is an anachronism, totally out of step with life in the twenty-first century.

For more than half a century 'the Queen' has been the last resort to the backwoodsmen - and women, too - of Australia, a symbol of all which is good and worthy, despite Her Majesty's increasingly dysfunctional family, and archaic constitutional arrangements and pretensions. To a greater or lesser extent Her Majesty's far away Prime Ministers - whether in sycophantic self-indulgence *à la* Menzies, or cautious homage *à la* Gillard have played to the masses. One wonders whether a 'republican' Gillard should say one more time, as Gillard did on receiving Elizabeth II in Canberra, that she is "*a vital constitutional part*" of Australian democracy. And one even more so wonders whether any other 85 year old woman would deserve similar 'instant' affection, acclaim, grovelling adoration, were it not for the institution she represents and embodies.

It is tempting, and relatively easy, to ridicule the pompous attitudes of the Battenberg-Windsors. They betray a peculiar, other-worldly arrogance which suggests they really do believe that they are superior beings. The House of Windsor is unique in the 'western' world for its constitutional role and vast wealth. One of its greatest assets to the capitalist system lies in its potential for rallying reaction. It is a weapon the ruling class keeps in reserve. But even the less extravagant royal families could become a focus for reaction to varying degrees. The Windsors remain a throwback to a far distant time and system of unlimited privileges and power which feed the illusion of both exclusiveness and independence of Australians.

Nevertheless, the media - and particularly the printed media which are largely controlled by and expression of privilege and power in a *Murdochracy* - presented the itinerary of Her Majesty's visit to Australia at the end of October 2011 as a 'historic vote for Australia's future'.

Between 19 and 29 October, the Royal Couple, in the programme from Buckingham Palace, was to be busy as follows: 19 afternoon, arrival in Canberra with a ceremonial welcome at the airport; 20 morning, Queen's meeting with Governor-General Quentin Bryce, and afternoon visit to *Floriade* flower show; 21 morning, Queen's meeting with Prime Minister Julia Gillard and, later, with Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott, afternoon: Parliament House reception hosted by Prime Minister Gillard, and Prince Philip to attend a Duke of Edinburgh Award Reception; 22 morning, presentation of colours to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and in afternoon the Duke of Edinburgh to attend a Commonwealth Study Conference reception; 23 morning, worship at St John's Church, with afternoon Reception and lunch hosted by Governor-General Quentin Bryce; 24 morning, flight to

Brisbane, boarding of a river craft and travel up the Brisbane River to Southbank, and visit to the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. In the afternoon, Reception for emergency response personnel and community members affected by recent floods, Post-flood Rededication Ceremony of Rainforest and opening of Rain Bank, Lunch with the Governor of Queensland, Penelope Wensley, and other guests, and return flight to Canberra; 25 morning, Australian War Memorial visit to view the Afghanistan Memorial and Meeting with Australian Defence Force Personnel at Orientation Hall; 26 morning, flight to Melbourne to attend opening of the Royal Children's Hospital, and in the afternoon, visit to the Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, walk through Federation Square and journey on board a Melbourne Tram, Reception hosted by the Governor of Victoria, Alex Chernov, at Government House, and flight to Perth.

In Perth for CHOGM 2011: 27 morning, visit Clontarf Aboriginal College and view sporting facilities, in afternoon, Garden Party at Government House; 28 morning, Opening Ceremony of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and Lunch for new Heads of Government at Government House, and evening Banquet at the Pan Pacific Hotel; 29 morning, visit the Perth community barbecue event - 'The Big Aussie BBQ' [thus styled by Buckingham Palace], midday, The Queen and Prince Philip depart from Australia.

The days before the arrival and during the visit of the Royal Couple have seen an outpouring of platitudes over the elderly monarch. 'Ephemeral' and even avowed 'republicans' have been eager to sing Her Majesty's praises. It is the kind of 'constitutional tomfoolery' - a provincial farce - which has been going on for decades, without visible abatement.

In 1999 there was a 'referendum' - designed to be responded to negatively because it was worded in a such a way as to propose a 'republic of politicians'. 'Real' Australians intensely dislike politicians. The 'no' case was a grand fraud - a measure of success of 'Parliamentary sovereignty' as firmly distinguished from 'republican democracy'; it became a populist protest because the president was not to be elected by the people. The story in 1999 was that the Queen triumphed off the back of a strange alliance of monarchists and 'direct-election' republicans who put their preferred republican model before the principle of the republic.

Ten years later Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, a *soi-disant* republican, pushed the republic issue aside, although the Senate did not. The first public hearing into a bill providing for a plebiscite on whether Australia should cut its ties with the British monarchy was to be held in Canberra on Wednesday 29 April 2009. On 13 November 2008 the Senate had referred Greens Senator Bob Brown's *Plebiscite for an Australian Republic Bill 2008* to the Finance and Public Administration Committee for an inquiry. The Senate instituted the inquiry because senators deemed the republic issue "an extremely important one for the Australian Parliament and public." The Committee was due to report in March

2009 but extended the reporting date to 15 June 2009. 246 written submissions had been received and nine witnesses were scheduled to appear before a public hearing in April 2009. The matter has languished ever since, partly overcome by political events. Despite Labor's pledge to hold a plebiscite on the question, Mr. Rudd quietly sidelined the republic on 29 April 2009, when he released the Government's response to the '2020 Summit' held the year before.

Senator Brown said that Australians had long supported a move to a republic, and it was now time to revisit the question after the referendum on a model he considered flawed and complex resulted in a vote to keep the monarchy in 1999. "The Government has a long-standing policy commitment for an Australian republic, as well as an election promise to hold a new referendum in 2010." he said.

The Rudd Government did not keep the promise of a referendum. Instead, Mr. Rudd himself was replaced at the hand of some 'Labor' *apparatchiki* and C.I.A. 'protected sources' by Ms. Julia Gillard, the present Prime Minister, returned during new elections in August 2010.

Towards the end of the electoral campaign, on 17 August 2010, Ms. Gillard was asked by a journalist: "Where do you stand on a republic? Is it time to move forward on getting Australia a republic?" She replied in that characteristic Australian s/language which banks on equivocation and demands the use of a conditioning adverb and/or at least a conditional verb: "I obviously am a republican. I believe that this nation should be a republic. I also believe that this nation has got a deep affection for Queen Elizabeth. What I would like to see as Prime Minister is that we work our way through to an agreement on a model for the republic, but I think the appropriate time for this nation to move to being a republic is when we see the monarch change. Obviously I'm hoping for Queen Elizabeth that she lives a long and happy life and having watched her mother, I think there's every chance that she will live a long and happy life. But I think that's *probably* the appropriate point for a transition to a republic." [Emphasis added]

Asked again by the host during a press conference the same day: "... we in the program this morning revisited the republic debate and I've noticed that you've been speaking in the last twenty four hours on this particular topic. So what is your stance on a republic for Australia?", Ms. Gillard replied: "Look, I am someone who supports a republic for Australia, I also understand that there is a great deal of affection for Queen Elizabeth, so when asked about the question of a republic a little bit earlier today, I did say I thought the appropriate transition point *would be* when there is the move to a new monarch, now obviously, I'm wishing Queen Elizabeth a long healthy, happy life and if she's anything like her mother, she [is] certainly going to live a long happy healthy life." [Emphasis added]

An insistent host went on: “Well why wait for that funeral, instead of looking at it now? The Queen is even expecting us to be a republic and has spoken about why we’re not.” He was met with the customary vagueness: “Well, I think it is the appropriate transition time.”

By April 2011 it was thought that support for an Australian republic was at its lowest level since the mid-1990s as growing ambivalence on the need for a home-grown head of state saps the nation’s will for constitutional change. *Newspoll* had 41 per cent in favour and 39 per cent against. This had dropped from a peak of 52 per cent in favour and 35 per cent against in 2000 and 2001. Support for a republic was highest among middle-aged voters, with 48 per cent of those aged 35-49 in favour. The over-50s were more likely to be opposed, while 18-34-year-olds were increasingly undecided. Men were much more likely to support a republic, with 49 per cent favouring the change compared with 34 per cent of women.

A Roy Morgan poll conducted the week preceding CHOGM showed 51 per cent supporting the monarchy and 39 per cent supporting a republic.

Prime Minister Gillard, speaking while visiting north Asia before attending the wedding of William Battenberg-Windsor and Kate Middleton on Friday 29 April 2011, was cool on the possibility of a republic any time soon, despite being a republican. The Prime Minister declared that the time to revisit the republic question would be when the present Queen died or she handed the throne to her eldest son, Charles.

Speaking in Seoul on 24 April, Ms. Gillard dismissed British media criticism of her attendance at the wedding. She said although she was a republican, she represented the people of Australia. Ms. Gillard said the issue of a republic would continue to be discussed within “our national life”.

On leaving Australia the previous week she had reiterated the low priority she attached to the issue. “I think that will happen *at some time*, that we will make that decision to become a republic. But to date Australians have expressed their view and we haven’t had a republic proposal accepted.” [Emphasis added]

Interviewed at her official residence on 23 October 2011 by *The Australian*, Prime Minister Gillard said that she believed Australia would “end up a republic” but “it’s hard now to see what the timeframe is.” She agreed it could be distant. ‘End up’ ? Is that anticipated *nostalgia* ?

According to a leading Australian monarchist support for the monarchy would continue to grow, even after the death of the Queen; he predicted an “enormous retrospective” on her reign when it came to an end. “They will call it the second Elizabethan age. It will be quite astounding.” ... “And then the

interest will come up about the coronation and the next Prince of Wales and the sons and daughters of the Prince of Wales.”

The chairman of the Australian Republican Movement lamented what he saw as “a lack of political leadership on the issue.” “All sides are looking for some sort of cheap political advantage, preferably next week.” he said. “That is not the kind of issue the republic is. It is not about scoring cheap political points.” He said that public fascination with the then forthcoming royal wedding was a symptom of modern celebrity culture. “We’re interested in the goings-on of footballers, of Russell Crowe and of everyone else.” he said. ... “That is quite different [from] the concept of having a republic.”

Even the former chairman of the Republican Movement and former Leader of the Opposition Malcolm Turnbull, remarkably silent on the subject since he went into Parliament, no longer sees the republic as an urgent priority. Playing by the royal rules, he said that “Changing the Constitution is extremely difficult and that is why I believe that the next republic referendum has the best chance of success after the Queen’s reign.” “That moment will be an historic and political watershed.” he said in an opinion piece published last year in *The (London) Times*.

The present chairman, who was once a general, holds the view that even if Australia did not become a republic until after the Queen’s reign was over, a “sensible national discussion” was needed to ensure the nation was ready. Otherwise - he said - Prince Charles would become king of Australia. “It doesn’t matter what we think when the Queen dies ... We don’t have a say ... It is the Windsor family’s line of succession. We will not be consulted. ... It will be done to us, not by us.”

William and Kate’s wedding was certain to be a grand affair, a ‘wedding of mass distraction’ - one which had already garnered wall-to-wall media coverage and might have been viewed by more than 2 billion people. Yet it was feared that the wedding could be met with widespread apathy, and in many instances outright hostility, although not in Australia. There the orgy of deference, snobbery and worship for the hereditary principle which will take place before, during and after the wedding was assured by the media - particularly by the peddlers of porno from the Murdoch stable. So, in Australia the wedding was certain to become more of a spectacle, a form of entertainment, than a historical event to be watched with reverence. It was not to be cricket, one branch of the cult to which Australians are truly devoted: sport.

Today, the monarchy as an institution is anathema to the modern liberal mind, of whatever political affiliation. Amid frequent proclamations of multiculturalism and multilateralism, of fundamental equality and democracy, the monarchy as an institution embodies everything such liberal view of the world detests. But the view belongs to a minority. That is the rub.

It only stands to reason that a royal wedding, particularly a British Royal Wedding, can be seen as a modern-day repeat of the '*panem et circenses* - bread and circuses' political strategy of imperial Rome. In the waning days of that empire, the rulers sought to distract the masses from their grinding misery and the unwieldy wealth and corruption of the *élite* by sporadically throwing scraps of bread to the hungry public while saturating them with spectacles of gore and bloodlust at the Colosseum.

Today, the British public - grinding under massive austerity budget cuts, unemployment, poverty wages, social deprivations and crumbling services - are thrown scraps of 'feel-good comfort' from the much-hyped wedding. Fawning media coverage presented the latest Royal Wedding as a day of romance, nationhood, nostalgia and pride, and of the monarchy getting closer to the people in the marriage of a prince to a commoner.

Meanwhile, the spectacles of gore and bloodlust - admittedly despite much public opposition - are located thousands of kilometres away. This has been so for ten years, in Afghanistan and Iraq, where over a million civilians have been killed in British-supported 'wars-on-terror'. Only one day before the wedding, the British Government announced that troops were to be dispatched to the borders of Libya to provide 'humanitarian corridors' for displaced civilians - many of whom will have been displaced by Royal Air Force ground attack aircraft. Of course, the British Empire has long ago waned as a singular entity and its *élite* is not alone in lording over their masses. Still, the same bread and circuses obscenity is being offered in varied ways by the other 'western powers' - the United States, France, Germany, Italy and the other fiefdoms which today make up the Global Empire of Capital.

But what should be appreciated from the display in Britain is the revelation - albeit unintended - of raw state power. Behind the translucent wedding veil, what can be seen is raw state power which blows away any vestige of illusions of 'Parliamentary democracy', illusions which are not just peculiar to Britain, but to all the 'western powers'. In short, the Empire of Corporate and Financial Aristocracy which has emerged in late capitalism is now asserting itself increasingly and more blatantly as a Dictatorship of Capital. All political parties, whether Conservative as in Britain, 'Labor' as in Australia, Republican/Democrat or Democrat/Republican as in the United States, are seen to be and act as willing servants of that dictatorship.

That the London's royal circus was being imposed, without any public question, at an estimated cost of some AU\$ 70 million, most of that for state security against any sign of popular protest, did not really matter. When the wider cost to the economy of the British government's declared 'public holiday' is factored in, the total cost might have been AU\$10 billion - while the British Exchequer is embarking on implementing austerity budget cuts of some AU\$ 127 billion. The bill for the Royal

Wedding will be footed by the British public through future deeper cuts in jobs, education and health services, and social welfare programmes.

So where is the democracy in that ? Austerity budgets were imposed against public will, a deficit was substantially increased from a royal pageant imposed without democratic consultation, and war expenses were loaded on to the suffering public - even though these wars are opposed by the majority of voters.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth, one of the world's top 10 richest individuals, has a personal fortune which is reckoned to exceed by far her country's US\$ 130 billion deficit cuts. She is a major shareholder in Royal Dutch Shell and British Petroleum - these companies along with Exxon and Chevron make up the 'four horsemen' of global Big Oil. The rest is conversation, fantasy, make believe, a gigantic display of pomp and circumstance - just like 'the monarchy'.

Of the 54 members of the Commonwealth that the British monarch heads, only 16 are not able to select their own head of state - including Australia.

To many the notion of an inherited monarch in the twenty-first century does not fit well, yet in Australia the population, as well as the current government, do not seem to have the will to change the constitution to make the Australian people as free as they think they are. In mid-1970s William Winter 'Willie' Hamilton, a Scottish Labour Member of the House of Commons, said that the reason why the British put up with these "clowns in ridiculous clothes with their prancing horses is because they have been subjected to "lifelong brainwashing about the value of the monarchy." The circus in the media and in politics about the old Mrs. Battenberg-Windsor is almost a hysterical form of personality cult. She is only an old woman and many families include old women, such as a grandmother. No one gets hysterical if grandmother comes for a visit. But look at Australia ! The rhetoric of 'choice' and 'equality' throws things out the window, fawning and boot licking become the preferred vogue. And the people ? *tamquam de merda agetur*. Yet, even the most obdurate subtropical morons began to realise that the Royal Family was no different from other families in the Realm.

Coupled with this is the fact the Queen of Australia may as well be living on another planet as far as any practical benefits to Australia are concerned. The fact that Her Majesty's representative in Australia, the Governor-General, performs all of the necessary political functions required with respect to the local government simply highlights that the monarchy is an absent, redundant, most of the time forgotten and, actually, a completely unnecessary element of Australian political system. *Pacem* to Ms. Gillard and others.

Royal tours arrived in Australia in 1954, 1963, 1970, 1973, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1992, 2000, 2002 and 2006 - and in 2011.

When the young Queen first arrived on 3 February 1954, a crowd of one and a half million people had gathered to watch. Anxiously waiting media described it as Sydney's biggest party since 'Victory over Japan' day with female editorialists gushing over the young monarch's youth, beauty, poise and impeccable fashion sense. "Her dress was simplicity itself, a flutter of champagne chiffon printed in gold which had a tinge of green. Her little hat was a pretty conceit which showed her softly waved hair. The Queen's complexion is flawless and paler than the impression gained from paintings and colour photographs. Many a suntanned woman yesterday must have regretted the extra hours on the beach." one oozed. The grovelling has gone on ever since.

Of course, an 85 year old ordinary woman who would go about dressed in vivid colours - the hottest pink, the brightest lemon or the most evocative turquoise would be seen as a figure of fun, perhaps coming out of *vaudeville* - but not the Queen. It follows: where would *the visibility* go otherwise? Such feast would continue throughout Elizabeth II's most recent visit to Australia.

Still, the 1954 Royal Visit - Her Majesty's first, particularly given the communications and transport facilities of the time, set a high water mark which has never been matched. It lasted two months from 3 February to 1 April and, for the duration, it dominated the front pages of the nation's newspapers. The Queen's travel schedule involved 33 flights taking 57 hours and covering 16,000 kilometres. This paled into insignificance when compared to the airlift required to keep the show on the road. Described as the largest individual civil air operation in history, this involved 257 flights covering more than two million kilometres and carrying over a million pieces of freight. Then there were a further 363 flights by the Royal Australian Air Force.

The federal election, held the month after the Royals departed, saw the Menzies government fight off a strong Labor challenge to retain office. While this is usually credited to the 'Petrov Affair', and Menzies' rightly suspected manipulation of the timing of it, the Royal Carnival with all its pomp and ceremony doubtless played a part. That pomp was present no more strongly than in Canberra in that mid-February. During their five day stay the Royals were the absolute centre of attention. The Queen opened Parliament on 15 February, the Australian-American Memorial on 16 February and presented the Military College at Duntroon with its first set of colours from her hands on 17 February.

It was at the official reception in Parliament House that the Prime Minister of the time abandoned himself to the most archaically sycophantic expression of prostration. Robert Gordon Menzies, Q.C. *et cetera*, a lawyer of a certain ability, but firmly operated by Melbourne big business and safely in hock to the Bank of New South Wales, delivered himself to grovelling by disturbing an obscure



seventeenth century English composer, lute and viol player, musician to Charles I from 1626 to 1642 and poet. So, here was the former and up to November 1938 admirer of the Nazis quoting from Thomas Ford (c. 1580-1648), in a tribute to a lady of his time: “I did but see her passing by, and yet I love her till I die.”

On the occasion of that visit the Duke of Edinburgh was seen wearing his own Field-Marshal’s uniform and carrying a baton. During the second world war he had served in the Royal Navy and was safely as possible posted in different places but always ready to be flown for signs of distinction and victory. It is a *fête* of medals - about twenty? - which would be repeated, though in minor scale and only in the pictures provided by the media to announce the October 2011 ten-day-long visit to Australia to coincide with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth.

No obscure English poet was invoked, but the power of rhetoric was unashamedly displayed for the arrival of the Royal *Fashionista*.

On 19 October 2011, it was noted, Her Majesty “stepped off the plane in a light blue ensemble.” The atmosphere was transformative. An old woman who was present and whose information may be usually directed to scandals and weddings, as the cameras zoomed in for a close-up, was obviously impressed: “She has beautiful skin.” To a neighbour who simply said: “Mmmm.” she intimated: “No, look, she hasn’t a wrinkle.” To which the neighbour rejoined: “Well, she’s a Pom, they don’t go out in the sun.”

On 24 October the press went overboard: the Queen was noted for “wearing a floral scarf and pale green coat.” She was carrying a matching green hat that - those in the know could disclose - “she’ll wear during her Brisbane visit.” From other source, Her Majesty was “dressed in a pale green wool dress by [a famous so-and-so]”. Her dress was described as “a printed silk floral pattern of pale green and turquoise on ivory.” “The matching straw hat is by [another so-and-so] and [for historical exactitude, it was] first worn at Royal Ascot in June of this year.”

On 26 October a usually restrained journalist could not fail to remark that “If anything, absence has made us a little fonder of this bent figure in a big blue hat.” But she later appeared - almost as if by miracle - “in shocking pink!” Those were the precise words from ‘The Palace’, according to *Sky*, and who would dispute the distant and proximate sources?!

On 26 October, at Perth airport “Her Majesty emerged wearing the same fuchsia coat and matching wide-brimmed hat she wore as she departed Melbourne.”

In the picture pre-announcing the 2011 visit the Queen's Consort was seen wearing a uniform and some fifteen medals and white gloves. 'The Duke' is regarded as eccentric, difficult, one with a wacky sense of humour which in another, 'common', mouth could be interpreted as unwarranted. But not Philip, nooh !, never a boor - rather a 'jolly fellow' whose witty - and sometimes foot-in-the-mouth - comments add a questionably light presence to formal occasions.

During a visit to a Queensland Aboriginal cultural centre in 2002, he casually asked an Indigenous leader: "Do you still throw spears at each other?" More recently, on meeting the Oscar-winning Australian 'Cate' Blanchett, who was introduced as "someone who worked in movies", His Royal Highness surprised her with a request to repair the Buckingham Palace DVD. It is not known what Cate responded, but this Royal sense-of-humour is highly appreciated by H.R.H.'s thong-wearing subjects.

A poll conducted earlier in 2011 among 1,200 people showed that interest in forming a republic has dropped to a 17-year low of 41 per cent, down from 45 per cent in 2007.

By all accounts, and for those who care, the Queen is 'popular' in Australia - but she is 'popular' in the same way in which President Obama is 'popular', and would be feted like he would be on a state visit. Even the republicans like Her Majesty. Mr. Rudd, another 'somewhat-but-not-too-much republican' former prime minister, said that "there is a deep affection in Australia for the Queen - I mean, the Queen has been the Queen ever since I was born." And *that* would count !

On 18 October 2011 Prime Minister Julia Gillard, another 'republican', indicated - albeit obliquely - that abolishing the monarchy is not a priority. Foremost on the political agenda now are 'pleasing' multinational behemoths, 'stopping the boats' which bring 'illegal' immigration, the economy, the over-reliance on the raw materials of Western Australia for exports, and indeed the country's reliance on China as their buyer. As a good humoured colleague commented recently: "Gotta have someone guard the quarry !" Too right.

What emerges from that unprincipled attitude is a strange form of 'royalist republicanism'. Most republicans have 'deferred' consideration of constitutional change until after the Queen's death. It does not help republicans that the Queen has been, outwardly, an impeccable monarch - the 1975 Royal ambush of Prime Minister Whitlam apart. As the receptions in several Australian cities were likely to confirm, Australians - republicans and monarchists alike - have a healthy respect, 'love', for the Queen.

Perhaps the most influential republican of this sort was poet Henry Lawson, who believed it was offensive for Australians to remain subjects of the crown.

Thus, over one hundred years ago, in *A song of the Republic*, Lawson wrote that Australians had to choose between “The Old Dead Tree and the Young Tree Green / The Land that belongs to the lord and Queen, / And the Land that belongs to you.” Clearly, Lawson thought there was no cause for any hesitation. In his view, there was little in common between Australia and England except for a shared language - perhaps, one should add. Worst of all was the ‘good-natured contempt’ the upper class in the mother country reserved for its southern sons.

Certainly, Australian ‘civic culture’ is no longer as explicitly British as it once was. This is not to deny some ‘British heritage’ when it comes to ‘Parliamentary democracy’ - rather Parliamentary sovereignty - or the common law, although an insecure need to prove that Australians are more British than the British is perceived to be a thing of the past, except for ‘patriotism’: ‘slow march’ in parade and bag-pipe music at funerals. But there is no denying it: Australian republicanism has stalled. This is because it has been so preoccupied with the symbolic and continues to be defined by its anti-British flourishes. It fails to say enough about exactly why Australians need a republic beyond the simplistic slogan of ‘having a resident for president’. Australians seem to be unable, perhaps because of widespread ignorance and political illiteracy, to conceive of a republic as a popular government for the common good, as an anti-despotic, balanced and representative form of self-rule.

They may seem to be unable to dispel the misconception that supporting a republic must mean trashing the majority’s British heritage. They may also be unable to provide a clearer answer to that most fundamental question: in what ways, symbolic and otherwise, will becoming a republic enhance what it means to be an Australian citizen?

Such were the basic questions that those who care were asking in October 2011. Most would confine themselves to the crass question: how much would the visit cost? There was good sense in that, too. The last time the Queen visited Australia, for the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, the Australian taxpayer paid AU\$ 1.8 million for the brief tour. It was AU\$ 1.4 million over budget. The figures were revealed under the Senate Estimates procedures.

Still, in October 2011, the Royal Couple would arrive in Australia and no doubt would take the locals’ pulse and do their business - discretely, of course.

The Royals were due to land in Canberra on 19 October by chartered plane, together with an-up-to-30 support staff.

The Queen's main official purpose was to open the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth on 28 October.

But the Royal Couple would also attend functions in Canberra, Brisbane and Melbourne, where the Queen was to open the new Royal Children's Hospital on 26 October. This was the Queen's sixteenth visit to Australia in her 59 years on the throne. During her reign she has made more than 250 overseas visits, entertained more than 1 million people at garden parties and conferred 388,000 awards and honours. And, of course, there are the 30-odd Welsh corgis to be attended to.

A military band would play and hundreds of school children would be on hand to greet the Royal Couple at their touch-down in Canberra.

Invitations to the royal reception, the matter of a glorious, though mysterious, carriage fit for a monarch and a visit by the head of the Church of England to a small Canberra Anglican church were having the national capital a-flutter as the Queen and Prince Philip prepared to touch down. There is a hilarious story attaching to that coach. Once Labor Senator John Faulkner used the already mentioned Senate Estimates Committee to revisit a matter which had been vexing him for some time: a carriage which had been under construction for seven years in Sydney as a private gift from a Sydneysider to the Queen, helped along by an AU\$ 245,000 handout by the office of former prime minister John Howard. No one from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet had ever seen the splendid creation. "I have a very quick question. Have you found the coach?" Senator Faulkner asked the Department's Assistant Secretary, ceremonial and hospitality branch. "I do not think the coach was ever lost." the Secretary replied, adding that he understood from press reports that it was in a warehouse in Sydney. Alas, he could not provide an update on what had happened to the coach, known as the State Coach *Britannia*.

In fact, the coach had been built at North Head, Sydney, by one who had once cared for Prince Philip's horses, drove royal coaches for Buckingham Palace and crafted the Australian State Coach, Australia's gift to Her Majesty for the 1988 Bicentenary. On 18 October he told *The (Melbourne) Age* that he expected an announcement "any day now" from London that the latest coach - complete with an extraordinary array of historical fittings from the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, ancient ships, a segment of Newton's apple tree and even the front door of 10 Downing Street - could be transported to the other side of the world. "We have people in Britain keen to sponsor it and present it to the Queen for her Diamond Jubilee next year - this is only the second time in 1000 years that a monarch will celebrate a Diamond Jubilee [60 years]." he said.

Even die-hard republicans would have had to admit that the Royal Couple is a pair of royal troupers who showed no signs of slowing down to any degree at the start of their umpteenth Australian tour.

Finally, Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip arrived and she stepped off the plane “in a light blue ensemble and matching hat” to greet the cream of assembled Antipodeans including Governor-General Quentin Bryce, Prime Ministers Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

Fifty-seven years after she first arrived in Canberra as a young monarch, then greeted by large and rapturous crowds lining the roads, the Queen emerged, a tiny figure at the top of a long flight of airline steps, to a restrained cheer from some 200 schoolchildren and another 200 parents, teachers and minders. Governor-General Quentin Bryce - a “symphony in pink to the Queen's quieter aqua” - offered a curtsy. Prime Minister Julia Gillard, in sensible navy suit, bent her head a bit in what might have been construed as a bow. Ms. Bryce's husband, Michael, and Ms. Gillard's partner, Tim Mathieson, stood by, hardly more than observers, and Prince Philip maintained his traditional role, trailing his wife by a step or two.

It was a perfect ladies' day: the Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory, on hand as well for the welcome, is also a woman, Ms. Katy Gallagher. During the Queen's long reign, there has been nothing quite like it.

Perhaps it is too early to predict this is the monarch's last journey to Australia. The Queen, now 85, and Prince Philip, 90, appeared unaffected by the flight from London aboard their chartered British Airways Boeing 777. As a 21-gun salute boomed out and echoed off the Brindabella hills, the Queen inspected the Australian military's Federation Guard, the evening sun heating the long walk along the runway.

A monarch's task is not so easily finished at such an event. She was handed flowers, again and again, and each was handed back to a chain of ladies-in-waiting with a dexterity born of long practice. The Queen has been laden with flowers for 59 years as monarch. She smiled and offered a word here, a word there, and kept moving. Finally aboard a shiny black Range Rover, she and Prince Philip were driven away, off to the suite built especially for them long ago at Government House, Yarralumla.

Bow or shake? Despite the row which ensued, Ms. Gillard still refused to curtsy when she met the Queen the following day. Instead she performed two shallow bows of her head, once as she entered a room at Parliament House, Canberra, and a second time as she approached the Queen whose hand was outstretched. She quickly put her hand out to the monarch and shook it. She also stood with lips sealed as the British anthem was played at the start of the reception in the Monarch's honour. She did, however, sing the Australian anthem.

The drama was intense. But from 'The Palace' came the correct instruction to the subjects on “How to greet the Queen properly.” It said: “There are no obligatory codes of behaviour when meeting The

Queen or a member of the Royal Family, but many people wish to observe the traditional forms. For men this is a neck bow (from the head only) whilst women do a small curtsy. Other people prefer simply to shake hands in the usual way. On presentation to The Queen, the correct formal address is “Your Majesty” and subsequently “Ma’am”. For male members of the Royal Family the same rules apply, with the title used in the first instance being ‘Your Royal Highness’ and subsequently ‘Sir’. For other female members of the Royal Family the first address is conventionally “Your Royal Highness” followed by “Ma’am” in later conversation.”

The media had a field-week over whether Prime Minister Gillard should have curtsied and not bowed - preferably grovelled, meaning ‘respect’ or not did not matter ! Ms. Gillard, of course, added to the controversy when she stood with lips sealed as the British anthem was played.

Ms. Gillard, in a veiled reference to the possibility of Australia becoming a republic ‘one day’, told the Queen in her welcoming speech that “we do not know where Australia’s path of nationhood may lead in the times to come.” But she added that she knew for certain that the Queen’s journey of service would continue. It did not help Ms. Gillard - British-born - that she should let it be known that curtseying is “just not me.” Of course, but why did she not ‘fake it’ ?

Ms. Gillard was asked on Melbourne radio whether she believed curtseying was demeaning. She said: “Some things are you, some things aren’t. I made a choice and I thought I would feel most comfortable with bowing my head. The advice was to do what comes most comfortably and naturally.”

In addition, she also drew criticism for not wearing a hat. How rude could one be ?! William Hanson, a British *étiquette* and protocol expert, told Sydney’s 3AW radio that Ms. Gillard should have curtsied and worn a hat. By contrast Australia’s Governor-General, Quentin Bryce - who was born in Brisbane - curtsied to both the Queen and Prince Philip. That is the way of true colonials !

As the controversy took over social websites, a prominent Australian TV host tweeted: “Small thing: saw GG [Governor General] curtsy to Queen but not the PM. Anyone know background to that?”

To downplay the issue, Ms. Gillard insisted she had done nothing wrong, pointing out that she was an admirer of the Queen and believed many Australians held her with a great deal of affection and respect - “and so do I”. She added: “I mean, what a life, what an incredible life she’s lived over so many generations of change and to see someone play such a steadfast role over so much change, I think, is remarkable.”

But the matter of ‘how properly to greet the Queen’ would vex the mind of the colonials forever. Was Australia’s P.M. rude to the Queen? Was it just their difference in height, or was she holding herself ramrod straight to make a point? Just how did Australia’s Prime Minister greet the Queen on the monarch’s arrival in the country? There are those who call Ms. Gillard’s conspicuous failure to bend the knee a trifle half-hearted, while others think it downright defiant. After much agonising, the matter seemed to be settled over some fundamental points. And the ‘proper’ press was full of them.

The usual ‘pragmatic solution’ was proffered: “Perhaps she should have pulled out all the stops and gone for the full-blown traditional curtsy to show some proper old-fashioned respect.” And why so? Ms. Gillard “should have forced herself to manage a bit of a nod, if only because as she hastily said afterwards she admired the Queen. And a little deference to an older woman wouldn’t have come amiss please whoever she was.”

Then and the day after the two ‘wise women’ overcame the impasse by such serious exchange as: “Good morning your Majesty, it is lovely to see you again.” Referring to the bright sunshine blazing down, the Queen replied: “It is beautiful again.” To which Ms. Gillard rejoined: “It is a beautiful, beautiful day, as it was yesterday.”

On 20 October public opinion poll was giving the following figures: for a republic, 55 per cent and for the retention of the present condition, 45 per cent, on a total vote of 5,386. The 45-percenters based their preference on such good reasons as that the monarchy offers Australians “a unifying image of glory, dignity and nobility, as well as reminding us of the wisdom and heroism of past generations over 11 centuries. It helps to keep power out of the hands of self-interested business and political elites. It embodies the principles of authority and justice which are a much better guarantee of peace, security and stability than a foolish and headless egalitarianism.”

On the afternoon of 20 October, at a cost that only the Royal Australian Navy’s auditors might know, the Navy presented the pride of its small V.I.P. fleet *The Admiral’s Barge*, a 12.8-metre study in elegance, its deck teak and its flanks royal blue. It had been hauled from its home on Sydney Harbour, settled on the bed of a large truck, driven down the Hume Highway and transported across the mountains to land locked Canberra, 300 kilometres away. Some wag described the transport as looking something like a classic vintage cruiser from a James Bond movie.

The barge took the Queen and Consort from Government House to Commonwealth Park. The trip was short, no more than six kilometres on the waters of Lake Burley Griffin, an ornamental lake completed in 1963 after the Molonglo River was dammed. It is named after Walter Burley Griffin, the American architect who won the competition to design Canberra. It is 11 kilometres in length, 1.2 kilometres at the widest point, and 4 metres in average depth.

While the Queen waved gently Her Royal gloved hand to the well-wishers lining the shores, the Duke stood behind the command control post as if he were on the bridge, navigating a dreadnought - the stage for a Lehar's *operetta* complete ! Destination: Canberra's annual floral exhibition, *Floriade*, which had been kept open for the occasion.

Elsewhere, on the nation's radio waves, furious debate continued to rage about Prime Minister Gillard's decision not to offer the Queen a curtsy on her arrival in the national capital.

As the Queen later commented on the trip: "It was very popular, there were lots of people there to see the boat go past.", and Ms. Gillard rejoiced: "I suspect there were more people because you were there." Her Majesty added: "It was very nice to be able to do that and see the flowers. I had no idea that they do that every year."

On 21 October the Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh were greeted at Parliament House by the speakers of the House of Representatives and the Senate; diplomats, religious figures and sport entities were among the 700 guests invited. The Royal Couple looked at ease amid the relaxed proceedings, with the Queen wearing "an ivory silk ensemble." Welcoming the Queen, and wearing silvery colours strikingly similar to the Queen's, the Prime Minister invoked former Prime Minister Menzies's famous "I did but see her passing by" debasement, if only to point out: "Far from passing by, you have endured." And she added: "You have endured with dignity and abiding strength of spirit." (Some people with long memory remember that it was not that long ago that Menzies unilaterally decided to call Australia's new unit of decimal currency 'the Royal' ! - just as well 'the dollar' prevailed.)

Prime Minister Gillard said: "So it is, that we greet you on the sixteenth time you have honoured us with a visit to our shores." And she added: "Many heads of state and government are welcomed within these walls, but in this, the home of Australian democracy *you are a vital constitutional part*, not a guest." [Emphasis added]

The Prime Minister appeared to hint - but no more - that Australia may yet become a republic in the coming years as she praised the Queen for a lifetime of service. Ms. Gillard told the Queen that it was not known where Australia's future as a nation lay but it remained a "country on the move." She praised Her Majesty for her "long, eventful and greatly productive" life, during which she had remained true to the pledge she made in Cape Town 64 years ago when, as Princess Elizabeth, she devoted herself to the service of the British people and the Commonwealth.



The Leader of the Opposition, a Catholic priest *manqué* and a visceral monarchist, described the Queen as “one of us” and praised her life as “an exemplar of the ideals of duty and service that make societies strong and civilisations last.”

The Queen followed by paying tribute to the Australian armed forces in her only public speech during the 10-day visit. She also paid tribute to the economic, social and industrial strides Australia had made since her first visit in 1954, and how it played its part on the world stage making significant contributions to peace-keeping efforts. The Queen also praised the sacrifices made by Australians fighting in Afghanistan.

The republic debate would go on. On the occasion it was revealed that eighteen years ago, over a barbeque at Balmoral Castle in September 1993, then Prime Minister Paul Keating told Her Majesty that there was a growing feeling that Australia should have an Australian head of state. “I said such a move was seen as necessary to establish clearly Australia’s identity as an independent nation.” he recorded next day. “Her Majesty authorised me to say that she would, of course, act on the advice of her Australian ministers, as she always has, and on any decision made by the Australian people.” ... “I had come from Australia on the unpleasant errand to tell her, in all her conscientiousness, that we did not need her anymore.” ... “I told the Queen as politely and gently as I could that I believed the majority of Australians felt the monarchy was now an anachronism; that it had gently drifted into obsolescence. Not for any reason associated with the Queen personally, but for the simple reason she was not in a position to represent their aspirations.” ... “The Queen knew I had come to Balmoral to broach this topic with her and she had sat through what must have been a difficult conversation for her. When I finished my remarks, she said, rather plaintively: ‘You know my family have always tried to do their best by Australia.’ .... “I said: ‘Yes, I know that, Ma’am.’ ” ... “She said: ‘I will, of course, take the advice of Australian ministers and respect the wishes of the Australian people.’ ” ... “I said: ‘We would expect no less of you and ask no more.’ ”

Mr. Keating revealed much more of what he told the Queen in two articles in *The Australian* of 21 October 2011, the publication of which might have been designed to coincide with the publication of his recent collection of speeches after he left Parliament.

Keating has gone but Her Majesty is still here.

Mr. William Hayden, Governor-General during Paul Keating’s prime ministership, now believes that the former leader was wrong when he told the Queen she was an anachronism, and that she was no longer needed, reflecting on what he saw as her lack of a contemporary mandate as “banal”, “sad” and a “continuing fantasy”, because - in fact - the Royal Family’s acceptance of the marriage of her grandson this year to a ‘commoner’ had a rejuvenated interest in the monarchy. Mr. Hayden said on

21 October 2011 that that marriage had overturned centuries of tradition and would give the throne a more acceptable “democratic foundation.” Of course, Mr. Hayden would never concede that William and Kate’s marriage was intended as a ‘wedding of mass distraction’, designed to keep the *proles* happy and obedient.

When the big dust cloud of such furious polemic on such absurd, primitive, medieval nonsense as the British monarchy settles down, the truth remains that such *élitist* system does not stand up to scrutiny despite the outpouring of platitudes which accompanied the visit of the Battenberg-Windsors. One had the clear impression that much of such ‘compulsory happiness’ had been dictated entirely by Her Majesty’s infrequent media appearances. Unfortunately, these media appearances are usually so contrived, scripted and stage managed as to be next to meaningless. Who knows what Her Majesty thinks ? The subjects have never been allowed to ask her.

The truth is that the system is designed simply to place the monarchy up on a pedestal for the subjects’ uncritical adoration - as it happens in fanatically blind religious organisations. In the case of monarchies such privileged *élites*, which inherit their positions through nothing more than a lucky accident of birth, are simply deemed - by an odd quirk of history - to be of a higher status in a society than ordinary people. Even the Prime Minister - a person in a way, defective as one may think, but still somehow democratically elected by the Australian people, must visibly abase her/himself before this foreigner, fabulously wealthy, elderly woman, or else be prepared to face widespread public outrage, both at home and abroad. At its heart, this remnant of the class system inherited by Australia is intrinsically abhorrent to democratic ideals everywhere - but most especially to those in Australia who literally believe to share an egalitarian nation.

There is no logical way to defend this system of inherited privilege and caste. The chance of finding out the real person behind the veil of royalty through any realistic, civilised scrutiny by the media, unfortunately appears to be utterly out of the question. When Prince William visited Australia last year, apparently to visit Victorian bushfire victims, the media were unanimous in their verdict that he was “charming”. They reached this conclusion, quite apparently, on the basis of nothing more than some gossip they picked up from the odd person who shook William’s hand as he wandered around on his occasional ‘meet and greet’, and through some television footage they managed to film from a minimum of 50 metres away. This was because one of Clarence House’s [stringent conditions for that tour](#) was that the media would not to be allowed to interview, or come any closer than 50 metres, to what could be Australia’s future head of state. And, obediently, compliantly, no media did try to break those strictures and ask him a question while he was in Australia. William Battenberg-Windsor left, having given just one public address in 2010 - an Australia Day address at the Victorian

Governor's mansion. Afterwards, of course, no-one was allowed to direct a single question to him from the floor.

The institution of monarchy endeavours to ensure that the media consistently present a reverent, artificially constructed, picture of who the Royals are simply to keep them - and the many hundreds courtiers and functionaries who happily sup on the royal gravy-train - in a spectacularly well-funded public service occupation with every perk imaginable. Royal tours are nothing but painstakingly stage managed P.R. extravaganzas designed to keep the uncouth yokels in the distant colonies curtsying, bowing, obsequiously fawning and ferociously tugging their forelocks to these same immensely powerful, wealthy, and well-connected hereditary *élites*. As for the common people, they are not meant to know more than what they are told, because maybe if they did know more and how much like them such Royals really are, that might break the spell which keeps Australians conveniently entranced by the pomp and splendour of monarchy.

And so, once again, there was another, exquisitely stage-managed, royal tour.

On the morning of 23 October Mr. Rudd saw to it that he would become the Canberra Anglican little church's most high profile worshipper - after the Queen of course ! He had been granted dispensation to attend the 11.30 am service. Mr. Rudd took the opportunity to say that the Queen represented "*extraordinary continuity* for the British people, and I think all Australians, whether they are republicans or not, would have a special affection for her." [Emphasis added] How can one speak of "extraordinary continuity" and be a republican ? Well, that contradiction is plain nonsense - everywhere but in Australia. Such ambivalent expressions are totally out of character with the 'republican spirit' of anyone who makes them. They go beyond just courtesy. They are the expression of duplicity and servility, and of a life 'spent downstairs'.

On a 'social note' the press specified that the Queen was wearing "the same outfit she wore to the April wedding of her grandson William to Kate Middleton, though in deference to yesterday's warm spring day, there was no coat. Members of the royal household, always on hand to explain the precise details, described the hat and frock as primrose yellow, and said it was designed by the much-favoured [so-and-so]."

As it was carefully reported, on the afternoon of 23 October, at a reception and lunch in Canberra hosted by the Governor-General, two veterans of the sport of kings and queens - the Cups King, Bart Cummings, and the Queen herself - shared their love of the track when they met, the spring racing carnival on their minds. "Thank you, but I don't bet." said the Queen, with a twinkle in her eye. In fact Her Majesty had inherited a string of racehorses when her father, George VI, died in 1952, and usually has 20 or so flat-race horses in training and reads the *Racing Post* every morning.

On 24 October a very brief visit to Brisbane from Canberra turned out to be more of a ‘visitation’. The Queen, “who was wearing a floral scarf and pale green coat”, had left Canberra at 9.30 am on a R.A.A.F. plane with the Duke of Edinburgh. She was carrying “a matching green hat” that she would wear during her Brisbane visit.

Her Majesty spent about four hours in Brisbane. In that time she performed all sorts of ‘miraculous’ things and live updates were published, almost minute by minute. Her Majesty’s plane had touched down at 11.11 am to cheers from the crowd waiting to greet her. She stepped off the plane at 11.16, greeted by the Queensland Governor, Penelope Wensley, the Premier Mrs. Anna Bligh who, despite her lack of a curtsy had dressed up for the occasion donning a new red outfit, and some ministers. The Queen was driven off in a dark Range Rover, headed with the usual escort to Kingsford Smith Drive then Bretts Wharf - “where for good measure the police and State Emergency Service volunteers almost outnumbered the well wishers prepared to welcome the Queen” - and boarded a “large wave-piercing catamaran with the name *Pure Adrenalin*”, a 27 metre luxury motor yacht specialising in corporate and luxury charters and an appropriate name for the buzzing royalists in the crowd, to arrive to the South Bank Parklands “as thousands of Brisbane locals gather[ed] at a steel barricade, preparing a reception fit for a Queen.”

Some keen fans had been at South Bank since 3 am to get the best spots.

By 11.15 “Royal fever was sweeping over.” amidst “Aussie flags and Union Jack umbrellas. There were Royal-themed temporary tattoos being traded by teenagers. And signs saying thanks and come again.” The crowds had swelled to several thousand along Kingsford Smith Drive, for the occasion closed to traffic with enthusiastic well wishers, many sheltering under umbrellas, lining the foot paths.” Many women had been waiting for hours, uncomfortable on their unused high-heel shoes and under their weirdest hats, soon to be disposed off to return to the customary bare feet under a scorching sun. It was after all an epochal - *iconic*, maybe ? - adoration chance in a life time !

Enthusiasm was overflowing from the public and British journalists, including one from *The (London) Times* and another from *Sky News*, recorded their impression of how “impressed [they were] with the affection being displayed to the Queen.” and with “Australia’s welcome widely reported in British media.” to see “the most important woman in the world.” The Queen “graciously received a ‘hip-hip-hooray’ from the crowd, up the Brisbane River.”

The cruise was expected to take just under an hour before the Royal Couple and dignitaries would arrive at South Bank at about 12.20 for a walk along the Cultural Forecourt.

At 11.43 Premier Bligh was seen “in animated conversation with the Royal Couple on the top deck of the wave-piercing catamaran.” At 12.08 pm the Queen was sitting inside the top cabin of the catamaran while about 20 dignitaries were gathered on the lower deck. At 12.10 Koalas *Nivea*, 9, and *Sprite*, 8, had been hand-picked by Lone Pine Sanctuary to meet with Her Majesty as she and the Duke of Edinburgh had started a stroll through the South Bank rainforest. At 12.13 the Queen was back outside as the catamaran came up towards the Story Bridge and acknowledged crowds who had draped a Union Jack over the side of fencing on the river’s edge. The Premier and the Queen once again emerged from the top cabin to engage in an animated discussion while gesturing to the river bank.

At 12.18 *Pure Adrenalin* had passed under the Story Bridge and was within sight of the crowds lining the Kangaroo Point cliffs and the Central Business District. At 12.20 Premier Bligh was recorded continuing to play tour guide for the Queen and Prince Philip, pointing out the highlights along the river and the areas which suffered during the floods earlier this year.

By 12.26 *Pure Adrenalin* had rounded the Botanic Gardens and was approaching the Captain Cook Bridge and the crowds congregating at South Bank where the Queen “was expected to make a public ‘meet and greet’.” At 12.28 passengers aboard a cross river ferry and CityCat had passed close to the Royal vessel as it passed the Botanic Gardens. The cross river ferry passengers lined the top deck and one waved an Australian flag as the Queen waved.

By 12.33 thousands of people filled the riverside at South Bank as the Royal Couple passed along the river.

At 12.39 the Queen, who at 12.38 “had been offered bananas, pineapples and Bundaberg Rum in a meal prepared by the flooded Stamford Plaza hotel as she cruised up the river, alighted from the *Pure Adrenalin*, being greeted by Lord Mayor Graham Quirk ahead of her public ‘meet and greet’ at South Bank.” There was a crowd estimated at 40,000. There, at 12.42 the Queen had received bouquets and curtsys from a series of small children at South Bank, including one boy dressed as a royal guard, and seven minutes later a small stuffed koala toy. Infantilism was at its highest !

While at 12.53 an excited Premier Bligh began walking through the crowd, talking animatedly to numerous people along the way, the Queen entered the private reception for victims of the Queensland summer of disasters. Stamford Plaza had been given the honour of preparing dessert for the Queen: ‘Essence of Queensland’ it was, which included limes from the Sunshine Coast, north Queensland bananas and an “*iconic* tipple, Bundaberg Rum.”

At 1.26 the Queen left the private reception for disaster victims and heroes and re-entered her Royal Range Rover for a short trip through South Bank, two minutes later starting another public walk about through South Bank, this time near the Arbour ahead of officially opening the Rain Bank at Rainforest Green. At 1.30 the Queen, accompanied by Premier Bligh and the Duke of Edinburgh “in a Panama cane hat”, entered the Arbour to be greeted by two koalas from Lone Pine Sanctuary. At 1.36 a red carpet had been laid out for the Queen to cross a dirt path to the official podium ahead of the official opening of Rain Bank. “Your Majesty the Queen and Your Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, I warmly welcome you to the state.” Ms. Bligh had historically (*iconically*, perhaps ?) said. “We are pleased the river that brought you here today was on her best behaviour. The site we stand on here today was seriously impacted. As you have seen first hand our disaster recovery is in full swing.” Ms. Bligh added that the Queen’s presence was a celebration of Queensland’s “get on with it attitude” - whatever that means in English.

At 1.44 loud applause greeted the Queen as she took the podium. “I am very glad to be back here in Queensland for my 16th visit to Australia.” the Queen said. “This morning we travelled along the river listening to stories of the river breaking its banks. I wish you every success as you rebuild from the damage of the storms with the optimism with which you are renowned.”

At the end of the ceremony - for the chronic just two minutes later - members of the crowd burst in to *God save the Queen*. The Queen then started a tour of Rainforest Green.

At 1.56 the Queen attended the Queensland Government Reception for those affected by the natural disasters during the [southern] summer of 2010/11. The luncheon was hosted by the Governor of Queensland. It was a private event not open to the media.

At 3.33 pm, having completed her scheduled engagements, the Queen was farewelled at Brisbane Airport by officials, there “to shake her gloved hand and wave goodbye.” as the media reported. “The Queen then “climbed the stairs and gave one last, *iconic* wave to the assembled crowd before ducking inside the R.A.A.F plane and head back to Canberra.”

A still, grey dawn set the solemn tone for the Queen’s last event in Canberra on 25 October, a wreath-laying and meeting with past and present members of the defence forces at the Australian War Memorial. The skies had opened by the time the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh arrived, but that did not deter up to 1,000 hardy Canberrans from turning out.

The Queen, escorted by former Defence Force Chief and War Memorial Chairman Peter Cosgrove and Parliamentary Secretary for Defence David Feeney, made her way through the memorial’s courtyard past the Roll of Honour, the Pool of Reflection and the Eternal Flame into the Hall of

Memory. There she laid the wreath at the foot of the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier as swallows swirled around the hall's high dome.

The Queen was to have a full day of activity in Canberra and to leave on 26 October for Melbourne. The Royal Couple would then fly to Perth for CHOGM.

For the Royal Visit to Melbourne 'Occupy Melbourne' protesters had decided to spare the Queen, and retreated orderly. There was much surprise that anyone would protest in Melbourne or anywhere in Australia. After all, it was observed for the occasion, a recent survey by *Credit Suisse International* showed Australia to be the second richest country in the world after Switzerland judged on average wealth, and the richest judged on median wealth. The figures were telling, ranking the highest average wealth, expressed in U.S. dollars, per adult in June 2011 as follows: 1) Switzerland with 540,010, 2) Australia with 396,745, Singapore 284,692 in fifth place, and the United Kingdom 257,881 at the ninth. Oh, what things are possible with smoke, mirrors and statistics! In the end, 'law-and-order' plays pretty well in the outer suburbs, particularly when dispensed by Australian 'uniformed best' beating up the local 'uninformed worst' - a wag mused. That is what was going to happen in Melbourne by instigation of the Lord Mayor.

The Royal programme would have been almost as hectically busy as in Brisbane.

At 11.10 am the R.A.A.F. Royal Transport from Canberra touched down at Melbourne Airport for a 240-minute Royal Visit to what thinks of itself occasionally as 'the Athens of the South'. It was not just an arrival. As the press put it: "... out she pops in (drum roll) ... fuchsia! We think. Possibly rosehip. A hue of puce, perhaps? Pink, to most. Coat, gloves and hat all a-match. She's a sugar-plum vision." Every uncertainty was soon dispelled: "Shocking pink! That was the very word from 'The Palace', according to Murdoch's *Sky*. He should know!

The Queen "appeared in the aircraft doorway, waved, descended the aircraft stairs, shook hands and entered into the Royal Charabanc, blanket over knees, for a short drive to Parkville, where Her Majesty arrived at 11.35 for the official opening of the Royal Children's Hospital. The Queen was greeted by the Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu and his wife Robyn, Governor of Victoria Alex Chernov and his wife Elizabeth, as well as the chairman of the hospital, Tony Beddison, and its C.E.O., Professor Christine Kilpatrick.

Her Majesty listened to the Premier and others and proceeded to unveil a plaque. She then walked around the gleaming new corridors. Security around Her Majesty would have been tight, of course. The 'Occupy Melbourne' protesters who had given the under-exercised riot squad a bit of practice on the previous week had voted not to disrupt the day's Event.

Waiting media, including members of the British press, had been briefed on the Royal protocols for the whirlwind through the hospital. “We must keep five metres ahead ideally, don’t touch, don’t ask questions, just go through.”

There was “a fair crowd now outside the hospital, with the Royal Moments away.” It appeared that Her Majesty was wearing “a floral dress beneath her ‘shocking pink’ ensemble. Philip, in the interests of balanced reporting, is in a sombre grey suit, white shirt and chocolate brown tie.”

At 12.10 pm, after a five-minute ceremony, the Royals were on their way out.

At 12.15 Her Majesty was driven to The Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria and Federation Square. Some irreverent pen noted that “it probably takes longer to say the gallery’s name than the time it will take H.M.Q. to see round it.” But thanks so much for the qualifying *probably* to save the rude scribe the consequences of such impertinence.

At 12.25 a [3AW](#) showbiz reporter tweeted that “he is ‘totally stunned’ by the size of the crowd in the Central Business District. Five times bigger than for Oprah, he reckons.” But, in fact, the over the top described “milling crowds”, which gathered to look at the Royal Couple, were small compared to the hundreds of thousands who had gathered to catch a glimpse of Oprah Winfrey on her visit.

By 12.45, after a marathon ‘meet and greet’, the Royal Couple proceeded to Swanston Street to catch a tram to the nearest stop to Government House. Again, the same pen observed that “there is no first-class cabin. No need to ring.”

Now, this was no ordinary tram, but a specially re-commissioned tram, freshly-painted and refurbished blue, red and white. It was to take the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh and hangers-on some two kilometres down Swanston Street towards a State Reception at Government House.

A journo-poetaster could not help himself and wrote:

*“I did but see her on a tram.*

*I hope the driver called her ma’am.”*

Two viewers, old school friends, remembered the Queen’s first visit to Melbourne in 1954 when they were 16. “We love the Queen, it is nice having something to look up to.” Another viewer was totally mesmerised: “The Queen’s got amazing energy for an 85-year-old and she seems to be genuinely charmed as school children continue to mob her on a seemingly endless red carpet. A lady-in-waiting’s was working hard collecting flowers a few steps ahead.”



At 12.50 the crowd burst into *God save the Queen* as she accepted posy after posy from masses of beaming school children. Enthusiasm was almost orgasmic. Not far from such place of collective *delirium*, the Police, some on horses, was using capsicum spray and dogs to push the ‘Occupy Melbourne’ activists away, with officers dragging some protesters away. **On 21 October, a schoolteacher/writer was punched by a policemen during the violent removal of peaceful ‘Occupy Melbourne’ protesters from a Melbourne Park. It all came about because Lord Mayor Robert Doyle (Lord ?) was “desperate not to have the eyesore of a few tents when the Queen arrives.” On 24 October, in an editorial in Murdoch’s *Herald Sun* Doyle mendaciously defamed the protesters, attempting to justify his actions and asking, rhetorically, “how do these protesters explain the knives, hammers, bricks, bottles and flammable liquids that we found in their illegal tent city? What were they for?”** The teacher, in a public letter, retorted: “It was a campsite, you sneaky, moral dwarf. A campsite. These were the tools used to set up camp. To erect tents, to cook, to establish a peaceful community. To suggest that they were going to be used to attack police is a vile, morally bankrupt slur. ... You lie, you impugn and you defame. You sound not so much like a Mayor as a headmaster - an authoritarian, inept one at that.” And the open letter concluded: “You fail to see the truth before your eyes. We live in a cold, unfeeling, aggressive society. If you express delight at someone getting smacked for defending an ideal, you are a small, small, sad individual. What’s more, you’re party of the problem. Grow a spine.” No action followed.

Whatever one’s views on the ‘Occupy Melbourne’ protesters and their aims, the decisions and actions taken by Doyle and the Victoria Police forcibly to evict peaceful demonstrators, and innocent bystanders, from City Square raised a number of serious questions about infringement of fundamental civil and political rights and the excessive use of force by Victoria Police. Importantly, in Victoria, these human rights have an illusory legal force, through the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, a pale version of a human rights act.

Police have responded to criticism by stating that they were obliged to act after the City Council’s decision. Regardless of whether the decision to evict the protesters was lawful or not - and arguably it was not - the usual problem of use of force and compliance with the law by Police presented itself. Excessive use of force is not a new issue for Victoria or other parts of Australia. No remedy ever seems to be provided.

At 1.05 church bells rang out as the party climbed aboard the ‘Royal tram’.

The spectacle of this 85 years old woman looking with an empty, standardised smile from beyond the glass window of the tram, dressed in “shocking pink”, waiving to the crowd with small moves of a

gloved hand - as reproduced by the obsequious media - more reminds an unimpressed viewer of some figure staggering out early in the morning from a boozy masque-ball where everyone was dressed in a 'fun' way. It could have been found rather embarrassing. But not in this case.

At 1:08, at the end of the short journey Her Majesty and Consort stepped off the 'Royal tram' without incident and boarded a car for Government House for a State Reception hosted by the Governor of Victoria. "The crowd along the way route looked massive."

A curious aspect of this whistle-stop, tram-stop blow-in was its absence of official words. In fact: none. At the hospital, the Queen simply drew aside a curtain on a plaque. The same journalistic bard would remark:

*"I did but see her touring south.*

*But no words flowed from royal mouth."*

At 2.30 the Queen's motorcade left Government House Melbourne Airport.

At 3.15 Her Majesty and Consort ascended the aircraft stairs, waved and disappeared inside the aircraft - and so to Perth for the chief business of Her Majesty's visit.

The likelihood was palpable that this CHOGM, like its predecessors, would offer no credible answer to a simple question: what can the Commonwealth possibly add to what the United Nations does?

Perth, about 3 thousand kilometres west of Melbourne has for some time tried to live down its reputation as a 'mining town'. In fact, during the last thirty years it saw the rising of mining 'magnates', as well as generalised crooks, few of whom went to gaol for their 'entrepreneurship' - like Alan Bond, but many of whom had consorted into W.A. Inc. By all outside measure of scandals, W.A. Inc. was a very large one. In the 1980s, the state government, which was led for much of the period by Premier Brian Burke, engaged in business dealings with several prominent businessmen. These dealings resulted in a huge loss of public money and the insolvency of several large corporations. By the end of 1990 a Royal Commission of Inquiry was appointed. Almost two years of investigations and hearings resulted in a multi-volume Report, which identified - amongst others - the members of the government: Premier Burke and his successor Peter Dowding, Deputy Premier David Parker, Industrial Development Minister Julian Grill and Attorney-General Joe Berinson. Years later the former Premier was sent to gaol over unconnected crimes.

There has always been a special atmosphere of the 'can do' type, an insufferance of anything which cannot be translated into quick money - and a lot of it, accompanied by a firm dedication to that

‘law-and-order’ which characterises frontier towns, in such a pretentious far-away capital. That spirit would have boded well for such an organisation as the Commonwealth, particularly the business side of it.

Here is what the ‘Eastern’ press - the adjective being used as a derogatory word by Western Australians when referring to the other states - called the ‘cheat sheet’ of the Commonwealth business for 28 to 30 October:

- First CHOGM for P.M. Julia Gillard and British P.M. David Cameron
- Third time held in Australia (first in Melbourne 1981, then Coolumberr, 2002)
- Largest gathering of world leaders in Australia
- Cost AU\$ 58 million
- 3,000 delegates from 53 nations (Fiji suspended in 2009)
- Notable non-attendee: Indian PM Manmohan Singh
- Queen to open proceedings on Friday, 28.10.2011
- Centrepiece is a retreat on Saturday in Kings Park, Perth
- Agenda to include global economy, climate change, terrorism, asylum-seekers, the spread of HIV/AIDS and food security
- Eminent Persons Group, which includes former High Court judge Michael Kirby, to present report on future of Commonwealth
- Kirby and Kevin Rudd named as possible candidates for a new role of Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights
- Protests expected, including ‘Occupy Perth’
- Police, including 700 interstate and N.Z. officers, given special stop-and-search powers
- Army, air force, navy and special forces on standby for possible terrorist attack
- Meeting to conclude with a *communiqué* on Sunday [30 October] detailing decisions.

The archconservative Western Australian Government had worked assiduously to prepare for the occasion, from the smallest details to the most important ones.

- One year before 'the Event' it moved the Queen's Birthday official holiday from 3 to 28 October, to minimise disruption.

- In January 2011 it was announced in Perth that the Fraser complex in Kings Park would have been upgraded at the cost AU\$ 9 million to provide a suitable place for the 'retreat' of the heads of government. "The Retreat will involve the construction of a new high quality reception centre on top of the existing complex where the temporary marquee currently exists - offering visitors exceptional facilities and views of Perth." Prime Minister Gillard said. "With leaders from more than 50 nations visiting Perth, including some of our major trading partners, it is important we offer them a truly memorable meeting experience." Premier Barnett echoed. The main meeting venue had been identified as the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre and about 3,000 delegates were expected to attend events over the three days. Premier Colin Barnett said that public transport would be free for all on the *Transperth* network on 28 October, to allow people to view the planned cultural and sporting events.

- In February 2011 the Police was given special powers and it was expressly declared then that the Police would have "cracked down on protesters during CHOGM." The CHOGM *Special Powers Bill* was to provide for an Act to give police and authorised people "security powers such as the ability to stop and search people in designated security areas, to order them to walk through an electronic screening device or have their belongings X-rayed, and to close roads." The Police Minister said in State Parliament. "People may be required to remove headwear, footwear, jackets or coats" and be "detained for a long as reasonable." Police would also have the power to search vehicles or vessels, order people to provide their personal details and set up check-points, cordons and road blocks around security areas. Most of the powers granted under the Act would have expired on 5 November 2011. The Minister said that the Government had also approved more than AU\$ 12.2 million of additional funding for Police in order to establish a 24-hour command centre, recruit more officers and purchase further vehicles. And that would not have been the final cost. It was not. The Opposition made some faint noises. From 'the East' civil libertarians warned the extra powers planned for CHOGM were a "slippery slope" and could actually inflame tensions. W.A. Greens Senator Scott Ludlam said that passage of the laws would allow police to draw up "hit lists" and exclude individuals from certain areas of the city.

- In March 2011 it was announced that the City of Perth was looking at spending AU\$ 60,000 for an exhibition to showcase how the city looked almost 50 years ago. In 1962 astronaut John Glenn had passed over Perth, and the city had hosted the British Empire and Commonwealth Games.

- In April 2011 it was proposed 'to solve' the problem of the homeless people camping and sleeping in public places in the Central Business District by having them housed during CHOGM. To a question from the Opposition, the Minister for Police thoughtfully replied: "Where do you live? We'll send them round to your house if you're really concerned." Four days later Premier Barnett said that he regretted comments made by the minister about the treatment of homeless people. On its part, Perth's homeless community threatened to march in protest and set up camp in front of State Parliament to prove to the government they could not be swept under the rug during major events.

- In April 2011 also the call had gone out for an army of volunteers - at least 500 - for the CHOGM summit needed to chauffeur heads of state and their entourages, as well as guide an estimated 4,000 visitors expected to the city for the occasion. Volunteers also would be assigned to the Perth Cultural Centre, which was to become the 'people's place', while 'the Meeting' shut down the Central Business District. The precinct would feature an 'uncensored' speaker's corner where the public could voice their 'uncensored opinions' - even if they targeted regimes of countries represented at the meeting. Warned the Premier: "The people will be able to get up and say what they want and as long as they're reasonably respectful and they're not, I guess, crude in their comments and offensive to the public there will be no censorship of that." And he added: "I'm sure there will plenty of political speeches about conditions in various countries ... about asylum seekers and poverty and the plight of children and illegal immigration, all those matters." However - he sternly intimated - activists would have been banned from protesting near 'the Meeting'. People familiar with the violence practiced by the Western Australian Police had really been warned. A Deaths in Custody [mainly of Aborigines, the 'First Australians'] Watch Committee W.A. spokesman correctly commented that placing the public forum away from the CHOGM summit indicated the government was attempting to protect leaders from negative opinion. The Commonwealth Festival director, who would run the 'people's space' - which takes in the Western Australian Museum, State Library, State Theatre Centre of W.A. and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art - said it would host musical performances, film screenings, art displays and market stalls.

An AU\$ 2.45 million arts and culture festival running for eight days from 23 October would include an International Super Series hockey tournament featuring teams from Australia, India, Pakistan, New Zealand and Malaysia, two international netball matches (South Africa v. Malawi and Australia v. New Zealand) and free family activities. In calling for applicants, W.A. Senator Chris Evans, a minister in the Gillard Government, said volunteers would be 'an integral part' of CHOGM, much like during the Sydney Olympics. "They'll be the face of CHOGM for many visiting Perth." he said. "It is a tremendous opportunity for people of W.A., young and old, to engage in CHOGM, to become the face of Perth, the ambassadors of Perth."

- In May 2011 it was estimated that CHOGM hotel bill would have reach beyond AU\$ 5 million, while AU\$ 201,000 would be spent to refurbish the driveway and forecourt also at Government House. A further AU\$ 282,000 would be spent on capital works including accommodation upgrades at a cost of AU\$ 191,000 and the purchase of catering set-up and furnishings for the Royal Banquet.

- In June 2011 a list of risky chemicals used in home-made explosives had been identified by the Council of Australian Governments in sight of CHOGM. The Council had identified 96 chemicals which require priority risk assessment, which were set out in the list entitled '[Chemicals of security concern](#)', and had informed businesses of its chemical '[hit list](#)'. Attorney-General Robert McClelland said the publication of the list will help industry and the wider community remain vigilant about suspicious activities. As 'the Meeting' was nearing there was some feeble voice raised against the incorporation of over 150 private security personnel into the Police, with a serious risk of identification confusion of functions.

- In August 2011 Western Australia high school students were chosen for a mock CGHOM event in the lead-up to the real thing. Later on, to compound the farce, an AU\$ 200,000 training programme was initiated across Western Australia, aimed to lift the standards of restaurants, cafes and hotels ahead of 'the Meeting' and to teach baristas, waiters and bar tenders to smile. The Premier called such 'Service with a smile' programme a "quantum leap in the level of customer service" in the state's hospitality, tourism and retail sectors. These became area of major concern and expected gigantic profit.

- In September 2011 the Culture and Arts Minister John Day declared that City of Perth would be "open for business" during 'the Meeting' with the announcement of an eight-day, AU\$ 2.45 million arts festival between 23 and 30 October. The occasion would have brought to Perth artists and performers from Australia and sixteen other countries as "representations of the *British Commonwealth*." Oops ! And, in addition, a brand new reception centre with sweeping views of Perth and the Swan River built especially for the occasion and costing AU\$ 9 million was 'unveiled' by the Premier. Finally, the State Government felt compelled to reject claims that it had spent \$300,000 on upgrading a section of the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital to ensure it was up to standard for the 53 leaders and the Queen expected to attend 'the Event'.

- In October 2011 a newly built AU\$ 5 million police command centre, continuously 'manned' by 100 officers, was inaugurated. The Australian Defence Force was to stand-by during 'the Event'. "[The command centre] is a fantastic facility." exulted the Police Minister. "We are ready for CHOGM." With a 30-metre-wall-full display of television screens and rolling CCTV footage it would have checked every strategic point of Perth - a real triumph of the climate of 1984. It would have begun with ensuring the safety of the Queen, of the over 3,000 official participants and other visitors

during the three-day CHOGM event and continued ‘to protect’ the people of Perth. Officers also would have access to aircraft movements and open-source information from networks around the country and the world.

- On 19 October 2011 the first of 700 interstate and overseas police, in addition to 300 regional police, began to filter into Perth for ‘the Event’; a specialist team from New Zealand was due in the following days. The biggest foreseeable obstacle to police during the three-day Meeting would have been unruly protestors. To ward off any menace, the ‘usual suspects’ had been rounded up, protest actions, such as the ‘Anti-Corporate Greed’ and ‘Anti-Wall Street’ movements, had already been widely monitored through *Facebook* and *Twitter*, many people had been placed under surveillance, homes had been raided, preventive arrests had been made, informers had been infiltrated, new measures had been taken, exclusion areas proclaimed, and certain streets and places barricaded. In time innocent passer-by would be arrested - no apologies to be proffered.

All was ready for the ultimate *Kermesse*. It was not going to be a *burlesque* like the one on Lake Burley Griffin, or a ‘banana monarchy’ occasion like the one in Brisbane, or a *Kindergarten* exercise like a tram ride in Melbourne.

Maybe it was just unfortunate that, on the same day as the Queen was touching down, to be greeted by up to 400 clapping and flag-waving well-wishers at Perth Airport, the media were publishing some ‘unsavoury’ items: a Prince Charles’s fawning letter to Colonel Gaddafi had been discovered at one of despot’s palaces. In his letter the heir to the throne was calling for greater ties between Britain and Libya. It was the latest embarrassing link to emerge between the British Establishment and Gaddafi’s regime, following revelations that Prince Andrew was also used as a go-between. In September 2011 Prince Andrew’s role was revealed in papers discovered at the British Ambassador’s residence in Tripoli. Dated 7 June 2007, and discovered in a palace used by Saif al-Islam, Gaddafi’s London-educated playboy son, in the photocopy of the letter Prince Charles praised the dictator for his work with Christians, Aids victims and the British Council, writing: “I just wanted to write to Your Excellency to say how heartened I am by the breadth of these developments.”

Charles’s letter was sent days after Tony Blair had visited Libya in his final weeks as Prime Minister to seek oil and defence deals for British companies.

CHOGM had been regarded from the beginning as Perth’s greatest opportunity not only to showcase its unparalleled economic position but also to attract even more investment. There would have been plenty of handshaking in Perth at the time of ‘the Event’ and over the following week, months, years (?), but the most valuable was likely to take place behind closed doors at the Burswood Entertainment Complex which is located on the Swan River near the city, and is owned by Crown Limited. The

complex includes a 24-hour casino, seven restaurants, eight bars, a nightclub, two international hotels, a Convention Centre, Theatre and the Burswood Dome. Alongside some of the world's most influential economists, scores of international businesspeople would have attended the Commonwealth Business Forum in the lead up to CHOGM.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard also had early highlighted the opportunity presented to Western Australia: "In particular, with the business forum we will be able to bring together business leaders from around Australia, and particularly West Australian business leaders, with business leaders from around the world." she said. "It is very appropriate that as we look to a rise of development in Africa, particularly focused on mining, that there is collaboration between business leaders of this great mining state with business leaders from Africa."

Opening the Commonwealth Business Forum in Perth on 25 October, Ms. Gillard said that investment flows across the 54 nations were expected to reach \$220 billion in 2015, more than double the level of 1997. Later on Prime Minister Gillard, speaking at the University of Western Australia, announced the formation of a mining centre to help developing nations. While Australia enjoys its mining boom, the government is seeking to help developing countries make the most of their natural resources to improve their economies in a sustainable manner. Australia will put well over AU\$100 million into a 'mining for development' initiative, seen as 'smart aid' which will reduce countries' dependence on aid in the longer term. Expertise from Australian government, industry and academia would be drawn on to help more than 30 countries in Africa, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific to deal with "mining-related challenges." the Prime Minister said.

The absence of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh - head of the largest Commonwealth country - might have led some to downplay the relevance of Perth's CHOGM, but the number and high calibre of Indians participating in the business forum was regarded as significant. "Anyone who suggests that India's presence and profile this week is not high is ignoring that fact." said the head of the Western Australia Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "India is an important part of Australia's, including W.A.'s future and I'm confident that there will be a lot of serious engagement between India and Australia over this week."

Late in the afternoon of 26 October the Queen and her Consort arrived in Perth and were promptly driven to stay at the Pan Pacific Hotel. The following morning the Queen would tour the Clontarf Aboriginal College and watch basketball and football demonstrations by students. At the same time the Duke would visit the University of Western Australia, to see the latest technology for mining exploration: a project able to locate valuable iron ore deposits by detecting changes in the earth's gravity field. It had been developing during the past 30 years by the University and world's mining giant Rio Tinto.



Later that day the Queen would keep her first social engagement - an exclusive garden party at Government House, attended by only a select few. But she was not going to have a late night, with official tasks starting on 27 October in the morning when she was to open the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in front of world leaders representing 53 nations. In the evening she was to attend a banquet at the Pan Pacific Hotel.

Saturday 29 October would see Their Royal Highnesses 'mingling' with what was expected to be Perth's largest ever public gathering. That was to be the Queen's highlight of her trip for most in the city: a massive public barbeque, where she would be served a classic sausage and tomato sauce sandwich. For the occasion some 120 barbeques would be set up along Perth foreshore, as well as 10 giant screens to allow better public viewing. Premier Barnett had encouraged visitors to enjoy a relaxed family fun, suggesting thongs and jeans would not be out of place. Mr. Barnett had billed the event as 'historic', promising tens of thousands of people the opportunity 'to mingle' with the Royal Couple as they wander down a roped-off path.

Now to CHOGM. At about 9 am the procession, almost an *introit (absit injuria verbis* - no offence meant !) began of the head of states and government of the 53 countries represented and their entourage of up to 3,000 persons. It lasted about one and a half hours - more like the procession of feudal vassals and vavasours.

At about 10.30 Prime Minister Gillard began her opening address. During the course of it she said that "unlike other global bodies united by practical concerns such as commerce and trade, we are also joined by a very different motivation." ... "*We are a Commonwealth of values.*" [Emphasis added] "*Shared values* of peace, democracy, racial equality, the rule of law and a commitment to social and economic progress. *Shared values* freely embraced and consensually expressed." [Emphasis added]

Ms. Gillard urged "a more agile Commonwealth, equipped to respond when our values are tested and to speak clearly when our voice needs to be heard." Rhetorically she asked: "How do we pursue our timeless values in a world of change ?" And replied: "Let us make CHOGM 2011 memorable for embracing this question, memorable for giving the Commonwealth the direction it needs at a time of uncertainty and risk."

At 11.10 Prime Minister Gillard became Chairwoman of the Commonwealth ! In another 'historic' moment, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Ms. Kamla Persad-Bissessar - her predecessor - handed over the role to Ms. Gillard in the presence of the Queen. For Ms. Gillard it was like an anointment. Ms. Persad-Bissessar said that it was fitting that the theme of CHOGM was 'women as agents of change'.

It was now, at 11.19, the moment for the Queen to speak. She began by exhorting the leaders to respond boldly to proposal for reforming the organisation.

“[Perth] is known for its optimism. The state is known for its opportunity and potential and this country is known for its warmth, openness and generosity.” ... “We therefore come together in a place that embraces so much of the Commonwealth spirit.” ... “The last time Australia hosted CHOGM at Coolum in 2002, the world was still reeling from a new chapter in global terrorism. Almost a decade later we were in a similar situation,” she said, “facing insecurity and uncertainty in finance, food security, climate change and trade and development. “

She said that the ‘women as agents of change’ theme “reminded us of the as yet unlocked potential and encouraged the leaders to create ‘positive and enduring’ outcomes.”

She wished, “heads of government well in agreeing further reforms that respond boldly to the aspirations of today and that keep the Commonwealth fresh and fit for tomorrow.”

“In these deliberations, we should not forget, that this is an association not only of governments but also of peoples - this is what makes it so relevant in this age of global information and communication.”

The Queen concluded her speech with an Aboriginal saying: ‘We are all visitor to this time, this place, we are just passing through’ - she said. “Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love and then to return home.”

There were three ‘reform’ proposals before the CHOGM for the leaders to decide on.

One was to strengthen the powers and discretion of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, a group of nine which can recommend expulsion or suspension for members which behave badly - a status Zimbabwe and Fiji presently enjoy, and which in the past has befallen Pakistan.

Another was to adopt a Commonwealth Charter, outlining a commitment to human rights and democracy.

And the third was to appoint a Commonwealth Commissioner for democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

Ahead of everything, however, there was a notice, brought on 28 October by the British Prime Minister - the present attendees being called simply to ratify as a matter of *fait accompli*. In the words of Mr. David Cameron, “Put simply, if the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were to have a

little girl, that girl would one day be our queen.” In other words, sons of future monarchs no longer get to cut in line for the throne, as daughters will have equal right to the crown. Previously, women only ascended should the monarch have no eligible, living sons.

The decision to overturn the centuries-old tradition known as primogeniture was accompanied by the scrapping of a constitutional prohibition on the monarch’s marrying a Roman Catholic. But the rule that reserves the throne to Protestants will remain. The bar on the monarch marrying a Catholic, like the rule on primogeniture, was enshrined in an array of statutes, most significantly in the *Bill of Rights* of 1689 and the *Act of Settlement* of 1701, which followed the turmoil of the monarchy of King James II, the last Catholic monarch. The prohibition has seemed all the more incongruous given that there is no similar bar on the monarch marrying somebody from others faiths, including a Hindu, a Jew or a Muslim.

The rules governing the monarchy were set after the violent upheavals that Britain endured in the 16th and 17th centuries after Henry VIII broke with Rome over control of the church in England, an event which led to centuries of marginalisation, and often persecution, for Roman Catholics in Britain.

The British Government had begun reviewing the succession rules before William married Kate Middleton, but with an eye towards the possibility that William’s first child could be female. Was this in fear of a possible succession by Harry - who may not even be blood-related to the Battenberg-Windsors ?

One should not entirely blame the infamous stodginess of the monarchy for how long the changes have taken. The legal procedures required to alter the line of succession are nearly mummified in red tape. Each of the 16 ‘Commonwealth realms’ would be bound to place the reform through their own legal processes, which will require several pieces of legislation in Britain alone.

One old rule kept intact will continue to bar Catholics from actually ascending to the monarchy. As Mr. Cameron explained, “Let me be clear, the monarch must be in communion with the Church of England because he or she is the head of that Church.” Early asked about her opinion, Prime Minister Gillard manifested her enthusiasm: “You would expect me, as the first female prime minister of our nation, to say I believe women are equal to men in all regards and, consequently, to say I support a change to the act of succession.” But she added that she was required to consult with the state premiers because the Queen was also heads of the states as well as of the Australia Commonwealth. “So their views are important and I have already written to them canvassing their views.” They were to come quickly and favourably, of course.

Despite obsequious high praise from Prime Minister Gillard, who said that the change “equals equality for women in a new area,” many were left questioning the relevance of it all.

Real republicans were not impressed. Republic - a campaign group in the United Kingdom which supports an elected head of state - let it be known that the changes amount to “nothing of substance” adding: “The monarchy discriminates against every man, woman and child who is not born into the Windsor family. To suggest that this has anything to do with equality is utterly absurd. It fails the equality test both in practice and in principle.”

The Canadian republican movement, Citizens for a Canadian Republic, said that the changes were seriously flawed and tokenistic and do not go far enough: “...retaining the rule forbidding the reigning monarch from being [Catholic], does not go far enough. Eligibility to become Canadian head of state based on one’s religious affiliation still runs contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which bans any kind of discrimination based on faith.”

According to the Republican Movement of Aotearoa-New Zealand the proposed changes were irrelevant to every day New Zealanders, just like the monarchy itself, and should be part of the current ongoing parliamentary review being held into New Zealand’s Constitution. The vice chair of the Movement said: “The changes, to remove the sexist rules from the succession, only remind us how long the monarchy has discriminated against women and Catholics.” “These aren’t just out of date rules about which Windsor will assume the British throne. They’re a statement about our constitution and about who is and who isn’t allowed to be New Zealand’s head of state.” “These rules still mean that if you’re a New Zealander - Pakeha, Maori, Pacific or Asian - you are not as good as the British royal family and can’t be head of state of New Zealand.”

The Australian Republican Movement did not issue a statement, however a prominent representative dismissed the new laws as late in coming and unlikely to have any bearing on Australia.

CGHOM meeting was called to consider two major documents, both aimed at self-examination of the Commonwealth’s relevance and future.

The first was that of the Ministerial Action Group. Current CMAG members are: Australia (Chairperson-in-Office), Bangladesh, Canada, Jamaica, Maldives, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago and Vanuatu. The theme for CHOGM 2011 was ‘Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience’. The Group sought to pursue the Commonwealth’s fundamental political values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It asked how well constitutions are being observed, whether elections are being held regularly and fairly, and about media freedom.

The Group's recommendations were unanimous. But the assembled leaders ignored its key recommendation, which concerned the establishment of a Human Rights Commissioner to oversee and report on the actions of member governments. The human-right performance of Commonwealth countries, developed and developing, clearly needs improvement in many areas. But to be adopted, a recommendation needs the consensus of all 53 Commonwealth leaders represented. India, South Africa and Sri Lanka and another number of states were leading opposition to the appointment of a Commissioner and sources behind the scenes said that, even as the leaders spent the first day discussing the report, the proposal was dead.

India's position was firmly that a Commissioner would just duplicate functions which are exercised elsewhere, such as in the implementation of the fundamental *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* - the ratification of which is a condition for membership of the United Nations, of the United Nations treaties and conventions - such as the *International Convention on Human Rights* - ratified by over 170 nations, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and other conventions or declarations expanding on the rights of women, children, racial and ethnic groups, immigrants, refugees, *et cetera*. There are also all those agreements setting up other U.N. organisations or numerous regional international treaties such as the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms*, the *American Convention on Human Rights*, the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* and the *Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam*. Finally, there are the many Bills and Charters of Rights adopted at the national level. By the way, Australia is conspicuous among 'democratic' nations in not having one; its record of violation of treaties and conventions is appalling.

India further criticised 'western' countries for maintaining double standards with regard to pursuing their lofty concepts of democracy and human rights. While such countries are more than willing to support the undemocratic *status quo* in the Middle East, where European and North American countries are allied with the Arab oil monarchies of the Persian Gulf, they are critical of Fiji, the Maldives and Sri Lanka which are on the fringes of their geostrategic objectives.

The attendees agreed on the need to strengthen the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, said Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak. The Prime Minister said that Commonwealth leaders had decided that the matter should be studied further to determine how each member country could further strengthen these values. "We have accepted in principle the idea to strengthen rule of law, democracy and human rights. ... "The only question is in what form it will take; whether there should be a High Commissioner, a deputy secretary-general post be created or the post of the Commonwealth secretary-general be further strengthened." ... "We wanted a consensus on this, but we couldn't get a consensus yet." The Malaysian Prime Minister said.

A compromise human rights mechanism, agreed to by Commonwealth leaders and touted by Prime Minister Gillard as a significant advance, was branded completely inadequate by the Group of statesmen. The Group was scathing, one of its members saying that the CMAG idea was flawed because it was comprised of politicians who ultimately would be compromised by allegiances and diplomatic sensitivities. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, a former British conservative Foreign Secretary, said that CMAG has had interventionist powers for more than a decade but has “never had the political will to use those powers.” A Commissioner - he said - would ensure that the Commonwealth acts when democracy is under threat in one of its member nations. “Bring the analysis and the evidence to the ministers and thereby make it much more difficult to be frank that they could simply look the other way and take no action.” he said. He reminded CGHOM that the Queen had pointedly endorsed the Group’s report when she opened CHOGM by urging leaders to be bold, “to keep the Commonwealth fresh and fit for tomorrow” and “not [to] forget that this is an association not only of governments but also of peoples.” Sir Malcolm said that this was an implicit reference to the title of the report: *A Commonwealth of the People*.

The Eminent Persons Group, too, publicly confronted Commonwealth leaders over their resistance to its proposal for a human rights and democracy watchdog. It warned that rejection of its reform plan would doom the Perth CHOGM to failure.

The ‘western’ member states, Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand, had pressed for an institution which would monitor human rights in the Commonwealth. Of course, ‘western powers’ have a long history of the most outrageous criminal conduct when it comes to human rights. Colonial rule in Africa, Asia and the Arab world was predicated on mass exploitation, slaughter and unimaginable human misery. And their support for some of the most brutal regimes of our times is a telling indictment of their commitment to human rights. However, such hypocrisy and duplicity cannot be regarded as immovable obstacles to the realisation that human rights are universal, important and very much needed, especially in the developing world.

So, in search of a lowest-common-denominator consensus, CGHOM accepted some less controversial solutions, such as a Charter. “It will bring together the Commonwealth’s values, principles and aspirations in one clear and powerful statement.” Prime Minister Gillard said.

The idea of a Human Rights Commissioner had proved too much. “There have been a few blips like in any part of the world but I don’t think [the Commonwealth] demanded a commissioner.” noted Suruj Rambachan, the Foreign Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

In this climate of obfuscation, under pressure from South Africa and other states, CGHOM would even refuse to publish the E.P.G.’s report. The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, who chaired the

E.P.G., said the summit would be remembered as a failure. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the former British Foreign Secretary, described the unwillingness to publish the report as a disgrace. This is hardly surprising, as the Commonwealth comprises a veritable who's who of governments with dubious human rights records - from Cameroon, Nigeria, Pakistan and Rwanda to Bangladesh and Singapore - and most recently Sri Lanka.

Prime Minister Gillard said that Australia supported the idea of a Commissioner but the Commonwealth operates by consensus so - on that ground alone - it was not being set up. In many cases, and this is one, the practice of consensus, like political correctness, makes differences on matters of principle almost unsayable. She simultaneously played down a suggestion that Sri Lanka had led the campaign against the Commissioner because of questions over human rights abuses during its recent civil war.

The question whether human rights are purely a 'western construct' which is of no relevance to the developing countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East is worth pondering given the striking fault lines between East and West on the issue. 'Western' countries always seem to be pressing for greater respect for human rights while developing countries always seem to be on the defensive.

On 30 October CGHOM reappointed Australia - in the person of Foreign Minister Rudd - to the Group of nine foreign ministers with new powers to intervene in member states which start to undermine human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Whether in fact Sri Lanka was so powerful as to succeed in torpedoing the proposal of a Commissioner for Human Rights is a moot question. But there is no denying that it should have been an important issue for CHOGM. The question was virtually ignored, even in the presence of a United Nations Human Rights Commission report which suggested substantial evidence of war crimes by the government and the Tamil Tigers, especially in the final two to three years of the conflict. A separate independent report by the International Crisis Group came to much the same conclusion. Indeed, there is sufficient evidence to justify an international inquiry into the actions of both sides, potentially leading to indictments before the International Criminal Court.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who had made it a point to arrive in Perth several days before the beginning of CHOGM, presumably to lobby some of his counterparts, has been under pressure to allow an international investigation into the final months of the war in 2009 against the Tamil Tigers. According to the United Nations, up to 40,000 civilians were killed when government forces moved against the insurgents.

Prime Minister Gillard let it be known that she had delivered a sharp message to Sri Lanka - which is under attack from within the Commonwealth and whose President has been accused of war crimes - to address its major issues of human rights. Speaking ahead of her meeting with President Rajapaksa on 26 October, the Prime Minister said that Australia's position was clear. "We have consistently raised our concerns about human rights questions in the end stages of the [Sri Lankan] conflict. These need to be addressed by Sri Lanka, through its Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission." Ms. Gillard indicated that she would be taking up the human rights issue with President Rajapaksa. Later, a spokeswoman for Ms. Gillard said that, in the talks, the Prime Minister noted the opportunity provided by the Perth CHOGM to reform and strengthen the Commonwealth, including its ability to support democracy, human rights and the rule of law. She also pointed to Australia's support for reconstruction, resettlement and reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka, including through the development co-operation programme. She asked about progress in Sri Lanka's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and underlined the importance of this process in addressing allegations of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka at the close of the civil war.

Both Prime Minister Gillard and Foreign Minister Rudd ruled out CGHOM meeting revisiting the issue of Sri Lanka hosting the next meeting in 2013. Mr. Rudd told a news conference it would be a matter for individual governments as to how they viewed matters in Sri Lanka between now and the next CGHOM - *in two years' time, in Sri Lanka!* "I think *our friends* in Sri Lanka are mindful that there are a range of views on this across the Commonwealth ... and the agenda makes it possible for individual governments to raise these matters in the next two days [of CGHOM, in the foreign ministers' meeting] but also when the heads of governments meet." [Emphasis added]

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma said respect for fundamental human rights was *one of the core values* of the Commonwealth. "We have offered our support to Sri Lanka in the past and remain available to assist if the Sri Lankan government so wishes. Sri Lanka is aware that the Commonwealth has considerable expertise."

The controversy over Sri Lanka's culpability for war crimes, committed in its prosecution of the civil war against the Tamil Tiger rebels, concluded in 2009, became a stark illustration of how ineffective the Commonwealth is at upholding universal standards of human rights among its members.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has threatened that his country may boycott CHOGM in Sri Lanka if there is not an improvement in human rights. Mr. Harper had said long before the Perth meeting that he wanted "to make clear to my fellow leaders at the Commonwealth that if we do not see progress in Sri Lanka in terms of human rights ... I will not as Prime Minister be attending that Commonwealth summit [in 2013]."



On 24 October Mr. Arunachalam Jegapheeswaran, a Sri Lankan-born Australian civil engineer, who had been employed as an aid worker in his former home country of Sri Lanka from 2007 to 2009 when he saw the bombing of civilian populations and clearly-marked Red Cross field hospitals, filed an indictment under the Australian criminal code in the Melbourne Magistrates Court against Mr. Rajapaksa, declaring he was seeking justice for thousands who perished in aerial bombardments and ground attacks on shelters, schools, hospitals, orphanages and community centres. The indictment was set for hearing on 29 November. Mr. Jegapheeswaran denied that his motive was to embarrass the president during CHOGM. “People are still suffering because of what he did and I think the world should know.” he said. “I’ve seen all of these things. I can’t bear that the person who is responsible for all of this - who is the commander-in-chief - is coming to my country and getting off scot-free.”

But, for the case to proceed against Mr. Rajapaksa the consent of the Australian Attorney-General Robert Mr. McClelland is required. The Attorney-General had received the request in the afternoon of 25 October. His office confirmed that a similar request was made to the Australian Federal Police to investigate the matter. The A.F.P. was said to be evaluating it.

However, later that night, a spokesman for the Attorney-General said that the request had been refused “as continuation of the proceedings would be in breach of domestic law and Australia’s obligations under international law.” “Australia has obligations under international law including the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* [of 1961] which extends immunity to visiting Heads of State.” he said. “The *Foreign States Immunity Act* 1985 extends immunities of heads of diplomatic missions applying under the *Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities Act* 1967 to Heads of States. ... “Those immunities include personal inviolability including from any form of arrest or detention and immunity from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving state.” ... “This derives from Australia’s obligations under international law and the principles of state immunity.”

Needless to say, lawyers for Mr. Jegapheeswaran were extremely disappointed by the decision. A spokesman said: “It is an issue we had hoped to get more careful consideration of but it seems there has been no effort to mount an investigation into these atrocities.” He went on observing that it appeared that diplomatic expediency was put ahead of human rights and there was little more the lawyers could do, with the exception of a High Court case.

The leading lawyer in the firm, interviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation services in Western Australian said that he expected Mr. McClelland to treat his client as a *bona fide* witness. “We expect that both the Australian Federal Police and Commonwealth Attorney General must take this complaint seriously and must conduct enquiries in accordance with the law.” ... “We’re not asking that any person be arrested or remanded in custody, and all those things are possible. We’re

simply saying that while [Mr. Rajapaksa] is here and whilst this complaint is a *bona fide* complaint and it must be one before it can be issued by the courts ... he should be spoken to or interrogated in a way that any other suspect in a serious crime might be interrogated.”

President Rajapaksa, who strenuously denies any wrongdoing, has already been cited in a separate brief of evidence compiled by the International Commission of Jurists’ Australian chapter and handed to the A.F.P. The brief recommends that Mr. Rajapaksa be investigated for war crimes, along with Sri Lanka’s High Commissioner to Australia, Thisara Samarasinghe, and other military and political figures. Mr. Samarasinghe has also denied committing war crimes and cast himself as a unifier of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Australia.

The lawyer for Mr. Jegapheeswaran said that there was plenty of evidence against those accused. “The Canadian Prime Minister, a conservative prime minister, has said that he will not visit CHOGM in Sri Lanka in 2013 unless the human rights records are addressed.” he said. “John Dowd who is the former Liberal Party Attorney General [of New South Wales, later Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales] and [currently Chairman of the Australian chapter] of the International Commission of Jurists had said there must be an inquiry and it must start now.” ... “So these are not radical fringe claims, these are mainstream conservative organisations that say a great atrocity has been committed in Sri Lanka and it requires investigation.” ... “Australia can play an important part; it can play a leadership role in that process.” Mr. Dowd said on 26 October that there is damning new photographic evidence of war crimes by the Sri Lankan army. He said that this includes evidence of executions and degradation of female victims in 2009. The photographs had been sent to him by an Australian union official recently, and he had passed the evidence on to the Australian Federal Police. “All members of the Commonwealth, if the Commonwealth is going to be taken notice of as a human rights body discussing human rights, should take this fact into account.” Mr. Dowd said.

And what was the Commonwealth offering ? Why, respect for fundamental human rights, *one of the core values* of the Commonwealth, and assistance if the Sri Lanka government so wishes. That may not mean too much, because - if it means anything - it leads one to think that the Commonwealth could help the Sri Lankan Government to investigate itself !

Prime Minister Gillard refused to be drawn on the issue, conveniently indicating that it was a matter for the Attorney-General. The Australian Government was not listening. In fact, it appeared more interested in ensuring partnership with the Rajapaksa regime to prevent Tamil asylum seekers coming to Australia. The Australian Federal Police had officers in Colombo working specifically for that purpose vetting prospective applicants.

The controversy over Sri Lanka's liability for war crimes is a stark illustration of how ineffective the Commonwealth is at upholding universal standards of human rights among its members.

The second document to be considered by CHOGM, titled *Time for Urgent Reform*, would come from the Eminent Persons Group of 11 members, chaired by the former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The other members are [Dr. Emmanuel O. Akwetey, from Ghana](#); [Ms. Patricia Francis, from Jamaica](#); [Dr. Asma Jahangir, from Pakistan](#); [Mr. Samuel Kavuma, from Uganda](#); the [Hon. Michael Kirby, from Australia](#); [Dr. Graca Machel, from Mozambique](#); the [Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, from the United Kingdom](#); [Sir Ronald Sanders, from Guyana](#); [Senator Hugh Segal, from Canada](#) and [Sir Jeremia Tabai, from Kiribati](#). The E.P.G. had originally been set up in 1995, specifically to address persistent or serious human rights violations in Commonwealth states.

The Commonwealth Secretariat - better still, Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma - demonstrating a long tradition of transparency in all things, decided to keep the E.P.G. report secret, though naturally it was leaked. Writing in *The Times*, Sir Malcolm Rifkind commented: "A common lament is the seeming failure of the Commonwealth to speak out when its values are violated. This is seen as a decay that has set into the body of the organisation, and one that will encourage the association's irrelevance, if not its demise, unless it is promptly addressed."

The Group had released the report in defiance of the leaders and said that if their key recommendations - such as the appointment of a Commissioner for democracy, the rule of law and human rights - were not adopted, then "this CHODM 2011 will be remembered not as the triumph it should be, but as a failure."

The report called for radical reform of the Commonwealth if it is not to be seen as "hypocritical". In its 106 detailed recommendations, the report lamented the Commonwealth's failure to speak out when its values are violated. Among the recommendations is one for a tough new draft Charter for the Commonwealth and the appointment of an independent Human Rights Commissioner, empowered to monitor violations and propose action.

Not surprisingly the report was 'kicked into the long grass' by India, South Africa and one or two other members. Resistance to change alongside the report's conclusion that "the most serious threat to the continued relevance and vitality of the Commonwealth itself" is the "complacency and inertia" of the London Secretariat does not bode well.

In the end CHOGM reappointed 70-year-old former Indian diplomat Kamalesh Sharma as Secretary-General for a further four-year term. Mr. Sharma congratulated Ms. Gillard and Mr. Rudd for “delivering a landmark CHOGM.”

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While inside the CGHOM venue the delegates were orderly debating their agreed themes, outside, but prudentially kept well far away by police security guards and other keepers of ‘the Queen’s peace’, several groups of protesters were making their voice heard.

The leader of the CGHOM Action Network, a coalition of activist groups, said that his group had met with police and they had been working out an agreed route for the protest march which would allow them to pass close by the CHOGM venue. They insisted that they would be planning only non-violent action. “I don’t have any complaints about the behaviour of the police in our negotiations with them.” he said. “We’ve made it clear [that] everyone’s welcome to participate in our protest as long as they are supporting the aims of the protest and are prepared to respect the ethos of the protest, which is non-violent.” But he added that the special police stop and search provisions introduced by the Western Australian Government for ‘the Event’ were “a major attack on civil liberties.” “We never have made any threat or we don’t have any intentions to enter the restricted areas or to disrupt the actual event.” he said. “But we are interested in exercising our democratic rights, including in the areas open to the public. Obviously we have got a message, we want the leaders in the summit to hear it, we don’t want to be tucked away in back streets. We want to be able to get as close as is reasonably possible.”

They had told the police to expect some 1,000 marchers. There would have been groups upholding Aboriginal rights, advocating freedom for detained asylum seekers, demanding the end of war in Afghanistan and promoting renewable energy. They, too, had themes: ‘justice and climate action, not racism and war’, and they hoped that they could go as close as possible to the leaders. Protesters had early declared their intention to target “war criminals and parasites” among Commonwealth leaders. Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa topped the list of such leaders.

Rajapaksa was one of the first leaders to arrive to the venue on 29 October, followed shortly after by Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani - also a target of demonstrators.

Among the most vocal protesters were a group of Africans from Congo demanding to know why the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, has been allowed to attend. “We don’t want Kagame here because Kagame is a killer of more than 8 million people of the Congolese in 10 years.” they were claiming. And they invoked “support in Australia, from Her Majesty, and from Julia Gillard.”

A woman from Pakistan was present - one of those on whose face acid had been thrown, often for not meekly accepting what their families or husbands say is a woman's lot.

Even British Prime Minister Cameron had been singled out as 'a social vandal' for having slashed, during his short time in office, social services 'to pay off the millions of dollars handed out free to banks.' "They are looking after the interests of the corporate rich and they're not looking after the interests of ordinary people, they're not looking after the 99 per cent." said one of the leaders of the protesters.

In an interview on 30 October with the BBC 'Andrew Mar Show', Prime Minister Cameron would be heard threatening to withhold British aid from countries which do not "adhere to proper human rights." British economic assistance should have "more strings attached" - he said - particularly on the treatment of women and on the question of repression of homosexuality. But he conceded that countries could not change immediately, and that it would be a "journey".

Leaving aside the many examples of hypocrisy and double standards (and who can forget Prime Minister Cameron trying to flog weapons to dodgy Middle Eastern regimes days before launching the Franco-British 'human intervention' in Libya ?), this message now has even less salience than it has ever done.

The role of 'western' governments in proselytising about human rights has been hugely compromised. In most instances nowadays it is counterproductive. African and Asian countries can simply look to China and its allies and reap the rewards of a less squeamish approach to individual liberty.

With reference to women and homosexuals, one does not go beyond observing that 12 Commonwealth members still allow the abhorrent practice of forced marriage and homosexuality is criminalised in 41 member states.

The absurd borders with the incredible: The role of the Commonwealth is brought into even sharper focus when one looks through the lens of one member: Bangladesh. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is only one of three female heads of government in the Commonwealth - along with Australia and Trinidad and Tobago. But, ironically, women's rights in Bangladesh are pretty much non-existent. According to the United Nations, 47 per cent of Bangladeshi women are victims of domestic violence and one human rights group cited 181 acid attacks against women last year. In common with many other Commonwealth members, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister also faces some of the greatest challenges of leadership, with corruption endemic and a system of historically unstable government to contend with. In 2009 her party was swept into office on the promise of stamping out corruption, but more than two years after it looks like Bangladesh will be crowned top of both

Transparency International's *Corruption Perception Index* and *Bribe Payers Index*. Yet, British aid in Bangladesh doubled last year.

Speakers at the protesters' rally included Ms. Marianne Mackay, an Aborigine law student, from the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee and Mr. Kado Muir, an Aboriginal tribal leader, cultural custodian and professional anthropologist for the W.A. Nuclear Free Alliance and Dr. Wong Chin Huat, a journalism lecturer and Malaysian democracy campaigner, who had travelled from Kuala Lumpur to take part and said that Commonwealth election observers should be sent to monitor Malaysia's next election, which is yet to be called. "The election is so flawed, so rigged, the legitimacy of the next government may be questioned," he said.

All protesters were particularly bitter that, while the CGHOM participants were "sleeping in five-star hotels, homeless people in Perth had been kept out of sight, [and thus] out of mind."

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CGHOM ended on 30 October with leaders agreeing to a range of proposals on food security, support for small and vulnerable states and giving the Ministerial Action Group more power.

Prime Minister Gillard said that the new powers given to the Group will strengthen the organisation. "This will provide for an earlier and more constructive engagement by the Commonwealth and the Secretary-General where countries are veering from the path of democracy," she said. "It will provide criteria for action and a graduated set of measures that the Ministerial Action Group can take in response to situations of concern." She said also that a Commonwealth Charter would be prepared, "to bring together the Commonwealth values, principles and aspirations in one clear and powerful statement."

Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma described CHOGM as a landmark event. "This CHOGM will be remembered as a CHOGM of reform, renewal, and resilience," he said.

The Commonwealth Secretariat issued a *communiqué*. Couched in *bureaucratese*, under 17 headings, most of them with sub-headings, it demonstrates the ability of the Commonwealth Secretariat to employ some 4,800 words - largely into illustrating the obvious, expatiating on the self-evident and explaining the unnecessary.

In substance, 30 of the 106 recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group, which had prepared the report on reforming the Commonwealth, had been "adopted without reservation," 11 were deemed "inappropriate for adoption," and 12 would be adopted "subject to consideration of financial implications." On the remaining 43 recommendations, the Task Force of Ministers would provide

“more detailed advice” to Foreign Ministers meeting in September 2012 in New York “as a basis for further decision by Heads.”

On the contentious issue of a Human Rights Commissioner - a move which was opposed by India, South Africa and Sri Lanka - leaders agreed to ask the Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group “further [to] evaluate relevant options” relating to the proposal by the E.P.G. For the time being, that function appeared to have been left to the CMAG.

Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who was one of the five leaders at the CHOGM conclusion briefing, said there had been agreement on strengthening the role of the CMAG. “It will provide an effective check on attacks on human rights in any member state.” she said.

The *communiqué* said that there had been agreement on “the importance of taking urgent action on climate change and sustainable development, particularly through the G20, the UN climate change conference in Durban, and Rio+20... to assist small and climate vulnerable states develop their capacity to respond in a timely and effective way to disasters and to build their national disaster response capabilities.”

On the issue of terrorism, leaders committed to improve international security by “unequivocally preventing the use of their territories for the support, incitement to violence or commission of terrorist acts... suppression of terrorist financing... accelerating efforts to conclude negotiations on a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.”

It remains arduous to establish where does the document sit between motherhood statements and something with bite - and, in the end, to decide what is the worth of CHOGM.

Despite recognition in the CHOGM 2011 *communiqué* that the organisation needs to remain vigilant against the persistent threat of its own irrelevance, the *communiqué* on paper does reflect important elements of the international agenda, particularly some key priorities of African states - which with 19 members comprise the largest regional bloc within the Commonwealth.

In Perth, Australia has added to the number of votes needed to win a seat on the U.N. Security Council next year, with quiet back-room lobbying of the 53 Commonwealth countries. Winning over small countries, such as small Lesotho, was seen as crucial to Australia’s success in its forthcoming competition with Finland and Luxembourg. Every U.N. member has a single vote - no matter its size.

19 African countries were represented at CHOGM. Australia took the opportunity to press its case. Swaziland Prime Minister Barnabas Dlamini said he had been asked by Australia to support the bid.

The world's newest nation, South Sudan, had applied to join the Commonwealth; its membership was expected to be canvassed in Perth, and Australia was also hoping to win the support of that country.

In exchange for support from the African bloc, both the Rudd and the Gillard governments promised to allocate increasing amounts of Australian Official Development Assistance to Africa in line with Labor's commitment to spending to 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income by 2015-16. But the Australian Government is also interested in using its own expertise and position to help African countries develop their emerging resource sectors and in turn promote the interests of the 230-and-growing Australian resources companies on the continent, which have already collectively invested AU\$ 24 billion in that sector.

The CHOGM *communiqué* itself calls for "more effective natural resources management through greater transparency and better governance." This reflects a desire by African governments effectively to utilise their natural resources for national development, including through foreign investment and expertise, while mitigating the foreign exploitation and corruption which has characterised their history.

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Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation has been an issue at CHOGM as far back as November 1999, when Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe described gay men and lesbians as "pigs and dogs." Ironically, Fiji, which has enacted legislation to decriminalise homosexuality, is suspended from attending CHOGM because of its 2006 coup. Clause 8 of the CHOGM Singapore Declaration of 1971, confirmed in Harare 1991, states "We will use all our efforts to foster equality and dignity everywhere."

Yet, in the *communiqué* there is no mention of homosexuality. Of the 53 Commonwealth nations, a total of 39 retain bans on homosexuality, including Uganda where an anti-homosexual bill - proposing the death penalty in some cases - was brought before parliament earlier this year, although it has since been shelved. 23 countries allow female-female relationships.

Gay sex remains a criminal offence in some Commonwealth members including Uganda and Nigeria. In January, Ugandan gay rights activist David Kato was bludgeoned to death [after he was pictured on the front of the Ugandan tabloid \*Rolling Stone\*](#) (not related to the music magazine of the same name) alongside the headline 'Hang them.'

Other Commonwealth countries such as Tanzania and Trinidad and Tobago retain goal sentences of up to 25 years for those found guilty of breaking anti-homosexual laws.



Speaking four days before the opening of CGHOM, former High Court Justice Michael Kirby said that the gay community alone cannot fight the discrimination that sees homosexuality [outlawed in 39 of the 54 Commonwealth nations](#). “I was in Kenya for a Commonwealth law conference in 2007 and one of the other delegates was Justice Edwin Cameron from South Africa, who is both openly gay and also living with HIV.” Justice Kirby recalled. “We organised a reception for the local GLBTI community and only two people turned up. These are the realities we deal with.” Kenya is one of 23 Commonwealth nations which allow female-female relationships but not male-male relationships.

Justice Kirby said he was pleased to see that CHOGM would discuss the topic of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, as part of a discussion on HIV education by the Commonwealth's Eminent Persons Group. Justice Kirby is a member of the E.P.G., alongside representatives from Canada, the United Kingdom and Mozambique - where homosexuality is legal - and Ghana, Malaysia, Jamaica, Pakistan, Uganda, Guyana and Kiribati - where it is not. “Nothing ever gets done by gay people alone.” Justice Kirby said. “It also depends on good, heterosexual people understanding the issues.”

Over the week-end, Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma repeated observations that laws relating to the criminalisation of homosexuality are colonial legacies which need to be addressed at the domestic level by the countries concerned.

And what did the *communiqué* say on the subject ? It carefully massaged it, so to speak: homosexuality ignored; AIDS, well ... yeeees, but within the general discussion of health.

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At 5 pm, Sydney time, of 29 October, the manager of Qantas Airways Limited, the so-called ‘flag carrier of Australia’, went on radio and television to announce that the company would with immediate effect ground the entire domestic and international fleet. As the last, desperate manoeuvre in a protracted industrial dispute, a lock-out would have commenced at 8 pm of 31 October. 108 planes at 22 airports around the world were grounded. 447 flights were involved. 68,000 passengers would be inconvenienced. Qantas is estimated to carry 65 per cent of the domestic and international traffic.

The action left world leaders stranded in Perth. The Prime Minister informed the participants: 17 heads and their delegations due to leave Perth over the following 24 hours had been forced to linger in Perth with no concrete plan for returning home.

On the night, the Prime Minister warned the Qantas' managers and the three trade unions involved representing pilots, engineers and some baggage and ground staff - that the spiralling dispute must be "urgently resolved" before it also grounds the two-speed Australian economy. She immediately invested Fair Work Australia - the successor of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission - to deal with the conflict. "Fair Work Australia was called to have the industrial action terminated and have Fair Work Australia deal with this dispute." Ms. Gillard told reporters in Perth.

When Federal Parliament resumed on 31 October accusations flew. There was much, continuous reference to Qantas as the 'national airline', an 'iconic' institution, and other expressions of uninformed rhetoric were used. The illusion left after 'corporatisation' of the airline in 1993 was that 'Australian ownership' of it was to be symbolised by the presence of the familiar kangaroo on the 'brand' of the company - nothing more. In fact, the 20 largest shareholders in Qantas control 80.3 per cent of total voting shares, and just the top four - a group of major of global financial conglomerates - hold over 70 per cent.

Qantas is an example of how the most powerful financial interests exert sway over the commanding heights of the economy. Just 240 of the company's 133,392 shareholders own 82.49 percent of the stock. Small investors have no say in the company's direction or conduct. The largest Qantas shareholder - with 22.72 percent of the shares - is J. P. Morgan Nominees Australia, a division of the global J. P. Morgan investment house. The second largest is HSBC Custody Nominees with 18.91 percent. Next is National Nominees with an 18.26 percent stake. The fourth largest is Citicorp Nominees. These four investment funds are also among the largest shareholders of Australia's four major banks, the ANZ Bank, Commonwealth Bank, National Australia Bank and Westpac Bank, which in turn are large shareholders of the investment funds. J. P. Morgan, HSBC, National Nominees and Citicorp are also the top four shareholders of Australia's two largest resource companies, BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto.

In truth, Qantas has been for almost twenty years a foreign corporation incorporated in Australia.

The Chief Executive Officer of Qantas is Mr. Alan Joyce; the Chairman is Mr. Leigh Clifford, appointed in 2007, who between April 2000 and April 2007 was Chief Executive Officer of the Rio Tinto Group, Melbourne. He had made his career there: 37 years of it. He is no stranger to 'difficult industrial matters'. The Qantas dispute was terminated on 31 October by order of Fair Work Australia, the planes are back in the air, an arbitration decision on the merits is forthcoming; it may never be possible to show that Joyce was just a tool in the hands of Clifford who had gained his grades by breaking unions in industrial disputes. Clifford is what is called a 'union buster'. There is an element of *pathos* in Mr. Joyce's claiming on television that it was his decision to ground the

airline and that “the board endorsed it.” He then added: “It is not driven by Leigh [Clifford], it is driven by me.”

For long-time watchers of the Australian mining industry, Qantas’s lock-out looks to have come straight from the playbook of accomplished ‘union buster’ Rio Tinto, Clifford’s ‘home’ for most of his working life. Clifford, who is seen as one of the toughest in the business when it comes to unions and everything else, ran Rio Tinto’s Australian east coast coal business when it broke the union’s hold in the late 1990s, with Clifford himself wading into the action to break picket lines. Clifford’s move on the coal unions in the late 1990s followed Rio Tinto’s defeat of the mining unions in Western Australia’s Pilbara region - finishing a fight begun by Peko Wallsend in the late 1980s - and after Rio Tinto’s union-defeating efforts in aluminium.

When appointed chairman in 2007, Clifford reportedly said that the airline industry was “like mining 20 years ago.”

By all accounts, Clifford is not someone one would want to run up against. For all which is known, Elizabeth ‘Windsor’ is one of the largest shareholders in Rio Tinto, protected through the device of the Bank of England nominee companies.

As for Clifford, he might have pretended to be impressed by the Prime Minister ‘serious language’ in facing with *bravado* her difficulty with Qantas *and stacking the law against the unions* - which is what a ‘union buster’ ultimately wanted, and received from a so-called Labor Government. Perhaps he did not even bother: he, better than anybody else, knows well to whom Ms. Gillard is indebted for the abrupt removal from office of Mr. Rudd in June 2010: Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Xstrata, three very powerful economic behemoths.

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It is hard to say whether the world, meaning by that the other five billion people outside the Commonwealth of Nations, has taken any notice of CHOGM 2011 in Perth, Western Australia.

The Australian Prime Minister may bow-but-not-curtsey, preside over, hector, lecture the local yokels, and the Europeans about the need to live within their means, and otherwise posture as a world leader. She is at best a second rate manager of and for foreign interests. The Commonwealth that she will ‘lead’ to next CGHOM at Colombo in 2013 is just a travelling theatre, shadow without content, pomp without substance. It is a political fantasy, it serves no real purpose. If the rest of the world takes notice of it, it is as a picturesque anachronism, like the monarchy which heads it.

It is difficult to think of anything the Commonwealth does that the United Nations does not. And the U.N. is much, much more efficient.

Forty, thirty, twenty years ago the Commonwealth might have meant something, might have done something. But its opportunity for effectiveness is gone now. One should consider at least two significant absences. The Prime Minister of the nearest member country, New Zealand, did not even bother to attend. The pretext was that he was less than four weeks from a national election - six hours away ? hardly a credible reason !

And the second, perhaps more important absence was that of the Indian Prime Minister. The head of the largest Commonwealth member, the most populous democracy in the world, one of the most diverse, the second-fastest growing economy, did not attend CGHOM 2011. No Indian prime minister has visited Australia during the past thirty years. It may have something to do with the ill-treatment of highly paying Indian students in 'multicultural' Australia, huge contributors to what is now called 'the education industry'. It may have something to do with the fact that Australia sells uranium to just about every country which can afford to pay, but not to India, on the pretext that it is not given sufficiently acceptable guarantees of safe use. So, Australia exports uranium to China, but imposes a discriminatory ban on India, a member of the 'Commonwealth family' !

What is left of the old organisation, which was at least being able to put an end to *Apartheid* in South Africa, and bring majority rule in Rhodesia, is nothing more than 'tradition' and 'sentimentality' of the kind that 'The Firm' is capable to express. And as for the 'republicans' in the so-called Labor Government of Australia the best they can say is that they are satisfied with the *status quo*, at least as long as the current Queen lives.

At the end of October 2011, outside the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre representatives of the '99 per cent' made all their noises; inside the Commonwealth's 'one per cent' enjoyed the best hospitality Western Australia has to offer - even if Western Australians' civil liberties had to be **ignored** for a few days to make that happen.

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Perth is a place for exhibitionist vulgarians, mainly from the mining industry; but during CGHOM there was room for others, provincial and unsophisticated.

One will never know, and most people would not care to know, what the Queen might have thought of a Premier who took a *public* occasion for *publicly thanking by name* the providers of 120

barbeques, of 120,000 sausages and 1,500 litres of tomato sauce. A private letter might have done it, but where would have been the show ?

Some prominent Perthites speculated out loud, and concluded that CHOGM was worth it. “For three days leading up to the official heads of government meeting, about 1,000 company representatives and government ministers met at Burswood to discuss economic issues and future investment opportunities.” ... “For weeks, probably months, to come, deals will be struck around the world that can be traced back to the hallways and private meeting rooms of the Burswood Convention Centre.” rhapsodised the C.E.O. of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

“A lot of companies [based] in Perth organised visits outside the formal CHOGM activities. I have no doubt that deals would have been moved along and would be finalised more quickly as a result of bringing so many key decision makers and influencers together. You simply can’t bring those kind of people together over an extended period of time ... *and not expect magic to happen.*” *Magic !*

“It was very clear that at the big end of town, particularly in the mining industry, very important discussions were going on between mining company leaders, investors and some of the visiting heads of government about investment opportunities and deals, particularly in Africa. That was evident.” he said.

“It takes a small fraction of people [overseas] to wonder why [CHOGM delegates] are there and put Perth into Google and one of the first things that comes up is the Tourism WA website.” enthused the C.E.O. of Tourism Council W.A. *Phantasmagorical !*

There is more. What will any delegate take back of the demonstration by the Prime Minister’s partner of the ‘ethics of the shed’ ? There is no other way to call this peculiarly Australian custom.

The wires were hot in September 2011 about the forthcoming visit of ‘the nation’s First Man’ to host a ‘surprise shed’ for the partners of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting leaders. It was expected that, while in Perth ‘the First Man’ would visit the various [men’s sheds](#) set up across the metropolitan area, which help men connect through woodwork and other crafting projects to improve mental health - as he would later explain. There, there you have it !

As a patron for Men’s Sheds Association, ‘the First Man’ said that the project now boasts 700 sheds nationally and he would welcome the members input when demonstrating its value to overseas representatives. “At CHOGM we actually are going to highlight men’s health and men’s sheds on the [the first day] as part of my spouse’s programs, so I’m sure we’re going to call on you guys to put together some stuff for us, which is really good.” ... “ ... that whole week, which will be an enormous

week.” ... “A lot of guys who have been bank managers love to get in and start making rolling pins and things like that.” he said.

“I think the future of men’s sheds will be bringing youth into it and getting some nice mentoring from the older guys. The older guys have a lot of things to obviously pass on and I think the young kids can learn a lot.” ... “So if there is more male mentoring they can get by coming to sheds, I think it’s going to be great.” ... “It used to be Rotaries, it used to be Lions clubs, sheds is the way to go now and it is certainly growing at a rapid rate.”

Then there was the call by Western Australia’s flamboyant mining billionaire Andrew Forrest for China to ignore its ideological differences and join the Commonwealth. “The best way to really engage with the Commonwealth, China, would be to, ah, join it.” he said on 25 October during a Commonwealth Business Forum roundtable discussion on “how the two could forge better partnerships.” ... “That’s a little tough ... but, you know, let’s put ideology aside, let’s think where do we stand as people, where do we stand as a human race. It actually makes pretty good sense.” And he added: “You’re seeing an integration now between the values of people, the values of parents, the aspirations of children, be it any member of the Commonwealth or any member of China, they’re becoming common.”

Towards the end of a long intervention by Mr. Forrest, the Vice-chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, Wang Jinzhen, said that China was investing more than US\$ 1 trillion in more than 600,000 projects overseas, including in Australia. He signed a minute agreeing to forge better ties with the Commonwealth Business Council. However, he was more reserved about Mr. Forrest’s suggestion to join the Commonwealth. “China has joined many international organisations - the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the G20 and special events, many, but of course [the Commonwealth] is not an international organisation under the umbrella of the U.N., so that is the difference.” he said. “And a lot of members of the Commonwealth are English-speaking countries; China speaks Chinese.”

No doubt the distinction for good taste and style belongs to Ms. Georgina ‘Gina’ Hope Rinehart, another Western Australian mining magnate and entrepreneur. During 2011 both *Forbes Asia* and *Australian Business Review Weekly* claimed that Ms. Rinehart is Australia’s wealthiest person, US\$ 9 billion and AU\$ 10.3 billion, respectively. She was among the first of 1,800 guests to arrive at Government House for the Queen's State Reception - no hat, barefoot.

The Royal Couple departed Australia from Perth International Airport at lunchtime on 29 October. Elizabeth II will again be what she has been so far as Australians are concerned: an absentee head of state. The monarchy is a relic of the colonial and imperial past, and Australia ought to sever the

remaining link with that past by becoming a secular, federal, democratic republic with an Australian as head of state.

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Dr. Venturino Giorgio Venturini, formerly an *avvocato* at the Court of Appeal of Bologna, taught, administered, and advised on, law in four continents, ‘retiring’ in 1993 from Monash University. Author of eight books and about 100 articles and essays for learned periodicals and conferences, since his ‘retirement’, Dr. Venturini has been Senior Associate in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash; he is also an Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University, Melbourne. It is while writing on subjects such as this that he remembers: ” ... how hard a road it is going down and climbing another’s stairs.” Dante, *Paradiso*, canto XVII, vs. 59-60. [george.venturini@arts.monash.edu.au](mailto:george.venturini@arts.monash.edu.au).