

Australia Dossier by Robert Barwick

Constitutional Convention run by Crown

Her Majesty's lackeys ensured that it did not adopt a republic, but retained the British parliamentary system.

Australia is set to remain a colony of the British Empire, following the decision of the Constitutional Convention to retain the British parliamentary system as its form of government. On Feb. 13, the convention wrapped up ten days of intense debate by voting to hold a national referendum on whether Australia will adopt an Australian citizen as head of state and become a "republic," or whether the country will remain a constitutional monarchy. However, in the planned referendum, rather than voting yes or no on whether to become a republic, the people of Australia will be asked to vote for a specific model of republic, in which the head of state, the President, will be appointed and dismissed by a majority of the parliament.

This model is contrary to what opinion polls show the vast majority of people want in a republic, which is a President directly elected by a majority of the people, i.e., the end of the British parliamentary, or Westminster, system. At the convention, the fiercest opposition to direct election came not from the monarchists, but from another group of loyal assets of the British Crown: the Australian Republican Movement (ARM).

The ARM is the baby of merchant banker Malcolm Turnbull, the long-time in-house lawyer of press baron Kerry Packer, Australia's richest man and a personal friend of the royal family (Packer shares a box with the Queen at the Royal Ascot races). Turnbull became famous by defending Packer when the billionaire was forced to appear before the 1983 Costigan Royal Commission to answer allega-

tions that he was the "Goanna" ("Mr. Big") of the Australian underworld who was alleged to be involved in drug-running, racketeering, murder, and pornography rackets. Former New South Wales Premier Neville Wran, Turnbull's deputy in ARM, played good cop to Turnbull's bad cop throughout the convention: Turnbull was described as "arrogant" and a bully, because of his arm-twisting tactics toward other delegates, while Wran was the mediator. Between them, they had the greatest impact at the convention: Turnbull is being called the "father of the republic."

From the beginning, the Constitutional Convention was stacked to give the ARM, and other defenders of the parliamentary system, maximum power. The government of avowed pro-monarchist Prime Minister John Winston Howard mandated that half the delegates would be elected by the general population via a non-compulsory postal ballot, and half would be appointed by the government; most of the appointees were state and Federal parliamentarians, most of whom vigorously defend the parliamentary system. Voter participation in the election was less than 50%, figures unheard of in Australia (which has a compulsory voting system), but perhaps indicative of a realization among the population that, in the Westminster system, the subjects have no say anyway. To further shore up the parliamentary model, Howard appointed the nation's highest-ranked Privy Councillor, National Party MP Ian Sinclair, as convention chairman, rather than allowing the delegates to elect their own chair.

The big concern of many delegates opposed to a direct election model was that it would require a "codifying of the powers of the President." Under the Westminster system, Australia's Governor-General, as the representative of the Queen, is ostensibly a figurehead, but one who commands "reserve powers," powers which are ill-defined, but crucial. For example, in 1975, on orders from the Crown, the homosexual Governor-General Sir John Kerr sacked the democratically elected Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, who was trying to assert national sovereignty over Australia's vast mineral wealth. Codifying the powers of the President, U.S.-style, would remove the clandestine intrigues that characterize the power structure of a parliamentary system; a coalition of the ARM and the appointed parliamentary delegates ensured its defeat.

Another stated concern of opponents of direct election of the President was the potential for the office to be filled by an opponent to the establishment. As an example, some delegates singled out Independent Federal MP Pauline Hanson, who has gathered a sizable following for her populist attacks on Aboriginal land rights and tariff cuts. But the establishment's real fear was expressed by former Governor-General Bill Hayden, who predicted during the convention that Hanson would dissipate as a political power, because of her lack of "intellectual force." The problem, Hayden warned, is that the resulting void will be filled by a force which does have such potency.

Hayden was unmistakably referring to Lyndon LaRouche's Australian co-thinkers, the Citizens Electoral Council, a Federal political party which has just announced a slate of 32 candidates for the next election, which could be held as early as July.