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***“Britain and Australia: holding together or falling  
apart?”***

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I don't suppose many lecturers begin by saying that they're very disappointed to be here. But in my case, I'm doubly delighted not only to be back in New South Wales but also to be fit to speak to you. Only a couple of weeks ago, when in North Queensland, my car had a rather unequal argument with a road barrier; and I really am very lucky to be alive. So I would like to thank everyone who helped me and my family at that time and expressed concern. Anyhow, the upshot was, though the car was a write-off, your lecturer wasn't. The lecture wasn't cancelled. And now you have to listen to it.

I hope you realise that anything I say about British History comes with an official Government Health Warning. For I don't follow the traditional line; and I'm not your standard academic scholar. I am British; and I am a professional historian. But I'm something of an interloper in the field of British History. I have spent much of my career researching Central and Eastern Europe, especially Poland and Russia; and I have devoted a lot of time to popularising my interests and enthusiasms. In my view, historians who keep their knowledge to themselves, or to a small circle of learned colleagues, are letting the side down. I took up British history as a sideline, partly because, like many others, I was dismayed by the general decline of historical knowledge and education in Britain, and partly because of the ever-growing confusion about history and national identity. Very few people here, I suggest, would confuse 'Australia' with 'New South Wales'. Yet many, many English people – and I mean the English – are complacent of the differences between 'England' and the 'United Kingdom' or between 'the UK'

and 'Great Britain'. They have never ever been taught the basic facts about the three Acts of Union - 1536, 1707 and 1800 - and hence about the make-up of the British state in which they live. Far too many British citizens, let alone foreigners, treat 'Britain' and 'England' as interchangeable terms.

Sorry to say, the same sort of confusion can be met in Australia. The Centennial Publication, *Why are we celebrating?*, talks of Queen Victoria as 'Queen of England' - which she certainly was not. And, as I noticed myself last week, a telephone discount centre on Orchid Avenue in Surfers' Paradise is offering cheap calls at 29c per minute to the UK and at 50c per minute to Scotland. I can assure you that no canny Scot would ever fall for that one!

Let me give you one example of our unreal attitudes. Britain was long perceived as the mother country and Australia as the offspring. So Britain is seen as ancient, stable and unchanging, Australia as young, dynamic and evolving. Yet which of the two states has been the more radically altered in the last century? I put it to you, that the Commonwealth of Australia as at present constituted has changed little since its creation in 1901. Queen Victoria's United Kingdom, in contrast, lost 30% of its home territory in 1922, lost the Empire of which it was the hub in 1947, and only reached its present form in 1997. So Australia is relatively old and stable. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is relatively impermanent and fragile. You can expect to receive invitations to the Centennial in 2022 - if we get that far.

[I intend to say a few words about Britain, therefore, a few words about Australia; and a few words about 'Britain and Australia'.]

## Britain

One of the most powerful convictions that I derived from writing *Europe: a history* is that all states, like individuals, have a finite life-span. They are born at a particular moment. If they survive their infancy, they evolve and mature; and they pass away. I remember drawing up a table in 1993, listing the European states that had been in existence five hundred years before in 1493 - the year of Columbus's encounter with the Americas - and charting their subsequent demise. It turned out that only one sovereign state in Europe had survived those five centuries; and it was the Principality of Andorra.

British politicians, led by Mrs Thatcher, have been given to boasting that British History has rolled on unbroken 'for a thousand years.' And yet, as any schoolchild should know, British History did not even start running until 1707 or, if you are a monarchist, until 1606, 395 years at a maximum. Five hundred years ago, at the start of the 16th century, the United Kingdom had never been dreamt of, even as a wink in the constitutionalists' eye. The Kingdom of England was one of five or six separate polities within the Isles; and it included an important chunk of Northern France round Calais. It dominated Ireland, which was a papal lordship with its own parliament; and it controlled Wales, which had been stripped of its native rulers, but not yet annexed. It had no jurisdiction whatsoever over

Scotland, which was a completely independent nation with a powerful navy and with close ties to France. One might add that England at the time possessed a highly orthodox Catholic regime, whose closest ally was the newly formed Kingdom of Spain. Two successive heirs to the English throne were betrothed to Catherine of Aragon, daughter of the Most Catholic Ferdinand and Isabella.

Since then, three processes have been at work in the formation and de-formation of the state. Firstly, England consolidated its inner empire within the British Isles. This process was completed with the annexation of Ireland on 1 January 1801. Secondly, an overseas empire was assembled, first as an English and then as a British Empire. Australia took its place in this constellation exactly one hundred years to the day after Ireland. Thirdly, starting with the cession of the Ionian Islands to Greece in 1864, the imperial collection began to fall apart. This last process is still at work.

Needless to say, this is not the way that most English people - and I mean the English - see their past. To an Australian audience, the typical English attitude to history can only be described as DREAMING. It is all the more remarkable because in the Isles, and contrary to what they may think, the English are NOT the aboriginals. History for the English is a sort of ancestral dreamtime, where no people other than their own ancestors exist, where all traditions are taken to be unbelievably ancient, and where all sites are regarded as sacred. In this mode of thinking, the English are not interested in the periods before the Anglo-ancestors arrived in the 5th century. They are not interested in the cultures and doings of non-English peoples in the Isles. And they are not interested in laws, institutions and customs of the many non-English kingdoms and principalities which flourished before and alongside England right up to the nineteenth century. Above all, they never attribute anything of merit to foreigners. There is a vague awareness, for example, that the ruling class of mediaeval England was French. But these must have been far-sighted Frenchmen who had done the sensible thing by moving to England and adopting its wonderful traditions. To suggest, as some historians have dared to do, that the holy origins of the English Parliament may have lain in the ideas and practices of the nobility of France is a damnable heresy. And, as I found to my own cost, to present the mediaeval monarchs of England by the names which they would have used themselves - Guillaume le Conquérant, Jean Sans Terre, Edouard Trois - is just plain silly.

In the middle of the 19th century, Queen Victoria, who was German on both sides of her family, learned that four English Plantagenet royals were buried in the Abbey of Fontevault on the Loire. So she wrote to the President of France and demanded their return. According to the guide at Fontevault, she received a letter from the Prefect of the Maine-et-Loire stating that citizens Henri Plantagenet, Aliénor d'Aquitaine and others had been properly buried in the land of their birth and would not be going anywhere.

The only major exception to the almost instinctive put-down of foreigners can be found in the extraordinary English admiration for Roman Britain. In reality the Romans left practically nothing which the invading Angles, Saxons and Jutes chose to use. Yet in account after account they are

dressed up as really good chaps, with whom English readers can safely indentify. After all, the Romans were sound imperialists, who suppressed the native Celtic tribes, introduced decent plumbing, and generally prepared the ground for the English gentlemen who followed. Throughout this prevailing anglocentric view of our past, one meets repeated assertions of continuity, where little continuity existed: repeated assumptions about superior English institutions, where no comparisons are made, repeated denials of English indebtedness to European civilisation, and the repeated mis-equation of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness'.

In this situation, I should perhaps recount some of the basic facts of British state history, which do not surface often enough. Prior to the reigns of Henry VIII of England and James V of Scotland, no-one had ever even conceived the idea of a British state encompassing all the British Isles. Henry VIII's plans for a British Union, which took shape during the so-called 'rough wooing' of Scotland in the 1540s, proved abortive. The infant Mary Queen of Scots was not married to Henry's son, Edward, but to the Dauphin of France. English monarchists can hardly bear to imagine the consequences if that particular Franco-Scottish union had borne fruit. Similarly, the plans drawn up for a British Union by James VI and I in 1604 were decisively rejected by the English Parliament. Oliver Cromwell created the first British state in all but name after 1651 when his armies had conquered Scotland in addition to Ireland and England-and-Wales. The Protectorate of Cromwell's later years was in effect an all-British Republic ruled by one central government and parliament in London. Yet the cardinal event of the Restoration lay not in the fact that the monarchy was restored but rather in the fact that the separate kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland were restored, each with their particular parliaments. As a result, it was left to Queen Anne to set up the first version of the United Kingdom in 1707. For all practical purposes, 1707 is the starting-point of British History. Since then, the British state has passed through several important transformations. The United Kingdom of Great Britain, from which the modern usage of the adjective 'British' derives, became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland 93 years later. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which emerged in 1922, through the secession of the Irish Free State, was formed at a juncture when Westminster and Whitehall were still claiming pan-Imperial jurisdictions. The Dominions like Australia, were still only self-governing in a rather limited sense. The emergence of the United Kingdom as a political entity in its own right, distinct from all the other possessions and dependencies of the Crown, did not occur until the 1930s and 40s. The re-emergence of Scotland and Wales, alongside Northern Ireland as autonomous units within the UK, did not occur until 1997. The twists and turns are manifest. Whatever it is, this is not the story of 'eternal England'.

As I implied earlier, one has to be literally dreaming not to see that the British state order, as assembled in the 18th and 19th centuries, is now dissolving fast. Nor is the dissolution confined to territorial changes or the loss of Empire. To a greater or lesser degree, all British institutions have been affected. In the later chapters of my book, *The Isles*, I conducted a systematic survey of the progress and health of what I called 'the pillars of Britishness'. Initially, I had intended to examine only six such pillars - the Royal Navy, the British Army, the Parliament, the Protestant Establishment, the Monarchy

and the Empire. But the list expanded as I wrote, until it came to include no less than eighteen pillars, including the Industrial Economy, the Aristocracy, the Civil Service, State Symbols, the Law, the Sterling Currency, the Imperial System of Weights and Measures, and yes, Sport. I found to my surprise that every single pillar of Britishness had been following a similar pattern. Every single one of them had seen a period of dynamic growth in the 18th and 19th century: every one had reached a peak of power and influence in the early twentieth century. And every single one a rapid decline in subsequent decades.

I can't recapitulate it all here. But if one takes the first on the list, the Royal Navy, the pattern of rise and fall is self-evident. It was the navy on which the expansion and maintenance of the British Empire relied. The minute that naval power was superseded by air, ballistic and space power, the British Empire was doomed. You can see it all very clearly here in Australia. The founding of the Botany Bay Colony in 1788 would have been unimaginable without the Royal Navy. The establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia as a British Dominion would have made no sense without the Navy-protected sea lanes which linked it to Britain. As the day dawned in 1942, when the Royal Navy was forced to withdraw for good from the Pacific, it was clear that Australia was heading for complete independence. Today, its historic task completed, the entire British fleet could ride at anchor in one corner of Sydney Harbour.

In my book, I searched for a metaphor to summarise the net effect of this comprehensive set of crumbling pillars. And I hit on the metaphor of the avalanche. This is what I wrote:

Explosions, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions were hardly the right metaphors. Britain was not a Yugoslavia or a Soviet Union. There was no head of political steam, except in Northern Ireland, and no great well of suppressed anger. Inertia, not fanaticism was the enemy. The better metaphors were probably those of a quietly gathering avalanche that could strike out of the blue in the best of weather, or possibly a minor landslip. With no way of measuring the hidden damage, no one could exactly predict what might be swept away. And no one could imagine what trifling incident could set it off.

*The Isles*, p.1052

Not surprisingly, the decline of British institutions has been accompanied by a parallel shift in British attitudes. The most important of these relates to a marked shift in attitudes to 'Britishness' itself. The very identity of the British people is in serious, possibly terminal crisis. Only two or three decades ago, the issue would not have been raised. Nowadays, it stands at the forefront of anxious debate. And historians have done much of the stirring. It was only twelve years ago, that my colleague, Linda Colley wrote a book called *Britons*, which showed how 'Britishness', British identity, was a creation of the 18th century, instilled by the political and educational experiences of the citizens of the newly founded British state. To me, Colley's main contention is blindingly obvious, even if some of the constituent arguments are debateable. Yet it was greeted in some quarters by howls of derision. And it is still being contested by opponents, who can't see that they prove nothing by putting forward earlier instances of national consciousness and by completely missing the crucial distinction between

post-union 'Britishness' and pre-union 'Englishness'. The greatest shock, however, was delivered by the realisation that if 'Britishness' could be forged - to use Colley's unfortunate phrase - it could also be dissolved. In other words, it was not eternal.

The extent to which the galloping dissolution of Britishness has proceeded can be illustrated from many sources, not least from an analysis of symbols and rituals. One could talk at length about the rise of unofficial national anthems like 'Flower of Scotland' or the widespread substitution by England fans of the Cross of St George in place of the Union Flag. Yet the clearest proof was provided in 1999 by an opinion poll which did the rare thing of asking the right question, namely 'Do you consider yourself primarily British?' The poll accepted the key concept of multiple or multi-layered identities. It did not force respondents to choose between being British or English or British or Welsh or Scots. But it did prompt them to decide on the most important level of their self-identification. And the result was not expected. It showed that a narrow but absolute majority of British citizens no longer think of themselves as British above everything else. They think of themselves as primarily English, as primarily Scots, or primarily Welsh, or even as primarily 'Black' or primarily 'European'. From the point of view of the British authorities, it should be profoundly disturbing. It is the clearest indication yet that the British community is on the skids and is likely to fall apart. I presume that it is inconceivable at present that a similar poll in Australia would show a majority of Australian citizens rejecting the primacy of their Australian identity.

## **Australia**

My own experience of Australia and Australians is necessarily limited. I don't claim any expertise. But three extended visits have taken me to all the states of the Commonwealth except Tasmania. I have made many Australian friends. And I have seen Australia's rich human diversity with my own eyes. So I dare to make some personal observations.

My encounters with the Indigenous population started on my very first day. In 1997, I was invited to give the Festival Lecture at Adelaide, and I did so on 'Europe Overseas and Europe Overland.' On arrival, I was installed in the plush luxury of Adelaide's Hilton Hotel. But on opening the curtains in the morning, I was treated to the sight on the square below of a large company of exclusively aborigine drop-outs. The contrast between my own predicament and theirs on the other side of the plate glass window were, to put it mildly, disturbing. I'm not competent to assess the validity of the claims of the 'Black Arm Banders'. But notions like that of 'an indelible stain' or of 'The Stolen Generation' are clearly not frivolous.

The Anglo-Celtic Australians of British origin still represent over three quarters of the total population. They don't seem to have any general grounds to feel threatened. My oldest friends - Hello, Val and Rich - were English, and emigrated as young newly weds from Bournemouth. Indeed Val emigrated to Australia twice - once involuntarily with her parents and a second time voluntarily with

her new husband. My next oldest friends, Margaret and Ian, are sixth or seventh generation Australian. They are keen on genealogy, witter on warmly about the ancestors in Cornwall and the Isle of Skye, and talk proudly of the Swan River Colony and of early Victoria. The interesting thing, though I've been taken to Burns Societies, Irish Clubs, and Festivals of Welsh Song, and Cornish gatherings, I've never been taken to an English Heritage Centre. I wonder why that is.

Thanks to my Polish connections, I have seen quite a lot of Australian Polonia. They are typical of the waves of South and East European refugee migrants - Greeks, Yugoslavs, Italians, Poles, Czechs and Hungarians - who arrived after 1945. Yet as a historian, I can't help noticing how migration filters out the inhabitants of multi-ethnic European societies into separate groups with separate identities. Most of Australia's Jews, Ukrainians and Belarussians as well as Poles would be able to trace their family origins to historic Poland. Yet once they left, they lost the sense of a common heritage.

For complicated reasons, which I forget, I worked as a visiting Professor at ANU in the Division of Pacific and Asian History. All my colleagues were researching Indonesia or Japan or India or Vietnam: and everyone seemed to have resided in PNG. It was a fascinating mix, and an excellent introduction to the most recent layers of Australia's multicultural identity.

In this regard, it has been a privilege in Australia to make the close acquaintance of one of the pioneers of multiculturalism, Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki. Professor Zubrzycki is no doubt well known to this audience as a prominent sociologist who served on numerous committees in the 1970s, such as the Immigrant Advisory Council, and who authored several influential reports that persuaded the Government of the day to build what is now called Multicultural Australia. But as a historian of Poland, I have been particularly moved to find that Professor Zubrzycki's convictions about individual liberty, social equity and cultural pluralism grew out of his formative experiences in pre-war Poland. As a very young man, he belonged to a group of Catholic intellectuals in Cracow, who called themselves *Odrodzenie* or 'Renaissance' and who believed that Poland's multi-ethnic society was not developing on the right tracks. He was in the same category as another young member of the same organisation, Karol Wojtyła, now Pope John Paul II and was exposed to the same interpretation of Catholic teaching which argued that respect for human personality and individuality precluded ethnic or religious intolerance. In their view, Polish Catholic society should not have been aiming to assimilate, convert or homogenise the country's Jewish, Orthodox, Uniate or Protestant minorities, but rather to recruit them to a forum of mutual acceptance and understanding. Of course, the *Odrodzenie* Group like everything else in pre-war Poland, was overtaken by the German and Soviet invasions, which ensured that the ills of Polish society would not be cured so much as physically destroyed by the tidal wave of Nazi and Stalinist mass murders, deportations and genocide. The exiled Zubrzycki, known to his British comrades as 'Zoop', found himself serving in the ranks of the Parachute Brigade. But after the war, as a permanent refugee, he was naturally attracted to the academic circles in Britain, notably at London's L.S.E., which were striving to design a liberal social policy to match the needs of

Britain's growing immigrant communities. In Britain's case, the two largest immigrant groups of the immediate post-war era were Poles and West Indians, each of them with ways of life quite far removed from that of their British hosts. In Australia's case, which Zubrzycki addressed when he came to Canberra as an eager young academic, the mix was different. But the problems were similar. And the aims, of social justice and harmony, identical.

It's not for me to pass judgement on Australian multiculturalism. But one or two observations may not be amiss. I take it that the old American idea of a melting-pot is a proven non-starter and that adaptational steps are required both from the hosts and the from immigrants. It is not realistic to expect the newcomers to assimilate whilst the old time community stays set in its unwelcoming ways. I also take it that Culture is much more crucial than Race. How people act and feel under their skins must have precedence over considerations of how they look on the outside. Beyond that, I assume that numbers and patterns of distribution are not irrelevant. Both at the national and the local level, pluralist ethnic diversity offers healthier prospects than local concentrations which often leave two competing communities in a confrontational posture. Dialogue, to my mind, is a dangerous word, whilst multi-sided debate can be fruitful.

On the historical side, I can say just three things. Firstly, Australia's multicultural experiment is extremely young and tender. It was a natural corollary to the dismantling of the 'White Australia' policy in the 1960s, and has only been underway for one generation. Its very brief existence has to be contrasted with the British experience in these matters, which is twice as long, and the American experience which has been going for over two centuries. Australians could be in the happy position to learn from other people's mistakes.

Secondly, the promotion of multiculturalism in Australia is an example of social reform which did not originate from popular demand. It was launched by politicians who were converted to the idea by expert advice. Social reform from above always runs the risk of fuelling popular resentment, especially in a democratic society. Hence, the surprising aspect of One Nation Hansenism is not that it exists, but that it took so long to appear.

Thirdly, as in all reforming societies, the key to eventual acceptance lies in education. The old dogs in the population may not be able to learn new tricks. But the youngsters can. Everything will depend on the spirit in which the coming generations are raised, not only in their formal schooling but also in their respective ethnic gatherings and communal organisations. As a British citizen, I am well aware that social divisions are perpetuated by the regrettable structure of our educational system and that ethnic conflict in places like Northern Ireland or Bradford are inevitably encouraged by the largely sectarian character of the children's schooling.

Given more space, a comparison between British and Australian multiculturalism would yield some interesting insights. I must confine myself here to some points of difference which would seem to

weigh in Australia's favour. For one thing, Australia has not suffered the alarming level of communal violence that erupted thirty years ago in the Brixton and Toxteth riots or more recently in Oldham and Bradford. For another, to the best of my knowledge she does not suffer from the same degree of institutionalised and ritualised confrontation which arises almost daily between organizations campaigning for civil liberties and racial equality and various branches of the state and local authorities, notably in Housing, Immigration and Police. Most importantly perhaps, she does not have to worry about the kind of divisions which are opening up between elements of the anciently settled British population. In my view, the dangers of falling apart in Britain are less evident along the racial and immigrant divide than in the growing animosity between English and Scots, English and Welsh, and Unionists and Republicans in Ulster. The majority of Britain's Black and so-called Asian citizens appear to be proud of their hard won British status. Increasing numbers of their white neighbours, who imagine that they have been British since time immemorial, have grown increasingly indifferent to the privilege. Exactly why this happened is not easily explained, but the loss of Empire, the absence of war, the end of national service, the disgrace of the royal family, and the rise of European consciousness would all have been contributing factors. It is a curious fact that a sizeable proportion of the cases of alleged racial discrimination that have come before the courts in recent years, have been brought by English people complaining of their treatment in Scotland or Wales. It is news to me if the English can claim to be a race. But everything is possible in the worldwide culture of complaint.

This last issue points to a much graver one – namely the centrifugal drift of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. The British authorities never fully succeeded in their aim of creating a British nation-state. The UK has no national church: no unified system of national law; and no national football or cricket team. And now, the longstanding campaign for centralisation and integration has moved into reverse. The policy of Devolution, which was introduced by the Blair Government in 1997, was designed to stem the tide of separatism, especially in Scotland. It may work for a season. But it has created a lopsided and potentially unstable governmental machine that is likely to come under great stress in the near future, not only because the over-mighty position of England has been brought to the fore but also because resentment is bound to be generated by the differential powers of different regions. Why, after all, should the Scots have more rights than the Welsh and far more than England? In the last analysis, the critical decisions will lie with the English who now represent over eighty percent of the whole, and who are getting more assertive and more nationalistic with every day that passes. In the politics of the game, it is absolutely crucial that the so-called Conservative and Unionist Party, once the anchor of the British Establishment, has lost all of its parliamentary seats outside England but one, and will be sorely tempted to play the English nationalist card.

With regard to indigenous peoples, one should remind you that Britain, too, has its aboriginals and that they are known to foreigners as 'the Welsh', (They call themselves *Cymraeg*). With the extinction of the native Cornish, the Welsh are the only true Britons left. They once occupied the greater part of Great Britain from Strathclyde to the Channel, and they have been the leading losers from the spread of the English. (At any rugby match in Cardiff, you can see what the Welsh call

England; and it is *Lloegr* which means ‘the lost territory’.) Still less known is the fact that the Welsh struggled for centuries before they gained equal rights in their homeland for their language and culture. The decisive moment arrived as late as 1962, when after protracted protests and hunger-strikes, the British Government relented. Since then, a judicious policy of bi-culturalism in Wales, where English-speakers and Welsh-speakers both have equal access to the media, to education, and to the administration, has achieved much. It has resulted in relative peace and quiet and in an absolute increase in the number of Welsh-speakers for the first time in 1500 years. It stands in marked contrast to the precarious position of the Gaelic language in Scotland – which, despite belated assistance, now belongs to the category of endangered species.

As for immigration problems, I don’t know what to say. Much of Britain’s present troubles stem from the shortcomings of an inefficient immigration service and from the near total incapacity of the authorities to enforce whatever rules may be laid down. In a country which shuns identity cards and domiciliary registration, fugitive migrants and asylum-seekers are impossible to trace. Nor is it much use, as one Conservative M.P. has suggested, if immigrant communities who practise arranged marriages should stop importing spouses from abroad. If they did that, they would be violating the example set by the British Royal Family over the three centuries of their existence. The British royals are obliged to arrange their marriages by the terms of the Acts of Settlement and Union; and, being almost purely German by descent, they have consistently imported a bride or bridegroom from Germany for every single heir and heiress to the throne from late Hanoverian to mid-Windsor times. The girl who became Queen Victoria was smuggled in from Germany a few days before her birth. And the best known immigrant of our own era, Philip von Sonderburg-Glücksburg (aka Prince of Greece and Denmark or Duke of Edinburgh) is an undeniable case of skilfully marketed German matrimonial exports. The one exception to the rule happened only 20 years ago in 1981, when the heir to the British throne married ‘England’s Rose’, Lady Diana Spencer, who by my calculation would have been the first ever person of English descent to wear a British (or an Australian) crown. Judging by last year’s referendum, Australians don’t care much to examine these matters. So one need not enlarge on the problems which Princess Diana’s tragic life and death exposed. Yet the consequences are still with us. For those who see the monarchy as a means of holding together in a democratic age, the era of pretence must surely be brought to an end.

Apart from all that, Australia is not being subjected to the same internal and external pressures that afflict the United Kingdom, and hence can expect to stay in one piece for longer.

## **Australia and Britain**

The world is changing fast. Britain has willingly surrendered a significant part of its sovereignty to the European Union. Australia is an independent nation that plays its full part in the life of the Asian and Pacific regions to which it belongs. One is fully entitled to ask in the circumstances whether the close links between Britain and Australia will survive.

My answer to that question would be in the affirmative, though not necessarily for the reasons which conservative advocates of the British link might prefer. For a start, most present-day Britons and most present-day Australians share the lot of being orphans of the late great Empire which will never return. For the foreseeable future, they are going to share a common language, and in large measure, a common kinship. Whatever new political or economic framework may emerge, this basic human legacy will remain. One shouldn't forget that the USA chose to leave the British community before the First Fleet sailed. And yet, 220 years on the ties of the English-speaking world, which are not exclusively linguistic, continue to exert their influence.

And then, I would argue that a multicultural Australia will feel greater empathy for a multicultural Britain than if either of them had escaped the multicultural experience. What is more, the Eurodiversity of the Australian population - the presence of all those ex-Italians, ex-Greeks, ex-Germans, ex-Poles and others - can only help to lubricate relations with a Britain that is firmly installed in the European Union. If, as expected, the European Union enlarges in a few years time to encompass twenty or even twenty-five members, the influence in Australia of people descended from dozens of those same nationalities can only work for closer understanding.

Finally, I would argue strongly for the power of History. (He would, wouldn't he?) In the late and unlamented Soviet Union it used to be said that, while the future was fixed, the past was always changing. In reality, though the future is always uncertain, the past can never be changed. Nothing will be able to alter the fact that Australia was born and matured in the British orbit. Nothing can budge the historical reality that in 1901, when the Commonwealth of Australia began its journey, it was part of that same great British family to which England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales also belonged. Hence, when the British monarchy has been pensioned off – as it surely will be: when the UK itself has fallen apart – as it probably will do: when the very word 'British' has been consigned to the past – as it possibly may be: the memory will remain. The point will likely be made at Australia's bi-centennial celebrations of 2101, and, who knows, at the tri-centennial celebrations of 2,201. In a world of growing globalisation, Australia will develop closer contacts with places all over the world. But only one place – not Rio, not Shanghai, not San Francisco – will remain the place from which the First Fleet sailed. And only one country can be remembered as the country by which that first constitution was granted.

Norman Davies  
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