

ISSUE 2310

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

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A coronation

The circus cont.

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A real live circus

A fiction writer could not come up with such an extraordinary assemblage of gadgets and symbols to capture the imagination of readers, or to convince a populace that they have a new leader.

A sword, symbolising the Sword of State (from the 17th Century), which was exchanged for the jewel-encrusted Sword of Offering, encrusted with symbols of a "united" realm, carried by the personage who has the title of Chair of the King's Privy Council, (one Penny Mordaunt MP – a name closely resembling characters from Game of Thrones or Lord of the Rings), a block of stone, representing an ancient ritual of Scottish kings, an Orb and Cross, a Royal Sceptre, a Rod of Equity, a couple of crowns, and all players in fancy dress with each piece of clothing representing some long ago ancient symbol of feudal fealty. And let's not forget the Order of the Thistle and the Order of the Garter, to name but two.

The ceremony involved a deal between church and state, whereby each said they were beholden to the other, and reflected on the value of Protestantism over all other religious beliefs, the king being the "Defender of the Faith", and a musical presentation that one could only say was eclectic. Robes were shed, pacts were signed, oil was anointed, and robes replaced. All very colourful, to be sure.

Every major player read from a script – even the pledges of loyalty were scripted. Finally, they all walked out into the pouring rain, the newly crowned king with an over-sized crown perched atop his head - not looking particularly happy - gets into a horse-drawn gilded cage (carriage), followed by 4000 soldiers in a range of uniforms marching up the Mall, back to where they started from. What a show!

This self-serving pact between church and state goes back to the issue of succession after the progeny of James II, of the Stuart line and himself a Catholic, had two daughters, both of whom reigned, but neither had children. Mary had married William of Orange, followed by her sister Anne. Who was to follow?

James II had a son from a second marriage, who was staunchly Catholic. This was not what the parliament was prepared to accept, and so dug deep into the genealogical records to find a protestant line in George of Hanover. (George's grandmother was the elder daughter of James I, the father of younger brother Charles I).

Needless to say, the Stuarts were not happy. and argued they were the rightful heirs to the throne. Thus, the Jacobean uprisings, and of the claim of Bonnie Prince Charlie – the Pretender. Anyway, the Anglican Church got what it wanted, and the deal was done. The Act of Settlement was born.

All of which adds to an impressive historical narrative, none of which is particularly relevant to Australian society, or to our very own social covenant.

The ceremony, with all its pomp and circumstance, clearly underscores the fact that here in Australia we have reached the point where we should proclaim ourselves a separate self-governing country, with our own traditions and aspirations.

The value of the Westminster system is that it provides us with an appropriate governance model, where the head of state has a symbolic role with reserve powers to be used in time of need, but with executive power residing in an elected parliament.

For the record, the 14 other countries that still have the British monarch as their head of state are (in Oceania) Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. And from the Americas, Canada, Jamaica, the Bahamas, St Vincent, St Kitts Nevis, St Lucia, Antigua, Belize and Grenada.

All other Commonwealth countries have their own head of state.

The ABC was having none of this carry-on. In the buildup to the ceremony itself, with all the comings and goings, and the musical offerings, the ABC basically ignored the pageantry and ran a separate narrative - the historic point - of invasion and slavery. What extraordinary timing! And what a turn-off. The response was immediate - most folk just changed channels. Talk about losing an audience!

The Circus continues

After a last-minute negotiation – whatever it was about it was a secret - the nineteenth AFL licence was handed by the AFL to the State. Deal done. The big issue - no, not the money, but what were we going to call it, and who was going to lead it. Everyone liked naming the team (or it the club? The Devils. However, this is certainly not a done deal. Not sure yet whether they can, because of copyright arrangements.

As for the money, who knows? For some reason, the terms of the deal remain a secret. One presumes it is at the AFL's request as it may jeopardise negotiations with other AFL clubs. However, once again suspicion and doubt reign.

We are told a state team will encourage more young kids to take up football. The Mercury, now on the Kool-Aid, continues to paint the virtues of having "our own team", and continues to talk up the deal and report those who show suitable enthusiasm, including kids.

As if to provide some balance to the hype, or should I say counterbalance, the AFL then moved to close down the state-wide league, leaving the 7 senior clubs scratching their heads and querying "next steps". The state-wide league has been a hard slog, and most teams have suffered. The head of the TSL advised that the supporters did not support the state-wide league – nor did many of the players, because of the travel.

Obviously, a state-wide league did not incentivise our kids.

As for the stadium, the stadium has stirred up deep divisions, both in terms of cost, the open-ended nature of the commitment and choice of site, and it will remain a point of serious divide for some years to come.

For the government to enter into a deal with the federal government without resolving what the money is to be spent on and the GST issue (see last newsletter) says heaps about how this matter has been handled.

The Federal Budget

The federal budget was delivered last evening. As predicted, the budget delivered a surplus, it provided a higher level of community support through a range of targeted packages, and gained additional revenue from *inter alia* taxing the gas companies.

Critics on one side will say not enough support was provided, while critics on the other side will say too much spending will fuel inflation.

The budget has tried to be fair and has been handled responsibly. It certainly sets the scene for further reforms, including tax reform, and quite frankly, not before time. If there is a criticism to be made it is that the government could have moved faster in this space.

It was with some incredulity that we witnessed on budget eve the state government calling on the federal government to provide electricity pricing relief, when they had steadfastly refused to provide that relief themselves.

Not only that, but they also allowed prices to rise by 12%, far in excess of the cost of providing that power. Which begs the question whether it could be regarded as an excise! And that is an interesting question!

No doubt they will now be fulsome in their praise for the actions the feds have taken on this matter to relieve the pressure caused by them. Don't hold your breath!

On elections:

1 Legislative Council

Last Saturday saw an election for 3 of the 15 Legislative Council seats. All three retiring members contested their seats, and all three were returned, handsomely.

The Leg Co is not a chamber that excites much interest in the public mind, at least not normally, being the State Parliament's House of Review, and it is indeed a rare thing to witness a sitting member not be re-elected. Once there, one would need to do something extraordinary against the public interest to be voted out.

It is often argued that the Leg Co, being a House of Review, should be a House of and for Independents, but it is an argument that does not hold water, as it plays no Executive role as such. It is not the House of Government.

In this instance, two of the successful candidates proclaimed themselves as independent, and one Labor.

Congratulations to each on their success!

2 And finally, a resignation

With impeccable timing Stuart Robert announced last Friday afternoon he was standing down from Parliament. You may recall Robert as being the Minister in charge of Robo-Debt, and you may have seen his role exposed in the Royal Commission into the Robo-debt scandal. Well, maybe you didn't, especially if you were relying on the Murdoch media for your news.

The Royal Commission is due to report its findings on or before 30 June, and it will no doubt be scathing of the former government and individual ministers in its findings. As such the decision of Roberts to leave parliament at this time might be coincidental, but his expressed desire to spend more time with his family comes at a most convenient time.

Stuart Robert is the member for the Gold Coast seat of Farrer, a blue-ribbon seat, and another by-election will test the popularity of the two major parties post the budget.