



Speech by

**JEFF KNUTH**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

Hansard 22 July 1999

### **AUSTRALIA ACTS (REQUEST) BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Burdekin—IND) (11.30 a.m.): I rise to speak on this Bill which will assist the changing of the Constitution of Australia. Many members have spoken about Australia's original Constitution and stated that certain aspects of the Bill of Rights persecuted Catholics. I would like to set the record straight. I agree that the 1688 Bill of Rights came into being during a time of conflict between Protestants and Catholics. However, the conflict surrounded not just the Catholics, the Anglicans and the Puritans; at that time King Charles I tried to dissolve the Parliament of Great Britain. He tried to hire a Catholic army from Scotland in an attempt to defeat the combined forces of Oliver Cromwell and the Roundheads. At the time of that conflict—

**Mr Reynolds:** I didn't realise you were so well read.

**Mr KNUTH:** I take the interjection from the member for Townsville.

That battle was not necessarily between Catholics and Protestants. Protestants and Catholics had been fighting over the Crown of England for quite some time. The main issue was that the King of England had failed to uphold his oath of coronation. He tried to bring in a Scottish army in an attempt to defeat the Protestant army. That issue was the catalyst for the 1688 Bill of Rights, which came into fruition, I think, under William of Orange and Princess Anne, who eventually swore in the coronation oath to uphold the 1688 Bill of Rights. We have enjoyed freedom ever since. That Bill of Rights gives the common people of our land the rights of freedom to stop a tyrannical Government from being able to overtake our State or nation. It gives the rights back to the people. We have enjoyed those rights for the last 400 or so years.

I remember when I was a young fellow seeing pictures of Bill Hayden, one of the Labor Party's well-known representatives. I can remember seeing pictures of Bill Hayden marching up and down the streets with a red banner and all his pinky mates wanting to get rid of the monarchist system and all the privileges that we enjoy. He fought for that issue for many years. I saw him on the media on many occasions saying, "We have to get rid of the constitutional monarchy. We must get rid of the Australian Constitution. We must get rid of the Queen. We must get rid of anything that comes from that country." As we all know, our old mate Bill never got to be Prime Minister, so he was given another great position, that of Governor-General of Australia. After a couple of years in office, he thought, "This ain't such a bad position after all. We really shouldn't be fighting." He told his mate Paul—

**Mr Pearce:** Is that Shaun saying this?

**Mr KNUTH:** No, I do not think Shaun is saying this. I am saying this.

He started to try to tell his own party that we have inherited a very good system. We inherited from the English monarchists the Westminster system and the 1688 Bill of Rights, which is incorporated into our Australian Constitution.

**Mr Hamill:** Don't forget Magna Carta.

**Mr KNUTH:** The 1688 Bill of Rights is the revised Magna Carta. We have enjoyed that system.

**Mr Gibbs:** What about Archimedes' principle?

**Mr KNUTH:** I am speaking here. It was your mate Bill Hayden who said these very words. You cannot deny that.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind the member for Burdekin to speak through the Chair. I am having a bit of difficulty understanding the relevance of the member's speech to the Bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** There is a lot of relevance. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sorry that you cannot understand that, but I will continue on.

As I was saying, the attempts to try to get rid of—

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am having great difficulty understanding the application to the Bill. Could members please let the member for Burdekin speak.

**Mr KNUTH:** If my words are offending the members opposite, I will get on with my contribution to the Bill.

**Mr Feldman:** There is a lot of sensitivity there.

**Mr KNUTH:** It is very sensitive.

**Mr Hamill:** It is not offending us; it is amusing us.

**Mr KNUTH:** Can I continue then?

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Logan!

**Mr KNUTH:** It is good to see that the member for Logan has returned to his correct seat to interject.

Will the dissolving of our Australian Constitution do anything for the unemployed in this country? Will it solve any of the problems and the issues that are facing us today? Will it add one hair to a head?

**Mr Mickel:** That's what you would like it to do.

**Mr KNUTH:** I would be hoping for that. I can assure the member for Logan that, if it did, I would be pushing for it myself; but it will not. The truth is that it will not change the way we live. It will not help the unemployed. It will not help the disabled. The \$1.5 billion that this will cost would help the unemployed and the disabled in this country. It would give people a little more opportunity to seek work. I am not speaking as a member for Parliament now; I am speaking as a normal representative citizen of this country. Honestly, what will this do for our country?

**Mr Gibbs:** Haven't you heard that part of the plot is also to confiscate the Crown jewels?

**Mr KNUTH:** I do not know anything about the Crown jewels. I can understand some aspects of the Republican movement's arguments that question having the Queen as our country's head of state. I can understand that. I do not have a problem with that, but I do not think that is the issue. What I do have a problem understanding is the desire to change Australia's terrific system of government, the Westminster system. Why change it? I am a true conservative. If the system works, why change it? Why reinvent the wheel?

**Mr Mickel:** Why did you want to paint the bridge in that case?

**Mr KNUTH:** The member for Logan raised an issue. On behalf of my electorate I will act on any idea that will benefit tourism in my electorate.

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I think it would assist the entire House if members allowed the member for Burdekin to continue his speech uninterrupted.

**Mr KNUTH:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. You are a man of integrity.

I am not of English descent; I am of German descent. My great-great-grandparents were German Catholics. They were persecuted in the northern part of Germany for their religious beliefs as, at that time, the Lutherans were very strongly pushing their doctrine over the northern parts of Germany and Scandinavia. They were under persecution. They were farmers who were virtually pushed off their land. So I have no allegiance to Great Britain or the Crown. In 1870 my great-great-grandfather came to Australia and landed in Bowen. In 1873 he moved to the Burdekin. In 1876 most of my family moved to Charters Towers. They recognised that this land had a terrific system of government. Federation had not yet occurred, but they recognised that the English parliamentary system was not derogative to different religions and races. They quite happily settled in this country. We have been in the district ever since.

The Westminster system, the constitutional monarchy, is a terrific system. Who has suffered under our system of government? No-one! It is a terrific system. I agree that the American system may be slightly better, but I think that the Westminster system is the best that we can have.

**A Government member:** In what way?

**Mr KNUTH:** I think that it offers a bit more in terms of the individual rights and freedoms of citizens. However, I know from talking to many people, especially people who have, wisely, come from other countries and chosen to live in Australia—and members can criticise my past involvement with One Nation, but whether they like it or not, my family is a multicultural family—that they cannot understand why Australia wants to become a republic. Apart from the United States, very few countries that have republics enjoy the freedoms that we have.

The member for Ashgrove raised a few good points. He talked about his Greek ancestry and heritage. I have no problem at all with that. Most of my constituents are Italians, Sicilians and Spaniards, and I have no problem with that. They are very fine people and they are proud of their heritage. However, they all recognise that the Westminster system that we have is a better system than the system in their own countries. So why would we want to change that system?

**Mr Mickel:** You have just lost your audience.

**Mr KNUTH:** I think that they had enough of the interjections from those opposite. They thought that they were disgusting and unparliamentary.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I would appreciate it if the member would return to the contents of the Bill.

**Mr KNUTH:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sorry. The members opposite keep distracting me.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Burdekin will return to the Bill. He does not have to take interjections.

**Mr KNUTH:** The point I am making is that I think that this Australia Acts (Request) Bill is a total waste of time. Come September, I think that the Australian people will reject the republican movement. It just does not make sense. The referendum is going to be a waste of money and it is going to be a waste of time. I would rather see that \$1.5 billion spent on the needs of the community, such as assisting disabled people by providing ramps and other things.

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** That is a good point. I agree with that.

**Mr Mickel:** You just said they were a waste of time.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Logan!

**Mr KNUTH:** He is disappointing. He just cannot help himself. I will not support this Bill, on the grounds that I think the referendum is going to be a waste of taxpayers' money and a waste of time. We have a terrific system. Let us stick to it.

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