



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard 21 July 1999

AUSTRALIA ACTS (REQUEST) BILL

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (5.30 p.m.): I was not going to speak in the debate on the Australia Acts (Request) Bill, but I have been sitting here for some time now and have listened to those opposite get up and say mealy-mouthed that they will support this legislation because people have to have their democratic right but then take every opportunity to show their monarchist colours. I thought it would not be fair of me, as one of the migrants in this Chamber, to not respond to some of the inane comments made.

The previous speaker, the member for Redlands, said that his view was that the United States left its English brotherhood because of taxation. It had nothing to do with taxation; it was really about nationhood. It was about America not being allowed to have its own banking system. It was about it having tariffs so that it could protect its own industries. America had had imposed upon it a set of economic circumstances that would have allowed it to become nothing more than a quarry. That was nothing more than colonialism at its worst.

The wars for independence were about economic nationality. They were about America having its own industry and having the ability to grow and become a strong nation. All the colonialists in England wanted America to be was just a quarry. They wanted to get raw materials from it—buy them cheap and then sell the products from them at a higher price. The war of independence was all about America's right to issue its own bank notes and so on. Ultimately, America came to a decision to be truly independent much quicker than we have. It came to the decision that it was ultimately in its interests to be independent, to have its own head of state, and to have its own constitution.

It was not that long ago that Australia had recourse to the Privy Council as the final arbiter of our laws. How ludicrous! We continually see examples of our need for an Australian head of state. It is symbolic. We are taking a minimalist approach. This is about who we are and where we are going.

I am one of six million migrants who have come to this country since the war. Two-thirds of those—more than four million—came from non-English speaking backgrounds. I swore allegiance to the Crown because I wanted to be an Australian citizen. I did not take citizenship; I was naturalised. I wanted to be Australian. That is why I came here. I wanted to belong. I wanted to be able to contribute. I wanted to play a role in shaping the cultural and economic fabric of this my adopted nation. Unlike others such as Mr Santoro, who is a Sicilian, I did not come here to be part of a new little Britain in a brighter, wealthier new Britannia of the southern hemisphere; I came here to be an Australian. I am proud to be Australian. That is what this is all about.

Members opposite are trying to tell us that they are about supporting the status quo. They are telling us that somehow or other, by virtue of having our own head of state, by virtue of actually growing up one day—cutting the apron strings and becoming a truly independent nation—we are selling out. How ludicrous can those opposite get?

I agree with One Nation in one regard. I think the treatment of Heather Hill under the Constitution was very technical. My view is that if one votes in this country, one should be able to be a candidate. Electors should be able to be candidates. I am pleased that to become a member of the State Parliament I did not have to get up on a soap box and say publicly that I disown my Greekness, because I do not want to do that. I am an Australian national. The Greeks have two words that can describe this difficulty. One is "cratos", which means nation. The other is "ethnos", which means

peoplehood. My cratos—my nation—is Australia. My children were born here and I am proud to be Australian. My first loyalty is to Australia.

The most misused word in our community is "ethnic", because we all have ethnicity. We all are ethnics. The only non-ethnic people in this country are the Aboriginals, and they are the ones One Nation dislikes the most. We all have ethnicity; I happen to have a Greek background. I happen to be of Greek ethnicity. I am pleased that I do not have to say that I disown my Greekness. I am pleased that our Constitution allows me to say that I am an Australian national. I have been one for more than 40 years.

In my view, as a voter I have a fundamental right to be a member of this Legislature. I think that the technicality in the Constitution that came into play in relation to Heather Hill should be looked at. The Greek Government will never not recognise my Greekness. As far as it is concerned I am Greek, but I took the positive step of becoming an Australian more than 40 years ago.

It amazes me that members opposite get up, one after the other, and say, "We support the legislation. We support the fundamental right of Australians to vote for a republic. Of course, it is going to be beaten, but we support that right." If that happens, in a democracy, then we should support the Australia Acts (Request) Bill, as every other Australian Legislature will.

I was amazed by the speech made by the member for Clayfield. For a person of his background to disown who he is and suddenly become a grovelling monarchist I think does him no credit, and it certainly will do him no credit in his own community. The member for Indooroopilly says that his reason for not supporting the republican movement is that it does not go far enough. He says that we are trying to con people with this minimalist approach.

I am pleased to be on record as saying that I support this legislation. I will do whatever I can in the months to November to make sure that people understand that the republican debate is about relevance. It is about us being an independent nation. It is about us growing up. It is about us cutting the apron strings from mother England. It is about not having the Queen as head of state. Wherever she goes, except when she comes here, she is the Queen of England. I know that a lot of people who have come here from a lot of countries—even from England—understand that it is about time we grew up.

I have sat here today and heard inane arguments put forward about why we really are better off as we are—for example, that it will cost a lot of money to change stationery and that there are other things more worthy of debate. There are many arguments for doing nothing. I could use the analogy of a young man looking for an excuse not to do something. He finds that excuse very readily. That is exactly how the people opposite are behaving. They are behaving like spoilt children who want to rationalise the position they have taken. It is a classic rationalisation. They are trying to find all the wrong reasons and will not state the real reasons for their opposition. Although I worry about Queensland supporting the referendum, I am sure the majority of Australian States and the majority of voters in Australia will vote for a republic, no matter how much Opposition members try to muddy the waters. I am amazed that One Nation members want to be two nations. They have come into this House draped in a flag saying that they are Australians. They claim that they are about one nation, but they really want to be two nations. They want to have the Queen of another country as their Queen. It is such an anomalous argument. It is beyond—

Mr Lucas: They support a head of state who must be a male—regardless of whether a female was born first—must be a Protestant, cannot marry a Catholic and cannot be an Australian citizen by definition. That is the sort of system they want.

Mr FOURAS: I know how incongruous that argument is, and anybody who wants to support that argument should get on a boat and go back to England.

I commend the legislation to the House. I stand proudly in this Chamber and support the rights of Australians to have their own integrity, to have their own character and to have their own nation. It is a shame that members opposite want to side with that inane and obsolete group who call themselves One Nation and who want to split this country. I support the Bill.
