

## ACTU CONGRESS SEPTEMBER 1993

### AN AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC

The ACTU Congress, having considered developments in regard to the introduction of a republic:

- 1.1 Recognises a republican Australia with its unique blend of history, languages and cultures has long been an objective of the Australian Labor Party and congratulates Prime Minister Keating on reintroducing this debate into the political arena.
- 1.2 Recognises that the current Constitution is basically undemocratic in the role assigned to the Governor General and its reliance on uncodified, vague and ambiguous conventions.
- 1.3 Deplores the fact that successive Federal Labor Governments have been frustrated in their attempts to implement progressive programs through conservative interpretations of the Constitution as well as being denied Government in 1975 by the unabashed failure of the conservative parties in this country to abide by those conventions, in particular that a Prime Minister with the confidence of the House of Representatives forms a Government.
- 1.4 Encourages affiliates to participate actively in the debate and in particular to inform their members of the issues involved in order to enhance greater understanding of and respect for the fundamental principles of democracy and political legitimacy in our community, including:
  - (i) sovereignty of the people;
  - (ii) the principles of responsible government, ie. public office on public trust for the public good and open to public scrutiny;
  - (iii) equality of individuals as citizens.
- 1.5 With respect to the specific matters being investigated by the Republic Advisory Committee:
  - (i) Supports the removal of all reference to the Queen in the Australian Constitution for reasons of autonomy, independence and symbolism.
  - (ii) Supports the creation of a purely symbolic Head of State to be known as President of Australia,
    - (a) required to act solely on the advice of the Government of the day,
    - (b) with reserve powers codified and subject to interpretation by the High Court and limited to dismissing a Prime Minister who has lost the confidence of the House of Representatives and requiring an election when no party holds a clear majority in that House,
    - (c) to be appointed by the Government of the day for a fixed term of five years and capable of being removed by the Government of the day,
    - (d) with no qualifications for office beyond being an adult Australian citizen.
  - (iii) Supports the Constitution setting out the reality in terms of executive power, ie. to be exercised by the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

- (iv) Supports all States severing their links with the monarchy.
- 1.6 Supports the inclusion in any proposal for constitutional change the outcome of any successful process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- 1.7 Recognising that the constitutional changes sought by the Government will be limited to the Head of State and related matters, calls on unions to use the associated public debate to reinforce basic Australian community values such as:
- (i) support for a key role for the public sector in terms of the quality and breadth of the services it provides where, by way of example, the Australian social welfare system and Medicare are international models;
  - (ii) Australian ownership of major resource developments, major institutions, etc, which impinges on notions of sovereignty;
  - (iii) support for the preservation of Australia's natural and cultural heritage;
  - (iv) support for a reassessment of the roles of the different tiers of government in terms of the services they provide and their inter-relationship in particular with respect to urban and regional development initiatives directly related to job creation;
  - (v) commitment to the traditional values of fairness, tolerance, respect and a rejection of discrimination and racism.