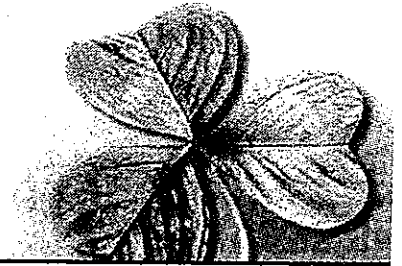


# For what it's worth

Billy Cantwell  
on St Patrick's Day



## **'The Irish Australian republican desire is consistent with history. It is this country's destiny.'**

I emigrated here in 1987. As many as one million Irish had made the same trip before me and quite a few have since.

I became a citizen in June 1994, alongside 90 other Irish expats at the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney.

It was an emotional day. The significance of embracing a new citizenship was not lost on any of us. Irish and Australian songs were played and sung.

The Department of Immigration wondered why so many Irish had suddenly decided that they would become Australian citizens. It was not an impulse move.

The Irish had waited patiently for Australia to change.

Weeks earlier, the Labor government had got rid of a certain oath of allegiance to Queen Elizabeth, the English monarch.

Now, almost 20 years later, we are waiting for Australia to change again.

I have three little Aussies of my own and I want them to grow up in a country where they, or any of their fellow Australian citizens, can be the head of state.

As it stands, that rare privilege is reserved for the members of a rich, dysfunctional family who live in England.

Monarchists will try to tell you we have our own Aussie head of state, the Governor-General. But if they do, they haven't read the constitution they are so desperate to hold on to.

By now you might be thinking, here we go, another Paddy consumed with a pathological hate of the English.

But today – St Patrick's Day – I think it is important to set the record straight on behalf of generations of Irish Australians.

The Irish position on Australian nationalism has been more or less consistent since the convict days. There was never a desire to claim this country in the name of Ireland. The Irish wanted Australia to be independent and free.

To be a loyal Australian, you had to be loyal to England and the monarch. This continues to be problematic for the Irish.

But the issue of loyalty is one that may be now trending against the monarchists. Loyalty to Australia is no longer synonymous with loyalty to Britain.

Republicans, and Irish republicans in particular, have had to endure the slur of disloyalty for over 200 years. It may be time for monarchists to feel the heat.

Smugly, the monarchists have declared the republic dead in the water. But on Australia Day this year we saw 12 former Australians Of The Year, and the incumbent Simon McKeon, calling for a new flag. Hope springs eternal.

As Australia celebrates its oldest ethnic celebration – St Patrick's Day – I want to say to Irish Aussies that they need not be inhibited in their desire for this country to shed its English livery.

The Irish Australian republican desire is consistent with history and, ultimately, it is this country's destiny.

Monarchy – any monarchy – is, for want of a better word, un-Australian.

It may be too much to hope for that this country might one day see the merit in getting rid of the sycophantic names of the states (I mean, c'mon, Queensland?).

But I would like to think by the time my eldest can vote, Australia will have had its own glorious constitutional makeover and we will be selecting our own president.

That gives us seven years, Australia. Over to you, Julia.

■ Billy Cantwell contributes to [thepunch.com.au](http://thepunch.com.au), where this article first appeared.