

DAVID TAKES ON GOLIATH IN A FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS

By Kevin Glancy

One should never underestimate Professor David E. Flint AM, particularly when he is on a mission. Quietly spoken, articulate and highly intelligent, David's passion for the challenge ahead lies just under the surface but there's no mistaking its presence.

As our conversation turns towards the task at hand it begins to burn bright as he reminisces about a group of people who gathered in Corowa, a small town perched on the southern edge of New South Wales on July 31st 1893.

When David Flint talks, you listen. You can't help it. His knowledge of Australian history is fascinating, extensive and detailed, but he doesn't waste words and this was no idle journey back into the past. He was simply making the connection between where we were then and where we are now and he had my attention. After all, this is where it all began.

In 1893, the people had assembled for the conference in the Corowa Court House, brought there by grand ambition to plot a democratic course for Australia. It's difficult to know how confident they were on that July morning so long ago but in six short years, thanks to their efforts, Corowa would become indelibly marked in Australian history, to be regarded forever as the birthplace of Federation.

It should not be forgotten that in effect, their humble conference had been Australia's first real demonstration of people power with regard to how we are to be governed.

But as David explains, what was also significant about that particular conference was the motion accepted by all who attended and it is as relevant today as it was over 100 years ago. In effect it was an example of direct democracy by the people through the conference process, the very process that David wants to see reinstalled.

The motion passed in Corowa adopted a novel process that all future Federation conference delegates should be elected by the people, instead of being representatives of the various governments; that they should draw up a constitution and that this be referred to the people and not the parliaments for acceptance or rejection.

The point was made. 1893 was about the people directing politicians to act on their behalf. In effect, Australian politicians were to be held accountable and to be responsive to the people's wishes. Unfortunately, to the country's detriment, since those pioneering days that right has been gradually eroded, to the extent that it has now, all but disappeared and as David says.

"Australians need to re-connect with that same Corowa spirit. It illustrates how the power of the people through representative democracy can influence change."

Back then people directed politicians; however, in Australia today we have lost that power. There is no longer a process to protect our right to decide on which matters government is to respond. Further there is no process in place by which we can hold our government to account for their actions which may be contrary to our best interests."

There are many examples of such conduct from both sides of politics but a clear case in point would be the imposition of a carbon tax. It was introduced despite an election promise made to the Australian people by our Prime Minister, who was emphatic at the time."

"There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead."

"Apart from that broken promise, the question is yet to be asked. Is such a major tax in our best interests given that no mandate has been sought or provided by the Australian people to confirm that interest?"

What is the point of supporting a party or candidate in an election when promises made to gain our vote are so easily cast aside? There needs to be a post-election process conducted by the people to prevent that outcome."

David points out that in fairness to all politicians and for those who would argue that they are all the same, how former Prime Minister John Howard had initially promised not to introduce a Goods and Services Tax and then changed

his mind. However, in direct comparison to Gillard and the carbon tax, John Howard, to his credit, sought a mandate from the people at a federal election before he imposed the GST. David continues as he drives home the point.

"Julia Gillard should have sought that kind of mandate for the carbon tax and the fact that she didn't confirms that her promise prior to the election was a cynical exercise. It was made by her because she knew that the majority of Australians would not have approved and votes would be lost.

It highlights how deceitful and mercenary her pre-election actions were which were then compounded by her post-election arrogance and further dishonesty, refusing to admit that her promise actually meant that there would be no carbon tax.

Ms.Gillard's total lack of respect and contempt for the wishes of the electorate clearly emphasises why Australians need and deserve a process by which we can hold politicians to account and force them to seek a mandate prior to imposing such major policies like the carbon tax.

And now we are seeing a disregard in NSW for the very clear indication that CSG mining not proceed on prime agricultural and urban land."

David's enthusiasm for the subject matter is contagious but he remains in control and objective. As he continues, despite his vast 'technical' knowledge, his arguments are simple, logical and highly persuasive.

It's obvious that he clearly cherishes his country but as a proud Australian, David Flint believes its people have been let down, even betrayed. So he cannot resist the challenge to right the wrongs. Perhaps that is due in part to his legal background and throughout our conversation, despite David's over-riding charm and reasoned delivery, you sense that he is coiled, prepared and ready to spring forth into battle.

Goliath the government should take heed. David Flint is no stranger to conflict. His last melee saw him beat the odds despite the venom, the hate and the full force of the national media firing potshots at him and the people he represented.

It was 1999 the year of the Republican Referendum and David was the National

Convenor of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy (ACM). His was the principal organisation standing between the barrage of mainly pro-republican propaganda and the much smaller force of quieter but alternative voices.

For those vague on that memory, it was not a time to underestimate the nature of the battle. Australia's immediate political and constitutional fate was very much on the line and the forces were amassed against David Flint and all he stood for.

Most in the media and many politicians demanded that Australians deliver a 'yes' vote. To do otherwise would be un-Australian and this was the slogan hurled at Australians on a daily basis in headlines and on television across the country.

The reality of course was that a simple 'yes' vote would dismiss a proven formula that had held Australia in reasonable stead and in turn, deliver a republican 'she'll be alright on the night' model with too many holes. Worse; it would see the two party 'dictatorial' system set in concrete from that day forward, untouchable by mere man or woman.

The appointment of a head of state was to be purely symbolic much like it is now. In effect, that person would be a servant of the government and not of the people. Worse, Australia would have become the only republic in the world or in history where it would have been easier for the prime minister to sack the president than his driver. The president would be the prime minister's poodle.

The hypocrisy of many in politics who called and continue to call for a republic based on achieving so-called independence is a myth. Our independence has long since been surrendered, not to the Queen but to the United Nations, by those very same people in government who continue to make us subservient to that questionable, socialist organisation.

Fortunately in 1999 the powers that be, underestimated both David Flint and the majority of Australians who, much to their great credit, weren't fooled by the bombardment of biased, emotional rhetoric they had endured over many weeks.

On November 6th of that year, the majority stood tall and firmly closed the door. And David says we are a republic anyway – a "crowned republic". Whether or not the door to the alternative, a politicians' republic is opened again in the future, there is one thing we do know. Regardless of where you stood on the

issue, the right decision was made on that November day because it was a majority decision, the people had spoken and for one brief moment we saw true, Australian democracy in action.

On reflection David Flint sees it as a time when Australia came of age when a 'yes' vote may have been a natural response under the pressure of such concentrated media bias and jingoism. Yet Australians proved to be resistant to those louder, constant voices that demanded that we blindly follow their unreliable course without question. David recalls his elation at the time when it was such a proud day to be Australian despite the continued grumblings of those who had been left wanting.

David learnt much about campaigning back in 1999 and believes that it is now time to marshal the forces once more. This time it's about reinstating a process that will provide representative democracy similar to a system that operates in Switzerland. However, this is a far greater challenge than the republican referendum. It can be assumed that the politicians and their media supporters will resist any opportunity to restore our rights. Further, they will use any means to ensure that it doesn't happen.

Already the signs are there with the movement for action being referred to as Australia's Tea Party. This is a reference to an American conservative entity that has been completely misunderstood and deliberately vilified by our dominated Left-wing media over the past few years.

In any event, there is little comparison between the two, apart from the fact that anyone who sensibly wants to stop government waste and make government accountable is deemed to be some kind of extremist or at the very least irresponsible. Look out for more of that type of misleading and insulting rhetoric over the next few months.

However, David Flint is determined and believes that in the current political climate and with the approaching federal election that there is no better opportunity to repair the damage than right now. Although left unsaid, it's clear when you talk to Professor David Flint that, from his perspective, this is a battle that must be won for all our sakes.

As he says;

"Many people are now saying that they cannot recall in their lifetime a federal government which has been as incompetent, so deceitful and so unworthy as the one we currently have.

The government is very much the product of a political system controlled by the faceless, the factions and the vested interests.

It's a system that influences all major political parties and breeds mediocrity; a system that controls all levels of government, and puts the governance of our country in the hands of people who, for the most part, are bereft of wisdom and sound judgment.

The current government is an example of that mediocrity with its members clearly out of their depth, thrashing around and using distraction to conceal their failures and to save their political lives. All made worse because they operate with little scrutiny from the media and for the most part with impunity.

Any attempt made by the few objective sections of the media to highlight their errors and they are referred to as the 'hate media' by the government. Unjustified media inquiries are then established under the guise of privacy concerns when their sole purpose is to find ways to limit the ability of journalists to hold the government to account.

Make no mistake. These are dangerous times for our democracy because there is no accountability. We are kept at arm's length with very little say in the decisions that are made. Inevitably, governments make mistakes, fail to address what is important to all of us and ultimately, we all pay a very high price for their lack of due diligence and incompetence."

It's hard to argue with the disturbing picture of reality that David presents. It is Australia today and it doesn't matter which part of the political spectrum you occupy, most of us have one thing in common. It's that shared recognition of an acute lack of accountability throughout all levels of government whether local, state or federal. We also know that the distance between we the people and the process of government, is wider than it has ever been before.

Politicians like to throw the word 'democracy' around but there is little of it in our day to day lives. Ours is not to question government but to obey without question.

Governments are elected to serve and to respond to our wishes yet we have little influence. Any influence we might have during an election campaign is flung aside once the dust has settled on polling day. Promises are broken without even a hint of remorse and legislation is introduced without a mandate.

So I asked David what is the solution? Where do we go from here? David's response was instant.

"I believe in relying on the inherent common sense of the people. After all, that's what happens with our juries, who determine guilt or innocence. The people operate in the real world in the cities, the suburbs and the country towns throughout Australia. I believe that they are better placed to know what's best for them and they deserve a voice or at the very least, a representative voice."

David explains how the campaign to find that voice starts with a simple question for all Australians.

"Do you want your government to be accountable?"

If the answer is yes then we will have taken our first step towards making all politicians responsible for the things they say and do, to be held accountable and responsive to the wishes of a working representative democracy.

It's not a pipe dream we have that power – the power to change the way we are governed and there is a process we can follow in order to achieve that outcome.

Our power is in the numbers and when we vote at the next federal election we can exert that power in the direction of the party that guarantees a commitment. That if elected it will instigate a system to provide representative democracy by establishing an elected convention.

The convention delegates would be elected and unpaid as in the 1998 Convention. No doubt coming from all walks of life, the convention would consist of Australian citizens who want to restore government accountability.

Federal, state and territory leaders would also be invited as in 1998, but unlike then, they would not vote. Much of the work of the Convention would be undertaken in committees assisted by experts and using modern and inexpensive methods of communication. The task of the Convention would be to consider all

the technical issues and then prepare bills for referendums on the forms of direct democracy to be considered by the Australian people. The Convention would operate under the Corowa process- after consultation with the politicians, it would be understood that the bills would be passed and put to the people.

The ultimate aim is to make our politicians accountable to their masters , the Australian people, not every three or four years in elections where too many of the candidates have been preselected in some opaque process more for factional loyalties than on merit. The aim is to make the politicians accountable in every week of every month of every year – just as rank and file Australians are in their employment and in their businesses.”

As an Emeritus Professor of Law, David Flint is well versed in the legal process required at such a convention and explains that there are 4 basic tools by which we can restore accountability at all levels of government. However, gaining the commitment from political parties to establish the convention system is the priority and where the battle begins.

That battle can only be won with people power and those voices need to be harnessed.

It all sounds good in theory so I asked David about the mechanics. How can this force of people power be recruited and brought to bear on a system of government that must be changed?

“We’ve established an independent, grassroots Community Action Network called CANdo and its major role is to provide the meeting point for all who are in favour of seeking greater government accountability.

People can access that network online and answer the simple question; do you want your government to be accountable? By doing so membership of CANdo is provided and they will become part of the force seeking that change in the way we are governed.

Prior to the election we will seek a commitment from all political parties to install representative democracy via the convention method as part of the process of government and advise our members of their reaction. Ultimately, it will be recommended to our members that the party which provides that ‘iron clad’ commitment is worthy of their vote.

If we can recruit enough people we will have enough power to instigate change and bring an end to the system of government which currently operates as a dictatorship."

There is no doubt that David Flint and Executive Director of CANdo Jai Martinkovits have taken on the fight of their lives and it is a fight that must be won. You can be equally sure that because it is about our rights as Australians that there will be many who operate in the political world, particularly those of the Left-wing persuasion who will do all they can to obstruct such a process.

Of course, David Flint has seen it all before and when most in the media are on your case you need a very thick skin but David Flint has the hide of an elephant so insults and name calling are of no consequence, he won't be swayed.

As his mother, a remarkable woman in her own right, used to say about those who trade in insults, *"When you want to hit someone you can always find a stick."*

You can be sure that now her son has launched his latest crusade there will be many with undemocratic intentions looking for every dirty piece of wood that they can find.

When one talks of democracy it's hard to avoid a cliché but David genuinely believes in the power of the people and he is emphatic. *"It will be the people, not the politicians who will put Australia back on track."*

So now it's up to us to make sure that happens. It's that simple but it's no time for apathy, this is our chance to invoke the Corowa spirit, to take on Goliath and win back our rights.

Footnote: To answer the question; **"Do you want your government to be accountable?"**

Go to <http://directdemocracy.org.au/index.php/get-involved/sign-the-petition>

You can also visit <http://www.cando.org.au/campaign-hub/current-campaigns/4-make-governments-accountable-247>



theissue.com.au