

Ralph G.C. Bartlett: Good Flag – Bad Use

Abstract: *The purpose of my lecture is to share with you all how attitudes and use of the Australian National Flag has changed, I think in a detrimental and sinister way, particularly since the shameful and tragic events of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States of America.*

Historically until recent years flag use in Australia has been pretty benign. We are a nation which likes to think of itself as relaxed and tolerant, always willing to give a person a "fair go", in place that we like to call, "the lucky country". In the past this attitude also extended to Australian's usage of flags.

Popularisation of flag usage in Australia really began in September-October 1983, when the Australian yacht, Australia II, won the America's cup flying the "Boxing Kangaroo" flag. This flag, together with the Australian National Flag, began to be flown and displayed by individuals at sporting events around the nation. In 1988 and then again in 2001, the Australian National Flag took pride of place in commemorations marking first the 200th anniversary of permanent European (British) settlement in Australia, and secondly the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia. This was all very harmless and basically not intrusive to anyone.

Since then, in my view, flag usage, particularly involving the Australian National Flag has become more sinister, being hijacked as a weapon or cloak to prove to what degree a person is an Australian. The flag is also being used by the current federal Government to control the direction of funds from the public purse. Also, some people now consider it "un-Australian" if a person does not show the flag in one form or another, and have used it to directly attack people in our community who do not conform in appearance to the traditional Australian of Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Why has this happened to our national flag? This lecture will detail this change and hopefully offer some answers and directions for the future.

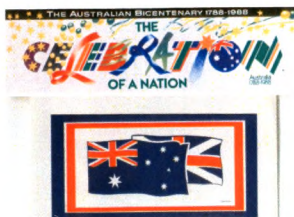
The purpose of my presentation is to share with you all how attitudes toward and use of the Australian National Flag have changed, I think in a detrimental and sinister way, particularly since the shameful and tragic attacks of the 11th September 2001 on the United States of America, and the follow-up "War on Terrorism".

Historically, until recent years, flag use in Australia has been pretty benign. We are a nation which likes to pride itself as being relaxed and tolerant, always willing to give a person a "fair go", in a place that we like to call, "the lucky country". In the past this attitude also extended to Australian's use of flags. Popularisation of flag usage in Australia

really began in September-October 1983, when the Australian yacht, Australia II, won the America's Cup flying the "Boxing Kangaroo" flag. This flag, together with the Australian national flag, began to be flown and displayed by individuals at sporting events around the nation. In January 1988 and then again in January 2001, the Australian national flag took pride of place in commemorations marking first, the 200th anniversary of permanent British settlement in Australia, and secondly, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia. Late in that year, on the 3rd September 2001, the 100th anniversary of the first version of the national flag was commemorated.



Aust. & Boxing Kangaroo Flags ^[1]
(Off Newport, Rhode Is., U.S.A.)



Aust. Bicentenary Slogan - 1988
John C. Vaughan's Bicentenary Flag



Aust. Flag Centenary
Logo ^[2]

Since then, in my view, flag usage, particularly involving the Australian national flag, has been hijacked as a weapon or cloak to prove to how much of an Australian any person is. This style of nationalism has also been exploited by the current Federal Government for its own political agenda. As in the United States, and some other nations, senior Australian Government politicians have taken to wearing lapel flag pins, showing a version of the national flag. This was followed up in June 2004, when the Federal Government announced that it would withhold normal funding to public (government) schools that did not erect a flag pole and fly the national flag ^[3], as part of its wider "national civics" curriculum for Australia's school students. As part of this, schools also had to hold an official flag raising ceremony with a government Member of Parliament being present. In May 2007 ^[4], this condition was changed so that any Parliamentarian could officiate. Such use of flags has also extended to the State level, where in at least one Australian State, Victoria, most public servants, including myself, are

now expected to wear a formal uniform which includes the main symbol of the State.



*Aust. P.M. John Howard & U.S. Pres. George W. Bush
White House Press Photo – 16 May 2006 [5]*



*Prime Minister John Howard
Photographer: Peter Morris – 16 Sept. 2006*



Flag raising ceremony [6]



Ralph Bartlett



Victorian Public Service Logo

Amongst the general public the methods used to fly or display the national flag have become so informal but in some ways increasingly obligatory, that conservative politicians and so called nationalists are increasingly considering it “un-Australian” if a person does not show the flag in one form or another. This is particularly the case if you do not look like the stereo typical white Anglo-Saxon Australian.

The national flag, in various forms, was the predominant feature of the early December 2005 racial riots in the Sydney beachside suburb of Cronulla. So called “white real Australians” chased and bashed anyone else who looked “ethnic”, while either carrying or being cloaked in the Australian national flag. Not one national government politician or pro-government media commentator condemned the use of the flag by these rioters. Instead they condemned the actions of two people, who identified with the victims of these riots, and climbed up the flagpole of a local Returned Services League (war veterans) building and pulled down the flag before burning it. The actual person who set fire to the flag was charged and found guilty of “malicious damage and entering enclosed lands with the intent to commit an indictable offence during public unrest”.

*Cronulla Riots**(Photographer: Andrew Meares)**The Age (Melb. Vic.)**Fairfax Digital, <http://www.theage.com.au>**"Real Australians"**(Photographer: Simon Oduyer)*

The Magistrate sentenced him to concurrent gaol terms of three months in prison for each offence, backdated to the 23rd December 2005 [7]. For the record, two actual rioters were also charged and refused bail over their actions during the Cronulla riots [8].

*Australian National Flag Burning**(Photograph sourced from Today Tonight – Channel 7 Television 23 Aug. 2006)**(Replayed on Media Watch – Channel 2 A.B.C. Television 28 Aug. 2006)**"Big Day Out" Aussies – Jan. 2007 [9]*



*Australian Flag "Protector"
"Big Day Out" – Jan. 2007*



*Australia Day "Larrikins" 2007 – Newcastle, N.S.W.
Photo: Tony Burton [10]*

About 6 weeks after the riots in late January 2006, the Australian national flag was used, or I should say abused, again by so called "real Australians" at the annual Australia Day "Big Day Out" pop music concert in Sydney, when some "ethnic" looking people were forced to kiss the flag or risk being physically attacked [11]. One year later, in late January 2007 the organisers of the "Big Day Out" concert tried to at first ban and then discourage people from bringing the Australian or any other national flag to the concert, so that flags would not be used in an abusive way against people. Also, the organisers feared that the flag, in its various forms, including as bandannas and other types of clothing, had become "gang colours" [12]. Despite various attempts by the organisers to say that far from being opposed to the use of the Australian flag, their motive was only to protect the flag from being "brandished aggressively" which "has led to increased tension" in the concert audience. The tabloid mass media and the Federal Government condemned the organiser's efforts. Once again it appears that conservative elements in Australia favour any use of the current national flag, regardless of how it is used [13].

Due to this attitude, some minority groups feel that they must display the national flag to prove that they are loyal Australians. An example of this is a group of women of the Muslim faith who have fashioned the Australian flag into traditional body clothing and head scarves (hijab) [14]. Also, in early 2007 Australian–Muslim community groups called for

the flying of the Australian national flag outside all mosques. No other religious faith in the nation feels the need or obligation to prove that they are Australian in such a way.



Photo: Ellen Smith, Herald Sun (Melb.) 22 Mar. 2006



Photo: Simon O'Dwyer, The Age (Melb.) 22 Mar. 2006



Cartoon: Prime Minister John Howard wrapped with the Aust. Flag^[15]

On the 15th March 1941, presumably as part of the patriotic response to World War II, Prime Minister Robert G. Menzies, who later founded the political party which currently holds office, issued a statement allowing for the Australian Blue National Ensign to be flown by the general public in a dignified manner. His statement said;

*“The official view is that there should be no unnecessary restriction on the flying of the (Australian) Blue Ensign on shore. Its use on public buildings, by schools and by the public generally would not only be permitted but appreciated, **provided it is flown in a manner appropriate to the use of a National emblem***

Australian Merchant vessels will, of course, continue to fly the Commonwealth Red Ensign.”^[16]

The sentiments contained in this Statement were also implied, although not actually stated in the Australian “Flags Act 1953” as presented to Parliament as a Bill on the 20th Nov. 1953, and then enacted by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II on the 14th February 1954, while in Australia.

Despite the above statement and Act, I should like to ask, why has our current national government failed to condemn or take action to prevent the use of our national flag in such a racist, offensive and undignified way by thugs? Also, why does the current Federal Government, not uphold the sentiments of Prime Minister Menzies?



Olympic Gold Medalist, Cathy Freeman (Sydney Olympics 25 September 2000) [17]



*Australia Day 2007 [18]
Clovelly Surf Club, N.S.W.*



*A.N.Z.A.C. Day Commemorations 2007 [19]
Gov.-Gen. in Ipswich, Qld.*



Gallipoli, Turkey

Surely in the current climate when significant numbers of Australians, like a lot of other people in the western world, now feel vulnerable to “foreign” extremists following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the supporters of the current Australian national flag should be supporting the flag’s dignified use for celebrations and commemorations, such as sporting

achievements, national days and commemorations. I believe that the display of the national flag, any national flag or any other flag, should be a relaxed and free willed expression of either one's nationhood or friendly respect to a foreign nation or international visitor.

To me, personally, as a proud citizen of "*the lucky country*", Australia, and as a vexillologist, who has reservations about the design of the current Australian national flag, I acknowledge that there is a genuine liking for the current flag by a large proportion of the Australian community. The current Australian government which has overseen and indirectly sanctioned the abusive use of my national flag, runs the risk, over time, of undermining the flag's community affections by directly wrapping the national flag around its partisan political policies. This process, if left unchecked, could lead Australians to view the current national flag not as a national symbol of a secular, liberal-democratic nation proud and tolerant of its diverse composition, but as a national flag only representing the views of one particular group of people and/or political party, who believe that the only right direction for the Australian nation is their way. This could bring about the one thing the current national government does not want to have happen, the re-igniting of the Australian national flag debate. Unfortunately, history, particularly that of the 20th Century, is draped with flags which have come to symbolise the tragic policies of partisan national symbols.

Thank you for your attention.



Postscript:

Should in the future Australia decide to change its national flag through democratic means and hold an official national flag competition, my brother and I would submit our proposed new national flag for Australia for judgment ¹²⁰¹.

A flag that we believe represents Australia & Australians without preference or prejudice for "*the lucky country*".



*Ralph & Charles Bartlett
Proposed Australian National Flag (1992)
Photo: Michel R. Lapaant – 24 Sept. 2005*

Bartlett Brothers' Proposed Australian National Flag (1992)



Graphics: Ralph Bartlett

Colours

- Green** – Pantone 348 CVC
- Golden–Yellow** – Pantone 123 CVC, **Blue** – Royal / Reflex
- Red** – Pantone 032 CVC, Stars (8 – Pointed) –

Proportions

Eureka *Southern Cross* (inner) Field 1:2 External Flag Shape 2:3

Symbolism

- Green** – Natural Bush / Rain Forests
- Golden–Yellow** – Sandy Beaches of an island Continent
- Blue** – Night Sky, *Eureka Southern Cross Stars & Minerals*
- Red** – Sun burnt *Red Centre* of the Continent
- Red**– **Blue** – Historical colours of the current Australian & British Flags.

Blue & Golden–Yellow – Australia’s Heraldic Colours.

Green & Golden–Yellow – Australia’s Sporting Colours.

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Literature and Notes:

1. Photo: “The Aussie Cup ‘83 – A Pictorial Record” (Kevin Weldon & Associates Pty. Ltd.-1983), p.48 .
2. Logo design by John C. Vaughan for the Australian National Flag Association.
3. See flags@yahoo.com chat site, 23 June 2004, plus, Sydney Morning Herald 23 June 2004.
4. See Herald-Sun (Melbourne, Vic.) 4 May 2007, p.11.
5. White House Press Photo: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/images/20060516_p051606pm-0141jpg-515h.html
6. Malcolm Turnbull, Federal House of Representatives Member for Wentworth (Sydney, N.S.W.) & Federal Minister for Environment & Water Resources, at Galilee Catholic School, Nth. Bondi, Sydney, N.S.W. (<http://www.malcolmtturnbull.com.au/DefaultGallery.aspx>)
7. See: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/flag-burner-jailed/2006/01/12/1136956285859.html> .
8. See: *Crux Australis* (Flags Australia) Vol. 19-1, No. 77, Jan.-Mar. 2006, pp. 4-33 & 36-48.
9. Photos: Daniel Boud <http://www.boudi.com> (“Big Day Out” Pop Music Concert – Sydney 2007)
10. Photo: Tony Burton, see *Crux Australis* (Flags Australia) Vol. 20-2, No. 82, Apr.-June 2007, p.66.
11. See: “The Bartlett Diaries” – <http://www.andrewbartlett.com/blog/?p=1295> , Aust. Dem. Sen. Andrew Bartlett
12. See: *Herald Sun* (Melb.) newspaper 22 Jan. 2007 & Internet: <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,21095565-661,00.html> 22 Jan. 2007.
Internet: <http://www.ninemsm.com.au/article.aspx?id=82456&print=true> 22 Jan. 2007.
13. See: *Crux Australis* (Flags Australia) Vol. 20-2, No. 82, Apr.-May 2007, pp.66-91.
14. See: *The Age* (Melb.) newspaper Weds. 22 Mar. 2006, p.3 & Herald Sun (Melb.) newspaper 22 Mar. 2006, p.19
15. Sourced: *The Australian newspaper*, Mon. 3 Sept. 2001 – Opinion, p.13
16. Menzies’ Flag Statement contained in a letter dated 3 July 1952, from the Acting Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department (Canberra) to Mr. R.L. Gair, of Gair’s (Flags) Proprietary Ltd.
17. Source: *Western Australian newspaper* (2003), as shown on the Wandoo Didgeridoo web site: <http://www.wadidge.com.au/didgeridoo-news/cathyfreeman.html>
18. Photo: John Feder (News Limited) Daily Telegraph (Syd.) & Herald Sun (Melb.) 22 January 2007 <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,21095565-661,00.html> , and *Crux Australis* Vol. 20-2, No. 82, Apr.-Jun. 2007, p.66.
19. Photos: A.B.C. News Online : Photo Gallery of Anzac Day commemorations 24-25 April 2007 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/indepth/featureitems/s1905145.htm>
20. The “Bartlett Brothers” proposed Australian national flag was designed in 1992, and was published in Carole Forley’s book, *THE AUSTRALIAN FLAG : Colonial relic or Contemporary Icon ?* (1996), p. 187-188.

About the author

- Mid - Late 1993: Established **VEXVENTURES**
(Flag researching, publishing and consulting business.)
- 1989 - 1997: Secretary-General for Congresses, International Federation of Vexillological Associations (F.I.A.V.)
- 20th August 1983: Founding member **FLAGS AUSTRALIA – Flags Society of Australia**.
- 2006 - Current President
- 1997 - 2005 Secretary
- 1994 - 1997 Secretary & Treasurer
- 1990 - 1994 Secretary
- 1988 - 1990 Secretary & Editor *Crux Australis*
- 1986 - 1993 Congress Co-Ordinator, 13th I.C.V.
(Melbourne September, 1989)
- 1985 - 1988 Secretary
- 1983 - 1985 Treasurer



- 2007 : Good Flag – Bad Use – 22nd I.C.V. Lecture.
- 2003 : Awarded a F.I.A.V. "*Fellow of the Federation*"
- 2003 : Wine, Women & Flags – The Birth of a Colonial Ensign – 20th I.C.V. Lecture.
- 2001–02: Internet: www.flagsonline.net (Carroll & Richardson Flags) (Consultant)
- 2001 : Stamping a Nation's Image – 19th I.C.V. Lecture.
- 2001 : *Flags of Empire – Flags of Commonwealth* Chart (Author / Publisher)
- 1999 : Australia's Vice Regal Legacy – 18th I.C.V. Lecture
- 1997 : Charting Vexillology's Brightness – 17th I.C.V. Lecture.
- 1996 : *Flags of Paradise* Chart (Author / Publisher).
- 1994 : *Flags of Aspirant Peoples* Chart (Co-Author / Publisher).
- 1990 : *Flags of Non-Independent Peoples* (Co-Consultant).
- 1989 : *Vexillology - A 25th Anniversary History and a Bibliography of Flag Literature* Book (Co-Author).
- 1988–97: *Flags of the Nations* Chart Consulting Editor & Researcher for National Australia Bank. (Three editions 1988, 1990, 1992).
- 1987 : 25 Years of World Vexillology – 12th I.C.V. Lecture.
- 1985 : Province of Bumbunga – 11th I.C.V. Lecture.
- 1980's–2000's : *Crux Australis*, Journal of Flags Australia – F.S.A. (Numerous Articles).

International Congresses of Vexillology: 1985 (Madrid), 1987 (San Francisco), 1989 (Melbourne), 1991 (Barcelona), 1993 (Zurich), 1995 (Warsaw), 1997 (Cape Town), 1999 (Victoria B.C.), 2001 (York, Eng.), 2003 (Stockholm), 2005 (Buenos Aires), 2007 (Berlin).

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