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INDEPENDENT AUSTRALIA

Monarchists appear to fear a popular uprising

Some high-profile dedicated monarchists have become more strident in their attacks on Bill Shorten's plan for addressing the republic issue, says [David Muir](#).

IS IT JUST me or are the pro-monarchy forces starting to worry about a change of federal government and the chance the people of Australia may actually exercise their democratic rights and voice support for an Australian republic?

In the past week we have witnessed Tony Abbott [step up his rhetoric](#) to new levels, or maybe new lows, by predicting all but the end of the Constitution as we know it if Bill Shorten gets to The Lodge and implements his [two-step process](#) for moving towards a republic.

The doom-laden claims by the former PM and former executive director of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy were soon followed in a column by Nick Cater in the *The Australian*.

Mr Cater is executive director of the Menzies Research Centre and, perhaps channelling Ming himself, his column mercilessly attacked the Shorten plan.

It too was full of inflammatory language and, in a disappointing tactic, included personal criticisms of Australian Republic Movement head Peter FitzSimons.

Mr Abbott has never changed his view on the correctness of Australia maintaining a member of the British Royal Family as our head of state.

Yet in his speech to [the Sir Samuel Griffith Society](#) in Brisbane he tried the well-worn monarchist sleight of hand by suggesting the Governor-General is actually our head of state.

He even verbalised his predecessor and successor in that regard.

"Prime Ministers including Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull, at different times, have described the Governor-General as our head of state," Mr Abbott declared.

He claimed Mr Shorten's two-stage plan — a referendum offering options on a model that would follow a successful national plebiscite on the threshold question of becoming a republic — was a dangerous idea that would *"delegitimise the Constitution"* and the whole process would inflict *"Constitutional vandalism"*.

Mr Abbott painted Mr Shorten's plans for an initial yes-or-no plebiscite on a republic as a "trick question" and part of a process that would be "toxic" for our Constitution.

Yet various governments since Federation have proposed Constitutional changes that have been widely known and canvassed before being put to voters at a referendum.

The mere existence of those proposals to change the Constitution via a referendum has never proved to be "toxic" as Mr Abbott claims would be the case once the outcome of the initial plebiscite question was known.

Mr Abbott thinks that consulting Australians on their own future will bring about the end of the world as we know it.

The fact is that achieving change that people want actually affirms and legitimises our Constitution.

Even allowing for Mr Abbott's well-known talent for punchy and cut-through arguments, his latest effort could be seen as being motivated by a fear that Mr Shorten might just tip out Mr Turnbull and implement his plan to give Australians a say on the future of their nation.

Mr Cater used [his column](#) in *The Australian* to air similar views aimed at retaining the British Royal Family as the source of Australia's current and future heads of state.

It is disappointing he resorted almost completely to the usual dismissive references to so-called elites and personal criticism of Mr FitzSimons.

He also peddled the idea that the Opposition Leader's plan was 'duplicitous' and echoed Mr Abbott's thought that asking voters their opinion was somehow political trickery.

Mr Cater seems to think we should not revisit the republic issue because it was settled in 1999.

He pointed to the [Australian Election Study for 2016](#) and a [Newspoll in April](#) this year to claim support for a republic had dropped from 54 per cent to 50 per cent over that period.

Curiously Mr Cater did not compare the 50 per cent support in the Newspoll in April with the 45 per cent yes vote nationwide at the 1999 referendum.

Or am I being tricky to suggest that means support has risen?

Both Mr Abbott and Mr Cater are entitled to criticise Bill Shorten's plan.

It's logical to suggest that not every supporter of a republic would be happy with it. Some may wish for a single referendum offering options for a model and some may wish a speedier timetable.

But what both Mr Abbott and Mr Cater fail to mention is that the Shorten plan is the only one on the table.

There is no corresponding plan from Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull except to wait until the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II to even start discussing the issue.

That's a recipe for a baseless and disrespectful "get Charles" campaign when advocacy for a republic should focus on a positive view of our nation's future.

Most Australians acknowledge the service of the Royal Family and respect them for it, and in return the Royal Family will no doubt respect the decision Australians will make in favour of a republic.

The Real Republic Australia believes voters will strongly support a move to a republic if they have chance to directly elect our head of state

Perhaps that prospect is what is apparently instilling such fear in our opponents.

David Muir is a Brisbane lawyer, chair of the Clem Jones Trust, and chair of the [Real Republic Australia](#) advocating an Australian republic with a directly elected head of state and other reforms. The Real Republic arose from among direct-election delegates to the 1998 Constitutional Convention including former long-serving Brisbane Lord Mayor, businessman, philanthropist, and community advocate, the late Dr Clem Jones AO. The Real Republic is supported by the Clem Jones Group.