

HAROLD SCRUBY

Raise our national standard and lose the Union Jack

In April 1984, the Hawke government proclaimed *Advance Australia Fair* our national anthem and green and gold our national colours. “Australia’s sons let us rejoice” was changed to “Australians all ...” In the second verse “youthful Commonwealth” was changed to “this Commonwealth” and “loyal sons across the seas” became “for those who’ve come across the seas”.

The original, sycophantic second verse including “Britannia rules the wave” and “true British courage” was rightly assigned to the dustbin. Thirty-seven years later, we have managed to change one word: from “young and free” to “one and free”.

Before 1984 Australia had a national anthem, *God Save the Queen*, and a national song, *Advance Australia Fair*. When *God Save the Queen* was proclaimed our “royal anthem”, we were left without a national song.

Now our national anthem has confirmed that we are one and free, it’s a perfect time to consider proclaiming *I Am Australian*, written in 1987 by Bruce Woodley of the Seekers and Dobe Newton of the Bushwackers, as our national song. As we are arguably the most egalitarian nation on the planet, this song would reinforce the notion that “we are one but we are many”.

National anthems are often dirges and more suited to formal occasions. National songs can be far more emotional and uplifting, especially at sporting events.

The proclamation of our own

flag does not require a referendum, only a plebiscite (as with the same-sex marriage vote).

Almost 29 years after Paul Keating called for a new flag, we continue to look like a British branch office, clinging to the breast of Mother England. It was only a month ago that the Wallabies sang the national anthem in a local Indigenous language while surrounded by illuminated Union Jacks with a couple of gratuitous Federation stars. It was like watching the British emperor in his new clothes — on steroids.

All six states emulate the Australian flag, with a Union Jack in the position of honour, on a blue ground; a veritable gaggle of colonial flags. Every time we see a premier, he or she is usually positioned between two Union Jacks and you can rarely see any other part of each flag.

In NSW, fewer than 8 per cent of residents can correctly define the state flag, which apart from being dominated by the Jack, includes a yellow lion couchant on the red cross of St George. There’s nothing new, south or Wales on this flag, but we cling to it like a drowning sailor to his life raft.

At least Scott Morrison has had the guts to raise the national flag higher behind him when he is speaking to camera so that what you see is only a flash of red and white at the top of the large Federation Star. Our Prime Minister understands marketing and realises the stupidity in promoting another nation’s flag and products.

If you want irrefutable evi-

dence of our mega-myopia, watch any sporting match between Australia and New Zealand. You’ll rarely see our national flag but you will see New Zealand’s unofficial flag, the silver fern on a black ground, and our green and gold boxing kangaroo flag.

When we play Canada, you see its fabulous, unmistakably beautiful, egalitarian flag; Canadians have no need for a boxing beaver.

It’s easy to understand just why our Indigenous people continue to feel marginalised. There’s nothing on any of these national or state flags that says anything about our original inhabitants.

To quote Aboriginal leader Lowitja O’Donoghue: “(Our flag) symbolises a narrow slice of our history including a significant period when the rights of Australia’s Indigenous peoples were overlooked. For this reason, most of Australia’s Indigenous people cannot relate to the existing flag. For us, it symbolises dispossession and oppression.

“We are a country that prides itself on diversity and tolerance, yet some of us cling to a flag that represents a monoculture and intolerance. We are a country that has debated important national issues such as justice, rights and identity, yet the current flag symbolises quite the opposite — complacency, dependency and subordination.”

Imagine if we were to proclaim a national flag that recognises all Australians as one (like Canada, Papua New Guinea and South Africa): an egalitarian flag that is instantly recognisable at home and abroad. A flag that does not subliminally imply a higher status to those of British descent. A flag that proclaims we’ve grown up.

Perhaps the Aboriginal people might consider giving their flag to Australia as the ultimate symbol of reconciliation. Without doubt, it’s the most beautiful, unequivocally Australian flag to fly over our land. We need a national flag and song that brings a lump to the throat and a tear to the eye. To date, we have neither.

Harold Scruby is executive director of Ausflag.