

Libs try a new tack on republic

THE Liberal Party changed direction on Friday fighting a republic yes, but distancing itself from supporting the British monarch as Australia's Head of State.

A day after Opposition Leader Alexander Downer described the royal family as "irrelevant" to Australia, conservatives in the party supported his stand to embrace the existing Constitution — not the monarchy.

Even high-profile monarchist and Liberal MP Tony Abbott said the Queen's constitutional powers to overturn Australian laws were an "anachronism".

The strategy has moved

By ADAM CONNOLLY
in Canberra

away from defending Australia's links with the royal family to raising fears that a republic would rip apart the nation's constitutional stability.

Mr Downer, risking new divisions in the Coalition over the republic, told The Sunday Telegraph that the behaviour of younger members of the royal family was like a "Hollywood saga".

Arguing that Australians ought to be concerned about what secret constitutional changes Prime Minister Paul Keating intended, Mr

Downer said the Queen was only a "theoretical" Head of State as her powers were in the hands of Australia's Governor-General.

His comments concerned some Liberal and National MPs who are struggling to contain antagonism among their conservative constituents.

Mr Abbott, debating the issue with republican Malcolm Turnbull, rejected claims that his party was only reacting to Government initiatives rather than showing leadership.

"If it ever comes to a vote — and I don't think it will — it won't be a vote on Queen Elizabeth II, it will be a vote about President Paul Keating," Mr Abbott told The Ten network's Meet The Press.

Mr Keating has announced his wish for Australia to become a republic by the centenary of Federation in January 2001.

Finance Minister Kim Beazley yesterday said the Federal Government had no secret republican



Multiculture vulture: Mr Downer and his wife at the Apia club yesterday

By FRANK ZELLER

IT was a foundation his father laid 34 years ago, and Liberal leader Alexander Downer built on it yesterday by cementing ties with Australia's Italian community at the Apia Club in Leichhardt.

Sir Alexander Downer laid the first foundation stone of the club when he was Immigration Minister in the Menzies Government.

So Mr Downer used the family link to show his commitment to the Italian community and the principles of multiculturalism.

He and his wife Nicky were helping celebrate the 80th birthday of one of the Italian community's living legends — radio and print journalist and long-time activist "Mamma Lena" Morelli.

Opposition health spokeswoman Bronwyn Bishop was also among the guests, and Prime Minister Paul

Downer's promise to his 'Mamma'

for her services to the Italian community in Australia since arriving in 1956.

Mr Downer promised the 700 guests that a Liberal government would be committed to the principles of multiculturalism. He said: "For my Party, we very much in the years ahead want to build on our achievements in the areas of both immigration and multicultural affairs."