

Vale Gough

1916 - 2014



The House has remembered one of Australia's most iconic leaders. The passing of the Honourable Edward Gough Whitlam AC QC, former Member for Werriwa and Prime Minister (1972-75) was recognised with a condolence motion in the House. Current Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten led the tributes. Many Members have spoken about the legacy of Mr Whitlam's work, reflecting on their interactions with the 'political giant' and the impact of his leadership on Australia and the international stage.

Here are a few extracts of how the House remembered.



5 DECEMBER 1972

25 JULY 1973

31 OCTOBER 1973

8 APRIL 1974



Whitlam is Australia's 21st Prime Minister and leads the first Labor government in 23 years.



The Australian Legal Aid Office is established, with offices in each state capital.



Whitlam is the first Australian Prime Minister to visit China.



Advance Australia Fair replaces God Save the Queen as the national anthem.



Tony Abbott
PRIME MINISTER

After 23 years of coalition government, Australians wanted change. It was time, as the famous campaign song proclaimed—probably the only campaign song that anyone can now remember. Whitlam represented more than a new politics; he represented a new way of thinking about government, about our region, about our place in the world and about change itself. Nineteen seventy two was his time, and all subsequent times have been shaped by his time. His government ended conscription, recognised China, introduced Medibank, abolished university fees, decolonised Papua New Guinea, transformed our approach to Indigenous policy

and expanded the role of the Commonwealth, particularly in the field of social services. These were highly contentious at the time; some of these measures are still contentious; but, one way or another, our country has never been quite the same. Members of his government displayed the usual human foibles, but, support it or oppose it, there was a largeness of purpose to all his government attempted—even if its reach far exceeded its grasp, as the 1975 election result showed. He may not have been our greatest Prime Minister, but he was certainly one of the greatest personalities that our country has ever produced. And no Prime Minister has been more mythologised.

“I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands part of the earth itself as a sign that this land will be the possession of you and your children forever.”

Gough Whitlam
The Gurindji land ceremony
16 August 1975

18 MAY 1974



Labor under Whitlam retains government after the 29th federal (double dissolution) election.

11 JULY 1974



18th Governor-General Sir John Kerr sworn in

11 JUNE 1975



Discrimination on the grounds of race is outlawed through the Racial Discrimination Act.

12 JUNE 1975



The Family Law Act provides for a Family Court of Australia and the introduction of no-fault divorce.



Bill Shorten

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

No other Prime Minister before or since, Gough Whitlam redefined our country and, in doing so, he changed the lives of a generation and generations to come. Think of Australia in, say, 1966: Ulysses was banned, Lolita was banned. It was the Australia of the six o'clock swill, with no film industry and only one television drama, Homicide. Political movements to the left of the DLP were under routine surveillance. Many Australians of talent—Clive, Barry, Germaine, Rupert, Sidney, Geoffrey—as a matter of course, left their home, their native country, to try their luck in England. Yet Gough reimagined Australia, our home, as a confident, prosperous, modern and multicultural

nation where opportunity belonged to everyone. The Whitlam government should not be measured in years but in achievements. Whitlam defined patriotism as seeing things that were wrong about Australia and trying to change them. In 1970, he was referring to our unacceptably high infant mortality rate amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our immigration policy based on race, our support for the Vietnam War. Whitlam said that a true patriot does not try to justify unfairness or prolong unfairness but to change it, and change it he did. Our country is most certainly different because of him. By any test, our country is better because of him.



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1 JUL 1975



Australia's first national health insurance scheme Medibank is introduced.

16 AUGUST 1975



Whitlam formally gives Vincent Lingiari of the Gurindji people in the Northern Territory title deeds to a part of their traditional lands.

16 SEPTEMBER 1975



Australia grants independence to Papua New Guinea.

11 NOVEMBER 1975



Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismisses Mr Whitlam as Prime Minister.

Julie Bishop

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

His decision to visit China as opposition leader in 1971 revealed the courage of his convictions in what was a path-breaking decision at the time. History records his angst at his decision to travel and whether or not he should send a delegation rather than go himself, but he had first argued in 1954 for the normalisation of relations with mainland China—a position then at odds with Labor’s official policy platform—and so he took the bold political gamble to visit China at a high point in the Cold War. He was vindicated when it was revealed that the United States National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, had also been sent to Beijing by President Richard Nixon.

A clear indication of his approach to foreign policy came in his first press conference as Prime Minister on 5 December 1972, when he said:

The change of government does provide a new opportunity for us to reassess a whole range of Australian foreign policies and attitudes ... the general direction of my thinking is towards a more independent Australian stance in international affairs, an Australia which will be less militarily oriented and not open to suggestions of racism; an Australia which

will enjoy a growing standing as a distinctive, tolerant, co-operative and well regarded nation not only in the Asian and Pacific regions, but in the world at large.

In an earlier speech, in 1968, titled ‘Australia as an Asian nation’, Mr Whitlam showed considerable prescience as he argued strongly for the benefits of economic development and growth to be spread throughout Asia, and particularly South-East Asia, to ensure the peoples of our region were able to feed themselves. He said:

Australia’s road-building teams in Thailand and Indonesia—show what can be achieved for under-developed nations through the application of technical skills in conjunction with relatively minor amounts of capital. This is a form of aid particularly suited to a country which is itself an importer of capital and which is still engaged in major developmental works within its own borders. Australia cannot explore the possibilities of such aid too fully.

This is consistent with the contemporary approach of many aid agencies and governments around the world, including the Australian government, as we seek greater levels of economic growth as a means of alleviating poverty and lifting living standards.



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“He changed the way in which politics is conducted in this country, and he can certainly lay claim to being the father of modern campaigning in Australia. His ‘It’s time’ campaign has probably never been surpassed, with its dynamism, vibrancy and momentum.”

Warren Truss
(Wide Bay, Qld)



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Tanya Pibersek
DEPUTY LEADER
OF THE OPPOSITION

Gough's commitment to equality for women was perhaps best embodied in the wonderful relationship that he had with his beloved wife Margaret—a relationship that spanned nearly 70 years of marriage. Gough's reforms for women were landmark. They included the election of the first Labor woman to the House of Representatives, Joan Child, in 1974. His partnership with Margaret was such a driving force in that drive for equality for women. Gough respected her. He listened to her views. He treated her as an equal in every way. When she died, just a few months short of 70 years of marriage, he said: 'We were married for almost 70 years. She was a remarkable person and the love of my life.'

On hearing of Gough's passing today, many people have described Gough as a giant of our nation—and he was. He was, as the Deputy Prime Minister said, a towering figure physically. He also had the ability to deliver soaring rhetoric. But his actions were also very down to earth. He was a very warm person on a one-to-one basis. I remember when my parents first met him. They were almost embarrassed to talk to him, because they admired him so much. He was so incredibly warm and welcoming to them, particularly to my mother. His ability to talk at an international level about issues of enormous complexity and convince an audience on the one hand and speak person to person to any Australian and make them feel respected and included was phenomenal. It was a phenomenal ability.

“Of course, my 26 years as member for Werriwa and three years as the Prime Minister were just flashes compared to the long, warm glow of the other significant anniversary I celebrated this year - 60 years together with Margaret Elaine Dovey.”

Gough Whitlam, Federal Parliamentary
Labor Party Dinner 2002

