

A close-up portrait of Gough Whitlam, an elderly man with white hair, wearing a light blue dress shirt and a red tie with a dark pattern. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office or library setting with bookshelves.

GOUGH WHITLAM

In His Own Words

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STUDYGUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Gough Whitlam: In His Own Words is a 90 minute documentary, filmed early in 2002, in which former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam is interviewed by ALP Senator John Faulkner. Faulkner entered the Senate in 1989 following the resignation of Senator Arthur Gietzelt and has been Leader of the Opposition in the Senate since 1996. While there is extensive use of archival film and photographs, the film is largely in the form of an extended and illustrated monologue, with Whitlam and Faulkner facing each other throughout in armchairs.



The documentary starts with footage of the 'It's Time' launch of the 1972 election campaign, it then goes back to 1951 and Whitlam's explanation of his decision to enter politics at that time. Thereafter it focuses on Whitlam's political career, with particular emphasis on the reorganization of the party, the achievements of his governments between 1972 and 1975, and the events leading up to the dismissal of the government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr—described as a conspiracy.

It makes no attempt to be a balanced account of the times and events which it covers: Faulkner, who was both the writer and narrator of the film, describes it as 'Gough Whitlam's view on a range of issues' and comments: 'we're not pretending it's anything else'. Faulkner's admiration for Whitlam throughout is palpable.

CURRICULUM LINKS

The film is of particular relevance to students of VCE Australian History, especially those studying 'The Dismissal'

as their focus for Area of Study 2 in Unit 4, and VCE Political Studies, in relation to the ALP and its organization and the roles of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. It would be difficult to use the film extensively at lower levels, in part because of its length. Short snippets, however, could be used by a teacher to illustrate particular facets of Australian political history in the second half of the twentieth century. The principal difficulty, however, is the levels of knowledge and language facility that are assumed, and it seems that the film is aimed at an educated adult audience with wide-ranging historical and political knowledge and an extensive vocabulary.

THE START

The film begins with footage of the Saint Kilda launch of the 1972 election campaign which led to the first ALP Federal government in Australia for twenty-three years, with Whitlam being photographed from below (this soon changes as the camera becomes level with him). Archival film and photographs are then used to establish a



picture of Gough as a family man with three children in 1951, seeing Federal government involvement as necessary in the provision of education and health services in the growing suburbs.

Towards the end of the film we see another election campaign—that of 1975—and return to Gough the family man with his comments on the longevity of his marriage, made shortly before their 60th wedding anniversary.

- Throughout the film, Gough's height is emphasized. Can you suggest why this should be so?
- Faulkner appears to be 'laid-back', almost casual, throughout the interview, while Whitlam is an upright figure throughout. Why do you think this was done?
- Comment on the structure of the film. To what extent is it chronological? Why do you think it starts in 1972, goes to 1951, and then back to 1944?
- Early in the film we hear the Intermezzo from Mascagni's opera '*Cavalleria Rusticana*'. Why do you think

this particular piece was chosen? (it recurs at various points throughout the film). Find out about Whitlam's relationship with Italy (besides Leggo advertising!)

1944

Whitlam identifies the 1944 referendum, in which he campaigned (successfully!) for a 'Yes' vote in his RAAF unit, as a 'galvanising point' for him. This was an attempt by the wartime ALP government to gain greater powers for the Federal government at the expense of the states, in particular for the Reconstruction period following the war.

- What were the powers the ALP government wished to gain for the Federal government after the war?
- Why was the referendum unsuccessful?
- How did

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the Uniform Taxation Act increase the Commonwealth government's powers at this time?

- How was Whitlam able to use the Australian Constitution later to largely control State Government spending?

THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION:

Throughout his time in parliament Whitlam was particularly involved in the workings and wordings of the Australian constitution. He was a member of the parliamentary joint Committee on Constitutional Reform from 1956 to 1959, and led the Australian parliamentary delegations to the Constitutional Conventions in Melbourne in September 1973 and Sydney in September 1975. He was deputy leader of the delegation to the Convention in Hobart on October 1976.

- Was Whitlam consistent in his attitude to constitutional reform throughout his career?
- In what ways has the Constitution been changed as a result of the Conventions of 1973-76 and the referenda that followed?

THE ALP AND ITS ORGANIZATION.

The Australian Labor Party began in the 1890s as the political arm of the trade union movement, after the relative failure of strike action earlier in the decade. After federation in 1901 it became a federal party, with each state's union movement sending an equal number of delegates to a federal conference, which was responsible for the Party's policy. In between meetings of the conference, policy was implemented by the Federal executive. ALP members of parliament signed a pledge to support the policy agreed on by conference: in general, the members of parliament were seen as servants of the union movement (this was one of the reasons for splits in the Party in 1917 and in 1931).

After the Second World War the ALP became involved in 'the Cold War' between communism and the 'free world'. Communists controlled many union branches; hence much ALP policy was being decided at state and federal

conferences by left-leaning unions. In Victoria particularly, some members of the Catholic Church began using similar tactics to try and gain control of union branches and, as a result, Labor policy. In the film Whitlam refers to the differences between New South Wales, where three successive Catholic cardinals did not follow this policy, and Victoria, where Mannix, whom he describes as "an Irish nationalist", had been in virtual control of the Church for many years. This was to lead to a split in the ALP, with the creation of the Queensland Labor Party and the Labor Party (Anti-Communist), later the Democratic Labor Party. DLP preferences went to the Liberal and Country Parties, and until 1974 the DLP held the balance of power in the Senate.

This was the background against which Whitlam began the process of changing the structure of the Australian Labor Party. The '36 faceless men' tag, whereby parliamentary leaders waited outside meetings to be given their instructions, needed to go.

- How did Whitlam change the structures of the party and bring about change in its policy-making processes?
- What happened in Victoria?
- Compare the changes made by Whitlam (and others) to the party organization in the 1960s to those now being put forward by the current ALP leader, Simon Crean. In what ways are they similar? In what ways different?

One of Whitlam's achievements as Parliamentary Leader of the ALP was the introduction of the 'shadow cabinet' which enabled the parliamentarians to have a much greater input into the creation of policy in their particular areas of expertise.

A key difference at this time between the ALP and L-CP in government was that the L-CP Prime Minister selected his own Ministers (or at least the Liberal Party ones). In an ALP government the Ministers were elected by caucus, the meeting of all parliamentary members, and their portfolios (areas of responsibility) were allocated by the Prime Minister.

- Who would have more power—an

ALP or a L-CP Prime Minister? Give detailed reasons for your answer, looking at the achievements of each,

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY:

- 11 July 1916 – born in Kew, Melbourne, the son of a solicitor who became a leading public servant (Commonwealth Crown Solicitor)
- 1918 – family moved to Sydney – Whitlam educated at Mowbray House and Knox Grammar School
- 1928 – family moved to Canberra – Whitlam educated at Telopea Park High School (four years) and Canberra Grammar School
- 1935 – to University of Sydney; graduated in Arts and Law (BA., LLB)
- 1941 – joined Royal Australian Air Force enlisting in the General Duties Branch; although he suffered badly from air-sickness, served as a navigator; discharged 1945 with rank of Flight Lieutenant.
- 22nd April 1942 – married Margaret Dovey at Vaucluse, Sydney; four children followed: Anthony (b. 1944, now a Federal judge); Nicholas (b. 1945, a merchant banker); Stephen (b. 1950) and Catherine (b. 1954).
- 1945 – admitted to the New South Wales bar
- 1945 – joined the Australian Labor Party
- 1950 – was unsuccessful in bid for the NSW State seat of Sutherland
- 1952 – won Labor pre-selection for the seat of Werriwa; won a by-election for the seat on 29 November following the death of the member, H.P. Lazzarini
- 17 Feb 1953-31 July 1978 – Member of the House of Representatives for Werriwa, NSW
- 1956-59 – served on Joint parliamentary committee on Constitutional Review
- 1960 (7 March)-1967 (8 Feb) – Deputy Leader of the Opposition
- 1962 – Queen's Counsel
- 1967 (8 Feb) – 1972 (5 Dec) – Leader of the Opposition
- 1967-77 – member of the ALP National Executive
- 5 Dec 1972-11 November 1975 – Prime Minister of Australia
- 5 December 1972- 6 November

- 1973 – Minister for Foreign Affairs
- 1975 (11 Nov) – 1977 (22 Dec) – Leader of the Opposition
- 1978 (31 July) – resigned from Parliament
- 1978 – Companion of the Order of Australia
- 1978 – became the first National Fellow at the ANU
- 1979 – Visiting Professor at Harvard, USA
- 1983 – Visiting Professor, University of Adelaide
- 1983 – appointed Australian Ambassador to UNESCO (in Paris; lived there until the end of 1986).

“THE DISMISSAL”.

In the film Whitlam refers to this as a ‘conspiracy’ involving Malcolm Fraser, leader of the Opposition, Governor-General Sir John Kerr, and former Liberal Attorney-General and Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick. He also refers to it as a ‘coup’. (Note that Garfield Barwick’s book on the matter is titled *Sir John Did His Duty*)

- Do you think that either of these terms is justified? Define each term and give reasons for your answer.

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY:

- 1972 (Dec) – the ALP wins government for the first time in twenty-three years (House of Representatives ALP 67, Liberal-Country Party coalition 58; Senate ALP 26, L-CP 26, Democratic Labor Party 5, Independent 3)
- 1974 (April) – Senate defers Supply – double dissolution of parliament
- 1974 (May) – Election – ALP retains government (H of R ALP 66, L-CP 61; Senate ALP 29, L-CP 29, Liberal Movement 1, Independent 1)
- 1974 (July) – Sir John Kerr appointed Governor-General
- 1974 (August) – Joint sitting of House of Representatives and Senate
- 1975 (February) – Senator Lionel Murphy (ALP) appointed a High Court Justice; NSW government appoints (Independent) Cleaver Bunton to his seat
- 1975 (March) – Malcolm Fraser replaces Billy Snedden as Leader of

the Opposition

- 1975 (21 August) – Fraser announces the opposition’s intention to ‘allow the Budget passage through the Senate’
- 1975 (3 September) – Bjelke-Peterson government in Queensland appoints anti-Whitlam Albert Field to the Senate vacancy created by the death of ALP Senator Bert Milliner
- 1975 (29 September) – Whitlam announces that there will be no House of Representatives election, even if the Budget is blocked
- 1975 (15 October) – Fraser announces that the Senate will defer Budget bills until Whitlam agrees to call a general election
- 1975 (16 October) – Appropriation Bills (Budget) blocked in Senate.
- 1975 (10 November) – Kerr meets Sir Garfield Barwick for lunch.
- 1975 (11 November) – Kerr dismisses Whitlam as minister, and appoints Fraser as caretaker Prime Minister. Senate passes Budget bills. House of Representatives passes no-confidence motion in Fraser. Both houses of parliament dissolved.
- 1975 (December) – General election – Liberal-Country Party gains control of both houses of Parliament (H of R L-CP 91, ALP 36; Senate L-CP 36, ALP 27, Independent 1)

GLOSSARY

(WORDS AND NAMES USED BY WHITLAM THAT MAY BE UNFAMILIAR)

‘Blue Poles’: famous and controversial painting by Jackson Pollock, bought by the Whitlam government for the National Gallery which it began

Clyde Cameron: ALP minister from South Australia heavily involved in trade union activity. Shifted by Whitlam

Rex Connor: ALP minister who unsuccessfully attempted to gain overseas capital to carry out his grand vision – the ‘Loans Affair’

Convention: this word has three key meanings in this context. Whitlam uses it to refer to ‘International conventions’: agreements between nations on particular issues. It is also used to refer to the meetings where changes to the Australian constitution are discussed

(Whitlam was leader or deputy leader of the parliamentary delegation to three of these), and to political ideas which are generally accepted but are not written as law. An example would be the convention that a retiring Senator will be replaced by someone from the same political party. This convention was broken twice in 1975, and has now become law as part of the Constitution

Dr H.C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs: long-serving senior public servant with substantial influence, especially in the area of Indigenous policy

Duumvirate: rule by two (the period of approximately a month after the 1972 election when all ministerial portfolios were held by either Whitlam or his deputy, Lance Barnard)

Edna Everage: one of the ‘alter egos’ of the Australian comic Barry Humphries; Whitlam’s only bestowing of an Imperial Honour was to create her a ‘Dame’

febrile: feverish (used to describe his relations with Calwell)

Vince Gair: DLP leader in the Senate. His proposed appointment as Australian Ambassador to Ireland was one of the precipitating factors of the 1974 double dissolution and the political demise of the DLP

Goa: a Portuguese enclave in India, held from the 1500s until 1960 when it passed into Indian control

hustings: formerly (until 1872), the platform from which candidates for the British parliament were introduced; now, any platform for political campaigning

‘Imperial honour’: awards given by the Queen on the recommendation of her governments. The Whitlam government introduced the Australian Honours system, which it hoped would replace Imperial honours

‘inherited colonial boundaries’: the boundaries created during the period of European imperialism, often bearing little relation to ethnicity or history; Goa and Timor are given as examples

‘Kerr’s cur’: Whitlam’s epithet for Mal-

colm Fraser, delivered on the steps of Parliament House 11 November 1975

Tirath Khemlani: Pakistani middleman who was involved in the 'Loans Affair'

Vincent Lingiari: Gurindji leader, pioneer in the Aboriginal land-rights movement

Sir Anthony Mason: Chief Justice of the High Court, 1975

Junie Morosi: personal assistant to Dr Jim Cairns—a controversial appointment. Her 1975 book *Sex, Prejudice and Politics* is an interesting document of the period

Justin O'Byrne: ALP Senate leader in 1974

'orange lava': Calwell's term for 'the threat from the North'

pressure groups: a group of people who organize to put pressure on governments (at any level) to achieve a particular outcome, for example, pro-abortion and Right-to-Life groups

Springbok tour: a tour of Australia by the racially-selected South African rugby team; conflict was particularly intense in Queensland

stagflation: a situation of stagnant economic growth but rapid inflation (wages and prices rise rapidly, but production doesn't)

vested interests: a group with a particular involvement (usually financial), in an issue

virulent: extremely bitter; poisonous

Wattie Creek: land returned to the Gurindji tribe by the Whitlam government (Dr Coombs suggested the 'dirt-pouring' gesture)

CONCLUSION

Whitlam says at one point that he does not wish to be regarded as an elder statesman, an icon or a martyr. He believes that he should be judged on the achievements of his government. What were these achievements? Which items in the ALP platform for the 1972 election were not achieved? Can you explain

why these failures may have occurred (look particularly at the role played by the Senate and by Reg Withers)?

Whitlam describes Sir John Kerr's second marriage as 'not appropriate'. What do you think he meant by this? Was it a fair comment, especially after his remarks about Kerr's problems with alcohol?

John Faulkner has said that he hopes he has achieved a 'well-rounded' portrait of Whitlam. Do you think he has succeeded in his aim? Has this programme given you a clearer picture of events in Australia in the last part of the twentieth century?

REFERENCES

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- www.whitlam.dismissal.com
- www.australianpolitics.com.au/dismissal/

These two sites are geared to students of VCE Political Studies, and contain a range of documents, background, sounds etc.

- www.library.trinity.wa.edu.au/subjects/sose/austhist/Whitlam.htm
- www.whitlam.org/gough

The site of the Whitlam Institute, within the University of Western Sydney

- www.cia.com.au/vic/cia.2.txt - 23k of conspiracy theory!
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