

Gough Whitlam, is an Australian former politician and 21st Prime Minister of Australia. A member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), Gough Whitlam entered Federal Parliament in 1952, winning a by-election for the Division of Werriwa in New South Wales. In 1960 Gough Whitlam was elected deputy leader of the ALP and in 1967, following the resignation of Arthur Calwell after a disastrous election defeat the year before, he assumed the position of Leader of the Opposition.

After falling short of gaining enough seats to win government at the 1969 election, Gough Whitlam led the Labor Party to victory at the 1972 election after 23 years of Liberal-Country Party government. After winning the 1974 election, he was dismissed in 1975 by Governor-General Sir John Kerr following a protracted constitutional crisis, and lost the subsequent 1975 election. Although his government spent a relatively short time in office, many of the policies and institutions set up under it are still evident today. His 'presidential' style of politics, the socially progressive policies he pursued and the dramatic dismissal and subsequent election loss still arouse intense passion and debate.

Gough Whitlam was born in Kew, a suburb of Melbourne. His father, Fred Whitlam, was a federal public servant who served as Commonwealth Crown Solicitor. Whitlam senior's involvement in human rights issues was a powerful influence on his son.

Gough Whitlam attended Mowbray House School and Knox Grammar School in Sydney, and Telopea Park High School and Canberra Grammar School in Canberra before studying law at the University of Sydney. During the Second World War he served overseas as a navigator in the Royal Australian Air Force's No. 13 Squadron, reaching the rank of Flight Lieutenant. He completed his studies after the war and was admitted to the New South Wales bar in 1947.

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Gough Whitlam's impetus to become involved in politics was the Chifley government's post-war referendum to gain increased powers for the federal government. He joined the Australian Labor Party in 1945 and in 1950 was a Labor candidate for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly: a contest he was later grateful to have lost. When Hubert Lazzarini, the sitting member for the safe Federal electorate of Werriwa, died in 1952, Gough Whitlam was elected to the House of Representatives at the by-election on 29 November 1952.

Noted since his school-days for his erudition, eloquence and incisive wit, Gough Whitlam soon became one of the ALP's star performers. Widely acknowledged as one of the best political speakers and parliamentary debaters of his time, he was also one of the few in the ALP who could hold his own against Robert Menzies on the floor of the House.

After the electoral success of the Curtin and Chifley years, the 1950s were a grim and divisive time for Labor. The Liberal-Country Party coalition government of Robert Menzies gained power in the election of 1949 and governed for a record 23 years. Chifley died in June 1951. His replacement, Dr H.V. Evatt, lacked Chifley's conciliatory skills.

Gough Whitlam admired Evatt greatly, and was a loyal supporter of his leadership, through a period dominated by the Labor split of 1955, which resulted in the Catholic right wing of the party breaking off to form the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). In 1960, having lost three elections, Evatt resigned, to be replaced by Arthur Calwell, with Gough Whitlam winning the election for deputy over veteran Labor MP Eddie Ward. Calwell came within a handful of votes of winning the 1961 election, but progressively lost ground from that time onward.

The ALP, having been founded as a party to represent the working classes, still regarded its parliamentary representatives as servants of the party as a whole, and required them to comply with official party policy. This led to the celebrated Faceless Men picture of 1963, which showed Calwell and Gough Whitlam waiting outside a Canberra hotel for the decision of an ALP Federal Conference. Prime Minister Menzies used it to great advantage in the November 1963 election campaign, drawing attention to "the famous outside body, thirty-six 'faceless men' whose qualifications are unknown, who have no electoral responsibility."

Gough Whitlam was quick to respond, and spent years struggling for party reform—at one stage, dubbing his opponents "the 12 witless men"—and eventually succeeded in having the secretive Labor Party National Conference turned into an open public forum, with state representatives elected in proportion to their membership, and with both state and federal parliamentary leaders being automatic members.

Through the 1960s, Gough Whitlam's relationship with Calwell and the right wing of the party remained uneasy. Gough Whitlam opposed several key Labor policies, including nationalisation of industry, refusal of state aid to religious schools, and Calwell's continued support for the White Australia Policy. His stances brought him into direct conflict with the ALP leadership on several occasions and he was almost expelled from the party in 1966 because of his vocal support for government aid to private schools, which the ALP opposed.

In January 1966, Menzies finally retired after a record term in office. His successor as Liberal Party leader, Harold Holt, led the coalition to a landslide election victory in November on a pro-American, pro-Vietnam War policy. This crushing defeat prompted Calwell to step down in early 1967. Gough Whitlam then became Leader of the Opposition, narrowly defeating his rival, Jim Cairns.