

**We The People**  
Program 159  
Comrade Whitlam



It was about twenty years ago and I was standing on the steps of Conrad Jupiters in Broad beach seeing my young daughter off on her first solo coach trip to Sydney. It was an emotional moment as this was her first real trip alone and although carefully planned, it still made me uneasy but formed a first step to independence. I knew she was safe enough and focused on the small waving hand in the bus as it left. I spontaneously shared aloud my fatherly apprehension with the figure alongside me. Back came an immediate response from a voice laced with a unique and measured cadence..... *she too has begun her journey, as we all must.* It was Goff Whitlam, right alongside me and he too had seen my daughter's small waving hand and saw fit to respond to the moment. That was my only meeting with Goff Whitlam but memorable to this day.

Goff's recent passing has brought forward sincere testimonials from both sides of the house and from many unexpected quarters. Much has been said and accolades given and I wanted to cast my lot as well regarding his contribution to Australia but perhaps with a different tone and of course the wisdom of 20/20 hind sight which I have in abundance.

Of all the things I remember about Goff Whitlam his acerbic wit and superior sense of timing like a talented stage presenter stands out the most. It was worth the great experiment just to enjoy his grand lines each containing the truth cloaked in intellectual humour and self-deprecation. His wit, with some was arrogance while with others just a vehicle to make a point with laser like accuracy. I liked it and while there may have been a measure of arrogance it was forgiven by most of us as his unassailable caravan rolled across the country. He was indeed the human headline and Whitlam was good value in the same way as a great actor delivers great lines with imposing skill. When asked about the hereafter and meeting God, Whitlam declared *he was ready and would treat him as an equal.....*and there it is that masterful humour and self adoration as he marked out his place in history. I think this might be true of all those with a legal background who become self appointed legends in their own lifetime but few have the skill to be memorable and many of our QCs will pass into obscurity as the boring charlatans they are. Not so with Goff Whitlam. During World War 2 Goff served in the Australian Air Force and in my book that puts him on the same standing as my father who served on the Kokoda Track along with so many other Australian men and women. He too helped win the freedom we have today only to see it abused by so many. He earned the right to refer to us all as the **Men and Women of Australia.**

The other side of Goff Whitlam was failure. There is a great difference between a leader and a manager and seldom are both skills shared by the one person. Goff was a visionary leader but he was a delinquent manager of the nation's finances. Before he left, the country was on its knees financially and that unhappy situation would be repeated by many Labor governments which do not seem capable of managing money. So in the end the Governor General appointed by Goff himself saw fit to sack him and his government thus bringing to an end the tumultuous few years of Emperor Whitlam. This ignominious loss did not set Whitlam back and his resolve was impressive to say the least. After being sacked Goff disappeared for a few hours and only years later admitted he went home and cooked himself a steak. When asked why, he said.....*well a man can't make decisions on an empty stomach.* You have to admire his courage and his laconic Australian tone. Whitlam's greatest revenge was to be followed by Malcolm Fraser who was possibly the most boring PM we have ever had and this together with his conflicted royal accent makes him forgettable. Even today Fraser tries hard to be relevant but never is and never will be.

I guess the legacy Goff Whitlam leaves is a mixed but he was a giant of a man and a leader and has added to the rich history of Australia. These days the light on the hill flickers with unseemly corruption and very poor leaders and managers and they need to do better. It's a shame the GG didn't sack the governments of Rudd and Gillard for the shameful way they did business and managed the country. Nonetheless they pale in the shadow of Goff Whitlam and so to the men and women of Australia I think Goff would say guard your freedom as if gold and take an interest in your country. We will remember him.

**Until next time this is Kent Bayley**