

## 14. Labor Out of the Wilderness

In March 1963, *The Daily Telegraph* published a bombshell picture of the Opposition Leader, Arthur Calwell, and his deputy, Gough Whitlam, waiting in the dead of night outside the Kingston Hotel for 36 members of the specially convened ALP National Conference to vote on the Menzies Government's legislation for a US naval communications base at North West Cape in Western Australia. This gave Whitlam a powerful weapon in his mission to transform the Australian Labor Party into a democratic national institution. Many inside and outside the Labor Party today would argue it is far from a truly democratic party. This is fair criticism, but when compared with the Liberal Party (Australia's most successful postwar party), the Labor Party is far more democratic. Under Prime Minister John Howard, who over four parliamentary terms assumed the role of an elected dictator, the federal parliamentary Liberal Party was less democratic than ever.

Whitlam's achievements were at least as great when in opposition as when he was Prime Minister. Whitlam ranks with Menzies as one of Australia's most significant political leaders. Menzies came back from his failed prewar career to unite the dispirited and impotent conservatives and overthrow a socialist Labor government that appeared to have a stranglehold on power. Whitlam brought together a divided and hopeless Labor Party to return it to power after its longest period in opposition, and changed politics profoundly.

To the astonishment of the nation, Whitlam was sacked by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, on Remembrance Day, 11 November 1975, despite having the confidence of the Lower House of Parliament both before and after his sacking. Whitlam saved Australia from a constitutional crisis by accepting the dismissal and fighting it unsuccessfully at the ballot box. His government lasted just a month short of three years. A year and five months after his election, he retained office in the 1974 double-dissolution election, when a young Sydney Liberal, John Winston Howard, was elected to represent the electorate of Bennelong.

Whitlam was born on 11 July 1916 into a comfortable middle-class family. His father, Fred Whitlam, was the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor and although he was President of the Young Men's Christian Association of Canberra, Whitlam's strong Christian faith did not influence his son towards a similar bent. Gough Whitlam, an avowed atheist, found this was no handicap to attaining the highest position in the country. When Whitlam was only a boy, his mother suffered a concussion in an accident, leaving her hard of hearing, and the family learned to speak to her slowly and clearly.<sup>1</sup> This assisted Whitlam to develop his measured

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1 Conversation with Whitlam.

and clear style of public oratory. He attended three primary schools in Sydney and two secondary schools in Canberra before graduating from the University of Sydney (BA, LLB).

He joined the Sydney University Regiment when Germany invaded Poland and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, serving in northern Australia in aircraft protecting Australian convoys and attacking Japanese positions in the islands. A navigator with the rank of flight lieutenant at the end of the Pacific War, he was a crewmember of the only British Empire aircraft at MacArthur's headquarters in Manila. His wartime experiences carried on into civilian life. Whitlam always noted in his diary all his flight details: the airline (be it a civilian or a RAAF VIP aircraft), flight numbers, type and registration of aircraft. In August 1945, he joined the Labor Party, and he was admitted to the NSW Bar in 1947. Fortunately, although failing to win the State seat of Sutherland (NSW) in 1950, he won the federal seat of Werriwa (in the western suburbs of Sydney) in a by-election in November 1952.

Evatt, by the end of the 1950s, was obviously crumbling, both mentally and physically. In what must have been one of the most extraordinary and foolish acts by any State government, the Heffron NSW Labor Government appointed Evatt Chief Justice of New South Wales. On 7 March 1960—with Evatt having gone to the Bench—Arthur Calwell, aged sixty-four and with 20 years in Federal Parliament behind him, finally rose to the top of the Labor Party. Whitlam, then only forty-three and qualifying as 'young' in politics at the time, unexpectedly and narrowly defeated Eddie Ward in the ballot for deputy leader. Fellow Labor MP Les Haylen described Ward as an unusual 'Labor ranter'—meticulously dressed, his iron-grey hair swept back from his forehead: 'He looked like a dentist ready to drill. He had a rocket take-off—not for him the preamble, the body of the speech, the lead-off and the peroration. He was airborne from the moment his hand hit the table.'

I found Ward, despite his forbidding manner, approachable and witty. Ward first entered Parliament in 1931, and, although earlier a supporter of Jack Lang, the mortal enemy of Curtin and Chifley, Ward had been in every Cabinet from Curtin's to Chifley's last in 1949. He had contested the deputy leadership in five previous ballots going back to 1946 and unsuccessfully challenged Evatt's leadership in 1958. He had every reason to be bitter about losing to a blow-in, Whitlam, who had been in Parliament for barely eight years. As a young man, Ward was a professional boxer, fighting 10 rounds at Sydney Stadium—only one level below the boxers fighting the main event.

Tall and still looking athletic, even in his fifties, Ward was so enraged at missing the deputy leadership he swung a punch at Whitlam in the Labor lobby, right outside Whitlam's office. The blow grazed Whitlam's lip, and he swung around,

rushed through his office door and locked it, leaving a fuming Ward outside. After losing to Whitlam, Ward suffered a heart attack—putting him out of Parliament for more than a year. He returned in 1963, and, yarning to him, Eric Walsh asked him when he first knew he was crook. Ward’s joking reply was, ‘When I missed Whitlam with that punch’.

Having won the deputy leadership of his party, Whitlam had to wait another seven years before he became Labor leader, on 8 February 1967. Whitlam was responsible for introducing the system of shadow opposition ministers into the Australian political system and one of his first initiatives as Labor leader was to allocate shadow ministers to the front bench of the Labor opposition—the Caucus executive. Until then members of the executive often made contradictory public statements on policy issues, such as industrial relations, giving the Coalition parties grounds for portraying Labor as a divided party. The outlook for Labor was bleak when Whitlam took over in the wake of Harold Holt’s crushing defeat of Arthur Calwell in the Vietnam War election of 26 November 1966. Yet in only four years and nine months, and after overcoming immense internal difficulties in his party, Whitlam was elected Prime Minister on 2 December 1972. When Whitlam took over the leadership of the party, the Liberals and Country Party had ruled for more than 17 years.

Having entered Parliament as the MP for Werriwa, Whitlam had to live in the electorate, and the family moved from their comfortable home, with Cronulla Beach nearby, to Cabramatta—then regarded as a long way out in Sydney’s west. The policy proposals (Whitlam referred to them as ‘the program’) were the most detailed and sweeping ever put forward by any national political leader, before or since. Included was a plan for extension of the sewerage system in the outer suburbs of major cities, leading DLP Senator Vince Gair later to deride Whitlam as a politician whose main interest was in the provision of sewers.

In fact, Whitlam had tapped into the concerns of voters out in the west—the first federal leader to do so. When the sewer was connected to the Whitlam home, the family had a celebratory party. It did not take long for gallery journalists to notice the tall, new member with considerable oratorical powers, a quick wit and some bright ideas. With his wife, Margaret, a charming and lively woman who matched her husband’s considerable intellect, they were a standout couple.

In the author’s experience, no party leader had better relations with gallery journalists than Whitlam, and if they wandered into his office, they were welcome. If they could not converse with Whitlam, there was always someone lively on his staff with whom to gossip. Most journalists were aching to see the back of Calwell, who had become a tragic figure.

Whitlam's press secretary/speechwriter, Graham Freudenberg ('Freudie', as he was known throughout Parliament House), barely made average height, wore glasses and dressed in a standard business suit and tie; he could have been mistaken for an accountant. With his usual candour, Freudenberg wrote that '[w]ith good cause [John] Menadue [then Whitlam's private secretary] had some reservations about my suitability as a press secretary. Apart from my irregular habits, he could see that the demands of the job were changing rapidly.'<sup>2</sup> 'Freudie' and his great mate Peter Cullen (staffer to the wily Victorian veteran Labor senator Pat Kennelly) were valued customers in the non-members' bar.

Freudie was, and probably still is, a night person, writing speeches after midnight and turning up to the office at midday. Whitlam was punctual, punctilious, energetic, a morning and night person and expected similar attributes from his staff—except Freudie. They hit it off and together bested on the floor of Parliament every Liberal leader after Menzies. Freudenberg was rarely in the advisers' box on the opposition side of the house, following every word of Whitlam as he delivered an important speech penned by his speechwriter.

Unable to stand the tension, Freudenberg would instead be in Whitlam's office, listening to the speech on the chamber's communications system, while pacing up and down chain-smoking. His intellect and powers of argument, coupled with his easy bar-room personality, had much to do with the gallery journalists being largely so pro-Whitlam when their proprietors certainly were not. When the non-members' bar closed half an hour after the Parliament rose for the night, inevitably there would be a troupe of journalists invited into the Opposition Leader's office for drinks from Whitlam's bar. Whitlam was all but a teetotaler and would normally have gone home for the night. Lorraine Hoare, one of Whitlam's secretaries, asked her boss on several occasions to give her the key to the office bar so that it would not be drained by Freudenberg and members of the gallery. Whitlam declined, aware of his speechwriter's great value as a link to the gallery.

After a bitter struggle with the ALP Left and finally attaining the ALP leadership, Whitlam was able to put forward in his 1972 election policy a proposal for aid to private schools on a needs basis. It was based on the same argument used decades later by Mark Latham as Opposition Leader that aid should not be given to wealthy private schools, but allocated on the basis of need. In the lead-up to the 1972 election campaign, Mick Young and prominent Catholic layman Arthur Rolfe met Bishop Carroll and Monsignor T. O. Wallace to put to them that the Church in New South Wales should make a statement that the Labor policy was acceptable, as was the Liberal policy of blanket aid, irrespective of the individual needs of schools. This was exactly the opposite message conservative Catholic bishops were putting out—that only the Liberal policy was acceptable.

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<sup>2</sup> Freudenberg, *A Figure of Speech*.

Carroll made an important speech accepting the Whitlam policy and stating the policies of both parties were acceptable and could be expected to evolve through time. Eric Walsh played a vital role in alerting the gallery that Carroll had said there was no longer a reason to vote against Labor on the basis of state aid. And this was the message the media carried the next morning. The curse of the DLP was finally lifted from Whitlam, by his own actions in putting his political future on the line and with the help of people such as Carroll, Rolfe, Mick Young, Walsh and Freudenberg. The gallery, with some personal ambivalence, was closely following developments in the struggle within the ALP on state aid. Many in the gallery were Catholics, educated in the system and supportive of the argument by the Church. It was a strong one: that Catholic parents were being denied justice by a tax system requiring them to pay their share of upholding the state school system, even though their children were not using it. A lesser number of journalists had a background of GPS schools and were also sympathetic to the Catholic argument.

In the author's experience, Eric Walsh, as press secretary, influenced the Prime Minister of the day to a greater extent than any other in the role, even exceeding the influence of the legendary Don Rogers, who was press secretary to both Curtin and Chifley. Walsh was not a 'spin doctor', but rather he created 'news' favourable to the Whitlam Government—a prime example being the work put in on Bishop Carroll. Then he sold the importance of the news to key gallery political commentators. Walsh started in journalism as a cadet on *The Tweed and South Coast Daily* at Murwillumbah, in northern New South Wales, and came into the gallery when he joined the *Mirror* as bureau head, following the departure of Kevin Power.

I came to know him well from this point. Walsh at that time was 20 or more years younger than other bureau heads such as Jack Allsop (*Sydney Sun*), Harold Cox (*Melbourne Herald*) and Ian Fitchett (*The Age*). After five years on the *Mirror*, he left to join *The National Times*. Walsh, a lapsed Catholic, had all the charm of the Irish, plus a keen interest in good food and drink, and at one stage in his career as a consultant, he was proprietor of a restaurant in Kingston, ACT, not far from Parliament House, named EJ's. He was later to be a partner in a restaurant of the same name in exclusive Macquarie Street, Sydney. Above all, he was a top journalist with an extraordinary array of contacts. Walsh left the *National Times* when Mick Young, who as National Secretary was then running the ALP campaign for the 1972 election, invited him to join the Whitlam team. Walsh's salary came directly from party contributions made by Richard Crebbin of Marrickville Margarine, who supported Labor in the hope of ending the restriction on margarine production imposed by State legislation setting a quota on production.

This was a Country Party device to protect the dairy industry, and, as not many dairy farmers voted Labor, it was thought Labor might be willing to put an end to quotas. And it worked. John Menadue tells of the tricks the Whitlam staffers were up to in the lead-up to the 1972 election.<sup>3</sup> Mick Young and Walsh set up a front organisation, 'Businessmen for Change of Government', which was put forward as a genuinely independent organisation aimed at getting rid of the McMahon Government. It was a sham. Sim Rubensohn, the brilliant advertising man running Labor's advertising campaign, provided a tame businessman from the Jewish community, Patrick Sayers, to head the organisation. Walsh prepared the press ads, and Rupert Murdoch, who was backing Labor in the election, ran the ads for free in his papers and funded payments for those run in other newspapers. Although the gallery did not know these details, my memory of the time is that journalists were not completely taken in. Nevertheless, it was an effective gambit.

Walsh joined the Prime Minister's staff as press secretary after the defeat of McMahon on 2 December 1972, and played a significant role in the early days of the Whitlam Government as it came to grips with a federal bureaucracy that had not served a Labor government for 23 years. Whitlam and Walsh soon got a taste of public service obstruction. Graham Freudenberg, nominally Whitlam's press secretary, was in fact his speechwriter. He was not keen on the press secretary role and, when Walsh came onboard after the election, Freudenberg decided he would move out of Whitlam's office to the Prime Minister's Department, just across the road in West Block, and would remain in his role as speechwriter. Sir John Bunting, Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, had a problem with this: there was no position for Freudenberg approved by the Public Service Board. Whitlam dismissed this as bullshit and told Freudenberg to get on with his move.

Although Freudenberg moved into the department, still Bunting would not bend. Well into February, three months into the Whitlam Government, Freudenberg, sitting at a desk in the department, opened a drawer and found a letter from Bunting to Keith Sinclair, an ex-editor of *The Age*, who had been hired to give the Liberal Prime Minister Bill McMahon public relations advice. Peter Wilenski, private secretary to Whitlam, fronted Bunting on this letter, demanding to know why the department was still paying a person hired to give advice to the defeated McMahon and, worse, the department was freezing out Freudenberg. Walsh says Bunting was 'sick' with embarrassment and lamely explained that 'he [Sinclair] was one of us'.

From then on, Walsh pushed Whitlam to get rid of Bunting and he finally did when Walsh suggested that John Menadue, Whitlam's private secretary when

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<sup>3</sup> Menadue, John 1999, *Things You Learn Along the Way*, David Lovell Publishing, Melbourne.

Whitlam was first deputy leader of the ALP and then leader, should head the Prime Minister's Department. Whitlam was hesitant about moving Bunting. His father was a senior public servant and Whitlam had grown up with the tradition of an independent, non-political public service. He was also concerned he would inevitably be accused of politicising the Public Service by appointing Menadue. From 1967, Menadue was the senior executive in Australia for News Limited, and Rupert Murdoch was quite happy that his headman was leaving to become the Prime Minister's principal adviser.

As a public servant, Menadue could only be seen as coming from the Labor side. Not only had he been private secretary to Whitlam for seven years, he had also been an unsuccessful Labor candidate for the southern NSW seat of Hume in 1966. I was a friend of Menadue, who was well known and liked by the gallery. The Opposition accused Whitlam of politicising the Public Service and the allegation was widely reported but did little to harm Whitlam's standing with ordinary voters. In any case, the senior ranks of the Public Service were widely regarded as being 'politicised' simply through serving Liberal prime ministers for so long. Given Bunting's attitude towards Freudenberg, the Public Service—at least at the permanent-head level—was reluctant to accept the election of a Labor government. Menadue wrote:

Bringing an outsider to such a senior position, who was personally associated with him [Whitlam] and into the Public Service, which was supposedly politically neutral, was risky. It wasn't politically neutral in my view. With its service to conservative governments for 23 years it was steeped, however unwittingly, in traditional ways of thinking and doing things. It was culturally, if not politically, conservative. But I had a label on me. There was an assumption that senior public servants were neutral and I wasn't. The difference as I saw it was that I was open about my position. Furthermore, I had always been sceptical of the person who says I am non-political. A person who is non-political accepts the status quo and is not attracted to political action to change it. That person, in my view, is conservative and should acknowledge it.<sup>4</sup>

The problem Whitlam and his staff encountered with Bunting was not the only instance of the Canberra mandarins finding difficulty in accepting a Labor government. On Sunday, 3 December 1972, the day after his election victory, Whitlam rang McMahon and said he would like to see as early as possible: Bunting, head of the Foreign Affairs Department; Sir Keith Waller, head of the Defence Department; Sir Arthur Tange, head of the Attorney-General's Department; Clarrie Harders and the Chairman of the Public Service

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Board, Sir Alan Cooley. Graham Freudenberg notes: 'The fraught omission was Sir Frederick Wheeler', head of Treasury, who would be the source of grave problems for Whitlam in the 'loans affair'.<sup>5</sup>

Waller, in his Sunday afternoon discussion with Whitlam, suggested Australia should continue to abstain on several important resolutions due to come before the UN General Assembly that week. In his book, Whitlam recorded his response: 'I thought otherwise. To abstain would be to pass up the opportunity to demonstrate at the highest international level that there was indeed a new Government in Australia, with new polices and new attitudes.'<sup>6</sup>

One of the matters to be voted on was a highly sensitive resolution regarding Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)—then not governed by the black majority, but by the white-minority government of Ian Smith. In 1971 only Portugal, South Africa and Britain voted against this resolution. Portugal, ruled by the dictator Antonio Salazar, was determined to hang on to its colonies in Africa and elsewhere. South Africa was still ruled by a racist apartheid government and Menzies believed the continuation of the hated apartheid system was a domestic matter and not one to be discussed at Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings. Britain was of course a colonial power. Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States were among nine countries abstaining.

Against this background, it was preposterous that Waller should advise Whitlam to continue Menzies' policy of abstaining and not join the 102 countries, including India and the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in our region, voting for the resolution. After several hours of discussion with the departmental heads, Freudenberg records, Whitlam called into the meeting his opposition staff who were to continue in the Prime Minister's office: Jim Spigelman, Dick Hall, Eric Walsh and Freudenberg. He declared to the mandarins: 'I take full responsibility for these men. I vouch for them and they are not to be subject to security clearances.' Freudenberg believed this illustrated that Whitlam was not free of Labor's deep-seated suspicions of the Australian Security Intelligence Service (ASIO). Sir Arthur Tange was one mandarin not prepared to hide his suspicions about the Labor Government's staffers.

Clem Lloyd came to Canberra as I did, but much later, for the *Daily Mirror*. Clem was a respected journalist, yet at heart a scholar, during his journalistic career accumulating an impressive variety of degrees. He was a big man, with a generous girth, and his hobbies were food and drink. Lloyd could not drive and got around Canberra in taxis, or with a lift from his many friends. I asked him once why he did not drive and he said, simply: 'I tried it once, but was no good

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<sup>5</sup> Freudenberg, *A Figure of Speech*.

<sup>6</sup> Whitlam, Gough 1985, *The Whitlam Government 1972–75*, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic., p. 14.

at it.' This was the statement of an honest man. For a male to declare he was no good at driving would be regarded as an admission of failure. Clem did not see it as that—just an explanation.

Lloyd's prodigious appetite for good food was legendary among his friends. He found himself, on a trip to Taiwan, on his own in a restaurant and ordered Peking duck—a dish prepared for at least four. When he had polished it off, the kitchen staff gathered around him and applauded. Lance Barnard, Whitlam's loyal deputy, was Defence Minister in the first Whitlam Government. Lloyd had been adviser/press secretary for seven years when Barnard became Defence Minister. Equipped with a powerful intellect, Lloyd could interpret politics as well as anyone, including Whitlam.

Eric Walsh told the author that at the Sunday meeting of department heads the day after the 1972 election, Tange, the Defence Minister, told Whitlam the new government could not end conscription because it would not get through the Senate, where there were five DLP senators, suggesting national service could be ended only by legislation. Veteran Fairfax journalist Brian Toohey, then an adviser on Barnard's staff with Lloyd, gave the author an account of a discussion he had with Tange the next day. Tange, without an appointment, turned up to see Barnard at his Parliament House office at 9 am. Toohey read a brief that Tange was to put to Barnard and at the end of the brief was the advice, on a single page, that conscription could not be ended other than by legislation. It transpired that Tange wrote this page. Toohey told Tange, before ushering him into Barnard's office, that this was unsatisfactory, explaining to Tange the Whitlam Government had settled on a perfectly legal way to end conscription. Tange rejected Toohey's offer to explain the plan.

The idea for avoiding legislation came from the Parliamentary Library and was uncomplicated: the Army Board comprised Barnard, the head of the Department of the Army and the Army commander, and simply by signing a piece of paper, the board members could give every conscript in the Army an honourable discharge. Lloyd and Toohey had already established that the Defence Department had no objection to this method of ending conscription, nor did the Department of the Army, the top brass in the Army and the Department of Labour and National Service, which administered conscription. Further, Lionel Murphy, the Attorney-General, had approved the scheme. Toohey believes Tange was not in favour of conscription, but would not accept it was the role of ministerial staffers to instruct him on such matters.

The episode provided yet another example of why the Whitlam Government doubted the ability of the entrenched bureaucracy to work with Labor. Another blow-up between Clem Lloyd and Tange occurred before Lloyd resigned in disgust from Barnard's office. Part of Labor's election policy in 1972—conceived

by Lloyd—was to merge the departments of Defence, Army, Navy and Air and Supply into one department: Defence. Naturally, the top brass in the three services objected to this. Instead of having their own separate minister to fight for more money for their service within the Government, they would have to go cap in hand to the Defence Minister. Tange did not like the policy, principally because he was not consulted about it and it slimmed down his bureaucratic empire.

Soon after the election and the dust-up with Tange on the means to end conscription, Clem Lloyd received Barnard's permission to issue a press release (under the minister's name), announcing the amalgamation of the various service departments would proceed. Tange's reaction was immediate: he stormed into Barnard's office demanding to know why he had not been consulted about the release. Toohey, who was present, told the author Lloyd seized the back of Tange's suit collar with one hand and lifted him off the floor and facing the exit door. Lloyd, while achieving this considerable feat of strength, explained Tange was not consulted because it was 'fucking election policy'. Returning Tange to the floor, Lloyd said: 'We'll now go straight to Gough Whitlam's office and sort this out.' Cowed, Tange replied this would not be necessary and departed. Little wonder he was after revenge.

Lord Carrington, the British Defence Minister, visited Australia on 19 January 1973 for talks with his counterpart, Sir Arthur Tange, and Barnard. Tange regarded himself as a law unto himself in defence and told Barnard that Lloyd could not attend the discussions with Carrington. Although Carrington's staffers attended the meeting, Barnard buckled and Lloyd was excluded. In disgust—not with Tange, but with Barnard—Lloyd resigned. From then on, Barnard's reputation was seriously damaged within his party and the gallery, yet with Whitlam's backing he remained Deputy Prime Minister until Labor narrowly won the 1974 election and Caucus dumped him for Jim Cairns.

The episode provided yet another example of why the Whitlam Government doubted the ability of the entrenched bureaucracy to work with Labor. Toohey was not getting along with Barnard and soon after was offered two jobs: Treasurer Frank Crean wanted him to join his staff and Max Walsh, then running the *Australian Financial Review's* Canberra bureau, wanted Toohey as a journalist. Barnard then got huffy about Crean poaching his staff. Toohey decided to refuse to work for either minister and took up Walsh's offer.

Mick Young, more than any other, deserved the credit for getting Whitlam into power. Young was burly, broad shouldered, curly haired, and one of the last important Labor figures who started on the shop floor—in his case, as a shearer. He became an organiser for the AWU, then SA State Secretary of the ALP, and, at a crucial time in Labor's history, Federal Secretary. Through Eric Walsh, Young's

greatest mate, I got to know Mick well and spent many a long lunch with him. He played a key role in the 1970 federal ousting of the left-dominated Victorian executive whose purists believed it was more important to cling to Labor's 'principles' than gain office.

Whitlam had to get rid of this obstacle and, with Young, he succeeded. Young was also his most important ally in breaking the tradition of the '36 faceless men' running the national conference and instructing the parliamentary party how to vote, even though the leader and deputy leader of the parliamentary party were not delegates to the conference. Whitlam and Young turned all this around with the federal and State parliamentary Labor leaders not only being given delegate status at the national conference, but with the federal parliamentary leader also having the most important role of any delegate.

The conference—previously an instrument of the State secretaries—was expanded to a far larger and more democratic body of several hundred. Most importantly, the conference was open to the media. Young was highly regarded by the gallery and brilliantly ran the initial national conferences—open to the media and the public. The media enjoyed a spacious press room and was provided detailed daily coverage of the conferences and debates. Today, even when Labor is in opposition, the national conference is the most important party event on the calendar for the media.

This is in sharp contrast with the deservedly meagre coverage given the weak and meaningless equivalent: the Federal Council of the Liberal Party. It has no power to impose policy on the parliamentary Liberal Party and is a mere talking shop. John Howard accepted a proposal by Lynton Crosby, Federal Director of the Liberal Party, for a Liberal federal conference of several hundred delegates—similar to the size of the Labor national conference, but unlike the Labor model, with no power to impose policy on Liberal MPs. Held in Brisbane in 1998, it was a flop, devoid of media interest, and was never tried again.

Mick Young, more than anyone I know (even Eric Walsh), seemed to know hundreds, if not thousands, of people in politics, business, the unions and academia, and was respected by them. Unlike many politicians, Mick was generous with his time and money and if a PR mate wanted Young to have lunch with a client, Mick would oblige if he could. With his mates—whether lobbyists, gallery members or politicians—he shouted in turn and often paid more than his share of a lunch or dinner. This sort of generosity is not the general rule of politicians, many of whom believe part of the perks of the job is to be wined and dined.

Menadue<sup>7</sup> gives a firsthand account of events leading up to Whitlam's 1972 election win when Rupert Murdoch was supporting Labor and Gough's team was desperate to keep it that way. At the time, Menadue was CEO of News Limited. His account of a social event that almost went wrong reveals Whitlam could be difficult about his relations with Murdoch:

About three weeks before the election, Mick Young and I spoke to Rupert about a social cruise on the harbour with Gough. He thought it a good idea. He was coming back from overseas and was in Australia for a few weeks before the campaign. He is always on hand for elections; he can't keep away. Mick and I organised the boat but weren't sure who was paying. But we couldn't get Gough to be in it. 'I'm too fucking busy to see Rupert. I'm too fucking busy'. We continued to press him, but as a concession he offered, 'I'm not going but will Margaret [his wife] do?' I don't think Margaret was consulted at all. We finally persuaded him that he had to come along for the boat ride. In the end it worked well and Gough was courteous and relaxed. Rupert paid for the boat.

Young entered Parliament in the 1974 double-dissolution election as MP for Port Adelaide. When Whitlam finally left the scene, Young was Senior Vice-President of the ALP and Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations in Opposition Leader Bill Hayden's Shadow Cabinet (he was a good friend of Hayden's). Additionally, Young held the key position of Manager of Opposition Business in the house until Hayden, out of the blue, removed him from this role.

Alan Ramsey, then Hayden's press secretary, authored the chapter 'The Hayden years: 1976–82' in *The True Believers—The Story of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party*. He wrote: 'Hayden took this [Leader of Opposition in the house] from him after one too many of Mick's long lunches and a growing concern that not a lot was happening in the development of employment policy.' I broke the story of Young's demotion in *Inside Canberra*, and Hayden, who has a naturally closed and suspicious nature, blamed Young for leaking it to me. Hayden was wide of the mark as I was given the yarn by Tony Ferguson, then in the ALP National Secretariat.

In 1983 Young was in hot water with the establishment of the Hope Royal Commission into foreign intelligence operations in Australia. Justice Robert Hope had been appointed in 1974 by the Whitlam Government to conduct a royal commission into Australia's intelligence services and, for this reason, the Hawke Government turned to him. The genesis of the second royal commission

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<sup>7</sup> Menadue, *Things You Learn Along the Way*, p. 110.

was information given the Government by ASIO that Soviet Embassy KGB spy Valeriy Ivanov had been attempting to recruit National Secretary of the ALP, David Combe, as a mole inside the Labor Party.

Like Mick Young, Combe was a prominent Labor identity in South Australia, and, due to Young's influence, he succeeded him as National Secretary. The Hawke Government was in serious trouble: not even in government for a year and its very future was threatened by the spy scandal. Cabinet, with Young in attendance, decided to expel Ivanov and to establish a royal commission. Held in Canberra, it was a sensational news development and was given maximum media coverage for months, particularly when Hawke was in the box giving evidence for 20 consecutive days. ASIO had information that Combe had been talking to Melbourne businessman Laurie Mathieson about trade with the Soviet Union.

Laurie Mathieson and his partner Bruce Fasham were big in trade with Russia and were clients of Young's closest friend, consultant Eric Walsh. Young tipped off Walsh so that he could warn Mathieson of the imminent appointment of a royal commission. ASIO then passed on the news to Hawke that Young had tipped off Walsh, who did not then know that Mathieson was an ASIO informer. Mathieson and Fasham occupied lavish offices in St Kilda Road, Melbourne, and Walsh advised them to have a sweep of their offices to ensure they were not being bugged by ASIO. The cream of the joke was that Fasham also was an ASIO informer and neither of the partners knew this about each other.<sup>8</sup>

Hope's terms of reference were extended to allow investigation of Young's leak, forcing his resignation from the ministry. Ultimately, Hope vindicated the Hawke Government's handling of the Combe–Ivanov affair and cleared Combe and Young of any wrongdoing. Young reclaimed his portfolio—temporarily filled by then Aviation Minister, Kim Beazley—in the ALP National Secretariat by January, after a spectacular own goal by the Federal Opposition.

Only a week after Justice Cross found Ian Sinclair had made claims that were not only untrue, but that he also knew to be untrue, the National Party elected Sinclair as its federal leader. In that instant, the Opposition's political attack over falling standards of ministerial propriety was blunted. The Government used the Sinclair findings to deflect attacks on its own conduct. Opposition Leader, Andrew Peacock, railed in vain that returning Mick Young to a national security role was like 'putting Ned Kelly in charge of the Reserve Bank' or 'locking up Dracula in the blood bank'. Bob Hawke pressed on with Young's rehabilitation under the political cover afforded him by the Nationals.

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<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Walsh.

Then Minister for External Affairs and Trade, Gareth Evans, in 1995 delivered the inaugural annual Peter Wilenski Memorial Lecture, established by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science to honour its former director. Evans referred to Wilenski's career as 'breathtaking in its range and level of accomplishments', and described Wilenski as 'the little egg-headed Jewish kid who came to Australia from Poland as a refugee in 1943'. Wilenski died of cancer a year earlier aged only fifty-five. Richard Hall, press secretary to Whitlam in opposition, confidently prepared for victory over McMahon in 1972. Hall recommended Wilenski as chief of staff and spelt out Wilenski's truly impressive academic credentials. 'Christ, he's a professional student' was Whitlam's first dismissive comment, but Wilenski got the job when Labor came to power.

Eric Walsh told the author they did not really hit it off. Wilenski was a small, quiet man—'egg-headed', as Evans described him—and moved quietly. He frequently appeared unexpectedly from behind the Prime Minister, evoking the exclamation from Whitlam: 'Don't fucking slither.' Suffering from a severe bout of pneumonia, Wilenski took no part in the 1974 election campaign. Whitlam, who like many of the top politicians seemed immune from illness, was impatient with staff off sick and, after the 1974 election, he got rid of Wilenski, sending him off as special adviser to the royal commission on the Public Service chaired by Dr H. C. (Nugget) Coombs.

Wilenski was brilliant. At only twenty-four, he was Resident Medical Officer at Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital, going on to become head of the Department of Labor and Immigration in 1975. Fraser removed him from this post. In 1983 he was appointed Secretary of the Department of Education and Youth Affairs; then Chairman of the Public Service Board; followed by appointment as Secretary of the Department of Transport and Communications in 1987–88. On the Public Service Board and in the Transport Department, he struck a blow for public health that had far wider ramifications than he could then have imagined. *Serving the Nation—100 years of public service* was commissioned by the Public Service Commission to mark the centenary of the Commonwealth Public Service, and it chronicled Wilenski's successful campaign to ban smoking in government departments, instrumentalities and on Australian airlines.

The downside was that it led to public servants standing outside their office buildings smoking, when they should have been working. It eventually led to a smoking ban in virtually all buildings, public and private, and it is now spreading to a ban on smoking outdoors in public places, such as football stadiums and beaches. At the end of the Cold War, as Gareth Evans said, 'a defining moment in international affairs and a time of extraordinary readjustment in the UN

itself', Wilenski in 1989 was appointed Australia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and in 1992 he was appointed Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, dying while still in that position.

Totally uninterested in sport, Whitlam was out of the ordinary. Menzies started the ball rolling as the first prime ministerial cricket 'tragic'—besotted by the game but a hopeless cricketer as a young man and promoting himself as a keen sports fan. Harold Holt was a keen spear fisherman. Gorton was not particularly into sport as a political tool, although his press secretary, Owen Lloyd, convinced him to go to North Bondi, put on lifesaver's cap and rush into the surf for the cameras. As Prime Minister, Hawke assiduously cultivated his image as an all-round sports participant in cricket, golf and yachting; both Howard and Rudd confessed to being 'cricket tragics' and enthusiastic followers of the game. Although her husband was not interested in sport, Margaret Whitlam represented Australia as a swimmer at the 1938 Empire Games in Sydney and his offspring were keen on sport; Whitlam had to be coaxed by his staff to attend sporting events.

Nevertheless, he simply had to attend a function organised by the Australian Olympic Committee, and Mick Young accompanied him to point out who were the champion athletes present. Reluctantly, Whitlam agreed to Eric Walsh's idea of attending the Miracle Mile classic trotting race at Harold Park in Sydney as guest of honour of the committee. Whitlam, a food enthusiast, enjoyed the lavish smorgasbord. Starting time came for the big event and the committee and guests moved to the viewing area overlooking the track and close to the winning post. The race was a thriller and excitement reached fever pitch as the field came around the last turn and headed up the straight, with the whips cracking and the huge crowd roaring. Walsh looked around for Whitlam. There he was at the far end of the big committee area, his bum pointing towards the track while he continued to demolish the smorgasbord.

Melbourne was a contender for the centenary 1996 Olympics, marking the first Modern Olympics in Athens in 1896, and word had gone out from the Foreign Affairs Department that staff at foreign postings were to do all they could to lobby on behalf of Melbourne. Whitlam happened to be in Jakarta and the then Ambassador, Phillip Flood, arranged for Whitlam to be present at a function he was hosting for top government people in the hope of influencing them to support Melbourne. Flood correctly believed that Whitlam—so well known in Asia—would be a good ally for Melbourne's cause. Whitlam (an authority in his own right on classic Greek history) had not been apprised of this. Flood joined Whitlam, who was conversing with Indonesian Government identities, and said something along the lines of 'Mr Whitlam, we were talking about what would be the best city for the 1996 centenary Olympics'. Whitlam replied: 'It should be Athens.' Dead silence.

Michael Delaney, aged only twenty-four, joined Whitlam's office as private secretary to the Prime Minister in January 1973, on secondment from the Public Service Board. Delaney was educated by the Christian Brothers, then won a scholarship to Latrobe University, working full-time at any job he could get: builder's labourer and service station attendant, among others. Delaney came to Canberra after winning a place in a competitive field as a graduate trainee in public administration and joined the Public Service Board.

The Prime Minister's office in the north-east corner of the Old Parliament House had been refurbished, although it was still cramped for a staff of about 10. (Later, Howard and Rudd had more than 40 staff.) Delaney remembers it as a well-organised office, ruled by Whitlam, who was, as he had been all his life, obsessive about getting things done. The character of the office and its operations, Delaney believed, were extensions of Whitlam's experience as a long-term Leader of the Opposition. Whitlam expected high standards from his staff and they would normally be in the office by 8 am (except Freudenberg), and when the Parliament was sitting, would not get away until 10–11 pm. Like most ministerial and opposition staffers, Whitlam's staff generally had rushed meals in the non-members' dining room (known by all who used it as 'the sheltered workshop', although with hindsight it was excellent: plain food and cheap).

Graham Freudenberg's skill as a subeditor played a part in the Fraser Government settling on *Advance Australia Fair* as the national anthem. Long before Paul Keating initiated the move to a republic, the Whitlam Government decided to ditch *God Save the Queen* as the anthem, arousing outrage among monarchists and joy among republicans. At the time, the feminist movement—with some influence on the Whitlam Government—had demanded political correctness and terms such as 'chairman' and 'fisherman' were to be avoided and replaced with 'chair' or 'chairperson' and 'fisherperson'. But what to do about the words in *Advance Australia Fair*: 'Australian sons let us rejoice'? 'Australian sons and daughters, let us rejoice' would be ridiculous. Perhaps only a complete rewrite would accommodate the feminists.

Freudenberg removed the gender issue with the simple device of changing one word, 'sons', to 'all'. So we now sing, 'Australians *all* let us rejoice'. The Whitlam Government commissioned the largest-ever unofficial poll to gauge voter preferences for a new anthem, and, in 1977, the Fraser Government undertook a non-binding plebiscite asking voters to show their preference. The Freudenberg version of *Advance Australia Fair* won easily, with 43.29 per cent of the vote over *God Save the Queen*, *Waltzing Matilda* and *Song of Australia*. If the decision had come down to preferences, *Waltzing Matilda* (which received the second-highest vote: 28.28 per cent) might just have won outright. As a point of interest, judging by support for *God Save the Queen*, the Australian Capital Territory was the most disloyal Territory, giving the then anthem, *God*

*Save the Queen*, only 6.65 per cent. Of the States, the old anthem was most popular in Western Australia, with 23.17 per cent, and least popular in New South Wales, with 15.32 per cent.<sup>9</sup>

Delaney was required to read all the newspapers before getting to the office. Whitlam would be up at 4 am in the Lodge reading the papers. Delaney remembers failing his paper-reading chore and an angry Whitlam told him: 'If you can't get them read by the time you arrive here, like I do, don't bother turning up.' A crisis in the newspaper-reading routine came in 1973 when Delaney moved from Queanbeyan to a house in the Ridgeway on a 3 ha block. The Ridgeway is on a hill to the north-east of and overlooking Queanbeyan and was only a 15-minute drive from Parliament House.

Although Delaney lived only a kilometre or two from the centre of the town, the newsagent with the monopoly control of newspaper retail sales refused to deliver Delaney's papers because he was 'out of town'. Worse still, he had no phone since the Post Office—then operating a telephone monopoly—wanted \$5000 dollars to construct a phone line to the property and Delaney simply could not afford it. That figure was not much less than what he had paid for his block. Whitlam fumed: not only was his private secretary without newspapers, he could not be contacted. Delaney, who had learned the intricacies of the bureaucracy when in the Public Service, had the task of getting the machinery of government busy first thing each day on whatever Whitlam wanted done arising from the morning news. This involved furious working of the phone from his home contacting senior officials, briefing them and explaining what the Prime Minister wanted.

This all had to be ready for Question Time in the early afternoon. In his usual 'crash through or crash' style, Whitlam got busy. He contacted Fairfax to complain about the treatment of Delaney and a second newsagency in Queanbeyan was licensed, which delivered the papers to Ridgeway and halved the value of the original newsagency business. Next, the Post Office was instructed to supply Delaney with a phone immediately, and, arriving home, he found his phone connected to a line strung on gum trees all the way up the side of the Ridgeway. There was no charge—just part of the work the Post Office was required to carry out for the Prime Minister's office. Delaney has carried the 4.30 am morning newspaper-reading obsession with him throughout his career in the private sector, including in his present position as head of one of the most important national small business groups, the Motor Trades Association of Australia.

Communication difficulties faced by busy prime ministers until the 1990s cannot be comprehended today, except by the elderly, and mobile phones were

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9 *Parliamentary Handbook*.

yet to appear in Australia. Frank Crean (father of Simon), first Treasurer in the Whitlam Government, disliked flying and would, if possible, be driven between Canberra and his Melbourne office in his chauffeured Commonwealth car. At one point, Whitlam was in Brisbane and urgently needed to speak to Crean, whom he believed was in Canberra, but could not be raised. Eric Walsh was asked to find out where the Treasurer might be and the press secretary returned to tell the Prime Minister Crean had left his Parliament House office about a certain time headed for Melbourne.

‘The bastard’s in Benalla’, Whitlam fumed. Walsh had never heard of Benalla (between Wangaratta and Melbourne), but Whitlam, who possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of Australian towns, gained as both a politician and an air force navigator, guessed Benalla was about where Crean would be. Michael Delaney, a Victorian, was ordered to get busy: phone the Benalla Police Station with the number plate of Crean’s car and instruct the police to intercept Crean with the message to urgently phone the Prime Minister. It worked and was not the first time Whitlam called on the services of the police for similar duties.

A corridor of small, cramped offices ran off the reception area of the Prime Minister’s office and here Delaney, Jim Spigelman and Peter Wilenski toiled for long hours. Whitlam referred to this as ‘the Polish corridor’. Spigelman was senior adviser for legal and constitutional matters and freedom of information—both lively political issues. Labor’s victory in December 1972 returned it to office federally for the first time since Menzies defeated the Chifley Government in the same month in 1949. It was the best day for Labor since the end of the war and was achieved entirely by the leadership Whitlam had given the party, yet for Caucus it would be business as usual, whether Labor was in office or not.

Whitlam was constantly reminded that Caucus ruled the roost. Caucus elected the ministry as it had since the early years of Federation and the Prime Minister allocated portfolios. In 1956 Menzies had followed the Westminster practice of a ministry with an inner Cabinet. There were 15 ministers in this Cabinet. Whitlam wanted to continue this system, but was defeated back in April when Caucus—by 34 votes to 33—ruled that Whitlam would have a Cabinet consisting of all members of the ministry. Had Caucus considered this after the election, Whitlam might well have won.

He now faced the burden of a Cabinet of 27: the members. Even worse, ministers (and particularly Lionel Murphy) would not abide by the Westminster practice of supporting a Cabinet decision once made, whether or not each minister had agreed with the decision. They were quite prepared to go to Caucus and overturn Cabinet decisions and inevitably Cabinet leaked like a sieve to the media. Every minister had a press secretary, many of whom regarded defence of their boss their major role, not serving the Labor Government. Factional opponents of

their boss were more frequently the targets of press secretaries than the Liberal opposition, who regarded the non-members' bar as an ideal place to sell their minister to the gallery and knife the minister's Caucus opponents.

With 27 ministers in the Cabinet, inevitably much time was wasted on repetitious debates and Whitlam's exasperation was palpable. Moss Cass, a short, dark, intense man from the Victorian Left faction, was a medical practitioner before he entered Parliament. As Minister for Environment, Cass publicly advocated the decriminalisation of marijuana smoking. About the same time, Cass's wife (in the *Melbourne Age*) bemoaned the loss of conjugal rights the wives of federal parliamentarians endured.

Soon after, at the weekly Cabinet meeting, Cass argued with Whitlam about some issue, telling the Prime Minister, 'The trouble with you, Gough, is that you know nothing about the grassroots of the Labor Party'. Whitlam retorted: 'Moss, you know a lot about grass and your wife apparently knows something about roots, but you know fuck-all about the grassroots of the Labor Party.' Whitlam could be bitchy. Cass passed by Whitlam and Bill Hayden walking down the government lobby, and, nodding to Whitlam, Cass said: 'Morning, Leader.' Out of earshot, Whitlam said to Hayden: 'I'm glad he spoke. Now we know his face from his arse.'<sup>10</sup>

Cass was a stern defender of the environment when it was regarded an issue of only secondary interest by the elite. (Incidentally, Peter Howson, a junior minister in the short-lived McMahon Government, was the first Federal Minister for the Environment.) Cass and Whitlam were in tune on environmental protection. Cass was not prepared to accept the standard views on motherhood issues, such as the high priority governments traditionally gave to assisting farmers, and when a huge flood rolled down the Darling River, a journalist asked Cass what he was going to do for farmers. Cass replied: 'Flood plains are for floods.'

The Health Minister, Doug Everingham, a medical practitioner, was another interesting non-conformist in the Whitlam Government, coming into the spotlight when, as the member for the Queensland electorate of Capricornia (a major centre for the sugar industry), he declared that sugar was 'a second-class food and a third-class poison'. Yet it did not seem to do him much damage in his electorate. Spelling reform was a particular hobbyhorse of the Health Minister and he proposed renaming his department the Health Department, involving an expensive change of government stationery, various forms and amendments to legislation. Whitlam commented: 'He's m-a-d in the h-e-d.' Whitlam wrote to Everingham, telling him that spelling reform was not part of his portfolio duties. He addressed it to 'Dug' and signed it 'Gof'. The department retained its name.

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10 Conversation with Eric Walsh.

Everingham turned out to be a resilient politician; elected to Capricornia in the 1967 by-election; losing it in 1975 with the defeat of Whitlam by Fraser; winning again in 1977; he retired in 1984. Graham Freudenberg wrote that there was a widely held view that Everingham was vulnerable in the by-election because of his atheism and views on communism.<sup>11</sup> Although a non-believer himself, Whitlam had unsuccessfully opposed Everingham's preselection. He issued an edict to Everingham: that he not issue public statements unless approved by Whitlam, and he had to curb his addiction to writing indiscreetly honest letters to newspaper editors.

Whitlam and his press party were to visit Everingham at his home, named 'Ingersoll' after the nineteenth-century American crusading free thinker. Freudenberg was worried that the 'smart alics' from the Canberra gallery would note the name of the house and 'revive the atheism thing'. Jack Stanaway, whom we all knew well because of his days in the gallery, was then working for the Queensland ALP and, hearing of Freudenberg's concern, he ordered Everingham to take down the name plaque of his home. Everingham refused, saying, 'Jack, I've done everything you and Gough have asked me in the campaign. I've shut up. I haven't written any letters. But this is my home and that name stays. Some things are sacred.'

Barbara Stewart from Whitlam's staff was stationed in Rockhampton for the election and realised voters in his electorate had high regard for Everingham. As a medico, he had operated his own private, personal version of Medibank for needy patients, seven years before Bill Hayden established it nationally. Everingham easily won the election, but, unknown to everyone in Parliament House, Gough Whitlam was soon to have much more to worry about than the personal foibles of Doug Everingham.

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11 Freudenberg, *A Figure of Speech*, p. 89.