

## **Gough Whitlam – ‘It’s Time For A New Government’**

### **Why would have some groups in the Australian community have supported the Labor Party’s policies in 1972?**

- Young people would have supported Labor Party’s policies in 1972 because the Labor Party planned to abolish university and college fees.
- Pensioners would have been in support of the Labor Party’s policies in 1972 because the Labor Party planned to increase the basic pension rate by 25%.
- Aborigines were in support because the Labor Party wanted to legislate to give the Aborigines land rights.
- People against Australian involvement in the Vietnam War would have supported the Labor Party in 1972 because the Labor Party planned to abolish conscription.
- Mothers were for the Labor Party because the Labor Party planned to make pre-school education available to every Australian child.
- Women would have supported the Labor Party because the Labor Party supported women’s rights.

### **Factors that would have influenced some Australians to vote Labor in 1972 when they had voted Liberal in previous elections**

- Australian involvement in the Vietnam War was very unpopular at the time
- Party leadership was unstable
- Gough Whitlam was becoming increasingly popular with his reformist policies.

### **Why might some groups in Australian society have felt threatened by Whitlam’s reform program?**

- Some groups such as the pastoralists would have felt threatened by Whitlam’s reform program as they would have been scared that some of their land would be given to Indigenous Australians (since the Labor Party wanted to give some land rights to Aborigines)
- The Liberal Party and its supporters would have felt threatened as Whitlam’s popularity was gaining momentum.
- Supporters of Australian involvement in war would have felt threatened, as well as people with high status because Whitlam’s policies promoted equality.

### **What made Whitlam so popular?**

- His increasingly harsh stance against Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War
- His attractive policies such as free university, Medicare and the abolishment of conscription reached a broad scope of people.
- He was confident, vibrant, had practiced law before entering Federal Parliament meaning that he was well educated, and was a witty orator.

# **The Whitlam Government's Reforms**

## **Reforms that Promoted Equality**

### **For Women**

- Creation of Office of Women's Affairs to help women achieve equality.
- Promoted equal opportunities for women.
- Removed sales tax on contraceptive pill.
- Created an adult wage to replace a male and female separate wage.
- Introduction of Family Law Act 1975 to help remove the social stigma of divorced women which undermined their rights in custody disputes and property settlements. This law also meant that women leaving abusive relationships would no longer bear the "guilty" label.

### **For Migrants**

- Made moves towards multiculturalism.
- Abolishment of White Australia policy
- Establishment of equal preference for tourists wanting to come to Australia whereas in the past, white tourists were given higher priority.
- Introduced Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Established radio programs in different languages, migrant education centres and interpreters on emergency phone calls.

### **For Aborigines**

- Established Northern and Central Land Councils to gain legal support for land rights claims.
- Introduced policy of self-determination.
- In 1975, Whitlam returned land to the Gurundji people had been denied in the 1971 Gove Land Rights Decision.
- Aborigines needed no longer to gain permission to leave the country.
- Funding for Aboriginal Affairs increased by 6-7 times.

### **For the Whole Population**

- Abolishment of university fees and increased spending on education
- Introduction of Medibank, a national health insurance scheme.
- Establishment of Legal Aid Office to provide legal representation for those who could not afford it.

### **Changes in Foreign Policy**

- Wanted to distance Australia from military commitment in Vietnam.
- Withdrew Australia from the Vietnam War and ended conscription.
- Granted PNG self-government in 1973 and independence in 1975.
- Encouraged involvement or support for international agreements on environmental, heritage and human rights issues.
- Greater active participation in the UN, such as signing conventions.
- Wanted to establish Australia as an independent nation (away from USA and UK)
- Took initiatives to improve relations with communist nations such as China, East Germany, North Vietnam and North Korea. Whitlam

visited China as Prime Minister in 1973.

### **Reforms that Promoted National Identity**

Creations of Australian passports that did not refer to Australians as British subjects

#### **Creation of things of pride**

- Australian Film Commission
- Australian Heritage Commission
- Australian National Parks and Wildlife Services
- A National Film and Television School
- Commencement on the building of the Australian National Gallery.
- Move towards multiculturalism
- Abolishment of the White Australia Policy made way for a new immigration policy and improved relationships with Australia's Asian neighbours.

### **Whitlam's Problems**

#### **What problems did the Labor government face in 1974?**

- There was an increase in unemployment
- The inflation rate increased substantially because the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) reduced oil supply to Western nations.
- Wages increased too quickly which resulted in increased unemployment – because companies would have made less and less profit and therefore would have cut jobs.
- Food prices rose
- Rex Connor was forced to resign after the Loans Affair, after he, in the attempt to ensure Australian ownership of the country's resources, lied to Parliament when asked whether he was still trying to gather funds. It was found on a telex sent to Khemlani that Connor was still trying to negotiate loans, three days after the Australian government told him to end negotiations. He had misled the federal government.
- The newspaper reports of Jim Cairns and Juni Morosi having an affair. "My Love for Juni" expressing his admiration of her intellect had negative connotations. Whitlam sacked Cairns after Cairns lied in federal government about giving a Melbourne businessman 2.5% commission if he succeeded in gaining a US\$500 million loan.
- These scandals made Whitlam's government seem incompetent and that Whitlam was not controlling his ministers well. Connors and Cairns lost their positions in the Whitlam government because they lied to the Federal government over loans issues.

#### **What were the causes and evidence of Australia's economic problems around 1974?**

- The causes of Australia's economic problems around 1974 is the increased price of petrol and the over-expenditure by the Whitlam

government to fulfill its promises. The evidence for this includes: food prices increasing, growing unemployment because of booming wage increases.

### **Whitlam's Problems with the Senate**

- Throughout its 3 years in power, the Whitlam government was faced with the problem of a hostile senate, which meant it could not be guaranteed that its bills would be passed. In 1974, Whitlam called a double dissolution in the hope that Labor might win a majority in the Senate. However this did not occur with the Labor Party and the Coalition having an equal number of Senators.
- This situation was made worse after two Labor Senators resigned. The premiers of NSW and QLD broke with custom and replaced these Senators with men who supported the Liberal Party. This meant that the Liberal/Country Party Coalition had more Senators than Labor and could block Labor Bills every time.
- Things got particularly bad for the Whitlam government when the Budget was introduced on 19 August 1975. Malcolm Fraser, the Liberal Party leader decided to defer the vote on Supply in the Senate which meant that Whitlam's government only had enough money to govern until November 1975. The Liberals did this because they wanted to force Whitlam to hold an early election.
- Kerr was extremely intelligent and very qualified – he had a law degree and had been very influential positions such as Chief Justice of the NSW Supreme Court, and was active in Labor Party politics, which shows that he was a Labor supporter.

### **Key People**

#### **Malcolm Fraser**

- Wished for Kerr to sack Whitlam and his government.

#### **Bob Ellicott – Shadow (Liberal Party) Attorney General (Minister responsible for legal matters)**

- Advised Kerr that he had the right to sack the Whitlam government if the government could not guarantee supply.

#### **Sir Garfield Barwick – Chief Justice of the High Court**

- Kerr asked Barwick about the reserve powers of the Constitution and asked whether he should use them to dismiss Whitlam or not.

#### **Gough Whitlam (Note: Whitlam never actually got the chance to speak with Kerr)**

- He wanted to ask the Governor-General to hold a half-Senate election. Perhaps the ALP could win control of the Senate and allow supply to go through.

#### **How did John Kerr justify his decision to dismiss the Whitlam Government on November 11 1975?**

- John Kerr justified his decision to dismiss the Whitlam Government by

saying that the Whitlam Government could not guarantee supply and because Whitlam did not want to hold a double dissolution.

### **What arguments were used by those Australians who opposed the Dismissal?**

**Those who opposed the Dismissal of the Whitlam Government believed that:**

- It was not just for someone who the Australian public voted for could get kicked out by a person which the public did not elect.
- John Kerr had other options, such as request that the Senate pass or reject the money bill, not just block it, or call a half-Senate Election if requested by the P.M, and did not have to initiate such drastic actions.
- The way the John Kerr dismissed Whitlam was unfair, as he consulted Malcolm Fraser and others EXCEPT Whitlam when making his decision.
- Some people supported Kerr's decision because of the high unemployment and high inflation under the Whitlam government. The Whitlam government could not get money to run the country.
- The Labor Party was so badly beaten in the December 1975 election because the voting public wanted the economy that suffered during the Whitlam Government to become better. The economy had suffered, bringing higher unemployment and inflation, during the Whitlam Government, and the public thought that the economy would improve under Fraser.

### **Whitlam's Legacy**

- Believed in bettering the lives and rights of migrants, women and Aborigines. E.g. The Family Law Act 1975 removed the stigma and public perception that women were the parties to blame in marriages ending in divorce. The Whitlam government introduced the policy of self-determination, which gave Aborigines more freedom in choosing how to live their lives. Under the Whitlam Government, migrants settled into Australian society better as the Whitlam government encouraged support for migrants through radio programs in community languages
- Made steps towards multiculturalism and improved Australia's international reputation due to the abolishment of the remaining White Australia policy and strengthening of ties between Asian countries and Australia as Whitlam's policy made Australia seem like not as much of a racist country as before.
- Gave recognition to the arts and put emphasis on education by making university free.
- The establishment of Medicare, which, to this day, has remained in place.
- The development of a more independent foreign policy.
- Whitlam championed support of human rights, conservation and the environment in the international arena.

### **What Whitlam Failed to do:**

- Establish a cohesive ministry – the Loans Affair and economic scandals involving his ministers showed that Whitlam did not have total control of those beneath him.
- Prioritise spending and as a result of his over-expenditure, inflation and prices rose and had a heavy impact on Australian society.