



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Whitlam, Hon. Edward Gough, AC, QC**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 28 October 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Fitzgibbon, Joel, MP

**Source** House  
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**Mr FITZGIBBON** (Hunter) (11:33): How does one sufficiently and comprehensively pay tribute to the great EG Whitlam in five minutes? The reality is one does not. One could not possibly hope to. You would need at least 20 and then, of course, that would not be enough. But I say 20 because I think we need to talk about Gough through four lenses: first, Gough the Prime Minister; second, Gough the parliamentarian; third, Gough the party member—that is the Labor Party member and party leader; and, fourth, Gough the human being—and an honest, compassionate man he was, dedicated to it equity and social justice not only in this country but right around the world.

Gough was by any measure one of Australia's greatest Prime Ministers. The history of the federation, I have no doubt, will treat him well. Just as well-known were the myths, particularly around Gough's economic management. It is very true to say that Gough came to office just as the long boom was coming to a close. There has been much talk about the December 72 OECD report, which pays testament to that proposition. He also faced two very significant oil shocks and came to office at a time when the EU was enlarging and all the consequences that had for the nation's economy. I should say he was a stickler for Treasury advice and followed Treasury advice almost always. In amongst all of that he also saw a need for economic reform and began to dismantle the then out dated and economically destructive tariff system, which was making Australia so inefficient, and, in doing so, paved the way for further economic reform and further economic restructuring.

To save time, I am going to take the second and third together—Gough the parliamentarian and Gough the party member and party leader. This is Gough's biggest legacy. Gough used the forms of the parliament from opposition to drag that then coalition government to new reforms—matters that would have been resisted otherwise if it was not for the advocacy skills of Gough Whitlam. Gough always also brought the Labor Party into the modern era, making it electable again after more than two decades in the wilderness—and it was not easy at all. He took on entrenched factional interests, faced expulsion from the party at one stage for his efforts, but, with true Gough Whitlam determination and courage, he stood up to the factional masters and those who had created their fiefdoms within their party at the expense of the party and took the party forward.

Fourth of course is Gough the man. I am one of many in this place who can say that I was honoured and privilege to know Gough and to know Gough well. I did not know Gough well when he was Prime Minister; I was only 10 or 12 years of age. I do recall meeting him at a nursing home opening in my town of Bellingen when I was around 12 years of age, which excited me somewhat, but it was in his later years that I got to know Gough well.

What always stands out for me is that—despite his public persona, his exaggerated public persona—Gough was not interested at any time in talking about Gough or his legacies. The great man was far more interested in talking about the Labor Party and how it was going—the future of the country. And more particularly he was interested in talking about me; he was far more interested to know how I was going than he was interested in talking about where he had been.

He encouraged me to study more, for example—some advice I followed. Although I must admit that, having been persuaded by him to begin a law degree, I did not finish that law degree. I think I was at about the halfway point at the time. But his advice was appreciated and his ongoing interest in my progress through that university degree was also appreciated.

I would like to share one small anecdote. I very fondly recall being contacted when I was Defence Minister by my good friend and Gough's son, Nick, to inquire as to whether there were any Ventura bombers that were still airworthy in the country; the family was starting to think about Gough's farewell and they thought if a Ventura was still airworthy it might have made a nice touch as a fly-past at his farewell.

There was something unique about Gough and his art for both self-deprecation and self-praise. He could talk himself up in a way which most people could not get away with. Gough got away with it, because amongst all

of his other fantastic attributes, he had a very sharp wit and a very good sense of humour. He will be missed by many. He had a very good innings; at 98, he had a full life, almost unchallenged by anyone else in Australia's political history. He will be missed by many. I will certainly miss him. What he did for his country he can be very proud of. Certainly, his family can be very proud of him, and I again extend my sympathies to his family.