



Gough

Helen McKenna

I WAS STILL IN PRIMARY school when Gough Whitlam led the ALP to electoral victory in 1972. It was a defining moment. As I was growing up in Queensland, it was not until then that I realised it was possible for Governments to be something other than a Country-Liberal Party coalition.

Most of my school friends, echoing their parents, saw a Labor Government as an unmitigated disaster. But it was difficult for even the most trenchant of critics to scoff when regional infrastructure funding brought sewerage connections to our little town as well as to western Sydney.

And when four of us went off to university a few years later, we all knew that it was only possible because Gough had abolished tertiary education fees. What we didn't appreciate at the time, of course, was the extent to which the breadth and audacity of his vision would fundamentally change the society in which we lived.

The record of achievement is so long it's incredible to think it happened in only three years. The headline items have been well rehearsed in the days since his death. Less well remembered, perhaps, are things like the introduction of the Single Parent and Widows Pensions, the listing of oral contraceptives on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule, Commonwealth funding of women's refuges, and reopening of the Equal Pay Case, all of which tackled systemic sex discrimination in very tangible ways.

However, Whitlam's most far-reaching legacy may be the way governments interact with the citizens they serve. The appointment of the world's first women's advisor (Elizabeth Reid) in 1973 signalled an intent to listen to different voices.

The appointment of the first woman to head an Australian Public Service agency (Marie Coleman) made it clear that the days of male-only mandarins were numbered. The establishment of the Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration (even though it reported after the dismissal), with its revolutionary calls for a public service based on merit, representative of the population it served, and committed to consulting with the community, laid the foundations for a more inclusive and open approach to public policy which still makes Australia a world leader.



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MOVING AT A SNAIL'S PACE TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE

OH MY GOODNESS, is that the time? What happened to Spring? It was just arriving when I started production on this issue of BWD. Now it's nearly Summer!

I promised in the last editorial to report on my trip to Canada with Alison. Well, they're just the same as us, in Toronto at least. They speak a language not too dissimilar, eat the same food, drink exactly the same wines (we have some excellent export trade deals going) and, like us, have a prime minister who places wealth acquisition as the noblest of national pursuits.

About those pedestrian crossings. In the beginning it seemed such a simple idea — install another crossing in the main shopping centre block so that darting, sprinting and propping skills were not a prerequisite for main street life.

The RMS never wanted to give us a crossing where cars had to stop for pedestrians. The community with its petition, the Seniors Association and some councillors kept up the pressure and lo-and-behold, they relented.

But the devil was in the detail. Large kerb extensions (because of our angle parking) and new brighter lighting so that pedestrians can be seen on bleak winter nights was in the small print.

Yes, I know — there'll be one every blue moon and why they'd wait for a car to come before crossing is anyone's guess. It's all about risk management, or liability mitigation really.

On the subject of council, amalgamation (see p14) is creeping ever closer. All our neighbouring councils are in the clear except for Queanbeyan which is marked down to amalgamate with Palerang. There are no other models, including boundary adjustments, on the table for discussion.

We must all jump to the state governments latest mantra and become, tada, cue echo: 'Fit for the Future'. Just giving us adequate funding to provide basic services and keep the roads in good nick is a solution too simple.

Your councillors are not in favour of amalgamation. We are working on a plan to remain viably Palerang.

At every chance you get, blow in a politician's ear and tell them we don't want to be a Queanbeyan outpost.

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