

The Honourable Robert James Lee Hawke, AC, GCL, Australia's 23rd Prime Minister.
1929 - 2019

Bob Hawke served as Prime Minister from March 1983 until December 1991, winning four general elections and becoming the longest-serving Labor PM.

Soon after the Australian Labor Party won government under his leadership, Hawke convened an Economic Summit which brought together leaders from business, politics and churches, welfare groups and trade unions. The summit established his *modus operandi* as leader: working with disparate groups to illuminate issues, exchange views, and achieve consensus. Delegates discussed economic strategy, approaches to unemployment and inflation, and thrashed out a Prices and Incomes Accord. The Accord between Labor and the unions was signed in 1983. It meant that workers would stop seeking wage increases, and in return the government would deliver a 'social wage' – entitlements and benefits that would improve Australians' quality of life and working conditions.

The arrangement aimed to keep inflation under control, create jobs and bring unions into the policy-making process. Mr Hawke saw the Accord as a first step towards the structural reforms his government would need to undertake to modernise the Australian economy. At the time of the Summit Hawke had been PM for just one month, and leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party for just over two.

Bob Hawke was a man of contradictions and paradoxes: a Rhodes Scholar who also loved a punt; an incisive intellectual who enjoyed telling racy jokes; a man who walked with royalty and presidents but lingered behind to thank the waiter; a hard drinker who became a teetotaler to ensure he was his best self as Prime Minister; a man's man who loved, valued and promoted women; a trade union leader who counted millionaire businessmen as friends; a lifelong supporter of Israel who in later years publicly criticised Israel for its treatment of Palestine; a tough negotiator who was unashamed at times to weep in public.

Robert James Lee Hawke was born at Bordertown in the south-east of South Australia on December 9, 1929. His father, Clem, was a minister of the Congregational Church; his mother, Ellie, was a teacher. Bob's older brother, Neil, died suddenly of meningitis when Bob was only 9. Neil's death and his parents' grief became one of the spurs to Bob Hawke's ambition and achievements.

His mother believed that great things lay ahead of her now only son and, at various points in his life, Bob Hawke renewed his determination to achieve what she dreamed for him. One of these was when, aged 17 – the same age at which Neil had died – he had a serious crash on his motorbike. He felt that his life had been saved for a reason and vowed to make the most of his abilities for the betterment of others. His father had always said, 'If you believe in the fatherhood of God, you must necessarily believe in the brotherhood of man'. Despite losing his own faith in the first half of that proposition after seeing the poverty and inequality of India in his early twenties, Bob Hawke's career was underpinned by his belief in the second.

After the family moved with the church to Perth, Bob was educated at the selective Perth Modern School, then at the University of Western Australia, where he gained degrees in arts and law, was president of the University Guild, and won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford in 1953. In Bob's last year at UWA, his uncle, Albert Hawke, was Premier of Western Australia. At Oxford he took a Bachelor of Letters in Economics, with a thesis entitled 'An appraisal of the role of the Australian Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration with special reference to the development of the concept of the basic wage'. The thesis gave a clue to Bob Hawke's future working life and became a core text for students of industrial law.

One of his exploits while at Oxford became the stuff of popular legend: in 1954 Hawke became the world record-holder for the fastest sculling of a yard of beer (about 1.4 litres) – in eleven

seconds. This feat gave him a kind of larrikin notoriety in the eyes of his fellow Australians, was repeated for publicity purposes during his ACTU days, with further attempts (this time with pint glasses only) gleefully urged on the ex-PM by other spectators at international cricket matches.

In 1956 Bob Hawke married Hazel (née Masterson). They had met through the Congregational Church youth fellowship in Perth; Hazel joined Bob in Oxford, but they could not marry then because of the terms of his scholarship. They were married for 38 years, divorcing in 1995, and had four children, one of whom died in infancy. Hazel Hawke AO died in 2013.

Hawke began doctoral studies in arbitration law at the Australian National University soon after his marriage. He was also elected student representative on the University Council. However, when invited to become a research officer at the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Hawke abandoned academic investigation for the reality of wage negotiations, arbitration, workers' rights and human rights issues. His first presentation as an advocate at the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission won a significant 15 shilling a week increase for workers, and marked Hawke as an up and coming figure in industrial relations.

In the 1963 federal election Hawke ran as ALP candidate for Corio, against Liberal Minister and former Olympic cyclist, Hubert Oppenheimer, and, while unsuccessful, he gained a 3 per cent swing to the ALP. He was elected President of the ACTU in 1969, after a close-fought campaign. As union leader Bob Hawke worked to resolve rather than instigate industrial disputes, even arguing conciliation rather than direct union action after the dismissal of Gough Whitlam in 1975.

He became the most prominent figure in the union movement, with a national reputation as an effective negotiator. His public persona was enhanced by high profile interventions, as when unions black-banned Frank Sinatra over his remarks about Australian journalists, along with Hawke's involvement in international labour and human rights issues: including the International Labour Organization; his negotiations on behalf of the so-called refuseniks – Soviet Jews who were refused permission to emigrate; and his strong stand, with the unions, against South African apartheid.

In 1973 Hawke was elected federal president of the Australian Labor Party for a five-year term. While president of both the ACTU and the Labor Party, he represented the labour movement and the Labor Party on national bodies, such as the Reserve Bank Board and the Australian Population and Immigration Council. In 1979 he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia, and delivered the ABC Boyer Lectures on 'the resolution of conflict'.

Drawing on his long experience on the fringes of the political process, and counting on his popularity with the Australia people – higher than that of either Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser or Opposition Leader Bill Hayden – Bob Hawke decided in 1980 to again seek political office. He had beaten his alcohol problem, enjoyed national recognition, and was easily elected as the Member for Wills in Victoria. Bill Hayden appointed him spokesman on Industrial Relations, Employment and Youth Affairs.

It was clear to all in caucus that Hawke was the most capable and attractive leader in the party. Hayden was a good man and a Labor stalwart, but lacked the charisma that was thought was necessary to topple PM Malcolm Fraser. A Hawke challenge to Hayden's leadership just failed at the ALP conference in July 1982. Hayden was persuaded to step down in February 1983 and Hawke was elected to replace him, the caucus meeting taking place on the same day that PM Malcolm Fraser was asking the Governor-General to call a general election, in which he thought he would defeat the Hayden-led Opposition.

After a four-week campaign, Bob Hawke led the ALP to its greatest electoral victory in 40 years. Fraser resigned from Parliament and was succeeded by Andrew Peacock. Hawke remained Prime Minister until 1991, leading a modern, reformist government which held power for the next

thirteen years. Hawke was eventually successfully challenged for the leadership in 1991 by his Treasurer Paul Keating, who was Prime Minister until 1996.

The achievements of the Hawke government have had wide-ranging and lasting impacts on both national and international affairs. Hawke himself acknowledged that he was gifted an extraordinarily talented cabinet. His ministers, in their turn, agreed that he was an outstanding chair of cabinet, allowing detailed discussions and always working to achieve consensus decisions, and also trusting them to run their ministries with a high degree of autonomy.

On the economic front Hawke and Keating immediately set in train the election slogan of 'Reconciliation, Recovery, Reconstruction'. Their goal was to reform the economy and the social security system and to make the Australian economy internationally competitive. Wages stabilised, industrial disputes declined, productivity increased, unemployment fell, and inflation reduced. The government floated the dollar; it was a bold decision – former RBA governor Glenn Stevens once described it as 'one of most profound economic policy decisions in Australia's modern history' – and one that set the stage for the 27 years of uninterrupted economic growth that began less than a decade afterwards. It also reduced tariff protection, deregulated the banking industry, instigated a privatised telecommunications industry, introduced compulsory superannuation, and cut personal income tax.

Hawke and his ministers championed the environment, leading the ban on mining in Antarctica and preventing damming of the Franklin River in Tasmania. They pursued and gained World Heritage listings for wilderness areas, expanded Kakadu National Park and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, returned Uluru Kata Tjuta to traditional owners, made Landcare a national program, blocked mining in areas of natural significance, and introduced the principle of ecologically sustainable development.

One of the guiding principles of Bob Hawke's life was his belief in the transformative power of education. At the establishment of the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre at the University of South Australia in 1998 he stated 'Knowledge is the antidote to fear and prejudice. It is the indispensable basis of good policy-making and of a cohesive community.' His government increased schools funding, lifted school retention rates, strengthened vocational education and training, opened up university education, and enabled enrolments from previously under-represented groups – disadvantaged students, women, and rural, regional and Indigenous students.

The emphasis on education for marginalised groups was part of the overall Hawke government focus on addressing inequality, with ground-breaking achievements in legislation to enable equal opportunities for women, create the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and establish ATSIC to give Indigenous people more control over their affairs. His government legislated to allow greater participation of people living with disability in education and the workforce, and pursued a strong focus on celebrating and enhancing Australia's multiculturalism.

Globally Bob Hawke and his foreign ministers were respected and their advice listened to. Hawke favoured personal diplomacy and made lasting friends of leaders from the United States to The Philippines. He wanted Australia to see itself as a part of Asia, and developed strong ties with Asian countries, especially China, a country with which he maintained business interests in retirement. As with Israel, he was not afraid to use a friend's privilege to criticise, notably by announcing, after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, without Cabinet discussion, that Chinese students could remain in Australia.

Hawke initiated the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), and used his influence at CHOGM, against fierce opposition from Margaret Thatcher, to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa. Nelson Mandela, visiting Canberra in 1990 said 'I want you to know, Bob, that I am here today, at this time, because of you'. Mandela later became the first International Patron

of the Hawke Centre. Helped by economic reforms, foreign trade expanded under the Hawke-Keating governments. Controversially, in 1990 Hawke agreed to Australia's participation in the first Iraq War because of his faith in the United Nations and its resolutions.

It was a source of amusement to Bob Hawke that, of all the stirring speeches he delivered, of all the serious papers he wrote, of all the reformist policies he instigated, his pronouncement that is most remembered by the Australian people was after Australia's America's Cup victory in November 1983. In the early hours of the morning, after Australia's historic victory, Hawke declared on live television, 'Any boss who sacks anyone today for not turning up is a bum'.

As the only Prime Minister to have been born in South Australia, Bob Hawke graciously accepted the offer of the University of South Australia to establish a Prime Ministerial centre bearing his name. Rather than an elaborate building housing memorabilia as in the US Presidential Libraries, Hawke insisted that it be 'an institution of which we can all be proud, not as a memorial to an individual, but as another small but important bridge to understanding, compassion and good policy'. With its goals: strengthening democracy, valuing diversity, building the future, the Centre aims to continue the Hawke legacy, principally through a program of public education and engagement and an active research centre.

The Hawke Centre plays a critical role in the intellectual life of South Australia and, through its online presence, much more broadly. Through partnerships with organisations who share the Centre's ideals, through involving the large audiences who attend its events, the Centre continues Bob Hawke's own determination to bring people together to explore ideas, then take action, for the greater good.

One of Bob Hawke's requirements was that the Centre host an annual lecture by an eminent Australian or international speaker on a theme that addresses and furthers the Centre's goals. He gave the first lecture, entitled 'A confident Australia' in 1998, and delivered a warm, eloquent and incisive vote of thanks at almost every annual lecture thereafter.

The Hon. R.J.L. Hawke AC GCL is survived by his second wife, novelist and his biographer, Blanche d'Alpuget, and his three children, Susan, Stephen and Roslyn.