

Resolution of Council

24 June 2019

Item 3.1

Vale Robert James Lee Hawke AC GCL

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

The national response to the death of Robert James Lee Hawke AC GCL, universally known as “Bob”, on 16 May 2019, revealed the respect he commanded from all sides of politics and the Australian community.

This respect had been earned over six decades in public life as labour advocate, ACTU President, activist against racism and Australia’s longest serving Labor Prime Minister.

Australians first became aware of Bob Hawke in 1959 when he won Australian workers a 15 shilling increase in the basic wage, the highest for some years. He was not yet 30 years old. A year before he had abandoned doctoral studies at the Australian National University to become the research officer and advocate for the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

As Bob enjoyed further wage case victories, Australians learned more about him. He was the son of a Congregational Minister and teacher, he was married to Hazel who largely raised their three children and he was an Oxford Rhodes Scholar. While at Oxford he completed a Bachelor of Letters thesis on wage-fixing in Australia and set a record for sculling 2.5 imperial pints of beer in 11 seconds.

In 1969, Bob was elected ACTU President. As President, he gained a reputation as the “great conciliator” for his ability to resolve industrial disputes, winning the respect of both sides. He took the trade union movement into new areas, establishing ACTU-Solo to challenge high petrol prices and becoming joint owner of a Melbourne department store, Bourkes-ACTU. Bob used this to end the practice of retailers being forced to charge prices which suppliers set. This enabled retailers to offer discounts, which meant lower prices for consumers.

Throughout the 1970s, Bob's increasing public profile and popularity, helped by his active engagement with the media, encouraged speculation that he would one day become Prime Minister. After passing up several opportunities to enter Parliament, Bob was elected to the safe Labor seat of Wills in October 1980. This also meant making significant changes in his personal life, particularly his heavy drinking. Five months before the October elections, his alcohol consumption completely stopped, and was not resumed for another 13 years.

Bob immediately became Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, and less than three years later, on 2 February 1983, replaced Bill Hayden as Labor Leader. Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser called a double dissolution election on the same day, which Labor won the following month. Bob became the 23rd Prime Minister of Australia.

Bob's approach to the Prime Ministership was in part defined by 'The Resolution of Conflict', the Boyer Lectures he delivered in late 1979. His lectures emphasised the importance of bringing people together through consensus by finding their common interests.

"Bringing Australia Together" was Labor's campaign slogan, and one of his first actions was to convene a National Economic Summit attended by representatives of Federal, State and Local Government, large and small employers, trade unions, churches and welfare organisations. The aim was to involve everyone in addressing the economic problems the incoming government had inherited: continuing inflation, unemployment nudging 10 per cent and a current account deficit blown out to 5.5 per cent.

This set the foundations for the Hawke Government's pursuit of a more open Australian economy. Cooperation of the trade union movement was achieved through the Prices-Incomes Accord and development of "a social wage".

Medicare, the rebadged and updated universal health care scheme first introduced by the Whitlam Labor Government and abolished under Malcolm Fraser, was a key component. Social, economic policy and labour policy were intertwined with the introduction of compulsory superannuation, the doubling of the number of childcare places, a boost in school retention and a strong focus on young people's job skills. Subsidised homecare services were doubled and poverty traps in the welfare system largely eliminated. The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 made gender discrimination in workplaces illegal.

As ACTU President, Bob led the union movement in stopping mining on the Great Barrier Reef. As a newly elected Prime Minister, he honoured the promise to stop the damming of the Franklin River in Tasmania's wilderness. Tasmania's forests, far north Queensland's rainforests and the Kakadu National park were protected by enacting world heritage legislation and listing them. Bob's leadership led to an international agreement to ban mining in Antarctica.

The Hawke Government's successes were due as much to Bob allowing his ministers to get on with their jobs, part of his leadership style. One example is Australia's internationally acclaimed response to HIV/AIDS. His Health Minister, Dr Neal Blewett, had the freedom to implement an effective partnership involving government, the medical and healthcare professions and the affected communities.

Bob had a lifelong abhorrence of racism. He led a campaign of direct action and union bans against the 1971 tour by South Africa's racially selected Springbok rugby union team. Later that year a tour by the South African cricket team, also racially selected, was cancelled. As Prime Minister he worked with other governments to impose financial sanctions against South Africa, a strong factor in ending Apartheid and freeing Nelson Mandela.

Bob's reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in June 1989 displayed leadership at its finest. He shed tears as he read a briefing describing the massacre in detail at a memorial service in Canberra. He extended temporary visas to around 42,000 Chinese students then studying in Australia on humanitarian grounds, against opposition from within the public service. Many remained in Australia, becoming permanent residents and citizens.

Throughout his Prime Ministership, Bob was unswervingly supported by his late wife Hazel, herself a popular and loved public figure. After losing the Prime Ministership to Paul Keating in 1991, Bob and Hazel retired to Sydney. Four years later they divorced and Bob married his biographer, Blanche D'Alpuget. They remained married until Bob's recent death.

His larrikin streak, as shown by his declaration that "any boss who sacks anyone for not turning up today is a bum" when Australia won the America's Cup, endeared him to the Australian people. He himself claimed he had credibility because he "didn't exude morality". This is what enabled him to convince Australia to accept reforms that were challenging and difficult. It is a combination rarely, if ever seen in public life.

Paul Keating captured the essence of Bob's achievements in his observation at Bob's memorial service on 14 June 2019.

"What matters is the value of the legacy, its quality and endurance. On both counts, Bob Hawke well earned five-star rank and 24 carat stars at that."

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council observe one minute's silence to mark the passing of Robert James Lee Hawke AC GCL; and
- (B) the Lord Mayor write to the family of Mr Hawke expressing Council's condolences.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Lord Mayor –

That the minute by the Lord Mayor be endorsed and adopted.

Carried unanimously.

Note – All Councillors, staff, press and members of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Bob Hawke.

S051491