

The CIA Coup Against ‘The Most Loyal Ally’ Is History’s Warning in 2020

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The Australian High Court has ruled that correspondence between the Queen and the Governor-General of Australia, her viceroy in the former British colony, is no longer “personal” and the property of Buckingham Palace. Why does this matter?

Secret letters written in 1975 by the Queen and her man in Canberra, Sir John Kerr, can now be released by the National Archives – if the Australian establishment allows it. On November 11, 1975, Kerr infamously sacked the reformist government of prime minister Gough Whitlam, and delivered Australia into the hands of the United States.

Today, Australia is a vassal state bar none: its politics, intelligence agencies, military and much of its media are integrated into Washington’s “sphere of dominance” and war plans. In Donald Trump’s current provocations of China, the US bases in Australia are described as the “tip of the spear”.

There is an historical amnesia among Australia’s polite society about the catastrophic events of 1975. An Anglo-American coup overthrew a democratically elected ally in a demeaning scandal in which sections of the Australian elite colluded. This is largely unmentionable. The stamina and achievement of the Australian historian Jenny Hocking in forcing the High Court’s decision are exceptional.

Gough Whitlam was driven from government on Remembrance Day, 1975. When he died six years ago, his achievements were recognised, if grudgingly, his mistakes noted in false sorrow. The truth of the coup against him, it was hoped, would be buried with him.

During the Whitlam years, 1972-75, Australia briefly achieved independence and became intolerably progressive. Politically, it was an astonishing period. An American commentator wrote that no country had “reversed its posture in international affairs so totally without going through a domestic revolution”.

The last Australian troops were ordered home from their mercenary service to the American assault on Vietnam. Whitlam’s ministers publicly condemned US barbarities as “mass murder” and the crimes of “maniacs”. The Nixon administration was corrupt, said the Deputy Prime Minister, Jim Cairns, and called for a boycott of American trade. In response, Australian dockers refused to unload American ships.

Whitlam moved Australia towards the Non-Aligned Movement and called for a Zone of Peace in the Indian ocean, which the US and Britain opposed. He demanded France cease its nuclear testing in the Pacific. In the UN, Australia spoke up for the Palestinians. Refugees fleeing the CIA-engineered coup in Chile were welcomed into Australia: an irony I know that

Whitlam later savoured.

Although not regarded as on the left of the Labor Party, Gough Whitlam was a maverick social democrat of principle, pride and propriety. He believed that a foreign power should not control his country's resources and dictate its economic and foreign policies. He proposed to "buy back the farm".

In drafting the first Aboriginal lands rights legislation and supporting Aboriginal strikers, his government raised the ghost of the greatest land grab in human history, Britain's colonisation of Australia, and the question of who owned the island-continent's vast natural wealth.

At home, equal pay for women, free universal higher education and support for the arts became law. There was a sense of real urgency, as if political time was already running out.

Latin Americans will recognise the audacity and danger of such a "breaking free" in a country whose establishment was welded to great, external power. Australians had served every British imperial adventure since the Boxer rebellion was crushed in China. In the 1960s, Australia pleaded to join the US in its invasion of Vietnam, then provided "black teams" for the CIA.

Whitlam's enemies gathered. US diplomatic cables published in 2013 by WikiLeaks disclose the names of leading figures in both main parties, including a future prime minister and foreign minister, as Washington's informants during the Whitlam years.

Gough Whitlam knew the risk he was taking. The day after his election, he ordered that his staff should no longer be "vetted or harassed" by the Australian security organisation, ASIO, which was then, as now, tied to Anglo-American intelligence. A CIA station officer in Saigon wrote: "We were told the Australians might as well be regarded as North Vietnamese collaborators."

Alarm in Washington rose to fury when, in the early hours of March 16, 1973, Whitlam's Attorney-General, Lionel Murphy, led a posse of Federal police in a raid on the Melbourne offices of ASIO. Since its inception in 1949, ASIO had become as powerful in Australia as the CIA in Washington. A leaked file on Deputy Prime Minister Jim Cairns described him as a dangerous figure who would bring about "the destruction of the democratic system of government".

ASIO's real power derived from the UKUSA Treaty, with its secret pact of loyalty to foreign intelligence organisations - notably the CIA and MI6. This was demonstrated dramatically when the (now defunct) National Times published extracts from tens of thousands of classified documents under the headline, "How ASIO Betrayed Australia to the Americans."

Australia is home to some of the most important spy bases in the world. Whitlam demanded to know the CIA's role and if and why the CIA was running the "joint facility" at Pine Gap near Alice Springs. As documents leaked by Edward Snowden revealed in 2013, Pine Gap allows the US to spy on everyone.

"Try to screw us or bounce us," Whitlam warned the US ambassador, Walter Rice, "[and Pine Gap] will become a matter of contention".

Victor Marchetti, the CIA officer who had helped set up Pine Gap, later told me, "This threat to close Pine Gap caused apoplexy in the White House... a kind of Chile [coup] was set in motion."

Pine Gap's top-secret messages were de-coded by a CIA contractor, TRW. One of the decoders was Christopher Boyce, a young man troubled by the "deception and betrayal of an ally" he witnessed. Boyce revealed that the CIA had infiltrated the Australian political and trade union elite and was spying on phone calls and Telex messages.

In an interview with the Australian author and investigative journalist, William Pinwell, Boyce revealed one name as especially important. The CIA referred to the Governor-General of Australia, Sir John Kerr, as "our man Kerr".

Kerr was not only the Queen's man and a passionate monarchist, he had long-standing ties to Anglo-American intelligence. He was an enthusiastic member of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, described by Jonathan Kwitny of the Wall Street Journal in his book, "The Crimes of Patriots", as, "an elite, invitation-only group... exposed in Congress as being founded, funded and generally run by the CIA".

Kerr was also funded by the Asia Foundation, exposed in Congress as a conduit for CIA influence and money. The CIA, wrote Kwitny, "paid for Kerr's travel, built his prestige, even paid for his writings ... Kerr continued to go to the CIA for money".

When Whitlam was re-elected for a second term in 1974, the White House sent Marshall Green to Canberra as ambassador. Green was an imperious, sinister figure who worked in the shadows of America's "deep state". Known as the "coupmaster", he had played a central role in the 1965 coup against President Sukarno in Indonesia - which cost up to a million lives.

One of Green's first speeches in Australia was to the Australian Institute of Directors, described by an alarmed member of the audience as "an incitement to the country's business leaders to rise against the government".

The Americans worked closely with the British. In 1975, Whitlam discovered that MI6 was operating against his government. "The Brits were actually decoding secret messages coming into my foreign affairs office," he said later. One of his ministers, Clyde Cameron, told me, "We knew MI6 was bugging Cabinet meetings for the Americans."

Senior CIA officers later revealed that the "Whitlam problem" had been discussed "with urgency" by the CIA's director, William Colby, and the head of MI6, Sir Maurice Oldfield. A deputy director of the CIA said: "Kerr did what he was told to do."

On November 10, 1975, Whitlam was shown a top secret telex message sourced to Theodore Shackley, the notorious head of the CIA's East Asia Division, who had helped run the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile two years earlier. Shackley's message was read to Whitlam. It said that the prime minister of Australia was a security risk in his own country. Brian Toohey, editor of the National Times, disclosed that it carried the authority of Henry Kissinger, destroyer of Chile and Cambodia.

Having removed the heads of both Australian intelligence agencies, ASIO and ASIS, Whitlam was now moving against the CIA. He called for a list of all "declared" CIA officers in Australia.

The day before the Shackley cabled arrived on November 10, 1975, Sir John Kerr visited the headquarters of the Defence Signals Directorate, Australia's NSA, where he was secretly briefed on the "security crisis". It was during that weekend, according to a CIA source, that the CIA's "demands" were passed to Kerr via the British.

On November 11, 1975 - the day Whitlam was to inform Parliament about the secret CIA presence in Australia - he was summoned by Kerr. Invoking archaic vice-regal "reserve powers" invested in him by the British monarch, Kerr sacked the democratically elected prime minister.

The "Whitlam problem" was solved. Australian politics never recovered, nor the nation its true independence.

The destruction of Salvador Allende's government in Chile four years earlier, and of scores of other governments that have questioned the divine right of American might and violence since 1945, was replicated in the most loyal of American allies, often described as "the lucky country". Only the form of the crushing of democracy in Australia in 1975 differed, along with its enduring cover up.

Imagine a Whitlam today standing up to Trump and Pompeo. Imagine the same courage and principled defiance. Well, it happened.

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