
THE KERR COUP - ANOTHER MYTH¹

The recent death of former Governor-General John Kerr is a good excuse to look back over the way the left reacted to his sacking of Whitlam. It is a remarkable example of how people who claimed to be radical leftists could tie themselves to the coat tails of the Laborites. They convinced themselves of all sorts of conspiracy theories about CIA involvement and described the sacking as a semi-fascist coup – a case of the ruling class abandoning parliamentary institutions. The left's analysis of the Whitlam sacking is second only to its stance on the Gulf War as an example of its cretinism.

Essentially all Kerr did was to force the most unpopular government in Australian history to face the electorate. According to the left this was all terribly fascist because the government's unpopularity was due to a malicious media campaign engineered by the media barons and multinationals. However, given the ability of the Whitlam government to shoot itself in the foot every other week, it would have required the media to be actively biased in its favour for it not to show the government in a bad light. It was also the time of the worst world economic downturn since the depression of the 1930s and for that reason alone very few elected governments anywhere in the world survived the mid 1970s.

The left was also outraged at the Liberal's blocking supply in the Senate. The Labor Government liked to describe the House of Representatives as the 'people's house' and to claim that it was being defied by the Senate which is elected on a less representative basis. This is a funny argument given that Fraser's main interest was in getting an election for the lower house, so that 'the people could decide'. It was Labour that was keen to avoid that at all

¹ Originally published in *Strange Times*, No.10 April 1991. This article was written well before Keating launched his 'republican debate'. On 11 November 1975 the Australian Governor General, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, on the grounds that he was unable to get the budget through the opposition dominated upper house (the Senate). Kerr then appointed the opposition leader Malcom Fraser caretaker Prime Minister and called an election. Fraser subsequently won the election in a landslide.

costs. They had schemes for calling half senate elections, anything but an election over who was to govern.

Certainly the royalist institution of Governor-General should be replaced by a president, but that is another issue. Hopefully the appointment to the position of a republican and atheist in the person of Bill Hayden will do much to hasten its demise.