



**Sovereign Union of First Nations and Peoples in Australia**  
*Asserting Australia's First Nations Sovereignty into Governance*  
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Gough Whitlam, Pastor Ossie Cruise and Michael Anderson prior to leaving on an NAC tour of Africa. Image: Juno Gemes

MEDIA RELEASE

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***[SU] Anderson honours the passing of Edward Gough Whitlam  
by remembering his key role in advancing Aboriginal rights***

Michael Anderson, Convenor of the Sovereign Union of First Nations and Peoples in Australia and co-founder of the 1972 Aboriginal Embassy and Head of State of Euahlayi Nation, recalls the transformative contribution the former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam made to Aboriginal rights.

In remembering Gough Whitlam's dynamic and transformative role in the Land Rights movement Anderson extends condolences to Edward Gough Whitlam's family.

Ghillar Michael Anderson said from Goodooga today:

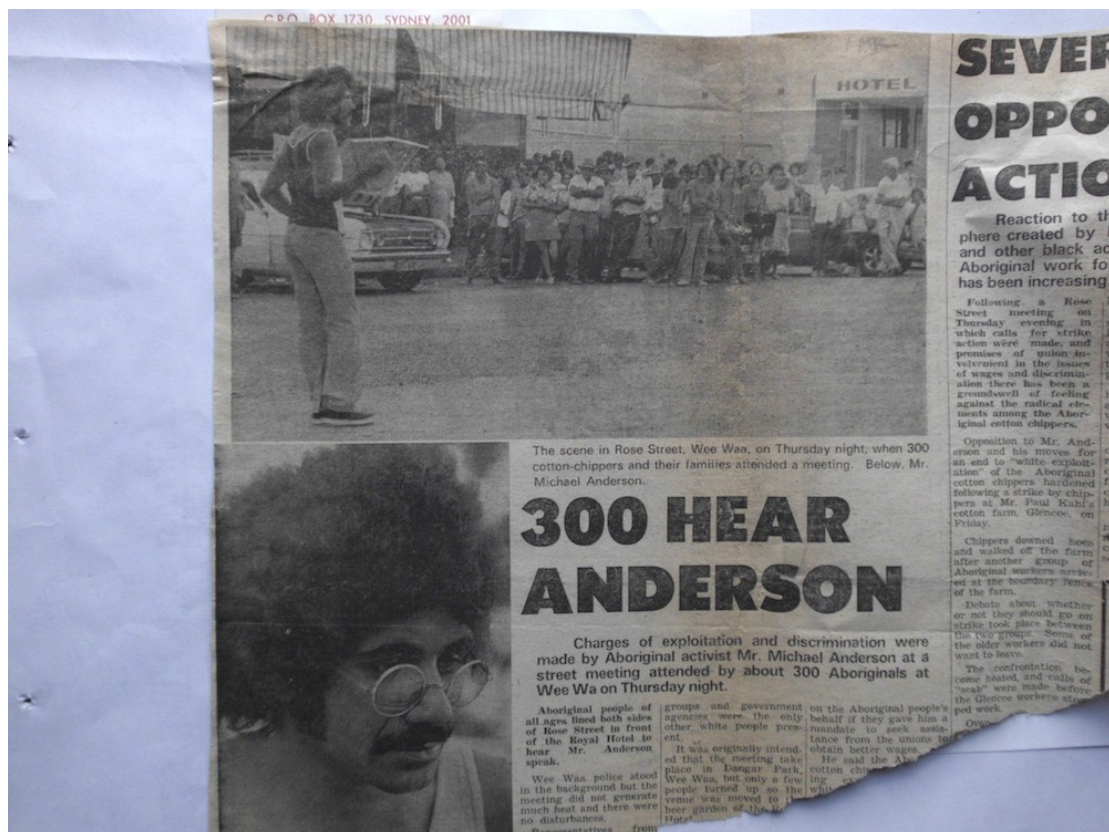
In honour of the passing of Gough Whitlam I send my condolences to his family and recall some key events in my association with this honourable man, who created major changes for Aboriginal Peoples.

My greatest memories of Gough Whitlam are in 1972 after we had set up the Aboriginal Embassy on the front lawns of Parliament House, where we had many conversations about pathways for settling our dispute in respect to Australia's obligations to Aboriginal rights.



*This picture represents the day the Federal Parliament opened in 1972 and Gough Whitlam, as leader of the Opposition, committed the Labor party to Land Rights.  
L - R Billy Bungie, Bruce McGuiness, Sam Watson, Bobbi Sykes, Michael Anderson, Pastor Frank Roberts, Mrs Briggs, Faith Bandler, Mum Shirl, Gordon Briscoe. MC Chicka Dixon on platform where Gough Whitlam is speaking.*

After the success of the Wee Waa cotton strike January/ February 1973 the late Charles Perkins and John Moriarty, of the then Aboriginal Publications Foundation, made arrangements to get me out of Wee Waa in north west New South Wales and into Canberra within days after the arbitration decision, which increased the cotton chippers' wages from 65cents minimum per hour to \$5.25 per hour.



*1973 Wee Waa Cotton Chippers Strike*



Having arrived in Canberra, Charles Perkins and John Moriarty accompanied me to the office Australian Prime Minister in Parliament House. When we arrived we were greeted by PM Gough Whitlam, Mr Don Willesee, Foreign Minister, and Mr Lionel Murphy, Commonwealth Attorney-General.

When we sat down together I vividly recall the words of Gough Whitlam, who said to me with words to the effect: While I'm Prime Minister I can't have you walk the streets. If you want to know about politics we have made arrangements for you to go to the United States and look at how they are dealing with the causes and outcomes of the 1960s, 1970s racial conflicts. The final US State Department agreement was signed by President Nixon. Among other events, it enabled me to go to Wounded Knee in 1973 and after the siege finished I could meet with the Wounded Knee leaders at the New York University.

Gough Whitlam further requested that I spend time with Australia's mission to the United Nations, under the tutelage of Richard Butler, Australia's Ambassador to the UN. My short time there certainly inspired me, having gained profound insights into racial conflicts and human rights.

A fonder memory I have of Gough Whitlam is the day Billy Craigie, late sister Isobel Coe and myself gathered up two boomerangs, a didgeridoo, and some clapsticks and crashed an official function organised by the Whitlam government for the visit by the first diplomatic emissary from China at the Four Seasons Motel in Elizabeth Street, Sydney. The three of us walked through security without any fuss and entered the hall of the round dinner tables. I recall the facial expression of PM Gough Whitlam – his eyes were throwing daggers at me, but at the request of the Chinese diplomatic emissary we were invited to take our seats at the table. I recall PM Whitlam whispering to me: We will have words later!

A most notable association was Gough Whitlam's support of the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC). In 1983, when I phoned him in his office in William Street, Woolloomooloo, Sydney, and asked him if he was prepared to accompany a delegation of the NAC to Africa, he said: Give me 15 minutes. I will get back to you. He called me up within the 15 minutes and asked: When are we going? I gave him the dates. Our visit has now gone down in history as an event that created the largest paper trail that had ever been created between African states and Australia on any issue in our time. The NAC's diplomatic mission, lead by Pastor Ossie Cruse and myself, as the diplomatic advisor, and Gough Whitlam, as our mentor in international politics and diplomatic relations, taught us great lessons. Something we will never forget.



1983 NAC delegation in Zimbabwe: l – r: Gough Whitlam, President Robert Mugabwe, Pastor Ossie Cruse and Michael Anderson



1983 NAC delegation in Tanzania: l – r Michael Anderson, Pastor Ossie Cruse, President Julius Nyerere and Gough Whitlam

We must never forget that the young Black Power movement took the mountain to Mahomet and in our view Mahomet was Gough Whitlam and his government. He did not let us down. As Prime Minister Gough Whitlam brought in (among much other transforming legislation) the Racial Discrimination Act to shut down Queensland racist policies; he commenced the Land Rights legislative process and courtesy of Malcolm Fraser, Edward Gough Whitlam achieved his desire when he poured sand into Vincent Lingiari's hand saying: This is now truly your land. No-one can take that away from you.

Gough Whitlam's greatest legacy, from my perspective, was his determined ability to fight against all odds because of a dream and a vision.

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