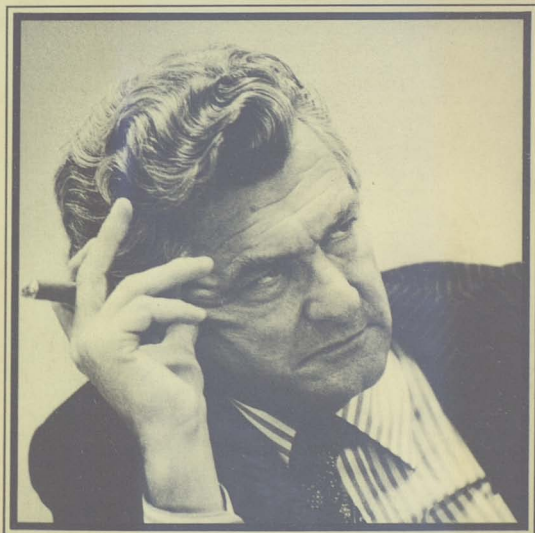


ROBERT J. HAWKE



A B I O G R A P H Y
by
Blanche d'Alpuget

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Robert James Lee Hawke is one of the great men of Australian public life, and his story, much of it never before revealed, makes compelling reading.

Hawke was a Rhodes Scholar, educated in three universities, before rejecting an academic career to commit himself to the trade union movement. Son of devout Christian parents, he had been reared to public duty and to the ambition of political leadership.

He first came to prominence in 1959 as the new union wages advocate, and before the age of thirty he had established a reputation for brilliance in that arena. To unionists he was a giant killer; employers saw him as a crypto-Communist bent upon their destruction.

In his decade as the Australian Council of Trade Unions advocate, he confronted the inadequacies of Australia's wage fixing system, forcing reform upon that central sphere of economic life. The same role took him to Papua New Guinea, where he helped germinate the seeds of Independence.

As President of the ACTU from 1970 to 1980 he was a master negotiator and peacemaker in industrial life. He agitated for social and economic reforms, becoming a folk hero and the most popular Australian of his time. In the International Labour Organisation he led the workers of the Western World in opposition to atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific, and was acclaimed as a fighter for human rights — and, champion of his great love, Israel. Hawke's devotion to Israel nearly destroyed his career.

While he was president of the Australian Labor Party he sought to heal its wounds after the sacking of the Whitlam government — and in his capacity as union leader he held back potentially violent industrial action over this most divisive issue.

Those who read this biography will come to know Hawke intimately. A fine writer, Blanche d'Alpuget's sensitivity and psychological insight illuminate this complex and enigmatic man — a man whose greatest challenges still lie ahead.

**ROBERT J.
HAWKE**

A BIOGRAPHY



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For my father, Lou d'Alpuget, with affection



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My mentor and friend, Peter Ryan, of Melbourne University Press, also read the manuscript for me when he was very busy, and when I had reached a

stage of exhaustion and despondency. There was great pressure of time in producing the book: chapter by chapter, in the later stages, it was edited and marked up as it was written. This speedy delivery caused in me a sort of post-natal depression during the fortnight's break between finishing writing and waiting for typesetting to begin, and I was overcome with doubts. Peter Ryan's encouragement, arrived like a basket of flowers in winter.

Finally, I thank my husband, Tony Pratt, for his patience, and my son, Louis Pratt, who, for a nine-year-old, takes great care of his mother.

Foreword

There is a school which holds that biographies of the living should not be written, because they cannot be honest. Indeed, the problems confronting the biographer of a living subject are daunting, especially if — as in the case of R.J. Hawke — the writer knows that much of what she reveals about her subject may be used and misused against him, in his lifetime, perhaps to the detriment of a career that is in mid-term. Such considerations have also concerned Hawke. It is a mark of his candour and integrity that he has permitted me, as an authorised biographer, to write about him critically and often unflatteringly and that, in the tradition of his spiritual ancestor, Cromwell, he is willing to be presented 'warts and all'. The only area I have avoided is a discussion of the Hawke children, whose privacy has already been invaded over many years. I have omitted information about the children at the request of Hazel Hawke. Her desire to protect them, and not to have re-published matters which have already appeared in the Press, has been a price worth paying for her help and unflinching frankness, both in giving information and in reading the manuscript for accuracy of detail. I have been guided by her perceptions a great deal, while exercising the responsibility to reach my own conclusions.

It is, surely, one of the most unnerving experiences in any life to have the past loom up, made solid in words. When Sir Richard Kirby first read the manuscript of the biography I had written about him, he exclaimed, 'Oh, God. I feel like a full frontal nude!' Hawke made a similar remark in the same situation: 'This is traumatic — like seeing your face in a mirror with a thousand facets. Some of the images seem to me grotesque.'

I have taken the view that there is no single truth to be told about something as complex and shifting as a fifty-year life span, but rather many truths, from various perspectives which, when viewed together, reveal the dimensions of personality. To do this I have had to rely on people who have known Hawke

at different stages of his life. Throughout the book I have allowed them to speak for themselves about him, offering opinions which, sometimes, are contradictory but out of which, I think, a coherent pattern emerges.

While the great drawback to biographies of the living or recently dead is the problem of candour — and, under Australian law, libel — an advantage lies in the wealth of information that may be collected, either from the subject or from those people who have known him or her. Importantly, too, friends, enemies and relations can provide a heavy counterweight to the subject's self-view. In Hawke's case their assistance to me has been crucial, for he is a man of dominating personality and persuasiveness and one, moreover, whose legal training has enabled him to confound critics with dextrous, logical argument. I make no claim to have been able, at all times, to withstand the force of Hawke's self-perceptions, but I have tried to present them as his own, by giving them as transcripts of his descriptions of situations, and where possible, presenting different views. The book is full of voices, for it is largely an oral history.

The use of oral history — in plain language, interviews — overcomes to some extent a major difficulty in writing about twentieth-century lives: lack of documentation. Telephones, radio, television, the whole world of audio-visual technology, has altered us so much: people have abandoned, for example, the custom of committing their intimate thoughts to letters and diaries, the documents which were once the primary source of a biographer. But oral history is only a partial solution — for what the middle-aged man recalls, let us say, about his parents is, generally, different from what the child, writing a diary, may have thought of them and may have later, unconsciously, built in to his behaviour in reaction to those thoughts. Again, the recollections of people who knew the subject in childhood are an important counterweight.

A particular problem created by the telephone is that much historically relevant communication is given over to it in the adult's career, where once the same transactions would have been made in writing. Oral history helps bridge the gaps — sometimes inadequately, sometimes much better than any written record: the Nixon White House tapes are, so far, the most celebrated example of the superiority of an oral record to a formal, written one. Wherever possible I have tape-recorded interviews.

I did some early work on this book in mid-1979 but did not turn my full attention to it until the beginning of 1980. At the time Hawke was still, as he described it later, 'climbing the mountain' — that is, struggling with his drinking problem. By the time I began writing, in mid 1981, he seemed to have conquered the mountain. By now he has been a teetotaller for two years. Much of this book is the story of Hawke's battle with alcohol. Much of it also is the story of a life contending with what I have called 'a dream' — that is, Hawke's ambition to be the political leader of his country. I have labelled it a dream not to suggest unreality, but because it is an aspect of something that is

larger and vaguer than the specific goal of political leadership, and is, rather, a yearning towards unity. The vision has come and gone throughout his life, like a recurrent dream that is part of a broader field of emotion. Intertwined with it are other 'dreams' — International House, the ACTU enterprises, peace in the Middle East — whatever their focus, all of them flowing out from the same powerful source.

One of the Hawke family dreams was so like gossamer that I felt I could not include it in the text, but record it now: Hawke's father told me that his favourite chapter of the Bible concerned the Building of the Temple, explaining, 'David planned it, but it was his son, Solomon, who executed it'. It was only when this biography was almost complete that Hawke learned that his father had been an office holder of the ALP and in youth had wanted a political career himself.

At the time I began research Hawke had decided to try to live out his ambitious vision of political leadership. That, and his recent struggle with drink, have given a shape and motifs to the book which may well, from the longer view, seem artificial. A life of Hawke written posthumously would perhaps give a very different emphasis to the themes of alcohol and ambition — or what may be termed hedonism and social integration. This is, therefore, a partial life and will be to some people an example of the wrong-headedness of not only attempting the biography of a living subject but of one in mid-career.

I think it has been worth writing, for a number of reasons: one, obviously, is the intrinsic interest of the subject. Another is that it has provided an opportunity to trap information which otherwise will vanish as its living sources die, information about a social institution for which I feel profound respect (and often irritation): the Australian trade union movement. Frustrating and foolish as it sometimes is, I believe the freedoms of our society are carried on its shoulders.

Blanche d'Alpuget
May 1982, Canberra

