

Mr William Charles Wentworth IV

Four generations after his great grandfather endowed Sydney University and served on the governing body of the new institution, William Charles Wentworth IV (pictured below) was back to receive an honorary Doctorate of the University at a ceremony held at 11.30am on 15 March 1996.

Dr Wentworth was joined in the celebration by the former Prime Minister, Sir John Gorton, who appointed him, then Liberal MP for Mackellar, as Minister for Social Security and Aboriginal Affairs in his government in 1968.

From 'The University of Sydney News', 28 March 1996



Former Prime Minister, Sir John Gorton and William Charles Wentworth IV, photo, Tracey Schramm, 'The University of Sydney News', 28 March 1996.

Citation

Presented by the Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor D J Anderson

Chancellor,

I have the honour to present William Charles Wentworth IV for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University.

In 1849 William Charles Wentworth moved in the Legislative Council for the creation of the University of Sydney. The legislation was passed in 1850 and Wentworth became a member of the governing body from its inception until 1872.

His statue in this Great Hall commemorates our debt where, despite his warning that leaving home to go to a university overseas was usually detrimental to the morals of young men without compensating improvement to their minds, young William Wentworth IV, whom we honour today, did not enrol at the University of Sydney but at New College, Oxford. He graduated in Classics and earned a Blue in athletics.

He returned to Australia at the age of 23, worked briefly as a factory hand in Lever Bros. soap factory in Balmain, next as Secretary to the Attorney General of NSW, Sir Henry Manning, and then as economic adviser and publicity officer for the Premier, B.S.B. Stevens.

He was as interested in public affairs as his great grandfather, wrote *Referendum & Reform* in 1933, and in 1939 *Demand for Defence* in which he warned that Japan threatened Australia's security, asserted that it was foolhardy to depend on Singapore as a guardian fortress, and called for the immediate production of

aircraft and munitions. The cost of Wentworth's program did not incline the Government or the Public at that time to support his views.

After the outbreak of war Wentworth joined the AIF as a private but because of his poor eyesight he was relegated to home defence. He studied the Japanese army's infiltration tactics in Malaya and in 1942 as Captain in the 45th Battalion he used such tactics to demonstrate the poor state of local defences. The way he did that was too much for Army Command which decided that he must leave the army.

After failing to win the seat of Wentworth as an anti-Menzies Independent in 1943, in 1949 he won the new seat of Mackellar as a Liberal and retained it until October 1977, when he resigned from the Liberal Party because he could no longer support the Fraser government's economic doctrine of salvation through stagnation.

From 1949 he had campaigned for the standardisation of the railway gauge in Australia and in 1956 he wrote an expert and ultimately very influential report on how to do it. He campaigned also for the abolition of the means test, promoted the case of open-cut coal mining, and during Parliamentary vacations he and his wife visited and got to know indigenous Australians living in tribal conditions.

The man of intellectual power and vision, with an endearing degree of eccentricity, seemed destined to remain a frustrated and at times unruly back bencher until John Gorton became Prime Minister in 1968. Gorton appointed him Minister for Social Services and Minister in Charge of Aboriginal Affairs. Wentworth proposed the abolition of the means test, the introduction of a national superannuation scheme and land rights for Gurindji tribe, at Wave Hill, but Cabinet did not support him. It was another 20-25 years before his proposals were adopted.

He did however establish the Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra which he once said was his greatest achievement. He did not become a Minister again until after the fall of the Whitlam government in October 1977. He stood for Senate as an independent after his resignation from the Liberal Party in 1977 but was not elected and so ended his parliamentary life of 28 years, at the age of 70 after only 4 years as a Minister.

Clement Attlee once remarked that de Gaulle was a very good soldier but a very bad politician - de Gaulle's response was that politics was too serious a matter to be left to the politicians. Wentworth must often have had similar thoughts.

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