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**Title:**  
The Cameron diaries

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## THE CAMERON DIARIES

DON DUNSTAN

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Clyde has never been one for regarding rules as important unless they suited the purposes of his policy. He broke rules with complete equanimity and admitted to doing so with disarming candour. As he says in his Diaries, "When a charge is not true it's best to treat it as a joke; when it is embarrassingly true the best thing is to confess to being fallible." Clyde not infrequently confessed; I can recall many occasions in the Labor Party when anyone else doing what Clyde did would have aroused resentment and rancour, but Clyde would blithely admit his wrongdoing

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The other central character of the Cameron Diaries is Gough Whitlam. Equally unique, a man of enormous talents who in a short time achieved more of Labor's reform policies than any other leader of the party, Gough was equally cavalier about rules, but in a different way from Clyde. He personally felt he was above them, but that they should apply when necessary to the lesser mortals who surrounded him. Unlike Clyde, he could not have a disagreement with a personal friend without being angry, and again unlike Clyde thought that personal friendship and support could be disregarded in his pursuit of his goals. It was inevitable that these two characters should clash, and clash they did. Most of the book is about, or informed by that clash. It gives a fascinating, intriguing, at times horrifying insight into the machinations about policies personalities and positions, (to use Gough's favourite alliterative form), in the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and also within the parties of the Coalition.

The Diaries are more than that. Clyde has expanded, sometimes as a result of research, sometimes with hindsight, his diary notes so that frequently we get a lengthy account of a topic of interest to him. So there is a mixture of personal notes about family

and friends and meals and other social occasions with an anecdotal account of the plots and vote-getting in which other members of caucus obviously felt they could always rely on Clyde's vote against Gough, and essays upon policy and the history of trying to get it into effect.

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Also Clyde describes the internecine and self-serving atmosphere of a Canberra cabinet very graphically; recounting a talk with Ian McPhee he says "He seemed astonished when I explained to him that the measure of his success would be gauged by the campaign his colleagues would wage against him." "You have to remain a mediocre Minister or be prepared to keep looking over your shoulder for the backstabbers," I told him. He looked hurt when I went on to explain that politics is a dog-eat-dog business. Each man is for himself and each man is envious of another individual's success - even though that success may contribute to the overall success of the Government of which he is a member. A colleague's congratulations, his invitation to dinner, his Christmas card or his cultivation of friendship rarely means that he likes you or believes you are a good person or a competent one. It is more likely to be motivated by a desire to make you think that he is good."

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