# A HISTORY OF **OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

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RESOURCE

# THE CONTENTS

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# THE INTRODUCTION

A national icon, and a place of great beauty, magnificent design and historical significance, Old Parliament House is home to the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD).

As a modern day town square, we celebrate the Australian democratic spirit, champion national leadership and continue to explore and promote the work of key thinkers who shaped who we are today.

The 61 years that Old Parliament House served as the home of the Federal Parliament was a time of enormous change in Australia. The country grew from an Imperial Dominion to a nation in its own right. Over that time, the building was the theatre in which the politics of the day were played out and momentous decisions made.

Today, the importance of the building lies in its historical and social value to the Australian people. The building is a nationally significant 'museum of itself' and of Australia's political heritage. It is listed on the National Heritage Register and as such, is a precious place.

MoAD Learning has prepared this resource in response to requests from teachers, students and parents for information on the history of the building and the people in it. Produced in a fact sheet format with each page covering one topic, it can be used as information for background research for a unit on Federal Parliament and as a starting point for further study and discussion on democracy.

For further information and resources check our website at moadoph.gov.au/learning

MoAD Learning
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Old Parliament House was the home of the Federal Parliament from 1927 to 1988. During this time, great changes took place in Australian social and political life. This is the building in which democracy matured in Australia. It was here the nation was shaped.

The building was designed by John Smith Murdoch; the first Commonwealth government architect. He was asked to design a 'provisional' building intended to serve as a parliament for 50 years. Around the building grew the new Australian capital city of Canberra. The need for a national capital arose when the Australian colonies united to form the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

Parliament House was like a town within the city of Canberra. It had its own library, post office, barber, carpentry workshop, bars and dining room. By the 1980s, thousands of people worked in the building including politicians, parliamentary staff, Hansard reporters, journalists, dining room and bar staff.

During its life as a working parliament, this building was the setting for many of Australia's major political events. Debates that influenced the future of the nation took place here, key decisions were taken, political careers were made and ended. In the 61 years that the building



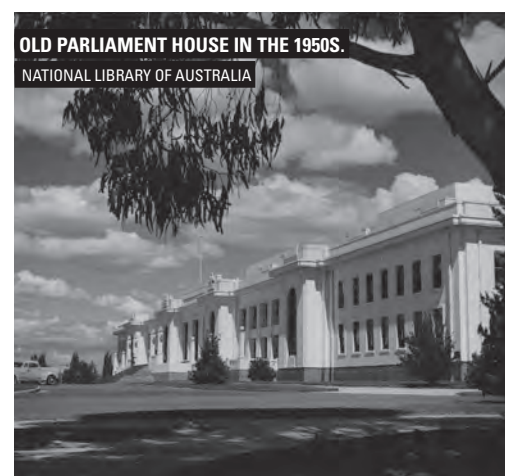OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE OPENS IN 1927.
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

served as Parliament House, there were many changes in the size and nature of the Federal Parliament. During this time the House of Representatives grew from 76 to 148 members and the Senate from 36 to 76 members. In 1927, only the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Government in the Senate and ministers had their own offices.

By the 1980s, the building had exceeded its capacity with almost 1800 people crowded into a building originally intended for a few hundred. Members and senators had offices of their own, most of them tiny and overcrowded.

A new and permanent Parliament House was completed in 1988. In June of that year, members sat for the last time after 61 years in the old building.
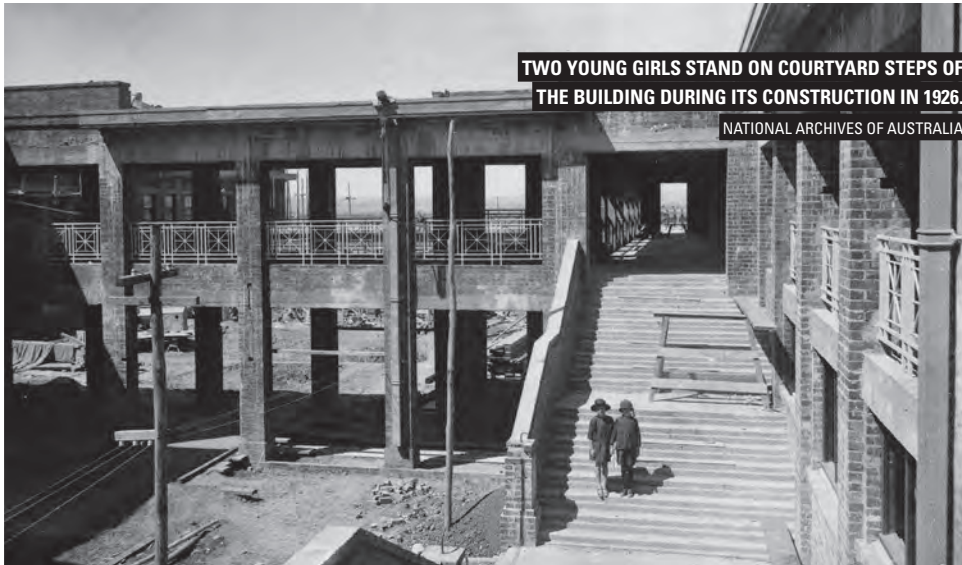
Today, the building is listed on the National Heritage Register and is home to the Museum of Australian Democracy—a museum that tells the story of Australia's democracy, including the history and heritage of the building.



OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE IN THE 1950S.
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

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# THE BUILDING

TWO YOUNG GIRLS STAND ON COURTYARD STEPS OF THE BUILDING DURING ITS CONSTRUCTION IN 1926.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

The Old Parliament House building was designed by Chief Commonwealth Government architect John Smith Murdoch. It is the last and best known of his government buildings. His designs can be found all over Australia from the Perth GPO to the South Brisbane Telephone Exchange. He designed East and West Blocks in Canberra to complement the building. The foundations of West Block were raised so the roofs of all three buildings were at the same height.

Murdoch's design for the building was thought to be very modern for its time. Square and circular motifs were features of the architecture and furniture throughout the build-ing. These appear on balcony rails, floor design, light fittings and the gold decoration on the glass doors. The building is filled with natural light from windows, skylights and light wells. Gardens and courtyards offer places for recreation or quiet thought. Covered walkways sur-round and link parts of the building.

The three storey building is planned around the two legislative or law-making Chambers—the House of Representatives and the Senate. The legislative section at the front includes party meeting rooms and offices as well as the Chambers. The recreational areas, located at the back of the building, comprise the dining room and bar. Press offices occupy most of the upper floor, while offices, kitch-ens, plant rooms and storage are located on the lower floor.

Construction started in 1923 and workers and building materials came from all parts of Australia. Timber from nearly every State was used inside to reflect the federal nature of the building. Bricks came from nearby Yar-ralumla brickworks, transported to the site by light rail. The cost of the building and the furnishings was more than £600 000—almost three times the original estimate.

There were many changes and additions over the years as the number of members, senators, staff and journalists increased. Windows were blocked off and verandahs glassed in. Extensions changed the shape of the building, in particular those to the sides and front of the building from the 1940s to the 1970s.



DEMOLITION WORK IN PROGRESS AS PART OF THE EXTENSIONS THAT WERE CARRIED OUT IN 1972–73. THIS INCLUDED THE ADDITION OF A NEW PRIME MINISTER'S SUITE.
CANBERRA TIMES PHOTO ARCHIVE

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# THE BUILDING

THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR CAME FROM BRITAIN. IN THE CHAMBER ALL NON-LABOR SPEAKERS WORE FORMAL DRESS OVER A BLACK SUIT SPEAKERS FROM THE LABOR PARTY NEVER WORE THE REGALIA.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

The House of Representatives is the place where Australia's governments are formed by the majority party or coalition of parties. Major decisions were made in this Chamber that continues to affect our lives today. It was the scene of debate and argument, regulated by rules known as 'Standing Orders'. The Speaker, who sat in the carved chair at the head of the centre table, was in charge of the debate.

Government members sat on the Speaker's right and Opposition members to the left. The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition sat at the central table facing each other, while ministers and senior members of the Opposition sat behind them on the front benches. The backbenchers initially had no offices of their own in the building. They worked at the desk in front of them and in their party rooms, and kept their papers in the lockable drawer under their seats. Hansard reporters were seated at the central table on the Opposition side. They recorded by hand, and later by machine, all parliamentary sessions, except for some secret meetings held during the Second World War.

Many remarkable characters have sat in the Chamber. The fiery Labor politician Eddie Ward holds the record for 15 suspensions from the House of Representatives for misconduct. Billy Hughes was the longest serving member. Prime Minister from 1915–23, Hughes was one of the original members of the Federal Parliament in 1901. He served until 1952, when he died in office at the age of 90.

Some major turning points in Australian history have been announced and debated in this room. In the early 1950s, the Chamber saw passionate debates when Robert Menzies argued for the banning of the Communist Party of Australia. The constitutional amendment to give the Commonwealth power to legislate for Aboriginal people was debated in 1967 and overwhelmingly supported when it was put to the people in a referendum. In 1975, Malcolm Fraser told the House of Representatives that the Governor-General had dismissed the Whitlam Government and appointed him Caretaker Prime Minister.



THE LAST SITTING OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN MAY 1988. BOB HAWKE WAS THE LAST PRIME MINISTER TO SERVE IN THIS CHAMBER. JOAN CHILD WAS THE SPEAKER AND THE FIRST WOMAN TO HOLD THIS POSITION.
ROBERT MACFARLANE, DEPT. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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# THE BUILDING

**THE USHER OF THE BLACK ROD LEADING THE GOVERNOR – GENERAL INTO THE SENATE CHAMBER IN THE 1970S.**
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

The Senate was established to give an equal say to each original Australian State, with the smaller States having the same number of senators as the larger ones. This was a crucial part of the Federation agreement. In time, senators' loyalty to their party became more important than State loyalties. Since 1949, proportional representation has made it easier for minor parties to win seats in the Senate than in the House of Representatives. Debate in the Senate is controlled by the President of the Senate who, like the Speaker of the House, sits in a prominent position in the Chamber.

While the Government is formed by the party which holds a majority in the House of Representatives, it may not necessarily have a majority in the Senate. The Senate has almost equal power to the House of Representatives, with the important exception that it cannot introduce or amend money bills. These bills are the means by which the Government obtains funds (often referred to as supply) for its administration. However the Senate can reject or refuse to pass such bills. In 1975, the Senate demonstrated this power when it refused to pass the supply bills, triggering the constitutional crisis that led to the dismissal of the Whitlam Government.

The Senate Chamber was the place where parliaments were opened—usually after a federal election. On these occasions, members of the House of Representatives would be summoned to walk across King's Hall to join the senators to hear the Governor-General or the Monarch declare the new Parliament in session. Queen Elizabeth II performed this function in 1954, 1974 and 1977.

Although some senators may be ministers, the Prime Minister must be a member of the House of Representatives. Only once in the history of the Federal Parliament has the Prime Minister come from the Senate. This happened in 1968 when Senator John Gorton was elected leader of the Liberal Party following the death by drowning of Prime Minister Harold Holt. Gorton then resigned his Senate seat and won Holt's vacant House of Representatives' seat of Higgins.
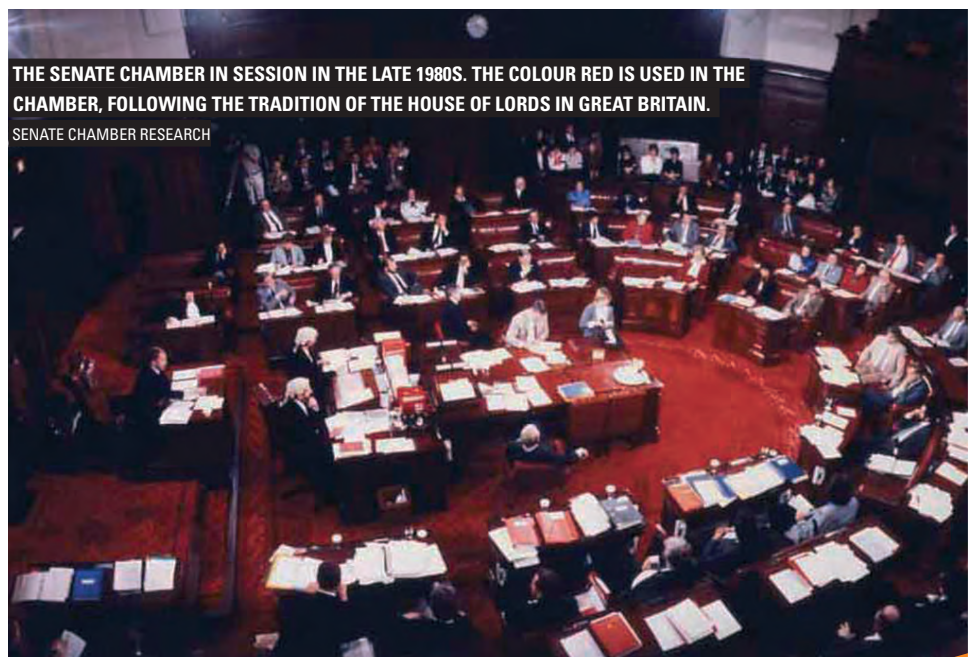


**THE SENATE CHAMBER IN SESSION IN THE LATE 1980S. THE COLOUR RED IS USED IN THE CHAMBER, FOLLOWING THE TRADITION OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS IN GREAT BRITAIN.**
SENATE CHAMBER RESEARCH

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# THE BUILDING

FORMER PRIME MINISTER BEN CHIFLEY LIES IN STATE IN KING'S HALL IN 1951. (ONLY SIX YEARS EARLIER IN 1945, PRIME MINISTER JOHN CURTIN LAY IN STATE THERE.)
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

In 1931, a journalist for the Melbourne Herald, Joe Alexander, was expelled from the House of Representatives Chamber and its surrounds for refusing to reveal the source of a leaked document. He was allowed, however, to keep working on the Senate side of the building. For the five months that the ban remained in place, Alexander was often seen wandering along an imaginary line running down the middle of King's Hall, waving at members of the House of Representatives with whom he wanted to speak.

King's Hall was the hub of the building. Open to the public from the earliest days, this space was far more than just a formal function room or foyer. It came to symbolise the openness of parliamentary democracy and representative government in Australia. Even in the 1970s, when new concerns about security led to the introduction of a separate entrance for the public under the front stairs, King's Hall remained open to the public. The openness of this old building now seems remarkable, particularly in comparison with the Australian Parliament House.

King's Hall was the place where great public ceremonies were held, politicians and journalists mingled and prime ministers brushed shoulders with ordinary citizens. Prime Minister John Curtin lay in state here after his death in office in 1945. During the 1963 Royal Tour, Prime Minister Menzies complimented Queen Elizabeth with the words of an Elizabethan poet Barnabe Googe, 'I did but see her passing by, and yet I love her 'til I die'.

King's Hall was well placed for journalists. They could observe most of the human traffic in the building from this central position, as members crossed between the two sides of the building, went into the library or down to the Members' Dining Room. 'If you waited in King's Hall, you would meet anybody you wanted to see,' said one veteran journalist. 'It was an ant's nest within a rabbit warren.' King's Hall was buzzing in November 1975 when the Senate's refusal to pass supply bills led to the dismissal of the Whitlam Government.



THE STATUE OF KING GEORGE V DOMINATES KING'S HALL. HE WAS THE REIGNING MONARCH WHEN OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE OPENED IN 1927.
MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY COLLECTION

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# THE BUILDING

THE ORIGINAL ROUND CABINET TABLE.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

Cabinet is the group of senior ministers led by the Prime Minister who meet to make most of the major decisions of government. Cabinet meetings are confidential and secret. Even new governments are not allowed to see the records of a previous government's meetings, as records are not released for at least thirty years. In the Cabinet Room, members of the Government can argue and disagree, but when decisions are debated openly in Parliament, the Government presents a united voice.

In 1973, the Cabinet Room was enlarged, taking in the former verandah. The original small Cabinet table with seating for 10 to 12 ministers was replaced. The new larger table accommodated all 27 ministers of Gough Whitlam's Cabinet (1972–75). Thick doors were installed in an attempt to make the Cabinet Room totally soundproof. Small tables in the corners were used by Cabinet notetakers—senior public servants who recorded Cabinet discussions and decisions. The notetakers began their work in 1940 during the first Menzies Government. Records of Cabinet decisions before that time were generally poor or undocumented. Wh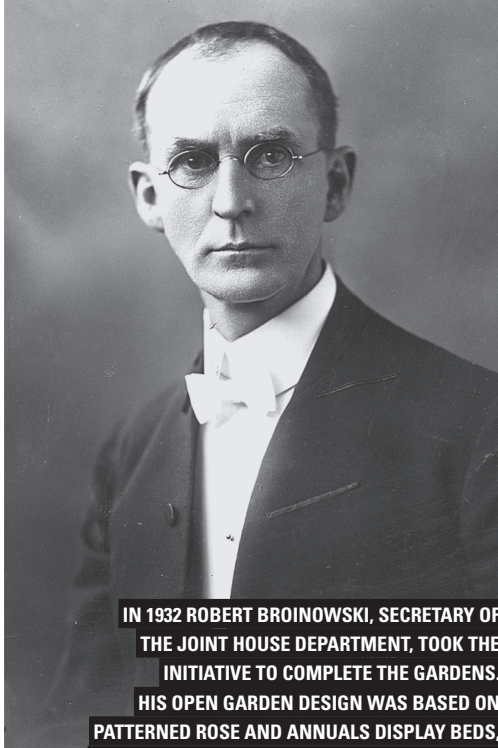ite buttons on the edge of the table were used to call an attendant, usually to take a message from a minister to someone in their office or department. A wall safe was used to store Cabinet submissions and other highly confidential papers.

In the early years, there were persistent rumours about eavesdropping through the ceiling. The culprits were assumed to be journalists, whose offices were just above, although this was never proved. The Press was much more likely to hear what was happening directly from members of Cabinet. When the Cabinet Room was extended, the temporary Press offices on the roof above were removed. In later years, the room was also checked regularly for electronic listening devices.


THE LARGE TABLE MADE FOR GOUGH WHITLAM'S CABINET, THE ONLY ONE SINCE 1956 TO INCLUDE ALL MINISTERS (1974).
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

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# THE BUILDING

## THE GARDENS



IN 1932 ROBERT BROINOWSKI, SECRETARY OF THE JOINT HOUSE DEPARTMENT, TOOK THE INITIATIVE TO COMPLETE THE GARDENS. HIS OPEN GARDEN DESIGN WAS BASED ON PATTERNED ROSE AND ANNUALS DISPLAY BEDS, SET IN LAWNS AND WITH A MINIMUM OF TREES.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

more private. The parliamentary gardens were central to architect John Smith Murdoch's vision for the building. Parliamentarians wanted private gardens, as they had enjoyed the attractive gardens of the State Parliament House in Melbourne. Once the Old Parliament House gardens had grown, they became a focal point for formal and informal gatherings, sporting activities, recreation and relaxation. The sporting facilities included tennis courts, a bowling green, cricket pitch and later, squash courts.

The gardens were used for formal events associated with royal visits and the opening of Parliament. Some politicians used the gardens to launch new policies and initiatives, and journalists using the gardens as a backdrop for television programs. Others thought of creative uses for the gardens.

One politician set up his beehives there and used the jars of honey as peace offerings to members of the opposing parties.

The gardens also provided floral decoration for offices and the dining rooms. The harmony created by John Smith Murdoch between the building and its unpretentious gardens was recognised when they were listed on the Register of the National Estate. The Register cites the importance of the gardens as 'expressing their history in plantings, sports facilities, modest features and layout patterns'. When Parliament left in 1988, the National Capital Authority took over the management of the gardens. In 2002, the gardens were refurbished with a fresh design and upgraded amenities.
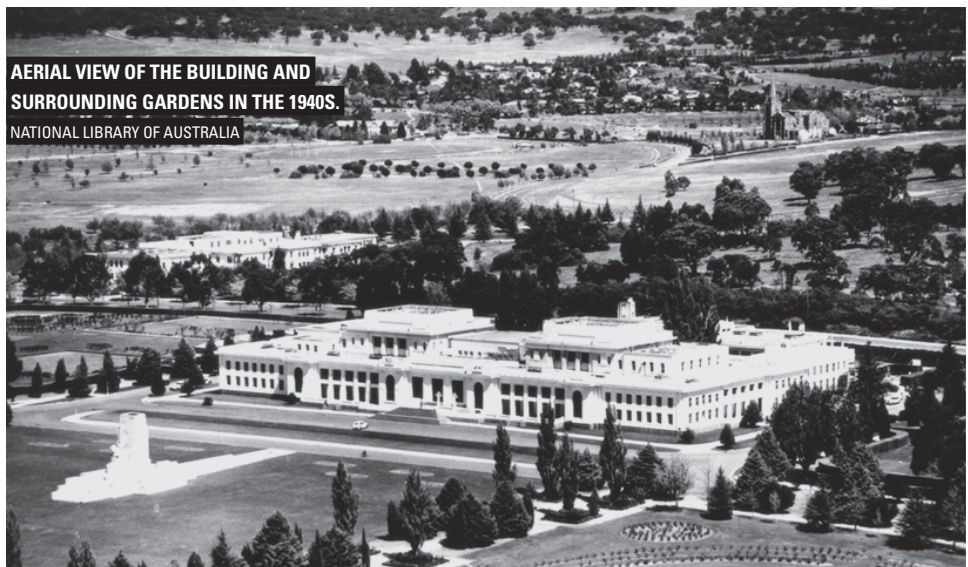
Sometimes even politicians need to get away from people and politics. The gardens on either side of the building gave them the chance to do that. The gardens were for the exclusive use of members and senators, although parliamentary staff also had access to them at certain times. Surrounding cypress hedges, planted around the edge of the gardens, acted as a wind break and made the gardens feel



AERIAL VIEW OF THE BUILDING AND SURROUNDING GARDENS IN THE 1940S.
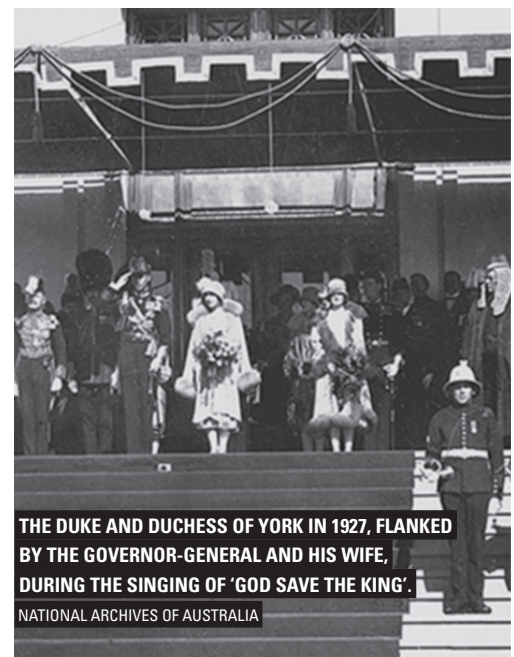NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

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On 9 May 1927, thousands of people flocked to Canberra for the official opening of the new Parliament House by His Royal Highness the Duke of York. Invited guests included parliamentarians and their wives, State premiers, judges, bishops, lord mayors, diplomats and senior military officials. They were joined by 15 000 members of the general public, many of whom camped in tents and cars on the paddocks that surrounded the building.

The Duke and Duchess of York arrived in a horse-drawn carriage to a noisy welcome. The tooting of 1500 motor cars added to the cheering and hand clapping. After being greeted by the Governor-General, his wife Lady Stonehaven, Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce and Mrs Bruce, the royal couple walked up the carpeted steps to join Dame Nellie Melba to sing the national anthem 'God Save the King'. Unfortunately the main chorus was drowned out as an RAAF squadron flew overhead. Prime Minister Bruce, in top hat and tails, delivered the official welcoming speech. The Duke, in the dress uniform of an admiral, spoke of the opening as 'a landmark in Australia's history and the birth of a greater awareness of Australia's destiny as one of the great self-governing units of the British Empire'.

At 11.00 am, the Duke formally opened the front doors of the building with a large 15 carat gold key, then proceeded to the Senate



**AIR FORCE AND CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT FLY OVER THE ROYAL ENTOURAGE AS IT MAKES ITS WAY BY CARRIAGE TO OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE IN 1927. ONE PILOT DIED IN A CRASH LATER THAT DAY.**
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA
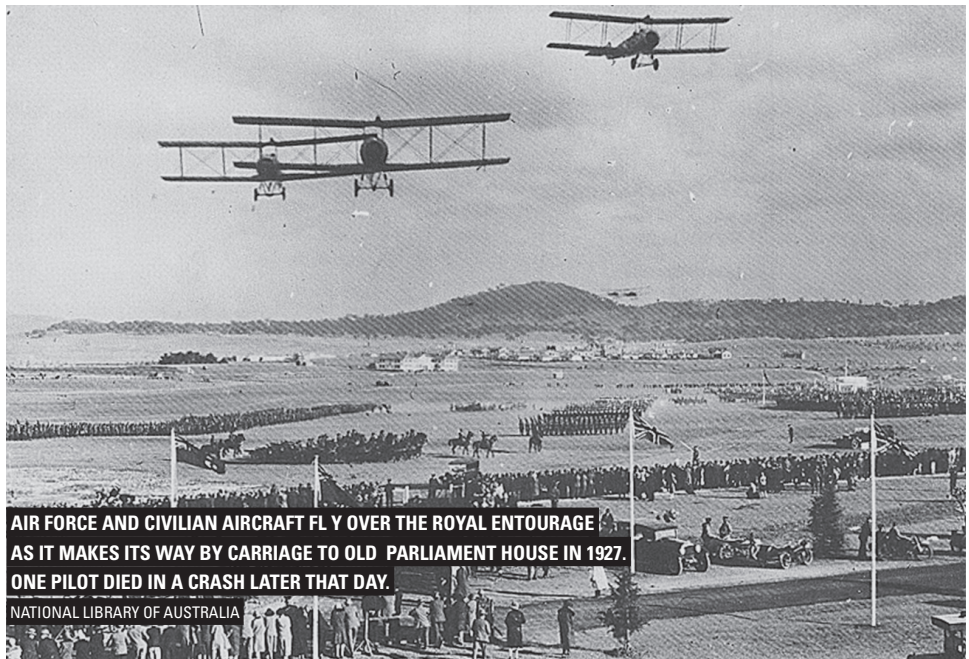
Chamber for more speeches. In a final ceremony, the Duke unveiled the statue of his father, King George V, which stands today in King's Hall. The official party then attended a lunch of turtle soup, poached salmon and Canberra pudding. At the time, alcohol was not allowed in the national capital, so the drink of the day was non-alcoholic fruit punch. The crowd outside dined on Sargeants meat pies and scones. However, the organisers had over–catered and two truck loads of meat pies, sausage rolls, prawns and fish had to be buried at the nearby Queanbeyan tip!



**THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF YORK IN 1927, FLANKED BY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND HIS WIFE, DURING THE SINGING OF 'GOD SAVE THE KING'.**
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

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# THE EVENTS

The years 1939–45 marked a volatile period for the House of Representatives. In September 1939, when it was Prime Minister Robert Menzies' 'melancholy duty' to announce that Australia was at war, there was disunity in his United Australia Party. By 1941, he had resigned and Country Party leader Arthur Fadden became Prime Minister. Fadden led for just 40 days before his Government was defeated on the floor of the House. It was Labor Prime Minister, John Curtin, who declared that Australia was at war with Japan in 1941. He brought stability to wartime administration until his death in office in 1945. Deputy Prime Minister Frank Forde took over for seven days until the Labor Party elected a new leader. Ben Chifley won the ballot. He took office just before the War ended in August 1945.

From 1941, the threat of Japanese invasion was very real for Australians. Like the rest of Canberra, the building was blacked out at night. White lines were painted on the footpaths to direct members back to their hotels after dark.

In 1942, US General Douglas MacArthur visited Old Parliament House shortly after he was appointed Supreme Allied Commander in the South West Pacific. Wearing his trademark custom-made silk uniform, he was greeted on the front steps by the Minister for the Army, Frank Forde and taken to the Prime Minister's Suite. At his first meeting, MacArthur put his arm around Prime Minister Curtin's shoulders and said, 'We two, you and I, will see this thing through together. We can do it and we will do it. You take care of the rear and I will handle the front.'



**GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR ON THE STEPS OF THE BUILDING IN 1942.**
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL #136227

The lives of Australians were regulated so that resources could be directed to the war effort. The Federal Government introduced identification cards as well as the rationing of petrol, food and clothing. Over 900 000 men and women were placed in jobs to support the war effort. Other regulations included conscription for home service and restriction of sporting events.

Wartime also changed the role of women. With men away fighting, women took over traditionally male jobs. This shift was reflected in politics as well. In 1943, Senator Dorothy Tangney and Dame Enid Lyons MP became the first women to be elected to the Federal Parliament.



**WORKERS FROM OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE STAND IN THE AIR RAID TRENCHES THAT WERE DUG INTO THE SENATE GARDENS.**
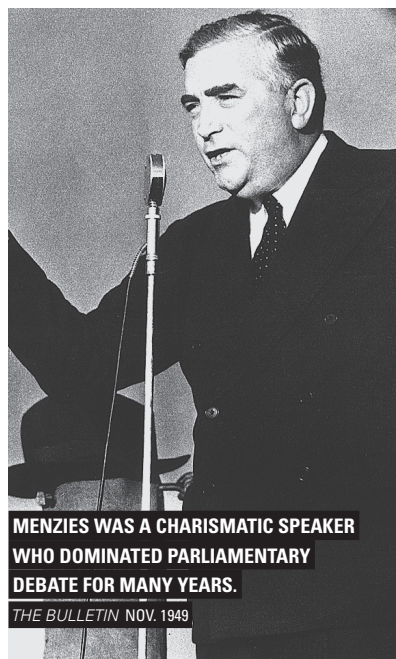AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL #136211

# THE EVENTS

In 1949 Australians went to the polls to elect a new federal government. Voters knew at the time that their choice would have a big influence on their country's future. Should they choose the Labor Government, which had taken them through most of the War and into peacetime? Or should they strike out in a new direction?

Two political parties competed for popular support and presented voters with sharply contrasting policies. The Australian Labor Party, led by Ben Chifley, emphasised a commitment to the less fortunate section of the community and believed governments had a vital role to play in creating the right conditions for full employment, provision of housing and looking after the health needs of people.

Robert Menzies presented the new Liberal Party as the party of free enterprise. In coalition with the Country Party, he promised lower taxes, smaller government and the removal of unnecessary controls. The Liberals also promoted themselves as a party that cared about such social issues as health, education and the welfare of the elderly. Above all they guaranteed the security of individuals and families against communism and socialism.

Chifley mistakenly believed that voters would recognise Menzies and his colleagues as yesterday's men. The Liberal Party introduced a new style of politics with the recruitment of a publicity firm to help with the campaign. Menzies was portrayed as a man of the people, an imaginative and determined leader, the right man to lead



**MENZIES WAS A CHARISMATIC SPEAKER WHO DOMINATED PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE FOR MANY YEARS.**
*THE BULLETIN* NOV. 1949

Australia into the future. Advertisements drew attention to his virile leadership, suggesting that Chifley's approach was tired and his party's policies old-fashioned.

On election night, as the votes reached the tally rooms around Australia, the trend quickly became clear: the Opposition parties had achieved a huge swing, turning a 40 per cent minority in the House of Representatives into a 60 per cent majority. The Liberals won 54 seats, the Country Party 20, and Labor 47. The victory signalled the beginning of a long period of conservative domination of Australian federal politics. Menzies led the Coalition to victory time and time again, surviving narrowly in 1961but mostly winning by a comfortable majority. He became Australia's longest serving Prime Minister: his second term lasted 16 years. The 1949 election turned out to be a landmark in Australian history.
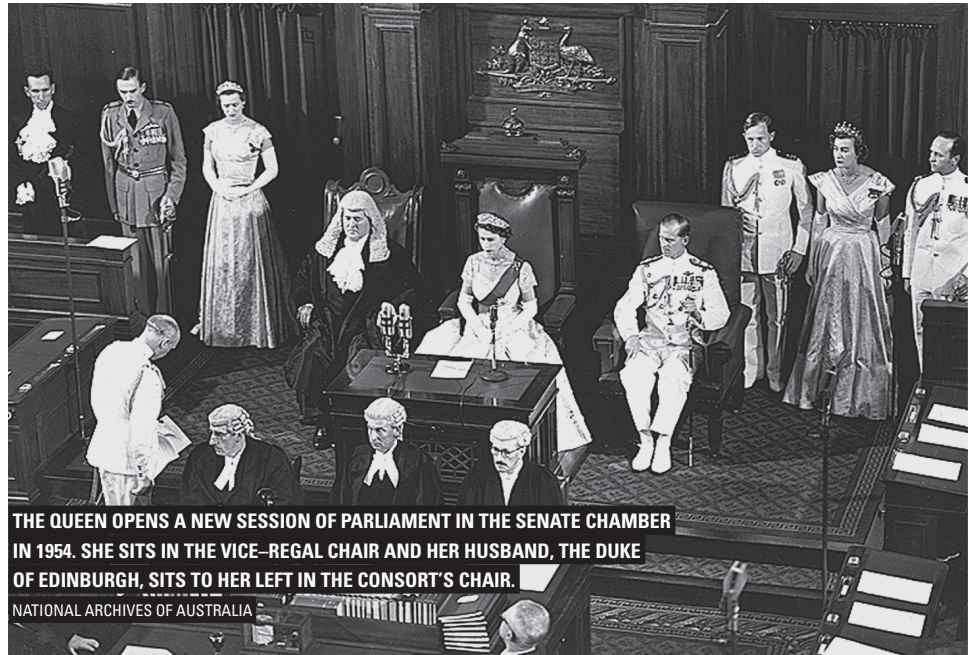


**GOING MY WAY? BY TED SCORFIELD.**
*THE BULLETIN* NOV. 1949

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QUEEN ELIZABETH II AND THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH STANDING ON THE WET FRONT STEPS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE.
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA



THE QUEEN OPENS A NEW SESSION OF PARLIAMENT IN THE SENATE CHAMBER IN 1954. SHE SITS IN THE VICE–REGAL CHAIR AND HER HUSBAND, THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH, SITS TO HER LEFT IN THE CONSORT'S CHAIR.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

Huge crowds turned out to see Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh when they toured Australia in 1954. It was Australia's first visit by a reigning monarch. The whirlwind eight week tour covered all State capital cities and provincial centres and delighted the Australian public.

On 15 February 1954, the most significant event of the tour occurred. Her Majesty opened the third session of the twentieth Federal Parliament. She was the first ruling sovereign of the British Commonwealth to do so.

The Queen arrived wearing her cream coronation gown embroidered with the floral emblems of her Commonwealth countries. Before entering the building, the royal couple stood on the front steps to review 4000 servicemen presenting arms in a royal salute. As the national anthem God Save the Queen played, 3000 school children formed an Australian flag and the words 'Our Queen'.

Thousands of spectators braved wet weather to glimpse the events through a sea of umbrellas. One of them, Meryl Hunter, recalls the rehearsal for the royal visit: 'The daughter [Heather Menzies] of one of our more famous prime ministers stood in for the Queen and we joined in the laughter as she giggled her way through the ceremony…Some days later we watched the real Queen arrive…in tiara and sash to open Parliament.'

Once in the Senate Chamber, the Queen took her place in the Vice-Regal Chair. She said it was a joy for her to address the House 'not as a Queen from far away but as your Queen and a part of your Parliament'. She then added, 'I am the first ruling sovereign to visit Australia, it is clear that the events of today make a piece of history which fills me with deep pride and the most heartfelt pleasure…'

Although the ceremony lasted only 15 minutes, it had enduring significance for the people of Australia.

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# THE EVENTS

On 11 November 1975, the Governor-General Sir John Kerr met Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in the study at Government House. Kerr handed Whitlam a letter withdrawing his commission as Prime Minister. For the first time in Australia's history, a governor-general had sacked a prime minister.

This event, commonly known as the 'Dismissal', was the climax of a political crisis that began on 15 October 1975 when Liberal and National Country Party senators voted to defer consideration of the Labor Government's money bills. Such bills, often referred to as supply, are the means by which the government obtains funds to govern. With supply blocked, the Whitlam Government faced the prospect of running out of money by the end of November. For four weeks, the Parliament was deadlocked—neither the Government nor the Opposition would change their positions.

On 11 November Kerr intervened, dismissed Whitlam as Prime Minister and called upon Malcolm Fraser, the Leader of the Opposition, to form a Caretaker Government on the condition that he immediately pass supply and call an election. Supply was passed and both Houses of Parliament were dissolved. The Liberal/National Country Party Coalition won a landslide victory in the election held on 13 December 1975.

Kerr's decision to sack Whitlam is still surrounded by controversy. There are claims that he deceived Whitlam and acted against established constitutional conventions. Others praise Kerr for bringing the crisis to an end and argue that he acted as he had to. Historians and lawyers will continue to argue over the significance of Kerr's actions. This debate raises questions not only about what occurred on 11 November 1975, but also about the future shape of Australia's system of government, the powers of Australia's Head of State, and the meaning of the Australian Constitution.



THE PROCLAMATION OF THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT BEING READ BY DAVID SMITH, THE OFFICIAL SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, ON THE STEPS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE ON 11 NOVEMBER 1975.
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MALCOLM FRASER (LEFT) AND THE GOVERNOR–GENERAL SIR JOHN KERR.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

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Conscription, or compulsory military service, has been a controversial issue throughout Australia's history. *The National Service Act 1964* introduced by the Liberal/Country Party Government divided both Parliament and the country, particularly when young conscripts were sent soon after to fight in the Vietnam War.

It was not the first time that a system of conscription was introduced and challenged in this country. The Universal Service Scheme, instituted by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin in 1911, lasted until 1929 when it was abolished by the newly-elected Labor Government. Compulsory military service for duty within Australia was revived in 1939; soldiers had to serve in defence of Australia and its South-West Pacific territories. The reintroduction of the National Service Scheme by the Liberal Government in 1951 was criticised for draining Regular Army finances and manpower and was discontinued in 1959.

Selective National Service was reintroduced in 1964 because the Menzies Government argued that conscription was necessary to safeguard Australia's security against the spread of communism. The issue was fiercely debated in the House of Representatives, with the Labor Party morally opposed to the Bill that passed in November 1964. By May 1965, Australian soldiers were involved with the war in Vietnam, and Menzies planned to raise the



**THE AUSTRALIAN**

NUMBER 248     FRIDAY APRIL 30 1965     PRICE SIXPENCE

# MENZIES SAYS IT — WE FIGHT IN VIETNAM

First Battalion to be flown out

DRAFTEES MAY HAVE TO GO, TOO

IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING THE RE-INTRODUCTION OF CONSCRIPTION, PRIME MINISTER MENZIES COMMITTED TROOPS TO COMBAT DUTY IN THE VIETNAM WAR.

*THE AUSTRALIAN* 1965

army's numbers to 40 000 in order to meet other South-West Pacific commitments.

Under the National Service Scheme, all 20 year-old males were required to register for national service. Their names were selected by the 'birthday ballot', in which men were randomly selected for national service by their date of birth. Marbles marked with a date were drawn out of a Tattersall's lottery barrel. Such a draw occurred every six months and on average, an Australian male stood a one in 10 or one in 12 chance of being selected. The Leader of the Opposition, Arthur Calwell, described this system as a 'lottery of death'. Those who were selected for national service were required to serve for two years full-time in the regular army, and three years part-time in the reserves.

Between 1965 and 1972, more

than 800 000 men registered. About 63 000 were on scripted and more than 19 000 served in Vietnam. Following widespread debate, anti-conscription and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations within the Australian community, the Scheme was abolished on 5 December 1972 by the newly elected Whitlam Labor Government.



**THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, ARTHUR CALWELL, WAS VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED TO CONSCRIPTION.**
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA
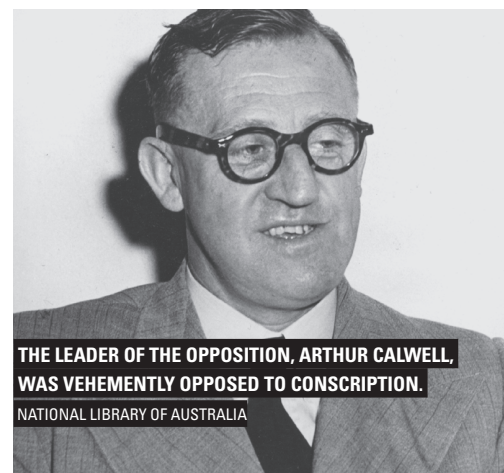
# THE DECISIONS

Australians seldom vote 'yes' in referendums. Yet on 27 May 1967, an overwhelming majority of Australians voted to alter the Constitution. The changes allowed Aboriginal people to be counted in the national census and the Commonwealth to make laws relevant to them. Before this time, the States controlled all matters regarding Aboriginal people.

Throughout the 20th century, several events organised by Aboriginal leaders and activists raised public awareness of the Aboriginal movement for equality. In 1928, the Association for the Protection of Native Races advocated the need for a Royal Commission to investigate the possibility of the Commonwealth taking control of Aboriginal affairs. The Australian Aborigines' League, established in 1932 by activist William Cooper in Melbourne, challenged the living conditions of Aboriginal people. In 1938, the first national protest was held by the Aborigines' Progress Association on the 150th anniversary of European colonisation of Australia. It was organised by both Cooper and Jack Patten, activists who lobbied the Government for citizenship rights. They renamed 26 January as the 'Day of Mourning'.

In 1957, Jessie Street and Faith Bandler campaigned for a referendum for Aboriginal people to be included in the Australian census, and to change discriminatory references to them in the Constitution. They drafted amendments to the Constitution and established a political lobby group—the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). The main aim of the group was to push for a referendum and in 1958, a petition with over 100 000 signatures was presented to the House of Representatives.

A key development over this ten year campaign was a meeting in 1965 between Prime Minister Robert Menzies and executive members of FCAATSI. At this meeting, Indigenous issues from the States of Australia, reasons for a referendum and changes to the Constitution were discussed. Despite mounting community support, it was not until 1966 that the Government, led by Prime Minister Harold Holt, agreed to hold a referendum.

The 90.7 per cent 'yes' vote brought welcome changes to the Federal legislation, addressing land rights, discriminatory practices, and preservation of cultural heritage. The referendum is remembered as one of the significant victories for Aboriginal people in the 1960s, along with winning the right to vote through *The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1962*.



A 1967 REFERENDUM POSTER ISSUED BY THE FEDERAL COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

MOAD LEARNING
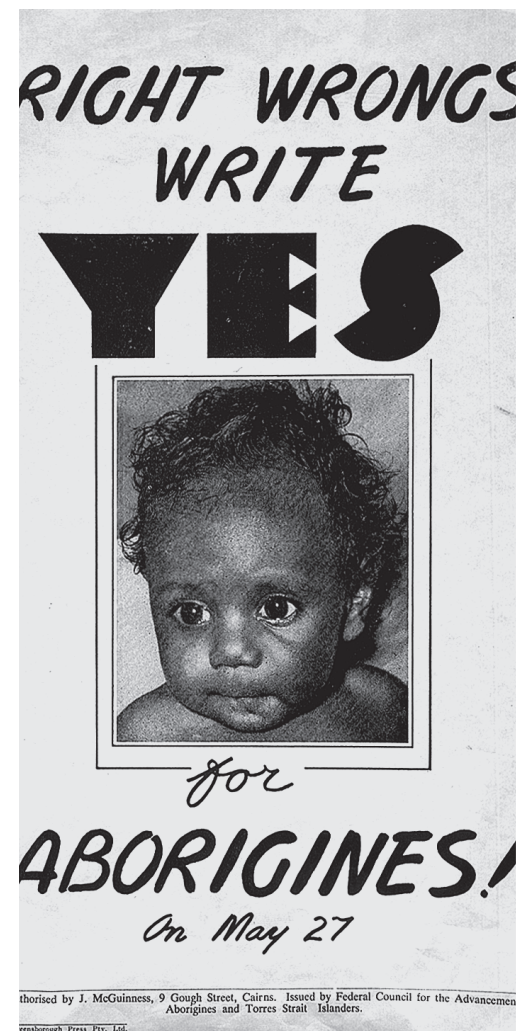
# THE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT 1975



IN 1982 SOME OF THE FIRST MIGRANTS FROM VIETNAM WERE MRS TRAN DAI DE, DAUGHTER HUYNH NGOC LIEN (6) AND HUSBAND MR HUYNH TRAN DUONG.
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

*The Racial Discrimination Act 1975* meant the end of the White Australia Policy. This policy had endorsed a preference for British migrants since Federation when *The Immigration Restriction Act 1901* limited migration to Australia. The immigration restrictions were supported by many, including the union movement, which believed that cheap Asian or South Sea Islander labour undermined Australian working conditions. In 1904, over 4000 islanders were deported under *The Restriction Act*.

The exclusion or deportation of migrants could not be determined by race since Britain opposed racially-based restrictions. The selection process for Australian migrants took the form of a 50 word dictation test set by customs officials in any European language. If the applicant passed, they would then be tested in another language. After 1909, no-one who sat the test passed.

Successive Australian Governments sought to increase Australia's population with child endowment payments and migration incentives for British people. As British citizens in the Asia Pacific region, Australians felt vulnerable. This fear was increased by Japan's offensive in the Second World War and the Communist victory in China. The post-war immigration policy was 'populate or perish'— increase the population to defend Australia. Australia's first Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, targeted Northern Europeans. Their customs and appearance were considered suitable for rapid assimilation into Australian culture. Calwell argued that Australians were too intolerant to cope with non-Europeans. Many agreed with his infamous throwaway line in 1947, 'Two Wongs do not make a white.'

During the 1950s, the White Australia Policy was widely condemned. In 1951 and 1952, the Federal Government signed migration agreements with Italy and Greece. Government aid programs welcomed large numbers of Africans and Asians to study in Australia. Immigration Minister Harold Holt's *Immigration Act 1958* abolished the dictation test, but the entry permit system was still racially-based.

The White Australia Policy officially ended in 1973 when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam declared, 'As an island nation of predominantly European inhabitants situated on the edge of Asia, we cannot afford the stigma of racialism.' *The Racial Discrimination Act 1975* followed. Immigration Minister, Al Grassby, promoted 'multiculturalism', a concept that valued cultural diversity and underpinned the policies of both the Australian Labor Party Government and the Liberal/National Country Party.



HAROLD HOLT, MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION, AND ZARA HOLT WITH TWO IMMIGRANT GIRLS, CA. 1950.
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

MOAD LEARNING

# THE DECISIONS

## THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES CONSERVATION ACT 1983



**'NO DAMS' PROTEST STICKER.**
THE TASMANIAN WILDERNESS SOCIETY

On 1 July 1983, the High Court upheld the Federal Government's *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983* against a challenge from the Tasmanian State Government. This stopped the Franklin River dam and confirmed the Federal Government's power to protect world heritage sites.

Long before the Gordon-below-Franklin dam proposal was put forward in 1978, successive Tasmanian Governments supported increased hydro-electricity generation. Cheap electricity meant opportunities for industrial development and employment growth. The State's largest employer, the Hydro-Electric Commission (HEC), controlled water resources and was government owned.

The conservation movement in Tasmania grew in response to development in environmentally significant areas. The United Tasmanian Group became the world's first green political party in 1971. Protest groups tried and failed to stop the HEC flooding Lake Pedder in 1972. By 1976 the groups had united as the Tasmanian Wilderness Society. Their 'No Dams' campaign was underway when the State Labor Government legislated for the Gordon-below-Franklin dam in 1981. In June 1980, 10 000 people had rallied in Hobart to save the Franklin, the largest Tasmanian protest ever.

In December 1981, a referendum offered Tasmanians a choice between two dam proposals on the Gordon River. The referendum results were unclear—53 per cent preferred the Lower Gordon option; 9 per cent the Upper Gordon and 38 per cent protested by writing 'No Dams' on the ballot. A State election followed with a change of government. New Liberal Premier, Robin Gray, threatened to secede from the Commonwealth if the Federal Government interfered with State affairs. The Wilderness Society leader, Bob Brown, toured Australia raising support for the campaign. He hoped this would persuade Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser to overrule the State legislation.

Protesters formed a blockade at the dam site on 14 December 1982, the day on which the area was listed as a world heritage site. During January 1983, around 50 people arrived at the blockade every day. Over 1000 people were arrested.

In early 1983, Labor leader Bob Hawke promised to save the Franklin River as part of his federal election campaign. Labor won office with a large swing on 5 March. By May, *The World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983* became law.
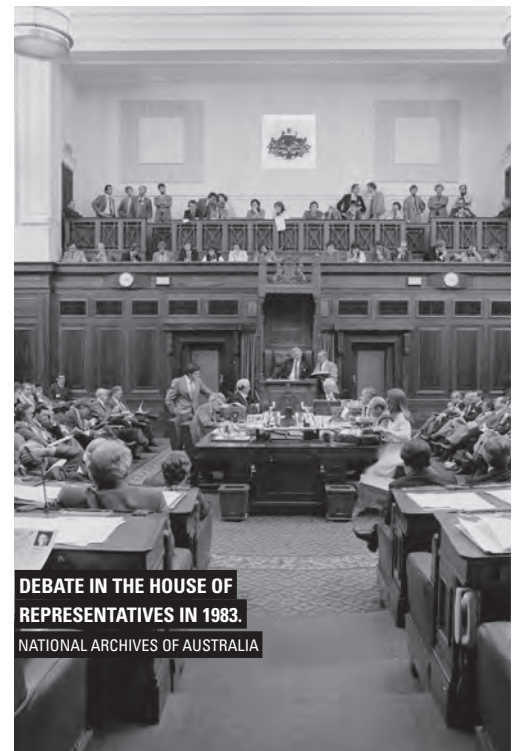


**DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN 1983.**
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

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# THE PRIME MINISTERS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

### STANLEY MELBOURNE BRUCE

## (1883–1967)

Prime Minister 1923–29, Nationalist Party

A Gallipoli veteran and experienced businessman, Stanley Melbourne Bruce entered Parliament in 1918. Within little more than four years he was Prime Minister. Among his enduring achievements was the Coalition agreement between the non-Labor parties. He oversaw Parliament's move to Canberra in 1927, but lost his seat at the 1929 election. Despite winning it back in 1931, Bruce had little real influence. Out-manoeuvred by Joe Lyons after the fall of the Scullin Government, he agreed to serve as High Commissioner in London and represent Australia at the League of Nations.

### JAMES SCULLIN

## (1876–1953)

Prime Minister 1929–32, Australian Labor Party

James Scullin had the difficult task of managing Australia's economy with its substantial foreign debts at the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s, while leading a party reluctant to cut social welfare and wages. A series of bitter splits destroyed his Government in less than two years. In spite of the sectarianism of the time, Scullin was Australia's first Catholic Prime Minister. He began his working life as a grocer and was a leading campaigner against conscription during the First World War.

### JOSEPH LYONS

## (1879–1939)

Prime Minister 1932–39, United Australia Party

One of the great dramas of Parliament's history began with the defection of Joseph Lyons from Labor in 1931. Anti-socialist politicians regrouped around Lyons to form the United Australia Party. This party won the 1931 federal election and Lyons became Prime Minister. Lyons began his political career as a fiery Tasmanian socialist. He had been forced to go to work at the age of nine, but was later able to return to school and became a teacher. He was Premier of Tasmania for five years in the 1920s, and then moved to federal politics in 1929. He died in office in April 1939.

# THE PRIME MINISTERS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



## SIR EARLE PAGE
## (1880—1961)

Prime Minister April 1939,
Australian Country Party

Earle Page became Caretaker Prime Minister for 19 days after the death of Joseph Lyons in 1939. One of the founding members of the Country Party, Page entered Federal Parliament in 1919. He set out the conditions of the coalition between his party and the conservatives—an arrangement still in place today. Once Robert Menzies became the new leader of the United Australia Party, Earle Page stepped down. At the time, his reputation suffered because he attacked Menzies' leadership credentials on the floor of the House of Representatives. He was, however, returned to Cabinet by Menzies as Health Minister in 1949.



## SIR ROBERT MENZIES
## (1894—1978)

Prime Minister 1939–41,
United Australia Party

Robert Menzies was Prime Minister for a total of almost 19 years and a leading figure in Federal Parliament during his entire period in the House—from his election in 1934 until his retirement in 1966. He was a founder of both the United Australia Party and the Liberal Party. Menzies grew up in Jeparit, a Victorian country town, where his parents kept a store. His was a political family, prominent in the local community. Menzies' first political tutor was his grandfather, John Sampson, who had been a union organiser driven from the mines by an owners' boycott.



## ARTHUR FADDEN
## (1895—1973)

Prime Minister March 1941,
Australian Country Party

Arthur Fadden first took centre stage in public life in 1918 when he and an alderman took charge of the city of Mackay after a destructive cyclone. Later Fadden became an accountant, and went into State politics. In 1936, he was elected to Federal Parliament. He resigned from the Country Party in protest at Earle Page's attack on Menzies in 1939, but became Country Party leader in 1940. After the failure of Menzies' first Government, he became Prime Minister himself—the only Country Party member to do so in his own right. He inherited a deeply divided Coalition which fell after little more than a month when two independents crossed the floor.

MoAD LEARNING

# THE PRIME MINISTERS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



## JOHN CURTIN

## (1885–1945)

Prime Minister 1941–45,
Australian Labor Party

John Curtin came to power in 1941 when Arthur Fadden was defeated on the floor of the House of Representatives. He led Labor to a landslide victory in the 1943 elections. Many revere him as one of Australia's greatest leaders. During the Second World War, he was able to transcend party differences for the sake of national unity. General Douglas Macarther hailed him as 'one of the greatest of the war time statesmen'. Curtin went to work as a copyboy for *The Age* newspaper at the age of 14, and later became a union organiser and journalist. He was the first federal president of the Timber Workers' Union, and Victorian secretary of the Anti-Conscription League during the Second World War. He died in office and lay in state in King's Hall before his burial in Perth.



## FRANCIS FORDE

## (1890–1983)

Prime Minister July 1945,
Australian Labor Party

Frank Forde, like Earle Page, was a Caretaker Prime Minister. He took office for eight days after the death of John Curtin. A loyal and dependable Deputy Prime Minister, Frank Forde was by-passed twice for the leadership. In 1934 he lost narrowly to John Curtin and again in 1945, to Ben Chifley. Nevertheless he strongly supported both leaders during the Second World War as a member of the War Council, as Minister for the Army and later as Minister for Defence. He entered Federal Parliament in 1922 as the Member for Capricornia, serving for 24 years until his defeat in 1946.



## BEN CHIFLEY

## (1885–1951)

Prime Minister 1945–49,
Australian Labor Party

Ben Chifley's childhood in a wattle and daub hut outside Bathurst has become Labor legend. A railway worker and locomotive driver before he entered Parliament, Chifley served as Curtin's closest colleague and Treasurer throughout the Second World War. As Prime Minister, he retained the respect of most Australians, even after his unsuccessful attempt to nationalise the banks and Labor's defeat in the 1949 election. His sudden death in 1951 overshadowed the celebration of Australia's first 50 years as a nation, and he lay in state in King's Hall before a State funeral at Bathurst.

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# THE PRIME MINISTERS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



## SIR ROBERT MENZIES

## (1894–1978)

Prime Minister 1949–66,
Liberal Party of Australia

Robert Menzies' second term as Prime Minister began in 1949, after the Coalition took power in a landslide win over Labor. He had been leader of the newly formed Liberal Party since its foundation in 1944, and shaped many of its policies. He retired in 1966. Only he and Andrew Fisher, who resigned the prime ministership in 1915, have chosen to depart the job voluntarily.



## HAROLD HOLT

## (1908–1967)

Prime Minister 1967,
Liberal Party of Australia

Harold Holt's short-lived prime ministership ended in tragedy when he drowned during the 1967 Christmas holidays. Holt entered Parliament during the re-shaping of conservative political forces in the 1930s, and was closely associated with Sir Robert Menzies throughout his career. His refuge from politics was a beach house at Portsea, near where he drowned. He won an increased majority at the 1966 election, but his death precipitated a long-running leadership crisis in the Liberal Party.



## SIR JOHN MCEWEN

## (1900–1980)

Prime Minister Dec 1967 – Jan 1968, Australian Country Party

John McEwen was Deputy Prime Minister when Harold Holt drowned, and served as Prime Minister while the Liberals chose a new leader. McEwen was a public servant, a soldier and a farmer before entering Parliament. He was once expelled from his party, after accepting a portfolio in the Lyons–Page Coalition Government in 1937. He gained a reputation as a tough fighter for the interests of both farmers and the Country Party. His particular foe within the Coalition was William McMahon, whom he vetoed as Holt's successor.

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# THE PRIME MINISTERS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



## JOHN GORTON
## (1911–2002)

Prime Minister 1968–71,
Liberal Party of Australia

John Gorton was appointed Prime Minister soon after the death of Harold Holt. Earlier he had been elected to the federal Senate as a Liberal candidate in the Menzies landslide of 1949. Gorton's independent and exacting style of leadership put him at odds with his own party. In early 1971, a party motion of confidence resulted in a tied vote. Gorton used a casting vote to vote himself out of office. He remained on the backbench until he resigned from the Liberal Party in 1975.



## SIR WILLIAM MCMAHON
## (1908–1988)

Prime Minister 1971–72,
Liberal Party of Australia

William McMahon's career spanned 23 years, beginning with the Liberal triumph of 1949, when Labor was swept from power. Elected in 1949, after training as a lawyer and economist, McMahon became Prime Minister in the closing days of Liberal power after a long and very public struggle with John Gorton. He had a great deal of ministerial experience, but paired with this was a history of internal party conflict and distrust. His Government was defeated by Labor in 1972.



## GOUGH WHITLAM
## (1916–2014)

Prime Minister 1972–75,
Australian Labor Party

Gough Whitlam entered Parliament in 1952 and made his early political career in the worst years of the Labor Party Split, when it appeared his party might never govern again. Through the 1960s, Whitlam reformed the Labor Party, modernising many of its policies. He became Prime Minister in 1972 and won an early election in 1974, forced by the threat of the Senate blocking money bills. In 1975, his Government was dismissed by the Governor-General after the Senate refused to pass the money bills. He was defeated by a massive Liberal landslide in the resulting election.

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# THE PRIME MINISTERS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



MALCOLM FRASER

## (1930—2015)

Prime Minister 1975–83,
Liberal Party of Australia

Malcolm Fraser came to power during a time of crisis, following the dismissal of Gough Whitlam after the Senate refused to pass the Government's money bills. He won the 1975 election with a massive landslide, gaining a House of Representatives majority of 55. Fraser entered Parliament in his twenties, after studying at Melbourne Grammar School and Oxford University. He played a leading role in the Liberal infighting which led to the downfall of John Gorton as Prime Minister. His Government was defeated by Labor in 1983.



BOB HAWKE

## (1929—)

Prime Minister 1983–91,
Australian Labor Party

Bob Hawke was Prime Minister within three years of entering Parliament, and led Australia for longer than any other Labor prime minister. Hawke's early career was in the trade union movement, which he represented in important wage cases in the 1960s. A brilliant advocate, he cultivated a popular larrikin image. He was President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions from 1970 to 1980. His landslide win over Malcolm Fraser's Liberal/National Coalition in 1983 laid the foundations for 13 years of Labor rule. During this time, Labor moved away from many of its traditional industrial and trade policies.

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