Our Democracy

Australia's Prime Ministers

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Nicolas Brasch

▶ Contents

Word watch

Look out for the 'Word watch' feature, which explains the meanings of words shown in **bold**.

Democracy in Australia

You might have heard someone say, 'Aren't we lucky to live in a democratic country?' Living in a **democracy** means we are free to speak our mind and have a say in who governs us. We can all aspire to be the leader of our country.

What is democracy?

Good question! Basically, democracy is a form of government in which the people of a country have an equal say in who governs them. American President Abraham Lincoln came up with possibly the best and simplest definition. In 1893, he said that democracy was 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people.'

Has Australia always been a democracy?

Australia has not always been a democracy. In the years following European settlement, the governor of the **colony** of New South Wales issued orders and everyone had to obey them. In fact, even when the first **federal** parliament was elected, many women were not allowed to vote. However, today, everyone over the age of 18 has the right to vote for their local, state and federal governments.

> I have known little communities in the Australian bush, which ... realised for me much, so much, of what I desired in a democracy.
>
> Francis Adams, English writer, 1893

▲ In Australia, during elections everyone's vote is equal, whether they are rich or poor, male or female, employed or unemployed.

Word watch

colony a land governed by another country
democracy the word comes from two Greek words: *demos* meaning people and *kratos* meaning power. So together they mean 'power to the people'.
federal national

Are all countries democracies?

Not all countries are democracies. There are other forms of government, such as:

* dictatorship: government by people who have seized power by force and who use force (or the fear of force) to maintain power

* monarchy: government by a single ruler (such as a king or queen), often from a particular family

* oligarchy: government by a few people (such as members of one family or a few military leaders)

* theocracy: government by religious leaders who enforce the law of God.

▶ Iran is a theocracy, with several important decision-makers, headed in 2011 by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In this book ...

... you can learn about the leaders of our nation, Australia's Prime Ministers, and discover their achievements, struggles and the political battles they fought for the good of Australia and its people.

A timeline of Australia's Prime Ministers

This timeline is a snapshot of each Australian Prime Minister since **Federation** – who they were, when they were elected, which party they belonged to and what they are most remembered for.

▶ Use the page references to find more information about each Prime Minister.

Word watch

Term of office	Name	Political party	Best remembered for	Go to page
1 January 1901 – 24 September 1903	Edmund Barton	Protectionist	Being Australia's first Prime Minister	10
24 September 1903 – 27 April 1904	Alfred Deakin	Protectionist	Introducing pensions and establishing an **industrial relations** system	11
27 April 1904 – 17 August 1904	Chris Watson	Labor	Being Australia's first Labor Prime Minister	12
17 August 1904 – 5 July 1905	George Reid	Free Trade	Being Australia's only Prime Minister from the Free Trade Party	12
5 July 1905 – 13 November 1908	Alfred Deakin	Protectionist	Introducing pensions and establishing an industrial relations system	11
13 November 1908 – 2 June 1909	Andrew Fisher	Labor	Establishing the Commonwealth Bank	13
2 June 1909 – 29 April 1910	Alfred Deakin	Protectionist	Introducing pensions and establishing an industrial relations system	11
29 April 1910 – 24 June 1913	Andrew Fisher	Labor	Establishing the Commonwealth Bank	13
24 June 1913 – 17 September 1914	Joseph Cook	Liberal	Being Prime Minister when World War I broke out	13
17 September 1914 – 27 October 1915	Andrew Fisher	Labor	Establishing the Commonwealth Bank	13
27 October 1915 – 9 February 1923	Billy Hughes	Labor; Nationalist	Leading Australia through most of World War I	14
9 February 1923 – 22 October 1929	Stanley Bruce	Nationalist	Being Prime Minister when Government moved to Canberra	15
22 October 1929 – 6 January 1932	James Scullin	Labor	Becoming Prime Minister during the early years of the **Great Depression**	16
6 January 1932 – 7 April 1939	Joseph Lyons	United Australia	Leading Australia out of the Great Depression	16
7 April 1939 – 26 April 1939	Earle Page	Country	Becoming Prime Minister after the death of Joseph Lyons	17
26 April 1939 – 29 August 1941	Robert Menzies	United Australia	Being Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister	18
29 August 1941 – 7 October 1941	Arthur Fadden	Country	Becoming Prime Minister after Menzies lost the support of his party	19

Term of office	Name	Political party	Best remembered for	Go to page
7 October 1941 – 5 July 1945	John Curtin	Labor	Leading Australia through most of World War II	20
6 July 1945 – 13 July 1945	Francis Forde	Labor	Being Australia's shortest-serving Prime Minister	21
13 July 1945 – 9 December 1949	Ben Chifley	Labor	Leading Australia in the immediate post-war period	21
19 December 1949 – 26 January 1966	Robert Menzies	Liberal	Being Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister	18
26 January 1966 – 19 December 1967	Harold Holt	Liberal	Disappearing off the Victorian coast (presumed drowned) while Prime Minister	22
19 December 1967 – 10 January 1968	John McEwen	Country	Serving as Prime Minister during the search for Holt and the vote for his successor	22
10 January 1968 – 10 March 1971	John Gorton	Liberal	Standing down when losing the support of half of his party	23
10 March 1971 – 5 December 1972	William McMahon	Liberal	Leading his party to first defeat in 23 years	23
5 December 1972 – 11 November 1975	Gough Whitlam	Labor	Being dismissed by the Governor-General	24
11 November 1975 – 11 March 1983	Malcolm Fraser	Liberal	Leading Australia during tough economic times	25
11 March 1983 – 20 December 1991	Bob Hawke	Labor	Being a very popular leader among the Australian people	26
20 December 1991 – 11 March 1996	Paul Keating	Labor	Pushing for Australia to become a **republic**	27
11 March 1996 – 24 November 2007	John Howard	Liberal	Introducing a new **tax** (the GST) and taking a hard line against **asylum seekers**	28
24 November 2007 – 24 June 2010	Kevin Rudd	Labor	Being replaced during his first term as Prime Minister	28
24 June 2010 – 27 June 2013	Julia Gillard	Labor	Steering Australia's economy through the Global Financial Crisis	29
27 June 2013 – 18 September 2013	Kevin Rudd	Labor	Gaining revenge for being toppled by Julia Gillard	28
18 September 2013	Tony Abbott	Liberal	Returning the Coalition to power	29

The role of the Prime Minister

The Prime Minister has official responsibility for the running of the nation. The Prime Minister has many important roles, including setting the government's **policy** direction and ensuring their political party has the best possible chance of being re-elected.

Who becomes Prime Minister?

Prime Ministers are not elected to that position by the Australian people. The leader of the political party that has the most seats in the **House of Representatives** becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister must be a member of the House of Representatives.

Setting policy direction

Setting the direction of the government's policy program involves deciding which issues are the most important to put in front of Parliament and the Australian people. The Prime Minister makes decisions after discussions with **ministers**, other members of parliament (MPs) and advisers. **Legislation** is then written up and presented to Parliament for a vote.

The Lodge
The Australian Prime Minister has a home in Canberra, called The Lodge. They also have a home in Sydney, called Kirribilli House.

▲ Most **policy** decisions are made by the Prime Minister at Cabinet meetings. These are meetings of the most important government ministers. Julia Gillard's (third from left) first Cabinet meeting as Prime Minister was on 25 June 2010.

Word watch

House of Representatives the lower house of federal parliament
legislation laws
ministers senior members of government responsible for a particular area, such as health
policy a course of action planned by a government

Short-term and long-term policies

Certain decisions that Prime Ministers make are in response to short-term demands, such as providing financial assistance after a natural disaster. They also make long-term policy decisions, which affect the wellbeing of the nation for many years to come. In the case of laws involving climate change, decisions could have a global effect.

▲ A policy to encourage **renewable** energy sources could have a long-term global effect if it reduces harmful gases from other energy sources.

Balancing priorities: policy vs. re-election

The Prime Minister must balance the responsibility of making policies that are in the country's best interests with trying to win the next election. Achieving both these aims is not easy to do. Some policy decisions that are good for the country may never be introduced because they are unpopular with voters, and some policy decisions that appeal to voters may not be the best thing for the country in the long term.

The governor-general's role
The Prime Minister cannot hold an election without the permission of the governor-general. In fact, all new laws passed by federal parliament must be approved by the governor-general before they are **enacted**. This system helps to protect Australia's democracy because it stops the Prime Minister doing something that might be against Australia's best interests.

Word watch

enacted put into force
renewable lasts forever

Barton and Deakin
(1 January 1901 – 29 April 1910)

Edmund Barton: *Australia's first Prime Minister*

While Edmund Barton became Prime Minister on 1 January 1901, he was not elected to this position. He had been chosen by the Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, to form the first federal government. The first election was held in March 1901 and Barton was elected Prime Minister by the Australian people.

Background

Barton studied law at the University of Sydney and worked as a barrister. In 1879 he was elected to the New South Wales Parliament. He became leader of the **opposition** in 1898.

Main achievements

Barton played a major role in the formation of an Australian **federation**. In 1900, he led a group of Australian politicians to the United Kingdom and successfully convinced the British Parliament to allow Australia to become a federation. Barton's other achievements in office include:

* setting up the federal **public service**
* establishing the **High Court of Australia**.

> *Creating a nation requires the will of the people!*
> Edmund Barton

▶ After his term as Prime Minister, Barton served as a judge on the High Court.

Word watch

federation a system of government with a national government and several state governments

High Court of Australia the highest court in the land

opposition the political party (or a combination of parties) that has the second most seats in parliament

public service the body of people who work for a government

Alfred Deakin: *a father of Federation*

When Barton resigned in 1903, Alfred Deakin became Prime Minister. He went on to serve three terms as Prime Minister and two as opposition leader.

Background

Deakin studied law at the University of Melbourne and worked as a writer before entering the Victorian Parliament in 1879. In 1901, Deakin became a member of the first federal government and served as Attorney-General under Prime Minister Barton. The Attorney-General is the person responsible for the nation's legal affairs. Deakin left federal parliament in 1913.

Main achievements

Deakin was one of the leading figures in establishing an Australian federation. As Prime Minister his achievements include:

* introducing old-age pensions
* establishing Australia's **industrial relations** system
* planning Australia's defence forces.

> *He [Alfred Deakin] was a gifted politician in an era that lent itself to his natural talents of compromise and persuasion.*
> Ronald Norris, historian

The Protectionist Party
The Protectionist Party existed in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Members believed in supporting Australian businesses by **taxing goods** imported into Australia.

▲ Alfred Deakin was so well liked that he was nicknamed, 'Affable Alfred' (*affable* means 'likeable').

Word watch

goods products

industrial relations the relationship between employers and employees

taxing charging a fee for a product, income or activity

Watson to Cook
(27 April 1904 – 17 September 1914)

Chris Watson: *taking Labor into power*

Chris Watson was the Labor Party's first Prime Minister, and at 37 Australia's youngest. Watson resigned as Prime Minister after serving for only four months.

Background

Watson was born in Chile, grew up in New Zealand and moved to Australia when he was 19 years old. He became involved in the **trade union** movement while working as a printer. He entered the New South Wales Parliament in 1894 and federal parliament in 1901.

Main achievements

He was the first federal leader of the Labor Party and became Prime Minister in 1904.

▲ After Watson left federal parliament in 1910, he became a successful businessman.

> *His [Chris Watson's] iron will surfaced on the rare occasions when gentle persuasion seemed likely to fail.*
> Bede Nairn, Labor historian

George Reid: *from Premier to Prime Minister*

George Reid entered federal parliament and became Prime Minister in 1904. His term as Prime Minister lasted only 11 months.

Background

Reid was born in Scotland and moved to Australia when he was seven years old. After working as a barrister, he became a member of the New South Wales Parliament and served as Premier of New South Wales from 1898 to 1899.

▲ Reid became Australia's first High Commissioner to the United Kingdom in 1910 and later took a seat in the British Parliament.

Main achievement

In the short time he was in office, Reid introduced the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904* which gave Australia one of the fairest **industrial relations** systems in the world.

Word watch

industrial relations the relationship between employers and employees
trade union an organisation that fights for the rights of workers

Andrew Fisher: *out of the mines and into power*

In 1901, Andrew Fisher was a member of the federal parliament for the Labor Party. He became leader of the Labor Party in 1907, and Prime Minister the following year. He served three terms as Prime Minister, his third during the early stages of World War I.

Background

Fisher was born in Scotland and worked as a miner before moving to Australia in his early twenties. He became involved with the trade union movement and was a member of the Queensland Parliament from 1893 to 1900.

Main achievements

Fisher's achievements as Prime Minister include:
* the formation of the Commonwealth Bank
* founding the Royal Australian Navy
* introducing **maternity allowances**.

▲ Fisher served as Australia's second High Commissioner in London from 1916 to 1921.

Joseph Cook: *the first wartime Prime Minister*

Joseph Cook took office in 1913 as the leader of the Liberal Party. He served as Prime Minister for 15 months until 1914.

Background

Cook was born in England and moved to Australia in 1886 when he was 25. He was elected to the New South Wales Parliament as a member of the Labor Party. In 1901 he entered the federal parliament as a member of the Free Trade Party and later joined the Liberal Party.

Main achievement

At the outbreak of Word War I, the Cook Government immediately gave its support to the United Kingdom and agreed to send Australian troops to the war.

▲ After being Prime Minister, Cook served as the Minister for Navy and as the **Treasurer**.

Word watch

maternity allowances payments to mothers to help with the cost of raising children
Treasurer the government minister responsible for the nation's finances

Hughes and Bruce
(27 October 1915 – 22 October 1929)

Billy Hughes: *a divisive leader*

Billy Hughes became Labor leader and Prime Minister in 1915, just as Australia had entered World War I. Hughes remained Prime Minister throughout the war and up until 1923.

Background

William Morris Hughes, better known as Billy Hughes, was born in London and grew up in Wales before moving to Australia in 1884, aged 22. He ran a small business in Sydney and became active in politics. In 1894, he was elected to the New South Wales Parliament for the Labor Party, and in 1901 he entered federal parliament.

As Prime Minister, Hughes was a strong supporter of Australia's involvement in World War I and his enthusiasm for the support earned him the nickname 'The Little Digger'. After the war, he made sure that returning soldiers were looked after with payments and even small parcels of land.

Conscription and the split

Hughes was keen to introduce **conscription**. He failed in his bid but he upset so many Labor Party colleagues that he was forced out of the party. He remained Prime Minister by forming a new political party (Nationalist Party) with the **opposition** and by convincing a few Labor Party members of parliament to switch with him.

▲ Billy Hughes was a controversial figure who was forced out of three political parties and was a member of four.

Main achievements

Hughes served as a member of the **House of Representatives** for a record 51 years and 7 months, until his death in 1952. His achievements as Prime Minister include:

✳ leading Australia during most of World War I

✳ helping returned World War I soldiers re-establish normal lives

✳ fighting for 'ordinary' working-class Australians.

> He [Billy Hughes] had two qualities which are very rare and very important in a politician: he had imagination and he had courage.
>
> Stanley Bruce

Stanley Bruce: *backer of business*

Stanley Bruce had served as **Treasurer** under Billy Hughes in the newly formed Nationalist Party before replacing him as Prime Minister in 1923. In 1929, Bruce lost government and became the first Prime Minister to lose his seat at an election.

Background

Bruce fought at Gallipoli during World War I and entered federal parliament shortly after returning to Australia. Bruce was a passionate supporter of business. In 1929, he tried to dismantle the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, which had been set up to make sure that employers paid their workers fair wages. He fought an election on this issue and his party lost government.

Main achievements

Bruce's achievements as Prime Minister include:

✳ establishing the **Loans Council**

✳ establishing the **CSIRO**

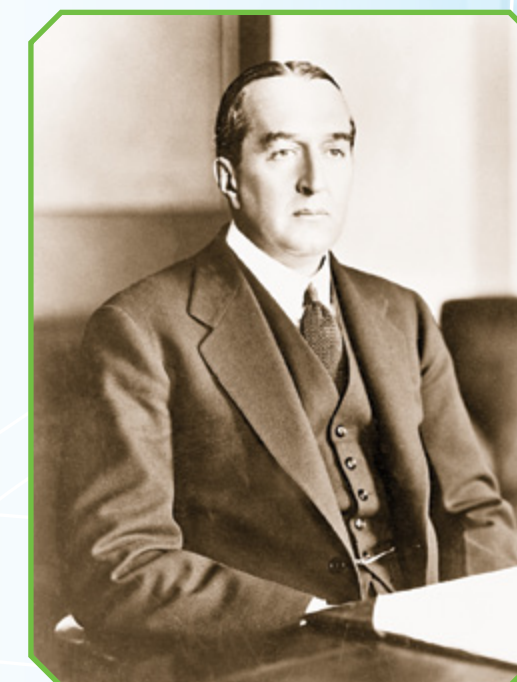✳ overseeing the government's permanent move to Canberra.

> Bruce disliked anyone calling him by his first name and, as Prime Minister, became famous for being impeccably dressed.
>
> John Connor, historian

▲ Bruce was the first Australian Prime Minister not to have been a member of the first federal parliament.

The Nationalist Party

The Nationalist Party was Australia's major anti-Labor party between 1917 and 1931, when it became part of the United Australia Party.

Scullin to Page
(22 October 1929 – 26 April 1939)

James Scullin: *Depression-era leader*

James Scullin was unlucky to become Prime Minister just before Australia was hit by the **Great Depression**. His Labor Party won government but they had only 7 seats out of 35 in the **Senate**. This made it difficult for the Scullin Government to pass **legislation**.
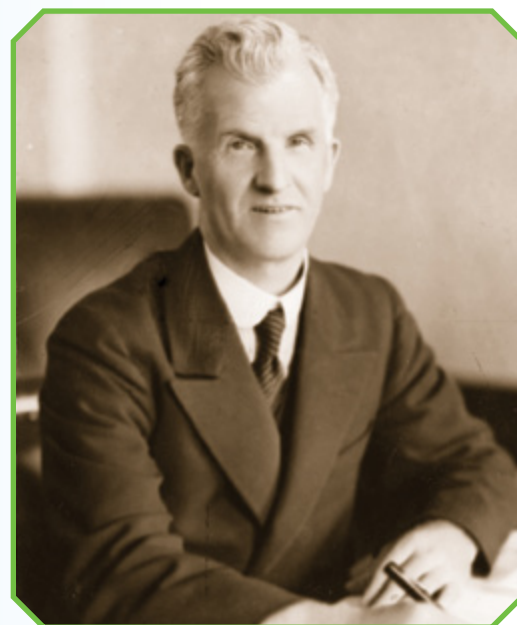
Background

Scullin owned a grocery shop in Ballarat, Victoria, before being elected to federal parliament in 1910. In 1928, he became leader of the Labor Party and led them into government the following year. Many Australians lost their jobs during the Great Depression, and although Scullin did all he could to help, he was voted out of office at the next election.

Main achievements:

Scullin's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* putting in place tough measures to help Australia's economic crisis
* appointing the first Australian-born Governor-General (Isaac Isaacs)
* ending **compulsory** military training.

> It can be said that he [James Scullin] brought character, honesty and sincerity of purpose to the Australian Labor Party and to his political life.
>
> Warren Denning, author

Word watch

backbencher a member of parliament who is not a minister or shadow minister

compulsory required, whether a person wants to or not

Great Depression a period of great economic hardship and high unemployment that lasted for most of the 1930s

legislation laws

Senate the upper house of federal parliament

▶ After losing the 1932 election, Scullin stayed in parliament as a **backbencher** until 1949.

Joseph Lyons: *the popular Tasmanian*

Joseph Lyons was the first Prime Minister from Tasmania and the first to win three successive elections. He was also the first leader to die while in the role of Prime Minister.

Background

Lyons was a school teacher before entering the Tasmanian Parliament in 1909 as a member of the Labor Party. He was Premier of Tasmania for five years (1923–28) and then became a member of federal parliament in 1929. In 1931 he joined the newly formed United Australia Party and within two years was Prime Minister.

▲ Joseph Lyons

Main achievements

Lyon's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* leading Australia out of the Great Depression
* restricting **immigration** to protect Australian jobs during tough economic times.

Enid Lyons

Joseph Lyons' wife, Enid, was the first female elected to the **House of Representatives** – an even greater achievement considering she was a widow with 12 children!

Earle Page: *a caretaker Prime Minister*

Earle Page was Prime Minister for only 19 days, in between the death of Joseph Lyons and the appointment of Robert Menzies as Lyons' replacement.

Background

Page studied medicine at the University of Sydney. He entered federal parliament in 1919 and helped form the Country Party. From 1934, the Country Party governed in **coalition** with the United Australia Party. As the leader of the Country Party and the Deputy Prime Minister, Page took the position of Prime Minister after Lyons' death.

▲ Earle Page

Main achievement

As a caretaker Prime Minister, Page made sure the government operated efficiently until the next Prime Minister was **sworn in**.

Word watch

coalition partnership

House of Representatives the lower house of federal parliament

immigration permanently moving into one country from another country

sworn in installed or introduced

Menzies and Fadden
(26 April 1939 – 26 January 1966)

Robert Menzies:
Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister

Robert Menzies is Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister. He served for just over two years at the beginning of World War II, and then for more than 16 years after World War II.

Background

Menzies studied law and was a barrister before entering the Victorian Parliament in 1928. He moved to federal parliament in 1934 as a member of the United Australia Party. When Joseph Lyons died in 1939, Menzies' party colleagues elected him Prime Minister.

After two years he lost the support of some members of his government and was forced to resign as Prime Minister. In 1944, Menzies formed a new political party, the Liberal Party of Australia, and led it to victory in the 1949 election. Menzies was again Prime Minister.

He was a strong supporter of small business, and also maintained Australia's close ties with the United Kingdom and the United States. In the 1950s, he tried to ban the Communist Party because he believed they threatened Australia's system of democracy. However, the **High Court of Australia** disallowed his attempts.

Main achievements

Menzies' achievements as Prime Minister include:

* putting more government money into schools
* overseeing a strong economy
* supporting small business.

▶ Menzies never lost an election, holding office until he resigned in 1966.

"
Sir Robert Menzies was Australia's greatest statesman. Indeed, I go further: he was the greatest Australian.
"
Victorian Premier, Henry Bolte

Word watch

High Court of Australia the highest court in the land

Arthur Fadden: *representing the country*

Arthur Fadden became Prime Minister when Robert Menzies' first term as Prime Minister ended in August 1941. Fadden was in office for just over a month.

Background

Fadden was leader of the Country Party and Deputy Prime Minister when Robert Menzies resigned as Prime Minister. Fadden was chosen as Menzies' replacement, even though the Country Party had far fewer members in the government than the United Australia Party. Fadden faced the same fate as Menzies and lost the support of some party members, who decided to give the Labor Party the chance to form government.

Main achievements

As a caretaker Prime Minister, Fadden made sure the government operated efficiently until the next Prime Minister was **sworn in**.

"
I could have had a meeting of all my friends and supporters in a one-man telephone booth.
"
Arthur Fadden

◀ Fadden served as Deputy Prime Minister again when Menzies, as leader of the Liberal Party, won government in 1949.

Word watch

sworn in installed or introduced

Curtin to Chifley
(7 October 1941 – 19 December 1949)

From jail to the Lodge

John Curtin was jailed for three days in 1916 for campaigning against **conscription** during World War I. Yet, as Prime Minister, he was responsible for sending young Australian men to war.

> Captaining the government of a nation is a bit more exacting than the captaining of a football team. I know, for I've done both.
>
> John Curtin

John Curtin: *leader during World War II*

John Curtin led Australia throughout most of World War II. The pressure of being a wartime Prime Minister took its toll and he died just weeks before the end of the war.

Background

Curtin left school at age 13 and worked at several jobs before becoming a journalist and then a **trade union** leader. In 1928, he was elected to federal parliament for the Labor Party. In 1935 he became leader of the Labor Party and in 1941 was handed the prime ministership when Arthur Fadden lost the support of some of his party members.

Curtin's term was dominated by World War II. Soon after taking office he upset the British Prime Minister and military leaders by ordering Australian troops be moved from Europe and the Middle East back home to fight in the Pacific. Although this move angered the United Kingdom, it strengthened Australia's ties with the United States.

Main achievements

Curtin's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* strengthening Australia's ties with the United States
* providing reassuring leadership during World War II.

◀ John Curtin led Australia during a particularly turbulent time in its history.

Francis Forde: *eight days in office*

Francis Forde was Australia's shortest-serving Prime Minister, in office for just eight days.

Background

Forde entered federal parliament in 1922 for the Labor Party. He was Deputy Prime Minister when John Curtin died and he took over as acting Prime Minister. Forde stood for the position of Prime Minister but was defeated by Ben Chifley. Forde remained Deputy Prime Minister but lost his seat at the next election.

Main achievements

As a caretaker Prime Minister, Forde made sure the government operated efficiently until the next Prime Minister was **sworn in**.

▲ Francis Forde

> His face went deathly white, the veins on his neck stood out in an effort to suppress his emotions.
>
> Les Haylen, Labor Party politician, after Forde had lost the leadership vote to Ben Chifley

Ben Chifley: *rebuilding the nation*

Ben Chifley was Australia's Prime Minister in the years immediately following World War II. One of his first tasks as Prime Minister was to announce the end of the war.

Background

Born in Bathurst, New South Wales, Chifley worked as a train driver before entering federal parliament for the Labor Party in 1928. Chifley served as **Treasurer** in the Curtin Government. He was chosen by members of his party to be Prime Minister after the death of John Curtin. Within four years he had lost the support of most Australians and was defeated at the federal election by Robert Menzies.

Main achievements

Chifley's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* promoting **immigration** from Europe to boost Australia's population
* starting the Snowy Mountain Hydroelectric Scheme and creating thousands of jobs
* introducing **legislation** that allowed the federal government to collect income **tax**.

▲ Ben Chifley

*H*olt to McMahon
(26 January 1966 – 5 December 1972)

Harold Holt: *a term cut short*

Harold Holt was expected to serve as Prime Minister for a long time but he drowned less than two years after taking over, making him the third Australian Prime Minister to die in office.

Background

Holt worked as a lawyer before entering federal parliament in 1935. In 1966, he was elected Prime Minister by his Liberal Party colleagues after Robert Menzies resigned. Holt agreed to send more Australian servicemen to the Vietnam War and introduced **conscription**. On 17 December 1967, he went swimming at Cheviot Beach, Victoria, and was never seen again.

Main achievements

Holt's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* ✦ overseeing currency conversion to dollars and cents
* ✦ strengthening Australia's ties with Asia.

▲ Harold Holt

John McEwen: *a farmer in the Lodge*

John McEwen was Deputy Prime Minister when Harold Holt disappeared. Two days after Holt's disappearance, McEwen became Prime Minister until a new leader was elected 22 days later.

Background

McEwen was a successful farmer in Victoria and a member of the Country Party. He entered federal parliament in 1934 and was made leader of his party in 1958.

Main achievements

As a caretaker Prime Minister, McEwen made sure the government operated efficiently until the next Prime Minister was **sworn in**.

▲ McEwen was given the nickname 'Black Jack' McEwen because of his stern appearance.

Word watch

conscription when people are forced to join the armed forces

sworn in installed or introduced

John Gorton: *from the Senate to the House*

When Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared, John Gorton was chosen by his party members to take over, even though he was in the **Senate**. He took over Holt's seat in the **House of Representatives** because the Prime Minister must be from that House.

Background

Gorton was a farmer before signing up as a pilot during World War II. In 1949, Gorton was elected as a senator for the Liberal Party. Defence issues and the Vietnam War took up a lot of Gorton's time as Prime Minister. In 1971, he was challenged for the leadership of the Liberal Party by William McMahon. With the vote tied at 33 to 33, Gorton voted against himself, knowing he could not govern for long with so many colleagues against him.

Main achievements

Gorton's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* ✦ introducing laws for equal pay between the sexes
* ✦ the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

▲ John Gorton

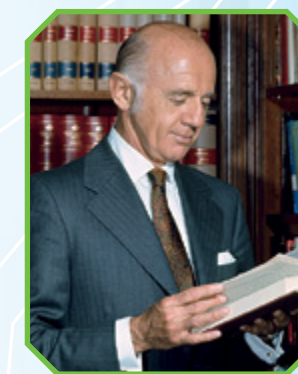## William McMahon: *leading an unpopular party*

William McMahon became Prime Minister at a time when the Labor Party was becoming popular for the first time in more than 20 years. He took over from Gorton in 1971 but lost the next election, 18 months later.

Background

McMahon worked as a lawyer before serving in World War II. He entered federal parliament for the Liberal Party in 1949. He was deputy Liberal leader under Harold Holt and served as **Treasurer**, but did not get on with John Gorton. McMahon remained in parliament until 1982.

Main achievements

McMahon was the first Prime Minister to appoint a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

▲ William McMahon

Word watch

House of Representatives the lower house of federal parliament

Senate the upper house of federal parliament

Treasurer the government minister responsible for the nation's finances
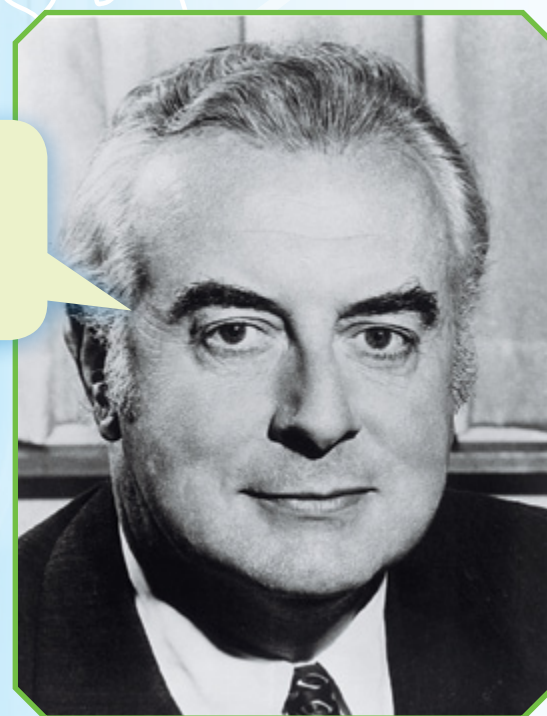
Gough Whitlam: *three turbulent years*

In 1972, Gough Whitlam became the first Labor Prime Minister since 1949. He is the only Prime Minister to have been sacked by the Governor-General.

Background

Whitlam was studying arts and law at the University of Sydney when he joined the Australian Air Force to serve in World War II. In 1952, he was elected to federal parliament for the Labor Party, and spent the next 20 years in **opposition**. Whitlam became leader of the Labor Party in 1967 and turned it into a party that had a chance of being elected. In 1972 they won the federal election.

Whitlam's Government introduced and had passed by parliament a record number of laws. However, his government was not a good manager of the country's money, and the opposition tried to force an election by refusing to pass laws that provided the money for the government to function.

On 11 November 1975, the Governor-General, John Kerr, dismissed Gough Whitlam and forced an election. At that election, the Labor Party was easily defeated. Whitlam remained leader of the opposition until he was defeated at the 1977 election.

Main achievements

Whitlam's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* recognising the rights of Indigenous Australians
* making university education free
* promoting the arts.

◀ Shortly after being sacked as Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam made a famous speech in which he said, 'Well may we say "God Save the Queen", for nothing will save the Governor-General.'

> *The only interruption I tolerate is applause.*
>
> Gough Whitlam

Word watch

opposition the political party (or a combination of parties) that has the second most seats in parliament

Malcolm Fraser: *three tough terms*

The way Malcolm Fraser came to power has always been controversial, but he went on to win three elections as Prime Minister.

Background

Fraser was a farmer before being elected to federal parliament for the Liberal Party in 1954. He became leader of his party in March 1975. As leader, most of his time was spent organising tactics to defeat the Whitlam Labor Government. He refused to pass the government's money laws in the **Senate**, which led the Governor-General to dismiss Prime Minister Whitlam and give Fraser the opportunity to form government as long as he called an immediate election. Fraser won that election, as well as those in 1977 and 1980.

Fraser's main focus in government was managing a difficult economy. He supported **immigration**, particularly for Vietnamese people affected by the Vietnam War.
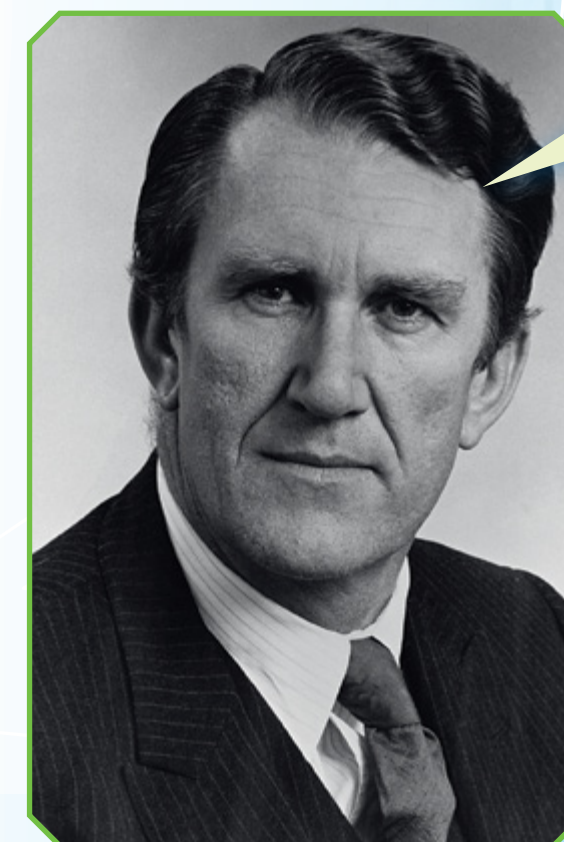
In 1983, Fraser called an election, expecting to face Bill Hayden as Labor leader. However, the Labor Party did a quick change and made Bob Hawke leader. Fraser lost the election.

Main achievements

Fraser's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* restoring confidence in the Australian economy
* increasing immigration, including accepting Vietnamese refugees from the Vietnam War.

▶ In 2009, Malcolm Fraser resigned from the Liberal Party because he was unhappy about some of its **policies**.

> *For an Australian to become Prime Minister is the greatest honour any Australian can have, subject to us becoming a **republic** and having a President.*
>
> Malcolm Fraser

Word watch

immigration permanently moving into one country from another country
policies courses of action planned by a government
republic a nation where the head of state is elected or chosen rather than given the position because of birth
Senate the upper house of federal parliament

Hawke and Keating
(11 March 1983 – 11 March 1996)

Bob Hawke: *the Australian larrikin*

Bob Hawke is the Labor Party's longest-serving Prime Minister. He was the first Labor Prime Minister since Gough Whitlam and led the Labor Party to a record four terms in office.

Background

Hawke's first attempt to enter federal parliament failed in 1963. He became well known to most Australians as the leader of the country's **trade union** movement. He finally entered federal parliament in 1980 for the Labor Party.

In 1983, the Labor Party was led by Bill Hayden. The Labor Party replaced Hayden with the popular Hawke, who easily won the March election and became Prime Minister.
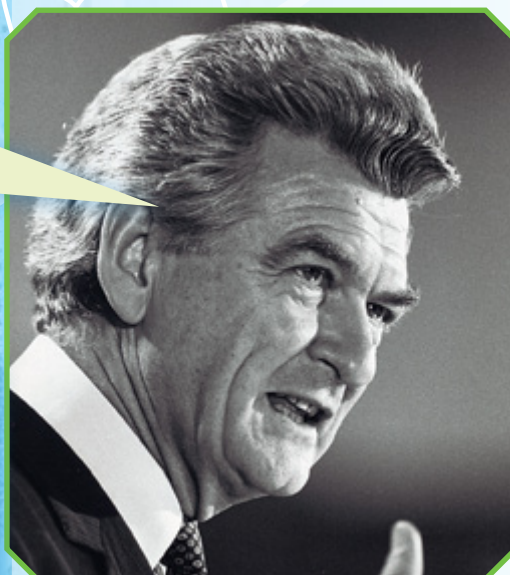
Hawke's Labor Government introduced **policies** that were 'un-Labor-like' – that is, they were more like the policies of the Liberal Party. These laws reduced government control over business and allowed foreign companies to compete more evenly with Australian businesses. The **trade union** movement even agreed to stop asking for so much money.

Hawke had worked closely with his **Treasurer**, Paul Keating, but by 1991 they were not on good terms. Keating twice challenged Hawke for the party's leadership and won on the second attempt. Hawke left federal parliament in 1992.

Main achievements

Hawke's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* allowing more foreign investment in Australia, which created jobs for Australians
* encouraging international companies to invest in Australia
* encouraging businesses and trade unions to work together.

> *Education doesn't finish at secondary school. Education is a lifelong thing so ... keep learning, keep learning, keep learning.*
>
> Bob Hawke

Word watch

policies courses of action planned by a government

trade union an organisation that fights for the rights of workers

Treasurer the government minister responsible for the nation's finances

▲ Hawke was popular with the Australian people, winning elections in 1983, 1987 and 1990.

Paul Keating: *taking Australia closer to Asia*

Paul Keating was Treasurer for eight years before becoming Prime Minister in December 1991.

Background

Keating left school at the age of 15 and worked for a local council before working for a trade union. He entered federal parliament in 1969 for the Labor Party and was a **minister** in the Whitlam Government for a few weeks before it was dismissed.

As Treasurer, Keating was beside Prime Minister Hawke all the way in **reforming** the Australian economy. In 1991, Keating challenged Hawke and became Prime Minister. The Labor Party had thought they were going to lose the next election, but Keating led them to victory. However, he lost the next election in 1996.

Main achievements

Keating's main achievements as Prime Minister include:

* developing closer ties between Australia and Asia
* promoting an Australian **republic**
* making an important speech (called the Redfern Speech) that highlighted problems faced by Indigenous Australians.

▶ Paul Keating was well known for verbally abusing his opponents in parliament.

> *You've got to protect people on the bottom rung of the ladder.*
>
> Paul Keating

Word watch

minister senior member of parliament, responsible for a particular area, such as health

reforming improving by making changes

republic a nation where the head of state is elected or chosen, rather than given the position because of birth

Howard to Abbott
(11 March 1996 –)
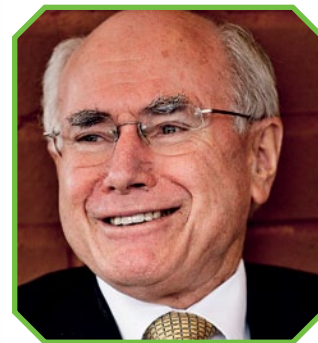
JOHN HOWARD
Born 26 July 1939
Political party as PM Liberal Party of Australia
Term of office 11 March 1996 – 24 November 2007
Best remembered for Introducing a new **tax** (the GST) and taking a hard line against asylum seekers

KEVIN RUDD
Born 21 September 1957
Political party as PM Australian Labor Party
Term of office 24 November 2007 – 24 June 2010 and 27 June 2013 – 18 September 2013
Best remembered for Steering Australia's economy through the Global Financial Crisis

Word watch

asylum seekers people seeking a home in a new country because they fear for their lives in their own country
opposition the political party (or a combination of parties) that has the second most seats in parliament
reforming improving by making changes

John Howard: *Australia's second longest-serving Prime Minister*

John Howard led the Liberal Party into government after 13 years in **opposition**. He won three elections and served for eleven years as Prime Minister. In 2007, he became the second Australian Prime Minister to lose his seat at an election.

Background

Howard was a lawyer before entering federal parliament for the Liberal Party in 1974. He became deputy leader of his party in 1983 and was leader from 1985 to 1989, and again from 1995. At the 1996 election, Howard defeated Paul Keating and became Prime Minister.

In the 2000s, Howard took a firm stand against **asylum seekers**. This caused great public debate but proved popular.

Main achievements

Howard's achievements as Prime Minister include:

* tightening gun ownership laws
* managing the Australian economy well and **reforming** Australia's taxation system.

▲ John Howard

Kevin Rudd: *toppled by his party*

Kevin Rudd led the Labor Party to victory after 11 years in opposition but was removed by his own party three months before facing re-election. Within three years he had won back his position. However, he led the Labor Party to a large defeat at the 2013 election.

Background

Rudd entered federal parliament for the Labor Party in 1998 and was chosen to lead his party in 2006.

Main achievements

Rudd's main achievements as Prime Minister include:

* apologising to the Stolen Generations of Indigenous Australians
* avoiding the worst effects of the Global Financial Crisis.

Julia Gillard: *Australia's first female Prime Minister*

Julia Gillard became Australia's first female prime minister in 2010.

Background

Gillard was a lawyer before entering federal parliament for the Labor Party in 1998. Elected deputy leader of the party in 2006, she became deputy prime minister after the election several months later.

In June 2010 she replaced Rudd as Prime Minister and soon after called an election. None of the leading parties won a **majority** of seats at the election but some independents supported her as prime minister. She spent the next three years negotiating with non-Labor members of parliament, as well as battling Kevin Rudd's supporters who wanted Rudd to take over again as prime minister.

Main achievements

Gillard's main achievements as Prime Minister include:

* Introducing the National Disability Insurance Scheme
* Starting the National Broadband Network.

▲ Julia Gillard

JULIA GILLARD
Born 29 September 1961
Political party as PM Australian Labor Party
Term of office 24 June 2010 – 27 June 2013
Best remembered for Being Australia's first female Prime Minister

> There will be some days I delight you, some days I disappoint you. On every day I will be working my absolute hardest for you.
>
> Julia Gillard

Tony Abbott: *Returned the Coalition to power*

Tony Abbott led the Liberal and National Parties to victory at the 2013 election.

Background

Tony Abbott was a journalist and political advisor before entering parliament in 1994. He served as a minister in John Howard's government and became opposition leader in 2009. He won the 2013 election after campaigning to get rid of the carbon and mining taxes, and to stop asylum seeker boats heading for Australia.

TONY ABBOTT
Born 4 November 1957
Political party as PM Liberal Party of Australia
Term of office 18 September 2013 –
Best remembered for Returning Coalition to power

Word watch

majority more than half

Your say:
what I would do if I was PM!

Many young Australians aspire to being Prime Minister. We asked seven students to tell us what they would do first if they got into power.

Question: It's your chance to make a difference. If you were in federal government, what are the first things you would do?

Audrey: Firstly, I would try to get Australia out of the Commonwealth, because we are a country that can fend for itself, and we'll be able to have presidents. Secondly, I would help refugees, because they have rights like everyone else. I would also donate money to countries in need, because if a country is poor then the people there are poor, and it's not fair if people have to suffer for someone else's mistakes.

Lisa: I would help all the homeless people find homes so they do not have to sleep in the cold and be teased by people walking past. I would make mines safer because many people's lives are lost on the job. I would also give free solar panels to every house to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the air.

Matthew: I would give millions of dollars to hospitals to buy better equipment for patients. I would also build a drag strip to stop cars dragging on the roads.

Hussein: I would try to stop wars in other countries because too many people die in wars. I would also help starving people in poor countries.

Corey: I would make it easier for people to get jobs so there would be less unemployment. I would also give more money to schools so they could buy more technology.

Masuma: I would put free solar panels in every house so we have a healthier environment. I would give teachers more money so they take more interest in the job and feel happier to teach. Actually, I would talk to people and find out what they wanted, instead of just making decisions.

Alex: I would also make solar power **compulsory**. I would stop **asylum seekers** coming into the country because it isn't fair on legal refugees. Also, lots of people die on the boats that they come in on.

Thanks to ...
Audrey, Lisa, Matthew, Hussein, Corey, Masuma and Alex from Grades 6 and 7 at Seaton Park Primary School, South Australia.

It sounds as if there are plenty of ideas ticking over in your minds. Maybe one day some of you will be in federal government and will be able to carry out your wishes.

Word watch
asylum seekers people seeking a home in a new country because they fear for their lives in their own country
compulsory required, whether a person wants to or not

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