



SIR ROBERT MENZIES | A BETTER WORLD?

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MC9

Did Sir Robert Menzies Contribute to A Better World? | Leo Ng

Sir Robert Menzies undoubtedly contributed to a better world, especially for Australians. As the longest serving Prime Minister in Australian history, he has become an iconic cornerstone to the Australian culture, image and identity. The policies and attitudes that he brought to the forefront of Australian politics revolutionised the country's standards and expectations of their leaders, with his 18 years of prime ministry, ended in voluntary retirement, as a testament to its positive effect.¹ Credited with the creation of the Liberal Party, Menzies spearheaded 23 years of consecutive Liberal government of which he was the Prime Minister for the majority (1949-1966).² Much of Menzies' administration was characterised with an uncanny focus on the working middle class, and that philosophy has had a profound impact on how Australia functions to this day.³ Menzies also formidably represented Australia on the global stage, making sure that the presence of this British colony was felt. In addition, his office kick-started advances in Australian education, academia and health care.

Sir Robert Menzies successfully developed and secured Australia's international relations during his numerous terms. After the fall of Singapore during the Second World War, which preceded the British withdrawal of troops from the Pacific theatre of War, it became clear to Australia that Britain could not be universally depended upon for reinforcements.⁴ Australia had to face the reality that Britain had fire and foremost a responsibility to its own population. In recognising that Australia was virtually defenceless in isolation, Menzies stated in a 1949 policy speech that his government would be strongly advocating for "a close co-operation between the Commonwealth and Empire and the United States of America."⁵ Prime Minister Menzies' America-reliant defence policy saw the formation of the Australia, New Zealand, and United States (ANZUS) Treaty in 1951, which has remained in place to this day.⁶ The true strength of the alliance lied more so in deterring aggressors than pooling armies together, as evidenced by the treaty's first invocation being half a century after its inception.⁷ The friendly relations, which the ANZUS treaty paved the way for, have allowed for the exchange of crucial intelligence, the mutual development of more efficient and powerful arms, as well as the sharing of cultural entities.⁸ In modern times, the strong USA-Australia relationship has become a norm, long beyond any novelty and seldom questioned by the public. Furthermore, the Liberal Prime Minister consigned Australia to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation in 1954, which at the time served the purpose of a sizeable blockade to communist influence in the midst of the cold war, but also provided military security.⁹ Despite the disbandment of SEATO in 1977, its 23 years in existence

¹ National Archives of Australia, (n.d.). *Robert Menzies*. [online] Available at:

<http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/menzies/> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

² ABC, (n.d.). *Sir Robert Menzies*. [online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/btn/v2/australians/menzies.htm> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

³ National Archives of Australia, (n.d.). *In Office*. [online] Available at:

<http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/menzies/in-office.aspx#section6> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

⁴ Greer, V., et al., (2012). *Nelson Connect with History 10*. South Melbourne: Cengage Learning Australia

⁵ Menzies, R. (1949). *Robert Menzies' Election Speech -1949*. [transcript] Museum of Australian Democracy.

Available at: <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1949-robert-menzies> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

⁶ National Archives of Australia, op. cit. *In Office*.

⁷ Brown, G., Rayner, L. (2001) *ANZUS After Fifty Years*. [online] Parliament of Australia. Available at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0102/02CIB03 [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

⁸ Holding, P. (2010) *Time for a cost benefit analysis of US alliance*. [online] ABC News. Available at:

http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-11-03/time_for_a_cost_benefit_analysis_of_us_alliance/40688 [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

⁹ National Archives of Australia, (n.d.). *Robert Menzies Timeline*. [online] Available at:

<http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/timeline/results.aspx?type=pm&pm=Robert%20Menzies> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

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allowed Australia ample time to develop positive relationships with other nations. In addition, in the same 1949 speech Menzies put forward his “good neighbour” policy that was to be applied in the South West Pacific, claiming that such an approach was the most beneficial to Australian special interests.¹⁰ A direct result of this policy was the commencement of the Colombo Plan in 1950, which saw the increased stability of Asian allies via the generosity of a group of countries, of which Australia was one.¹¹ Within 20 years of the plan running, Australia had given \$300 million to further relations with Asia.¹² This support resembled food, equipment, but uniquely in the provision of education to 20000 students by the end of 30 years in operation.¹³ Robert also set up an embassy in Tokyo to allow for a more comprehensive monitoring of that region.¹⁴ In recent times, China has taken up a role in an invaluable two-way trading partnership, with a telling 90% of imported merchandise coming from China.¹⁵ Clearly, many policies that began in the Menzies era have had a lasting impact on how Australia is viewed and accepted around the world today.

Australian education has been significantly affected by Sir Robert Menzies’ philosophy in action. In the Prime Minister’s speech by the name of “The Forgotten People”, emphasising the importance of the middle class, Menzies said, “...we must have frugality and saving for education and progress.”¹⁶ This stalwart support in favour of tertiary education is perhaps a direct result of how important academic prowess was to Menzies, affording him the scholarships necessary to receive outstanding education in his youth.¹⁷ In 1956, Menzies commissioned Sir Keith Murray to lead a review of nation-wide higher education, which led to the 1957 Murray Report that spurred the Liberal leader onto fighting for an increased portion of Commonwealth funds towards education.¹⁸ The following years of Menzies’ administration would see the creation of the Australian Universities Commission, which saw immense changes introduced, for example increased university salaries.¹⁹ Despite the government’s interest in universities across Australia, Menzies was almost pious to the view that it was “utterly undesirable that any government in a free country should tell a university what and how it is to teach.”²⁰ This approach allowed universities a freedom from state interests, placing growth and education as a priority. Moreover, Sir Leslie Martin was enlisted in 1961 to envision a revolutionary plan of the tertiary education to come to Australia’s future generations.²¹ Meanwhile, the aforementioned Colombo Plan saw an influx of foreign students invigorate the academic climate.²² These future alumni went on to profess their previously impossible higher education to the world, an

¹⁰ Menzies, op. cit.

¹¹ National Museum of Australia, (n.d.). *The Colombo Plan*. [online] Available at: http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection_interactives/endurance_scroll/harvest_of_endurance_html_version/explore_the_scroll/colombo_plan [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

¹² ibid.

¹³ ibid.

¹⁴ National Archives of Australia, op. cit. *In Office*.

¹⁵ Holmes, A. (n.d.). *Australia’s economic relationships with China*. [online] Parliament of Australia. Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/Briefing_Book44p/China [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

¹⁶ Menzies, R. (1942) *The Forgotten People*. [online] liberals.net. Available at: <http://www.liberals.net/theforgottenpeople.htm> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

¹⁷ National Archives of Australia, op. cit. *Robert Menzies*.

¹⁸ White, F. (n.d.). *Robert Gordon Menzies 1894-1978*. [online] Australian Academy of Science. Available at: <https://www.science.org.au/fellowship/fellows/biographical-memoirs/robert-gordon-menzies-1894-1978> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

¹⁹ ibid.

²⁰ Pyne, C. (2014). *The Return of the Menzies Tradition in Australian Higher Education*. [online] Quadrant online. Available at: <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2014/05/return-menzies-tradition-australian-higher-education/> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

²¹ White, op. cit.

²² Pegler, T. (2001). *The Colombo Plan*. [online] Monash Magazine. Available at: <http://www.monash.edu.au/pubs/monmag/issue8-2001/colombooct2001.html> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

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example being Dr Susan Lim, who executed the second ever successful liver transplant.²³ Unsurprisingly, this focus on the growth of tertiary education rapidly increased the population partaking in it. Recently, modelled on the successes of the original, a New Colombo Plan has emerged under that exact name, with a similar goal of injecting the Indo Pacific area with some academic sophistication via the provision of scholarships.²⁴ The existence of such programs are increasingly more important as society shifts from being based in labour to an information economy, where knowledge truly is power. Thus, Menzies' education policies have had incredibly positive and far-reaching impacts on the modern day, whether it be granting thousands education opportunities that were otherwise barred by financial circumstance, or preparing Australia to handle a vastly skilled workforce.

The implementation of a vast array of healthcare reforms improved the accessibility of treatments for innumerable Australians. Going beyond the average vision of healthcare, Menzies managed to supply free milk to school children as a preventative measure for future illness.²⁵ This supply of free dairy lessened the financial burden of many families, and gave others a source of calcium that they otherwise would not have been able to afford. Furthermore, under the Medical Benefits Scheme, numerous medical treatments and life-saving medicines were subsidised by the federal government.²⁶ This generous policy extended to contemporary issues of the time like tuberculosis, for which sufferers were granted additional medical allowances. Likewise, child endowments were extended to include the firstborn children of Australian families nationwide, spurring on healthy population growth.²⁷ Clearly, Menzies' opinion of healthcare is concisely summarised by his own words, "A growing nation must be a healthy one."²⁸ Before the Prime Minister Menzies' era, Australia had never been privy to a national healthcare scheme.²⁹ This revolutionary reform is one of the factors that enticed the thousands of immigrants that settled in Australia post-Second World War. In hindsight, these pension and subsidy programmes are the precursors to modern services like Medicare, and Centrelink. In addition, a nuclear reactor was built in 1955 to better research some forms of medical treatment. The organisation responsible for this research was originally called the Australian Atomic Energy Commission (AAEC), but came to be known as the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) in 1987.³⁰ In its lifetime thus far, the ANSTO has produced radioisotopes necessary certain medical procedures, researched gamma radiation in the hopes of improving cancer therapy and sterilisation operations.³¹ The influence of Menzies' placed importance

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (n.d.). *New Colombo Plan*. [online] Available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/pages/new-colombo-plan.aspx> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

²⁵ Menzies, R. (1958). *Robert Menzies' Election Speech -1958*. [transcript] Museum of Australian Democracy. Available at: <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1958-robert-menzies> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

²⁶ National Museum of Australia, (n.d.). *Robert Menzies*. [online] Available at: http://www.nma.gov.au/primeministers/robert_menzies [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

²⁷ Menzies, op. cit. (1949).

²⁸ Menzies, R. (1961). *Robert Menzies' Election Speech -1961*. [transcript] Museum of Australian Democracy. Available at: <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1961-robert-menzies> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

²⁹ Menzies, R. (1954). *Robert Menzies' Election Speech -1954*. [transcript] Museum of Australian Democracy. Available at: <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1954-robert-menzies> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

³⁰ National Archives of Australia, op. cit. *Robert Menzies Timeline*.

³¹ Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, (n.d.). *Australia's first reactor: HIFAR*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ansto.gov.au/AboutANSTO/HistoryatANSTO/HIFAR/index.htm> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

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on a healthy and thriving nation directly preceded the considerate cornerstones of modern governments.

Menzies' social reforms progressed Australia towards becoming a more diverse and equal population. The most impactful of these to the modern Australia is Sir Robert Menzies' acceptance of mass immigration, stating, "We believe that a rapidly growing population is essential and that a large flow of migration must continue."³² Whilst this policy was begun by the preceding government under Labor leader Ben Chifley, Menzies wholesale embracement of the migration program is a standing testament to his mindset of doing what he thinks is the best for Australia, as opposed to dismissing anything proposed by his political opponents. The economic benefit was certainly not something to be refused with annual factory-based turnover increasing four-fold within the span of a decade.³³ Yet, this influx of immigrant has axiomatically contributed to the modern multicultural image of Australia. These immigrants did not just increase the population of Australia, but also tampered with its diversity as well. Furthermore, Prime Minister Menzies passed the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1962, which released Indigenous Australians from the arbitrary restrictions that prevented them from voting in the past.³⁴ Despite common belief, the 1967 referendum had nothing to do with Indigenous Australian voting rights, but instead concerned commonwealth legislation over aboriginals and their inclusion in population based grants.³⁵ In addition to multiculturalism and Indigenous parity, Menzies was privy to the needs of his female voters as well. One such issue was female representation in the government, where Menzies struck a deal with the Australian Women's National League (AWNL).³⁶ This deal ensured female representation in the executive branches of the Liberal Party. Also in 1959, the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed, standardising laws on the topic of divorce throughout the nation.³⁷ One standardisation in the act allowed for a "no-fault" divorce, where a divorce could be completed on the grounds of the couple being physically separated for a sufficient period of time.³⁸ Thus, Menzies' social reforms have dictated the diverse and inclusive make up of our modern society, furthered equality for Indigenous Australians and women.

Thus, our longest serving Prime Minister has irrevocably evoked a better Australia. At his core, Sir Robert Menzies' liberal philosophy of caring for the "forgotten people" remains central to the positive actions that came about in his administration. His exemplar childhood, escaping from mediocrity via educational opportunities reflects the chance that has been given to many more an Australian because of his immense efforts in the world of politics. He has bettered the lives of people from both genders, numerous races, all ages and varying degrees of health. Regardless of political philosophy, it is difficult to deny the far-reaching and penetrating influence that Sir Robert Menzies has had in the span of his approximate two decades in the highest Australian office.

³² Menzies, op. cit. (1958).

³³ National Archives of Australia, op. cit. *In Office*.

³⁴ National Archives of Australia, (n.d.). *Robert Menzies Timeline*.

³⁵ Creative Spirits, (2017). *Australian 1967 Referendum*. [online] Available at: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/australian-1967-referendum#axzz4qfrrPfPx> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

³⁶ National Archives of Australia, op. cit. *In Office*.

³⁷ National Archives of Australia, (n.d.). *Robert Menzies Timeline*.

³⁸ *ibid*.

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Gave some background as to what the ANSTO does.

Brown, G., Rayner, L. (2001) *ANZUS After Fifty Years*. [online] Parliament of Australia. Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0102/02CIB03 [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

Detailed analysis of the ANZUS Treaty that was written before its first invocation.

Creative Spirits, (2017). *Australian 1967 Referendum*. [online] Available at: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/australian-1967-referendum#axzz4qfrrPfPx> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

Clarified the point that the 1967 referendum was not about granting the vote to Indigenous Australians. Among the lower quartile of useful sources.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (n.d.). *New Colombo Plan*. [online] Available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/pages/new-colombo-plan.aspx> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

Demonstrated the existence of a new Colombo Plan.

Greer, V., et al., (2012). *Nelson Connect with History 10*. South Melbourne: Cengage Learning Australia

It had a multitude of information concerning the World Wars but little on Menzies.

Holding, P. (2010) *Time for a cost benefit analysis of US alliance*. [online] ABC News. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-11-03/time_for_a_cost_benefit_analysis_of_us_alliance/40688 [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

Evocative article that came to no conclusion about the cost-benefit ratio of ANZUS, but contained historical facts.

Holmes, A. (n.d.). *Australia's economic relationships with China*. [online] Parliament of Australia. Available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook44p/China [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

Insightful and comprehensive evaluation of our future with China.

Menzies, R. (1949). *Robert Menzies' Election Speech -1949*. [transcript] Museum of Australian Democracy. Available at: <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1949-robert-menzies> [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

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Transcript of a policy speech. Very insightful to events of the time, and had good quotes.

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Reliable and contains the major achievements of Menzies' career.

National Museum of Australia, (n.d.). *Robert Menzies*. [online] Available at: http://www.nma.gov.au/primeministers/robert_menzies [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

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National Museum of Australia, (n.d.). *The Colombo Plan*. [online] Available at: http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection_interactives/endurance_scroll/harvest_of_endurance_html_version/explore_the_scroll/colombo_plan [Accessed 23 August. 2017]

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Contained some useful statistics of the Colombo Plan.

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