




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Liberal Party of Australia, 70th Anniversary

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (12.35 pm): I rise today to pay tribute to Australia's pre-eminent political movement and to the life of its founder, a leading figure of our political landscape. Seventy years ago in October 1944 Sir Robert Gordon Menzies convened the Canberra Conference to bring together 80 men and women from 18 separate political parties. Outlining his view for a united force to defeat the rising threat of centralism and socialism, Menzies told the conference—

What we must look for, and it is a matter of desperate importance to our society, is a true revival of liberal thought which will work for social justice and security, for national power and national progress, and for the full development of the individual citizen, though not through the dull and deadening process of socialism.

Menzies' Liberal Party stands for the citizen over the official, the community over the state and the family over everything, and it is the enemy of privilege, sectional interests and narrow prejudice. As Menzies said—

We took the name 'Liberal' because we were determined to be a progressive party, willing to make experiments, in no sense reactionary, but believing in the individual, his rights and enterprise, and rejecting the Socialist panacea.

The Liberal Party believes in the innate worth of the individual and the right to be independent, to own property and to achieve and in the need to encourage initiative and personal responsibility. Our philosophy of individual liberty finds its footings in the writings of John Stuart Mill who famously denounced excessive government intervention by saying—

... the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.

Mill called for freedom that allows the pursuit of our own good in our own way so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it. It seems clear to me that the Liberal Party is not a party of unfettered individualism, but a party that recognises the responsibility of individuals to their community. The rights of any individual are limited and constrained by the equal rights of other individuals.

As founder of this Liberal Party of Australia, Menzies would go on to lead Australia for 17 years until his resignation from politics in 1966. In a gross misunderstanding of Australian political history, Julia Gillard once labelled Gough Whitlam's government as the transforming moment for Australia. However, in his book *The Menzies Era*, John Howard set straight Australia's postwar narrative. According to Howard, it is the 1949 election, rather than Whitlam's election in 1972, that defines postwar Australia. Challenging the misconception that the fifties and sixties were a joyless ultra conservative decade when time stood still, Howard writes—

We can find fault with all of the decades that have gone before us, but to endorse that description of the 1950s is to divert attention from the remarkable economic and social progress that period spawned.

Indeed, Menzies oversaw a golden era of Australian progress. Menzies put an end to Australia's Asian isolation by instituting military, trade, diplomatic, educational and cultural links with the region—Australia's true pivot to Asia. Menzies invested heavily in universities, transforming the funding and the reach of higher education. Immigration was expanded and diversified allowing Menzies' successor, Harold Holt, to abolish the White Australia Policy in 1966. Many of the building blocks of the modern Australian economy were put in place in the fifties and sixties.

It is the middle class that defines Menzies' Australia—mainstream Australians whose goals, needs and aspirations had been ignored by government. They were the forgotten people who represented the backbone of this country. There is perhaps no better example of this middle class than those I am fortunate enough to represent in this parliament. From the tradesperson at Carina, the family at Wakerley, the small business owner from Tingalpa, the retailer at Carindale to the professional at Belmont it seems to me that these are Menzies' mainstream Australians. People who are envied by those whose benefits are largely obtained by taxing them, but are not rich enough to have individual power, are the backbone of the nation. These lifters of Chatsworth live the virtues of thrift, hard work and risk taking. They are the people up at 5 am each day in order to carve out a better future for both themselves and their families.

Seventy years ago Sir Robert Menzies hoped the Liberal Party would change the current of Australian politics and it is on the 70th anniversary that we reflect on the triumphs of Australia's longest serving Prime Minister and on Australia's most successful postwar political party. It is our responsibility as the government to be an enabler of opportunity and not a provider of assumed entitlement. We have to take responsibility in this state for our own actions, develop resilience and accept risk. I congratulate the Liberal Party on its 70th anniversary.