



## 'The backbone of this country'

Sir Robert Menzies  
(1894–1978)  
Radio broadcast 'The Forgotten People', 22 May 1942

Sir Robert Menzies

Radio came into its own during World War II. More than two out of three Australian families—5 million people—equipped themselves with a wireless set so they could tune in to hear the latest news from Europe and the Pacific. It also transformed the political landscape, opening up an entirely new way of communicating, enabling politicians to reach people at the most intimate level, right inside their homes, gathered around the kitchen table or in the lounge room.

Australia's longest serving Prime Minister and a consummate public speaker, Sir Robert Menzies was quick to see radio's potential and used it to great effect when he found himself out of office and relegated to the backbench. It was during one of the darkest periods of the war, and a bleak time for Menzies. Only the year before he'd been Prime Minister, leading the war effort and sitting on Churchill's war cabinet. He'd resigned in a dispute with his own cabinet leaving a specially convened meeting at midnight with tears in his eyes, telling his private secretary, Cecil Lodge, 'I have been done. I'll lie down and bleed awhile... Many political pundits were convinced he was finished, but even though he was out in the cold, for two years Menzies kept himself in the public spotlight, sharing his ideas and opinions every Friday night at 9.15 on the highly popular commercial channels 3AW in Melbourne and 2UE in Sydney, with the program re-broadcast regionally later. In confident, well-modulated tones with full vowels—a voice of the managerial classes—he talked directly to ordinary middle Australia.

'The Forgotten People', which was one of the earlier broadcasts, has gone down in history as one of Menzies' most powerful speeches and the closest in sentiment to his own beliefs and in his own words. It is the defining demographic that he calls 'the backbone' of the country. These are small business people, salary earners, skilled

Robert Gordon Menzies was born in 1894 to poor but well-to-do Scottish-born parents who ran the town store. He was educated at private school in Ballarat and Melbourne's Wesley College before taking law at the University of Melbourne. At age 32, he gave up practising as a barrister to enter state politics representing the Nationalist Party of Australia. He moved to federal politics six years later and stood under the United Australia Party banner, becoming Prime Minister at the 1940 election. However, a year later the party split and Menzies took a group of dissidents to form the new Liberal Party. Menzies spent eight years in opposition before being elected Prime Minister in 1949. His second term saw him become Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, with a total of eighteen years, five months and twelve days in office. He was knighted in 1963, but in 1971 he suffered a severe stroke that left him incapacitated. Menzies died in May 1978 at his home at Malvern, Melbourne. He was accorded a state funeral and was privately cremated.

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## 'A great gift from a greatly gifted man'

Miles Franklin  
(1879–1954)  
'Commemorating Henry', *The Domain*, Sydney, 5 September 1942

Miles Franklin

Defining the Australian national identity has been a preoccupation for minds both great and small virtually since Arthur Phillip stepped ashore. Just how do you encapsulate in words such a strange, vast and empty country at the opposite side of the known world, the character of the people who settled her, and those who were born out of her? It was something that engrossed the marvelously energetic and free-spirited Miles Franklin, an Australian author with a strong sense of her homeland, and she touches on it in a speech given to commemorate the birthday of national icon, writer Henry Lawson. She uses it to tell the story of how in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Australians started to let go of the old country and embrace the new, and in the process realise that it was something worth celebrating.

Delivering this speech in the 1940s, with the guns and bombs of World War II echoing around the 'top end' of the globe, Franklin was keen to paint a picture of what it felt like growing up in Australia in the 1890s, in the days before movies and radio, when the world was slower and people would gather together and recite poetry and prose for entertainment. Invariably, in the beginning, it had been mostly the verse of exiles, a nostalgic remembrance of English sunsets and rolling hills, Scottish, Welsh and Irish ballads.

Lawson had been pre-eminent among those writers and painters to capture the prevailing mood in verse what it was like to be an Australian. She describes him as 'one of that powerful band who in the sensitive hold Australians to a realisation of their country'. Franklin had much to thank him for. She had written to him in 1899 when she was in her late teens and finding it difficult to get an Australian publisher for *My Brilliant Career*.

Miles Franklin was born in 1879 at Tabbing, New South Wales, as Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, the daughter of an Australian-born grocer and his wife. After her first novel, *My Brilliant Career*, was published, she continued to write freelance while working as a nurse and then housekeeper in Sydney. A keen activist in the women's movement, she moved to America in her twenties where she wrote as a novelist and journalist while working at a number of jobs, including as a secretary in the National Women's Trade Union Leagues, Chicago. During this period, she wrote *On Clouston Street* and *Some Oneville Folk and Doves*. In 1915, Franklin moved to London, and with the outbreak of World War I worked as a nurse. Her life in England gave rise to *Bring the Manley*—a commercial and critical failure. She returned to Australia in 1932 and wrote a string of novels under the pseudonym Brent of Bin Bin, including *All That Swagger*. Although highly popular with the opposite sex, Franklin never married. She was a strong supporter of Australian literature and left a bequest to start a literary prize. Franklin died in 1954. Her ashes were scattered on Jounana Creek, Tabbing.

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## 'We say sorry'

Kevin Rudd  
(1957 )  
Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, House of Representatives, Parliament House, 13 February 2008

Kevin Rudd

I move:

That today we honour the indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking-up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation. For the future we take heart, resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.