

# PRIME FACTS

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTERS CENTRE

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## Stanley Melbourne BRUCE, PC, CH, MC

Prime Minister 9 February 1923 to 22 October 1929

- Stanley Bruce became the 8th prime minister when Billy Hughes resigned after losing Country Party support. Member of Nationalist Party 1918-31 and United Australia Party 1931-33.
- Member of the House of Representatives for Flinders (Victoria) 1918-29 and 1932-33. Treasurer 1921-23; Minister for External Affairs 1923-29; Health 1927-28; Trade and Customs 1928; Honorary Minister in London 1932-33.
- Bruce's government fell after Hughes and five other Nationalists voted with the Opposition against the Maritime Industries Bill. Labor won the election, led by James Scullin. Bruce lost his seat, the first serving prime minister to do so, but regained it in 1931.



### Main achievements (1923-1933)

- Established the coalition agreement with the Country Party, an arrangement that continues today.
- Set up new Commonwealth bodies such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the Federal Health Council and the Commonwealth Radium Laboratory.
- Formalised Cabinet meetings: an agenda was circulated and minutes taken.
- Represented Australia at the 1923 World Economic Conference and also at Imperial conferences in London in 1923 and 1926 with a view to securing guaranteed British markets for Australian produce, British investment in Australian agriculture and infrastructure, and the migration to Australia of scores of thousands of British men and women on assisted passages. His policy was 'Men, Money, Markets'.
- Established Australian liaison officers in London, aiming to influence British policy.
- Won a constitutional change in 1928 to provide for Commonwealth assured liability for State government debts and established an Australian Loan Council.
- Completed construction of the Provisional Parliament House in Canberra.
- Led the Australian delegation to the Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa in 1932.
- Through his authorship of the Bruce Report (1939), established the foundations of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation.



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## Personal life

- Born 15 April 1883 at Toorak, Melbourne. Died London, 25 August 1967.
- Educated at Melbourne Grammar, where he excelled at cricket, football, athletics and rowing. Worked in the family's importing business briefly before going to England in 1903 to study at Cambridge University. Became a barrister in London in 1906.
- Married Ethel Anderson in Berkshire, England, 1913.
- Military service with the British Army in First World War as a captain in Egypt and at Gallipoli. Awarded Military Cross and the *Croix de Guerre avec Palme*. Wounded in action and invalided back to London.
- Returned to Melbourne in 1917 as general manager of the family firm. Elected to parliament as a Nationalist in May 1918.

## Life after politics

- Australia's High Commissioner in London 1933-45.
- President of the League of Nations Council, 1936.
- Australia's representative on the British War Cabinet and on the Pacific War Council, 1942-45.
- Became Viscount Bruce of Melbourne 1947.
- Chairman of the World Food Council, 1947-51; Finance Corporation for Industry, 1947-57; Chancellor of the Australian National University, 1951-61.
- Captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, Scotland, 1955.

## Character

- *Bruce went out to meet the people, and on tour and as a host he had a charm few could resist. Yet his reluctance to wheel and deal, his propensity to argue from basic principles, and his toughness once a decision was taken, marked him out as exceptional. In consequence, he was regarded, mistakenly, as an Englishman who happened to have been born in Australia: too aloof and reserved to be an Australian. His spats seemed to confirm this. Having worn borrowed spats to the football to protect an old ankle injury from the chill of a damp Melbourne day, when the press scoffed he persisted in wearing them: he would not accept dictation on what he wore. As he was tall, well-built and, in the conventions of his time, handsome, the spats were the joy of cartoonists. (Source: Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 7, 1979, p. 460)*

## Did you know?

- Even though he died in England, Bruce's ashes were scattered in Canberra, as requested in his will.
- He was the first Australian parliamentarian to take a seat in the House of Lords and the first prime minister to have an Irish family background

## Sources

Brett, Judith, 'Stanley Melbourne Bruce' in Michelle Grattan (ed), *Australian Prime Ministers*, New Holland, Sydney, 2000, pp. 126-38

Radi, Heather, 'Bruce, Stanley Melbourne [Viscount Bruce] (1883 - 1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7, MUP, 1979, pp 453-461. On-line: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au>

National Archives of Australia: <http://primeministers.naa.gov.au>

## Further reading

Edwards, Cecil, *Bruce of Melbourne: A Man of Two Worlds*, Heinemann, London, 1965



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