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Ranking Australia's Prime Ministers: an exercise in interpretation

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Summary: Our public discourse, such as it is, and our democratic ethos, rests on the assumption of a common memory, a common context, shared understanding and experience. Sometimes confidence in this can be shaken.

Australian history has become a battleground in which political partisans claim ownership of our past. Most history debates have been crude and superficial (although far more sophisticated than equivalent debates in the United States), compounded by a shallow grasp of historical detail. Geoffrey Bolton observed that to a seventeen year old, Paul Keating was medieval history, Bob Hawke was ancient history and Bob Menzies was pre-history.

Of Australia's 26 Prime Ministers the names of only a handful are remembered. This lecture sets out to identify turning points in Australia's history and relating these events to the Prime Ministers who both shaped them and were shaped by them.

'Dumbing down'

Our public discourse, such as it is, and our democratic ethos, rests on the assumption of a common memory, a common context, shared understanding and experience. Sometimes my confidence in this can be shaken.

Australian history has become a battleground in which political partisans claim ownership of our past. Most history debates have been crude and superficial (although far more sophisticated than equivalent debates in the United States), compounded by a shallow grasp of historical detail.

In 2005 the distinguished historian Geoffrey Bolton observed that to a seventeen year old, Paul Keating was medieval history, Bob Hawke was ancient

history and Bob Menzies was pre-history. On that basis, John Curtin might well predate the ice age.

Theoretically, the current crop of undergraduates should be the best educated cohort in the nation's history. This ought to mean that they have a good understanding of Australian culture and society. And yet, in practice, I have some doubts. In mid-2007 I was talking to a group of 50 second year drama students at a university in Melbourne. I tried to gauge their reaction to the ABC's then recent film on John Curtin, starring William McInnes. The reaction was blank because so few had seen it. So I tried another tack. I said, 'We're not very good at recognising our great figures from the past. If we go back to the 19th Century, there's really only one Australian name that leaps from the history books'. I was assuming, especially as I was talking to a Victorian audience, that everybody would identify Ned Kelly. I went on: 'We see him as our Robin Hood, an outlaw, the subject of many iconic paintings by Sidney Nolan, and in films starring Mick Jagger and Heath Ledger'. I smiled ingratiatingly. 'I'm sure you all know whom I mean'. Two hands went up. The owner of the first hand ventured: 'Bob Hawke?' The second volunteered 'Captain Cook?'

The final program in the ABC's 'The Hollowmen' (8 October 2008) was disturbingly close to the bone. In the episode, minders and senior bureaucrats were distinctly uneasy when challenged about what Australia Day commemorates, and what Australia is doing in Antarctica. It is to be hoped that the forthcoming ABC series 'Australian Documentaries', starting later this month, might familiarize many Australians (providing that they are viewers of ABC 1) with Robert Menzies, Ben Chifley, John Monash and Harold Holt. But I wouldn't be holding my breath.

Ranking Australian Prime Ministers

Prof. Malcolm Mackerras, the eminent psephologist, published an interesting article in *The Australian* (August 16, 2008) in which he ranked Australian Prime Ministers. He concluded:

AUSTRALIA has had four great prime ministers and four failures. The other 18 have been successful (to a lesser or greater extent) without being great. That adds up to 26, the number of prime ministers we have had so far, including Kevin Rudd.

And Robert Menzies was Australia's greatest prime minister.

These are the conclusions to which I have come after studying a great amount of the relevant literature and conversations with about 40 historians: academics, journalists, politicians and former politicians, as well as laypeople who simply read Australian political history and think about it...

My logic with prime ministerial ranking comes from nation building, successful reforms, initiatives, election wins and longevity as prime minister. However, I add marks for being a successful prime minister in either of the two world wars and for leaving on his own terms. Electoral defeat, debacles and divisiveness cause me to subtract marks.

He ranks four Prime Ministers as 'Great':

1. Robert Gordon Menzies
2. John Curtin
3. Alfred Deakin
4. Andrew Fisher

Then follow his 'High average' :

5. Bob Hawke
6. J B Chifley
7. Joseph Lyons
8. Stanley Melbourne Bruce
9. William Morris Hughes
10. John Howard
11. Paul Keating
12. Malcolm Fraser
13. Gough Whitlam

He lists four as 'Failures':

23. Arthur Fadden
24. William McMahon
25. Earle Page
26. Frank Forde.

(Three of his four are 'interims').

I have a real difficulty with his list.

Malcolm Mackerras was, he admits, strongly influenced by a Canadian study, *Prime Ministers: Ranking Canada's Leaders* by J L Granatstein and Norman Hilmer. The authors rank William Lyon Mackenzie King as the greatest, largely

because (at 22 years) he was the longest-serving, and this model, applied to Australia, must have made R G Menzies seem beyond challenge.

Malcolm seemed to regard his choice of Menzies as No. 1 as self-evident and did not devote even a paragraph in his essay to justifying the placement.

Paradoxically, he makes a very strong case in favour of Andrew Fisher.

I have met sixteen of Australia's twenty-six Prime Ministers, and could claim to have known ten of them reasonably well.

I would have to 'declare an interest', as they say in the courts, and make it plain that while I try to be objective, there is an inevitable bias resulting from my personal history in politics, which prejudices me in favour of interventionism and against passively 'holding the line'.

My approach (and my ranking) differs radically. I can't see much point in Malcolm Mackerras' inclusion of interim Prime Ministers. He overstates the importance of 'election wins and longevity as prime minister', perhaps understandable in as psephologist, while understating the significance of being a 'change agent'. Obviously, having only a short period in office inhibits capacity to roll out new programs: Curtin, Chifley, Holt and Whitlam were affected by this. It is also premature to attempt a ranking for Kevin Rudd.

Our six interim Prime Ministers, Watson, Reid, Page, Fadden, Forde and McEwen, never fought elections as Prime Minister. It is true that Reid was Leader of the Opposition in the 1903 and 1906 elections and Fadden was Leader in 1943.

In the first decade of Federation there were five Prime Ministers and eight Governments. The party system was not firmly established, conservatives were divided between Free Traders and Protectionists, personal alliances were contingent and constantly changing.

I begin by addressing Malcolm Mackerras' choice of the four 'Greats', beginning with Menzies.

After the failure and repudiation of Menzies' first Government, he shrewdly refashioned Australian politics by appealing to the Forgotten People, so well described in Judith Brett's *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (1992), created the

Liberal Party in 1944 as a centrist rather than a conservative party, kept his distance from big business, ensured that government was corruption free and strengthened Commonwealth power. He was weak on the social agenda, Aborigines and foreign policy, especially Asia, seemed abjectly deferential to the British and American connections and exaggerated Communism as a domestic issue.

Sir Robert Menzies' long career demonstrates the democratic paradox that contemporary judgment is often overturned by historical judgment. In politics, timing is everything. Menzies won seven straight elections, but his political program was anachronistic even in his lifetime, as he came to recognize himself. Bert Evatt lost elections in 1954, 1955 and 1958 and suffered from serious errors of judgment – but decades later his platform retains some contemporary relevance/resonance.

He was a great orator, strategist, campaigner and parliamentarian. Menzies had a record of spectacular misjudgments in foreign policy which suggested that he simply did not understand what was happening in the world, or Australia's part in it. He was wrong on Hitler, Munich, appeasement generally, the invincibility of Singapore, the end of Empire, Indian independence, Indonesian independence, the Chinese revolution, Suez, apartheid in South Africa, Britain and the Common Market, and the war in Vietnam. He told me himself that the three issues he wanted to be remembered for were university expansion, the breakdown of Catholic-Protestant antagonism and the development of Canberra. (None was featured in any of his election campaigns). He became disillusioned with the Liberals, voting DLP in his last years.

It is paradoxical to compare Robert Menzies and Barry Goldwater. Menzies won election after election, while Goldwater's single bid for the Presidency, in 1964, was overwhelmingly defeated. Despite his heavy loss, Goldwater's political agenda became increasingly important and contributed heavily to the presidential victories of Ronald Reagan (1980; 1984) and the two Presidents Bush (1988; 2000; 2004). Menzies was, I think, a great politician, not necessarily a great leader.

However, I regard John Curtin as a great leader.

He was probably a bipolar depressive, like Churchill, and overcame alcoholism, like Hawke. He held Australia together during World War II, at the time of Australia's greatest crisis, when the political system faced collapse and many

feared Japanese invasion (an unrealistic prospect as it turned out). His appeal to the United States was a turning point in our history. He transformed the Labor Party and, with Chifley's help, ran an efficient administration. A bitter opponent of Conscription in World War I, he enforced it during World War II. He also had a clear vision of how post-war Australia should develop. In his memoirs *They Called Me Artie* (1969), Sir Arthur Fadden, the man Curtin displaced as Prime Minister, wrote: 'I do not care who knows it [he presumably was aiming this at R G Menzies] but, in my opinion, there was no greater figure in Australian public life in my lifetime than Curtin. I admired him both as a man and as a statesman. Curtin is entitled to be rated as one of the greatest Australians ever.'

Alfred Deakin was an idealist and intellectual, a great driving force for Federation. He created what Paul Kelly called The Australian Settlement, the five principles which dominated our politics until the 1960s: White Australia, Industry Protection, Wage Arbitration, State Paternalism and Imperial Benevolence. (All have disappeared). He secured passage of the Invalid and Old Age Pensions Act (1908) but resigned before its proclamation. He speech on the Judiciary Act (1903), creating the High Court, against strong State objections, promoted a strong national vision.

Andrew Fisher, a Scottish coal miner, led the ALP 1907-15 and was Prime Minister three times. In his second term he became the first Australian Prime Minister who could claim a mandate. He established the Commonwealth Bank, maternity allowances, pensions for old age (1909) and invalidity (1910), supported Douglas Mawson's Antarctic Expedition, strengthened the arbitration system, promoted the railway link with Western Australia, chose Canberra as the national capital, issued the first banknotes, currency and stamps, created the RAN and AFC (1911). Fisher tried to amend the Constitution, first in April 1913 with two Referendum propositions (both heavily defeated), then in May 1913 with six more, giving the Commonwealth additional powers to regulate trade and commerce, corporations, industrial matters, trusts, monopolies and railways disputes. In 1913 the margins were surprisingly narrow (more than 49 per cent voted Yes on each question). He won the 1914 election just after World War I began, despatched troops then went to London as High Commissioner in 1915. I rank Fisher above Deakin because so much of Fisher's achievement is intact, while Deakin's is not.

I propose an alternative approach to ranking Prime Ministers, by identifying 'turning points' in Australian history and naming the Prime Ministers

associated with them. Obviously the number (sixty) and even the choice is arbitrary, but I would be prepared to argue for them.

Turning points in Australian History since 1901 in which a Prime Minister played a decisive role:

Elements which are no longer current, such as the White Australia Policy, have been struck through. Some factors which have had a profound economic, social and political impact such as drought, Britain joining the Common Market and the minerals boom are excluded because they were not directed or imposed by Prime Ministers. Antarctica will be of increasing global significance but I doubt if it is perceived as a 'turning point' for Australia. I have not included events where something did *not* happen, such as a range of defeated Referenda.

1. ~~White Australia Policy~~ Ba, D
2. ~~Tariff protection~~ Ba, D
3. Establishing Commonwealth Public Service Ba, D
4. Australian armed forces: army (1901), RAN (1911), AFC (1911) Ba, Fi
5. Votes for women Ba, D
6. Creation of High Court Ba, D
7. ~~Arbitration system: creating context of *Harvester* judgment~~ D
8. Old age and invalidity pensions (1909-11) D Fi
9. Transcontinental railway Fi
10. Establishment of Commonwealth Bank Fi
11. Canberra chosen as national capital (1911) Fi ; (1927) Br.
12. Bank notes, currency, stamps Fi
13. World War I Fi WMH
14. Commonwealth income tax (1915) Fi
15. Gallipoli and Western Front WMH
16. Versailles Treaty – and League mandate for P-NG. WMH
17. Creating CSIRO WMH Br
18. National control of overseas borrowing Br
19. Depression – and recovery ('Premier's Plan') Sc Ly
20. Establishing the ABC Ly
21. World War II RGM JC JBC
22. US alliance JC RGM HH JWH KR
23. Resistance to Churchill on war aims JC
24. Uniform taxation scheme JC JBC
25. Post war reconstruction JBC
26. Mass migration program JBC

27. Involvement in UN and Bretton Woods JBC
28. Nationalisation of Qantas/ creation of TAA JBC
29. Nationality and Citizenship Act (1948): passports 1949 JBC
30. Water management JBC JWH KR
31. University expansion M
32. Phasing out of sectarianism: state aid to church schools M
33. Introduction of television M
34. Restructuring of Reserve Bank of Australia (1959) M
35. Aborigines on political agenda HH W Fr
36. Phasing out of White Australia Policy HH W Fr
37. Engagement with Asia HH W RJLH PK
38. Ending demonology in foreign policy (China, Vietnam) W
39. Electoral reform: one vote = one value W
40. Australian honours and symbols W F
41. Affirmative action for women W RJLH
42. Law reforms (Family Law, Death Penalty). W
43. ~~Free tertiary education~~ W
44. Multiculturalism W Fr
45. Phasing out of tariffs W RJLH PJK
46. New economic direction: responding to globalisation RJLH PJK
47. Floating the \$A RJLH PJK
48. Financial deregulation RJLH PJK
49. Universal secondary education RJLH
50. Universal health care RJLH
51. Commonwealth power over the environment RJLH
52. Compulsory superannuation RJLH PJK
53. Australia Act (1986): High Court decisions final RJLH
54. Privatisation of public assets RJLH PJK JWH
55. Aboriginal land rights: *Mabo* judgment/ legislation W Fr PJK
56. Corporatisation of universities JWH
57. GST JWH
58. ~~WorkChoices~~ JWH
59. Addressing climate change KR
60. Aboriginal apology KR

I have listed Prime Ministers chronologically where they are involved in at least one of my 60 ‘turning points’.

Barton 6

Deakin 7 [5 as AG, 2 as PM]

Fisher 8
Hughes 4
Bruce 3
Scullin 1
Lyons 2
Menzies 5
Curtin 4
Chifley 7 [2 as Treasurer, 5 as PM]
Holt 3
Gorton 2
Whitlam 11
Fraser 5
Hawke 12
Keating 8 [5 as Treasurer, 3 as PM]
Howard 7
Rudd 4

The list might seem unfair to Curtin (as well as keeping Menzies down) because I have only linked him with four turning points. However, each of the four was critical to Australia's history.

I have worked out another list of important issues or controversies which will make more sense if and when you have an opportunity to read my text but which Australian Prime Ministers essentially responded to, rather than initiating or directing.

Second list

1916; 1917 Conscription rejected
1951 Referendum on banning the Communist Party
1999 Republic failure
1975 Dismissal
Motor vehicles and suburbanisation
Preferential voting
Founding of the Liberal Party
Easing Censorship
Supporting Mawson's Antarctic expeditions F, B, S
Excluding mining from Antarctica
Appeasement in 1930s L, M
Managerialism

The end of ideology
Corporations power
Labor split
Snowy Mountains scheme
Australian citizen as Governor-General
Managerialism displaces ideology
Korean War
Vietnam War
Iraq War
Afghan War
Social wage
Minerals boom PJK JWH
Drought
Reaction to terrorism
Refugees: 'the Pacific solution'
Britain joins Common Market
Uniform rail gauges (1970)
Active promotion of the arts and film H G W
Support for multi-racial 'Commonwealth' W Fr
Redefining relationship with the US KR
Gun laws
Atomic bomb tests in Australia
Mutual obligations in welfare.
Aboriginal intervention in Northern Territory JWH

Based on my 'turning points' criteria, I would rank our ten leading Prime Ministers in this order:

1. Curtin
2. Chifley
3. Hawke
4. Whitlam
5. Fisher
6. Deakin
7. Menzies
8. Keating
9. Fraser
10. Howard

I rank Ben Chifley very highly. He secures a 7 in my 'turning points'. An outstanding Treasurer 1941-49, he helped run Curtin's wartime Government, was the architect of post-war reconstruction, including full employment and the welfare state. He supported Evatt on foreign policy. While Arthur Calwell is rightly seen as the architect of the post-war mass migration program, it would never have happened without Chifley's great strength. He was strongly committed to Bretton Woods, the World Bank and early elements of the global economy, and had to use all his political skills to win Caucus' reluctant approval. He aided CSIRO and the ABC, created the ANU but ran aground with his preoccupation with banking and excessive regulation. The long coal strike of 1949 was no help either. David Day, biographer of both Curtin and Chifley, concludes that, on balance, Chifley was the greater man: Curtin had a Chifley, but Chifley had no Curtin. However, there were significant gaps in his political repertoire: White Australia Policy, Aborigines, Women's Issues and Schools, the last regarded as a state responsibility. On these issues, Chifley was a man of his times.

Bob Hawke has the highest score in my list of 'turning points', 12. Many of the economic changes were carried out with Treasurer Paul Keating., but from my direct observation, Hawke was the initiator of the new economic direction. Phasing out of tariffs, responding to globalisation, floating the \$A, financial deregulation, achieving universal secondary education, universal health care, Commonwealth power over the environment, compulsory superannuation, the Australian Act (1986) were all part of Hawke's achievement. He also led the successful international fight to exclude mining from Antarctica. Hawke was regarded as having led an outstanding Cabinet – and as a Minister in the second division I can be objective on this.

Philip Flood, former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and High Commissioner to UK, ventured to me that he had worked closely with every Prime Minister from Menzies to Howard. Who was the greatest? 'Hawke. No question'. I put the same question to the eminent banker Will Bailey and his answer was the same.*

Gough Whitlam scores an 11 with my list. In barely three years he created a new agenda for Australian politics, took the Commonwealth into education and city planning, ended demonology in foreign policy, began dismantling tariffs, pushed law reform, opportunities for women, the arts, the environment and Aborigines, was an enthusiast for law reform, created the Australian honours system and promoted multi-culturalism. Despite the bitter controversies leading

to the 1975 Dismissal, most elements of the Whitlam platform are still with us – an exception being free tertiary education.

I have already discussed Fisher (8), Deakin (7) and Menzies (5).

Paul Keating, as Hawke's Treasurer 1983-91, was at first a reluctant convert to economic rationalism, then embraced it with a convert's fervour. He forced through major tariff changes, repudiated interventionist economic policies, and pushed the Asian connection, especially APEC. He reformed taxation and toyed with a GST. He was a zealot for the arts and multiculturalism, pushed for Native Title after the High Court's *Mabo* decision, and put the Republic on the agenda.

Malcolm Fraser scores a 5. He was good on Africa and racial issues, foreign policy and multi-culturalism, but hesitant about some aspects of globalisation and cautious in his relations with the US and Mrs Thatcher.

John Howard had the narrowest political repertoire of any recent Prime Minister and at first his emphasis was domestic, and defiantly suburban, essentially the view from Earlwood. His sweeping victory in the 1996 election was partly a reaction against Keating's style and emphasis on 'big picture' issues. He used to be palpably uncomfortable with issues outside his range – Aboriginal affairs, foreign affairs, Asia, cultural and arts issues, multiculturalism, women's issues, but then became increasingly confident with successive wins. Howard showed leadership qualities of a very high order on the issue of gun control after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, admittedly with bipartisan support from the Opposition. He derailed the Republic and Aboriginal reconciliation and was confrontationalist on drugs and Greenhouse issues. He won on the introduction of GST. In my list he scores a 7.

It is significant that Harold Holt, often under-rated, took the opportunity in his 23 months in office to initiate reforms that Menzies refused to tackle: the 1967 Referendum on Aborigines, phasing out the White Australia Policy, engaging with Asia, relaxing censorship, early stages of promoting the arts, and a conciliatory approach to trade unions.

Forgive me if I close with an unexpected diversion, a few comments on the impending US Presidential election in which we are all non-voting participants.

An addendum on the U S Presidential Election

Three weeks from tomorrow, on Tuesday, 4 November, an unusually high proportion of American voters will cast their votes for the US Presidency, one-third of the Senate, all Members of the House of Representatives and eleven Governorships.

I expect that Senator Barack Obama will win comfortably, securing about 350 Electoral College votes. The Democrats will increase their margin in the Senate and the House. Obama will probably poll behind his Party. His win will be overwhelmingly due to the financial meltdown on Wall Street, its devastating impact on American confidence, a strong confirmation of the amazing incompetence of the Bush Administration in a variety of fields – economic management, crisis response, health care, law reform, foreign policy, even the response to terrorism. Ironically, Obama will owe his victory to Bush-Cheney, to McCain-Palin (a ticket put together as an act of astounding cynicism), and to the valiant support of Hillary Clinton (even through clenched teeth) and most of her team, rather than his own efforts.

Since World War II, the political heartland/homeland in the United States has moved South and West. Many factors contribute: demography, climate, lifestyle, ageing. The American Civil War is not yet over, and in recent decades the Confederates seemed to be winning. If Obama wins, he will be the first U.S. President to be elected from the North since Massachusetts's John F. Kennedy in 1960.

In 2004, George W. Bush's defeat of Senator John Kerry from Massachusetts was significant, but not overwhelming. Bush, with 50 per cent of the popular vote, won the Old Confederacy and the heartland of Middle America, areas which are historically isolationist, deeply conservative on moral issues, with strong fundamentalist and evangelical churches, committed to gun ownership and the death penalty. Kerry, with 48 per cent, won the Pacific coast, the north-east, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

After Bush's 2004 victory, the eminent Anglo-American historian Simon Schama, incandescent with fury, argued that the United States was now deeply split between 'Worldly America', which Kerry won by a landslide, and 'Godly America', which Bush won overwhelmingly. Worldly America is 'pragmatic, practical, rational and sceptical' while Godly America is 'mythic, messianic, conversionary'. Worldly America engages with the world and is nourished by it, while Godly America 'turns its back on that dangerous, promiscuous, impure world... If Worldly America is a city, a street and a port, Godly America is at

its heart...a church, a farm and a barracks, places that are walled, fenced and consecrated. Worldly America is about finding civil ways to share crowded space...Godly America is about making over space in its image.'

The irony about Obama winning the Democratic nomination is that he secured his greatest wins proportionally in the States of the old Confederacy, States where the black vote was high but where he had little realistic chance of winning in November. I have no doubt that Hillary Clinton would have won the Presidency, and by a stronger margin...

There is serious doubt about the capacity and vision of both candidates. John McCain was much more attractive as a maverick who took a strong line on reforming campaign finances, opposed use of torture, supported action on climate change and stem cell research, and distanced himself from the religious Right. Now he has been forced to compromise with the Bushites, and the Party manifesto reflects Bush's priorities rather than his own, quite apart from the disturbing choice of Sarah Palin for the Vice Presidency. Obama, is charismatic with a Blair-like fluency, but his legislative record is very thin and his executive record non-existent.

There seemed to be general agreement that the second Presidential Debate in Nashville, Tennessee (7 Oct. 2008) was the most mediocre since they began in 1960, despite (or perhaps because of) the apocalyptic challenges that the US faced.

The English writer Francis Wheen reminds us that in 1800 the U.S. Presidential election was a contest between John Adams, president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Thomas Jefferson, president of the American Philosophical Society. In the 2000 contest, the contenders, George W. Bush and Al Gore, were both 'born-again's, and Gore sported a toe-curling sign on his desk which read 'WWJD?' ('What would Jesus do?').

In the context of the US Presidential election of 2008, where the bloc vote of religious fundamentalists is regarded as critical in many states in the interior, is it conceivable that somebody with Thomas Jefferson's beliefs, or even Lincoln's, could now be nominated for President by a major party? The answer is almost certainly 'No'.

It is ironic that the United States, with the world's greatest universities

and an unequalled record of scientific achievement, should have an enormous anti-science constituency. Nearly 50 per cent of Americans consider Genesis to be the final authority on the creation of the world, a significant minority is doubtful about a heliocentric universe, 40 per cent believe that angels exist and 75 per cent reject Darwin's theory of evolution.

The most recent averaging of all polls gives Obama a 7.3 per cent lead. That should be enough.

But I don't need to remind you that odd things can happen in the Electoral College. You will all recall what happened in 2000 when Bush beat Gore despite being 500,000 votes behind in the aggregate. Most of you may have forgotten what happened in 2004, which was an inversion of 2000. This time Bush was 3 per cent ahead in the popular vote but he only beat John Kerry by 286 votes to 252 in the Electoral College. If Kerry had won Ohio (which he would have done with 65,000 more votes) he would have gained the Presidency.

We can draw some consolation – and this is my closing thought – that Australia's political process and the quality of debate is (like our banking system) is far more sophisticated than in the United States. But we don't claim to be leading the world so we can't too much consolation from this judgment!

E-mail from Philip Flood, AO 13 October 2008

Barry

All this is very shorthand.

I rate Prime Ministers on the basis of what I consider 10 desirable qualities as follows;

1. High Intelligence
2. Shrewd capacity to judge people
3. Fine oratorical style
4. Understanding of the Australian people
5. Vision for the future of Australia
6. Energy and commitment to move towards vision
7. Capacity to delegate
8. Sense of humour
9. A degree of aloofness (ie a leader's confidence to be aloof when necessary)
10. Knowledge of the right time to quit

Of the Prime Ministers I have known (Menzies to Howard) I rate Hawke first then Menzies.

I rate Hawke (in '83-91) well ahead of Menzies on 4, 5 and 6, Menzies ahead of Hawke on 3 and 10 and both of them roughly equal on the rest. For 'post-Prime ministerial majesty' it is hard to go past Gough.

Regards
Philip