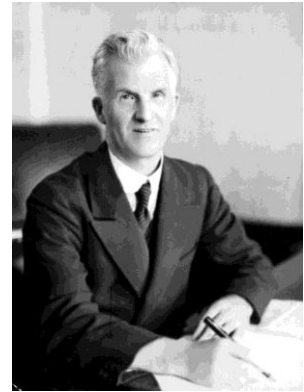


James Henry SCULLIN, PC

Prime Minister 22 October 1929 to 6 January 1932



- Jim Scullin became the 9th Prime Minister when the Labor Party won office, replacing the Nationalist Party government headed by Stanley Bruce.
- Initially a member of the Political Labor Council from 1903, forerunner of the Labor Party. Part-time organiser for the Australian Workers Union from 1906. Stood unsuccessfully for the seat of Ballarat held by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin 1906.
- First elected to parliamentary office in the 1910 federal election, representing the Victorian seat of Corangamite for the Labor Party 1910-1913. President of the Labor Party's Victorian branch 1918-19. Held the seat of Yarra in the Commonwealth House of Representatives 1922-1949. Deputy leader of the federal parliamentary Labor Party (1927), and leader from 1928 until he resigned due to ill health in 1935.
- Whilst prime minister, he also held the External Affairs and Industry portfolios 1929-1932 and Treasury portfolio 1930-1931.
- Voted out of office after a no-confidence motion following a Labor Party split over the government's Depression policy, and the formation of the United Australia Party led by Joseph Lyons and a separate Labor group under New South Wales Premier J.T. Lang. Parliament was dissolved and a general election held 19 December 1931. Lyons replaced Scullin as prime minister on 6 January 1932.

Main achievements (1929-1932)

- Secured appointment of Sir Isaac Isaacs, Chief Justice of the High Court, as the first Australian-born Governor-General.
- Persuaded the United Kingdom government to reduce the Commonwealth government's interest payments by £1.6 million per year.

Personal life

- Born 18 September 1876 at Trawalla near Ballarat, Victoria, son of an Irish railway worker. Died 28 January 1953, in Melbourne.
- Modest upbringing in Victoria's western district. Left school at 12. Worked as a farmhand, wood-chopper, miner, and ran a grocer's shop in Ballarat 1900-1910. Avid reader. Skilful as orator and debater. Member of Catholic Young Mens Society.
- Married Sarah Maria McNamara 11 November, 1907 in Ballarat.



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Life after politics

- Advocate for reform of the banking sector and parliamentary control of banking and credit.
- Persuaded the government to expand scope of the Commonwealth Literary Fund.
- Mentor to two future prime ministers, John Curtin and J.B. Chifley.

Character

- Remembered as honest, stoic, teetotal, non-smoking, decent, reserved, somewhat puritanical, a man of integrity with modest tastes, a great public speaker. These qualities were shaped by his impoverished upbringing and Catholic faith, as well as his early impressions of the 'squattocracy' in rural Victoria and the effects of economic depression and drought on the poor. His brief tenure as prime minister was dominated by the economic turmoil of the Great Depression and the division of the Labor Party into two factions. He was described by one writer as 'a prophet destroyed' and another, less charitably, as 'the man who failed even at failure'.

Did you know?

- Scullin was Australia's first native-born Labor prime minister, first Catholic prime minister and first Labor Party leader.
- The New York Stock Exchange failure (the 'Wall Street crash') occurred in the first week of Scullin becoming prime minister.
- A leading opponent of conscription during the First World War. A strong nationalist and supporter of the White Australia policy and protection for Australia's manufacturing industries.
- Initially opposed Canberra as seat of national Parliament, but later gave his support after becoming leader of the Labor Party in 1928. Subsequently moved Cabinet meetings into Old Parliament House, initiating a major expansion of the building functions to house the legislative and executive branches of government.
- His gravestone in Melbourne Cemetery is inscribed with his words 'Justice and humanity demand interference whenever the weak are being crushed by the strong...J.H.S.'.

Sources

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

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Further reading

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