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‘Zachary Gorman (Editor), *The Menzies Legacy: Ideals, change, procession, 1960s and beyond*’

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Zachary Gorman (Editor), *The Menzies Legacy: Ideals, Change, Procession, 1960s and Beyond* (Melbourne University Publishing, 2026), 384pp. Hardback. A\$50. ISBN: 978-0-5228-8190-5.

Zachary Gorman's edited volume *The Menzies Legacy: Ideals, Change, Procession, 1960s and Beyond* is the final volume in a four-book series chronicling Menzies' political life, produced by the Menzies Research Institute at the University of Melbourne. For contemporary scholars, Menzies is too often treated as an interregnum between two state-shaping Labor governments. This sense of the Menzies government as a placeholder era rather than one worth studying does scholars a disservice when they seek to explain the country to the public. This volume makes the case against that neglect. The book's real strength lies in its policy richness and its description of the origins of the path dependencies it set running in foreign policy, housing, education, and the role of the state.

The book is the product of an open call to researchers, and the chapters reflect a range of disciplinary perspectives, spanning economic policy, education, public administration, housing, defence and foreign policy, Empire and decolonisation, before finally concluding with reflections on Menzies' political legacy. That format produces exactly what you would expect: an eclectic collection rather than a single sustained argument, with genuine surprises but notable silences. This is less a flaw than the nature of the method, and Gorman deserves credit for shaping disparate contributions into something that reads as a coherent whole.

Read together, the chapters on domestic policy reveal the cross-cutting ideological currents of the time and those embodied in Menzies himself. He did have a deep commitment to liberalism but was politically deft and pragmatic. As he aged, he appeared to become more conservative, but whether this is true remains unexplored in this collection, given it is muted on the rise of the new-Left agenda. Multiple chapters canvas the economy, particularly the treatment of the Vernon Report — perhaps the loneliest of reports on the modern Australian economy, and one whose central debate, about the state's proper economic role, is newly relevant in an era of protectionism brought on by Trump's America. Menzies famously rejected economic planning — as John Hawkins and Nick Brown explain in their respective chapters — a rejection that coexisted with his willingness to embrace the spirit of post-war reconstruction, explored in James Walter's chapter on the development of the Prime Minister's Department into a genuine source of cross-government advice.

The education chapters, read together, trace a liberal commitment to education's power to build a democratic citizenry, which is a through line in Menzies' thought and policy over the course of his long life. His support for state aid, science education, and the Commonwealth scholarships emerges as a coherent, integrated agenda, not just a set of political manoeuvres. This idea was built on a firmly elite conception of what a university was for and how the school system needed to be modernised to make young Australians ready for the scientific age, a point lucidly argued by Jennifer Clark.

Housing receives similarly rich treatment. Menzies built his case for home ownership on the family's centrality to the good life, in what Chris Beer referred to as a 'property-owning liberalism'. Beer's account of the political-psychological landscape of Western Sydney, and its lasting mark on a generation of politicians across the political spectrum, is a particular highlight. David Furse-Roberts' chapter reminds us that Menzies (and the state premiers) presided over the largest

expansion of housing supply in Australia's history, through an almost exclusive focus on supply-side policy. Only at the very end of his government did demand-side measures appear, prefiguring the housing system we live with today. That expansion rested on conditions we could not now reproduce: a generation of returned soldiers the state felt it owed; a willingness to reward marriage specifically that would now be read as discriminatory social engineering; and greenfield land supply that made state lending for construction a fundamentally different exercise to today's constrained urban market.

The closing chapters trace Menzies' political ascendancy and retirement: Stephen Loosley on federal Labor's depressing trudge as Menzies retired triumphant over his enemies; Frank Bongiorno and Matilda Hatcher on a press pack keen to laud his political mastery but more ambivalent about his policy legacy, against a public that regarded him with affection and gratitude; and Charles Richardson on Menzies' philosophical legacy, invoking Daniel Bell's 'The End of Ideology' to describe how his early-twentieth-century liberalism settled into a more conservative posture. The collection closes with Richardson's reflections on the ways Malcolm Fraser and John Howard each chose to continue the Menzies legacy.

Finally, I must note the collection's near-total silence on the major social transformations gathering steam during this period. The most conspicuous absences are twofold. First, the significant changes to women's place in both the public and private sphere. Second, Indigenous Australians' campaign for equal rights: an agenda that included the 1962 extension of voting rights, and the 1967 referendum, the first department for Indigenous Affairs and, eventually, the *Racial Discrimination Act*. It points to an obvious next book for the centre to organise around.

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