

## The Leader of the Opposition

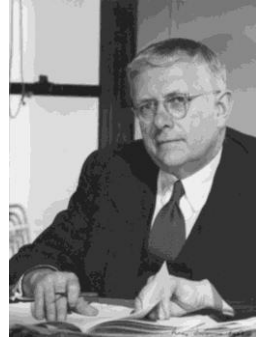
'...just as there can be no good or stable government without a sound majority, so there will be a dictatorial government unless there is the constant criticism of an intelligent, active, and critical opposition.'

Sir Robert Menzies, 1948

The practice in Australia is for the leader of the party or coalition that can secure a majority in the House of Representatives to be appointed as Prime Minister. The leader of the largest party or coalition outside the government serves as Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is his or her party's candidate for Prime Minister at a general election.

Each party has its own internal rules for the election of a party leader. Since 1967, the Leader of the Opposition has appointed a Shadow Ministry which offers policy alternatives and criticism on various portfolios. The Leader of the Opposition is, by convention, always a member of the House of Representatives and sits opposite the Prime Minister in the chamber. The Senate leader of the opposition party is referred to as the **Leader of the Opposition in the Senate**, even if they lead a majority of Senators. He or she usually has a senior Shadow Ministry role.

Australia has an adversarial parliamentary system in which the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition face off against one another during debates in the House of Representatives. The Opposition's role is to hold the government accountable to the people and to Parliament, as well as to provide alternative policies in a range of areas. The Opposition are particularly active during Question Time when its members interrogate ministers about their portfolios.



Hon. Dr. H.V. Evatt  
Leader of the Opposition  
1951 - 1960  
National Library of Australia

### Did you know?



Hon. Andrew Peacock  
Leader of the Opposition 1983 -  
1995, 1989-1990  
National Library of Australia

- Thirteen Leaders of the Opposition subsequently became Prime Minister, either as a result of a general election or due to their party gaining control of the House of Representatives.
- Ten Opposition Leaders had previously been Prime Minister.
- Thirteen past Opposition Leaders never became Prime Minister at all. Despite this, all of these men were important figures in the Australian political landscape.

### Further Reading

For a list of Leaders of the Opposition, see the reverse of this sheet.

Menzies, Sir Robert, *The Measure of the Years*, Cassell & Company, 1970  
Contains Menzies' thoughts on the art of opposition.

Parliament of Australia – Historical Parliamentary Information  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/handbook/historical/index.htm>



| <b>No.</b> | <b>Opposition Leader</b> | <b>Term of office</b>  | <b>Party</b>                     |
|------------|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.         | <b>George Reid</b>       | May 1901 – 18.8.1904   | Free Trade Party                 |
| 2.         | <b>Chris Watson</b>      | 18.8.1904 – 5.7.1905   | Australian Labor Party           |
| -          | <b>George Reid</b>       | 7.7.1905 – 16.11.1908  | Free Trade Party (1905-06)       |
| 3.         | <b>Joseph Cook</b>       | 17.11.1908 – 26.5.1909 | Anti-Socialist Party             |
| 4.         | <b>Alfred Deakin</b>     | 26.5.1909 – 2.6.1909   | Commonwealth Liberal Party       |
| 5.         | <b>Andrew Fisher</b>     | 2.6.1909 – 29.4.1910   | Australian Labor Party           |
| -          | <b>Alfred Deakin</b>     | 1.7.1910 – 20.1.1913   | Commonwealth Liberal Party       |
| -          | <b>Joseph Cook</b>       | 20.1.1913 – 24.6.1913  | Commonwealth Liberal Party       |
| -          | <b>Andrew Fisher</b>     | 8.7.1913 – 17.9.1914   | Australian Labor Party           |
| -          | <b>Joseph Cook</b>       | 8.10.1914 – 17.2.1917  | Commonwealth Liberal Party       |
| 6.         | Frank Tudor              | 17.2.1917 – 10.1.1922  | Australian Labor Party           |
| 7.         | Matthew Charlton         | 16.5.1922 – 29.3.1928  | Australian Labor Party           |
| 8.         | <b>James Scullin</b>     | 26.4.1928 – 22.10.1929 | Australian Labor Party           |
| 9.         | John Latham              | 20.11.1929 – 7.5.1931  | Nationalist Party                |
| 10.        | <b>Joseph Lyons</b>      | 7.5.1931 – 6.1.1932    | United Australia Party           |
| -          | <b>James Scullin</b>     | 7.1.1932 – 1.10.1935   | Australian Labor Party           |
| 11.        | <b>John Curtin</b>       | 1.10.1935 – 7.10.1941  | Australian Labor Party           |
| 12.        | <b>Arthur Fadden</b>     | 8.10.1941 – 23.9.1943  | Country Party                    |
| 13.        | <b>Robert Menzies</b>    | 23.9.1943 – 19.12.1949 | United Australia Party (1943-44) |
| 14.        | <b>Ben Chifley</b>       | 21.12.1950 – 13.6.1951 | Australian Labor Party           |
| 15.        | Herbert Vere Evatt       | 20.6.1951 – 9.2.1960   | Australian Labor Party           |
| 16.        | Arthur Calwell           | 7.3.1960 – 8.2.1967    | Australian Labor Party           |
| 17.        | <b>Gough Whitlam</b>     | 8.2.1967 – 5.12.1972   | Australian Labor Party           |
| 18.        | Billy Snedden            | 20.12.1972 – 21.3.1975 | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 19.        | <b>Malcolm Fraser</b>    | 21.3.1975 – 11.11.1975 | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| -          | <b>Gough Whitlam</b>     | 27.1.1976 – 22.12.1977 | Australian Labor Party           |
| 20.        | Bill Hayden              | 22.12.1977 – 3.2.1983  | Australian Labor Party           |
| 21.        | <b>Bob Hawke</b>         | 3.2.1983 – 11.3.1983   | Australian Labor Party           |
| 22.        | Andrew Peacock           | 11.3.1983 – 5.9.1985   | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 23.        | <b>John Howard</b>       | 5.9.1985 – 9.5.1989    | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| -          | Andrew Peacock           | 9.5.1989 – 3.4.1990    | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 24.        | John Hewson              | 3.4.1990 – 23.5.1994   | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 25.        | Alexander Downer         | 23.5.1994 – 30.1.1995  | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| -          | <b>John Howard</b>       | 30.1.1995 – 11.3.1996  | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 26.        | Kim Beazley              | 19.3.1996 – 22.11.2001 | Australian Labor Party           |
| 27.        | Simon Crean              | 22.11.2002 – 2.12.2003 | Australian Labor Party           |
| 28.        | Mark Latham              | 2.12.2003 – 28.1.2005  | Australian Labor Party           |
| -          | Kim Beazley              | 28.1.2005 – 4.12.2006  | Australian Labor Party           |
| 29.        | <b>Kevin Rudd</b>        | 4.12.2006 – 3.12.2007  | Australian Labor Party           |
| 30.        | Brendan Nelson           | 3.12.2007 - 6.9.2008   | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 31.        | Malcolm Turnbull         | 6.9.2008 - 1.12.2009   | Liberal Party of Australia       |
| 32.        | Tony Abbott              | 1.12.2009 -            | Liberal Party of Australia       |



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