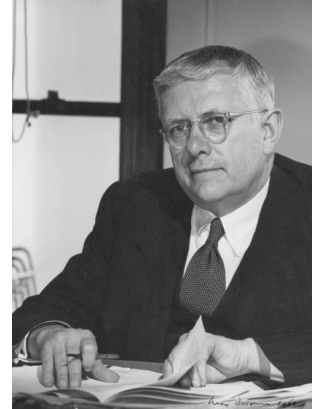


Dr. Herbert Vere EVATT QC PC

Leader of the Opposition 20 June 1951 to 9 February 1960

- Bert Evatt became the 15th Leader of the Opposition after the death of Australian Labor Party leader and former Prime Minister Ben Chifley.
- Member of the Australian Labor Party 1918–27, 1940–60.
- Member of the House of Representatives for Barton, NSW 1940–58, Hunter 1958–60. Minister for External Affairs and Attorney-General 1941–49.
- Evatt resigned as Leader of the Opposition on 9 February 1960 and was succeeded by Arthur Calwell.



As Opposition Leader

- Vigorously opposed the Menzies government's attempt to outlaw the Communist Party. Evatt conducted a nation-wide barnstorming campaign in defiance of opinion polls which suggested a large majority in favour of the ban. Evatt's campaigning contributed to the rejection of the proposed constitutional amendment to ban the party in a national referendum in September 1951.
- Personally appeared before a royal commission on Soviet espionage after members of his staff were accused of being in contact with the Soviet Embassy in the wake of the 'Petrov Affair', in which a senior Soviet diplomat had defected to Australia.
- Offered to resign as leader in 1955 to persuade the anti-communist Labor members, who had split from the ALP Caucus, to return but was rebuffed. He made a similar offer in 1958 to the Democratic Labor Party in exchange for their second-preference votes and was again turned down.

Political life

- Labor Member for Balmain in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1925–27; Independent Labor member 1927–30.
- Appointed as a Justice of the High Court of Australia in 1930 at the age of thirty-six, becoming the youngest High Court judge in Australia's history.
- Served on the multi-party Advisory War Council 1940–41.
- Played an important role in the founding of the United Nations in 1945. Served as President of the United Nations General Assembly 1948–49.
- First Chair of the Atomic Energy Commission 1946–47.
- Helped to mediate the successful independence of Indonesia from the Netherlands in 1948–49.
- Represented the Waterside Workers' Federation before the High Court in 1950 as part of a challenge to the government's anti-communism legislation.



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Personal life

- Born 30 April 1894 in East Maitland, New South Wales. Died 2 November 1965 in Canberra.
- His publican father died when Evatt was seven; Evatt was raised by his Irish-Australian mother.
- Attended East Maitland Superior Public School and Fort Street Model (Boys' High) School, Sydney. Entered St Andrew's College, University of Sydney in 1911.
- Married Mary Alice Sheffer 27 November 1920 in Mosman, a suburb of Sydney.
- He and his wife adopted two children.
- Suffered a stroke in 1962 and was in care until his death in 1965.

Life after politics

- Served as Chief Justice of New South Wales 1960-1962.

Character

Evatt had neither the charisma or Curtin nor the calm of Chifley. He was good-humoured in times of crisis, calm and courteous; but if the baggage was lost or his hotel room noisy – some little thing that someone should have attended to – he would have a brief attack of the vapours, vent his irritation, and recover quickly. Everything in him was thrown into the terrible forward drive, the relentless pace of his purpose. He could keep ten operations going at once, change his strategy in mid-stride, vault over obstacles.

Tennant, K., *Evatt: Politics & Justice*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson 1970

Did you know?

- Evatt had a severe phobia of air travel.
- He was the author of a number of works on Australian politics and history, including *Rum Rebellion* (1938), *The King and His Dominion Governors* (1936) and *Australian Labour Leader: The story of W.A. Holman and the Labour Movement* (1954).
- Evatt is the only Labor leader to have earned an academic doctorate (LL.D)
- Was never known by his given name of 'Herbert'. He was known universally as 'Bert' or by the nickname 'Doc.'

Sources

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