

= Andrew Fisher =

Andrew Fisher (29 August 1862 ? 22 October 1928) was an Australian politician who served as Prime Minister of Australia on three separate occasions between 1908 and 1915 . Fisher 's second government between 1910 and 1913 completed a vast legislative programme which made him , along with Protectionist Alfred Deakin , the founder of the statutory structure of the new nation . The Fisher government legacy of reforms and national development lasted beyond the divisions that would later occur with World War I and Billy Hughes ' conscription push .

Fisher 's second Prime Ministership resulting from the 1910 federal election represented a number of firsts : it was Australia 's first elected federal majority government , Australia 's first elected Senate majority and the world 's first Labour Party majority government at a national level . After the minority governments of 1904 Chris Watson and his own in 1908 @-@ 1909 it was the world 's third Labour Party government at a national level . It was the first time a Labour Party had controlled any house of a legislature , and the first time the party controlled both houses of a bicameral legislature . At the time , it represented the culmination of Labour 's involvement in politics . Passing 113 Acts , the 1910 ? 13 government was a period of reform unmatched in the Commonwealth until the 1940s under John Curtin and Ben Chifley . Serving a collective total of four years and ten months , Fisher is second to Bob Hawke as Australia 's longest serving Labor Prime Minister .

'Labour ' was changed to ' Labor ' during 1912 at the instigation of King O 'Malley .

= = Early life = =

Fisher was born in Crosshouse , a mining village near Kilmaurs , East Ayrshire , Scotland . He was the second of eight children of Robert Fisher and Jane Garvin . Fisher 's education consisted of some primary schooling , some night schooling , and the reading of books in the library of the cooperative his father had helped to establish . At the age of 10 he began work in a coal mine . He worked six days a week for 12 hours a day . He then had a 4 km trek to go to night school . At 17 he was elected secretary of the local branch of the Ayrshire Miners ' Union , the first step on a road to politics . The union called a strike in 1881 to demand a 10 per cent increase to wages , but this was to prove ultimately unsuccessful and Fisher lost his job as a result . After finding employment at another mine , he once again led miners to strike for higher wages in 1885 . This time , he was not only sacked but also blacklisted .

Unable to find work , Fisher and his brother migrated to Queensland in 1885 . Despite leaving his homeland , Fisher is said to have retained a distinctive Scottish accent for the rest of his life . Here , Fisher worked as a miner , first in Burrum and then in Gympie . He became an engine driver (a role involving the operation of machinery to raise and lower cages in the mine shaft) after attaining the necessary qualifications in 1891 . In the same year , he was also elected as the president of an engine drivers union . He was also active in the Amalgamated Miners Union , becoming President of the Gympie branch by 1891 .

= = Member of Parliament = =

= = = Queensland Parliament = = =

In 1891 , Fisher was elected as the first president of the Gympie branch of the Labour Party . In 1893 , he was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Queensland as Labour member for Gympie and by the following year had become Labour 's deputy leader in the Legislative Assembly . In his maiden speech , he pushed for a 50 per cent cut in military spending and declared support for federation . Another policy area that captured his attention during this term was the employment of workers from the Pacific Islands in sugar plantations , a practice that Fisher and Labour both strongly opposed . He lost his seat in 1896 after a campaign in which he was charged by his opponent Jacob Stumm with being a dangerous revolutionary and an anti @-@ Catholic ,

accusations that were propagated by the newspaper Gympie Times .

The 1896 establishment of the Gympie Truth , a newspaper that he was to part @-@ own , was part of his response . Intended as a medium to broadcast Labour 's message , the newspaper played a vital role in Fisher 's return to parliament in 1899 . This time , he was the beneficiary of a scare campaign , in which conservative candidate Francis Power was consistently painted by the Gympie Truth as being a supporter of black labour and the alleged economic and social ills that accompanied it . In that year he was Secretary for Railways and Public Works in the seven @-@ day government of Anderson Dawson , the first parliamentary Labour government in the world .

= = = Federal Parliament = = =

The state Labour parties and their MPs were mixed in their support for the Federation of Australia . However Fisher was a firm federationist , supporting the union of the Australian colonies and campaigned for the ' Yes ' vote in Queensland 's 1899 referendum . Fisher stood for the electorate of Wide Bay at the inaugural 1901 federal election and won the seat , which he held continuously for the rest of his political career . At the end of 1901 Fisher married Margaret Irvine , his previous landlady 's daughter .

Labour improved their position at the 1903 election , gaining enough seats to be on par with the other two , a legislative time colloquially known as the " three elevens " . When the Deakin government resigned in 1904 , George Reid of the Free Trade Party declined to take office , resulting in Labour taking power and Chris Watson becoming Labour 's first Prime Minister for a four @-@ month period in 1904 . Fisher established and demonstrated his ministerial capabilities as Minister for Trade and Customs in the Watson Ministry . The fourth Labour member in the ministry after Watson , Hughes , and Lee Batchelor , Fisher was promoted to deputy leader of the party in 1905 .

George Reid adopted a strategy of trying to reorient the party system along Labour vs non @-@ Labour lines ? prior to the 1906 election , he renamed his Free Trade Party to the Anti @-@ Socialist Party . Reid envisaged a spectrum running from socialist to anti @-@ socialist , with the Protectionist Party in the middle . This attempt struck a chord with politicians who were steeped in the Westminster tradition and regarded a two @-@ party system as very much the norm .

At the 1906 election , Deakin remained Prime Minister even though Labour gained considerably more seats than the Protectionists . When Watson resigned in 1907 , Fisher succeeded him as Labour leader , although Hughes and William Spence also stood for the position . Fisher was considered to have a better understanding of economic matters , was better at handling caucus , had better relations with the party organisation and the unions , and was more in touch with party opinion . He did not share Hughes ' passion for free trade or that of Watson and Hughes for defence (and later conscription) . In political terms he was a radical , on the left of his party , with a strong sense of Labour 's part in British working @-@ class history .

At the 1908 Labour Federal Conference , Fisher argued for female representation in parliament :

With a majority of seats in the Labour @-@ Protectionist government , Labour caucus by early 1908 had become restive as to the future of the Deakin minority government . With the Deakin ministry in trouble , Deakin talked to Fisher and Watson about a possible coalition , and following a report agreed to it providing Labour had a majority in cabinet , that there was immediate legislation for old @-@ age pensions , that New Protection was carried and that at the following election the government would promise a progressive land tax . No coalition was formed , however the pressure from Labour brought about productive change by Deakin : he agreed to a royal commission into the post office , old @-@ age pensions were to be provided from the surplus revenue fund and £ 250 @, @ 000 set aside for ships for an Australian Navy . New Protection was declared invalid by the High Court in June , Fisher found the tariff proposals of Deakin unsatisfactory , while caucus was also dissatisfied with the old @-@ age pension proposals . Without Labour support the Deakin government fell in November 1908 .

= = Prime Ministership = =

== First government 1908 ? 09 ==

Fisher formed his only minority government and the First Fisher Ministry . The government amended the Seat of Government Act providing for the new federal capital to be in the Yass @-@ Canberra area , passed the Manufacturers ' Encouragement Act to provide bounties for iron and steel manufacturers who paid fair and reasonable wages , ordered three torpedo boat destroyers , and assumed local naval defence responsibility and placed the Australian Navy at the disposal of the Royal Navy in wartime . Fisher 's first government also saw the passage of the Seamen 's Compensation Act , which provided payment of compensation for seamen engaged upon Australian registered ships wherever trading , and (in certain cases) upon British and foreign ships engaged in the coasting trade who were killed or injured in the course of their occupation .

Fisher committed Labour to amending the Constitution to give the Commonwealth power over labour , wages and prices , to expanding the navy and providing compulsory military training for youths , to extending pensions , to a land tax , to the construction of a transcontinental railway , to the replacement of pound sterling with Australian currency and to tariffs to protect the sugar industry . In May 1909 , the more conservative Protectionists and Freetraders merged to form the Commonwealth Liberal Party , while the more liberal Protectionists joined Labour . With a majority of seats , the CLP led by Alfred Deakin ousted Labour from office , with Fisher failing to persuade the Governor @-@ General Lord Dudley to dissolve Parliament .

== Second government 1910 ? 13 ==

At the 1910 election , Labour gained sixteen additional seats to hold a total of forty @-@ two of the seventy @-@ five House of Representative seats , and all eighteen Senate seats up for election to hold a total of twenty @-@ two out of thirty @-@ six seats . This gave Labour control of both Houses and enabled Fisher to form his Second Fisher Ministry , Australia 's first elected federal majority government , Australia 's first elected Senate majority , and the world 's first Labour Party majority government . The 113 acts passed in the three years of the second Fisher government exceeded even the output of the second Deakin government over a similar period . The 1910 ? 13 Fisher government represented the culmination of Labour 's involvement in politics , it was a period of reform unmatched in the Commonwealth until the 1940s under John Curtin and Ben Chifley .

Fisher carried out many reforms in defence , constitutional matters , finance , transport and communications , and social security , achieving the vast majority of his aims in his first government , such as establishing old @-@ age and disability pensions , a maternity allowance and workers compensation , issuing Australia 's first paper currency , forming the Royal Australian Navy , the commencement of construction for the Trans @-@ Australian Railway , expanding the bench of the High Court of Australia , founding Canberra and establishing the government @-@ owned Commonwealth Bank . Fisher 's second government also introduced uniform postal charges throughout Australia , carried out measures to break up land monopolies , put forward proposals for more regulation of working hours , wages and employment conditions , and amended the 1904 Conciliation and Arbitration Act to provide greater authority for the court president and to allow for Commonwealth employees ' industrial unions , registered with the Arbitration Court . A land tax , aimed at breaking up big estates and to provide a wider scope for small @-@ scale farming , was also introduced , while coverage of the Arbitration system extended to agricultural workers , domestics , and federal public servants . In addition , the age at which women became entitled to the old @-@ age pension was lowered from 65 to 60 . The introduction of the maternity allowance was a particularly major reform , as it enabled more births to be attended by doctors , thus leading to reductions in infant mortality . Compulsory preference to trade unionists in federal employment was also introduced , while the Seaman 's Compensation Act of 1911 and the Navigation Act of 1912 were enacted to improve conditions for those working at sea , together with compensatory arrangements for seamen and next of kin . Eligibility for pensions was also widened . From

December 1912 onwards , naturalised residents no longer had to wait three years to be eligible for a pension . That same year , the value of a pensioner 's home was excluded from consideration when assessing the value of their property .

Fisher wanted additional Commonwealth power in certain areas , such as the nationalisation of monopolies . The 1911 referendum asked two questions , on Legislative Powers and Monopolies . Both were defeated with around 61 per cent voting ' No ' . An additional six questions were asked at the 1913 referendum , on Trade and Commerce , Corporations , Industrial Matters , Trusts , Monopolies , and Railway Disputes . All six were defeated with around 51 per cent voting ' No ' . At the 1913 election , the Commonwealth Liberal Party , led by Joseph Cook , defeated the Labor Party by a single seat .

= = = Third government 1914 ? 15 = = =

Labor retained control of the Senate , however , and in 1914 Cook , frustrated by the Labor controlled Senate 's blocking of his legislation , recommended to the new Governor @-@ General Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson that both houses of the parliament be dissolved and elections called . This was Australia 's first double dissolution election , and the only one until the 1951 election . The First World War had broken out in the middle of the 1914 election campaign , with both sides committing Australia to the British Empire . Fisher campaigned on Labor 's record of support for an independent Australian defence force , and pledged that Australia would " stand beside the mother country to help and defend her to the last man and the last shilling " . Labor won the election with another absolute majority in both houses and Fisher formed his Third Fisher Ministry .

Fisher and his party were immediately underway in organising urgent defence measures for planning and implementing Australia 's war effort . Fisher visited New Zealand during this time which saw Billy Hughes as acting Prime Minister for two months . Fisher and Labor continued to implement promised peacetime legislation , including the River Murray Waters Act 1915 , the Freight Arrangements Act 1915 , the Sugar Purchase Act 1915 , the Estate Duty Assessment and the Estate Duty acts in 1914 . Wartime legislation in 1914 and 1915 included the War Precautions acts (giving the Governor @-@ General power to make regulations for national security) , a Trading with the Enemy Act , War Census acts , a Crimes Act , a Belgium Grant Act , and an Enemy Contracts Annulment Act . In December 1914 , a War Pensions Act was passed to provide for the grant of Pensions upon the death or incapacity of Members of the Defence Force of the Commonwealth and Members of the Imperial Reserve Forces residents in Australia whose death or incapacity resulted from their employment in connection with warlike operations .

In October 1915 , journalist Keith Murdoch reported on the situation in Gallipoli at Fisher 's request , and advised him , " Your fears have been justified " . He described the Dardanelles Expedition as being " a series of disastrous underestimations " and " one of the most terrible chapters in our history " concluding :

Fisher passed this report on to Hughes and to Defence Minister George Pearce , ultimately leading to the evacuation of the Australian troops in December 1915 . The report was also used by the Dardanelles Commission on which Fisher served , while High Commissioner in London .

Fisher resigned from the Prime Ministership and Parliament on 27 October 1915 after being absent from parliament without explanation for three sitting days . Three days later Labor Caucus unanimously elected Billy Hughes leader of the Federal Parliamentary Party . Fisher 's seat was narrowly won by the Commonwealth Liberal Party on a 0 @-@ 2 percent margin at the 1915 Wide Bay by @-@ election .

= = High Commissioner to the United Kingdom = =

Fisher served as Australia 's second High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 1 January 1916 to 1 January 1921 . Fisher opposed conscription which made his dealings with Billy Hughes difficult . Hughes asked Fisher for support by cable three weeks before the first referendum , but Fisher cabled back " Am unable to sign appeal . Position forbids . " He subsequently refused to

publicly comment on the issue . Hughes ' 1916 referendum on conscription had a No vote of around 52 per cent , while the 1917 referendum had a No vote of around 54 per cent . Fisher visited Australian troops serving in Belgium and France in 1919 , and later presented Pearce with an album of battlefield photos from 1917 and 1918 , showing the horrendous conditions experienced by the troops .

The Dardanelles Commission , including Fisher , interviewed witnesses in 1916 and 1917 and issued its final report issued in 1919 . It concluded that the expedition was poorly planned and executed and that difficulties had been underestimated , problems which were exacerbated by supply shortages and by personality clashes and procrastination at high levels . Some 480 @,@ 000 Allied troops had been dedicated to the failed campaign , with around half in casualties . The report 's conclusions were regarded as insipid with no figures (political or military) heavily censured . The report of the Commission and information gathered by the inquiry remain a key source of documents on the campaign .

= = Final years and death = =

Fisher wanted to continue to serve as High Commissioner in London when his term expired in 1921 , but Hughes did not permit it . Upon his return to Australia , there were attempts to secure Fisher a seat in parliament and lead the Labor Party once more , but he was not interested in doing so . In 1922 he returned to London and lived in retirement at South Hill Park , Hampstead , for the remainder of his life . In his final years , Fisher gradually succumbed to the effects of dementia , such that he would ultimately lose the ability to even sign his own name . He caught a severe bout of influenza in September 1928 and died a month later . He is buried at Hampstead Cemetery in West Hampstead .

= = Honours = =

At the end of the First World War , France awarded him the Légion d 'honneur , but he declined it ; he did not like decorations of any kind and adhered to this view throughout his life . The federal electorate of Fisher was named after him . A Canberra suburb , Fisher , was also created in his memory , with its streets reflecting a mining theme in honour of Fisher 's occupation before entering public life . Ramsay MacDonald , Britain 's first Labour Prime Minister , unveiled a memorial to Fisher in Hampstead Cemetery in 1930 . A memorial garden was also dedicated to Fisher at his birthplace in the late 1970s .

In 1972 he was honoured on a postage stamp bearing his portrait issued by Australia Post .

In 1992 , his home in Gympie (Andrew Fisher 's Cottage) was listed on the Queensland Heritage Register .

In 2008 Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd launched a biography titled Andrew Fisher , written by David Day . In turn , Rudd was presented with an item that once belonged to Fisher - a slightly battered gold pen engraved with Fisher 's signature , which had been held in safekeeping for 80 years .