

= Matthew Charlton =

Matthew Charlton (15 March 1866 ? 8 December 1948) was an Australian Labor Party politician . Charlton was born at Linton in rural Victoria but moved to Lambton , New South Wales at the age of five . He worked as a coal miner after only a primary education and then married Martha Rollings in 1889 . Charlton had an interest in politics from his early middle age , and joined union strikes against wage reductions in 1896 .

After a two @-@ year stint in Kalgoorlie , Western Australia , Charlton returned to Lambton and rejoined the local colliery workers ' union , becoming its treasurer in 1901 . He won a by @-@ election for the NSW seat of Waratah in 1903 and transferred to Northumberland in 1904 .

In 1910 Charlton won the seat of Hunter and rose through the ranks of Andrew Fisher 's government , then staying with the Australian Labor Party during its period in opposition . Charlton rose through the ranks to become party leader in 1922 . He lost his first election campaign , partly because he was hospitalised with illness during its course . In 1924 Charlton was invited to a meeting of the League of Nations (now United Nations) but was unsuccessful in getting Australia to adopt the Geneva Protocol , established during the meeting .

Due to union strikes in 1925 , Charlton and his party lost the election held that year and he resigned in 1928 . He died on 8 December 1948 .

= = Early life = =

Little is recorded about Charlton 's early life , as he grew up in a relatively unknown mining district . It is known , however , that Charlton was born on 15 March 1866 in Linton , Victoria , a small town near Ballarat that today has less than 500 residents . He was born to Matthew Charlton , an English miner from Durham , and Mabel (née Foard) . In 1871 , the five @-@ year @-@ old Charlton 's father moved with his family to Lambton , a suburb of Newcastle , New South Wales . After primary education at Lambton Public School , Charlton began work at Lambton Colliery as a coal trapper ; a children 's @-@ only job opening trapdoors for coal carts . When too old for the job , Charlton was given a job at the coal @-@ face . At 23 he married Martha Rollings at nearby New Lambton .

= = Emerging interest in politics = =

In 1896 plans to reduce coal workers ' wages led to strike action . Charlton supported the struggle against wage reductions , but the effort failed and , along with many other miners , he moved to the goldfields near Kalgoorlie , Western Australia . After two years there , Charlton returned to Lambton and became an official in the Colliery Employees ' Federation , becoming treasurer in 1901 . While occupying that position , Charlton also prepared arbitration cases . Battling for an improvement in mine workers ' conditions , he attended a trade union congress in November 1902 , at which he moved for nationalisation of the coal mining industry , believing it would " eliminate cut @-@ throat competition between owners that depressed miners ' wages and conditions " . That idea was opposed as being too radical but a compromise was drawn up urging state governments to open and run their own coal mines , while affirming the ultimate desirability of full nationalisation .

= = State political career = =

Colleagues urged Charlton to stand for the state electoral district of Waratah , and on 5 December 1903 Charlton became the second member for the district in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly . His representation of that district was short @-@ lived , as the next year he transferred to Northumberland , replacing John Norton . Charlton became the unofficial spokesperson for the miners , speaking principally about mining matters in parliament . In 1909 a coal miners ' strike struck New South Wales and Charlton was called upon by the Colliery Employees ' Federation to represent it in front of a wage board . Charlton was unsuccessful in gaining better conditions for the miners but he did settle the dispute , talking to miners around the state and convincing them to

return to work . He resigned from state politics and in 1910 Charlton wrested the federal Division of Hunter from the sitting Frank Liddell. Hunter has remained a safe Labor seat ever since .

= = Early federal career = =

Charlton was an immediate success with Andrew Fisher and was promoted to the temporary chairmanship of committees in the House in 1913 , however Charlton threatened to resign in 1915 over a dispute in government delays in granting the committee increased powers . Fisher mollified him and in 1916 Charlton proved his loyalty to the new Labor leader Billy Hughes by voting for Hughes ' conscription referendum bill , even though he was vehemently opposed to conscription and fought hard against it . However , Charlton seemed to accept the affirmative result of the referendum and again proved his loyalty to Hughes by defending him when he became the target of caucus criticism . Charlton attempted to deflect attacks made on Hughes to a party conference , but Hughes left the party before a decision could be made .

The new Labor leader Frank Tudor was a weak leader in health and political prowess . A successor @-@ designate was chosen by the caucus but it was not Charlton . T. J. Ryan was chosen over him , but he died in 1921 and Charlton filled the deputy leadership position . During election year , 1922 , Tudor died also , and Charlton became Leader of the Opposition going into the 1922 election .

= = Leader of the Opposition = =

Charlton offered alternative policies and looked to be favourite until he was hospitalised with illness halfway through the campaign . Labor still won the most seats as a single party , but Charlton was unable to defeat a strong government coalition . Labor remained in opposition .

Because of great losses during World War I , Charlton opposed military training and commitments of Australian forces . In 1924 Charlton was invited to a League of Nations (now United Nations) conference in Geneva , Switzerland . At the conference Charlton strongly opposed war , and the Geneva Protocol took form . Upon his return to Australia , Charlton advocated adoption of the protocol , but the government sided with the British and refused to observe it .

Charlton lost the 1925 election , largely due to his stance on industrial relations and continual militant union action which plagued his campaign . Charlton always aided in maintaining amicable relations in the party and many times lent his expertise to conflicts within the NSW branch of the Labor Party . He resigned from his positions on 29 March 1928 . His successor James Scullin went on to become the Prime Minister of Australia , something Charlton never managed to do .

= = Final years = =

Following his six years of service as Labor leader , Charlton took an interest in local government and became an alderman on the Lambton Council from 1934 to 1938 (before its merger with the City of Newcastle) . On 8 December 1948 Charlton died at Lambton , New South Wales , where he grew up and had lived most of his life .

The Division of Charlton in the Hunter Region was named in his honour and had been a safe Labor seat since its creation in 1984 until its abolition in 2016 .