

= Vere Bird , Jr . =

Vere Bird , Jr . (c . 1937 - 31 March 2013) was an Antiguan lawyer and politician who served as chairman of the Antigua Labour Party (ALP) and a government minister . He is the son of Vere Bird , the former Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda , and brother of Lester Bird , who later held the same position .

Bird entered politics in 1981 . Three years later he was elected to the House of Representatives and became Minister of Aviation , Public Information and Public Utilities . As minister , Bird conducted a purchase deal for Dominican water before being made Minister of Public Works and Communications on 1 January 1987 . In this role , he oversaw the reconstruction of V. C. Bird International Airport , which was the subject of controversy after it was discovered that he had granted a contract for the construction of a new runway to a company in which he was a shareholder . This led to conflict within the ALP , but Bird remained a minister . He was later fired after a scandal in which Israeli weapons , sold to Antigua and Barbuda , were found in the hands of the Medellín Cartel of Colombian drug smugglers ? it was discovered that the weapons had been transferred at Bird 's instruction , and a report by Sir Louis Blom @-@ Cooper recommended that he be prohibited from holding public office again .

Despite this decision , Bird returned to government on 15 May 1996 as Minister of Science , Technology and Communications , with a transfer to the Ministry of Trade , Industry and Business Development following the 1999 general election . In 2000 , he became Minister of Agriculture , Lands and Fisheries ; in this role , he negotiated an end to the Antiguan boycott of agricultural goods from Trinidad and Tobago . The ALP lost the 2004 general election and were replaced by a United Progressive Party government under Baldwin Spencer . Bird remained involved in politics , and along with six other senior ALP members was arrested in 2009 after an unauthorised May Day rally . The seven politicians were found guilty of public order offences , although the trial was delayed following a seizure suffered by Bird . He suffered two more seizures in 2010 , after the completion of the trial , and died on 31 March 2013 of heart failure .

= = Early career = =

Bird , the eldest son of Premier Vere Bird , first entered politics in 1981 when he served as an unelected security official during the general election . In the following election in 1984 , Bird and his brother Lester were both elected to the House of Representatives after the Antigua Labour Party , led by their father , took 16 of the 17 House seats . Bird himself was victorious over George Walter , leader of the Progressive Labour Movement and former Premier of Antigua and Barbuda , gaining 912 votes to Walter 's 358 . Upon election , with his father as Prime Minister , he was given the Ministry of Aviation , Public Information and Public Utilities . As Minister he visited Dominica at the head of a four @-@ person delegation that was dispatched to reach a deal on selling Antigua and Barbuda , a country lacking natural supplies , water . This business was concluded on 16 July 1984 , when it was announced that Dominica would sell Antigua and Barbuda 2 million gallons of water every 10 days , at a cost of around 3 US dollars per thousand gallons .

A cabinet reshuffle on 1 January 1987 saw Bird replaced by Robin Yearwood as Minister of Aviation , Public Information and Public Utilities and becoming instead Minister of Public Works and Communications . This followed controversy over Bird 's construction of a new airport , which the opposition charged was " grossly inflated " in cost ; retired Grenadian judge Sir Archibald Nedd was appointed to investigate the project and look for signs of wrongdoing . The independent investigation concluded that Bird had been incorrect in his funding of the project , particularly in granting the contract to build the runway to a company in which he was a shareholder . This scandal threatened to topple the government , with eight ministers , including Bird 's brother Lester , arguing that the Prime Minister should fire him .

This scandal led to the Labour Party splitting into two distinct factions , one led by the Prime Minister and one led by Lester Bird . Despite a general election not being due until 1989 , there was widespread speculation that it would be called early . Despite this , no election was called until 9

March 1989 , when the ALP were again victorious . With the Prime Minister delegating most of his work due to his advancing age , and instead spending time with his 27 @-@ year @-@ old companion , the election was seen as a struggle for power between Bird and his brother Lester . Although Lester had long been the frontrunner with most powers delegated to him , Bird , described in The Guardian as " a more single @-@ minded , figure , long resentful at being over @-@ shadowed by his sibling " , was still seen as a close competitor ? one with control of the nation 's army . After the election , both Bird brothers retained their respective positions in the Cabinet , but with the Prime Minister 's health getting worse , the struggle continued .

= = Scandal and firing = =

Bird 's career in the Cabinet was ended by scandal in 1990 after a shipment of Israeli weapons to Antigua and Barbuda were received and then diverted to the Medellín Cartel of Colombian drug dealers . The scandal broke after the Colombian government publicly complained about the use of Antigua and Barbuda as a trans @-@ shipment point ; a diplomatic note from the Israeli government revealed that the weapons had been shipped at the apparent express instruction of Bird , who had given assurances that they would not be passed on to any third parties . The guns were actually ordered as part of a conspiracy by Maurice Sarfati and Yair Klein , who forged documents showing that Sarfati was an authorised representative of the Antiguan government and that the purchase of weapons had been approved by the Antiguan Minister for National Security , though that position did not exist . The plan was to set up a mercenary training camp on Antigua in order to train and supply Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha 's Medellín forces . The Prime Minister repeatedly refused to open an investigation , despite demands by community leaders and members of his own government , saying that " conclusive evidence " was needed . An investigation was finally ordered on 25 April , with Bird asking to be temporarily relieved of his position until the inquiry concluded .

The inquiry was run by Sir Louis Blom @-@ Cooper ; Bird was formally fired as a Cabinet minister on 10 May , the day Blom @-@ Cooper arrived on Antigua . Blom @-@ Cooper began work on 4 June , with Bird retaining a team of six lawyers for his defence ; the inquiry , concluded in November , recommended banning Bird from holding public office for the rest of his life . The report was acted on and Bird was banned from becoming a minister again , although he retained his seat in the House . The report did not , however , recommend that Bird be forced to resign from the House or prosecuted criminally ; it was felt that the public ridicule the guilty parties had been subjected to was punishment enough . Bird was later re @-@ hired by the government , not as a Minister but as a special advisor to the Prime Minister on the subject of Public Utilities . After the Prime Minister finally retired and Lester became Antigua and Barbuda 's leader on 5 September 1995 , Bird was made Chairman of the ALP .

= = Reappointment = =

Despite Blom @-@ Cooper 's recommendations that Bird never be allowed to hold public office again and strong opposition disapproval , he was made Minister of Science , Technology and Communications in a cabinet reshuffle on 15 May 1996 . He soon found himself at odds with the Prime Minister ; after the government announced plans to evict Thomas Bufton and his wife from Guiana Island , where they had lived for 32 years , in order to build a tourist resort , Bird began serving as the Buftons ' lawyer . A dispute between Bufton and Bird led to a fight at Bird 's law offices , during which he was shot in the mouth and taken to intensive care on 16 December 1997 ; this followed Bird speaking up for the Buftons ' cause before voting in support of a motion to allow the police to evict them , using force if necessary . Bufton was later acquitted of attempted murder , but still evicted .

Following the ALP 's victory in the 1999 general election , Bird was again appointed to the Cabinet , this time as Minister of Trade , Industry and Business Development . By July 2000 , he had become Minister of Agriculture , Lands and Fisheries ; in this role , he held talks with fishermen over the dumping of dredged material in the ocean and signed a trade agreement with Trinidad and Tobago

to end a year @-@ long ban on the import of Trinidadian produce .

= = Time in opposition = =

The ALP government lost the 2004 election , with the United Progressive Party under Baldwin Spencer taking 14 of the 17 seats in House . A year later , Bird was ousted as Chairman of the ALP and replaced by Molwyn Joseph . Following an unauthorised ALP march on May Day in 2009 to protest the Spencer government , Bird and six other senior ALP figures , including the former Prime Minister , were arrested and charged with public order offences . They pleaded not guilty , but were convicted and fined . This followed severe delays after Bird suffered a seizure during the trial , his third since 2008 . Two more seizures occurred in 2010 , the second on 11 March 2010 in court , where Bird was defending an individual accused of grievous bodily harm .

On 31 March 2013 , Bird died of heart failure , a few days after being separately diagnosed with liver cancer . The Antiguan government confirmed that he was to receive a state funeral .

= = Personal life = =

Bird was the son of Vere Bird , the former Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda , who died on 28 June 1999 . His siblings include Lester , also a former Prime Minister , Ivor , who owns a radio station , Curtis , a lawyer , Roswald , a teacher , and Lisette . Ivor was later found guilty of attempted drug smuggling after being caught with a 25 @-@ pound bag of cocaine at Antigua 's main airport ; he was fined 75 @,@ 000 East Caribbean dollars . Bird 's son , Vere Bird III , was convicted of driving offences in 2006 .