

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?

- 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

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>



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

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



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OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

No.	Opposition Leader	Term of office	Party
1.	George Reid	May 1901 – 18.8.1904	Free Trade Party
2.	Chris Watson	18.8.1904 – 5.7.1905	Australian Labor Party
-	George Reid	7.7.1905 – 16.11.1908	Free Trade Party (1905-06) Anti-Socialist Party (1906-08)
3.	Joseph Cook	17.11.1908 – 26.5.1909	Anti-Socialist Party
4.	Alfred Deakin	26.5.1909 – 2.6.1909	Commonwealth Liberal Party
5.	Andrew Fisher	2.6.1909 – 29.4.1910	Australian Labor Party
-	Alfred Deakin	1.7.1910 – 20.1.1913	Commonwealth Liberal Party
-	Joseph Cook	20.1.1913 – 24.6.1913	Commonwealth Liberal Party
-	Andrew Fisher	8.7.1913 – 17.9.1914	Australian Labor Party
-	Joseph Cook	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.	James Scullin	26.4.1928 – 22.10.1929	Australian Labor Party
9.	John Latham	20.11.1929 – 7.5.1931	Nationalist Party
10.	Joseph Lyons	7.5.1931 – 6.1.1932	United Australia Party
-	James Scullin	7.1.1932 – 1.10.1935	Australian Labor Party
11.	John Curtin	1.10.1935 – 7.10.1941	Australian Labor Party
12.	Arthur Fadden	8.10.1941 – 23.9.1943	Country Party
13.	Robert Menzies	23.9.1943 – 19.12.1949	United Australia Party (1943-44) Liberal Party of Australia (1944-49)
14.	Ben Chifley	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.	Gough Whitlam	8.2.1967 – 5.12.1972	Australian Labor Party
18.	Billy Snedden	20.12.1972 – 21.3.1975	Liberal Party of Australia
19.	Malcolm Fraser	21.3.1975 – 11.11.1975	Liberal Party of Australia
-	Gough Whitlam	27.1.1976 – 22.12.1977	Australian Labor Party
20.	Bill Hayden	22.12.1977 – 3.2.1983	Australian Labor Party
21.	Bob Hawke	3.2.1983 – 11.3.1983	Australian Labor Party
22.	Andrew Peacock	11.3.1983 – 5.9.1985	Liberal Party of Australia
23.	John Howard	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
-	John Howard	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.	Kevin Rudd	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 – 18.9.2013	Liberal Party of Australia
33.	Bill Shorten	13.10.2013 -	Australian Labor Party

*Opposition Leaders with their name listed in **bold** were also Prime Minister before or after their period in opposition.*