

ARTHUR FADDEN

Rt Hon. Sir Arthur William Fadden was Prime Minister from 29 August 1941 to 7 October 1941.



Born: 3 April 1895 at Ingham, Queensland.

Died: 21 April 1973 at Brisbane, Queensland.

Arthur Fadden was born in Ingham, Queensland, on 13 April 1895. He died in Brisbane on 21 April 1973.

He married Ilma Thornber in 1916, and had three children.

He was the son of Richard Fadden, an officer in charge of the Mounted Police at Walkerston, near Mackay.

After primary education at Walkerston Public School he became 'billy boy' to a cane-cutting gang at 15. Later he joined the staff of Pleystowe sugar mill. At 18 he became Assistant Town Clerk of Mackay Town Council and was appointed Town Clerk in 1916. He studied accountancy, and from 1918 practised as an accountant in Townsville, where he later became an alderman on the city council.

In 1932 he was elected to Queensland state parliament, but lost his seat in the 1935 general election after serving one term.

He was elected to federal parliament as the Country Party candidate for the seat of Darling Downs in the by-election in 1936, replacing Sir Lyttleton Groom, who had died. He retained the seat through the next four general elections: in 1937, 1940, 1943 and 1946. After electoral redistribution he won the McPherson seat in the 1949 general election, and held it through the next three general elections, held in 1951, 1954 and 1955. He retired in 1958 at the expiration of the 22nd parliament.

He served as Minister Assisting the Treasurer and Minister for Supply and Development in the R.G. Menzies United Australia Party-Country Party coalition from March-August 1940, then as Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation from August-October 1940, and finally as Treasurer from October 1940-August 1941. He was a member of the War Cabinet and Economic Cabinet from 1940 to 1941.

Australia's entry into World War II; on 3 September 1939 the departure overseas of the 2nd AIF to North Africa and Malaya; military operations against Italian and German forces in North Africa and against Vichy French in the Middle East from 1940-41; participation of the RAAF in the Battle of Britain 1940 and of the RAN in Mediterranean operations from 1940-41.

The CP experienced a crisis in leadership in October 1940 after A.G. Cameron, stung by criticism from party members, quit leadership of the party. E.C.G. Page and John McEwen then contested the leadership, resulting in a tied vote. Fadden, now Deputy Leader, was appointed 'Acting Leader' to break the deadlock. He was confirmed as CP leader 21 March 1941, and retained the position for the next 17 years, until March 1958, shortly before retiring from parliament.

1939-41 was a period of instability in federal government, marked by conflict between the UAP and CP coalition partners, and by power struggles within each party, with the leadership of each changing several times. Taking advantage of coalition disunity during this period of national wartime crisis, Labor under J.J.A. Curtin took power and effectively united the nation for the war effort.

In January 1941 Fadden became Deputy Prime Minister for four months while R.G. Menzies was overseas. After increasing dissension within the UAP-CP coalition Menzies resigned as Prime Minister on 28 August 1941 in favour of Fadden. Menzies now became Deputy Prime Minister in an otherwise unchanged Cabinet, although he lost leadership of the UAP to W.M. Hughes.

Fadden served as Prime Minister from 29 August until 7 October 1941. He had lost support of two independents, who voted with Labor to defeat his government in the House, thus making way for J.J.A. Curtin's Labor government. Except for the periods in office of three caretaker Prime Ministers (E.C.G. Page, F.M. Forde and J. McEwen), Fadden's 40 days as Prime Minister was the shortest of any Prime Minister in the twentieth century.

On the return of R.G. Menzies as Prime Minister at the general election in December 1949, Fadden was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer in Menzies' Liberal-CP coalition government. He retained both positions for the next nine years, until he retired from parliament in December 1958 at the height of his political power. His position as CP leader was taken by John McEwen.

Fadden's second period as federal Treasurer 1949-58 was a period of rapid economic growth, expanding population, industrial development, rising levels of education, improved standards of living, low unemployment and the beginning of the 'long boom' of the immediate postwar decades.

Fadden was Acting Prime Minister on six occasions from 1950 to 1957 during Menzies' absences on overseas travel. At times he spent several months in the position. His period as Menzies' loyal Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer was typified by such close cooperation between their parties that to many observers the coalition appeared to function as a single party.

A notable raconteur, in retirement Fadden published his memoirs, 'They Called Me Artie' (1969). He also wrote an account of his short time as Prime Minister, 'Forty Days and Forty Nights', published in Australian Outlook in the year of his death.

In contrast to an earlier period of coalition disunity from 1939-41, the Menzies-Fadden (1949-51) and Menzies-McEwen (1958-66) coalitions were strongly united. Except for close votes at the 1954 and 1961 general elections, they appeared electorally unassailable. They took great advantage of Labor disunity following the 1955 Labor split, drawing electoral support from the Democratic Labor Party, Labor's anti-Communist breakaway faction. The Coalition successfully portrayed Labor to the electorate as being disunited,

'soft' on Communism, unreliable on defence and national security, wedded to impractical socialist ideals, committed to high-tax policies, and controlled by unelected 'faceless men' — political ideologues and trade union activists who remained outside the federal parliamentary party but exerted strong influence on the party's national executive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hadden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping tail.