

CONDOLENCE MOTION - THE LATE SIR EARLE PAGE

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies,  
in the House of Representatives,  
Tuesday, 20th February, 1962

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As Honourable Members know, Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page died on December 20, 1961.

He was born in 1880. He became a notable surgeon. He served in the first A.I.F. as a surgeon, in Egypt and France.

Urged on by an enthusiasm which marked the whole of his public life for national development, and particularly rural growth, he entered this Parliament in 1919 as the member for Cowper, a seat which he held continuously until the recent election.

He became leader of the Country Party in 1921, an office which he held until 1939. On February 9, 1923, he became associated, as Treasurer, with Mr. Bruce (as he then was) in the Bruce-Page Government, which held office until October 1929.

During this period, in 1924-25, he led an Australian delegation to the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to examine banking, electricity, and road and rail transport.

In 1923 and again in 1926 he was Acting Prime Minister.

In 1934 he entered the Lyons Government as Minister for Commerce, an office which he retained until April 1939, doing much significant work in the field of orderly marketing, and was Minister for Health from November 1937 to November 1938. He was the leader of Australian Ministerial trade delegations to London in 1936 and 1938.

He acted as Prime Minister in 1935 and 1937.

On the death of the Rt. Honourable J.A. Lyons, Sir Earle Page became Prime Minister from April 7 to April 26, 1939.

From October 1940 to October 1941 he was Minister for Commerce first in my own Government and then in the Fadden Government.

He was a member of the Australian War Cabinet from January to May 1941, and of the Economic and Industrial Committee of Cabinet from June to October of that year. In 1941-42 he represented Australia in the British War Cabinet.

He was a member of the Australian Advisory War Council from August 1942 to September 1943 and again from February 1944 to August 1945.

In December 1949 he became Minister for Health in my own Government, and retained that portfolio until 1956, when he expressed a wish to retire from Ministerial office.

From July to September 1951 he visited Canada and the United States of America to study problems of health administration.

In August-September 1953 he visited the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and attended a conference of the World Medical Association at the Hague.

He represented the Government at the inauguration of the Republic of Pakistan in March 1956.

Over a long period, from 1923 to 1934, and again from 1937 onwards, he was a member of the Standing Orders Committee.

His public career, even as stated in this summary form, was a very remarkable one. Few men have served Australia with such distinction in so many ways over so long a period of time.

But the record does not end there. It is a difficult task to select the outstanding features of the versatile work he did. But perhaps I might venture to refer briefly to three of a number of matters which should be on the record.

The first is that, conscious of the need for strengthening the rural economy, he was largely responsible for many special taxation and other provisions designed to encourage capital improvement on the land, and with it the essential improvement of efficiency and production.

The second is that, as Commonwealth Treasurer, he was a leader in the creation of the Financial Agreement and the Loan Council, each of which has had a permanent and far-reaching effect upon the financial relations of the Commonwealth and the States.

The third is that he was the prime author of and driving force behind the Commonwealth Medical and Health schemes which are now successfully operating in Australia.

His labours were recognised when he was made a Privy Councillor in 1929, a G.C.M.G. in 1938, and a Companion of Honour in 1942. But even more importantly he will be honoured and remembered with gratitude for his great contributions to the development of the Australian Nation, its institutions and its policies.

All Honourable Members, both new and old, and of whatever party, will join with me in expressing appreciation of his public service, and in expressing to the family our sense of recognition and of loss.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this House expresses its deep regret at the death on 20th December, 1961, of the Right Honourable Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page, G.C.M.G., C.H., a Member of this House from 1919 to 1961 and a former Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, places on record its appreciation of his long and meritorious public service and tenders its profound sympathy to his wife and family.

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