Francis Michael FORDE, PC

Prime Minister 6 July to 13 July 1945

- Frank Forde became the 15th prime minister after the death of John Curtin. He was prime minister for eight days.

- Member of the Australian Labor Party 1917-83.

- Member of the House of Representatives 1923-46 for seat of Capricornia (Qld). Assistant Minister for Trade and Customs 1929; Minister for Trade and Customs 1931; Minister for the Army 1941-46. Previously, Member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly 1917-22 for Rockhampton. Returned to Queensland Legislative Assembly representing Flinders 1955-57.

- On Curtin's death Forde was sworn in as our second caretaker prime minister. One week later a ballot of the federal Parliamentary Labor Party was held which made Ben Chifley prime minister while Forde resumed the role of deputy.

Main achievements (1940-1953)

- Forde was always the ideal deputy leader, staunch in his support, astute and hardworking. He was the 'wind beneath the wings' of prime ministers Scullin, Curtin and Chifley. Forde worked closely with all three leaders to rebuild a fractured party and present a single Labor voice.

- Forde was a member of the Australian War Council (1940-45) and in both the Curtin and Chifley governments.

- In 1944, Forde led the Australian delegation to the San Francisco Conference for International Co-operation which ultimately led to the signing of the United Nations Charter.

- Appointed Australian High Commissioner to Canada 1946-53.

Personal life

- Born on 18 July 1890 in Mitchell, Queensland, Irish Catholic immigrant parents. Died on 28 January 1983 in Brisbane.

- Educated at Toowoomba Christian Brothers College. Trained and worked as a teacher. Also a railway clerk, telegraphist at the Brisbane Post Office, telephone technician and post office assistant to the district engineer in Rockhampton.

- Married Veronica O'Reilly 25 February 1925 in Wagga Wagga, NSW.

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Life after politics

- Forde effectively bowed out of active politics at the age of 69 in 1957 when the Queensland Labor Party was soundly defeated at the polls.
- In 1964 Forde represented Australia at the funeral of General Douglas MacArthur with whom he had formed a close personal relationship during the war.
- In 1972 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam invited him to lunch in Canberra to celebrate the return to power of a federal Labor government.

Character

- Forde's biographer, David Gibson, wrote that *'during times of dissension and division within the Labor Party, Forde's propensity to put the party first sometimes conflicted with his own beliefs and judgment. In the long term, however, his faithfulness to principle rather than to personal ambition enabled him to ride out political storms with his integrity intact.' (*Source: David Andrew Gibson, 'The Right Hon. Francis M. Forde PC: His Life and Times', BA Honours Thesis, Department of History, University of Queensland, 1973)

Did you know?

- Forde, who died aged 92, was the second longest lived prime minister but his eight day term in office was the shortest.
- His daughter-in-law Leneen Forde was the first female governor of Queensland 1992-97.
- Forde was given a state funeral in Brisbane and after the service senator John Button persuaded the federal Labor leader Bill Hayden to stand aside and allow Bob Hawke to become leader of the Labor Party. Hawke became prime minister in 1983.

Sources

Brown, Elaine, 'Francis Michael Forde (6 July 1945 – 13 July 1945)', in Michelle Grattan (ed), *Australian Prime Ministers,* New Holland, Sydney, 2000, pp 239-245

National Archives of Australia: http://primeministers.naa.gov.au

Further Reading

Gibson, David Andrew, 'The Right Hon. Francis M. Forde PC: His Life and Times', BA Honours Thesis, Department of History, University of Queensland, 1973

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