

Joseph Benedict Chifley

Prime Minister of Australia 1945–49

Born in Bathurst (NSW) in 1885, Joseph Benedict (Ben) Chifley joined the state railways and in 1913 became a railway engine driver. With a developing interest in union affairs, the Australian Labor Party and local politics, he entered local government as an Abercrombie Shire Councillor during the 1920s. He entered federal politics as Member for Macquarie in 1928. A junior but well-regarded backbench member of the Scullin government (1929–31), he served as Minister for Defence from March 1931 until the downfall of the government later that year.

Chifley lost his seat in Labor's devastating loss in 1931 and did not re-enter parliament until the general election of 1940. When the Labor government of John Curtin came to power in 1941 Chifley was appointed Treasurer, a position he held until Curtin's death in 1945. He was also a member of the Advisory War Council and the War Cabinet.

Following Curtin's death on 5 July 1945, Chifley was elected leader of the Australian Labor Party and became Prime Minister on 13 July 1945. He remained Prime Minister and Treasurer until his government was defeated in the general election held in December 1949.

Ben Chifley died while still leader of the Labor Party in 1951.

Records relating to Ben Chifley held by the National Archives

The National Archives holds a collection of Chifley's personal records in Canberra. It is listed below. The National Archives also holds many records about Ben Chifley and the issues he was involved in during his years in government. A selection of these records, and of those held by the Australian War Memorial, is listed overleaf.

In the tables below, reference numbers direct you to the item or series in [RecordSearch](#), the National Archives database. There you can find more information. In many cases you can view entire digitised records. The information will appear in a new browser window.

Personal records of Ben Chifley

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Correspondence maintained as Director of Labour Supply and Regulation</u>	1940	M1414
<u>Correspondence relating to portfolio matters</u>	1943–49	M1457
<u>Correspondence to and from the Prime Minister and his parliamentary office</u>	1945–49	M1455
<u>General correspondence from various political organisations, and representative groups</u>	1945–49	M1458
<u>Subject files, single number system</u>	1945–49	M1459
<u>Copies of replies to correspondence, maintained by the Private Secretary</u>	1948–49	M1456

Other records relating to Ben Chifley – in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Governments – Curtin and Chifley Ministry</u>	1941–45	A461, AP4/1/3
<u>Press file – Political – Statements by Mr Chifley</u>	1943–47	A5954, 2210/1
<u>Housing Commission – Correspondence with Minister for Post War Reconstruction (JB Chifley)</u>	1944	A11676, HC1944/15
<u>27th Commonwealth Ministry – Chifley Ministry</u>	1945–46	A5447, 43
<u>Chifley Ministry</u>	1945–47	A461, BA4/1/3 Part 1
<u>Prime Ministers – Rt Hon. JB Chifley</u>	1945–50	A461, V4/1/12
<u>Economic outlook – Statement by JB Chifley, PM</u>	1946–47	A571, 1947/455
<u>28th Commonwealth Ministry – 2nd Chifley Ministry</u>	1946–49	A5447, 44
<u>Personal correspondence from Rt Hon. JB Chifley</u>	1946–51	A5954, 49/10
<u>Parliamentary and Ministerial press statements by the Prime Minister, Rt Hon. JB Chifley</u>	1947–48	A1068, PI47/5/2/2
<u>Legislative and administrative record of the Curtin and Chifley governments</u>	1948	A432, 1948/25
<u>Press statements by Mr Chifley</u>	1948–49	A5954, 2210/2
<u>Federal Elections, December 1949 – Speeches and statements by the Prime Minister (Mr JB Chifley, MP)</u>	1949	A5954, 2315/5
<u>Curtin and Chifley Led the Way (Newspaper Cuttings)</u>	1963–66	A5954, 1213/16

Other records relating to Ben Chifley – in Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Chifley, JB – Declaration of Peace – Sydney, 15 August 1945 (audio tape – ABC radio broadcast – Australian political)</u>	1945	C102, 1567786
<u>Evatt, Dr HV – Tribute to JB Chifley (audio tape)</u>	1951	C102, 1499273
<u>Tribute to JB Chifley (by: Menzies, Evatt, Rodgers, Spratt, Fadden) (audio tape – radio broadcast)</u>	1951	C102, 1499277