

## Sir Allen Fairhall, 1909-2006

*Ed: Much can be said about this great and noble geoist, but here's just a few excerpts from all the tributes from newspapers in Australia and New Zealand, starting with the Sydney Morning Herald on November 10 which headlined their obituary with "A fair bet for PM, but he declined" and followed with:*



Sir Allen Fairhall was perhaps a rare bird in Australian politics; he didn't have a burning ambition to become prime minister. Yet much political wisdom of the day had it that he, not John Gorton, would have been prime minister had he stood for the Liberal Party leadership after Harold Holt drowned in December 1967.

Fairhall, who had undergone major abdominal surgery a year earlier, declared that his health would not stand the additional burdens of the top job. He soldiered on as defence minister, though not very happily, under Gorton.

Government members uneasy over the prime minister's style viewed Fairhall's departure with some dismay, seeing the removal of the restraining influence of "sense and solidity", which he had provided in cabinet. In July 1968 that same steadying quality had led Businessmen for Democratic Government to place a newspaper advertisement seeking support for his nomination as prime minister. Fairhall dissociated himself from the advertisement.

So the man who said he was "not a political animal and never would be" got out of politics and devoted himself to business interests, family life in Newcastle, amateur radio broadcasting and deep-sea fishing from his holiday home at Shoal Bay.

In retirement he took up a range of company directorships. He was created a Knight of the Order of the British Empire in 1970. He also received an honorary doctor of science degree from Newcastle University, the James N. Kirby Medal from the Institute of Production Engineers, and was made a life member of the Wireless Institute of Australia.

Although Fairhall was passionate about radio, electronics and the promotion of Australian industry, it was, as Sir Paul Hasluck suggested, a "higher sense of duty that took him into politics". Fairhall said: "I never asked anything out of politics but the opportunity to render some kind of service to the people I represent."

*....and from Brisbane's Courier-Mail on November 9:*

He popped briefly back into the spotlight 30 years later as a supporter of resource rental, or land tax, first advanced by 19th century American economist Henry George.

This led him to savagely attack the Howard Government's proposed GST and to write a pamphlet declaring Australia's present tax system was so flawed that it should be abolished and the taxing of land was simple, fair and produced much better outcomes.

Oddly, land tax was one thing he had in common with Clyde Cameron, the Labor leftwinger and fellow 49er. The also shared longevity. With Fairhall's death, Cameron is the last surviving MP of that historic vintage.

*.... and from the New Zealand Herald on November 11:*

Fairhall was largely instrumental in curbing Holt's enthusiasm for a greatly increased Australian military role in Vietnam at the end of 1966. Fairhall, who was knighted in 1970, retired to Newcastle.

*..... and from Sydney's Daily Telegraph:*

After Mr. Holt's death in 1967, Mr. Fairhall declined to be nominated for the Prime Ministership, a position he might easily have won. Mr. Fairhall's retirement was a great loss not only to Parliament, but to the whole of Australia. He had shown qualities of drive and commonsense. He represented all that is best in politics and left his office with the knowledge that he had his country's thanks and respect.

Sir Allen had written a book (titled "*Towards a New Society*") on the implementation of the philosophies of 19th century American Henry George, exploring their application locally through a land value taxation system. Unfortunately, the implementation of Australia's GST somewhat restricted the impact that Sir Allen's book might have had upon our politicians.

*.... and finally, no tribute could be more fitting than from the last page of Henry George's Progress and Poverty, placed in Melbourne's Age:*

The Land Values Research Group mourns the loss of its longstanding patron. **"Strong soul and high endeavour, the world needs them now. Beauty still lies imprisoned, and iron wheels go over the good and true and beautiful that might spring from human lives."**