

Parliamentary Information Service



PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE
Te Ratonga Whare Pāremata

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Your request	Clarification of Prime Minister Dates and Records: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What date in 1996 was Bolger appointed Prime Minister.2. Clarification on Right of Centre political party.3. Clarification of start of political parties.4. Clarification of Prime Ministers who were members of the Legislative Council.

Summary

Thank you for your request. Please find responses to questions 1-4 of your request below. We are unable to supply the document you requested in question 5, as we do not hold a copy ourselves. The [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet](#) may be able to assist you further.

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Question 1: Rt Hon James Bolger

Question: Please clarify which date in December 1996 was Rt Hon James Bolger appointed Prime Minister? Note: The New Zealand Parliament website above says 12 December 1996, while the New Zealand Gazette says he was appointed on 16 December 1996.

Rt Hon James Bolger was appointed on 16 December 1996 as per the New Zealand Gazette. Thank you for drawing this to our attention. We have updated our website with the correct dates.

Parliamentary Information Service answers requests for information relating to all aspects of the New Zealand Parliament

Question 2: Right of Centre political party

Question: Could you explain what 'Right of Centre' means regarding Rt Hon James Bolger's political party? Note: See screenshot above. It would be helpful if this could be more specific and list the political parties being referred to.

In this instance, "Right of Centre" refers to a specific political party, rather than a group of parties who are politically right of centre. The Right of Centre party was a political party formed in September 1994 by Hobson MP Ross Meurant.¹ Meurant was elected as a National electorate MP at the 1993 election but later broke away from the National Party to form the Right of Centre party. He entered into a coalition agreement with Jim Bolger and the National Government which allowed him to keep his position as Parliamentary Under Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Forestry.² I have attached a copy of this agreement to the email. As such, the Right of Centre party is listed under the parties section of the [Governments in New Zealand since 1856](#) web page as it was one of the parties that formed the Government at the time.

In 1995 a second National MP, Trevor Rogers, defected to join the Right of Centre party.³ Prior to the 1996 General Election, Right of Centre changed its name to the Conservative Party.⁴ The Conservative Party did not win enough votes to enter Parliament at the 1996 election, nor did they win any electorate seats.⁵ In 1998 they merged with United NZ.⁶

Question 3: Political Parties

Question: Please confirm whether the footnote text 'There were no political parties before 1890' on both web pages (above) should be changed to 'There were no political parties before 1891'? Note: The first mention of a political party is for John Balance's Liberal Party in 1891. We would also appreciate any information explaining how this shift from the absence of political parties to the formation of the Liberal Party in 1891 came about. Any suggestions in terms of books or links would be most welcome.

Thank you for drawing our attention to this. It is true that there were no formal political parties before 1891. We have updated the date on our website.

The Liberal Party existed in faction/alliance form in 1890 in the lead up to the election of that year. They became a formally organised party in 1891, with the creation of their national party organisation, the New Zealand Liberal Federation.⁷ The following newspaper excerpts are taken from 1890 refer to the "Liberal party":

¹ Ruth Laugesen "Meurant move gives NZ taste of coalition" *The Dominion Post* (12 September 1994, page 1).

² "Coalition Agreement between the New Zealand National Party and the Right-of-Centre Party (8 September 1994)" Jonathon Boston et al (eds) *Electoral and Constitutional Change In New Zealand: An MMP Source Book* (Dunmore Press: Palmerston North, 1999), at 314-315.

³ Sarah Boyd "National MP defects to ROC" *The Evening Post* (8 June 1995, page 1).

⁴ Cathie Bell "Conservative Party new name for ROC" *The Dominion Post* (16 October 1995, page 2).

⁵ [1996 General Election - Official Results and Statistics, 1.1 Summary of overall results.](#)

⁶ "Conservative Party merges with United" *The Dominion Post* (16 April 1998, page 2).

⁷ David Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals: The Years of Power, 1891-1912* (Auckland University Press: Auckland, 1988) at 82-83; also "[A New Political Movement](#)" *The New Zealand Herald* (18 April 1891, page 5).

The principles and practice of the Liberal party, of which Mr Ballance is the acknowledged leader, are, first, to give every man who deserves it an opportunity of making for himself and family a home on the Crown lands of the colony; and, secondly, to give labour its proper place in the body politic, so that the people of New Zealand may enjoy true freedom, and build up for themselves and their descendants an honorable position among nations, and prove to the outside world that true liberty is the only safe foundation upon which to erect a lasting edifice.

"The Election" Wanganui Herald (5 December 1890, page 2)

MASTERTON ELECTION.
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To THE ELECTORS.

GENTLEMEN--
In response to the wishes of the Liberal Party I have decided to come forward as a candidate in their interests at the forthcoming general election, and it is my intention, in due course, to meet you in the principal centres of the electorate.

I am, &c,
A. W. HOGG.

"Page 3 Advertisements Column 3" Wairarapa Daily Times (21 November 1890, page 3)

Below are some resources on the establishment of political parties in New Zealand and the formation of the Liberal Party. The Te Ara story provided below also includes a list of further sources that you may wish to consult:

- Raymond Miller, *Party Politics in New Zealand* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005)
- David Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals: The Years of Power, 1891-1912* (Auckland University Press: Auckland, 1988)
- Jennifer Curtin and Raymond Miller, "Political parties", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/political-parties> (published 30 May 2012).

Question 4: Prime Ministers who were members of the Legislative Council

Question: Please clarify why these four pieces of information (footnotes 3-6) on the [Governments in New Zealand since 1856](#) web page mean in practice? We want to understand why the reference to the Legislative Council was important. For example, were these the only prime ministers that were also members of the Legislative Council. Please explain.

These footnotes indicate Prime Ministers who were not members of the House of Representatives during their leadership term, but instead governed from the Legislative Council. Appointments to the Legislative Council were made by the Governor at first of his own initiative, and from 1860 onwards on Ministerial advice.⁸ Meaning that these Prime Ministers were not elected officials at the time of leadership indicated by the footnotes. J. O. Wilson notes that “until 1950 [...] it was only a convention that members of the Executive Council should be members of the Legislature.”⁹

As well as the three Prime Ministers indicated on our website, there was one additional Prime Minister who governed from the Legislative Council: Francis Henry Dillon Bell, who served as Prime Minister from 14-30 May 1925.¹⁰ Bell was a close friend of William Massey, and was acting Prime Minister several times while Massey was overseas during the First World War.¹¹ After Massey's death, Bell became Prime Minister to give the Reform party time to choose a new leader.¹² He was not an elected member of the House of Representatives at this time. We will work to update the website to reflect this information.

Other former Prime Ministers did sit on the Legislative Council, but this was at a time separate to their term of government leadership. These are Henry Sewell, Alfred Domett, Harry Atkinson, John Hall, Robert Stout, William Hall-Jones, and Thomas Mackenzie.¹³

⁸ J. O. Wilson, *New Zealand Parliamentary Record: 1840-1984* (V. R. Ward, Government Printer: Wellington, 1985) at 145.

⁹ Wilson, *New Zealand Parliamentary Record*, at 54.

¹⁰ Wilson, *New Zealand Parliamentary Record*, at 78.

¹¹ Gavin McLean, “Francis Henry Dillon Bell” *NZ History - Manatū Taonga – Ministry for Culture and Heritage* (updated 8 November 2017), <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/sir-francis-bell>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Wilson, *New Zealand Parliamentary Record*, at 57-58, 148-167