



## John Christian Watson (1867-1941)

**Member for Bland (New South Wales) 1901-1906**

**Member for South Sydney (New South Wales) 1906-1910**

Chris Watson was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and spent his childhood in New Zealand, where he trained as a printing compositor. He migrated to Sydney, New South Wales, in 1886 where he worked for the *Australian Star*. Through activities in the Typographical Association of New South Wales, he became first a member and ultimately President of the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council; at the same time he worked to develop the nascent Labor Party of New South Wales. In 1894 Watson was elected as a Labor candidate to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly seat of Young.

Watson opposed the Constitution Bill at the referendums of 1898 and 1899, but accepted the outcome as the expressed will of the majority and thereafter was a supporter of federation.

In 1901 Watson was elected to the House of Representatives to represent Bland for the Labor Party at the first federal election. At a meeting of the Labor Party members in the first week of sitting of the Parliament, Watson, an ardent Protectionist, was elected leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, a position which he held until October 1907. From April to August 1904 Watson was Australia's first Labor Prime Minister, and possibly the leader of the first national labour government anywhere in the world.

Watson did not contest the election of 1910, but retired from Parliament to continue his work for the Labor Party and the union movement. In 1916 he was expelled from the Labor Party for supporting conscription for overseas military service. Watson was president of the newly formed National Roads Association (later NRMA) from 1920 until his death in 1941.

The electorate of Bland was named after William Bland (1789–1868), doctor and politician.