

SIR GEOFFREY PALMER

*Distinguished Fellow, Faculty of Law and New Zealand Centre for Public Law
Victoria University of Wellington*

Sir Geoffrey Palmer, in full Sir Geoffrey Winston Russell Palmer (born April 21, 1942, Nelson, N.Z.), New Zealand Labour Party leader and prime minister of New Zealand for a year in 1989-90.

Palmer was educated at the Victoria University of Wellington (B.A., LL.B.) and at the University of Chicago (U.S.). He worked as a solicitor for a Wellington law firm (1964-66) before turning to teaching, becoming a lecturer in political science at Victoria University of Wellington (1968-69), professor of law at the universities of Iowa and of Virginia (1969-73), and professor of English and New Zealand law at Victoria again (1974-79). After joining the New Zealand Labour Party in 1975, he was elected to Parliament in a by-election in 1979. He became personal assistant to the prime minister Wallace Edward Rowling and soon was deputy leader of the party (1983-89) and deputy prime minister and minister of justice and attorney general (1984-89).

When Prime Minister David Russell Lange, suffering serious setbacks in party loyalties and public opinion, resigned in August 1989, he nominated Palmer as his successor, and party leaders confirmed the choice. One year later, in September 1990, Palmer resigned for virtually the same reasons.

Palmer subsequently taught law at Victoria University and the University of Iowa, and in 1994 he cofounded a law firm. In 2005 he became president of New Zealand's Law Commission, a government-funded organization that reviewed areas of laws and then made recommendations for changes to Parliament. Palmer was knighted in 1991.