



James Callaghan **Labour Leader 1976 - 1980**

James Callaghan was born on 27 March 1912 and for the most part was brought up by his mother (his father died when he was young). There was no Oxbridge education here, but after leaving school he took – and passed – the entrance examination for the civil service.

By 1929 at the age of 17, Callaghan was working for the Inland Revenue and was instrumental in establishing the Association of Tax Officers for those in his profession. A couple of years later he had joined the local branch of the Labour Party. He married Audrey Elizabeth Moulton in 1938.

War saw a young Callaghan becoming an officer in the Royal Navy, being promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Whilst on leave he was selected as a Parliamentary Candidate for Cardiff South where he defeated the incumbent Conservative at the 1945 election. He was to represent this constituency for 42 years.

He was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Transport in 1947 under Attlee's Government, moving to Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty in 1950. While the Labour Party was out of government he was elected to the shadow cabinet on each occasion until Labour found itself back in power in 1964.

The 1960's saw Callaghan as chancellor in Wilson's Labour Government and after a good start found himself with an economy in turmoil. A run on the Pound and the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 amongst other factors led to the need to devalue the currency. On Wednesday 15 November the historic decision was taken to commit the government to devaluation, resulting in Callaghan offering his resignation as Chancellor. The result was that he and Roy Jenkins (Home Secretary) swapped posts, so becoming new Home Secretary on 30 November 1967. It was in this role that he took the decision to send in the Army to support the police in Northern Ireland.

He was instrumental in developing – while labour was once again out of office following defeat at the 1970 General Election - the idea of the Social Contract between the Party and Trade Unions. 1974 saw two General Elections, the October one producing a Labour majority of 3 in the House Of Commons. Callaghan returned as Foreign Secretary and took charge of negotiating terms for entry into the EEC. By 1976 Wilson had resigned as leader and succeeded by Callaghan as leader of the Party and Prime Minister.

His time as Prime Minister was not a happy one in that there was no majority in parliament – instigating the Lib-Lab Pact. On top of this was an economy stagnating, high unemployment, Inflation and a balance of payments deficit. Also the social contract had begun to break apart as attempts were made to maintain wage restraint, leading to the infamous “winter of discontent”. Failure in the referendum on devolution for Scotland was followed by a motion of no confidence on 28th March 1979, which was lost by one vote.

1979 saw the election of Margaret Thatcher and Labour once again ended up in opposition. Callaghan did not resign straight away but only did so in October 1980, shortly after Party Conference had voted for a new system of election, but before it came into effect – thereby ensuring his successor would be elected by MPs only. He was succeeded by Michael Foot.

He remained in Parliament and in 1983 became father of the House of Commons before standing down at the 1987 Election – after which he became Baron Callaghan of Cardiff.

He died at his on 26 March 2005, 11 days after the death of his wife and one day before his 93rd birthday.