



John Smith
Labour Leader 1992 - 1994

John Smith, son of a Headteacher, was born on 13th September 1938 in the village of Dalmally in Argyll and Bute. He joined the Labour Party in 1956 at the age of 18 before studying at the University of Glasgow to be a solicitor.

Hi unsuccessfully stood as the Labour candidate at a by-election for the East Fife Constituency and also at the 1964 General Election (gaining little over 25% of the vote on each occasion). However, he was more successful standing for the North Lanarkshire constituency and entered Parliament following the 1970 General Election.

His early time in parliament he was linked to the former Gaitskell right of the party – Jenkins, Williams, Owen etc all of whom would eventually sit in Callaghan’s cabinet.

In October 1974, Smith took a position in Wilson’s Government as Under-Secretary of State for Energy, rising to the position of minister a year later, working closely with Michael Foot. His role included guiding the devolution proposals for Scotland and Wales through Parliament. His reward was promotion by Callaghan to Secretary of State for Trade and youngest member of his cabinet.

In opposition following the 1979 election he became shadow Energy Secretary, then in 1984 he became shadow Secretary for Trade & Industry. Following the 1987 election he was appointed Shadow Chancellor by Neil Kinnock. In October 1988 he suffered a heart attack, but made a full recovery modifying his diet and lifestyle and began hill walking. In 1986 he was named parliamentarian of the year – an accolade he would receive again in 1989.

The 1992 General Election the Conservatives campaign centered on “Labour’s Tax Bombshell” and a shadow budget that included a rise in top rate of income tax from 40p to 50p. Much of the blame for the defeat at this election was therefore placed on Smith. However, this did not stop him winning the Labour Leadership contest (he won convincingly against Brian Gould) following Kinnocks resignation.

September 1992, he made his maiden speech as leader of the Opposition, savaging John Major at the dispatch box. These performances continued into 1993, with the Conservatives being ridiculed at every opportunity. This was followed by increasing success in local elections and parliamentary by-elections. By May 1994 the conservatives were reeling over their worst local election results in over 30 years and a consistent Labour Party lead in the polls of over 20 points. Success at the next General Election looked increasingly a probable rather than possible outcome.

This was something that Smith would never see as on the morning of 12th May 1994 he suffered a second, massive, heart attack for which he was not to recover. Smith was later buried in a private family funeral on the island of Iona.