



Neil Kinnock **Labour Leader 1983 - 1992**

Born in 1942, Neil Kinnock was the son of a coal miner, spending much of his education (including his degree in 1965) within his homeland of Wales. It was while he was still at school – the age of 15 – that he joined the Labour Party. He married Glynis (who he had met while at university) in 1967. Though coming from a Welsh background he strongly opposed devolution for Wales.

In June 1969 he won a close selection contest to stand as the Labour Party candidate in the Bedwellty Constituency, successfully entering Parliament at the 1970 General Election where he quickly became involved with the Tribune group of Labour MP's. He was successful in becoming a member of the National Executive Committee in 1978 as part of this left wing platform.

Callaghan, after the election defeat in 1979 appointed Kinnock to the shadow cabinet as education spokesman. It was as a member of the shadow cabinet that Kinnock again stood out by voting against plans for the modernising Britain's nuclear deterrent, which the leadership had agreed to support. Kinnock supported Foot as leader in 1980 and continued as shadow education spokesman during his leadership. Following the resignation of Foot after the 1983 General Election, Kinnock became Leader – the first leader to be elected by a new electoral college – with over 2/3rds of the vote.

His early years as leader proved difficult as almost immediately the country was plunged into a national strike by the NUM. He also found himself having to deal with perceived extremism in the form of Militant Tendency. At the 1985 Labour Party Conference he took both on and was widely reported as successful in the media, but this also resulted in the left feeling betrayed by him.

Kinnock began attempts to rebrand the Party – the new Rose logo was introduced - relying increasingly on his then Director of Communications, Peter Mandelson. However, the party entered the 1987 General Election still in a severely weakened state and the threat from the SDP Liberal Alliance (who had recently won a by-election) would just not go away. Labour fought what has been seen as one of the most professional campaigns in the history of the Party, the success being not victory (there was only a net gain of 20 seats), but firmly re-establishing the party as the main opposition to the Conservatives.

After the election Kinnock began the drive to change long standing party policy by introducing a series of policy reviews. A challenge by Tony Benn for leader in 1988 helped to secure his position and claim he had endorsement for change. In Parliament, the introduction of the "Poll Tax" resulted in opinion polls showing a constant Labour lead in double figures.

The reaction of the Conservatives was to oust Mrs. Thatcher and replace her with John Major as Prime Minister. The huge opinion poll lead evaporated and Kinnock entered the 1992 election unsure of victory, with a hung parliament seen as a real possibility. The Conservatives won with a majority of 21 seats.

Kinnock announced his resignation as Labour Party leader on 13 April 1992, ending eight and a half years in the role - making him the longest serving opposition leader in British political history. John Smith, previously Shadow Chancellor, was his successor as party leader.

In 1994 Kinnock resigned as an MP to take up a position as a European Commissioner, rising to become vice president of the commission under Romano Prodi until 2004. He became a member of the House of Lords in January 2005, becoming Baron Kinnock of Bedwellty.

Recently he was an enthusiastic supporter of Ed Miliband's successful 2010 campaign to lead the Labour Party.