



**Michael Foot**  
**Labour Leader 1980 - 1983**

Michael Foot was born in Plymouth on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1913, son of a Solicitor and Liberal MP Isaac Foot. He was educated at Oxford and upon graduating he took up a job in Liverpool. It is said that the poverty he witnessed at this time was the driving force behind him joining the Labour Party in 1935. He stood for the Labour Party at the 1935 General Election in the seat of Monmouth, a Conservative stronghold, making little impact.

By 1937 Foot was working as a journalist for Tribune and supported the campaign to unite the parties of the left against fascism. He was later hired by Lord Beaverbrook as a writer on the Evening Standard, becoming editor in 1942 and in 1945 joined the Daily Herald.

It was in 1945 that Foot was finally successful in entering Parliament, winning the Plymouth Devonport seat. However he lost this in the 1955 election and failed to regain it in 1959. It was only as the Labour candidate in a by-election in Ebbw Vale, following the death of Aneurin Bevan, that he was successful in re-entering Parliament.

It was not long before he found himself having the labour whip withdrawn over his failure to support the labour Leadership in the division lobbies. He was effectively barred from the Parliamentary Party from 1961 to 1963 until after Wilson was elected Leader.

A year later Wilson offered foot a position in his first Government but he turned it down. Instead he preferred to lead the left from the back benches and take a leading role in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). He allied himself with supporters of Enoch Powell to defeat plans to reform the House of Lords, preferring abolition instead.

When, in 1974, Labour returned to office once again under Harold Wilson, Foot this time accepted a position in Government, becoming Secretary of State for Employment and was instrumental in developing the 1974 Health & Safety at Work Act and the establishment of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

When Wilson resigned as Leader in 1976 Foot stood for leader but was convincingly defeated by Callaghan. He did however secure the Deputy Leadership (against Shirley Williams), his main role over the following three years being to ensure the survival of Labour's minority Government.

Following defeat in 1979 Callaghan initially clung onto the Leadership and was not replaced until November 1980 when Foot beat Denis Healey by 139 votes to 129 in a final ballot of the PLP. At the time of his election as Leader the Party had a significant lead in the Polls over Margaret Thatcher, but what followed resulted in the Party being out of power for a generation.

Not for the first time in the history of the Labour Party there was a significant split – probably the gravest since 1931 – where the so called “Gang of Four” (Jenkins, Williams, Owen, Rogers) broke away to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Twenty eight Labour MP's eventually joined the breakaway movement – largely a collection of the former Gaiskellite right wing of the Party.

The 1983 General Election was a disaster for the Labour Party. Foot was faced with an alliance between the Liberals and SDP, together with a rejuvenated Conservative Party following the successful Falklands War. He was ridiculed by the Murdoch media regarding his age and mannerisms and the election was not helped by the manifesto, which was socialist in tone and attacked from all quarters, including within the Party.

Foot resigned days after the election and was succeeded as leader on in October 1983 by Neil Kinnock.

Foot took a back seat in Labour politics after 1983 and retired from the House of Commons at the 1992 General election. He continued to be active in CND and wrote a number of biographies before his death 3 March 2010 at the age of 96.