



Hilary Benn, MP



Leeds Central
(Majority 10,645)

Profile

Born 26th November, 1953
Education Holland Park Comprehensive School
Sussex University
Married Rosalind Rety (1973) deceased
Sally Christina Clark (1982)
3 sons, 1 daughter

Political

1979 – 1999 Councillor, London Borough of Ealing
1983 Contested Ealing North in General Election
1987 Contested Ealing North in General Election
1986 – 1990 Deputy Leader, London Borough of Ealing
1986 – 1990 Chair, Education Committee, London Borough of Ealing
1997 – 1999 Special Adviser to David Blunkett as Secretary of state for Education and Employment
1999 – 2001 Member, Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee
1999 Elected to Parliament as Member for Leeds Central
2001 – 2002 Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Department
2002 – 2003 Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
2003 Minister of State, Department for International Development
2003 Privy Councillor
2003 -2007 Secretary of State, Department for International Development
2007 - 2010 Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2010 – 2011 Shadow Leader of the House of Commons
2011 - Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Other

1975 – 1997 Research Officer and latterly Head of Policy and Communications, MSF
1986 – 1990 Member, Association of metropolitan Authorities Education Committee
1989 – 1990 Chair, Association of London Authorities Education Committee

Political Interest

International development, Home Affairs, Education, Employment, Trade Unions, Environment, urban Policy.

Publications

Contributor: Beyond 2002: Long-term policies for Labour, Profile Books, 1999
The Forces of Conservatism, IPPR, 1999
Men who made Labour, Routledge, 2006

Biography

The latest in a famous dynasty, Hilary Benn entered the Cabinet in 2003, thirty-seven years after his father, and nearly three-quarters of a century after his grandfather, the first Viscount Stansgate, joined Ramsay MacDonald's Cabinet as Secretary of State for India.

He represents the fourth generation of Benns to sit in the House of Commons, but he had first to dispose of some family political associations, describing himself as "a Benn but not a Bennite". He also denies being either a Blairite or a Brownite.

Elected in 1999, he was unexpectedly selected from a shortlist of four, reportedly because of his skilful oratory to fight the safe Labour seat of Leeds Central after the sudden death of the Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett. He had no local connections.

He was elected on a turnout of less than 20 per cent, the lowest in a by-election in living memory, with a majority reduced to just over a tenth of the 20,000 enjoyed by Fatchett in 1997. Voting took place on the day of the European elections, which provoked widespread apathy. Big majorities returned in 2001 and 2005, though the turnout was still little more than 40 per cent.

Though now very much New Labour, he was identified with the left when he was deputy leader of Ealing Council in the 1980s. He had the endorsement of the left-wing London Labour Briefing when he fought Ealing North in 1987. The Times said his political inheritance and personal record counted against him. He supported a teachers' strike and went on CND marches.

He was promoted to Cabinet only four years after becoming an MP. He joined the Government as junior Minister to Clare Short at the Department for International Development in June 2001,

exactly two years after entering the House of Commons, and at the same time as his father Tony retired from Parliament.

In 2002 he was moved to a higher-profile department, as Prisons Minister at the Home Office. Another year on, in May 2003, he returned to International Development, promoted to Minister of State as a result of the resignation of his former boss Clare Short. As deputy to the new Secretary of State Baroness Amos, he became the department's principal spokesman in the Commons.

Five months later Lady Amos was appointed Leader of the House of Lords, and Benn succeeded her as Secretary of State. In 2005 he was incorrectly reported as having turned down Tony Blair's offer of a move to be Work and Pensions Secretary after David Blunkett's second resignation.

But this was not the summit of his ambitions: in 2006 he entered the already crowded race to succeed John Prescott as Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. It was the job his father had narrowly failed to win in a bitter battle with Denis Healey in 1981, a battle that was said to be for the soul of the Labour Party.

He was eliminated in the third round of voting, having reached a total of 22.33%.

When Labour lost the 2010 general election he was appointed Shadow Leader of the House after receiving 128 votes in the Shadow Cabinet elections.

In October of 2011, Benn was appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Background

He was born the Hon. Hilary Benn in 1953, grandson of the first Viscount Stansgate. (His father renounced his peerage for life in 1963). Privately educated until the age of ten, he was then moved to the smart socialists' school of choice, Holland Park Comprehensive, and read Russian and East European studies at Sussex University.

A member of the Labour Party since the age of sixteen, he worked for the MSF union for twenty-two years as research officer and latterly as head of policy and communications.

A family man aged forty-five at the time of his election, he is serious, modest, eloquent, warm, thoughtful and charming, with a faintly clerical or professorial air. Reporters noted a similarity of voice and mannerisms to his father, a deep commitment to education, and knowledge of political history.

He is passionate about relieving poverty at home and abroad, though some have found him uncontroversial to the point of banality.

His father described him as: "his own man, very hard-working, well respected". He once gave him a piece of advice passed down from his grandfather: "Never wrestle with a chimney sweep."

Hilary explained: "Your political opponents may be down in the gutter, but you have nothing to gain by joining them."

Before joining the Government he served on the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and the Regions. He spoke about the postponement of local elections due to the foot-and-mouth crisis and the social fund.

His name has caused confusion. The first male holder of his office since 1987, he was amused to be greeted on a trip to Nigeria in 2004 with a banner welcoming "Hillary Ben", on the occasion of "her" visit.

He lists his hobbies as watching sport and gardening. He is part owner of a small nature reserve in Essex.

His first wife died from cancer at the age of twenty-six. He remarried in 1982 and he and his wife Sally have three sons and a daughter, just like his father.

Contact details

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