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Condolence book for John Prescott

Nov-Dec 2024

Accession number: 25/10

Historical Background/Biographical Background: John Leslie Prescott was born on 31 May 1938 in Prestatyn, Wales. When he was 4 his family relocated to Brinsworth in West Yorkshire, where he attended primary school, and then to Upton-by-Chester where he completed his schooling in nearby Ellesmere Port. After leaving school he joined the Merchant Navy, in the service of Cunard, as a steward and waiter. By joining the Merchant Navy he avoided National Service and during this time became a left-wing union activist. In 1961 he married Pauline Tilston and later went on to study at Ruskin College in Oxford, from which he gained a diploma in economics and politics in 1965. He continued his studies, and in 1968 graduated with a BSc in economics and economic history from the University of Hull.

Following his graduation he became a full time official of the National Union of Seamen before he was elected as MP for Hull East in 1970. A previous attempt to become MP for Southport in 1966 had been unsuccessful. Between 1975 and 1979 Prescott served as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and until the Labour leadership contest of 1994, held various posts in Labour's Shadow Cabinet. In the party leadership election, Prescott stood for both leader and deputy leader. Prescott was elected deputy leader with Tony Blair as the head of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party's success in the 1997 General Election led to the formation of a Labour Government in which Prescott was made Deputy Prime Minister and given the responsibility of leading the newly established Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions. As the title of Deputy Prime Minister is largely honorific and the position draws no salary, Prescott drew his salary as Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions until 2001, when this 'super department' was broken up. Following this reorganisation Prescott was given the title of First Secretary of State and an Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established to administer those areas over which he was still responsible.

During his time in Cabinet, Prescott was involved in several important policy initiatives and changes, for instance, Prescott acted as the leader of the UK delegation for the successful negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol. However, his idea to introduce elected regional assemblies proved unpopular and was later shelved whilst he was also publicly outspoken about his disagreement with particular aspects of Blair's plans for the education system. Despite this, he remained a key figure in 'New Labour', as a representative of 'old Labour' interests.

In 2006, after revelations about Prescott's private life and a generally poor performance in the local elections for Labour, there was a cabinet reshuffle with Prescott's departmental responsibilities being allocated to Ruth Kelly. Prescott continued as Deputy Prime Minister and was also appointed special envoy to the Far East. The same year Prescott announced that he would step down as Deputy Leader when Blair left Downing Street. True to his word within half an hour of Tony Blair's resignation in 2007, Prescott also resigned.

Despite his resignation and his retirement from the House of Commons, Prescott remained a significant political figure. He became the main UK representative in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and stated that he intended to use his position to forward the campaign against slave labour. In 2010 he was awarded a life peerage and entered the House of Lords on 8 July that year as Baron Prescott, of Kingston upon Hull in the County of

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East Yorkshire. In 2012 Lord Prescott was the Labour candidate for the post of Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside Police, ultimately losing to the Conservative Matthew Grove. In July 2013 Lord Prescott resigned from the Privy Council as a protest against delays to the introduction of press regulations, and on 21 February 2015 he was created a Special Advisor to the then Labour Leader, Ed Miliband.

Lord Prescott was a director of Super League rugby league club Hull Kingston Rovers. He also made numerous appearances on television and in the media after his retirement from the House of Commons. He died on 20 November 2024 aged 86 and his funeral took place at Hull Minster on 30 January 2025.

Custodial history: Transferred from the Mayor's Office, Guildhall in February 2025

Description: Messages of condolence on the death of John Prescott

Extent: 0.04 lm

Access conditions: Access will be granted to any accredited reader