

Definition: **Heseltine, Michael (Ray Dibdin) Baron** from *Dictionary of British History*

(1933-) A Conservative MP (1966-2001), whose cabinet posts included deputy prime minister (1995-97). As secretary of state for defence (1983-86), he resigned over the Westland affair (concerning the future of a British helicopter company). Increasingly a critic of Margaret Thatcher, in Nov 1990 he made an unsuccessful attempt to become party leader, which forced her to resign. He subsequently held office as secretary of state for the environment (1990-92) and for trade and industry (1992-95).

Summary Article: **Heseltine, Michael Ray Dibdin**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

British Conservative politician, defence secretary 1983–86 and deputy prime minister 1995–97. A charismatic speaker and strong supporter of closer British integration within the European Union, he became a fierce backbench critic of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher from 1986 and challenged her for the party's leadership in 1990. Under Thatcher's successor as prime minister, John Major, Heseltine served as secretary of state for the environment 1990–92, for trade and industry 1992–95, and as deputy prime minister 1995–97.

The day before Heseltine announced his challenge for the party leadership, deputy prime minister Geoffrey Howe had attacked Thatcher's stance on Europe during his vitriolic resignation speech in the House of Commons. Heseltine supported closer ties with Europe and asserted that he had a better chance of leading the Conservative Party to victory at the next election. He also promised a review of the poll tax. On the first ballot of the leadership contest Thatcher narrowly failed to gain the 15% majority required for re-election and two days later announced her resignation as party leader. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and Chancellor of the Exchequer John Major then joined the contest against Heseltine. On election day, 27 November 1990, with Major two votes short of an absolute majority, both Hurd and Heseltine conceded defeat. On 28 November Heseltine rejoined the cabinet as secretary of state for the environment. In April 1991 he announced a replacement for the unpopular poll tax.

After the 1992 general election, Heseltine was made secretary for trade and industry. His announcement of a drastic pit-closure programme in October 1992 met with widespread opposition. Forced to bow to public pressure, he agreed, together with prime minister John Major, to instigate an inquiry into the country's future energy needs, which resulted in 12 of the 31 coal mines destined for closure being temporarily reprieved.

In 1994 his proposals for privatization of the Post Office were rejected. He was appointed deputy prime minister in the cabinet reshuffle that followed the July 1995 snap leadership election, which was called, but only narrowly won, by prime minister John Major.

Heseltine was born in Swansea, south Wales, and was educated at Shrewsbury School and Oxford University. He founded a successful publishing company in the 1960s, before being elected to Parliament on 1966, representing Tavistock (to 1974) and Henley (1974–2001). He was environment secretary 1979–83, under Prime Minister Thatcher, and then succeeded John Nott as minister of defence until January 1986, when he resigned over the Westland affair, involving disagreements

between himself and Thatcher over rescue bids for an ailing helicopter manufacturer. He became a major critic of Margaret Thatcher. In November 1990, Heseltine's challenge to Thatcher's leadership of the party brought about her resignation. After the Conservatives' defeat in 1997, he announced that he would not contest the party's vacant leadership because of heart problems, but continued to make known his views on European issues, supporting a campaign for the UK to join the European Single Currency. He retired from parliament in 2001 and was given a life peerage as Baron Heseltine of Thenford in the County of Northamptonshire.

quotations

Heseltine, Michael Ray Dibdin

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Heseltine, Michael Ray Dibdin. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/heseltine_michael_1933



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