

# Major victorious in Britain



LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister John Major, who waged a come-from-behind, soapbox campaign to extend 13 years of Conservative Party government, claimed victory Friday morning after a nerve-wracking election count.

"We've won tonight a magnificent victory, a victory that many people thought was beyond our grasp." Major told cheering supporters at party headquarters.

With 613 of the 651 districts counted, the Conservatives had won 321 seats — five short of absolute victory — compared to Labor's 269 and 16 for the Liberal Democrats.

Although Labor had yet to concede, computer analysis showed the Conservatives were assured of a majority.

"I'm very pleased. Everything we have done in the last 13 years will now be conserved and built on in the future," former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher exulted.

Labor's share of the vote was up about five points since 1987, but its gains came almost entirely at the expense of the Liberal Democrats. Though Labor didn't dent the Conservative popular vote, it did erode the Tory majority in the House of Commons.

The British Broadcasting Corp. predicted the Conservatives would win 334 seats, with 273 for Labor and 19

for the Liberal Democrats. Independent Television News gave the Conservatives 335 seats, Labor 271 and Liberal Democrats 21.

The rest of the seats were won by smaller parties.

Labor Party officials appeared dazed.

"I simply don't know how the British mind and the British psyche works to produce these results," said Roy Hattersley, deputy to Labor leader Neil Kinnock, as it became clear in the early hours that the Tories had achieved a fourth successive term.

The Conservatives triumphed over a lingering recession and unemployment of 9.4 percent, a disastrous experiment in local taxation in Mrs. Thatcher's last term and a shaky start to the campaign.

Labor, encouraged by a small but consistent edge in opinion polls, ran a cautious, front-runner's campaign, while Major took to the streets in last days of the campaign with a soapbox and bullhorn.

Conservatives were even holding on to seats in Scotland, where the pro-independence Scottish National Party had been hoping for big gains.

"This is very, very bad news for Labor," said BBC analyst Peter Kellner. "It is also rotten news for the pollsters... they blew it."

The combined verdict of the last opinion polls this week showed Labor about a

point ahead, though the difference was well within the margin of error.

Labor did cut into the Tories' 369-seat majority in the old parliament. The Conservative campaign director, party chairman Chris Patten, was among prominent Tories who lost their seats in parliament.

Glenda Jackson, winner of two Academy Awards, triumphed for Labor in the north London district of Hampstead and Highgate.

The Conservatives held onto Mrs. Thatcher's seat in north London.

In bright sunshine that bathed most of the nation, about 76 percent of the 43.6 million voters in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland cast ballots.

Major, 49, succeeded Thatcher as prime minister 16 months ago after she lost support within the Conservatives over the party's direction.

Kinnock, 50, a coal miner's son, had moved the Labor Party from the far left to the center in eight years as Britain's longest-serving opposition leader.

The Liberal Democrats, the third-largest party, had set a stiff price for joining in any coalition government.

The party's leader, Paddy Ashdown, demanded a change in the electoral system from the current winner-take-all in separate districts to a system of allocating seats based on a party's share of the national vote.

# Arafat leaves hospital, PLO meeting put off

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — The PLO leadership decided Thursday to postpone a key meeting on participation in the Middle East peace talks until Yasser Arafat recovers from injuries suffered in a plane crash in the Libyan desert.

The 62-year-old PLO chief flew to Tripoli on Thursday, a day after he was rescued and taken to a hospital in Misratah, 120 miles east of the Libyan capital.

Libyan TV showed Arafat walking in Tripoli airport. He was wearing his traditional green fatigues and a military cap and appeared to be fit. Doctors at Salah el-Din Hospital said he was fine.

"My health is good," Arafat told Radio Monte Carlo in a telephone interview from Tripoli. "I ask God to give me the possibility of praying one day in Jerusalem."

Libya's official JANA news agency quoted Arafat as saying Bedouins helped searchers pinpoint the wreckage of his plane in southern Libya. Libyan rescuers arrived Wednesday morning 12 hours after the plane plowed into a dune during a sandstorm.

Arafat said the cockpit crew — the captain, co-pilot and flight engineer — died in the crash-landing of the Algerian-registered, Soviet-built AN-26 and five others aboard were hurt.

A total of 11 people were aboard. Initial reports had up to 19 aboard.

In Tunisia, Tunisia — where the

Palestine Liberation Organization has its headquarters — Arafat adviser Bassam Abu Sharif said Arafat "has several mild bruises. There's also a cut near the right eye, and another on the head."

On Thursday night, Arafat was said to be at a guest house in Tripoli. Journalists who went there were turned away. Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi visited Arafat on Wednesday night at a hospital in Misratah, east of Tripoli.

In a telephone interview with The Associated Press in Nicosia, Cyprus, Abu Sharif said Arafat was advised to "rest and take it easy for a few days." He said Arafat would return to Tunis "soon" and then decide on a new date for the PLO's Central Council session.

The council is an 80-member policy-making body that acts as a liaison between the PLO's ruling Executive Committee and a 450-seat parliament, the Palestine National Council.

Abdel-Hamid as-Sayeh, the parliament chairman who presides over Central Council sessions, recessed the meeting Thursday "until further notice" after briefing members on Arafat's accident, PLO officials told reporters in Tunis.

Arafat was expected to come under pressure to suspend Palestinian participation in the U.S.-sponsored Arab-Israeli peace talks. Twenty-nine members have signed a petition calling for a boycott of the next round of peace talks in Washington on April 27 unless the PLO is given a prominent role.

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