

COLEMAN, DONALD RICHARD (1925-1991), Labour politician

Name: Donald Richard Coleman
Date of birth: 1925
Date of death: 1991
Gender: Male
Occupation: Labour politician
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: John Graham Jones

He was born at Barry on 19 September 1925, the son of Albert Archer Coleman, a coalminer, and his wife, Winifred Marguerite Coleman. His father was unemployed for most of the inter-war period and eventually found work only in 1939. This bitter experience instilled in his son a life-long hatred of unemployment. He was educated at Cadoxton Boys School, Barry and Cardiff Technical College (as a self-confessed late developer, he was not a great success at either) and, as a mature student, at the University College of Wales, Swansea (1950-54). He had joined the Labour Party as a young man in November 1948 and also became a member of the Co-operative Party in 1955. He held a number of technical positions at various laboratories at Cardiff and Swansea before securing an appointment in 1954 as metallurgist to the Research Department of the Steel Company of Wales Ltd, Abbey Works, Port Talbot, in which position he remained until his election to parliament. He was a member of the Iron and Steel Trades' Confederation. He had also joined the Association of Scientific Workers in 1948 and BISAKTA in 1955.

Coleman stood as a Labour candidate for the Swansea Borough Council in 1960 and was elected Labour MP for the Neath division in the general election of October 1964. At the time it was a predominantly coal-mining constituency where the nominee of the NUM was invariably favourite at the selection conference. Coleman, against all the odds, was chosen at the fourth ballot and thus inherited one of the safest Labour seats in the whole of Britain. He remained MP for Neath until the time of his death. He famously succeeded in persuading the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson to visit Neath in 1968 to hear at first-hand complaints about the closure of two local coal mines. He was a PPS, 1964-70 (including serving as PPS to **George Thomas** when he was the Secretary of State for Wales, 1968-70, and thus in effect minister of state for Wales; he also served under **Eirene White** and **Cledwyn Hughes**), an assistant Opposition Whip, July 1970-March 1974, an active member and delegate of the Council of Europe, 1968-73, Lord Commissioner of the Treasury, March 1974-July 1978, and Vice-chamberlain of the Royal Household, July 1978-May 1979. This last-named position entailed writing a daily parliamentary report to the Queen. He was again appointed an opposition whip in May 1979. He readily admitted enjoying the wheeling and dealing which went with the position of whip. He also served as opposition spokesman on Welsh Affairs, 1981-83, a member of the Select Committee on Overseas Aid and as parliamentary adviser to the Institute of Medical Sciences. In 1984 he was appointed a member of the Panel of Chairmen of the House of Commons, a notably powerful body at Westminster. In 1979, a year of Labour defeat nationally, Coleman's majority still held up at 13,604 votes. In 1987 it had shot up to 20,578 in a four-way contest. Donald Coleman was very much a middle-of-the-road Labour man, committed to the success of democracy, and inflamed only by his love of music and the employment question in south Wales. His predominantly right-wing credentials had come to the fore in the Labour leadership contest of September 1983 when he backed Peter Shore (rather than his Welsh colleague Neil Kinnock) for party leader and Denzil Davies, the Labour MP for Llanelli, for deputy leader.

He was especially prominent in the public life of Neath, Swansea and West Glamorgan. His leisure interests included membership of the chorus of the Welsh National Opera Company, where he performed as a tenor soloist (probably the only MP ever to have sung in the Company), and the Swansea Amateur Opera Company. He had been appointed a JP for the county borough of Swansea in 1962. He was made a CBE in 1979. He was appointed Deputy Lieutenant for West Glamorgan in 1985. At the beginning of 1990 Coleman had announced his intention to retire from parliament at the next general election in order to concentrate on other activities, notably singing. A small group of his political papers is in the custody of the National Library of Wales. Coleman married (1) in 1949 Phyllis Eileen Williams, who died in 1963 - they had one son; and (2) in January 1966 Margaret Elizabeth Morgan - they had one daughter. His second wife survived him. Their home was at 'Penderyn', 18 Penywern Road, Bryncoch, Neath. Donald Coleman died on 14 January 1991 and was cremated at Margam Crematorium. He was succeeded as the Labour MP for Neath by Peter Hain.

Author

Dr John Graham Jones

Sources

Who was who?

Etholiadau'r Ganrif / Welsh Elections 1885-1997 (Talybont 1999)

Welsh Hustings - 1885-2004 (Ammanford 2005)

The Times, 15 and 16 January 1991

Western Mail, 15 January 1991

Further Reading

NLW Archives: [The man for Westminster. Donald Coleman, The Labour Party Candidate](#)

NLW Archives: [Welsh Devolution Referendum, 1979](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Donald Coleman](#)

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