

JONES, JOHN EMRYS (1914-1991), secretary and organiser of Labour Party Wales

Name: John Emrys Jones
Date of birth: 1914
Date of death: 1991
Gender: Male
Occupation: secretary and organiser of Labour Party Wales
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: John Graham Jones

He was born on 12 March 1914, the son of William and Elizabeth Susan Jones. They lived at 5 Harris Terrace, Penrhiwceiber in the Cynon Valley. He was educated at a secondary school at Mountain Ash, but left school at fourteen years of age. He worked as a shop assistant, 1928-29, a railwayman, 1929-33, for the Rootes motor factory, 1933-36, and as a railwayman again, 1936-49. He joined the National Union of Railwaymen aged sixteen, arranged his first political meeting when he was 17 and three years later had been elected chairman of the Aberdare branch of the NUR. Like so many of his generation, he studied quietly at home and contributed regularly to the *NUR Magazine*. He began to organise political meetings at the age of eighteen and he was particularly moved by the sight of miners in the dole queue in the Cynon Valley in the 1930s; this was to become a major influence on his thinking and political outlook. In 1942 he left his post at Aberaman station to move to Cardiff where he held a number of positions under the NUR and was elected a member of Cardiff City Council - the youngest member of the council at the time.

Emrys Jones was the first full-time, salaried regional organiser for the Labour Party in the south-west, 1949-60, the West Midlands, 1960-65, and for the Labour Party Wales from 1965 until his retirement in 1979. He was a regular at the 'Welsh night' at the Labour Party annual conferences and built up a close relationship with [Jim Griffiths](#) MP who was to become the first Secretary of State for Wales in 1964. During these years he was also secretary of the South Wales region of the Labour Party. He built skilfully on the efforts of the regional secretaries who had preceded him, notably [Cliff Prothero](#). Emrys Jones was a notably dedicated and skilful organiser who made a major contribution to help the Labour Party to repel the challenge of nationalism in the valleys of south Wales, notably at the by-elections at Rhondda West (1967), Caerphilly (1968) and Merthyr Tydfil (1972). There were also severe internal difficulties within the local Labour Parties in Merthyr Tydfil and Pembrokeshire. He set up a series of working groups to examine pressing issues and to re-define and formulate new policies. He also took steps to ensure that the new position of research assistant was established at Transport House in Cardiff so that the party in Wales would not have to rely entirely on its London headquarters. He also helped to formulate his party's policies on devolution and the Welsh language. He saw the case for a measure of devolution as part of the reform of local government and advocated an all-Wales tier of government controlled by about forty nominated bodies. This model, he argued, could be a precedent for Scotland and the historical provinces of England. Indeed in 1974 he was sent to Scotland by Labour Party leaders to outline the thrust of the devolution policies which were being developed in Wales. Jones was conspicuously even-handed in the struggle within the Labour Party in Wales between the pro- and the anti-devolutionists. In his heart of hearts, he cherished a hope that Wales would eventually benefit immensely from a democratically elected assembly sitting at Cardiff. From the early 1970s he was a warm supporter of the need to set up a Welsh language television channel, and he established a group to explore how this could best be achieved. He also pressed for the award of adequate compensation to the disabled quarrymen of north Wales who had suffered from disease caused by rock-dust and their dependants, and for the aberrations which remained following the passage of the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967.

In the general election of July 1945 Jones had served as the political agent for [George Thomas](#) and had helped to ensure that the party made seven gains in that watershed general election. He also served as the chairman of the Cardiff North Divisional Labour Party. His hobbies were reading and writing. He married in 1935 Stella, the daughter of T. Davies, a newsagent at Cardiff Road, Aberaman, Aberdare, and they had one daughter Maureen. The family lived at 4 Glancynon Terrace, Aberaman from 1936 until 1942. During his period of service to the Labour Party in Wales, he lived at Caerphilly, and on his retirement moved to Hanham in Bristol, an area which he knew very well since he had served there for the Labour Party in the 1950s. On his retirement in 1979 he was awarded a CBE. He was succeeded by Hubert Morgan as organiser to Labour Party Wales. He died on 24 December 1991 at his home in Bristol.

Emrys Jones possessed a calm personality and he was not given to displays of great emotion. He was unfailingly supportive and sincere, with a deep sense of commitment. He was also very self-effacing, sometimes to the point of diffidence. He presided calmly and effectively over meetings, helping to ensure that his party always took the right decision. Unlike [Cliff Prothero](#), he was no natural power-broker. Thus his immense contribution to perpetuating the dominance of the Labour Party in Wales was not always appreciated. But in 1979 he left the Labour Party in Wales in a relatively healthy state to face the challenge of the future. It is unfortunate that (unlike [Cliff Prothero](#)) Emrys Jones never wrote a volume of reminiscences which would have been an important source for the historian of the Labour movement in twentieth-century Wales.

Author

Dr John Graham Jones

Sources

Who was who?

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Additional Links

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