

POWELL, RAYMOND (1928-2001), Labour politician

Name: Raymond Powell
Date of birth: 1928
Date of death: 2001
Gender: Male
Occupation: Labour politician
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: John Graham Jones

He was born at Treorchy on 19 June 1928, the son of Albert Ernest Powell, a coalminer, and Lucy Powell. He was educated at Pentre Grammar School, the National Council of Labour Colleges and the London School of Economics. He worked as a fireman with British Rail, 1946-50, as a shop manager, 1950-56, and was responsible for running his own butcher's shop from 1956 until 1966. He was secretary and political agent to **Walter Padley** MP, 1967-79, undertaking the position without remuneration from 1969. He was a senior administrative officer with the Welsh Water Authority, 1969-79 and he also lectured at the National Council of Labour Colleges.

Powell served as a member of the executive committee of the Labour Party Wales, 1970-80 and again 1983-90, acting as its chairman in 1977. He was also a Labour member of the Ogwr Borough Council, 1973-79. He had previously sought the Labour nomination for the Rhondda constituency, Aberdare, Monmouth and Caerphilly. He was the Labour MP for Ogmore from 1979 until his death. Although he was known locally to be **Walter Padley's** chosen successor as MP for Ogmore, he nevertheless had to fight off powerful challenges for the 1979 Labour nomination there from individuals including Ron Davies and Ann Clwyd. Powell soon developed a reputation for being outspoken in the House of Commons. He was elected chairman of the South Wales Euro CLP in 1980, and was a member of USDAW continuously for fifty years. He held a large number of offices and official positions at Westminster and within the Labour Party. He was chairman of the Labour Party Wales, 1977-78, a member of the Select Committee on Employment, 1979-82, on Welsh Affairs, 1982-85, and of the Commons Services Sub-Committee, 1987-89. He was elected secretary of the Welsh Labour MPs Group in 1984. He also served as the Welsh regional opposition whip, 1983-95, and opposition pairing whip, and he then retired to the backbenches. As pairing whip, he adamantly refused to accept a single penny in salary and built up a formidable reputation as a man not to be crossed. He became a member of the Committee of Selection in 1987 and chairman of the Parliamentary New Building Committee in the same year, serving for ten years. He was thus closely involved at every stage with the creation of Portcullis House. He was virulently opposed to Sunday trading and was active in Parliament to block legislation to allow it. He became involved, too, in the campaign to secure proper meat inspection and to ban unfit meat. He readily championed a wide range of causes that concerned pensioners and he was a stalwart supporter of Bridgend Hospital. He was a supporter of devolution at the time of the 1979 referendum, but had changed his views by 1997 when he was a staunch opponent of the National Assembly for Wales. He stressed, however, that his opposition was based on his objection to the use of proportional representation in the elections to a Welsh Assembly, not the principle of devolution. Soon after Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party, Powell lost his post as a whip. In 1997 the Labour Party leadership attempted to pressurise Powell to stand down (possibly even offering him a peerage if he agreed to do so) in favour of Alan Howarth, the former Conservative minister who had joined Labour. But the local party urged him to stand again in the constituency, a reflection of the high regard in which he was held locally, and Powell stubbornly refused to be 'bought off' in this way. But the disclosures caused much embarrassment for Ron Davies as Secretary of State for Wales and the Labour Party in Wales at this time. (In the event, **Roy Hughes**, the Labour MP for Newport East, obliged and went to the House of Lords.) At the time of his death Sir Ray Powell was the oldest Welsh Labour MP and firmly identified as belonging to 'Old Labour' - a member of the old school in the age of 'New Labour'.

His hobbies were gardening, sport and music. He had married in 1949 Marion Grace Evans, and they had one son and one daughter. Their daughter Janice Gregory became the Assembly Member for Ogmore. They lived at 8 Brynteg Gardens, Bridgend. Ray Powell was knighted in 1996, a rare distinction, and possibly awarded as compensation for the loss of his post as party whip. He died at London on 7 December 2001.

Author

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Sources

Who was who?

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Western Mail, 10 December 2001

Further Reading

NLW Archives: Parliamentary Election 1979 Ogmore Constituency. Vote Labour. Vote Powell

NLW Archives: Welsh Devolution Referendum, 1997

Wikipedia Article: Ray Powell

Additional Links

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