

HEYCOCK, LLEWELLYN LORD HEYCOCK OF TAIBACH (1905-1990), prominent leader in local government in Glamorganshire

Name: Llewellyn Heycock
Date of birth: 1905
Date of death: 1990
Gender: Male
Occupation: prominent leader in local government in Glamorganshire
Area of activity: Public and Social Service, Civil Administration
Author: D. Ben Rees

Born 12 August 1905 at 9 Alma Terrace, Taibach, Port Talbot, the son of William Heycock, a labourer in Port Talbot Docks and his wife Mary Elizabeth (née Treharne). His family had migrated at the end of the eighteenth century from Worcestershire, and four generations of the Heycock family worked as miners in the Margam coalfield, and a number of them were involved in the rise of the Labour Movement in Aberavon. As he was the eldest of six boys, Llewellyn had to leave the Eastern School at the age of 14 so that he could help his parents financially. He found work, through the good offices of his uncle Edward Heycock (died 1938), pioneer of the Labour Party in the town, at Dyffryn Yard Loco Shed as a train cleaner, then as a fireman before becoming a train driver for GWR from south Wales to Paddington. He worked on the railway all his life.

In his spare time he immersed himself in the chapel culture, the activities of his union (the NUR), the classes of the National Council of Labour Colleges and Sunday school classes. He was influenced by the pioneers of the Labour Movement locally, among them Henry Davies (died 1927 and to whose memory the headquarters of the Taibach Labour Group were erected as a memorial hall), Taliesin Mainwaring, Rees Llewellyn and Robert (Bob) Williams who fought unsuccessfully as the Labour candidate in the Aberavon constituency in the 'Khaki' Election of 1918. Heycock came under the charisma of Ramsay MacDonald and his oratory as a socialist propagandist, and they celebrated in Port Talbot when he won the seat from the Liberals in November 1922. Later, especially in 1931, he became disillusioned with MacDonald.

Heycock took a prominent part in the 1926 General Strike, selling left-wing literature, avoiding the police, and becoming attracted to the local cell of the Communist Party. But his flirtation was soon over as he came into contact with **Aneurin Bevan**. He charmed meetings of the unemployed on Aberavon beach, and he remembered a crowd of seven thousand listening to **Bevan**. Another politician who had a huge impact on him was **James Griffiths**. Through these influences and his own determined efforts he was adopted as a County Councillor for Taibach in 1937 and represented this area of Port Talbot until his retirement in 1977. As a result of his passionate interest in education, he was elected Chairman of the County's Education Committee, an office that he held from 1944 until 1974, where he guided the education policy of the County Council for 30 years. In 1949 he was elected as a member of the Welsh Joint Education Committee and served as Chairman for 11 years. The same year he was invited to be a member of the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire and he was re-elected to the revamped Council in 1959.

Llewellyn Heycock's most important contribution was in the field of bilingual education in primary and secondary education. He believed that the crux of the Welsh culture was the Welsh language. Though he was reluctant to speak Welsh in public, he could converse adequately in the language at his home and amongst his sympathetic Welsh academic friends. His standpoint became the official policy of the Glamorganshire Education Committee and Welsh medium primary schools were established as well as comprehensive schools as, for example, Rhydfelen School near Pontypridd. Heycock always praised the support of central Government on this issue, and he was as firm in his commitment within the Courts and Executive Committee of the University of Wales. He contributed immensely to the University for a period of 40 years and he was honoured in 1963 when he received an honorary Doctorate in Law. He was the most important architect in the battle to uphold the unity and continuance of the University of Wales in the crisis of 1964.

His ambition by the 1950s was to follow W. G. Cove as the Labour MP for Aberavon. He was already on the Parliamentary Panel of the NUR, and when the opportunity came in 1957 he won 39 nominations compared with 3 for the 28-year old Cardiganshire-born barrister John Morris. But John Morris had received the nomination of the Steelworkers' Union, the backbone of the Port Talbot economy. In the Selection Conference John Morris was nominated to the great disappointment of Llewellyn Heycock as he had been for 30 years the Treasurer of the Constituency Party, secretary of the Taibach Ward for 40 years, and the most familiar name in the political world of Glamorganshire. On the advice of his wife he resisted the pressure of his supporters to stand in the 1959 General Election as an Independent Labour Candidate and concentrated instead on his local government activities, where he was highly respected for his commitment, though he was often criticised in the press for his tendency to support his friends and occasionally his family for posts within the orbit of the County Council.

He was fortunate in his wife, Elizabeth Olive Rees from Felindre, Port Talbot, as she came from a family which was heavily involved in Labour Party activities. They were married on 30 August 1930 in Bethany Presbyterian Chapel, Port Talbot (a chapel which was closed in 2009 and where he served faithfully for years as an Elder), setting up home in Conduit Place, a street where every breadwinner worked in the railway industry. Two sons were born to them, Bryan in 1932 and who died in a motor cycle accident in 1958, and Clayton (born 1941) who became an important figure in the world of educational administration. They moved in the last decade of their lives to Llewellyn Close, Taibach, a road so named in a tribute to his contribution.

After the bitter disappointment of 1957 a number of honours came his way, CBE in 1959, and he was then made a life peer, with the title Baron Heycock of Taibach, on 10 July 1967. He became a prominent figure and he was highly respected by his fellow peers in the debates of the House of Lords from 1967 to 1981. There is no evidence in *Hansard* that he took part in debates after 1981. There were three issues which attracted him to debates in the House of Lords, the Margam Coalfield, education and local government where he was acknowledged as one of the greatest living experts. In his speeches on education, he often referred (to the point of surfeit) to his own long experience as Chairman of the Education Committee, chairman of six different comprehensive school governing bodies, and to the record of Glamorganshire in furthering the Welsh language as a medium for education of children and young people, as well as their support for Adult Education, in particular the adult provision known as Coleg Harlech, where he was President for 30 years.

He failed in his campaign against the reorganisation of local government in 1974. The County of Glamorgan where he had been so powerful was divided into three counties, and his allegiance transferred to the new county of West Glamorgan. He became the first Chairman of the County Council (1973-5) (in 1962-3 he had served as the Chairman of the Glamorgan County Council, being the first man from Port Talbot to be so honoured) and there was an improvement in the attitude of the new county towards bilingual education. He gave a long, valuable service to education in the United Kingdom context, as a member, then President of the National Association of Divisional Education Executives for England and Wales and also a member, then President, of the Association of Education Committees for Great Britain. No other councillor had received this double honour of being a President of both associations. In 1976 he was the Chairman (after being a member of the Executive for years) of the Welsh Association of County Councils, and he led this body and most of his fellow councillors to the anti-devolution camp. He belonged to the No campaign led by Neil Kinnock, MP and Leo Abse, MP in the Referendum on Devolution in 1979. This was a disappointment to many within his party and outside who admired his rock-like support of the Welsh language in education and in the public life of his county.

He had been a leading figure on the Executive Committee of the National Eisteddfod of Wales when it visited Aberavon in 1966, and he gave unstinting support to the Aberafan Male Voice Choir and the Cymric Glee Choir. He was made a Commander of the Order of St John in 1967.

Heycock made a huge contribution to his native area, the chief negotiator when Margam County Park was bought and adapted, and in the purchase of a new rugby ground for Aberavon Rugby Club. Rugby was important to him. He was chairman of the Aberavon RFC as well as being President of the Taibach RFC; he used to travel to France and Ireland to support Wales.

He received the freedom of the borough in 1962, along with the former Town Clerk, William King-Davies, both products of the Eastern School. The artist Paul Thomas, of Barry, made a bust of him in 1977 when he retired which was placed in the Orangery, Margam Park.

Forthright, tenacious, and deeply religious, Llewellyn Heycock had Calvinistic principles, a committed teetotaler, anti-smoking, upholder of the sanctity of the Lord's Day, and very suspicious of the mass media. He seldom appeared on television. The *Western Mail* often attacked him as well as republican publications such as *Y Gwerinaethwr*. The *Times* journalist, Trevor Fishlock, felt that a great deal of the opposition came from envy and snobbishness at this remarkable success story of a genuine working-class person in the south Wales coalfield.

He enjoyed his retirement from local government, living next door to his son and family in the Taibach community, among people whom he had served with enthusiasm, still supporting the Taibach Youth Club and secretary of the Taibach Ward Labour Party. He died in Neath General Hospital on Tuesday, 13 March 1990 and the funeral

service was held on Saturday, 17 March in the Anglican Church of St Theodore, Port Talbot, followed by committal at Margam Crematorium.

Author

D. Ben Rees

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David Hughes, 'Lord Heycock - the man and his image', *Western Mail*, 4 May 1977

Trevor Fishlock, 'Welsh local government issues loses a Labour Baron', *The Times*, 24 May 1977

Information from his son, Clayton Heycock, Taibach in a letter 11 December 2009

Personal research and friendship for 20 years

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Q6662070](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [_Baron_Heycock](#)

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