

EDWARDS, NESS (1897 - 1968), trade unionist and Member of Parliament

Name: Ness Edwards

Date of birth: 1897

Date of death: 1968

Gender: Male

Occupation: trade unionist and Member of Parliament

Area of activity: Business and Industry; Politics, Government and Political Movements

Author: John Davies

Born 5 April 1897. He started to work in a coalmine when he was thirteen and when he was eighteen he was elected chairman of the Vivian Lodge. He joined the Independent Labour Party in 1915 and through his membership came into contact with the No Conscription Fellowship; he refused to join the armed forces and consequently he was imprisoned in 1917. He attended the Central Labour College in London in 1919 where his fellow students included [Aneurin Bevan](#) and [James Griffiths](#). In 1927 he became the full-time secretary of the Penallta Lodge and in 1932 miners' representative for east Glamorgan. In 1938 he became a member of the council of the British Miners' Federation, representing the South Wales Miners' Federation on that body. A year later, following the death of Morgan Jones, he was elected as the Labour Member of Parliament for Caerphilly, a seat he retained in subsequent general elections from 1945 to 1966, obtaining over 70% of the votes cast in all these elections. He was an ardent opponent of fascism and sharply criticised the Munich Agreement. He arranged for anti-Nazi colliers from the Sudetenland to escape from Germany in 1939; he visited the concentration camp at Buchenwald in 1945 and represented British colliers in the ceremony to unveil a memorial to the villagers of Lidice in Czechoslovakia. He was elected secretary of the parliamentary group representing coal mining areas in 1942 and chairman of the parliamentary group of Labour trade unionists in 1964.

Following the Labour Party victory of 1945 he became parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Labour. It was this administration that had the responsibility for demobilisation from the armed forces after the war; this was achieved more smoothly in 1945-46 than in 1918-19 and much of this is due to Ness Edwards. He was elevated to membership of the Privy Council in 1948. He was Postmaster General from 1950 to 1951 and was responsible for creating the greetings telegram. He opposed Gaitskell's appointment as leader of the Labour Party in 1955 and went to the backbenches for a period although he was, during the mid-1950s, prominent in opposing the plans of the Conservative government to set up commercial television.

Throughout the years he derided the idea of Welsh nationalism and he represented the tradition of international socialism nurtured by the Central Labour College. Despite this he had a lively interest in Welsh matters and he argued keenly in favour of reforming the way these were discussed in Parliament. He was proud of the industrial and socialist traditions of south Wales and for years his books (*The industrial revolution in south Wales* (1924), *The history of the south Wales miners* (1926) and *The history of the South Wales Miners' Federation* (vol. 1, 1938; the proofs of the second volume are in the library of Nuffield College, Oxford, but this has not been published) were the best available studies on these subjects. He died 3 May 1968.

Author

John Davies

Sources

Western Mail, 4 May 1968

The Times, 4 May 1968

H. Francis and D. Smith, *The Fed a history of the South Wales miners in the twentieth century* (London 1980)

Further Reading

Wayne David, *Remaining true: a biography of Ness Edwards* (Caerphilly 2006)

NLW Archives: [Caerphilly Parliamentary Election, 1939... Ness Edwards, The Labour Candidate](#)

NLW Archives: [Parliamentary Division of Caerphilly. General Election - 1945. Vote for Ness Edwards, The Labour Candidate](#)

NLW Archives: [Parliamentary Division of Caerphilly. Polling Day: Thursday 23rd... Ness Edwards, The Labour Candidate](#)

NLW Archives: [Your Candidate Ness Edwards](#)

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NLW Archives: [General Election 1959. Yor Candidate Ness Edwards](#)

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Wikipedia Article: [Ness Edwards](#)

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