

ABLETT, NOAH (1883 - 1935), miner and Trade Union leader

Name: Noah Ablett
Date of birth: 1883
Date of death: 1935
Spouse: Ann Ablett (née Howells)
Gender: Male
Occupation: miner and Trade Union leader
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: Huw Morris-Jones

Born at Porth, Rhondda, 4 October 1883, son of John and Jane Ablett. As a miner, he went for a period to the Central Labour College; he then became a checkweigher at Maerdy. He was elected a member of the Executive Committee of the South Wales Miners' Federation in January 1911, and subsequently a member of the executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. In 1918 he was appointed a Miners' Agent at Merthyr Tydfil, a post he held until his death.

Ablett's importance in the history of Trade Unionism in South Wales is twofold: he was one of the leaders of the opposition to the older miners' leaders like **William Abraham** (Mabon), and he became a propagandist for Syndicalist and Marxist ideas among the miners. Others had opposed **Mabon** before Ablett, and as a result had organised one union, the South Wales Miners' Federation, to take the place of the many small local unions; they had also ended the Sliding Scale agreement negotiated by **Mabon** which had controlled miners' wages from 1875 to 1903. Their opposition was based on principles of trade union organisation and interests. Ablett on the other hand based his opposition on his view that there was an irreconcilable conflict between the owners and workers in a capitalist society. He opposed any move to conciliate or compromise with the owners and called for the use of the strike not merely for improvement in the lot of the worker but to eliminate the owners altogether. To this end he advocated general strikes to foment a spirit of class warfare.

He first became prominent in the violent and bitter dispute in the Rhondda when there was a strike in the pits owned by the Cambrian Combine, to establish a guaranteed minimum wage. The strike lasted from October 1910 to September 1911. Rioting broke out and additional police forces and detachments of troops were sent into the valley. Ablett issued a manifesto to the miners in favour of a general strike, and opposed accepting the terms of the owners. But after the hardships of the eleven months' stoppage the Trade Union recommended their acceptance. Ablett, with others like **A. J. Cook**, formed an unofficial committee which issued a pamphlet called **The Miners' Next Step**. This had been drafted by Ablett and is notable for its mixture of Syndicalism and Marxism. It contains a plea for the formation of one vast industrial union, and advocates workers' control and ownership of industry. It had a large sale and provoked intense discussion in the industrial areas of the country. Ablett also wrote a number of articles for the *Plebs* magazine, the journal of the Labour College, and a book *Easy Outlines of Economics*. He was usually a lone dissenter on the Councils of the Union, which had adopted nationalisation of the mines as its policy rather than Ablett's Syndicalism.

He married Ann Howells in 1912; they had two children. He died 31 October 1935 at Merthyr Tydfil.

Author

Professor Huw Morris-Jones, (1912)

Sources

David Evans, *Labour Strife in the South Wales Coalfield, 1910-11 A historical and critical record of the Mid-Rhondda, Aberdare Valley, and other strikes* (Cardiff 1911)

Ness Edwards, *History of the South Wales Miners Federation* (London 1938)

information from members of Ablett's family

Further Reading

The Miners' next step: being a suggested scheme for the reorganization of the Federation (Tonypanyd 1912)

Ian Sinclair, *100 Years on: The Miners' Next Step*, 4 June 2012

Spartacus Educational: [Noah Ablett](#)

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