

BEVAN, ANEURIN (1897 - 1960), politician and one of the founders of the Welfare State

Name: Aneurin Bevan

Date of birth: 1897

Date of death: 1960

Spouse: Jennie Bevan (née Lee)

Parent: Phoebe Bevan (née Prothero)

Parent: David Bevan

Gender: Male

Occupation: politician and one of the founders of the Welfare State

Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration

Author: John Graham Jones

Born 15 November 1897 at 32 Charles Street, Tredegar, Monmouth, the sixth of the ten children of David Bevan and Phoebe, the daughter of John Prothero, a local blacksmith. David Bevan was a coal miner and a Baptist, he was fond of books and music and he exercised much influence on his son. Aneurin Bevan went to Sirhowy elementary school which he disliked intensely, and he left in 1910. Nevertheless, he borrowed books from the local Workmen's Library and read extensively on economics, philosophy and politics. He began to work underground in 1911, proved himself a skilled collier and developed an interest in the activities of the trades unions. An eye disease prevented him from enlisting for military service during World War I, and he achieved local renown as an opponent of the war. In 1916 he was elected chairman of the local lodge of the Miners' Union.

The award of a scholarship from the Miners' Union in 1919 enabled Bevan to spend the next two years at the Central Labour College in London where he broadened his horizons and became an effective debater. He returned to Tredegar in 1921 to face a period of unemployment. He was elected a member of the Tredegar Town Council in 1922, and secured a post as a checkweigher at a coal mine for several months before again re-joining the ranks of the unemployed. During the 1926 miners' strike Bevan was chosen as its agent by his trade union branch, and he proved himself a skilled organiser who spoke regularly at national conferences. He was elected a member of the Monmouthshire County Council in 1928, and in the following year he succeeded Evan Davies as the Labour M.P. for the Ebbw Vale division. He continued to represent this constituency in Parliament until his death.

Aneurin Bevan quickly proved himself an effective debater in the House of Commons, one who spoke regularly, especially on unemployment and matters relating to the coal industry. During the 1930s he launched particularly pungent assaults on Neville Chamberlain. Early in 1939 he was expelled from the Labour Party because of his support for Sir Stafford Cripps and the United Front movement, but was reinstated in December of the same year. He opposed the government throughout World War II, and was sharply critical of Sir Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, and Ernest Bevin. In December 1944 he was elected for the first time to the Labour Party's National Executive Committee.

As Minister of Health in the 1945 Labour Government Bevan laid the foundations of the Welfare State. Every member of the National Insurance scheme was given free medical and dental care by the 1946 National Health Service Act. The hospitals were nationalised and regional boards set up to administer them. National taxation was to be used to finance the service. In his battle with the doctors which continued until 1948 Bevan proved himself especially patient and ready to compromise. The 1948 Local Government Act gave new responsibilities to the local authorities, notably to care for children and young people. The 1948 National Assistance Act swept away the old Poor Law and introduced comprehensive schemes for welfare services. In addition, Bevan, also serving as Minister of Housing, took steps to repair much of the damage caused to housing during the war, to provide prefabricated housing and to grant subsidies to local authorities to enable them to offer homes available for rent. He was critical of the government's expenditure on armaments and of its policies towards the U.S.A. and Russia.

Aneurin Bevan was appointed Minister of Labour in January 1951, but he resigned in April of the same year because of a disagreement with Hugh Gaitskell over the intention to start levying charges in the health service. He assembled around him a number of M.P.'s who stood to the left in the political spectrum and who became known as 'Bevanites'. He remained popular amongst the electorate and the membership of the Constituency Labour Parties in the country, and he was still a member of the Shadow Cabinet. He was again ousted from the Labour Party for several months during 1955 following his challenge to Clement Attlee because of his attitude towards nuclear weapons. When Attlee resigned from the party leadership during the same year, Bevan stood for the vacant position, but was defeated by Hugh Gaitskell. He was elected party treasurer in October 1956, and he became Opposition Spokesman on colonial affairs and foreign policy. In 1959 he accompanied Gaitskell to Moscow, and in October of the same year he was elected deputy leader of the Labour Party as successor to [James Griffiths](#). By this time his speeches in the Commons and his attitude in general were much less abrasive. Bevan published a large number of pamphlets and articles, especially in *Tribune*, and his book *In place of fear* which gave expression to his belief in Democratic Socialism appeared in 1952.

He married in 1934 Jennie Lee who was Labour M.P. for North Lanark, 1929-32, and Cannock, 1945-70, and who stood firmly to the left within the Labour Party. There were no children. He died 6 July 1960 at his home Asheridge Farm, Chesham, Buckinghamshire, and his remains were cremated at Croesyceiliog crematorium.

Author

Dr John Graham Jones

Sources

Who was who?

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Further Reading

[Aneurin Bevan \(1897 – 1960\)](#), From Warfare to Welfare website, viewed 30 May 2019

NLW Archives: [Parliamentary Division of Ebbw Vale. General Election, 1950. Aneurin Bevan The Labour Candidate](#)

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Wikipedia Article: [Aneurin Bevan](#)

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Published date: 2001

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