

DAVIES, RHYS JOHN (1877 - 1954), politician and trade union official

Name: Rhys John Davies

Date of birth: 1877

Date of death: 1954

Spouse: Margaret Ann Davies (née Griffiths)

Parent: Ann Davies (née Griffiths)

Parent: Rhys Davies

Gender: Male

Occupation: politician and trade union official

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

Author: Walter Thomas Morgan

Born 16 April 1877 at Llangennech, Carmarthenshire, son of Rhys Davies, tinsmith, a native of Abergorlech, and Ann (née Griffiths), his wife, who came from Brechfa. In all she gave birth to 11 children, but died at the age of 34. Rhys John was educated at Church of England and British elementary schools at Llangennech. On leaving school he worked for three years as a farm labourer in the vicinity of his native village and then migrated to the Rhondda Valley, where he worked for 10 years in coalmines in Ferndale and Ton Pentre. In 1901 he was appointed cashier to the Ton Co-operative Society and during the four years he occupied this post he devoted himself to organising in south Wales the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees. In 1906 he moved to Manchester to become a full-time official of that Union, which later became the National Union of Allied and Distributive Workers. In 1910 he wrote jointly with a colleague, Joseph Hallsworth (who was later knighted and became a distinguished figure in the trade union world) a book entitled *The Working Life of Shop Assistants* dealing with the poor wages and bad working conditions of the workers in this industry. He was a recognised authority on social insurance and after the passing of the National Insurance Act of 1911 he concentrated on this aspect of his trade union activities, becoming secretary of the N.U.A.D.W. Approved Society. He was an early member of the I.L.P. and threw himself enthusiastically into trade union and labour activities in Manchester. In 1913 he began his ten-year stint on the Manchester City Council, serving on the Education Authority and on the City Insurance Committee. He became President of the Manchester and Salford Labour Party, of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council and of the Withington Divisional Labour Party. In 1918 he stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate for West Salford, but was elected in a by-election for Westhoughton in 1921, a seat which he held till his retirement from parliament in 1951. In the 1924 Labour Government he was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs. In this office he performed his duties efficiently and conscientiously, but he was not comfortable with ministerial office. He disliked the compromises with principles which the acceptance of office entailed. At the same time, his socialism was motivated more by his religious and humanitarian feelings than by theoretical or doctrinal considerations. He remained throughout his life an uncompromising pacifist. He was immensely popular in his constituency among people who admired his integrity and sincerity, even though they might not always agree with his views on temperance and pacifism. He was an able parliamentarian and a consummate master of the proceedings of the House. He was for many years joint-secretary of the British Group of the Parliamentary Union and was elected chairman of that body in 1945. In this and on other occasions he travelled widely throughout the world.

Though he had lived in Manchester for 45 years before returning to live in Porthcawl, he remained always in close touch with his native country. He was not only an eloquent speaker in Welsh, but was a frequent contributor to the Welsh language press, especially to *Y Cymro* and *Y Tyst*. He published a selection of those articles in two short books, *Seneddw'r ar Dramp* (1934) in which he gives his impressions of foreign countries he had visited, and *Pobl a Phethau* (1943) which contains interesting biographical details and reminiscences. He also published in 1941 a pacifist pamphlet, *Y Cristion a Rhyfel* (*Pamphledi Heddychwyr Cymru*, III).

He was a keen musician and frequently acted as precentor at Bootle End, the Welsh Congregational chapel in Manchester, where he worshipped. He was also occasionally invited to conduct cymanfaeod canu in different parts of the country. During the 1898 strike he organised a choir of 25 voices from the Rhondda to tour the country to raise money for the strikers' families.

In 1902 he married Margaret Ann Griffiths, a domestic science teacher in Ton Pentre. They had three sons. A younger brother was the poet-preacher, Rev. T. Cennech Davies (1875 - 1944; see David J. Thomas, *Bywyd a gwaith Cennech Davies* (1949).

He died at Porthcawl, 31 October 1954, his wife having predeceased him about a year before.

Author

Walter Thomas Morgan, (1912 - 1990)

Sources

Who was who?

Who's who in Wales (1921, 1933, 1937)

The Times, 2 November 1954

Western Mail, 1 November 1954

Rhys J. Davies, *Pobl a Phethau* (Denbigh 1943)(1943)

The Biographical Index of W. W. Price, Aberdâr

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Rhys Davies](#)

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