

## STONELAKE, EDMUND WILLIAM (1873 - 1960), politician and a key figure in establishing the Labour Party in the Merthyr Boroughs constituency

**Name:** Edmund William Stonelake

**Date of birth:** 1873

**Date of death:** 1960

**Spouse:** Rebecca Stonelake (née Hobbs)

**Parent:** Hannah Stonelake

**Parent:** George Stonelake

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** politician and a key figure in establishing the Labour Party in the Merthyr Boroughs constituency

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

**Author:** David Leslie Davies

Born 5 April 1873 in Merchant Street, Pontlotyn, Rhymney valley, Glamorganshire, last of the ten children of George and Hannah Stonelake. His mother (born in Gloucester) had a strong influence on him. He was brought up in a non-Welsh and Anglican home: two attributes which set him outside the Nonconformist, Welsh-speaking, Liberal culture characteristic of the south Wales coalfield during the 19th c. He left school at the age of ten and began working underground at eleven after his mother, in their poverty, had altered his certificate of birth, but he had to leave the pit within a month when this was discovered, recommencing when he was 12. Towards the end of 1888 he and his widowed mother moved to live with an older brother at Aberdare because coalminers' wages were higher there, and he came into contact with the radical tradition of the valley. Stonelake said that the move had 'saved his soul'. About 1892 his public life began with a local friendly society and as a student in a class held by [C.A.H. Green](#), vicar of Aberdare. By 1895 Stonelake considered himself to be a Socialist, and he was elected to the committee of the Co-operative Movement, the Workers' Hall and his colliery lodge. Eventually he became chairman of the District Miners' Executive Council for Aberdare. He was one of the first students from Wales to attend Ruskin College in August 1901. The experience made a lasting impression on him, but he returned in five months to the coalmine at Aberdare. He remained at the coalface until 1913 when he was elected by his fellow-workers in Bwllfa mine as safety inspector in the mine in compliance with the 1911 Mining Act. He was the first person in Britain to be elected thus, but his right was disputed by the company which was owned by the family of [Sir D. R. Llewellyn](#) until Keir Hardie secured his authority in the House of Commons. He was afterwards elected minimum wage representative for his fellow-workers, and he retained these posts until 1946. By 1897 he was a member of the Aberdare Socialist Society and was secretary of the local Trades Unions Council, 1902-29. At the suggestion of this Council in 1902 Labour candidates began to be nominated regularly for election to the local authority in Aberdare. In 1904 Stonelake was himself elected to the authority, and he was chairman of the local council, 1909-10. Stonelake and the Labour members pressed the authority to embark on a policy of public ventures. They initiated a public tram system and an electricity supply for house and street lighting; and as an education authority under the 1902 Act they opened a school for physically disabled children and those with learning difficulties (1913) and a baby clinic (1915). Stonelake himself was most proud of the appointment of a health officer for the authority's schools in 1907, and later of a service to provide meals for pupils in need. He was also prominent in establishing Aberdare General Hospital (1915). Between 1904-14 he led a strong campaign against the poor condition of houses in the area. Consequently, the local council began to build houses shortly before the War and resumed the work in 1918. However a scandal concerning financial corruption among some of the council house officials between 1919-22 cost Stonelake dearly as chairman of the housing committee; although he had no part in the offence he lost his seat permanently on the authority in 1922. His innocence was confirmed by his appointment as J.P. in 1928 (an office he held until 1950). He was the co-ordinator in the effort to support about 10,000 miners and their families during their strike in 1926 which lasted six months after the General Strike ended. He was secretary of the Labour Party in the constituency (1929-45), and spent much of his time during the depression of the 1930s organizing the protests of the unemployed and preparing them for trials in the Court of Referees which constantly challenged their right to benefit payments.

He utterly despised [C.B. Stanton](#) for 'retreating from his party' and betraying Keir Hardie in the hour of need in 1914. Stonelake was the Representative for every candidate who stood in opposition to [Stanton](#) after Keir Hardie's death, and his comments on [T.E. Nicholas](#) and the 1918 election in particular are revealing. Stonelake was never a national figure, but he served leaders on the broader front. He worked hard to ensure that the Labour Party was deeply rooted in the south Wales coalfield. The span of his activity extended from the marginal days of the I.L.P. at the end of the 19th century up to the first time a Labour government obtained a secure majority under Attlee in 1945. His life is a classical example of the effort which gave the Labour Party supremacy in south Wales politics in the 20th c.

He married, in 1895, Rebecca Hobbs (died 1950) and they had six sons and two daughters. He died 5 April 1960.

## Author

David Leslie Davies

## Sources

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information from his grandson

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Edmund Stonelake](#)

## Additional Links

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