

WHITE, EIRENE LLOYD, Baroness White (1909-1999), politician

Name: Eirene Lloyd White
Date of birth: 1909
Date of death: 1999
Spouse: John Cameron White
Parent: Eirene Theodora Jones (née Lloyd)
Parent: Thomas Jones
Gender: Female
Occupation: politician
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Lewis Jones

She was born Eirene Lloyd Jones at Anwyllfan, St Johns Avenue, Belfast, the only daughter of **Thomas Jones** and his wife, Eirene Theodora Lloyd, on 7 November 1909. Less than a year later, **Thomas Jones** returned to Wales and settled eventually at Barry where Eirene Jones attended a primary school. After **Thomas Jones** accepted the post of a temporary assistant in the Cabinet Office where he worked closely with **David Lloyd George**, the family moved between Barry and London where Eirene Jones attended a primary school in Upper Norwood. **Thomas Jones** decided in 1919 to move his family permanently to London and Eirene Jones entered St. Paul's Girls' School in 1920. She won a scholarship in 1929 to Somerville College, where she read philosophy, politics and economics. While she was a student at Oxford, Lady Astor, a family friend, arranged a twenty-first birthday party for Eirene Jones at Cliveden.

On leaving Oxford with a second-class degree in 1932, Eirene Jones travelled in Europe and then went to the United States for the year 1931-32 where, through her father's friend, Abraham Flexner, she obtained an unpaid position as readers' adviser at New York Public Library. She became a determined anti-racist after she was unable to eat in the same restaurant as **Paul Robeson**. From 1933 to 1939, she was a social worker with the unemployed and, to a lesser extent, a journalist. Her experience in social work led her to serve with the Women's Voluntary Service in Cardiff between 1939 and 1941 before she became a temporary civil servant as a Ministry of Labour welfare officer in South Wales.

Eirene Jones was ambitious to pursue a political career and she resigned from the civil service in order to seek a seat at the next general election as a candidate for the Labour Party. She obtained nomination as the Labour candidate for Flintshire where she achieved a creditable result at the 1945 general election when she came close to defeating **Nigel Birch**, the Conservative candidate in a safe Conservative seat. Meanwhile, she became a political journalist with the *Manchester Evening News*; she was among the first women to hold such a post and she was the first correspondent from a provincial newspaper who obtained access to the parliamentary lobby. On 2 January 1948, she married John Cameron White, also a political journalist, whom she met at a press briefing at 10 Downing Street. A member of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, she persuaded the party conference in 1947 to vote, by a large majority, for equal pay for women in the public sector.

Flintshire was divided into two constituencies at the 1950 general election: Flintshire East and Flintshire West. With the assistance of **Huw T. Edwards**, a friend of **Thomas Jones**, Eirene White obtained the nomination for Flintshire East seat, which she won with a good majority and held until 1970. **Thomas Jones** again campaigned actively for his daughter. Eirene White soon made her mark as an astute parliamentarian. Many men and women were living in settled relationships, apart from their legal spouses, but unable under the current law to obtain a divorce. Eirene White was sympathetic because her husband had obtained a divorce. In 1951, she introduced a controversial private members' bill, Matrimonial Causes Bill, which allowed a breakdown of marriage followed by seven years' separation to be grounds for divorce. To the government's alarm, the bill received a second reading in the House of Commons on 9 March 1951; in return for an assurance that a Royal Commission on marriage and divorce would be appointed, Eirene White agreed to withdraw her bill. Unfortunately, the Royal Commission took a more conservative view and its report closed further discussion for thirteen years. Legislation in later years took up Eirene White's views on this difficult matter. David Astor, a family friend, approached her to take up the cause of Seretse Khama, exiled from Bechuanaland (now Botswana) after he married Ruth Williams, an English woman. For a number of years, Eirene White pursued the government over this matter and the controversy showed her strength as a parliamentarian in that she kept to the facts of the case and she was meticulous in her background research.

Hugh Gaitskell appointed Eirene White deputy to Anthony Greenwood who spoke for education on the opposition front bench. She was flexible: she held a joint press conference in 1961 with Margaret Thatcher to draw attention to the lack of provision for pre-school children in the new high-rise blocks of flats appearing throughout the country. Her success on the opposition frontbench led Gaitskell to promise that she would be the Minister for Education in a Labour Cabinet. After the sudden death of Gaitskell, Harold Wilson became the new leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister in October 1964. Wilson appointed Eirene White to the post of Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office. For the next two years, she travelled extensively to the remaining colonies, including Fiji to ascertain the views of the local population before the Fiji Constitutional Conference was held and Gibraltar to support the local government and population at a time when the Spanish government had placed restrictions on the frontier. After the 1966 general election, Wilson appointed Eirene White Minister of State at the Foreign Office where George Brown was the Foreign Secretary; their relationship was distant. This was not a happy time for Eirene White because her husband was ill and she nursed him with devotion until his death on 4 December 1968. At the same time, she carried out her ministerial duties efficiently to the admiration of the Prime Minister. The situation in Rhodesia was a difficult question at the time and she had to endure a very hostile reception at the party conference in 1967. Devoted to the ideals of the United Nations, she struggled against those who sought to disparage the institution. In the government reshuffle of 1967, Eirene White was moved to the Welsh Office as Minister of State; here she worked with an old friend, **Cledwyn Hughes**, the new Secretary of State, who allowed her a full and responsible part in the development of government policy for Wales. During her time at the Welsh Office, Eirene White took an interest in environmental matters and she assumed a large part in the debates on the Countryside Bill of 1967-68. When **Hughes** left the Welsh Office in 1968, **George Thomas**, who was not close to Eirene White, succeeded him and she played a much lesser part in the affairs of the Welsh Office.

Eirene White did not stand at the 1970 general election and Wilson nominated her to a life peerage in his dissolution honours list; she took the title of Baroness White, of Rhymney in the County of Monmouthshire. In the House of Lords, Lady White took an active part in the work of the Select Committee on the European Communities,

established after Britain joined the European Economic Community. Besides serving on the main committee, first as a member and then as chairman from 1979 to 1982, Lady White also chaired the sub-committee on environmental questions where she introduced greater precision and a high intellectual standard to the work of the sub-committees. She also served as a Deputy-Speaker to the House.

Lady White was equally active outside the House and accepted a number of government appointments; deputy chairman of the Metrication Board 1972-76; a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution 1974-81; a member of the British Waterways Board 1972-76; chairman of the Land Authority for Wales 1975-80; chairman of the Advisory Committee on Oil Pollution at Sea 1974-78. She took an active interest in Welsh educational and environmental matters as President of Coleg Harlech 1974-84; chairman of the Council 1983-88 and President 1987-88 of the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology; and, President of the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales 1973-89. Within the Labour Party, she served as a member of the National Executive Committee 1947-53 and 1958-72; as chairman of the party 1968-69; and, as chairman of the Fabian Society 1958-59. Eirene White held honorary degrees from the universities of Wales (1979), Queen's, Belfast (1981), and Bath (1983).

Until 1995, Lady White attended the House of Lords regularly but, with increasing age, her participation in debates lessened and she retired to Abergavenny; she attended the House briefly during the first few days of the Labour government in 1997. She was not tall and in her features resembled her father. While not always tactful or possessed of a great sense of humour, she could on occasion be peremptory but she had considerable intellectual and administrative skills as well as great kindness to those who caught her favour. A woman in politics, she placed greater emphasis on the battle for socialism and the abolition of class inequalities rather than the struggle for women's rights. Her devotion to Wales was unquestioned and she worked unstintingly for Welsh educational and environmental bodies, particularly Coleg Harlech, the adult education college founded by her father. With great generosity, she arranged the donation of her father's papers to the National Library of Wales.

Eirene White was the eldest of three children and she supported her father after the death of her mother in 1935; her younger brother, Elphin Lloyd Jones, was killed in a road accident in 1928; her elder brother, Tristan Lloyd Jones, predeceased her in 1990. She was survived by the children of Tristan Jones. Lady White lived in Shotton as Member for Flintshire East; she also lived in London and owned a small cottage, without a water supply, near Machynlleth. During her last years, she had a house at Treberfydd, Breconshire, near her friend, Dorothea Raikes, as well as flats in Cwmbrân and Cardiff. After she retired from public life, Lady White lived in Abergavenny and finally at Trebencyn Park Nursing Home, also in Abergavenny, where she died on 23 December 1999. A public funeral was held at St. Mary's Priory Church, Abergavenny, followed by a private service at Croesyceiliog Crematorium, Cwmbrân; her ashes were later scattered in Barry where she spent a very happy childhood. A memorial service was held at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, on 17 May 2000 when Lord Morris of Aberavon gave the address. Lady White's estate was £325,448 net.

Author

David Lewis Jones

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The Independent, 5 January 2000
The Times, 24 December 1999
David Lewis Jones, *Eirene a tribute* (Gwasg Gregynog 2001)
private information
personal knowledge
The National Library of Wales holds Lady White's papers

Further Reading

NLW Archives: [Flintshire Labour Election Special... Here is our Banner Bearer - Eirene Lloyd Jones](#)
NLW Archives: [Three World-Famous Figures tell you why Flintshire should Vote for Eirene Lloyd Jones](#)
NLW Archives: [Flintshire Parliamentary Election, 1945. Miss Eirene Lloyd Jones, M.A., The Labour Candidate](#)
NLW Archives: [Mrs Eirene White, Your Candiate](#)
NLW Archives: [Parliamentary Election 1951 East Flintshire Division. Mrs Eirene White Labour Candidate](#)
Wikipedia Article: [Eirene White, Baroness White](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Eirene White Papers](#)
NLW Archives: [NLW ex 2368: Lady Eirene White letters and papers](#)
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