

HUGHES, ROYSTON JOHN, 'ROY', BARON ISLWYN (1925-2003), politician

Name: Royston John Hughes
Date of birth: 1925
Date of death: 2003
Spouse: Florence Marion Hughes (née Appleyard)
Parent: Florence Hughes (née Tucker)
Parent: John Hughes
Gender: Male
Occupation: politician
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Lewis Jones

Roy Hughes was born on 9 June 1925 at Pontllan-fraith, Monmouthshire, the son of John Hughes, a coal miner, and Florence Tucker. While expecting her next child, Florence Hughes fell ill and Roy was taken, around the age of one, to the home of his paternal grandfather. Elizabeth Hughes, his aunt, took charge of the boy and he remained with her throughout his childhood. Although his education, at Pontllan-fraith Primary School and Pontllan-fraith Secondary School, ended at the age of fifteen, he remembered these schools with affection and paid tribute to the influence of a master at the secondary school, [Edgar Phillips](#) (Trefin). Finding his first job at the local colliery office tedious, Hughes moved to work underground as a coal miner until he was conscripted in 1944. He served as a private in a Welsh regiment, first in India and then in Burma.

Following his demobilisation, Hughes returned to the Nine Mile Point Colliery and joined the Labour Party. Through his work for the party, Hughes earned a place, in 1954-56, on the two-year diploma course in economics and politics at Ruskin College. On the completion of his studies, Hughes found work as a records clerk with the Standard Motor Company, makers of the Ferguson tractor, at Coventry. Between 1959 and 1966, he became an official of the Transport and General Workers' Union and of the Coventry Borough Labour Party, as well as a councillor on Coventry City Council. He was on the left wing of the party; at the Scarborough Party Conference in 1963, he introduced a motion calling for the nationalization of the building industry, of the building supply industry and of land.

Hughes had larger political ambitions and his opportunity came when he was nominated, with the support of his union, for the Newport constituency in 1966. In a straight fight with Peter Temple Morris, the Conservative candidate, Hughes won the seat by over 10,000 votes. In the House of Commons, Hughes opposed, vigorously, attempts by the Wilson governments to introduce wage control and trade union reform. A voluble speaker, he could irritate fellow members and invited cries from the Tory benches of 'Too long' or 'Reading'. When he sought to introduce a private members' bill in July 1972 to repeal the Industrial Relations Act 1971, Selwyn Lloyd, the Speaker, had to ask him three times to conclude his remarks and to move the motion. Hughes was opposed to the Common Market and he was equally strong in his support of the rights of the Palestinian people, travelling with five other members to visit Yasser Arafat in 1975.

The only ministerial office held by Hughes was Parliamentary Private Secretary to his friend, Fred Mulley, first at the Ministry of Transport and then at the Ministry of Defence in 1974-75. Surprisingly, he was not dismissed from the second post when he voted, on 8 May 1975, against the government's defence policy. He was particularly active in the all party parliamentary groups, holding office in the following: Motor Industry; Roads Study; British-Bulgarian; British-Lebanese; British-Nigerian; British Malta; British-Egyptian; British Syrian; British Rumanian; and, British Hungarian. Membership of these groups would have involved travelling abroad as did his place on the executive of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. He took advantage of the Union's 1990 conference in Uruguay to attend the celebrations of the 125th anniversary of the Welsh settlement in Patagonia. For the last seven years of his career in the House of Commons, Hughes was a representative on the Council of Europe.

Born and brought up in his parliamentary constituency, Hughes's great strength as a Member of Parliament was his tenacious defence of Newport's interests. He was determined in his support for the great steelworks at Llanwern and served as chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party Steel Group from 1976. When closure of steel mills in Wales was threatened in January 1973, he resigned from the Select Committee on Nationalized Industries. The other great local interest to which Hughes devoted much time and effort was the Severn Bridge, being both quick to raise any matter relating to the condition and operation of the bridge and early in his advocacy of a second crossing. The campaign he led for the second bridge led some to call, after his death, that the bridge should be named after him. With regard to Wales as a whole, he was mildly supportive of devolution proposals, although this has been attributed to his disagreements with Alan Williams, the member for Swansea West and an opponent of devolution. He was appointed deputy spokesman for Wales in March 1984 but resigned in July 1988 because he had 'no confidence' in the chief spokesman, Alan Williams. The proudest moment of Hughes's career as a Member of Parliament came when he successfully sponsored a private members' bill, the Badgers Act 1991, to protect badgers' setts.

It was generally assumed that Hughes intended to stand again at the 1997 general election. In 1983, the Boundary Commission divided the Newport constituency along the line of the river Usk and added rural areas of Monmouthshire to both of the new constituencies. Hughes chose to stand for Newport East which included the Llanwern steelworks and which was a safe seat for Labour, both in 1983 and 1997. On the *Today* radio programme in 2001, Hughes described how, shortly before the 1997 election, he told a person close to the leadership of the Labour Party that he would stand down if he obtained a life peerage. This offer was accepted with alacrity because, with little time left before the election, the leadership of the party would have to select a candidate. Alan Howarth, the Conservative member for Stratford-on-Avon who had joined the Labour Party, stood at Newport East and won the seat.

The name 'Hughes' was already used as a title by a number of peers and Roy Hughes decided to be known, as Baron Islwyn, of Casnewydd in the county of Gwent, as a homage to Mynyddislwyn overlooking his childhood home. He was one of a small number of life peers who acquired a coat of arms; the crest is a red dragon supporting with both feet a miner's lamp, the two supporters are badgers standing erect, and the motto is 'Chwarae Teg' ('Fair Play'). In the House of Lords, he spoke, in his usual forthright manner, on the steel industry, on the rights of retired miners, on the rights of workers whose pensions were threatened, and on similar social topics.

In 2001, Lord Islwyn was rushed into Cardiff Hospital where he underwent triple heart bypass surgery, during which he suffered a stroke. He spent four months in hospital and nine months of convalescence at home before he returned to the House of Lords. In 2003, he published a short memoir under the title *Seek fairer skies (Cais Loywach Nen)*, which was the motto of Pontllanfraith Secondary School.

A man of medium height, portly and with heavy jowls, Hughes had a reputation in the House of Commons for being hot-blooded.

He married Florence Marion Appleyard, known as Marion, at St. Luke's Church, Scarborough, in 1957; they had three daughters. In 1966, they moved from Coventry to Chepstow, and from there in 1990 to Abergavenny. Lord Islwyn died at the Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny, on 19 December 2003; his parish church, St Teilo, was small and the funeral was held at St Mary's Priory Church, Abergavenny on 5 January 2004, followed by cremation at Croesyceiliog. Many in the congregation wore Newport Rugby Football Club ties to mark his great support for that club and his passion for the game. He left an estate of £665,787.

Author

David Lewis Jones

Sources

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Further Reading

NLW Archives: [Vote Roy Hughes Labour's choice for Newport](#)

NLW Archives: [Roy Hughes for Newport. Vote Labour](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Roy Hughes, Baron Islwyn](#)

Additional Links

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