

HAYWARD, Sir ISAAC JAMES ('Ike') (1884 - 1976), miner, trade unionist and local politician

Name: Isaac James Hayward
Date of birth: 1884
Date of death: 1976
Spouse: Alice Hayward (née Mayers)
Spouse: Violet Charlotte (née Cleveland)
Child: William Alexander Hayward
Child: Haydn Hayward
Child: Stanley Joshua Hayward
Child: Thomas James Hayward
Parent: Mary Elizabeth Hayward (née French)
Parent: Thomas Hayward
Gender: Male
Occupation: miner, trade unionist and local politician
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: Carole Powell

Isaac Hayward was born on 17 November 1884 in a two-bedroomed terraced house in King Street, Blaenafon, Monmouthshire, the third of five children to survive out of eight born to Thomas Hayward (1848-1925), engine fitter, and his wife Mary Elizabeth (née French, 1848-1925). He had two brothers and two sisters: Thomas, Elizabeth, Alice Louisa, and William Frederick.

Isaac was raised a Baptist and his parents instilled in him the importance of the Welsh nonconformist values of temperance and education. However, at the age of twelve, as was the norm, he had to leave school to work down the local mine, (now Big Pit). Every night he and his brothers and sisters educated themselves, borrowing books from the Workman's Hall. Aged fifteen he became a mine engineering apprentice.

He became active at the age of sixteen in both the Labour Party and the trade union, and to the end of his days he proudly kept his membership certificates. He had a great vision to improve the pay and working conditions of ordinary people. He became a councillor on Blaenavon Urban Council, held a seat on the Monmouthshire County Council and was appointed as a magistrate. In 1917 he became a full time official of the National Union of Enginemmen, Firemen, Mechanics and Electrical Workers. He was a moderate reformer rather than a fiery radical, and his negotiations were characterised by an innate sense of fairness.

He married Alice Mayers, a dressmaker from Blaenafon, in 1913 and they had four sons: William Alexander (killed in Normandy, 1944), Haydn (father to Ronald and David), Stanley Joshua, and Thomas James (father to Carole).

It was through Hayward's union work that he became a close friend and colleague to Ernest Bevin and to Herbert Morrison. At their request he and his family moved to London in 1924. His union was by then known as the Power Workers Group within the TGWU, with Hayward as London district secretary, later General Secretary (1938-1946). At the same time a second strand of his career began as he returned to local government and won a seat on the London County Council (LCC) for Bermondsey and Rotherhithe in 1928, later representing Deptford.

In 1934 he became chairman of the Public Assistance committee, transforming the old Poor Law into a modern system of welfare and overseeing the abolition of the detested workhouses. In common with many Welsh self-educated people of his background, he valued education very highly: 'Why should not the crossing sweeper have a university degree?', he asked. As chairman of the Education committee he championed the controversial policy of comprehensive schools to bring equal opportunities for all.

In 1947, aged 63, Hayward was elected leader of the LCC. This began his record period of that Council's leadership (1947-1965), and led to him being nicknamed 'Ike, London's Prime Minister' in the national press. After the Blitz had destroyed many of London's buildings Hayward was responsible for the new homes, schools, and hospitals that he believed ordinary people deserved. He worked closely with **Aneurin Bevan** to merge London's existing health system with the new NHS.

The Festival of Britain and the formation of the Southbank Arts Centre in 1951 was overseen by Hayward, and he ensured that the building of the Royal Festival Hall was completed on time and within budget. The Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Rooms and Hayward Gallery (named after him in 1968) followed over the next 17 years. He also played a major part in the birth of the National Theatre after a long campaign to establish it, awarding an LCC grant of £1 million. His vision also helped establish the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre.

Hayward's self-education had gained him a knowledgeable appreciation of the arts, and was a passionate believer in 'arts for all'. He pioneered the role of the public authority as benefactor, providing grants to opera, orchestras, ballet, sculpture, and painting which helped to revive the artistic world. As council housing and schools were built, he encouraged, for each development, the commissioning of over 70 works of modern art by artists such as Henry Moore ('Two-piece reclining figure number 3'), Siegfried Charoux ('Neighbours') and others. Many of these pieces survive to this day, accessible to all.

Hayward was a mild mannered and almost diffident man, avoiding publicity and allowing others to take credit for the council's work. A man of integrity, he strictly maintained procedures. Attlee is privately quoted as saying that under Hayward the LCC was 'the nearest approach to a totalitarian state in Western Europe' (Rhodes, 32).

The last six years of his leadership saw Hayward fight to save the LCC from abolition during local government restructuring. He obstinately refused to cooperate with the Royal Commission, as his great pride in the LCC's achievements made him unable to accept that it needed reforming. It was a battle that he was to lose when the Greater London Council (GLC) was created in 1965. Having planned to retire in 1964, aged 80, he was persuaded to stay on for an extra year, although his authoritarian style or 'bossism' was now resented by many of the younger generation of the Labour Party who felt that he had stayed too long.

He was knighted in 1959; awarded an honorary LLD by the University of London (1952), serving on its Court and Senate from 1945-1969; made Freeman of Bermondsey (1955) and of Deptford (1961), and honorary fellow of the RIBA (1970). In 1963 the *Sunday Mirror* listed him within the top twenty most powerful people in Britain.

His first wife died in October 1944, and he married Violet Cleveland in 1951, living with her at 140 Chudleigh Road, Crofton Park. Isaac Hayward died there on 3 January 1976 aged 91, and is buried at Grove Park Cemetery, Lewisham. A plaque was subsequently installed on the house of his birth in King Street. Although he had left Wales 50 years previously, he never forgot his homeland, and returned as often as he could to visit family and friends. In pride of place on his office wall in County Hall hung a picture of Blaenafon.

Author

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Sources

Family documents and information

ODNB: [Hayward, Sir Isaac James \(1884-1976\)](#)

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Further reading

Artware Fineart: [Portrait of Sir Isaac Hayward](#)
Instagram: [Happy Birthday #Ike #IsaacHayward](#), Marysia Lewandowska, Instagram, [share_what_you_know](#) (17.11.20)
Wikipedia Article: [Isaac Hayward](#)

Images

National Portrait Gallery: [Sir Isaac James Hayward \(1884-1976\)](#)

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