

A Welsh Pioneer of African Freedom

DID you know that a Welshman from Aberystwyth is buried in the heroes' cemetery in Moscow, beside Kropotkin and Khrushchev? And that he is there because he fought for the oppressed peoples of South Africa?

David Ivon Jones was born near Aberystwyth in 1883, into a large family which was orphaned early and scattered to the four winds. Brought up by grandparents ('Ivon' was his grandfather's pen-name) he was apprenticed to an ironmonger in Aberystwyth. He didn't like it much — 'snob pauperdom' he called it. He much preferred Lampeter, where he worked in a celebrated **Siop Sam** — 'Ah! the beautiful Teify!' he wrote later, 'the trout, the trees, the jovial people there, the touch of pagan humanism which respectable Aber has not!'

The idyll did not last; he took over his uncle's shop in Bridge Street, Aber, where he laced his account book with verse, ethical, theological and political comment. It was there, in 1905, that he left Calvinistic Methodist Salem and joined the Unitarians. This affiliation to one of the most powerful and dramatic of Wales's religio-political traditions was not painless. There were long arguments at shop-counter, in parlour and street . . . 'it's worth while ignoring the dictates of conscience for the sake of believing in the Deity of Jesus Christ!' expostulated one elder! The discussion was terminated when David Jones migrated to New Zealand to try to cure a chest ailment, which seems to have afflicted the family.

The first ship he saw in Wellington harbour had been built in Aberystwyth, but Jones, turning down training as a teacher, worked as a sheep shearer and trapped rabbits in the hills, while he ran a Unitarian cause and got his first taste of electioneering. In a couple of years, he hit the road again, to join members of his family in South Africa.

Trained by a brother, he got a job in a power company serving the mines, but promptly joined a workers' strike (it is

said that his was the only white face in a sea of black). Sacked, he launched on a career in the labour and resistance movements which made him a central figure in the early struggles for liberation. He was prominent in the labour movement, the War against War campaign, the International Socialist League (he seems practically to have written its journal) and was a founder-member of the Communist Party. He fought the cause in committee, in the streets, in jail and in court (he conducted a successful defence of a pamphlet he had written before the Supreme Court).

Jones, no more than his colleagues, could break free from the unconscious instincts which crippled the early white communist and socialist movements confronted with the class and colour complexities of South Africa. One of today's stern and principled critics calls him 'the best of a bad bunch'. But everybody remembered him with deep

affection and respect, as a selfless man, 'a natural Marxist of the first order', a man of principle, integrity and dedication, who loathed racism.

Almost inevitably, he was the man they sent to the new Third International at Moscow. On the way, he stopped at Nice to write a critical analysis of communism in South Africa, paid a flying visit to Aber and the Teifi and then threaded his way along the illegal route through Scandinavia to Riga and to Comintern . . . 'These days', he told a friend, a trip to Russia was like a trip to Pontrhydyfendigiaid — 'except you have to watch the police!'

He arrived in the Russia of 1921, the Russia of famine and the New Economic Policy. He had intended to stay for a few weeks; he was there for nearly three years, working for Comintern. His commitment was total . . . 'The Russian people are like the sea . . .' he said, 'this Soviet system is going to conquer Europe and then the

world . . .' He met Lenin, inspecting a new plough outside Moscow and 'looking like a country squire at home'.

News of Lenin's death reached him when he was in a TB clinic in Yalta . . . 'I am under the immediate sense of a great loss . . . the greatest figure of the present century and for the wideness of his influence, the greatest figure of centuries . . .'

David Ivon Jones died at that Yalta hospital in May 1924. The young Soviet Union and the sanguine International gave him a hero's funeral. He is remembered in the Soviet Union. He is remembered in embattled South Africa.

What about us? Will we remember our brother who brought honour to the name of our people among our oppressed comrades in Africa? David Jones's niece, Gwyneth Francis-Jones, has written a life of him. Let it be published soon. It is necessary to remember such men.

Gwyn A Williams.

POEMS

Easy Street

We've both travelled along way
Across Easy Street
Spent too many hours
Reading books
And selling stories
To Sunday papers.
At the storm wall
We reached a point
That forced us back
Made us feel old
In each other's arms
Silly in patched jeans
Conscience in white shoes
And dirty in bed.
I can match the photographs
To letters
Letters to tapes
Tapes to records
And the bleached business of ourselves.
Take away my final gift
And burn The evidence
That was with us.

John Watkins.

Grove Road

We played beneath lamplight twenty years ago
"please Jack" and Off ground touch
"ready or not" and the cry "black soap"
sitting in gateways on front door steps
talking of stars and dads and wars.
Time lay upon us, unmoving
wedged between hedge-fronted homes
red bricked and red walled
built by Mond in his nickel town
roads christened in the faith of the science men
Ramsey, Newton, Faraday and Kelvin
alien lands beyond safety and lane.
We played beneath lamplight near bramble banked ditch
slinking through field at the road's end
water weeds brown, soft, fed by waste pipes
delicate strands of rusting fur.
And here our young years seeped over stones
flowing unseen to forbidden ground
here where we ran between shadow and sun
between the green leaf and the brown earth
where mothers called and children hid
until fear drove us to the hanging voice.
And here the Fish man called from his van
until the women came singing with words
warm mothers with bare arms
quick tongues wrapped in love.
We played beneath lamplight twenty years ago
fresh limbed and soft eyed, embraced in innocence.
We played beneath lamplight at the old road's turn
and held tomorrow in our open palm.

Len Mullan.