

THE BANNED WIRELESS TALK

ON


# Welsh Nationalism

BY

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THE following "talk" was prepared at the request of the British Broadcasting Corporation, to be broadcast on December 6, 1930. On December 4th, 1930, the author was informed that his talk was not approved by the Headquarters of the Corporation and must not be given. An official of the Corporation defended the official action by saying that "the talk was calculated to inflame Welsh national sympathies." The author fervently hopes that its publication now as a pamphlet may have that effect.



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ON WELSH NATIONALISM.*

I SHOULD like to begin by saying that in preparing this talk I have had in mind chiefly those people in Wales who are either not Welsh or not Welsh-speaking, and it is very likely that a proportion of those people will have little idea what the word "national" can mean in connection with Wales.

Such people may perhaps connect the word at once with money-begging on behalf of some institution. For there are occasions when worthy and respectable and eminently "safe" and influential gentlemen have to take a "national point of view" about Wales. For example, when the President of the National Library of Wales wants money to build another wing to that fine institution at Aberystwyth, and when the President of the National Museum of Wales wants money for the splendid building in Cathays Park in Cardiff, then they don't hesitate to appeal to something that they call the "Welsh nation." Or for another example let me quote a few lines from the admirable appeal that Sir Walford Davies made a short while back on behalf of the National Orchestra of Wales. Sir Walford said :—

The National Orchestra of Wales should become, in fact and deed, a national institution, paid for and administered by and on behalf of the nation itself.  
. . . We want what every country must ultimately possess, the supreme joy of national musical service to a point of real efficiency.

These are strong words, admirable words. Yet I don't suppose, that anyone who read them felt at all uneasy or thought that Sir Walford Davies, who wrote them, was a dangerous extremist. We are accustomed to words like that even from gentlemen in administrative positions and responsible honorary positions whenever some good cause or institution is in need of support.

## CULTURAL NATIONALISM

The fact is, of course, that the National Library, National Museum, National Orchestra, National Eisteddfod, National School of Medicine, National University, are all educational or cultural institutions, and in that sphere, we are most of us now persuaded, it is quite correct and good form to talk of a "Welsh nation." Indeed, there have been English politicians so charmed with this inoffensive and untroublesome Welsh way of being a nation that they have recommended it as a model of political discretion to other and more turbulent peoples and minorities. In the sphere of culture, eminent critics have said, there is everything to be said in favour of nationality.

Now, I wish to make two points in criticism of this belief that nationality is healthy and inoffensive as long as it remains limited to the fields of art and literature and general culture. Firstly, whether the idea be in the abstract right or wrong, I submit that modern Welsh literature, provides no argument in its favour. Certainly there has been since the beginning of this century a remarkable literary revival in Wales. But the men who made that renaissance, and the men who sustain it to-day, have not been men content with a purely cultural national consciousness. On the contrary, they have been inspired in their literary work to a large extent by their faith in a broad general and political renaissance in Wales, and if to-day and generally since the war Welsh nationalism has begun to take a more definite political colour, it is due to the impulsion of poets and writers who have awakened a new generation to action.

This is my second point: if a nation that has lost its political machinery becomes content to express its nationality thenceforward only in the sphere of literature and the arts, then that literature and those arts will very quickly become provincial and unimportant, mere echoes of the ideas and artistic movements of the neighbouring and dominant nation. This danger is real for Wales to-day. Since the war the faith in the future of Wales, which had given such an impulse to Welsh literature previously, has almost exhausted itself. We have come to the moment

when a conscious choice must be made. The Welsh people must decide whether the faith of the poets was well-founded or not. If they decide that the literary revival shall not broaden out into political and economic life and into the whole of Welsh life, then inevitably Welsh literature in our generation will cease to be living and valuable. I do not think the Welsh language will disappear rapidly even if that should happen. But it will cease to be a language worth cultivating. Its literature will become entirely second-hand and fifth-rate. Believe me, there is something worse and more tedious than the death of a language, and that is its functionless survival.

### *THE NEW PARTY*

Now it is just because some of us in this post-war period have realised the futility of mere cultural nationalism that a Welsh Nationalist political party has arisen in Wales which aims at the establishment of a Dominion of Wales within the British Commonwealth of Nations. For it seems clear to us that a nation cannot, any more than an individual, divide its life and activities into separate compartments with no communication between them. Even the mere existence to-day of a distinct Welsh culture and of national institutions of any kind implies that Wales had once a political entity also, and whether we know it or not we are the heirs of that past. You cannot artificially encourage the language and literature and arts of a people and at the same time refuse them any economic and political recognition. The thing isn't possible. Literature and the arts are a function of social life, of political life, that is to say. You cannot segregate them. If you will the existence of a Welsh National Orchestra, National Museum, National Eisteddfod, university, literature, and architecture, you are willing the existence of a Welsh nation, and you are therefore willing a Welsh Government and political machinery. And it seems to me that the most promising thing for the future of Wales that has happened since the war is that the educated youth of this generation has understood these things, and that the old-fashioned

ageous ancestors for inspiring youth to heroism. Nationalism is above all a fountain head of heroism and of brave resolve. It gives a beaten people hope. It gives them resourcefulness and drives away apathy and cynicism and selfishness. It rouses them to co-operation and it kills obstruction and the spirit that says "No." In the present economic and social distress of Wales this inspiration is just what we lack. That is why we are facing another winter with no better provision than before and with no better hope.

I am convinced, you see, that the impasse, we are in to-day in Wales cannot be broken down by clever schemes and expert plans and the inevitable passing of the so-called "world depression." There can be no happy to-morrow at all for Wales unless we can arouse *ourselves* to action, to self-discipline, to a spirit of strong, manly independence and to an ancestral pride. What the Wales of to-day and to-morrow needs is a call to heroism. The heroic note has not been heard in Welsh politics. But it is the only note that can save us now. And that is why I am a political Nationalist—because nationalism is a call to action and co-operation, because nationalism closes the gaps of class and imposes on rich and poor, on clerk and labourer, an ideal that transcends and yet enriches the individual, the ideal of nation and country. A wave of national revival in Wales would enable us to come together and to organise our resources. It would give us the courage and clear vision necessary for our social reconstruction. It would give us the will to master our circumstances.

I have warrant for what I say. These things have happened in other countries. We have recent examples in Denmark, in Finland, and in Ireland. And if this can be brought to be in Wales, not Wales alone will gain by it. We shall bring a new method and a new force to the life of Great Britain, and England as well as Wales will benefit from our vigour and from our new and better-founded comradeship. The free peoples of Britain will march together in the trust and fellowship of equality.