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Welsh Party

## PLAID CYMRU

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- 2.—*To safeguard the culture, language, traditions and economic life of Wales.*
- 3.—*To secure for Wales the right to membership of the society of nations.*

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*Plaid Cymru Office, 8 Queen Street, Cardiff.*

*The*  
**Labour  
Party**  
*and*  
**Welsh  
Home Rule**

*by*  
**Gwynfor Evans**

**3d.**



## *The Labour Party and Welsh Home Rule*

A SELECTION was published recently in the Plaid Cymru's papers *Y Ddraig Goch* and *The Welsh Nation* of pronouncements by the Labour Party and its leaders in favour of Parliamentary self-government for Wales.

There is a long series of them, from the days of Keir Hardie, before the first World War, to the end of the second World War. The fidelity of this party to the principle of freedom for every nation was thought to be the foundation-stone of their policy and to stand in obvious contrast to the open imperialism of the Conservatives. Their success in turning out the Liberal Party in Wales and in capturing three out of every four Welsh seats, is partly attributable to this. Everyone knew what the Labour Party's attitude was. It was to the Labour Party that the unfree peoples of the Empire looked, and the people of Wales hoped for much from them.

Before they formed their second Government in 1929 they published their policy in a pamphlet called *Labour and the Nation*. "Labour," it said, "would support the creation of separate legislative assemblies in Scotland and Wales."

Nothing could be more definite. This was a reaffirmation of their declarations down the years, such as the party declaration made in 1918:

*"Labour believes in self-government. The Labour Party is pledged to a scheme of statutory legislatures for Scotland, Wales, and even England, as well as of Ireland."*

Thirty years before (in 1888) Keir Hardie had expressed his view thus:

*"I am strongly in favour of Home Rule, being convinced that until we have a Parliament of our own, we cannot have the many and great reforms on which the people have set their hearts"*.

Thus, when the Labour Party formed their third Government in 1945, they had behind them two generations of promises of self-government.

## *The 1945 Election*

LONG before 1945, however, it was clear that these pronouncements were no more than a formal ritual which satisfied a certain section of the party's Welshmen at no cost to the party. By that time a new generation of leaders, educated in Labour Colleges, like Ruskin College, Oxford and the Central Labour College in London, had arrived, who despised the ideas of nation and nationality, the language, culture and tradition of a nation, and even its land ("land is land"). They were working for better conditions for the industrial worker, but they wanted him to turn his back on his national heritage and to sink his identity in the rootless proletariat. They looked forward to a nationless world, a world of one language, and they called their hope 'internationalism'! They were called Communists or Bolsheviks by the Tories, and both parties called the Welsh Nationalists 'Fascists.'

We shall only understand how they found such fertile soil in industrial Wales if we remember the horrors of unemployment during those years and its dreadful effects on the spirit and mind of the people. This was the time which saw the greatest damage done to the life of these populous areas—the flight from the churches and from Wales itself, and the new hardness and sourness which rendered vain any appeal to the ideal. This was the time which saw the Rhondda and the other industrial valleys of Glamorgan anglicized, and it was during this period that the atmosphere and ethos of the Labour Party changed, as may be seen if we compare Keir Hardie and Bruce Glasier with Morrison or other leaders of this generation.

By this time, it was hard to see any difference between the spirit of the party in Wales and in England.

Some degree of Welshness in policy was, however, obtained in the Welsh-speaking areas, particularly in the North West, where the party was of less long standing; though responsibility for Wales did not lie heavy, even there. Few people realise that this sense of responsibility has developed only very recently, and that the Labour Party's Welsh



members of nationalist outlook are not characteristic of the whole party, a vast body not more than one per cent. of whose supporters live in that area. These Welshmen, in all probability, were responsible for *Llais Llafur*, Labour Party's publication in Welsh during the 1945 election. They could no longer speak on behalf of their party of self-government, though many did so as individual members. Rather, the Welsh programme of their party was limited to "*what can be secured if a Labour Government is elected.*" Their promises were cautious, but sufficiently definite.

How many remember that programme to-day—"THINGS WE CAN HAVE"? Here they are: *equality with Scotland, including a Secretary of State; a National Planning Authority for Wales on the lines of the T.V.A. in America; the end of compulsory transfer of workers out of Wales; a Radio Corporation for Wales; a road to link up north and south Wales.*

**"These we can have," said *Llais Llafur*, "if a Labour Government and Welsh Labour Members are elected to fight for Wales on the floor of the House of Commons."**

The Welsh Labour Members and the Labour Government were elected, but not one of the positive items in the programme was carried out.

### *For the 1955 Election*

THE Labour Party are now preparing for the election which will take place, perhaps next year. Since 1945 they have been six and a half years in power and two and a half in opposition to the Tory Government. They have nationalised electricity, transport and coal, setting up regional boards which have divided Wales and joined parts of Wales to parts of England. They have set up a Council for Wales to whose advice no one, so far, has paid any attention. But the Welsh element in the Labour Party has had another nine years to turn the party into an instrument of salvation for the Welsh nation. The programme just published is the measure of their success.

This programme has been more discussed than any Welsh programme the Labour Party has ever produced. It has been long in the drafting, and we have heard of many meetings in London with Mr. Herbert Morrison and others.

But round about St. David's Day of this year (1954), at a time when the consciousness of a rise in national feeling was giving us hope for our future as a nation, it was published and its publication came to Welshmen like a kick in the stomach.

It made it plain that the Labour Party as such, despite the hypocritical passage about cherishing the language and culture of Wales, hopes to bury the Welsh nation for ever in England, as it has buried its own early ideals. It intends to preserve the political conditions which imply the destruction of that language and that culture, exactly as they are, without alteration. Its policy for Wales is to maintain the *status quo*. No Tory could say fairer.

The most striking thing about the statement is its negative character. A great deal of space is devoted to explaining why we are not to have the things that would be worth having. In no part of the argument does there appear any understanding of national rights, nor of the role of a nation in the world, nor of the present critical situation of Wales.

We may see in this negativism an unintended tribute to the progress of the Nationalist Movement, since the Labour Party have at least been obliged to face the Welsh claim to self-government, and to give reasons for rejecting it. But they have rejected it and, with it, all effective administrative devolution, even a Secretary of State. They seem to believe that the effective choice lies between Parliamentary self-government and doing nothing.

### *A Poor Programme*

AS a party which believes that a politician need concern himself only with the conditions of economic life, they could do much to increase the stability, balance and development of Wales, without admitting its right to a



Parliament. They could set up a Board of Trade for Wales to combine and direct economic efforts, and to ensure (as any Welsh Parliament would do) that Welsh interests are not overlooked when England enters into agreements with other countries. Within the framework of such plans, they could set up a Corporation to develop rural Wales, such as the Council for Wales has asked for in vain. In addition, Welsh departments of the Ministries of Labour and National Insurance would be valuable, and a Welsh department of the Ministry of Fuel and Power could set to rights many a wrong at present suffered by Wales and its inhabitants. And, certainly, it was the Labour Party's business, and no one else's, to ensure a unified Welsh administration in the industries and services which they themselves had nationalized.

None of these things are to be done, nor is there any recognition of the difference in the economic needs of the two countries. The economic matters referred to in the programme would be seen to by any English Government, whether the Welsh nation existed or no, for the reason that Britain would be worse off if this province were allowed to deteriorate too far. They are referred to merely in order to fill up space. The factory programme left uncompleted by the Tories is to be continued; the iron and steel industry is to be returned to state control; the Remploi factories will be examined; the agricultural industry is to be helped—that is the whole of the programme on its economic side. **The English economic pattern will continue to be imposed on Wales without variation, without so much as the opportunity to adapt it to Welsh circumstances.** Coupled with this we find a hit or two at the Tories. The condition of Wales before the War is, of course, said to be their fault. No doubt they have a heavy responsibility, but those who remember that period know that no effective steps to alleviate the situation of the people, were taken by the two Labour governments either. One English government was as bleak as another in its attitude to Wales. It is easy to blame the Tories, who, in their turn, disclaim responsibility and blame the international slump. If the 1929-31 Labour government had lasted years longer, the condition of Wales

would, to say the least of it, have been no better. **But if Wales itself had had a government, there is no reason to believe that it would have been in worse plight than other small countries which rode the storm out pretty successfully.**

Since the English parties are hard at it, each claiming credit for having provided work for those Welshmen who were able to stay in their own country, one might forget that it was the War which brought them the work, and that no work came to Wales till every man and woman in England, who could lift a finger, was already employed. Not till then was the Welsh 'labour pool' tapped. After the War, likewise, only when there was a labour shortage in England was any industrial development undertaken in Wales. Welsh workers are the last to get work in prosperous times and the first to lose it in hard times.

### *The Minister*

**T**HE only point in the programme which shows some degree of novelty is that the Labour Party will continue to appoint a Minister for Wales, releasing him from other departmental duties. The present Minister has many times said, quite honestly, that he cannot do anything, not because he has no time, but because he has no powers. He has left it to his Tory followers to assert that his frequent flying visits are doing great things. The memory persists vividly of the contempt which Labour orators heaped on the office when it was first proposed by the Tories as their Welsh policy. **The only difference under the Labour government is that the Minister would have more time in which to do nothing.** If he were a Secretary of State, at least the organisation of the Civil Service in Wales would be developed. The office proposed by the Labour Party would lead neither to this nor to any other result of importance.

If one had to name institutions which had proved themselves as futile as the Minister, one might instance the Welsh Day as one and the Council for Wales as another. That is also the opinion of the Labour Party, for it intends to add



another Welsh Day and to make the Council 'more representative.'

That is the policy in full, and every Tory reactionary can say a hearty and grateful Amen to it. This troublesome little nation is neatly and helplessly tied up for a good while again, and one can turn to the Christian task of leading the other countries of the Empire towards responsible self-government.

### *No Parliament*

**I**F the policy outlined is contemptible, the excuses assembled for a complete rejection of self-government of any sort are just as pitiful. They are wholly economic, showing no understanding of any other aspect of social life. If the socialists of Israel and Denmark set store by no values other than those which motivate the Labour Party, their countries would be in a desperate condition.

The statement says—what everyone knew it would say—that the economic lives of England and Wales are linked together, and that the prosperity of the one depends on the prosperity of the other. Then a Welsh Parliament is spoken of as if it meant a complete economic severance between Wales and England. Of course, the completest independence would not entail anything of the sort. The goods of either country will continue to enter the other as long as the two countries exist, whatever their political relations may be; **and self-government might increase rather than diminish trade by developing Welsh resources more fully.**

But the Labour pamphlet is referring to the Parliament Campaign, and the economic powers of the Parliament proposed by that movement would be very limited. It could not set any obstacles in the way of the economic intercourse of the two countries, even if it should wish to do so, since it would have no power to levy customs or to conclude independent agreements with other countries. If Wales and

Scotland had parliaments on these lines, the scheme of the United Kingdom would resemble federalism. Since there are several successful federal states in existence, we know quite well how federalism works.

Such a system is found in Australia, Canada and South Africa, within the British Commonwealth of Nations, and in Switzerland and the U.S.A. without it. The economic prosperity of each of the states in these countries is bound up with that of the others, and each of them has as wide powers of self-government as a Welsh Parliament on the lines proposed by the Parliament Campaign. A federal country has a single economic plan, and each state co-operates in carrying it out, while exercising within those limits its own much-prized privileges. It is the people of these states—often working-men and Labour parties—who insist on the maintenance of 'State rights,' that freedom which they enjoy and which the Labour Party refuses to Wales.

It cannot be said that Wales would be less prosperous than these other countries, on the ground that it is poorer, for it can hardly be maintained that even the whole of Switzerland (which has twenty-three parliaments) has greater natural resources than Wales. Yet Switzerland, after the U.S.A., has the highest income per head of population in the world; and the third country in the list is Sweden. The income of Wales, though it cannot be exactly stated, is certainly adequate. We gave a rough estimate of £200,000,000 for the Welsh contribution in taxation to England's budget. Now the Catto Report on the financial position of Scotland has been published. It is a pretty useless report, but it has at least made known the amount of the Scottish contribution to the Treasury. It is £410,000,000,—substantially more than the whole of the Swedish budget. The Welsh contribution is at least half of that.

The reasons given against the establishment of a Welsh Parliament are so irrelevant and unreal that it may fairly be said that the objection is, in reality, based on another and unavowed ground. **Mr. Morrison could throw a flood of light on that.**



## *The Future of the Welsh Socialists*

THERE are still in the Labour Party many Welshmen who wish Wales well, who want to see her a prosperous nation and her people enjoying a full life. They give effective support to the Parliament Campaign. The policy pamphlet raises a critical issue for them. Some of them, we know, fought for something better, but they were completely defeated, and failed to save anything from the shipwreck.

The foundations of their hopes have been shattered. They have stoutly maintained for years that the greatest hope for Wales lay in the Labour Party, that though Welshmen formed a tiny minority in it, the most effective work for Wales could be done through that party. **The Nationalists, who had been slowly building a Welsh party, maintained that independent action, as Welshmen, was the right and the effective course. Now the Labour Party themselves have proved that the Nationalist's method is the right one.** They felt sure enough of their hold on Wales, and in particular, on the nationalist Welshmen in their ranks to ignore the national rights of Wales.

Even when Welsh self-government was on the Labour Party's programme, they made no effort in that direction. Now it is not on their programme, nor anything like it. After decades of work by Welshmen within the party, they have renounced every measure of national freedom for Wales. If all these good Welshmen had united outside this English Party, in Plaid Cymru, or in a Welsh Labour Party, who can doubt that the Labour Party would never dare to publish today, as its Welsh policy, so sterile a collection of platitudes, remote from the needs of Wales? It cannot, hereafter, be maintained that there is greater hope for Wales from the Labour Party than from the Tory Party, for neither will move, save under compulsion, on the part of Wales.

For the first time in their history, if the policy published recently is adopted, the Labour Party will be setting themselves against Welsh Home Rule. It is a heavy blow to Wales, but if they can do this and yet rely upon the

continued support of the Welshmen in the Party, that will be a heavier blow.

Is there perchance a hope of so violent an uprising against this futile statement that they will be obliged to reconsider it? Hardly, perhaps.

The benefit which may result is the realisation, by the best of the Welshmen in the Labour Party, that the only effective way to move constitutionally towards self-government is to create an independent Welsh party, strong enough to threaten the hold of the English parties on Wales and to turn them out.

After this publication the Labour Party cannot expect its Nationalists to abide by its Welsh policy. Wales has come to mean much in their politics during recent years, and the question which they face now is whether the Labour Party itself has any claim on their allegiance.

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*Translated from Welsh by HYWEL ap ROBERT*

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## **READ THE MONTHLY PAPERS :**

*Y Ddraig Goch* (in Welsh) 3d.

*The Welsh Nation* (in English) 3d.

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*Published by J. E. Jones, Organising Secretary, Plaid Cymru Offices,  
8, Queen Street, Cardiff*