



*Cyhoeddwyd gan J. E. Jones, Trefnydd ac Ysgrifennydd,
Swyddfa Plaid Cymru, 8 Queen Street, Caerdydd*

WHAT IS WELSH NATIONALISM?

by

H. W. J. Edwards

6^D

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I. HISTORY

In August 1925 a group of Welshmen, who were deeply concerned about their nation, formed the Welsh Nationalist Party. When that happened, it ought to have been the end of all the talk about Welsh yearnings and ideals. Perhaps in days to come it may be said to be the beginning of the end.

In 27 years, despite great obstacles, the Nationalist movement has advanced to a position which threatens the dominance of the English or other alien political parties.

Those who say that Wales will never be united, because North and South are so different, will have to take note of the fact that the Nationalist Party was the result of a fusion of North Welsh patriots such as H. R. Jones and South Welshmen such as Dyfnallt.

By 1927 it had established its economic policy* and had stated that capitalism was one of Wales' worst enemies. In 1930 it had formulated its policy of Dominion Status for Wales.

In the days of distress, it campaigned through the mining valleys with definite projects involving the creation of Welsh industry. The Thursday Dinner Club was a remarkable act of Nationalist self-denial at this time.

In 1936 certain Nationalists took positive action against the English seizure of Welsh land for English military purposes. They were imprisoned. But the movement went ahead. In 1951 a small company of Nationalists twice carried out successful acts of passive resistance to further seizures of Welsh land and planted the Welsh flag upon Welsh farmland taken by the War Office.

Today although they have not gained a seat in the English Parliament they have 132 local councillors in Wales (a gain of 33 seats at the last election). There are 200 branches throughout the 13 counties. Two monthly periodicals, one in Welsh, *Y Ddraig Goch*, and the other in English, *The Welsh Nation*, are published.

*This policy is co-operative socialist, distributist and democratic:

1. Co-operative socialist in advancing proposals to promote co-operative groups in industry.
2. Distributist in demanding as wide a diffusion as possible of private property.
3. Democratic in proposing real workers' control (as against control by managers in London) of the means of production.

The B.B.C. denies Nationalists the use of the Welsh Regional radio to proclaim the Welsh message, and Nationalists are hampered in other ways in the expression of opinion. But English Imperialism is not so successful after all. Indeed, several independent English people* and independent English political groups† are sympathetic towards Welsh Nationalism. In addition we have the companionship of Irish, Scots and Bretons, while our cause finds support from the smaller nations of the world.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. *Wales as a nation has the privileges and duties of a nation.*

In the year 1596 Cardinal Sega who was appointed to draw up a report on the affairs of the so called English College in Rome where a number of young Welshmen were studying wrote these words :

“Wales is a country distinct from England and differing from it in no slight degree as to manners, characteristics and language.”

That description stands today. Mr. Winston Churchill was forced to admit that, when in 1950 he said in Cardiff : “Wales is a nation.”

You can deny the truth if you like. Or like Mr. Churchill you can say, “But Wales will not have self government,” which is one of the ordinary faculties of a nation. But if you start with the conviction, ‘Wales is a nation,’ you ought quite easily to come a long way with us.

2. *The Nation is Vital to the Person.*

It is not much use saying Wales is a nation unless you really mean it. You ought to mean it, if only because it means so much to you. You see, no one really lives completely alone. And as a matter of fact, people do live in groups of which by far the most important is that special group called the nation.

*†Among independent Englishmen we should name the late H. J. Massingham and Dr. Arthur Bryant. Among English groups the Commonwealth party is one and the Distributists comprise another. English Guild Socialism is naturally favourable while various English reviews and periodicals of an independent character are sometimes ready to give space to the Nationalist cause.

It is in and through the nation that you and I find our special value. Indeed, it is the main purpose of the nation to give help to the individual person whoever he is. A person without a country — a displaced person — is a pathetic person.

3. *Repeal of Act of Union a First Step.*

But although English politicians (and Welsh ones who support English political parties) vie with each other in talking about “gallant little Wales,” our country is practically powerless to act as it should.

The Act of Union (1536) was not really an act of union. It incorporated Wales into England. That was the intention of the framers of that act. They wanted to get rid of Wales as a separate nation. Successive legislation was even more deliberate. Yet in spite of English legislation backed by English power Welsh people instinctively resisted. Their resistance has in fact been magnificent. It could never be effective, however, since Wales lacked political power.

The only logical means of getting national freedom for Wales is repeal of the Act of Union.

4. *Welsh people must have Welsh Laws and Institutions.*

At present because Wales lives under English laws, Welshmen are bound to order their lives in the same way as Englishmen. Now, although it is perhaps a little difficult to grasp quickly, it is true to say that this is a serious evil.

An English Prime Minister was fond of pointing out that a nation's laws come from the national character. England's laws may be very good laws — for English people. But it does not follow that they are good for Welsh people.

A very recent example — it is still with us — came to our notice in the last year of the Labour Government when that government refused to reform the law of leasehold. It gave as its reason that to reform the law would deal a radical blow to English law.

But it was admitted also that the demand for this reform came almost entirely from Wales.

So long as England dominates, there can be no major Welsh legislation and no Welsh political institutions.

5. *The Nation is the answer to Imperialism.*

The nations of this world have several enemies. One of them is the Power-State. The Power-State or the Great Power may be a

nation which has denied its own principles or it may be a confederation of nations ruled by ambitious rulers who delight in showing their power. In practice the Power-States are very few. Today the chief are : the United States of America, Russia and the British Empire.*

These Powers may form alliances against other Powers. Their policies spring, in spite of lip service to national rights, from their addiction to the theory of a Balance of Power. In order to achieve this imaginary Balance, the Powers coerce nations, intrigue or fight, in order to gain more power or to keep what they have got. Nations which fall inside the orbit of the Powers sometimes strive to be independent of the Powers. The Powers naturally resist national movements within their orbit, though, as England showed in the last century and this, it would support national movements within the orbit of enemy Powers. Thus, while crushing the Irish Nationalists, England backed the nations trying to escape from the thrall of the Turkish and Austrian Empires.

Sometimes a Power, realising that it is impossible with safety to maintain its power over a nation, pretends to give that nation its freedom. But that nation has always had to win its freedom. In reality Powers never really *give* a nation its freedom. They are forced to concede it. And usually they concede it when they cannot help themselves.

The deadly danger of Imperialism which is the "ism" of the Power-State is obvious in this atomic age. The Power States must be broken up into their constituent nations, or where a nation has become a Power, the ambitious rulers must be sent packing.

6. *The Nation as a Family of Families.*

The nationalist is a sociable chap. He is especially keen on the family. Within the Nation are other groups, of which the family is the most important. Family life may be a bit of a bore or a "bind" but it is fundamental. Indeed, the family has rights of such a kind that it is even more important in some respects than the nation.

The instrument of the nation, the State, must never interfere with family rights. For example, it must not :

1. Tell parents not to have children.
2. Force children at school to receive instruction different from that taught in the home.
3. Set members of a family to spy on other members.

The Nationalist seeks to raise Welsh family life to its old status. He knows that, while the English have largely lost their old regard for family life, it is a clue to Welsh life.

Other groups within the nation must also be protected. These groups or associations derive their existence from the human right to associate. The trade union is an obvious example. Nationalists are not only concerned with protecting this right of association but want also to promote the welfare of associations even to the extent of giving special place to all vocational groups.

In South Wales especially there is a tradition of what has been called industrial unionism. It is a tradition of great value and it ought to develop. It reminds us of the need not only for political democracy but economic democracy also.

A special word about a special kind of association — the religious denomination. Now this association resembles the family in some respects. Just like the family, so the religious denomination must not be interfered with. Wales is still a Christian country. And most Welshmen are rightly sensitive about matters of conscience. The nation must always respect the Crown Rights of the Redeemer, as some put it, or the Reign of Christ the King and Ruler of all nations.

7. *The Nation is Traditional, Free, Social.*

English political parties have laid stress on these three characteristics : but they have played them off against each other.

The English Conservative Party emphasises Tradition.

The English Liberal Party emphasises Freedom.

The English Labour Party emphasises Social Union.

The Welsh Nationalists emphasise all three equally.

8. *The Nation has a Moral Basis.*

Although we believe that Wales would be more prosperous if it were a responsible or 'free' nation again, the most important reason for wanting a self governing Wales is the moral reason. It is not because it suits us, but because it is right that we all ought to work for national freedom.

*The last named remains a Power despite the growing independence of large parts of it. In the sense in which I have used the term British Empire, I mean to consider not the various independent commonwealths with responsible government but England's colonial possessions.

3. ECONOMICS

Probably you sympathise with these principles. But probably you believe what romantic English people say of us and of you, that we are romantics. In actual fact Welsh Nationalism is a thoroughly practical matter. Just because we must start with what is *right* rather than with what happens to be *convenient*, it must not be supposed that nationalism is inconvenient.

This first job we have undertaken is to awaken national consciousness. The second is to show how worth while it is. We do not avoid economics. We put economics in its proper place which is here — second place.

One of the first questions we have put to ourselves is this: "Which is better, other things being equal, to live in a society the economy of which is in the hands of another society or group of societies, or in a society which has command over its own economy?" We think the latter is much better. And it looks as if our view is pretty widely shared. Nationalists in Wales are not the only folk to prefer national resources to be in national hands. In days past, Welsh coal came into the hands of alien capitalists. And Welsh mine workers agitated for workers' ownership. They agitated for many years but were fobbed off with "nationalisation." Today it is in the hands of the so called "National" Coal Board. Very recently the N.C.B. pleaded with the people of the South Wales coal mining valleys to buy 5,000 tons of English coal weekly in order that England (the N.C.B.) could export Welsh coal. The reason the N.C.B. gave for bringing English coal to Rhondda was "the good of the nation." What nation? Why, the English nation, of course. Almost every time the words 'nation' and 'national' are used by the English government, England is the nation in mind.

You can apply this principle to other Welsh resources. Because Wales is denied command of Welsh resources, you have ridiculous situations such as that in 1951 when people in South Wales ate frozen New Zealand lamb the same week in which Sussex folk sat down to Brecon lamb. Notice the odd exchange is not to the Welshman's advantage.

Then there are the seizures of Welsh resources by English government instruments and commissions. Classic examples are:

1. The seizure of Welsh farmland of varying quality by the War Office.

2. The eviction or threatened eviction of farmers by the Forestry Commission whose most recent projects in Gwent have aroused even a Conservative delegate from Pontypool to indignation.

3. The setting up of hydro-electric schemes to supply English industry with power. The pylons by-pass Welsh needs.

4. The use of Welsh water (e.g. the recent Claerwen dam) for English towns. When Pembrokeshire folk suggested using a Pembrokeshire water supply for local needs, it was refused.

In time of war England commandeered enormous Welsh resources. A confidential memorandum sent to the Board of Trade in 1943 made these points in this connection.

1. The temporary 'prosperity' of North Welsh towns would not survive the end of the war.

2. The end of the war would be followed by serious unemployment in North East Wales, especially where people had been tempted to work in factories for the first time.

3. There was a complete absence either of a long term or short term policy for this area.

4. The English Government would be unlikely to act until it had decided upon its own export-import policy.

So it goes on. What happens in North Wales, happens as a result of the English Government's so called "overall" policy, that is, its English policy.

This important document points out that North Wales offers magnificent opportunities for organising Welsh co-operative societies and factories related to the industrial and agricultural life around them. It concludes by urging that unless such schemes are set afoot, nothing but ugly dereliction awaits the population.

The Nationalist has no need to exaggerate. He sees that

1. Wales is an extremely rich country.

2. Welsh people are on the whole poor.

And he knows why they are poor. He knows that England, even with the best will in the world, cannot take such care over a subject nation as over itself. He knows also that "benevolent" English Imperialists are not crude Gradgrinds and that they do not want to pauperise the colonials who produce the goods. He knows, moreover, that the English capitalists have found Wales useful for 'over-

flow' factories controlled from the congested Midlands. Those factories have certainly given employment to Welsh people, and to criticise them may appear captious. But wait.

These overflow factories and similar enterprises such as "dispersed" English government warehouses are in no sense Welsh.

They exist on sufferance. They depend on English whims and on the characteristic boom-slump of the capitalist system. When trade recedes, when England's economy faces hard times, the first factories to close will be the English factories in Wales. Indeed, this has already happened several times whenever there are difficulties in supply.

"Last in, first out. Furthest away, soonest forgotten."

It is also to be noted that there has been a ban on the proposal to stamp Welsh goods 'Made in Wales.' This proves conclusively that the English government does not really admit that Wales exists as a real nation. The ban has, let it be observed, been criticised by the Conservative *Herald of Wales*.

The English economy has been built up on trade with a capital T. This trade depended partly on the Empire and partly on the once fortunate circumstance that huge areas of the world could produce cheap raw materials for England which could then sell what she made out of them.

But notice :

The Empire is now in a ramshackle state.

The "raw materials" areas now often produce their own finished products, and compete with England.

Old colonies are now nationally conscious. The black folk of the Gold Coast have already reached a stage of self government which puts them ahead of Wales.

The old fashioned "free trade" theory which in practice meant putting coolies to work for England on a few pence a day is now discredited. Nations want as far as possible to live at home.

The Nationalist has proved himself thoroughly up to date in this matter. Aware of the trends throughout the world, he is aware that by sticking to the out of date capitalist imperialism of England, he will not improve his economic hopes. Rather he and his people will suffer progressively as the English Empire falls to pieces.

A curious admission of the perils that confront the Powers and an implicit admission of the advantages of the little nation was made by Mr. Winston Churchill at the Pilgrim's annual dinner in

October 1952. Then he said that were war to come, the Power would be confronted with colossal dislocation. It would in the case of England be unable to maintain overseas communications. As time goes on the truth about the Power is admitted even by those who have striven to keep that Power strong.

4. COMMON OBJECTIONS

In a short account such as this, many objections must be left out. But here are some that are typical :

1. Nationalism means hating foreigners (Xenophobia).

Answer: No it gives us a reason for respecting foreigners. That is why Welsh Nationalists respect other nations. That is why they are good Europeans, realising their relationship to other nations especially Ireland, Scotland and Brittany. Nor are they anti-English. Nothing would please the Nationalist more than to find Englishmen preparing to be a real nation rather than trying to be a power.

2. Nationalism is opposed to Internationalism.

Answer : Internationalism depends on the national unit. The way to internationalism is *via* the Nation. The failure of internationalism today is due to the Powers.

3. Wales sends representatives to Westminster. Wales also has some autonomy in, for example, education. Wales also has a minister of Cabinet rank, and a Council. Is not all this sufficient?

Answer : It is not only sufficient but worse than useless. The existence of some 36 M.P.'s for Welsh constituencies is a 'red herring.' They cannot but be in a perpetual minority. In practice they vote according to the Whips. Some have started by saying they want self government, but they soon toe the English line. Some begin to intrigue for power and end up as Cabinet Ministers in a Government hostile to Welsh aspirations. The Council of Wales is generally unpopular. It is not in any sense representative and it is secret. The Minister of State for Welsh Affairs is the English Home Secretary. No real change.

4. Why not think of Britain? Isn't the nation really Britain?

Answer: England is the dominant partner in what some call 'Britain.' It is true that some Welsh, some Irish and some Scots have yielded to the English in this. But in yielding they have merely carried out England's policies and in so doing, they themselves have become English. For all practical purposes Britain means England plus what England has unjustly added to herself.

5. But why use political means? Since Wales has kept her national existence for centuries despite the lack of a separate political instrument, could she not continue to do so?

Answer: I have much sympathy with this objection. It has force since politics are unpleasant. But it also has weakness. It is true that many good folk are fed up with party politics on English lines. But to say you can do without politics is to start using political arguments. It is up to the good folk who hate party politics to lift Welsh politics to a high plane.

Again, it is a fact that Wales has only just managed to keep her national consciousness. That Welsh Nationalists have to start almost from scratch shows how Wales has lost much of it.

And then you may well consider the possibility that it is through the activity of the Nationalists that England has conceded to Wales what she has conceded.

6. Surely a Parliament for Welsh internal affairs would be sufficient? You surely cannot expect to separate yourself from England in every way?

Answer: We must distinguish between representative and responsible government. A Parliament for Wales would be merely representative government. A Wales that was not permitted those responsibilities which England claims for herself would be in a state of inferiority to England and to all other nations possessing national instruments.

We do not deny the need for co-operation with England. Co-operation is a principle dear to us. But you cannot co-operate until you are free.

To assume, as many Welshmen will do, that, after all, England should direct our foreign policy is to assume an identity of interest which does not exist. It is well known that Australia's foreign policy is in some respects utterly different from England. It is far less well realised that a free and responsible Wales would tend to think and act differently from England in many matters.

This may be the place to state that we regard the monarchy as no more an English monarchy than, say a New Zealand monarchy. That is to say the monarchy is above the nations of the Commonwealth.

7. Do you not preach self sufficiency?

Answer: We do not. 'Autarchy' or self sufficiency is not only impractical but cruel. On the other hand we believe we can provide more efficiently for ourselves than we do now and we claim the moral right to conclude our own commercial agreements.

8. Aren't you trying to drive a wedge between the workers by splitting the votes of the workers and by forming Welsh splinter unions?

Answer: We are not. But since Labour leaders from Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson have demanded self government for Wales, we cannot seriously be said to be demanding what is contrary to the Welsh workers' interest. The international solidarity of workers is not injured by the special tie of workers with their own country. The two enemies of the worker are Imperialism and the Mammoth Union. Welsh workers by their so called "unofficial" strikes have tried to throw off the dead weight of the Top Men in the English run mammoth unions. The bigger the union, the more local industrial unrest.

Wales should already have its own unions.

9. But you propose to force the Welsh language on all people in Wales.

This is an untruth which has been uttered by several politicians until many English-speaking Welsh people and others in Wales believe it. While cherishing the Old Tongue and fostering it in every possible way, we are well aware that where English has been the established speech in Wales, e.g. Gower, English will be normally used. The Nationalist believes, however, that Welsh can be re-established in regions where it has recently declined (e.g. Rhondda and Flint).

Some of the most convinced Nationalists are English-speaking. And the Party has several members of English and Irish descent.

10. But is not Nationalism a 19th century notion, and therefore out of date?

Welsh Nationalism is at least as old as the 12th century. English Nationalism is about as old. French Nationalism goes back to

Joan of Arc. But in any case dates are not important. Unless morality is out of date nationalism is not out of date.

5. CONCLUSION

You may well ponder upon the wonder whereby Wales has kept her sense of the nation for 700 years on virtually nothing, as those who think only of material factors would say.

The nation is not a thing to be sold by hucksters who do not understand why men will die for a flag.

The secret of Wales is one of loyalty. But we have given our loyalty to the wrong people or the wrong cause. In the 17th and 18th centuries we gave it to the Tory gentry many of whom betrayed Wales in their attempt to live like the English. In the 19th century we gave it to the Liberals, who, in spite of their worthy Welsh followers, are essentially an English party. In this, the 20th century, thousands of Welshmen have given their loyalty to the English Labour Party which has betrayed in turn its own promises to Wales. No wonder that more and more Labour Welshmen are coming into the Nationalist movement or at least trying to work against English dominated Labour. It is sad to find that some Welshmen still believe that the English Labour Party will redeem its promises. To believe this is to be a first rate sucker. The English Labour Party has changed out of all recognition since it tasted the fruits of being in the majority at Westminster. Nor will Wales find any hope in Bevan and his friends. In October 1952 Mr. Bevan was himself reprimanded within his own constituency for ignoring it while he pursued his own ambitions.

Your loyalty is to your nation, to all that it means to you, to your hearth and chapel, your work and your sport. Help Wales by giving Wales all your service. You will be helping to deliver the world from the fate that now looms over it.

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Form



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