

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, 26th July, 1966

(Extract from the Official Report)

WELSH FREEDOM

Speech by Mr. Gwynfor Evans, M.P.

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Mr. Gwynfor Evans (Carmarthen): It adds lustre to the honour which I have of representing Carmarthen in the House that I follow so very distinguished, respected and loved a person as the late Lady Megan Lloyd George. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is still very difficult to think of one who abounded with such vitality and gaiety as the "late" Lady Megan. Her passing was a very heavy loss to this House, as it was to Wales, the country which she loved so well. I enjoyed her friendship for 20 years, and, although I twice had the temerity to contest Carmarthen against her, it did not affect the warmth of our friendship, such was the generosity of her spirit. I rather think that she might be happy to see me here today in her place, speaking not only for Carmarthen but, if hon. Members will pardon the conceit, for Wales.

I want to speak for Wales on this Motion, although the Welsh nation does not seem to be included in its wording. The Motion refers to one nation. But there are four nations in these islands. Perhaps the framers of the Motion had in mind the English nation, which, for this House, is the nation. It is often called the British nation, and indeed in England and overseas "British" and "English" are very often used synonymously. I think that this stems from the fact that there is a British State, and "nation" and "State" are often confused.

However, because there is a British State, it does not follow at all that there is a British nation. The British State is multi-national. It serves four nations, although one would not gather that from the policies of Governments. This is not being pedantic. It is because the Governments at Westminster equate Britain with

England that the impact of their policies on Wales is not considered. What is good for the English goose is assumed to be good for the Welsh swan. Wales is ignored when policies are decided.

The power of the State has grown so greatly, particularly in this century, that it is only necessary for a multi-national State to ignore the existence of a small nation like Wales for that nation to be destroyed. We had evidence in this Chamber on Thursday that the English order has no place in it for a living Welsh nation. The rules of this English Parliament prevent even the taking of the oath in the Welsh language.

Since Wales was incorporated in England, in 1536, it has been the policy of successive Governments, pursued fitfully, it is true, to assimilate the Welsh people and so destroy the Welsh nation. The attitude to language is an example of this. In the middle of the last century virtually the whole of Wales was Welsh speaking. John Frost, the Chartist leader, would have to address his people in Newport and the Monmouthshire valleys in the Welsh language. Men who rode with Rebecca in the West were Welsh speaking to a man. The great insurrection at Merthyr Tydfil where between 30 and 40 were killed by the military happened in a town of almost entirely monoglot Welsh-speaking people.

In this situation it was decided in this Chamber, on the proposal of one who was a Member of this House, to, as he said,

"send the English schoolmaster among them". He said that this would be cheaper than sending the military to civilise them—that is, to make them English-speaking monoglots. Therefore, we had an entirely English education system imposed

on the Welsh people, and the children in the schools of Wales were punished if they spoke a word of Welsh during their school hours.

The Welsh language still has no official status in its own territory, and there is no intention on the part of the Government to give it anything like equality of status with the English language. English institutions and techniques have been imposed on us and the Welsh people have no self-defence. There is still no Welsh cinema or independent broadcasting corporation. There is still no Welsh national theatre or opera house. There is no Welsh national orchestra, despite the unusual talents of the Welsh people. The language which was the language of law and government in Wales, of kings and princes, scholars and artists has been made a pariah language in this country.

The result is that the Welsh nation which should today be living with the dignity and fullness which the Scandinavian nations enjoy, and which would be living in that way if it had its own Government, is being reduced to ruin. Many members of your Press and politicians gibe at us because three-quarters of our people have been deprived of their national language. It is the English order which has robbed them of their heritage. Now, through its spokesmen, it tells them that they are not true Welshmen. In doing this it has gravely impoverished and diminished their lives. I do not think that "barbarism" would be too strong a word to use for this.

This is usually justified on economic grounds. It is usually said that under the English order the Welsh people, whatever else they may not enjoy, do enjoy economic prosperity. For many, the death of a nation and the awful waste of great moral and spiritual resources matters nothing as long as the people are well fed, well-dressed and well housed. We are told that they are treated quite as well as any slaves in history.

The Leader of the Opposition celebrated St. David's Day with the affluent London Welsh—and there are more Welsh born people in London today than there are in all the five counties of Mid-Wales. He said that Wales was the success story of the Tory Government. Now we have seen spokesmen for the

Government soaring to even greater heights. During the recent by-election the Prime Minister told the people of Carmarthenshire, in a letter which expressed very great concern for Wales—after reading it the people of Wales felt that they should excuse his mistakes in Vietnam and Rhodesia; they were due, they thought, to his preoccupation with Wales—"The Welsh nation is prosperous". He gave us the reason for this prosperity in Wales. He said that it was due to the Labour Government's emphasis on regional development. The people of Carmarthen, praise be, did not believe him.

This is the sort of patronising rubbish which we have had throughout the years, and you will not be able to get away with it much longer because the Welsh are beginning to take their country as seriously as the English take their country and as seriously as the Danes and Swedes take their countries. They know the position. They see no evidence of this prosperity. What they see is mines closing, railways closing, steel workers being made redundant and a decline in agriculture.

In my County of Carmarthen, which is better placed than many in Wales, the economic situation gives the lie to the glib talk of prosperity. It is a county of very great natural wealth. There is in Carmarthenshire the only anthracite coal-field in Britain. There are steel and tin-plate works, ports, and great agricultural potential: it has produced more milk than any country in Britain. We have there great scenic beauty and a talented people. There is everything there, but the population of Carmarthenshire is falling year by year. It is the biggest county in Wales, yet its total population is today smaller than that of a medium-sized town like Swansea.

What do the Government do about it? They introduce an employment tax to drive men from the service industries. In Carmarthenshire, where will they go? What other work is there for them? The Government introduce centralised bureaucratic control of the steel industry. The aridity of a socialism which is little but bureaucratic centralism makes one despair.

At a time when Wales desperately needs expansion, which it has not had in

the past, it is having to face further contraction and deflation. Although there is no pressure whatever on Welsh manpower, unemployment in Wales is between three and four times as high as it is in these prosperous regions of England. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] It is between three and four times as high as in the South-Eastern region, and that is despite the heavy migration that we have had to face in Wales. Despite that, the Government intend to have still heavier unemployment, and that in a country which in the inter-war years saw nearly half a million people having to leave it because there was no work for them in their own land.

The Government do this because of English economic difficulties. They call it a crisis—that is a big word—but what do they know of crisis? In Wales, we are faced with a crisis far graver than that for which you mobilised all your resources in 1914 and 1939. There has never been a threat to the existence of the English nation, only to the existence of the English State. But what we are fighting for in Wales is the life of a nation, a nation which is threatened with extinction.

Your economic difficulty seems to us to be self-inflicted, as I have heard other hon. Members say this afternoon. It seems to us to arise because you place England's prestige above all else. Sterling, the pound, the hydrogen bomb, Aden and Singapore—your costly efforts to keep these relics of an imperial past place a devastating burden upon the Welsh economy. The proportion of the gross national product, said the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon, which is spent on overseas military expenditure is higher in this country than in any other country. That is an utterly shameful situation.

If you were prepared humbly to accept the reality of your present position in the world, there would be no talk of financial or economic crisis today and no panic Tory measures. This is an English crisis, but, as usual, the Welsh people have to pay more than their share of the price.

I would not have a single Welshman unemployed to save England's prestige. Even before we had this dose of deflation—and we in Wales cannot escape its

effects; that is quite impossible—the economic situation in Wales was critical. The Government told us six weeks ago that before 1970 we would have to find about 30,000 new jobs in Wales. That was an unrealistically conservative estimate.

We expect the displacement of 40,000 Welsh miners and the redundancy of 10,000 Welsh steel workers, and your agricultural policy, which will make agriculture an occupation which only the wealthy can enter, will drive thousands more from the land. The fact is that we would not be far out in saying that by 1970 we need in Wales, not 30,000, but more like 100,000 new jobs if we are to avoid the kind of migration and mass unemployment that we had in the 1920s and 1930s.

A problem of this magnitude cannot be tackled effectively unless you declare something like a state of emergency in Wales, but the massive complacency of the Government and their preoccupation with other matters lead us to be treated as a slight local difficulty undeserving of any special effort. The Welsh nation is prosperous, says the Prime Minister; and, therefore, if we are prosperous, why do anything about it? The Government say that they will give us advance factories—yes, sufficient to employ about one-tenth of the number necessary, even if they are filled, and who will fill them in present conditions when they are built?

What you are doing in Wales is making a desert and calling it prosperity. I can think of only one European nation which is governed as badly as Wales is governed, and that is the people of Brittany, where the French Government is deliberately trying to destroy the nation.

If you thought seriously about Wales, you would have had ready two years ago a plan for Welsh development, something like the late President Roosevelt's Tennessee Valley Authority. We have among us many admirers of that example of planning. But no plan was ready, and still no plan is ready for Wales. The Government's regional set-up is an ineffectual irrelevance. They could have created balanced development and stemmed depopulation—and in Wales we have depopulation not in just a few areas, but in nine of our 13 counties. In other words, nine of our 13 counties are seeing falling popu-

lation, as against only two out of the 39 in England. Not one of Norway's 18 counties is seeing depopulation, not one in a country which is far more difficult to govern than Wales. We are told that this kind of process is inevitable and is the price of living in the modern world. Nothing in this life is inevitable, not even a Labour win in Carmarthen.

If we are men, we have a will of our own, and we have a spirit and we can decide what our economy is to be. We could shape our economy if we had the freedom to do so. We are Welshmen in Wales, but we do not have the freedom to shape our economy. If we had that freedom we could subordinate the economy to social ends and, in particular, to create the conditions of full nationhood in our country.

A Government who were serious about Wales would first have created an efficient transport system. That is the key to all development. One cannot hope to have any industrial development without an efficient transport system. A Government serious about Wales would never have permitted the closure of Welsh railways. They would have modernised them instead. We have no evidence that Welsh railways in Wales as a whole are losing money. All the evidence is to the contrary and that they are making a profit year by year in Wales as a whole. There was no need of Beeching in Wales. It was in England that you had to have him, and even after having Beeching you lost last year £132 million on your railways, half the total Irish Budget. Will you close all the English railways? Not on your life. They are necessary to the English society and to the economy of England. Have we no economy and no society in Wales that our amenities are dealt with in this way?

A Government serious about Wales would have built major roads in our country, but apart from a derisory few miles in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire we have no motorways in Wales and very few dual carriageways. We are told that there is no industry in Wales to justify building them. Have you ever heard of the Autostrada del Soli, built right along the backbone of Italy as an axle for that country? Have you heard of the 3,000 miles of motorways which

4 Italy will have by 1970? We are told that we cannot afford these things. How can others afford them?

How can the Six Counties of Northern Ireland afford them, for instance? By 1970, they will have 100 miles of motorways. The equivalent in Wales would be 200 miles in our 13 counties. The Six Counties of Northern Ireland are planning to build 200 miles of motorway. The equivalent in Wales would be 400 miles. Between 1965 and 1970, those Six Counties will spend no less than £87 million on roads alone. The equivalent in Wales would be £150 million spent on roads alone during that period. To make up the leeway in our country, we need an expenditure of £200 million. Actually, less than one quarter of that sum is to be spent. They are even cutting down on expenditure on roads in our country.

Our feeling is that the Government never will invest in our country on this scale. They prefer to spend their money on bombs and bases. They never will take the necessary steps to build up a healthy balanced economy in Wales. What, therefore, should they do? They should get out of Wales, and leave the government of that country to the Welsh people themselves. It would be good for England, and it would be good for the people of Wales. It would be good for England to have a prosperous nation alongside her, instead of the ruin that the Government are now creating. It would be the right and magnanimous thing to do; and the English can be magnanimous, as many small young countries know from experience and as I know from my short experience in this House. I know that there is no shortage of magnanimity here. Why not apply some of it to the people of Wales in our present situation?

The Government recognise the existence of the Welsh nation. They have given us a series of concessions. It may be said that things are different in Wales as a result. We have a Secretary of State and a Minister of State, and, fortunately, we have had very fine Welshmen to fill those offices. It is no disrespect to or reflection upon them to say, however, that these offices make virtually no difference to our situation.

After all, Scotland has had a Secretary of State for 80 years, and look at the awful situation in that poor country now.

Let Wales have the institutions of nationhood. Let Wales live like a nation and act like a nation. Today, she can do nothing for herself. She cannot even build a road for herself. She has no power of action, no power of decision or choice, and no freedom. Let the people of Wales be free to act for themselves and live their own lives rooted in the traditions of millennia, and rooted in their Christian values.

I do not think that anyone would be disappointed in the fruits of Welsh national freedom. The most exciting thing about Wales is her possibilities. They are limitless. If the Welsh people only had freedom, they would be found to do more than justify their existence. After all, we have been there a long time, and there is a growing movement

throughout the country now, mainly among the younger generation, which is determined that this "ancient nation proud in arms", as Milton called her, will be there for a long time to come and that the language, so greatly enriched by the Romans when they lived among us—there are over 1,000 Latin words in the Welsh language from those distant days—will again be spoken through the length and breadth of our land.

Many people thought that the sun of Wales had set for ever, but I do not think so now. Looking round the country in which I live, I can see something different from the light of the setting sun. It looks more like the rising of a new dawn. "Westward look, the land is bright". I appeal for help at the seat of the only Government which we have to create quickly the conditions which will ensure for the people of Wales a fine national future.