

# THE STORY OF PLAID CYMRU in Neath

### BEGINNINGS

The Welsh Nationalist Party was founded in Pwllheli in 1925 with the coming together of nationalist factions in the south and the north. The southern group was led by Saunders Lewis and he was joined at the inaugural meeting by fellow south Walian, Fred Jones; and from the north together with Lewis were H.R. Jones, Lewis Valentine, Moses Gruffydd and David Edmund Jones. D.J. Williams missed a travel connection from his west Wales home and when he arrived at Pwllheli the meeting had launched the Movement.

The enthusiasm generated in that room would have been immense and the six men present couldn't have imagined the long, bumpy road that lay ahead of them as they set out to convince the electorate of the advantages of a self governing Wales.

Arguments for Home Rule weren't new in 1925. The case had been embraced by the Liberal Party and later by the blossoming Labour movement. Cynically one could argue that as the Liberals saw power slipping from them they attempted to grasp a last remnant of an ideal; whilst the Labour movement, despite the claims of Keir Hardie (ILP member for Merthyr & Aberdare 1900-1915): "When the men elected to make laws are but a small part of a foreign parliament, that is when all healthy national feeling died . . . I have always been a zealous supporter of self government." He was later to add: "I often wonder why it is that some men oppose Home Rule for the land of their birth". As the Labour movement continued to grow, it left behind the ideals of Welsh autonomy realising they had a larger pier to fish from in London.

Those six men in that room in Pwllheli had realised that the only way forward to securing a positive political aim was by forming a Party which could be trusted to fight democratically for Welsh nationhood and all that that would encompass.

H.R. Jones was elected to be the Party's first National Organiser and among his initial tasks was a Summer School for all those interested in joining the Movement. This was held in Machynlleth in 1926.

It is from this meeting we see the first glimmer of interest from the Neath Constituency emerge. Beth Jones and her brother, the poet David James Jones (Gwenallt) from Alltwen, decided to make the journey to Machynlleth using prize money for winning the Chair at a National Eisteddfod. That £20 prize was well spent as they remained dedicated members of Plaid Cymru for the rest of their lives.

Beth Jones who became Mrs. Beth Owen and lived in Neath for more than fifty years said: "£20 was an enormous amount to us then. But we had heard about the Summer School and had always believed in self government. It was like an expedition to us. And we were not disappointed. It was a wonderful time. Kate Roberts, Cassie Davies, Lewis Valentine, Saunders Lewis and the lovely D.J. Williams were there, and many more. We came away exhilarated and felt nothing could stop us gaining self respect for Wales.

Back home not a great deal happened but we talked about the movement and my brother wrote poetry about the state of Wales. We (the Welsh Nationalist Party) fought our first election in 1929 when Lewis Valentine contested Caernarfon securing 609



• Mrs. Wendy Richards presenting Mrs. Beth Owen with a thank you gift.



• The "three": Saunders Lewis, Lewis Valentine and D.J. Williams, who burned the R.A.F. Training Range buildings at Penyberth. The act had an enormous impact on the political and cultural life of Wales, and for the first time in centuries people had suffered for their vision of a free Wales.

votes (1.6% of the total vote cast). The result was a disappointment to us, but nevertheless it was a beginning."

It is as well to note the political climate in Wales, and particularly in Neath from 1918, when the town was granted a sole representative to speak on its behalf. Up to that time Neath had been a part of a constituency called Glamorgan County which consisted of five divisions.

Of the thirty-six seats in Wales then, twenty were held by the Liberal Party after the 1918 General Election. In Neath J.H. Edwards (Liberal) had a comfortable majority over the Labour candidate, H. Morgan, of 8148 votes.

It was after the 1922 General Election that Labour's domination of the Neath seat began when William Jenkins was returned with a majority of 6235 votes.

It is interesting to note that twice this century in General Elections in Neath, the electorate was not given the opportunity to cast a vote: in 1924 William Jenkins was returned un-opposed and this was repeated in 1935, again with Jenkins who by this time had been knighted.

Activity with Plaid Cymru on a national level was concentrated in the Welsh heartland when J.E. Daniel contested Caernarfonshire in 1931 and Saunders Lewis fought the University of Wales Seat where he finished second, securing 29.1% of the vote cast.

During the years between the Great War and Second World War the membership of Plaid was small in general, and only a few people advocated independence in the Neath area. The Trade Union Movement had transferred its support from the Liberal Party to the blossoming socialist ideal, but not without tribulations for those who were active in those early days of workers' awareness. A meeting in Seven Sisters illustrates the point and also highlights the difficulties the early Plaid Cymru members faced whilst trying to advocate amongst all Welsh people that the direction to ease the lot of working class people in general was through a managed Welsh national government.

The working classes between the wars, despite certain reforms introduced by the Liberals under Lloyd George to ease both their living and working conditions, were still grim despite the flowery image of 'life at the hearth'. In many cases the hearth was sited in hovels. It is not surprising that the proletariat ultimately listened to the combined efforts of the Labour Movement and the Trade Union leaders.

Every argument was listed as the worker against the capitalist. And this can be understood when one considers the hardships and uncaring attitudes of the industrialists.

Powerful arguments presented by powerful orators were more than a match for the few Plaid activists, who themselves were caught up in the social conditions the working class endured.

Trade unionism was introduced to Seven Sisters during the period of 'New Unionism', the new doctrine amongst trade unionists, that trade unions should be

more than a protection for labour within the capitalist society, it should become an instrument for the transformation of capitalism; in other words, trade union activity should be political as well as industrial.

This new political conscious movement was strongly influenced in the early days by the Social Democratic Federation. Although it did not receive the support of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, it had great influence over the young miners in the Seven Sisters Colliery.

Introducing this new revolutionary political thought to the inhabitants of Seven Sisters was no simple task. People who throughout their lives had been in a world of conservative outlook (under the influence of the old-time Lord of the Manor discipline) to whom coalmining was but an occupation to supplement their livelihood on their farms, could not be expected to lend a willing ear to this new method of thinking. They even classed the people who had settled in the village, as a result of finding employment in the new industry, as foreigners.

Time after time, attempts to organise political meetings in the village were met with bitter rebuff from the older inhabitants. Whenever a political meeting was held in the village, those who had the courage to attend, would slink along with their caps pulled well down over their eyes, hoping that no one would see them.

After several attempts, a meeting was convened at the Reading Room, when Mr. Vernon Harshorn tried to give a lecture on the principles of Socialism. After he had finished his lecture, the chairman invited questions from the meeting, or if they so wished, they could express their views on the subject matter of the lecture. For a long time there was complete silence, then a voice from the back of the hall shouted: 'We all liked the way you spoke, but we do not agree with what you said'.

Nevertheless despite this general conception of socialism, not only in this mining village but throughout rural and industrial Great Britain the progressive march towards a united working class movement changed these opinions which more and more became expressed through the ballot box.

It is somewhat ironic that it was also in Seven Sisters, locally called the Red Valley because of its radical political thought, that in 1972 Plaid Cymru's Huw Evans captured the County Council seat for the Dulais Valley and in 1976 Morris Davies was returned to Neath Rural District Council. The Red Valley had acted again to change its political face to one which should embrace a radical democratic socialism with a particularly Welsh flavour.

Neath had featured little in the fabric of Plaid's early campaigns. The Party did object to the Bath & West Agricultural Show being presented in Neath in 1936. This would have been seen as an affront to National identity that such a prestigious event to English rural life should occupy a section of Wales thus saying that Wales was nothing more than a geographic western arm to everything English.

### POST WAR

Interest in the activities of Plaid Cymru were intensified in 1945 when the Party contested the by-election caused in Neath by the death of Sir William Jenkins.

This would be the first time the Blaid would fight a seat in the industrial valleys of South Wales.

The candidate chosen was Wynne Samuel who had won a seat for the Party on the Pontardawe Urban District Council a few years previously becoming one of only a few nationalist councillors in Wales.

At the time of this by-election campaign the party began to sow grass root structure in Neath when a few members started meeting regularly in a room above Tucker's Cafe on Windsor Road. Coincidentally the same building was used for the very successful meetings conducted by Huw Evans in the early '70's, but by this time the cafe was owned by Vaccari's. The premises is now owned by Swansea Housing Association.

At these early Rhanbarth meetings Mrs. Wendy Richards acted as secretary. Mrs. Richards had come close to winning a Pontardawe District Council seat in 1946, losing by only 5 votes!

Plaid Cymru's campaign in Neath would have given great heart to the party as Wynne Samuel secured 16.2% of the vote to finish in second place to D.J. Williams. Optimism would have been high just under two months later when the General Election was fought and Plaid fielded seven candidates throughout Wales, one of which was Neath where the conflicts of the hustings were to the fore.

It is quite likely that campaigning didn't actually stop in 1945 from the by-election to the General Election as one newspaper report records a clash between D.J. Williams and Wynne Samuel about the former's religious convictions. A newspaper report dated Wednesday June 13 1945 carried the following: "Mr. Wynne Samuel, the Welsh Nationalist Candidate disassociates himself from the rumours - denied yesterday - that Mr. D.J. Williams, Labour, is an atheist. He said the rumours increased when Mr. Williams refrained from the Christian oath in Parliament." This minor ruffling of feather continues later in the same edition of the paper: "Referring to Mr. D.J. Williams' denial that he was an atheist Mr. Wynne Samuel said at a meeting in Cwmgwrach last night (12.6.1945) that he had heard the rumour during the recent by-election."

Mr. Samuel said that he did not once attack either of his opponents in the last campaign. He had entered the campaign with clean hands and had come out of it with clean hands.

Mr. Williams' religious convictions were his own personal concern. The rumour had recently increased because according to a report when Mr. Williams took his seat in Parliament, he had refused to take the Christian oath.

Mr. Samuel added, "that in any case, religious prejudices should not be exploited."

"No party had suffered more than the Welsh Nationalist Party in this direction, because a few of its members happened to be Catholics," continued Mr. Samuel.

"It was a credit to the Christian traditions of the nation that atheism had never thrived in Wales, but in a democracy all creeds and the convictions of all men must be respected."

The debate about the religious leanings of the Member of Parliament for Neath continues when Mr. Williams was asked by a reporter at the adoption meeting what foundation lay behind the rumours. The report said: "When he took his seat in the House of Commons (after winning the by-election) he had to take the oath or make the usual affirmation. His socialist friends advised him to make the affirmation. He himself did not care for the oath, with its references to 'standing by' the King; he preferred to make a straightforward statement that he would accept the duties of the House and carry them out to the best of his ability."

It seems that the basis for D.J. Williams' actions on entering the Commons was one of an anti monarchist stance as opposed to one of a bias against religious beliefs. However, this sort of political handball manoeuvring at the hustings did not harm Williams who was returned as the member for Neath with a majority of 29491.

But Wynne Samuel, fighting the seat for the second time for the Blaid held the vote to 7.3%. The traditional swing at by-elections had returned to the main party but Plaid had retained a respectable vote for nationalism. Very encouraging considering the electorate of Neath had that summer been offered for the first time the opportunity to consider a Welsh state.

It is interesting to read the election address published by Wynne Samuel during the General Election and to note that it differs very little to what we, as democratic nationalists argue today. Published in the South Wales Evening Post it reads:

> "Rival English political parties are today eloquent in their election promises, but they mean nothing to Wales. Many promises were made in the last war, but were never fulfilled.

> After the tremendous sacrifices of 1914-18, a war fought for the freedom of small nations - Wales received such treatment that her very national life was almost destroyed. Her language and culture languished, while her economic and social structure was so paralysed that poverty and distress became a parable of Welsh life.

The Government of London had no remedy except to transfer nearly half a million people from Wales to England, the majority being young people between the ages of 18 and 30. Despite this huge emigration the average unemployment figures for Wales varied from 25 to 30 per cent during the inter-war period, the highest in Great Britain.

In four years, 1932-36, 1,190 new factories were opened in London, 535 in North-west England, only 25 in Wales.

Numerous works, factories, mines, quarries, closed in Wales. Twenty-six local authorities in Wales levied rates of over 20s in the £. Public assistance increased. Shopkeepers who had been an integral part of an organic community failed to meet the increasing burden and the intensive competition of the capitalist chain stores.

The dread disease of cancer, tuberculosis and silicosis ravaged Wales to a

greater extent than any other country in Europe.

The Welsh Advisory report of Welsh Reconstruction admits that this poverty and suffering was substantially unrelieved until well into the present war.

Whether it was the Labour Government of 1929-31 or successive Tory Governments, it made no difference to Wales. They all rejected our appeals for assistance. They refused to listen to our protests. They rejected all our deputations.

The truth is that Wales has failed to gain Government recognition and has been ignored. In Government circles Wales does not count except as an appendage and a convenience to England, and our people are no more than fluid labour to be ladled out of the labour pool, wherever there is a demand for it.

There are no signs that the Labour or Tory parties are anxious to change this policy. Their spokesmen in Wales, of course, produce all manner of policies from the political hat, but the **official** policies of their London controlled organisations are adamant in their rejection of all Welsh claims.

Mr. Churchill, Mr. Attlee and Mr. Morrison have **all** rejected the claim of Wales to a mere Secretary of State. They have refused to treat or recognise Wales as a nation for any post-war development.

To allow the Welsh nation to be ignored by Government as it has been for years is to allow Wales to be destroyed.

Unless the people of Wales compel the Government to make a drastic change in its policy, we will find that a cultured community, which loved its eisteddfod, choir and chapel, drama and literature, will be reduced to a condition of fellaheen (a peasant culture), people without a country, without homes, without roots, driven at the beck and call of Government officials.

There is only one power that can change the situation - the common people of the Welsh nation.

There is only one way in which the people of Wales can change the situation - through effective political action.

That cannot be done by any English political party. It can only be done by a Welsh political organisation with its roots and control in Wales, owing its first allegiance to Wales and her people.

Wales must have in Parliament men and women free from London controlled party whip, free to serve Wales; men and women of character, integrity and ability, who cannot be silenced by petty offices and honours.

There must be created in Parliament a free Welsh Parliamentary party to defend the interests of Wales. The present Welsh Parliamentary Party is a farce. Vital economic and political matters are omitted from its agenda, but its members unite to protest against such trifles as the omission of Welsh insignia from Monty's baton.

The Welsh nationalist party is today fighting seven Parliamentary seats in

Wales. Soon it will fight every seat. It is a democratic political organisation whose social and economic programme has inherited the old Welsh radical spirit of Tom Ellis and breathes many of the ideals of Keir Hardie.

The pattern of our economic programme for Wales can be found in the policies already successfully applied in countries like New Zealand and the small Scandinavian countries, and, like those countries, a free Wales could make a great contribution to a World Commonwealth of Nations.

In Neath the electors have an opportunity to ignore the delightful parlourgame of English party politics. Wales will need their votes. In any case, English policy in England is secure without it. This time the Neath electors can vote for Wales.

The growth of Scottish Nationalism is already reflected in the greater attention given to Scottish problems. The growth of the Welsh Nationalism will have similar consequences for Wales."

### PERIOD OF INACTIVITY

Despite the encouraging percentage of votes secured in the by-election held in May 1950 and the July General Election the same year by Wynne Samuel there followed a twenty-one year gap before Neath was again to field a Plaid Cymru candidate in a General Election.

The reason for this was essentially of an economic nature with little structure at the grass roots for fund raising the election expenses had to be met by Plaid Cymru's central office. Naturally they concentrated their meagre resources in more winnable constituencies.

Despite Plaid's absence at General Elections in Neath there was a small core of activists who did, from time to time, contest local elections but with little success. Wynne Samuel did win a seat as P.U.D.C. and did have an office in Ystalyfera.

Mrs. Wendy Richards came very close to winning a seat at Pontardawe failing by a handful of votes but this was the best the Plaid could hope for with only a few cogs of a party machine to assist them, the members relied on enthusiasm more than organisation. Nevertheless, it is this enthusiasm and sincere belief in Welsh self determination that were the seeds that have natured into the strong body of Plaid members and councillors we see in Neath today.

The small band of Plaid members during those post war years did work exceptionally hard by organising public meetings throughout the constituency. People like Meurig Llewelyn, Ystalyfera, and Tom Currie were committed to the cause and fought the Labour Party in Neath and the Swansea Valleys on political issues refraining from responding to personal attacks by members of other political groups.

One such meeting was held in Cwmgwrach on May 12 1951 which was in response to Mr. Cliff Protheroe's call for the Labour Party to drop its policy to secure a Parliament for Wales.

Mr. Protheroe was the secretary of the Council of Labour for Wales and native of Glynneath. The Labour Party had always had in its constitution a commitment to form a Welsh Parliament and that still is the case despite moves as early as 1950 to remove it. The meeting at Glynneath was reported as follows in the South Wales Evening Post on May 12 1951:

### "BOYCOTT WELSH PARLIAMENT MOVE

Plaid Cymru Attacks Labour Attitude

A public meeting was held at Glynneath, under the auspices of Plaid Cymru Mr. Tom Currie, Neath, presiding.

Councillor Wynne Samuel (Pontardawe) referred to the statement issued by Mr. Cliff Protheroe, who is a native of Glynneath and secretary of the Council of Labour for Wales calling upon the Labour members to boycott the movement to secure a Parliament for Wales. Mr. Protheroe, he said, had described the demand as 'frivolous'. Yet said the speaker, less than five years ago, at the 1945 General Election, the same Mr. Protheroe had issued an official statement of policy, in which he said that the true freedom of Wales would be the result and product of

a Socialist Britain, and under such conditions, self government could be in Wales an effective and secure guardian of the life of the nation.

It was an amazing exhibition of political acrobatics as this was the first official declaration ever to be made by the Labour Party that it was not in favour of a Welsh Parliament.

From the days of the earliest pioneers onwards in books, pamphlets and conference resolutions, the Labour Party had always declared itself in favour of a Welsh Parliament.

If Welsh M.P.'s could be unanimous in their support of a parliament to Ceylon, where fully 80% of the population were illiterate there could be no possible argument against a parliament for one of the oldest and most civilised countries in the world - Wales."

This Glynneath meeting was typical of many held which paid constant attention to Labour's policy and decisions both at a national and local level.

The call for a Welsh Parliament was a focus, and Plaid members supported the call by Undeb Cymru Fydd, who officially sponsored the call for a Parliament for Wales. Undeb Cymru Fydd lasted from 1950 to 1956 and its aim was supported by Plaid, the Communist Party, the Liberal Party and by five Labour M.P.'s.

Gwynfor Evans, who had been elected the Party's President at the Llangollen Summer School in 1945 was naturally a key figure in the growth of the Party. Progress was painfully slow but Summer Schools were held on an annual basis and acted as a focus for members to meet nationalists from other parts of Wales and to inform themselves of any new developments and to discuss Party policy.

The core of members from Neath during the 1950's and through to the 1960's continued to grow despite the lack of a General Election candidate to focus attention on the call from a Welsh Parliament. The members would have gone into adjacent constituencies to help with their campaigns on those occasions when Aberafan and Gŵyr fielded a candidate. One notable election campaign during the 1955 General Election saw Chris Rees contest Gŵyr and securing 10.6% of the vote. He fought this election from jail, becoming the first Plaid Cymru candidate to do so. He had been imprisoned for refusing to undergo national service on the grounds of being a Welsh nationalist.

Other activities occupied members' time which were related to the advancement in Welsh consciousness and that was the founding of a bilingual education system for children in Neath.

A founder, with others, of this education system was Mrs. Wendy Richards of Bryncoch without whose efforts it can be argued that opportunities for parents to have their children's formal education conducted through the medium of Welsh would have taken many more years to have been established. The system was inaugurated in Neath in 1954 and has flourished ever since. Other members were active in trade union affairs always carrying the arguments for self determination. Of course such groups were dominated by members of the Labour party, whose official line was to support a Parliament for Wales but that policy was to lie dormant until, under Mr. Jim Callaghan's Government we saw the 1979 Devolution referendum campaign for a Yes

vote for the establishment of a Parliament or Assembly on Welsh soil.

Supported by Plaid Cymru this Campaign was routed by a few influential members of the Labour Party (Neath's MP then, Mr. Donald Coleman was against the policy) and was doomed to failure.

NEATH R.D.C. ELECTION

May 11th, 1967

(Bryncoch Ward)

# PLAID CYMRU

will hold a public meeting at

BLAENHONDDAN SCHOOL on Monday, April 24th, 1967 at 7.0 p.m.

SPEAKERS IN SUPPORT OF YOUR PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE

# **BRYAN JAMES**

WILL BE

# Illtyd Lewis

# Glyn John

A warm welcome is extended to all who wish to know more about PLAID CYMRU and what the Party stands for on a National and Local basis

PLAID CYMRU is the only Party whose FIRST priority is the Welfare of Wales and of her people

PLAID CYMRU is a democratic Party free from London political pressure

Amcan y Blaid yw:-

CYFIAWNDER I'R WERIN RHYDDID I GYMRU

Cyhoeddood gan genry hidydd Plaid Cymru, 10, Deffryn New, Bremoich, Aigraffwyd gan D. B. Smith, Ystradgenlais, i 109

An early Plaid Election poster.

### GROWING ORGANISED ACTIVITY

The by-election victory in Carmarthen by Gwynfor Evans in 1966 can be argued to have been the catalyst of the serious organised political activity which has formed and structured the party to the present time.

If the members and supporters of Plaid Cymru in Neath enjoyed only the minimal action, usually at the time of General Elections and then not even in this constituency, from Gwynfor's famous Carmarthen win the tide certainly turned with meetings becoming more political in content with the onus directly concerning securing seats in local government; with the forming of branches in every village in the area, building up a membership of committed workers who were prepared to face the Labour Party and its policies head on, both in public debate and through the media.

The faithful band of people who had resolutely argued the case for Home Rule through what has to be considered a barren period of Plaid Cymru activity between 1951 and the late 1960's they were enthusiastic young people who would rely on the guidance of their seniors as the branches grew in numbers and began to operate in a politically salient nature.

The strength of those who had been members and active during the 1950's and onward was to provide a solid foundation for the local party as we know it today. Members of the calibre of Meurig Llewelyn in Ystalyfera, Wendy Richards and Philip Cockwell in Neath, Tom Currie in Briton Ferry to name but three led the growing membership towards the seventies where the party was to enjoy more local election success and to have a real impact on various areas through making inroads by securing community council seats.



● Plaid supporters welcoming Gwynfor Evans at Neath Railway Station, 1966. Tom Currie and his wife are the second couple from the right, holding the Welsh dragon.

# Plaid deny wall slogans

# MP BLAMES PARTY AND CALLS FOR TOUGHER PENALTIES

### Western Mail Reporter

Plaid Cymru last night denied they were responsible for daubing political slogans on walls and property, after a South Wales M.P. said he would press the Home Secretary to introduce heavier penalties for daubing offenders.

Neath's M.P., Mr. Donald Coleman claimed last night that Plaid were "most guilty" of wall daubing. He has also made an official complaint to Neath "Rural Coencil."

But last night a spotermenfor Plaig Cytors at Nesth said. "My personal opinion is that it is dotte by little boys, whosy persona are not Plaid members.

"Tile does our party harm. If we found that it has been done by any Plad frember we would certainly rap his knockies very hard."

Mr. Coleman is pressing the flame Secretary to impose beavier penalties on people who paint slogans on the property of private house-holders, local authorities and punite books.

### Recover costs

He will also ask II it is possible for the people whose property has been affected to secure the cost of cleaning from the offenders.

Mr. Coleman said, "This question arises from the recent campaign in the Brytown ward for a seat on Neath Rural Council, Paid Cymru slogsth wery strawied over two cleo tricity sub-stations on Cae were housing estate."

"I don't care which party II is, whether her own or all; subset party, h is reprehension to do such a thing. I hope people will become really wild shout this, and we shall have no more of this runnerse."

Mr. Coleman said he hadeen Plaid Coneu sorgans moved all over Water.

### Offered help

"They say we must keep wales beautiful and yet they do this," he said. "You see it in the Black Mountains and on the Beauces I wooder what norther think?"

Plaid Cymrs; said they had affered to help our local sarragnowner whose howher had been daubed with singans, although they did not admit they were responsible.

Free Wales Army this does more harm than good to in." said the Plaid spokesman.



Plaid Cymru would have to pay for the removal of alor-like these if 1 M.P. Mr. Do Coleman has h.

### A 1967 newspaper cutting.

Plaid Cymru's enthusiastic approach to campaigning during the local elections was not to Donald Coleman's taste!



# South Wales Evenin



Wedding Rings

# PLAID CYMRU WINS CARMARTHEN

Historic day for Wales,' says the Nationalist candidate WELSH HYMNS-WILI



ommons interest

**IPS' REACTION** TO PLAID Evening Post headlines, 1966



HIGHER HOUSE PRICES

1,000 POLICE II SEARCH FOR Shares drop as

waits

FAR SHART









# MARGINAI **GOES** 1000 STRONGHOLD SOCIALIST

Plaid Cymru gets within 2,000 of Labour at Rhondda West ALL SAFE AS SHIP DODGES ROCKS

Results

Opencast workers



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Mumbles as

Evening Post front page, 1967

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ALEXANDER CARL

The younger members in particular were very active by talking to their peers, debating the policies of the Blaid and certainly enjoyed considerable success in convincing many to sign those green membership forms we were familiar with and joining the party. Many to this day remain members.

As the 1970's dawned political activity intensified with people like Mr. Tudor from Briton Ferry, Tom Penry Evans in Glynneath, Tom Davies in Neath Abbey, Morris Davies and Cliff Griffiths in the Dulais Valley all working towards getting elected to local councils.

The activity in Neath was a reflection of a new awareness of the political force which was being mirrored through membership with Plaid Cymru. It was a direct result of Gwynfor Evans' Carmarthen win. The train had started and was gaining speed.

Members from the Neath constituency were prepared, and did travel to other constituencies to help in election campaigns. Less than a year after Gwynfor's election success Rhondda West made national headlines when the solidly safe Labour seat came within a whisker of belongings to the Blaid.

Vic Davies was following that doyen of Rhondda Welshness, the inspirational Kitchener Davies who had fought the seat in the 1950's; Rhondda West was then contested for Plaid by Glyn James. Vic fought the seat for the first time in 1964 gaining 10.2% of the vote. In the 1966 General Election he finished in second place with a slightly less percentage; and in the by-election in March 1967 Vic nearly pulled off a major shock failing to take the seat in Labour's heartland, by only 2,300 votes.

Such events fuelled the enthusiasm of the Neath membership who flocked to Merthyr Tydfil for a by-election there following the death of the legendary socialist, S.O. Davies who had, despite being rejected by the Labour Party as their candidate for the General Election in 1970 stood as an Independent Labour candidate and had thrashed Labour's Tal Lloyd.

Emrys Roberts contested the by-election in April 1972 for Plaid and only failed to capture the seat for the nationalists by a little under 4,000 votes, a remarkable achievement which was to set a benchmark for greater things to come in Plaid's history in that constituency.

1970 also saw a return to General Election activity for the membership in Neath when Glyn John fought the seat and secured a respectable 10.1% of the vote.

The local party machine was beginning now to have its cogs oiled and serviced with activity of both a political and social nature bonding the existing members and attracting new people into the party.

For a few years Dr. Bryn & Mrs. Wendy Richards of Tyle Teg in Penywern had hosted Garden Parties which were often opened by prominent members of the Party such as Gwynfor Evans.

Meetings became a regular feature of the various branches and both the Rhanbarth and Talaith Committees were very active.

The Party supported the mining industry which had seen massive closures during the Harold Wilson's Labour administration which had brought economic mayhem to the local valley areas. It is a particularly salient point that Plaid's early election



• Lee Evans, Mrs. Phil Williams and Mrs. Jean Thomas at the Aberdulais Garden Party.

### PLAID CYMRU, NEATH

# A GARDEN PARTY

will be held at

Danygraig House, Aberdulais
(by kind permission of Dr. and Mrs. Norman Thomas)

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4th, 1971

In the event of rain the Fête will be held in a nearby hall.

ADMISSION: 5p

Sideshows, Refreshments, Entertainment, Stalls.



The Garden Party at Tyle Teg, 1969.

### PLAID CYMRU, CASTELL NEDD

Cynhelir

# **GARDDWEST**

Tyle Teg,' 19 Daphne Road, Penywern Castell Nedd

SADWRN, AWST 30, 1969. 2.30-6.30 p.m.

Agorir yr Arddwest am 3 o'r gloch gan Mr GWYNFOR EVANS, A.S.

Os bydd yn bwrw glaw, cynhelir yr Arddwest yn Hen Neuadd y Cyngor, Gwyn Hall

MYNEDIAD 1/6

Stondinau

Dawnsio Gwerin

Tê a Lluniaeth

success would come from Glynneath with the election of Tom Penry Evans to the Neath Rural District Council; and the Dulais Valley returned both Morris Davies and Cliff Griffiths to the Neath Borough Council in 1974 where they were joined by Sylvia Tudor from Briton Ferry.

The success of the three members on the Borough Council followed the victory, again the Dulais Valley in 1973 of Huw Evans who was returned to the West Glamorgan County Council, becoming the first Plaid member to sit on that authority.

Throughout the area there was a sprinkling of Community Council gains following the round of elections in 1974, which was a year that held two General Elections (May and October) local authority elections at both Borough and Community levels; and the infamous referendum held by the Edward Heath Conservative Government on whether we would remain in the EEC or not?



● Tom Penry Evans.

This activity was caught on a very upward swing in Welsh politics towards Plaid Cymru which was reflected in Neath by all the trappings of an organised political machine, who by this time was lead in name by County Councillor Huw Evans who had also represented the Party in both the 1974 General Elections holding second place to Donald Coleman for the Labour Party.

Huw Evans did epitomise the activity which was typical now in most valley areas of South Wales, areas which had been dominated by Labour Party politics for fifty or more years. Now they were facing a challenge on their doorsteps by people who were traditionally of their own socialist creed.

In many instances they would be from families which had formed the backbone on both the Labour and trade union movements but who saw a better future through self determination.

The Party was vibrant and full of optimism which packed meetings, both Rhanbarth and a return to the old style public meetings which were held both in the main hall of the Neath Technical College on Dwr-y-Felin Road and in the Gwyn Hall; these were supplemented by open forums held in all parts of the constituency.

They were on occasions attended by Party President, Gwynfor Evans whose charismatic presence was worth a thousand leaflets.

Bill Tudor from Briton Ferry was the Rhanbarth chairman, Sylvia, his wife held a Borough Council seat and remained the backbone of local council representation up to 1996 when she retired from the scene of local administration.

The two General Election campaigns of 1974 were fronted by the candidate, Huw Evans from Bryncoch whose style of tackling the Labour stronghold and convincing the electorate was similar to the methods of Wynne Samuel in the 1940's and 50's.

These relied on pure political argument and challenging the Labour Party to

contradict the time honoured views that Wales would be a better place with an administration governing its own affairs: and administration, elected by the people of Wales, that would exploit the resources of the country for the benefit of those living there, were succinctly carried at every opportunity and through every available medium.

Among the younger people they found a receptive voice; they found many converts too, from those a generation older who had suffered the depressions of the twenties and thirties.

From his position as a County Councillor, Huw Evans was able to make many statements appertaining to Neath which were hungrily carried in a local press which had been starved of another view from the power base of county government.

Huw Evans carried the Blaid into second place in both the 1974 General Elections and significantly lowering the Labour majority to below twenty thousand votes - such was the hill to climb for the local party but seeing their enthusiasm you would not believe it.

Neath's electoral activity was overshadowed, and justly so, by the dramatic success of Plaid Cymru in Merthyr Tudful where the Party took control of the council there in 1976; the Party would also form the administration in the Rhymni Valley. These successes proved that electorally we could win, and together with the 3 Plaid MP's there was a rare euphoria running through the veins of the membership generally.

The County Council Elections in 1977 saw Plaid double its representation to two members with Aled Gwyn (Blaenhonddan-Dyffryn Clydach) joining Huw Evans who had retained his Dulais Valley seat by just 36 votes.



 Councillors Tom Penri Evans, Huw Evans, Gwynfor Evans, Aled Gwyn and Morris Davies at a function at Plas-y-felin, Glyn-nedd.

Surprisingly Plaid fielded only six candidates in the 1977 County elections two of which were successful. The other four all polled well, Tom Davies, who stood with Aled Gwyn in Blaenhonddan-Dyffryn Clydach; Iris Curtis polled 1375 votes in a Neath Town ward; and two candidates in Coedffranc, Tom Phillips and M.L. Lewis.

Unfortunately during mid-term of the life of the 1977 County Council Huw Evans resigned his seat for personal reasons and the candidate in the resulting by-election was Morris Davies, who had represented Plaid on the Neath Borough Council in early seventies failed to hold the seat from a strong Labour challenge. This left Aled Gwyn as the lone nationalist at County level.

The Rhanbarth wished Huw and his family well as he left for a position in west Wales; he had formed a media foothold in Neath and had been the catalyst for electoral activity since 1970.

1978-1979 will in Welsh political terms be remembered for the ill fated Referendum on Devolution where the electorate voted by 4-1 to reject any form of assembly or parliament in Wales.

Plaid put its full weight behind this Labour Party proposal which was marred by factions within the Callaghan administration most notably by Neil Kinnock and Leo Abse. Donald Coleman the Neath MP was also against the proposal.

Plaid in Neath organised meetings and tried to get a debate with the MP. Mr. Coleman refused to take part. A meeting was arranged in the Gwyn Hall, fronted for the Blaid by Huw Evans (who had yet to leave the area) and for the Labour Party the Llanelli MP Denzil Davies took the platform.

Although against the proposal Mr. Davies opened by saying that he was totally in favour of public debate and didn't have a problem with sharing a platform with Plaid Cymru. "Your own MP has refused," he said. "Neath deserves a public debate on devolved powers for Wales."

Neath certainly appreciated a debate because the hall was packed; and despite the local MP's attitude to the debate many stalwarts of the local Labour Party attended. Not surprisingly the outcome wasn't conclusive but nevertheless those who wished to contribute to the meeting did so in an eloquent and forceful manner.

Plaid certainly committed itself both nationally and locally to secure a "Yes" vote in the Referendum. Meetings were regularly held by the branches which had been formed in many village areas: intensive leaflet distribution and canvassing were carried out. It's worth pointing out that although the local Labour Party was generally against their own Government's proposal there were certain members who did work with members of the Blaid. They didn't adopt the narrow and short sighted view of their colleagues and despite the resounding vote against an Assembly, eighteen years in retrospect doesn't seem a long time. Socially though, it carried a devastating effect with the Callaghan government suffered a Vote of No Confidence tabled by the Scottish Nationalists. Plaid's MP's didn't concur with their Scottish friends and supported Mr. Callaghan. But the Prime Minister couldn't survive the now infamous 'Winter of Discontent' and the onslaught of the 1979 General Election which saw the English Constituencies vote in huge numbers for the advent of the 'Thatcher Years'.

In Neath the 1979 General Election's Plaid candidate was the Rev. Aled Gwyn, a

minister at Soar-Maesyrhaf Chapel, Neath; and a West Glamorgan County Councillor. Unfortunately Aled slipped into third place behind the Labour and Conservative candidates with 15.3% of the vote.

That year also saw local elections with Mrs. Sylvia Tudor taking a seat on the Borough Council for a Briton Ferry ward.

On the same night as the local authority elections the electorate was asked to decide the outcome of the community councils. At this level the Blaid saw many gains but notably in Dyffryn Clydach where the local branch has fielded thirteen candidates for the thirteen seat council for the first time (in 1974 the branch put out eight candidates and they finished in eight last places).

How different five years on and considering the defeat in the referendum on devolution, the onslaught of the Tories, who were grabbing anti-Labour headlines in the national press which could all have focused attention on a pro-Labour vote at any level - in Wales Plaid Cymru in Dyffryn Clydach created a shock by taking control of the community council by winning seven seats.

The breakthrough at community council level for the Party has remained constant and reflects the activity displayed by the membership at the grass roots.

The victory in Dyffryn was significant for another reason: the branch there was led by Tom Davies, who had campaigned for the Party since the 1950's. The group elected comprised of two sets of husband and wives: Tom & Linda Davies, Hugh & Lyn Thomas; and Stephen Absalom, Emrys Walters and Robert King.

At the first meeting the council elected Hugh Thomas, a school teacher, to the chair and thus Hugh became the first Plaid Cymru councillor to be chairman of any local authority in the Neath area.



 Plaid Cymru candidates at Dyffryn Clydach. At one time Plaid held 13 of the 13 seats at Community Council level.

### 1980's

The Party consolidated itself in the village areas throughout the constituency and although the party was thinly represented at both Borough Council and County Council level they were beginning to get representation on most of the community councils.

The West Glamorgan County Council Elections held in 1981 saw our only member, Aled Gwyn, fail by 38 votes to retain his seat.



 Councillor Sylvia Tudor presenting Mrs. Menna Gwyn and the Rev. Aled Gwyn with a painting, in recognition of their contribution to Plaid Cymru in Neath.

Life-long Labour campaigner, Norman Thomas (one of the few Labour members to have actively campaigned to secure a 'Yes' vote in the 1979 referendum on Devolution) was victorious.

The membership in Neath was constant, if not increasing, with no major turmoil; very few by-election contests went without a candidate being put forward. At Community Council level we had our successes.

The disappointment of the Referendum didn't attract members to the splinter republican movements; nor did any notable members defect to other parties; many Plaid members did belong to 'Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg' but this pressure group wasn't in any way in conflict with the Blaid. Indeed only a tiny minority of members would be disturbed by anyone's interest or affiliation.

It is worth remembering that from the early days members in Neath were often monoglot English speakers who did argue fundamentally that the country should be completely bilingual. Those who did not adhere to the nationalist creed often saw this as inconsistent and refused to see that members of the Blaid could join for political reasons and not merely linguistic ones. The members did not subscribe to the naive view that when that sunfilled day arrived that Wales would be a nation controlling her own destiny that we should all be forced to speak Welsh. It's true, of course, that many members tried to learn the Welsh language: many were successful, many were not. But certainly in Neath in the halls of Plaid it wasn't a problem. The language of the meetings, of the minutes was conducted in English. What is a salient point is that most English-only speakers within the Blaid had their children educated bilingually. These were not going to suffer the indignities of being Welsh by nationality with the inability to function through the language.

This point is true of many who don't hold membership of the Blaid and who don't agree with its aims. They believe, too, that the language is important. Thus the huge success rate of, and continued growth of both Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera.

The Party gained and continues to be supported for basic political principles. In Neath we reap the rewards of the Party's campaigns to reduce Water rates; the support the Party gave the miners during their year long strike. Several branches in the constituency gave support from their funds to striking miners' families in their own villages. The Party's MP's joined miners on picket lines working with the Trade Union movement. Dafydd Elis Thomas was particularly active, joining picket lines in both the Dulais and Swansea valleys. Many miners joined the Blaid during and after this strike, particularly when Neil Kinnock's Labour Party officially refused to back the miners in their fight against Mrs. Thatcher.

Plaid to its credit was steadfast, and many miners joined the party during this time, continuing their political activity in the Party's name. It is worth remembering that much of Plaid's early electoral success came from the Dulais Valley, where mining was the foremost industry until the cuts started in the mid 1960's by Harold Wilson's Labour Government: from this rejection the Blaid grew in the 'red valley'. Plaid was always a socialist alternative despite the bizarre claims to the contrary by the Labour activists.

The Borough Council Elections of 1983 saw Dr. Del Morgan gain a seat on the Borough Council representing Bryncoch North. He joined Councillor Sylvia Tudor from Briton Ferry.

Dafydd Elis Thomas was the overwhelming selection of the members in Neath when he stood for the Party Presidency. Dafydd Wigley, who had taken over from Gwynfor Evans in 1981, was vacating the position because of personal reasons.

In a meeting held in the Gwyn Hall, Neath, Dafydd set out his ideas about Plaid Cymru's future.

The colour of his politics was no secret, he had been campaigning for years on left wing issues. This did find favour certainly in valley constituencies and he easily outvoted the only other candidate, Dafydd Iwan.

The meeting in Neath highlighted one of the fundamental strengths of those within the Blaid: tolerance. Whilst setting out his left wing agenda Dafydd Elis was asked by Dr. Bryn Richards, a pathologist and party member, whether he considered it correct that the Blaid should have definite right-left/wing policies? Should the party fight for independence, he asked, and consider the politics of the state when the battle was won?

Many would have agreed with Dr. Richards' view, which was the line Gwynfor Evans had always adopted; but particularly in the valley areas the Party was dominated by left wing thinking, and often a desire within the members to be seen to be more left wing than the Labour Party.

Ieuan Owen was the Party's candidate in the 1983 General Election which saw the newly formed Liberal Democrat Party representative pushing Plaid into fourth place with 7.2% of the vote.

Despite this disappointing result the activists remained buoyant with gains rolling in at community council level. The Party held its majority over Labour in Dyffryn Clydach; seats were held in Briton Ferry, Glynneath, Blaenhonddan and Seven Sisters.

One member from Briton Ferry, Arthur Evans, died and willed his house and property to the Party centrally. This was the first time anyone had made such a gesture. The house in Giants Grave was sold and the Blaid benefited by more than £20,000.

It was a sombre time for myself and Stephen Absalom who, on the direction of the then



leuan Owen.

National Secretary, Dafydd Williams, loaded a lorry one winter's evening and drove Arthur's possessions to Cardiff.

Arthur was often heard in Plaid's meetings, always ready to give his opinion: he was a natural Communist who had always seen the future of left wing politics being realised through the Blaid in an independent Wales. He was a poet, a man with deep political convictions. He suffered the wrath of McCarthyism in pre-war America; he was eloquent in debate, his politics were acted out through the trade union movement where he would have contributed a great deal to local arguments regarding the virtues of the political scene. Plaid would have fared well with Arthur on the shop floor.

The European Elections have tended to have a somewhat lower profile than at Westminster constituency level. Plaid's fortunes in Mid and West Wales (in which Euro constituency Neath finds itself) has steadily improved with each election save a dip in 1989.

High profile space scientist Dr. Phil Williams was the candidate in 1984 polling 15.3% with 32880 votes but still finished in fourth place behind the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties.

This despite Plaid's stance of internationalism, which is sold well by Central Office

and emphasises the plight of Wales in comparison with other small but autonomous nations.

But the ground is being well tilled and in 1994 Mark Phillips from Llanelli, after a well constructed and positive programme took the Party into a clear second place with 48858 votes equated to 25.3% of the vote.

This was a meritorious performance by Mark and his team which will stand the Party in good stead for future Euro campaigns by which time Britain could well be more integrated in the EU than at present making the politics argued at such campaigns more relevant to the Welsh electorate.

The vision of Wales being more integrated with Europe is an inheritance of one of the founding fathers of the Party, Saunders Lewis (who lived for a brief period of his life in Ena Avenue, Neath). The Party considers it an important aspect of its policy and one that is wholly supported by Rhanbarth Castell-nedd.

The period between '83 and '87 were intersected by the 1985 West Glamorgan County Council Elections where the party was unsuccessful, fielding only a handful of candidates.

Del Morgan campaigned successfully for the construction of a Northern Link road into Neath which would be advantageous to many people wanting to visit the town from Cadoxton, Bryncoch and the Caewern areas. Del went to great lengths to secure this facility by working out how much further people had to travel by using the only road into Neath, then at Neath Abbey. He was ideally placed to argue the case, representing Bryncoch North on the Borough Council.

The branches in Neath have always been adept and efficient at exploiting issues related to their areas. The instinct based on 'community' has always been a standpoint, certainly in the Blaid locally. This is never more distinctly displayed than in Dyffryn Clydach where the grass roots activity has seen the branch consistently increase its representation on the community council.

Plaid Cymru's candidate in the 1987 General Election was Huw John of Cwmffrwd near Carmarthen. A native of Crymych he moved to Bryncoch in the late 60's and was a lecturer in Motor Vehicle subjects at Neath Technical College. He fought at Borough and Community level in the difficult period of the 70's but his energies were also diverted towards the promotion of the Welsh language and contributed immensely to organisations such as Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, Cymdeithas yr



• Huw John, an active Plaid member who received a painting from Prof. Phil Williams at a presentation evening at Pelenna Mountain Centre following his 1987 General Election campaign.



Huw John, Plaid candidate in the 1987 election and his supporters at the Gwyn Hall.

Iaith, 'Clecs y Cwm'. Short in stature Huw was an energetic character. The General Election result was disappointing for the Blaid, but there was some joy when Ieuan Wyn Jones was elected member for Ynys Môn, and to form a group of three Plaid Cymru MP's in Westminster.

The 1987 round of local elections again saw the party make further gains on community councils but with Del Morgan (Bryncoch North) having moved to Glynneath he naturally didn't contest the seat. Del also gave up his seat on Blaenhonddan Community Council. However his loss was to be Glynneath's gain. Philip Cockwell fought the Bryncoch seat unsuccessfully and it returned to Labour hands.

The Party suffered a few setbacks in that elections for the Borough but none were to hurt as much as Mrs. Sylvia Tudor's defeat in Briton Ferry.

Unusually Mrs. Tudor had not previously represented the Ward where she lived. This is normally considered vital for success not only in the Blaid but in other parties, too. Mrs. Tudor had worked in the school which was near the infamous Hengwrt Flats. She had campaigned long and hard to get better conditions for the people there and was elected on the strength of this work.

The demolition of the flats and the up-grading of the estate had coincided with Mrs. Tudor's retirement from the school so it was natural to concentrate her energies into winning the seat on the council in the area where she lived.

She had represented the west ward, now she fought the east ward and was beaten. This defeat was the hardest of all to take. Mrs. Tudor is a quiet, unassuming person and it was hoped that the gamble at switching wards would not be a problem.

Briton Ferry isn't a huge place: the sense of community is strong and she was well

known for her tenacious ability to take on local issues and get them solved. However it was not to be and she was narrowly beaten.

This left Plaid with no representation on the Borough Council.

However fate played a hand and a by-election was called after the death of Jean Brown only months into the term of the new council, and the Party, with Mrs. Tudor as the candidate, moved their election machine to new heights to secure her return to the council chamber. The enthusiasm was infectious with members of the party in Neath travelling from the valleys to help.

After a robust compaign Mrs. Tudor was duly elected having been absent from the Borough Council only a few months and not long enough to deem her disqualified from becoming mayor, which, in Neath, is a position held in order of seniority.

Mrs. Tudor was inaugurated as Neath's First Citizen in 1990 and became the first Plaid Cymru councillor to hold the highest office in our town.



 Mrs. Sylvia Tudor (right) receiving a gift following her year as the first Plaid Cymru Mayor of Neath.

### The 1992 By-election

The spotlight of the national media was focused on Neath in 1991 when a parliamentary by-election was called following the death of Mr. Donald Coleman.

Dr. Dewi Evans, a consultant paediatrician living in Alltwen was selected to represent the Blaid. Dewi's agent was Nigel Bevan also from Alltwen who proved to be a very able organiser working closely with Central Office who virtually moved their entire operation into Neath.

We entered a cauldron of political activity with the other main parties all staking their claim to the constituency together with the usual novelty candidates who habitually appear on such stages representing the most obscure ideals. Foremost of these is Screaming Lord Such, a veteran performer at by-elections and Neath wasn't to miss his attention.

However, very early in the campaign it soom emerged that Plaid Cymru and Dewi Evans were favourites to upset the Labour strangle-hold on the seat.

A shop was opened and manned throughout the three weeks' campaign; press conferences were held every weekday morning in a room at the Castle Hotel. They were attended by representatives from all the national daily papers; the Sundays; and the cameras of the television companies.

Dewi was flanked at all times by Plaid's high ranking officers, and M.P.'s and statements were issued on matters relating to the town, its environs and beyond.

Two and three canvasses were made door to door; several policy leaflets were

published and distributed by almost every member of the Party in Neath together with a host of activists who homed in on the town to help get Dewi elected and thus send shock waves back to Westminster.

The strength of our activity and the relevance of what was said was already beginning to threaten a political upset.

The by-election, mentioned on national television news programmes helped to stir the coals of the Neath electorate and the news was good for Plaid. Dewi and the party were running well. Very well.

Vincent Kane brought his programme, "Wales This Week" to Neath where it was recorded in the Gwyn Hall. There, though, the candidates weren't on the platform, only representatives of the main parties. Nevertheless it was a lively debate and among others to ask questions on behalf of Plaid were Del Morgan and Trefor Jones.

Activity didn't abate until the polls closed at 10p.m. on election day. It soon became clear that the Labour Party's traditionally huge majorities had disappeared with Dewi proving the pundits' predictions right as the main opposition.

From a 20,578 majority in 1987 and a fourth place for Plaid, Dewi shot the Party in to second place and slashed Labour's majority to 9,832 by Plaid's 23.4% share of the vote. The highest ever achieved by the Party in Neath.

The by-election activities attracted many new members to the Party. The events which took place on the fringe such as Noson Lawen, in particular the one held in the Castle Hotel where Dafydd Iwan and Elinor Bennett entertained late into the night attracted people into the function who had previously not been interested in Plaid Cymru or indeed, Welsh folk singing. Many of those who 'looked in' that night have stayed with the Blaid.



 Nigel Bevan, agent at the By-election in 1992 and his wife Diane and children being presented with a painting by the Mayor of Lliw Valley William John Evans.

## THE 1992 BY-ELECTION



 Stephen Absalom and Gwynfor Evans canvassing in Longford.



• The campaign office in New Street, Neath during the 1992 by-election.



Dr. Dewi Evans and the other candidates after the by-election result was declared.



● The Mayor of Lliw Valley Councillor William John Evans presenting Dr. Dewi and Mrs. Delyth Evans with a painting, a gift for his contribution in standing in the by-election.

The officers who manipulate the civic boundaries have one of the most unenviable jobs imaginable. They will never please, no matter what they recommend. And so it was in Neath when, not for the first time, they altered the structure of local government by annexing Briton Ferry and Skewen to Aberafan; into the Neath constituency came Trebanos to Ystalyfera and including parts of Brynaman.

These changes only applied to parliamentary representation up until the second adjustment of local government in twenty-two years. The most recent change came about in 1996 with the formation of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

The Neath Rhanbarth protested through the appropriate channels, together with many other groups, about losing both Briton Ferry and Skewen to Aberafan. But nothing would convince the commissioner that we were right. So the residents of those two areas found themselves in the most unusual position of electing members to sit on Neath Borough Council; paying their rates to that authority; whilst being represented in Westminster by the Member from Aberafan. And that is the position in 1997 with regard to their parliamentary interest.

The dissolving of the county council structure that had served us well fused Neath and Port Talbot into a single authority; Swansea City Council was linked to Lliw Valley.

The council members who once sat on Lliw Valley but were now in the Neath Parliamentary Constituency would now sit on the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

Despite the protest to the Secretary of State for Wales for Neath to continue as a single authority, like the arguments to the boundary commissioner they were arguably listened to, but rejected. A simple numbers game still kept the traditional Neath areas of Briton Ferry and Skewen in Aberafan for Parliament purposes.

One of the gains to the Blaid from these changes was the joining to the Neath Rhanbarth of those members and councillors from Upper Lliw. And a welcome and inventive addition they are.

Dr. Dewi Evans was unanimously re-selected to fight the 1992 General Election for Plaid Cymru and after his bold showing in 1991 he was the obvious choice.

Naturally, the election was something of an anti-climax for the electorate after the media hugging hustings of the year before.

This election, as in every modern General Election was fought on very broad United Kingdom issues with the television set replacing public meetings. This was the election that Labour leader Neil Kinnock lost everywhere except in Wales. In Neath, Plaid missing the local attention slipped to third place holding on to 11.3% of the vote. It was disappointing but nevertheless the activity and focus on the Blaid during 1991-92 saw the Party returning five councillors to Neath Borough Council chamber after the local council elections in 1992.

Del Morgan (Glynneath), Trefor Jones (Resolfen), Stephen Absalom (Dyffryn Clydach), Sylvia Tudor (Briton Ferry) and Philip Cockwell (Bryncoch North) gave the Party its best result in the local elections to date.

A notable addition to the rank of members in Neath was the decision made by long time supporter of the Party, Lyn Tregoning of Skewen. Lyn joined the Plaid at a press conference held in the Castle Hotel, Neath, with Dafydd Wigley present. A past chairman of the Wales TUC, Lyn said at the meeting that the future of Wales lay in the policies and aspirations of Plaid Cymru with whom he was proud to be associated.



Plaid Cymru President Dafydd Wigley at a function at the Castle Hotel, c.1993.

The National Eisteddfod visited Pentreclwyda, in the Vale of Neath in 1994 and Plaid members totally committed themselves to fund-raising and supporting this historic event. Gareth Richards organised a series of evening events at Cam Gears Social Club. The highlight was Dafydd Iwan's concert on Friday evening when Resolfen village witnessed the true 'hwyl' of Eisteddfod night life. The resulting profit from the events gave the Blaid a strong financial footing for the future.

In Neath the financial position of Plaid Cymru has always been a hand to mouth affair, members often being asked to contribute to the various campaigns. There has always been a wonderful response to these calls and none more so than in the byelection and the following General Election when Dewi Evans personally requested members to contribute. They did so in great numbers resulting in the Blaid being able to produce literature of a high standard.

This literature was backed by an effective publicity department, a new position for the Rhanbarth, headed by Wil Havard, who produced policy statements on every local issue, and statements on events which had a direct effect on Neath and its people. Wil's addition to the committee in Neath is invaluable. Because of his expertise the party was getting published in all newspapers and policy statements were being broadcast on the radio services.

The local elections in 1996 saw the new authority, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council replace the old structure of local government. Missing from the list of Plaid candidates was that of Sylvia Tudor. Sylvia had decided to retire after more than twenty years in the council chamber. As mentioned earlier she became the first Plaid Cymru Mayor of Neath and has often been a lone elected representative for the Party. She has given those who elected her in Briton Ferry and the Blaid a substantial amount of her time. A sterling job and one that will not be forgotten.

The Party secured three seats on the new authority: Del Morgan (Glynneath);

Stephen Absalom (Dyffryn); and Alun Llewelyn (Ystalyfera). They were later joined by Glaslyn Morgan (Coedffranc) who had been elected on a Communist label but became a member of Plaid Cymru, thus making the Party the main opposition to the Labour group in Neath Port Talbot.

1996 also saw the opening of the new A465 road from Glynneath to Aberdulais. The campaign for this road had occupied the minds and efforts of many people both inside and outside the Blaid.

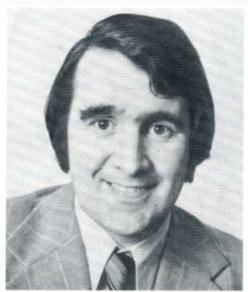
The campaign which had been going on at least since 1965 would have far reaching consequences for the lives of everyone in Alun Llewelyn. Neath and its environs. The old Neath Valley



A465 which was downgraded to the B4242 had claimed the lives of many people in road traffic accidents. The successful campaign for the new road brought together many people who protested in many ways including 'sit ins' at Abergarwed and a host of letter writing programmes aimed at the Welsh Office. Del Morgan for the Blaid committed himself to writing a letter a day until the road was built.

Its presence in the valley has confirmed everyone's view that it would be of great advantage to the people of Neath.

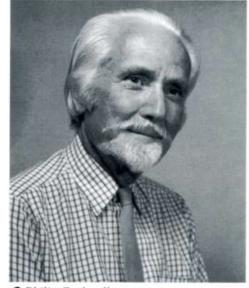
# PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES



Rev. Aled Gwyn.



Dr. Dewi Evans.



Philip Cockwell.



Glvn John.

A Year that will be etched in Welsh history with the positive referendum vote for a Welsh Assembly.

The creating of such an administrative body was included in Labour Party policy on the run up to the General Election that year.

After eighteen years of Conservative domination firstly led by Margaret Thatcher and followed by John Major, Mr. Tony Blair, the Labour leader confirmed that should his party be successful in the election, a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly would be priorities subject to endorsement by both the people of Scotland and the people of Wales.

But first he had to get elected.

Trefor Jones of Resolfen was selected to fight the 1997 General Election for the Blaid. Trefor is a teacher and a past Neath Borough councillor. He is also a councillor on Resolfen Community Council.

Plaid fought the election on its traditional plank of self government putting aside the pledges made by Blair on the formation of an Assembly. The result saw Plaid's share of the vote reduced to 8.1%. Considering the intensive campaign fought on the television screens by the three main parties in England, Trefor Jones did remarkably well in holding the vote to the sixth highest since 1970, this including the leanings to the Blaid in the mid 1970's and the frenzied activity of the 1991 by-election and the following General Election which had a degree of spin-off from 1991.

Mr. Blair was sensationally elected to power and immediately he implemented the pre-election policy statements of devolution.



 Plaid Cymru candidates Trefor Jones and Philip Cockwell and their supporters at the 'count' at the Afan Lido, 1997.

The campaign for a 'YES' vote crossed both political and social barriers. It also caused friction among members in both the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru. In Plaid's case many members voted 'NO' because it was a Labour Party initiative. I'm convinced they were wrong.

The main opposition to the principle of devolution came from the Conservatives who were joined by people of various shades of political opinion who fundamentally disagreed with the concept. They tried to play a separatist card making it a unionist versus a nationalist issue which was grossly misleading, because



 Members at Neath General Hospital during the 1997 General Election campaign.

what was on offer was far from what we, in Plaid Cymru, aspire for Wales. Nevertheless the campaign was fought on that platform and saw, generally for the first time, members from both Plaid and the Labour Party in Neath working in perfect



 Resolfen artist and Plaid Cymru member John Rees presenting Margaret and Trefor Jones with gifts in recognition of their effort during the 1997 General Election Campaign.



 An evening at the Old Star, Cwmgors when Councillor William John Evans was presented with a caricature of himself. In the picture are his supporters from the Aman Valley.

harmony. Consensus politics was with us.

September 18th 1997, Referendum Day, arguably the most important date in modern Welsh history. The arguments for and against the concept of devolved power were over, now the people would decide.

As the local authorities declared the number of votes cast for and against devolution on this natil-biting occasion, those on the right wing of political opinion in Wales had experienced a buoyancy of success which passed their most optimistic predictions.

Those of a more radical bent, were indeed downcast as the night wore on with the 'Yes' camp having difficulty in throwing off the cloak of despondency.

But shades of Carmarthen in 1966 returned with that authority being the last to declare: a massive endorsement for self respect and a degree of self determination swept the 'Yes' vote into a lead with the breathless climax of the Welsh rugby team scoring seconds before the final whistle to win.

The excitement continued hours after the result had been announced that Wales had voted for her Assembly.

And the electorate of Neath Port Talbot to its eternal credit recorded the second highest positive result in Wales. The **local** figure was **YES: 36,730. NO: 18,463** on a turnout of 52.1%.

Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies said immediately after the declaration: "Good morning . . . and it is a very good morning for Wales."

For the first time in Welsh politics we saw consensus politics work to the advantage of the people of Wales. A radical tradition was harnessed with Plaid, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrat Party working together.

Through the auspices of the National Assembly for Wales (Plaid Cymru's suggested title) the Party can now work more effectively to get its policies implemented without

the confines and conflicts of a distant parliament in London. Welsh politics for Welsh people to create a more wholesome nation from which we can help other less well off nations develop and prosper. They are the radical traditions of Plaid's view of a caring Wales - so unlike the interpretation of Plaid's nationalistic aspirations by those who oppose them.

Now the resources of Wales will, hopefully be exploited properly. The view of the men of Tower Colliery is a classic example. A Conservative Government minister said that the pit was worked out; was geographically not viable. The men thought differently and bought the pit from National Coal and made it a profitable and successful enterprise. The Government was wrong.



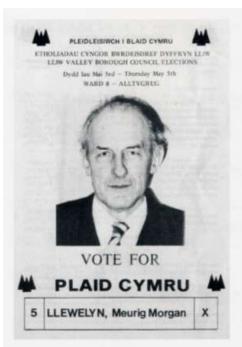
 Plaid members, including Councillor Del Morgan (Mayor of Glynneath), Glyn James from the Rhondda and Syd Morgan addressing the Tower Colliery supporters.

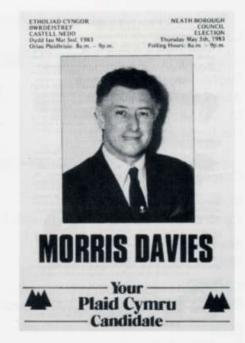
The Neath Rhanbarth is in a healthy situation and has an effective election machine which is a credit to the people who have worked within its confines down the years. – Cynog Dafis lived in Tonna; Saunders Lewis lived for a while in Ena Avenue, Neath and these coupled with the hard working membership have never wavered from the view that Wales is economically viable. The late Tom Phillips from Skewen, the late Bill Tudor from Briton Ferry, the late Tom Davies, Longford; the late Tom Penry Evans, Glynneath; the late Wynne Samuel, Ystalyfera; the late Gwenallt and his late sister, Mrs. Beth Owen, Cimla; the late Tom Currie, Briton Ferry; Mrs. Wendy Richards, Bryncoch; Meurig Llewelyn, Ystalyfera have all contributed in a huge way to laying the foundation stones of the Blaid we know in 1999.

A solid rock has been formed on which to build a better place which will reflect through the new Assembly a healthy outward looking nationalism in which the Neath Rhanbarth of Plaid Cymru will aspire to play an active part.



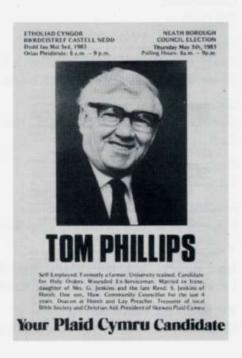
 Neath's own Cynog Dafis, receiving a 'Tonna plate' from Councillor Del Morgan.





True and gallant campaigners for Plaid Cymru.





Plaid Cymru's elected representatives in the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council area:

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council:

Stephen Absalom (Dyffryn)

Alun Llewelyn (Ystalyfera)

Dr. Del Morgan (Glynneath)

Glaslyn Morgan (Coedffranc)

### Community Councillors:

Blaengwrach:

Carolyn Edwards, Gwyn Price, Russell Richards

Blaenhonddan:

Phillip Cockwell, Olwen Roberts

Cilybebyll:

Dr. Dewi Evans, Huw George, Gil Harris

Clyne:

Lyn Gilliard, Betty Cresswell

Coedffranc:

Glaslyn Morgan, Susan Page, Huw Phillips

Cwmllynfell:

Wil Rock

Dyffryn Clydach:

David Bendle, Keith Davies, Gwyn Edwards, Llinos Evans, Steven Evans, Boyd Foster, Brian Hall, Robert King, Gareth Richards, Emrys Walters, Martyn Peters

Glynneath:

Susan Jefferies, Alwyn Hardwick, Horace Lewis, Dr. Del Morgan, Lindis Pritchard, Ruth Thomas, Sandra Wright

Pontardawe:

John James, John H. Morgan

Resolfen:

Conway Gillard, Trefor Jones, John Rees, Terry Thomas

Ystalyfera:

John Burgess, Rosalyn Davies, Tony Evans, Giraldus Jenkins, Brian Lauder, Alun Llewelyn, Meurig Llewelyn, Tony Randall

Ystradfellte & Pontneddfechan:

Eifion Davies, Joan Taylor, Mairwen Tay

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Robert King Abergarwed, 1999



● The author, Robert King and Plaid Cymru President Dafydd Wigley, M.P.

