



Plaid Cymru
The Party of Wales

Lecture to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales

Delivered on August 9 at the National Eisteddfod,
Llanelli 2000 by Dr. John Davies

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Price: £2.50

Plaid Cymru's first seventy-five years

Seventy-five years and six days ago today, on the Wednesday of the National Eisteddfod week of 1925, six men met at the Maesgwyn Hotel on the square in the town of Pwllheli. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a Welsh National Party by uniting two already existing movements: Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru (the Home Rule Army of Wales), the creation of Huw Robert Jones of Ebenezer, or Deiniolen in Caernarfonshire, and Y Mudiad Cymreig (The Welsh Movement), a group which met in Gruffydd John Williams's home in Penarth. The two movements were very different in character. Indeed, it could be argued that they represented two strains which have been present in the National Party up to the present day. Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru had its roots in the quarries of Caernarfonshire; its members, by and large, were drawn from the working class and they came from a background similar to that of the people who were then seeking to establish the Labour Party in Gwynedd. The members of Y Mudiad Cymreig were academics, and none of them lived in the place in which they had been brought up. Of the six members, three were natives of Caernarfonshire, one of Denbighshire, one of Ceredigion and one – Saunders Lewis – had been born in England, although he claimed that his roots were in Anglesey. Not one of them had any family connection with the south Wales coalfield, a consideration of significance, perhaps, in assessing the early history of the new party. To the extent that there was, from the beginning, a 'Labour' element in the party, it came from the north, not from the south.

Judging by first impressions, it might appear that what happened in Pwllheli was that Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru swallowed up Y Mudiad Cymreig. Even before the meeting, the former had adopted the title of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (the National Party of Wales), and its officials – its president, Lewis Valentine, its secretary, Huw Robert Jones and its treasurer, Moses Gruffydd – became the chief officials of the new party. Yet, as Hywel Davies demonstrated in his excellent study of the party's early history, the truth was otherwise, for Saunders Lewis – the outstanding personality in Y Mudiad Cymreig – insisted that the new party adopt the fundamental principles of his movement. Of these, the most important were the absolute centrality of the Welsh language, the breaking of links with all other parties and a refusal to have anything to do with the Westminster parliament. These principles are proof of Saunders Lewis's desire to create an entirely new kind of political nationalism in Wales. Ever since the time of Cymru Fydd in the 1890s, there had been a great deal of discussion of the need for a Welsh national party, but this was usually understood to mean the reorganization of the Welsh Parliamentary

Party in order to ensure that Welsh MPs would co-operate more effectively. Implicit in Saunders Lewis's arguments was a condemnation of existing Welsh nationalism, a nationalism which was characterized by inter-party conferences, an obsession with Westminster and a readiness to accept the subordinate position of the Welsh language.

It was the younger generation which was represented in Pwllheli. Apart from Fred Jones, who was forty-eight, the others were between twenty-seven and thirty-two years of age. They had been drawn together by their belief that their national culture was under threat and that the lack of political institutions was undermining the national community. The previous decade had seen a massive recognition of the political rights of the smaller nations of central and eastern Europe, and the achievements of peoples like the Czechs and the Estonians had aroused the admiration of Welsh patriots. While Wales had contributed significantly in blood to the allied victory which had made such recognition possible and had provided the man who had presided over the redrawing of the map of Europe, her reward, in terms of the recognition of her own nationality, had been negligible. More immediate was the experience of Ireland. The events of 1916 to 1922 underlined the contrast between the heroic sacrifice of the Irish and the supineness of the Welsh, a contrast which impressed itself in particular upon the consciousness of a number of Welsh ex-servicemen who reproached themselves for having fought for the freedom of every nationality but their own.

Of the political parties which, in the 1920s, were competing for the votes of the Welsh people, that of the Conservatives was considered to be incorrigibly Unionist and irretrievably Anglicized. The Liberal Party, the main vehicle for Welsh aspirations in the late nineteenth century, had come to advocate a form of Welsh patriotism which seemed to be verbose and lacking in content. Liberal enthusiasm for any sort of Welsh Home Rule was ebbing rapidly in the 1920s, particularly following the general election of 1922 which proved that, if there were to be a Welsh parliament, the Liberals would not be dominant within it. Fearing what they called the 'Bolshevism of the South', many Liberals came to believe that the unitary British state was the best defence of their interests. Hopes that the Labour Party would be more sensitive to Welsh national aspirations ran high in the early 1920s and, believing that the party would fulfil the dreams of their youth, several of the old campaigners of the Cymru Fydd era were attracted to its ranks. By the mid 1920s, however, the party was increasingly hostile to any notion that its organization in Wales should have a national basis, and it grew increasingly ready to believe that fostering Welsh national feeling would weaken the unity of the British working class. To many Labour supporters, Welsh nationalism was a

remnant of a former radicalism, something which should be used in order to attract the Welsh into the Labour Party, and which should then be cast aside. Furthermore, following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, Westminster ceased to be a place in which the rights of a Celtic nation were frequently discussed, and the hope that Wales might achieve self-government on Ireland's coat-tails withered away. In 1919, parliament set up a conference to consider devolution; interesting reports were published, but nothing came of them. As the chairman of the conference commented: 'Our discussions were academic rather than practical, for the driving force of necessity was absent.' Creating such a 'driving force of necessity' was the main aim of Huw Robert Jones, the real founder of the National Party and a man who was mesmerized by the Irish struggle.

Nevertheless, six years were to pass before the new party defined its constitutional goal. The process of definition was not the work of a conference representative of the party's members. The party had been in existence for eight years before the members were given the opportunity to discuss and vote on its policies, and they had to wait until 1938 before such discussion and voting became meaningful. As a result, the party's policies remained, almost until the Second World War, the responsibility of the executive committee, most of whose members were in awe of Saunders Lewis, who succeeded Lewis Valentine as president in 1926. In fact, apart from an important element whose views found expression in the ideas of D. J. Davies, Gilwern, the party, in its early days, was essentially the creation of Saunders Lewis.

It was he, more than anyone, who ensured in February 1931 that the party adopted the policy of dominion status – that is, that Wales should have the same status as was enjoyed by countries like New Zealand and Canada. Saunders Lewis's correspondence makes it clear that he did not believe that dominion status and independence were one and the same thing. Indeed, in his famous speech to Plaid Cymru's Summer School in 1926 he poured scorn on the idea of independence, arguing that it was an immoral and un-Christian concept. However, a few months after the party's adoption of the policy of dominion status, parliament confirmed the Statute of Westminster, which declared that the British parliament had no sovereignty over the dominions, and that the Commonwealth was united, not by the power of Britain, but by a common allegiance to the Crown. It followed therefore that, were Wales a dominion, sovereignty would reside in her parliament and in the governor-general; independence would be implicit in such a situation. At the time, however, the matter was not pushed to its conclusion; indeed, a reluctance to discuss the subject in detail has persisted to the present day.

In his attack on independence in 1926, Saunders Lewis argued that what the

Welsh people needed was sufficient freedom to enable them to defend their national culture. He expressed himself eloquently on the matter in the *Western Mail* in 1965: 'What...threatens humanity [is the] destruction of civilization through apathy . . . so that a particular Welsh experience of this century, the crisis that the Welsh Nationalist Party evokes and was organized to avert, takes on universal reference and significance. Civilization must be more than an abstraction. It must have a local habitation and a name. Here, its name is Wales.' He believed that the Welsh language was central to civilization in Wales and his principal political aim was to seek to ensure that the language would flourish. But, with Welsh a minority language in Wales, it was hardly to be expected that a majority of the country's electorate would consider the welfare of the language to be their main concern. Almost from the beginning, therefore, there was tension between the party's cultural and constitutional aims. There was no ambiguity about Saunders Lewis's priorities. In 1923 he wrote: 'If the future of the culture and language of Wales can be assured without any radical change in the relation of England and Wales, then I, for my part, will be content.' In 1962 he made the same point more concisely in his radio lecture: 'The language is more important than self-government.'

In seeking to safeguard Welsh civilization, the first necessity, as Lewis saw it, was to change the attitude of the Welsh people towards themselves. 'To take away from the Welsh people their fear . . . to take away from our beloved country the mark and shame of her conquest, that is the aim and policy of the national party.' In order to instil a new self-confidence into his fellow countrymen, Lewis believed it essential for the Welsh to conceive of themselves as members of one of the founder nations of European civilization – an exotic notion to many of them, steeped as they were in the belief that their nationality had an essentially British and imperial context. He remained faithful to this vision throughout his life, as his comments on the Common Market referendum of 1976 illustrate, and it would undoubtedly be a matter of satisfaction to him that Plaid Cymru is now aiming at self-government within the European Union.

In the beginning, the National Party had no social or economic policy of its own. However, Saunders Lewis soon came to the conclusion that, without such policies, 'a National Party is a short-term thing which has no mission of permanent value'. He set about creating the party's policies, since he wished, as he stated in 1930, to avoid a situation 'in which party members were nationalists on matters relating to Wales but English Socialists or English Liberals on any other question'. Socialism he hated as an ideology which gave too much power to the state. Yet he was equally scathing about capitalism. 'Capitalism and imperialism', he argued in 1931, 'are bride and groom, and their offspring are famine and death and the

destruction of the people.' Capitalism had given birth to *ffatriaeth* (factoryism) and in its wake generations of people had been bred to serve machines. When attacking what is now called globalization, Saunders Lewis could sound like some of the more hot-headed left-wingers of today. Nevertheless, it was from what is considered to be the right rather than the left wing of politics that he culled most of the ideas which gave rise to the philosophy to which he gave the name of *perchentyaeth* (house-holding). His inspiration was the system which had prevailed in Wales in the last centuries of the Middle Ages, when there had existed a host of small landowners eager to extend their patronage to the poets of the Great Century of Welsh literature. Having been accepted into the Catholic Church in 1934, Saunders Lewis was also greatly influenced by the papal encyclicals which sought a middle road between socialism and capitalism. The essence of *perchentyaeth* was 'to distribute property widely among the members of the nation'. Lewis believed that the property-less represented the greatest threat to civilization, since they were defenceless in the face of the irresponsible power of unfettered capitalism and the authority of an overmighty state. Such ideas were greatly to the taste of the small scale capitalists of the right and contain the kernel of the notion of a property-owning democracy which is sometimes put forward by the Conservative Party; indeed, Saunders Lewis claimed that, were he English, he would be a Conservative. In the 1930s, therefore, while public opinion in Wales was increasingly moving to the left, the National Party was moving increasingly to the right. It is interesting to note that an exactly opposite process took place in the early 1980s; as public opinion in Wales was moving further to the right, Plaid Cymru was moving further to the left. By now, it may be sensed that Plaid Cymru's ideas are moving hand in hand with public opinion in Wales – the key, perhaps, to the party's recent successes.

In tracing the history of Plaid Cymru during its first decade, it should be borne in mind that it was a very small party. Its income was less than a thousand pounds a year and its regular workers numbered only a few score. It published a monthly Welsh-language newspaper and, from 1932, an English-language one; it held a yearly summer school but, despite the stalwart efforts of J. E. Jones, its general secretary from 1930 onwards, its influence was very limited. It managed to put up only one candidate in the general election of 1929, two in 1931 and one in 1935, and it lacked the resources to contest even one of the twelve by-elections held in Wales between 1925 and 1939. Indeed, during its first ten years it is unlikely that the majority of the people of Wales were in any way aware of it. Nevertheless, its members believed that establishing the party had been an achievement in itself; its mere existence was a declaration of the distinctiveness of Wales.

The situation changed with the burning of the bombing school in Penyberth in 1936. In some sense, that was a contrived protest which derived from Saunders Lewis's desire to take dramatic action in order to draw attention to his party and to show that a spirit of defiance existed in Wales in the year of the four-hundredth anniversary of the Act of 'Union'. Many of the people of Wales first became aware of the existence of the party as a result of the publicity following the bombing school incident and, naturally enough, there were those among them who assumed that the party had been established in 1936 and that law-breaking was the essence of its strategy. On the other hand, the court proceedings in Caernarfon and the meeting held in the pavilion there to welcome the three incendiaries following their release from prison were thrilling experiences for the party's devotees. As Cassie Davies put it: 'I experienced a kind of rebirth. A ruling passion came into my life, and I could not escape from it'.

As a result of the bombing school incident, the party gained a number of new members, in particular young people from the north, many of them with socialist tendencies. They were unwilling to accept the party's centralist organization and were unhappy with Saunders Lewis's anti-socialism. In response to insistent demand, the matter was debated in the 1938 conference, and Saunders Lewis was forced to accept that *perchentyaeth* was not one of the party's core policies. The controversy caused Lewis much distress. An historic opportunity, he believed, had been lost. 'The greatest disappointment I ever had', he wrote a week after the conference, 'was that some branches wasted their time on economic arguments instead of reaping the harvest following the bombing school.' A year later he resigned from the presidency.

Others in the party believed that a different historic opportunity – the opportunity of marrying the patriotic and the progressive in Wales – has been lost because of Lewis's intransigent anti-socialism. As the periodical *The Welsh Review* argued in 1940: 'For all his sincerity and singleness of purpose, his personality forbids that he should ever be a leader of the people . . . The personal tragedy of the man is that while earnestly desiring to unite Welshmen, he succeeds only in exacerbating and sundering them . . . He has become the greatest single obstacle to his party's chance of becoming a party of the Welsh people.' Nevertheless, to argue that the content and style of Saunders Lewis's politics were at the root of the National Party's failure to win mass support is rather an unreal exercise. As R. T. Jenkins noted, when discussing Howell Harris's contribution to the Methodist Revival: 'Did he do more to harm than to benefit the Methodism of Wales? An academic question, to a very large extent, for there is another question to be answered first: Would there be Methodism at all in Wales without him?'

One month after Saunders Lewis's resignation, the Second World War broke out. J. E. Daniel was elected president, to be followed by Abi Williams, who was president from 1943 to 1945, when Gwynfor Evans took over the position. Despite his resignation, Saunders Lewis remained the principal influence on the National Party's policy throughout the war. It was he who insisted that the party should declare that Wales, like others of the small nations of Europe, had the right to remain neutral in the war. The intention was to set up a new loyalty to replace loyalty to the British state, and it was hoped that a number of young Welshmen would refuse to be conscripted on the grounds that they were Welsh. Only about twenty declared that their Welsh nationality was their sole ground for refusal, but although they were so few, Saunders Lewis considered that their stand was of the highest significance. It proved, he wrote, 'that the absorption of Wales by England was being resisted, even in the face of the utmost pressure . . . The only proof that the Welsh nation exists is that some are acting as if it does exist.'

In 1943 Saunders Lewis was a candidate in the by-election for the University of Wales parliamentary seat, thereby causing alarm among the members of the Welsh establishment. W. J. Gruffydd, the most distinguished of Welsh-speaking academics and a former vice-president of the National Party, was chosen as the Liberal candidate and it was he who was successful, although Saunders Lewis received almost a quarter of the vote. The panic felt by members of the establishment in 1943 at the prospect that Lewis could become the MP for the University seat sprang from a feeling that the National Party's appeal was growing stronger, despite the great hostility aroused by its policy of neutrality. In 1939, it was widely believed that the experience of total war would destroy not only the National Party, but also all hope that the Welsh would survive as a nation. This did not come to pass for, as J. E. Jones pointed out, the party was stronger in 1945 than it had been in 1939.

The year 1945 saw the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru. A new name, Plaid Cymru, was adopted and Gwynfor Evans was elected as president. He held the presidency until 1981, thirty-six years of unwearied commitment which is without parallel in the history of our nation. A number of historians have suggested that, in electing Gwynfor Evans, the party was turning its back completely on the tradition which had been inherited from Saunders Lewis. This theory draws strength from the perceived contrast between the characters of the two men – the latter being Catholic, dogmatic, oenophilic, traditionalist and respectful of the honour of warriors, and the former Nonconformist, pragmatic, teetotal, progressive and pacifist. The contrast, however, is more apparent than real. On a number of vital issues, Evans's views differ little

from those of Lewis. He shares Lewis's fear of a proletariat without roots or culture and his enmity towards an over-centralized state, and has consistently endorsed Burkeian notions of the transfer of values from generation to generation. As Bobi Jones wrote in *Ysbryd y Cwmwl*: 'I believe . . . that the future will hold [Gwynfor Evans] to be more similar to [Saunders Lewis] than we do today, and [he] is indeed his disciple in many ways.' Nevertheless, as Richard Wyn Jones has argued in a perceptive and recently published study: '[Gwynfor Evans in his autobiography] is rather reluctant to acknowledge his conceptual debt to Saunders Lewis . . . [One has to] hunt through 344 pages to find two half sentences'.

Gwynfor Evans's uncharacteristic coldness towards Saunders Lewis can be traced to the relationship which existed between them in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when Saunders Lewis did more than anyone to undermine the faith of the members of Plaid Cymru in Gwynfor Evans's leadership. In 1961 Saunders Lewis proclaimed bitterly: 'I was rejected by everyone . . . Every one of my ideas . . . has been abandoned.' There is no shortage of evidence of that. Lewis's policy of a monoglot Welsh-speaking Wales was rejected; *perchentyaeth* passed into oblivion; the importance of the Westminster parliament was emphasized; respect for the royal family was abandoned; heroic efforts were made to sustain employment in the coalfield, a region which Saunders Lewis had wished to see de-industrialized; the central role of the state in matters of welfare, education and family maintenance was stressed.

Thus in the decades after the war, there was much jettisoning of ideological baggage by Plaid Cymru. To borrow a concept from the religious sphere, the party has ceased to be a sect and has become a denomination. The shedding of the characteristics of a sect is a process usually accompanied by a significant increase in membership and acceptability; it is also accompanied by a decline in purity of doctrine and an abandonment of much of the ideology of the founding fathers.

Perhaps the most important element to be abandoned was the idea that Plaid Cymru was something more than a political party which operated chiefly in the electoral field. For Saunders Lewis, the party was not a vote-getting machine, but a national movement. This concept was adhered to during the early years of Gwynfor Evans's presidency but, from the 1960s onwards, there was an increasing readiness to cast it aside and to limit Plaid Cymru's role to the field of electoral politics. The key factor in this transformation was the matter of the drowning of the Tryweryn Valley in Meirionnydd, the main focus of Plaid Cymru's activities between 1956 and 1962. There was considerable expectation that Tryweryn would give rise to another Penyberth, and when that did not happen, there was widespread condemnation of the perceived pusillanimity of the party leadership. The fact that

nothing similar to the bombing school fire took place in Tryweryn was central to Saunders Lewis's distrust of Gwynfor Evans. In a letter written to Evans in 1962, Lewis declared: 'The Executive Committee of Plaid Cymru betrayed the cause of Tryweryn. I cannot forget that.' It could almost be claimed that, in the late 1950s, many Plaid Cymru members were suffering from what might be called 'Penyberthitis', a simplistic belief that only by having some kind of replay of the action taken at Penyberth every twenty years or so could the momentum of Welsh nationalism be maintained. In a way, it was a disease which the members greatly enjoyed. It meant that there was no need for them to do anything; their leaders would break the law, give themselves up to the police, deliver memorable addresses in court and go to prison, thereby providing their followers with a pleasurable patriotic thrill. That Plaid Cymru took no direct action in connection with Tryweryn was largely the result of the attitude of the party's executive committee in Meirionnydd, the most winnable parliamentary seat in Wales. The central document in the argument is a letter sent by that committee to the party's national executive committee in 1961: 'It should be clearly borne in mind that the Party in Meirion was never in favour of acting outside the law. On the contrary; our considered opinion was that any such action would be a hindrance and a stumbling block to a growing political party . . . Direct action, while not saving Tryweryn, would kill the nation's faith in and support of the Party, even if such action stilled the consciences of a few.' The key words are 'a growing political party'. By the 1960s, that is precisely what Plaid Cymru was determined to be.

Almost as crucial as the response of Meirionnydd's executive committee was the attitude of some of the more able of the party's new, young members. Among the most outstanding of them was Phil Williams, who described his first visit to the Plaid Cymru Conference in 1961: 'There were arguments until the early hours of the morning [about Tryweryn] and time and again there were references to Penyberth . . . But, nevertheless, although many individuals were inspired by Penyberth to do their utmost for Wales, it did not cause any dawn to break, because the organizational structure did not exist throughout Wales.'

Although Gwynfor Evans occasionally appeared to support the possibility of direct action at Tryweryn, such action was not a priority for him. His priority was to ensure that 'an organizational structure did exist throughout Wales'. It is possible to discern a fundamental shift in the thinking of party leaders in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, a shift which led them to decide to lead a political party rather than a protest group. Gwynfor Evans's answer to his critics – and it should be noted that some of them were exceedingly bitter – was to bring about the most significant development ever seen in the party's history, namely the nomination of twenty

candidates in the general election of 1959, compared with four in 1951 and eleven in 1955. Finding the resources, human and financial, to fight 55 per cent of the constituencies of Wales was a formidable achievement, especially when it is borne in mind that in that same year the SNP stood in only 7 per cent of the Scottish constituencies. (Here tribute must be paid to the massive contribution of Elwyn Roberts, who spent much of his life wrestling with Plaid Cymru's intractable financial problems.) The results were broadly encouraging, with the vote per constituency averaging four thousand and with striking increases in some areas – 28 per cent in Wrexham, for example, and 12 per cent in Llanelli. But there was a disappointing result in Meirionnydd, where Gwynfor Evans came fourth, with an increase of less than 1 per cent in his share of the vote. That result was a severe blow. Evans had worked unremittingly on the Tryweryn issue, and many had believed that his reward would be victory in Meirionnydd. Dafydd Wigley, who was seventeen at the time, recalled that 'many tears were shed and some hearts were broken as a result of the vote in Meirionnydd'. The election, Gwynfor Evans noted, was 'the most bitterly disappointing of all elections . . . and led to a period of stormy committees and conferences'.

It was the 1959 election campaign which was in Saunders Lewis's mind when, in his famous radio lecture of 1962, he attacked the expense involved 'in pointlessly contesting parliamentary elections'. Although he lived until 1985, the lecture was almost the last public utterance of that extraordinary man. Its purpose was to revolutionize Plaid Cymru, by putting an end to its development as a political party and turning it into a militant language movement. It was a fruitless attempt, particularly in view of the fact that the party, under the inspired leadership of Emrys Roberts, was gaining significant ground among non-Welsh speakers, especially in the south-east. The effect of the lecture was totally contrary to the intention of the lecturer. As it led to the establishment of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society), it enabled Plaid Cymru to give less prominence to the language issue and to concentrate upon becoming a movement which could contest elections more effectively.

The soundness of the decision to adhere to the political, electoral path was proved by Gwynfor Evans's astounding victory in the Carmarthen by-election of 1966. The confidence to which that victory gave rise was a key element in the vitality of the Welsh scene in the second half of the 1960s. Electoral success justified Gwynfor Evans's principled adherence to the constitutional path and silenced critics of Plaid Cymru's strategy. It could be argued that the Carmarthen constituency was exceptional and Gwynfor Evans an unique candidate. But this argument was difficult to sustain in view of the fact that, in Rhondda West 1967 and

in Caerffili in 1968, Plaid Cymru won a higher percentage of the vote than it had won in Carmarthen.

As a means of estimating the growth of support for the Nationalist Party in the 1960s, the results of the general election of 1970 were ambiguous. Plaid Cymru found the resources to contest every seat in Wales; it received a total of 175, 016 votes and was placed second in eight constituencies. At the beginning of the 1960s, such a result would have been a matter for rejoicing, but because the party lost Carmarthen and failed to make a breakthrough anywhere else, there was considerable disappointment.

The Conservatives won the election of 1970. With the Labour Party now in opposition, there was an expectation that it would receive the Welsh protest vote; that this was not always the case was demonstrated when Emrys Roberts succeeded in winning 37 per cent of the vote in the Merthyr by-election of 1972. By that time, Plaid Cymru was in a position to offer policies which were much more detailed than those put forward in the by-elections of the 1960s. The younger, progressive element which had been drawn in felt that the party could not, to quote Dafydd Wigley, 'expect the people of Wales to sign a blank cheque on the basis of emotion'. It must, he argued, be able to offer 'something other than the clichés of ultra-cultural nationalism'. The Plaid Cymru research group was set up and soon came to realize that 'there was reason to doubt many of the statements in the party's publications'. 'We failed', Wigley noted, 'to discover the unknown French economist who claimed that Wales, in terms of resources, was the richest country in the world, [but we did discover a claim that] Wales exported more water annually than the totality of the rain that falls on our country.' The principal result of the research group's work was the Economic Plan published in 1970. Confidence in the central government's ability to bring about dramatic change in the economy and society of Wales permeated the plan. It was drawn up a few years after the Labour government's National Plan, and illustrates the way in which Plaid Cymru's internal rhythms moved in tune with those of the Labour Party.

The results of these efforts were seen in the two elections of 1974. By the autumn of 1974, Plaid Cymru had three members of parliament, and since the Labour government had no majority, those members wielded considerable influence. 'We did not fully realize', noted Dafydd Wigley, 'how unique and crucial our situation was [between 1974 and 1979].' Realization came upon them swiftly following the election of 1979, when the Conservatives were elected with a substantial majority. '[After 1979]', wrote Wigley, 'hardly anyone in Parliament cared any more whether we were present or not.' The situation was very different before 1979, when the Labour government, as Wigley says, 'was panic-stricken as it

wondered how to deal with the presence of nationalists in a hung parliament’.

The Wales Act of 1978 and the referendum of 1979 constitute the high water marks of this period. I shall not dwell on the referendum of 1979, but the despair felt by party members in the spring of 1979 can hardly be overemphasized. Gwyn Alfred Williams argued that the results of the referendum meant that the people of Wales ‘had written *finis* to almost two hundred years of Welsh history’. Others went further, arguing that the vote of 1979 was not a vicissitude in that history, but rather its quietus.

The necessary first step, without doubt, was to rebuild confidence. This, in the last resort, was Gwynfor Evans’s intention when he announced, in May 1980, that he would fast to death if the government did not adhere to its original commitment to establish a Welsh-language television channel. Securing the channel was not his primary aim. ‘The restoration of confidence among nationalists was the intention’, he wrote in his autobiography, ‘[for] even the finest of the people of Wales were in a paralysis of hopelessness.’ The channel was won, but Gwynfor Evans’s first reaction was ‘disappointment that the government had yielded . . . too soon. Had there been another five weeks of agitation and awakening in Wales, Plaid Cymru . . . would have been placed in an impregnable position.’

But there was a danger that, by concentrating on the Welsh language, Plaid Cymru might lose the ground it had won in the non-Welsh-speaking areas. This was a matter of great concern to Phil Williams. ‘It may even be essential’, he argued, ‘to slow down the development of the Plaid in some areas in order that the gap between different parts of Wales should not reach unbridgeable size.’ It was to some extent this concern that led Plaid Cymru to change its constitution and to declare that one of its aims was the establishment of a decentralized socialist state. This happened during the 1981 conference in Carmarthen – the occasion when Gwynfor Evans resigned the presidency and Dafydd Wigley grasped the reins.

In his first period as president – from 1981 to 1984 – Dafydd Wigley tried to interpret the socialism of Plaid Cymru in a way consistent with the development of the party’s thinking since the time of D. J. Davies, Gilwern. He gained credibility also because he had, over the years, been a consistent supporter of the European Common Market and the developments which flowed from it – and that in a period when such support was contrary to his own party’s policy. This credibility was particularly important at a time when it was becoming increasingly apparent that any constitutional development in Wales would be bound to happen in the context of European unity. It is the influence of Dafydd Wigley, above all, which is explains why the connection with Europe became a central and undisputed part of Plaid Cymru policy. Whether self-government within Europe is the equivalent of

independence is an issue which will not be pursued here.

During Dafydd Wigley's first period as president, his fellow member of parliament, Dafydd Elis Thomas, strove to give a decidedly marxist slant to his interpretation of decentralist socialism. Y Chwith Genedlaethol (The National Left) was established in 1980, and that group, which included elements of the hard left, had a majority on the executive council by 1982. There were similar developments in the Labour Party, another example of the way in which the internal rhythms of Plaid Cymru were in step with those of the Labour Party. A great deal was made of the claim that Plaid Cymru's activities in the past had been nothing more than the self-indulgent practices of the Welsh-speaking lesser bourgeoisie. I remember several altercations on this theme, and there is a marvellous portrayal of one in that splendid book, *Y Dyn Dwad*: "You self-righteous bloody culture-vulture bastard!" said Mick . . . "You self-seeking free-state Plaid Cymru craphouse!" said Ben . . . "Come one then, you reactionary Adfer fascist bum!" said Mick . . . Connolly shouted: "Reit, boys! Stop it! . . . This is a solidarity rally!"

On a much more serious level, Dafydd Elis Thomas, president of Plaid Cymru from 1984 to 1991, tried to encourage a thorough and committed study of the problems of Wales, and to build bridges between the party and a whole host of movements, among them trade unions, feminists, the gay community, anti-racists, anti-nuclear campaigners, ecologists and the advocates of the validity of a national English-language Welsh culture. The press seized on every opportunity to conjure up a split between the right – the tradition of Gwynfor Evans and Dafydd Wigley – on the one hand, and the National Left on the other. However, many of the left's arguments, particularly on such topics as militarism and imperialism, echoed the convictions which Gwynfor Evans had held since the 1930s; furthermore, Plaid Cymru's policy on industrial democracy, which was mainly the work of Dafydd Wigley, was 'the most seriously left-wing document ever produced by Plaid Cymru'. Much was made of the rift which the press uncovered between the rural right and the industrial left; however, as Ned Thomas pointed out, the term rural right as used by the press referred to 'those few constituencies where more working-class people vote for the party than in the rest of the country put together.'

In the 1990s, the British Labour Party came to the conclusion that electoral trends were indicating that power in Britain would not be won by moving further and further to the left. Dafydd Elis Thomas had come to a not dissimilar conclusion somewhat earlier. In an article published in *Radical Wales* in 1985, he spoke of the 'gamble' of 1981, of the public's inability to grasp 'an excessively abstract' strategy and of the confusion which could arise if Plaid Cymru's image did not differ from that of the Labour Party. By the end of the decade, he was of the opinion that the

way ahead lay in establishing Welsh democratic control of the large number of institutions – quangos principally – which had developed in Wales. He argued that ensuring that there was a wide range of national institutions in Wales was the best way to foster civic nationality – possibly at the expense of ethnic nationality – and by so doing to ensure that everyone who lived in Wales had a stake in the nation.

This point of view shared common ground with the arguments of some of the most penetrating commentators on Welsh affairs, among them John Osmond, the man who did more than anyone to keep alive debate as to how Wales should be governed. Osmond argued that the growth in institutions – above all, the development of the Welsh Office – ‘has served to entrench an institutional sense of Welsh identity’. Much began to be made of the democratic deficit, the situation whereby Wales had administrative autonomy, but an autonomy over which the Welsh people had no control. This argument gained strength during Mrs Thatcher’s term as prime minister, a period which saw the appointment of a series of secretaries of state for Wales, none of whom had any real Welsh mandate. The argument was at its height during the secretaryship of John Redwood, a man who acknowledged that not once during his term of office had he spent a night in Wales. It must be admitted that he made this statement at a time when the Conservative government was plagued by a host of sexual scandals, and he expressed his astonishment that anyone should attack him because of his desire to go home and sleep with his wife. That’s as maybe, but there is no doubt that the experience of eighteen years of Conservative rule was a key factor in explaining why the result of the referendum of 1997 was different from that of 1979. It could be argued that two statues should be raised in front of the National Assembly building – one of Mrs Thatcher and one of John Redwood, to acknowledge that they were the true begetters of Welsh devolution.

Dafydd Wigley’s second term as president of Plaid Cymru – from 1991 to 2000 – was an exceptionally successful period in the history of the party; indeed, we have not yet fully realized Plaid Cymru’s debt, and indeed the debt of the whole of Wales, to the member for Caernarfon. There were numerous victories in local authority elections, a subject which merits a lecture to itself. The number of members of parliament increased to four, and above all, a very fruitful understanding was established between Plaid Cymru, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, an understanding which was central to the victory – victory by a hair’s breadth, it must be admitted – in the 1997 referendum. And to crown it all, Plaid Cymru won almost a third of the seats in the Assembly elections and made its long-awaited breakthrough in the industrial valleys of the south.

I will not discuss the Assembly’s first year; for that, at the moment at least,

is a subject for journalists rather than historians. And therefore, I will conclude; and in concluding I will quote the words I wrote at the end of my book, *Hanes Cymru*, which was published in 1990. I was referring to Gwyn Alfred Williams's question, 'When was Wales?', and I went on to declare that I wrote my book, 'in the faith and the confidence that the nation in its fullness is yet to be'. It is an exhilarating experience to see my prophecy being fulfilled. And thanks for that fulfilment must primarily be given to Plaid Cymru. One shudders to think what Wales would be like today had not six men gathered together in Pwllheli seventy-five years ago.