

# WELSH NATION

Vol 47 No 45

FRIDAY AUGUST 1-7 1975

5p

Plaid's early days — 10 page feature inside

## 50 Plaid Cymru Golden Jubilee



### A nation's will to live is born

BY GERALD MORGAN

On Saturday afternoon, September 20, 1924, an ashen-faced young man addressed a small group of Welsh men and women who had come at his request to a back room in the Queen's Cafe, Caernarfon. He was not a good speaker; he bungled frequently, and laughed nervously when answering questions. He had called the meeting to establish what he called Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru - the Welsh Home Rule Army.

The audience were people who he thought might be interested in such a movement. He had tried previously to hold a similar meeting in Caernarfon in 1923, with no success. His listeners were a diverse group, although drawn only from the Caernarfon area, and there were about 30 of them. They represented several sources of influence in Welsh life.

The chairman was Dr Iorwerth Lloyd Owen of Cricieth, a man whose speech was made almost incomprehensible by a nervous mannerism, and whose writing was illegible even by medical standards. In 1911 he had published a vigorous pamphlet in favour of Home Rule for Wales: *Ysbryd Glyndwr, neu Y Cledd Lle Metho Hedd* (The Spirit of Glyndwr, or The Sword where Peace Fails), and his letters were familiar to readers of Welsh papers and periodicals. Men of Lloyd Owen's generation had first hand contact with the Cymru Fydd movement, and could have heard Emrys ap Iwan (d. 1906) preaching.

One of the academics present was Ifor Williams, lecturer in the Welsh Department at Bangor. While Sir John Morris-Jones continued to lecture in English, and published most of his academic work in English, Ifor Williams had rejected this tradition; he lectured and published almost exclusively in Welsh.

The best-known man present was Thomas Rees, Principal of the Bala-Bangor Theological College, a brilliant scholar and uncompromising pacifist, a representative of the Independent Congregational tradition which from Michael D. Jones to the present day has given so much to Welsh nationalist tradition.

One of several ministers present was Lewis Valentine, a young Baptist in his first chapel in Llandudno. Valentine was a veteran of the First World War, whose experience had turned him pacifist. In 1920 he had led a protest in Bangor against the Government's treatment of the Irishman Kevin Barry. Some time in 1921 he and a group of Bangor University students started a society, Y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol Gymreig (The Welsh National Society), known as Y Tair G - the Three Gs.

The Society was officially established on March 14, 1922, with E.T. John as President. John had been Liberal MP for East Denbighshire from 1910-18, and had introduced a Welsh Home Rule Bill in 1914. He stood later as Welsh Nationalist and Labour candidate but failed. He was President of the Union of Welsh Societies, and had been at a series of meetings in Llandrindod Wells called by various bodies in 1917, 1918



• *Plaid Cymru's first general election address, issued when J.E. Daniel stood at Caernarfon in 1929. He got 609 votes. In 1974, Dafydd Wigley profited from that early investment.*

and 1919 to discuss the promotion of Welsh Home Rule or a Welsh National Council.

The "Tair G" group was not a political party, but it did have a programme. It sought nationalisation of quarries, coal mines and transport, the development of hydro-electricity, and payment by England for Welsh water. Welsh would be the official language of Wales and the only language of parliament. The peak of the society's achievements had been the calling of a meeting at the National Eisteddfod of 1923, in Mold, at which another war veteran was the principal speaker, on the subject of the rights of Wales and self-government. His name was Saunders Lewis.

Saunders Lewis had been a commissioned officer in France and after graduating in English at Liverpool he had worked for a short time as a librarian before becoming a lecturer in Welsh at the new University College in Swansea. He gave two addresses at the Mold Eisteddfod, one on the 18th-century poet Goronwy Owen, the other to the Three Gs meeting. What he said caused something of a sensation, and part of his speech can be found in a statement he sent to *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, August 9, 1923. *Y Faner* had suggested a national conference on nationalism, and had asked for reactions. Part of Saunders Lewis's answer read as follows:

*A conference will not redeem our position, but discipline and obedience will do so. Do not work for a conference where all the gasbags of Wales can speechify, but next year form a Welsh battalion and camp, so that any Welshman wishing to serve his country may go there*

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to drill for a fortnight and obey military orders, to learn how to cooperate quietly and without quarrelling, ready to obey and accept punishment if deserved. The drill would be without arms, and therefore open and not breaking the laws of any country, but it would prepare us to accept Welsh laws and leadership. If a hundred, fifty or even twenty were to do this in the first year, it would be the most important movement in Wales since the days of Glyndwr. I am wholly serious.

No wonder the Mold meeting had reverberations. Certainly it had more impact than another meeting at Mold, called by William George, L.G.'s brother, and attended by Sir John Morris-Jones, T. Gwynn Jones, Prosser Rhys and others. That had no effect at all. But although the meeting addressed by Saunders Lewis has its place in the succession which led to the foundation of Plaid Cymru, Saunders Lewis took notice of the critical reception given to his ideas. Certainly, as far as I know, he never advocated these ideas again. Although Wales had contributed more than her share to recruitment throughout the First World War, and conscientious objectors had an unpleasant time, the Welsh reaction against militarism was obviously under way in the early twenties, and it is interesting to note that Plaid Cymru itself later became partially identified with the peace movement, and many of its leading members were conscientious objectors in the Second World War (on National grounds). By 1923 Saunders Lewis's ideas were already unacceptable and he changed his ground, as we shall see.

To return to the Caernarfon meeting on that Saturday afternoon in September 1924; those present could muster a lot of experience, and so could the young man who addressed them. He was a former quarryman, forced by ill-health to work as a travelling groceries salesman. He was from Caradog Place, in the village of Ebenezer, a name which has now disappeared from the maps of Caernarfonshire, and his name was H.R. Jones. "H.R." was a dreamer and a visionary, whose nationalism was nourished both by the history books available to him and by contact with Irish nationalists. Irish history was at his fingertips; he had already visited Dublin several times,

# Plaid takes



● Lewis Valentine, first president of Plaid from 1925 to 1926, Saunders Lewis, president from 1926 to 1939, and D.J. Williams, by chance the first public speaker for Plaid in the North and the South.

he had written to tell Eamonn De Valera of the planned meeting in September, and he treasured two souvenirs of his Dublin visits - a small printing press, and a live Mills bomb, which he kept in his desk.

He had already gained experience of working to stir up interest in Welsh nationalism. In 1923 and 1924 he had been in correspondence with Welshmen whose names he had come across, and when he mentioned the idea of founding a Welsh Home Rule Society to an Aberystwyth correspondent of his, Iorwerth Peate, Peate wrote to him on April 16, 1924 naming Saunders Lewis, Ambrose Bebb and Prosser Rhys as people who would be interested. H.R. would certainly have known of Saunders Lewis from the reports of the 1923 Mold meeting, and Ambrose Bebb was often quoted in the Caernarfon Welsh weekly newspapers, *Yr Herald* and *Y Genedl*. Bebb had been

# shape

lecturing in Paris, and a Breton Nationalist, Yann Bricler, who had visited Wales in 1923, recruited him to write articles in Welsh for the Breton magazine, *Breiz Atao*. In an article in April 1924 Bebb had suggested abandoning the traditional parties because they were English:

*It is essential that we form our own party, a wholly national party that will not be involved in the politics of England, nor wallow in the mire of her parties. Only this will bring a Parliament to Wales.*

This was not a new idea; it had been floated in 1921 by John Williams, Brynisiencyn, and again in 1923 by the poet and editor Dyfnallt, writing in the *Aberdare* weekly, *Y Darian* (quoted in *Herald Gymraeg*, 10.4.23).

But Bebb had probably developed this idea in his contacts with his former fellow-student and fellow-Cardi, G.J. Williams, of the Cardiff Welsh Department, and with Saunders Lewis. These three had met on January 7th, 1924 to form "Y Mudiad Cymreig" - the Welsh Movement. This group met again at Swansea during the year with five more members, Dyfnallt, Fred Jones, Ben Bowen Thomas, R.A. Thomas and D.J. Williams.

All these characters and events can be taken as background to H.R.'s meeting in the Queen's Cafe, Caernarfon. It was not, according to *Yr Herald*, a successful meeting:

*There was no general agreement about what was to be fought for, and the meeting ended in uncertainty. However, it was decided to form a 'Home Rule Army' and a committee and officers were appointed.*

*If the movement for self-government is not more serious and responsible than this, the sooner it ends the better. And in those days the *Herald* was sympathetic to Home Rule. However, the Army existed, and its officials were*

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Gwallter Llyfnwy (Walter Jones), chairman; Alwyn Owen, Rhyd-ddu, treasurer; H.R. Jones, secretary.

In fact, this was not the first army that H.R. had assembled. On August 15, just five weeks earlier, a number of people interested in Home Rule gathered in the Friends' Meeting House in Llandrindod Wells, at the request of Dr Lloyd Owen. Thomas Rees had taken the chair, and H.R. was the secretary. According to the *Herald* report (26.8.24) H.R. was ready to issue pledge cards to all those willing to sign, and these were soon ready. They read, in translation, as follows:

## WALES BEFORE PARTY

*I am ready to support any democratic measure, but to put a Welsh measure (most of all a self-government measure) before any other measure.*

*In a word, I decide to put Wales before party.*

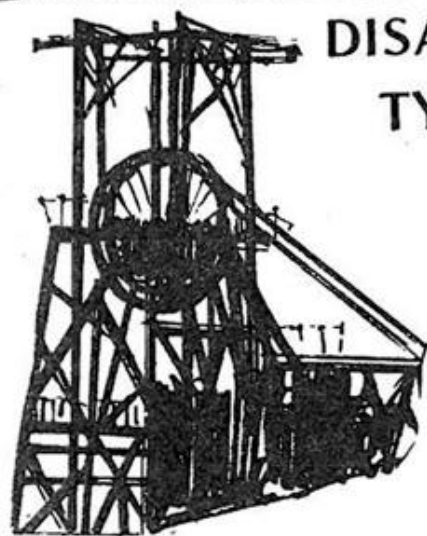
This meeting was followed by what was advertised as the annual meeting of *Byddin Yr Iaith* (the Language Army) whose secretary, Mihangel Evans of Llangynog, Maldwyn, had issued a number of badges.

Before the end of 1924 it seemed that the Welsh Home Rule Army would prove as ineffective as the Llandrindod groups, although a bundle of 72 signed membership cards still exists among the Plaid Cymru papers. Translated, the card reads:

*I hereby undertake to join the Welsh Home Rule Army. I will do what is in my power to support Wales, Welsh people and everything Welsh, and to win home rule for Wales. I am ready at the call of the Army's officials to do what I am called upon to do for the sake of Wales and Welsh home rule.*

However, on November 24, 1924, Alwyn Owen wrote to

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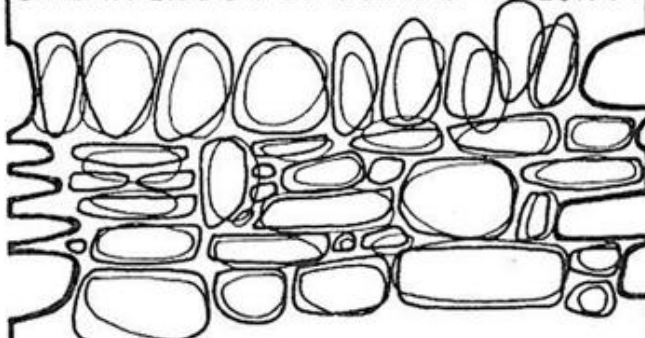
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Aberbargoed, Bargoed, Mid-  
Glam.  
Closing date: 1st September  
1975.



# Forging policy and principle

H.R. recommending that at its next meeting the Army should reconstitute itself as Y Blaid Genedlaethol Gymreig, the Welsh National Party. He suggested that it should put up its own candidate for elections, and support the League of Nations.

H.R. seized on the suggestion of his friend, and at a meeting on December 20, again at the Queen's Cafe, Caernarfon, the members formed themselves into the Plaid Genedlaethol Gymreig (the Welsh National Party), with Lewis Valentine as president, Dr Lloyd Owen as treasurer, Gwilym R. Jones as secretary, and H.R. Jones as organiser. (Gwilym R., incidentally, had been at the September meeting, and I rely largely on his practised memory for my description of it. He had first entered this field when he wrote to the Editor of the *Herald*, in December 1922, asking him to take the lead in forming a Society of Welsh Nationalists.)

This time H.R. seemed to have found the way ahead. Early in 1925 the Ministry of Pensions was proposing to close its regional office in Cardiff, and H.R. wrote to the Minister to register the Party's protest. On February 13, 1925, pressed by the Labour MP for Pont-y-pŵl, the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary said that the Minister had promised to meet the Welsh National Party before the Office was closed, but he refused to withdraw the notice of closure pending the meeting. However, the Minister then wrote to H.R. Jones saying that there was no point in holding a meeting, since the closure was to go ahead. Thus Parliamentary criticism was muzzled by a promise which was cynically broken, and all the Party had achieved was its first mention in *Hansard*. Nevertheless, this was a type of political action which was to be used frequently and more effectively in the future.

In February, 1925, H.R. took a vital step; he wrote to Saunders Lewis, apparently for the first time, inviting him to become a vice-president of the National Party, and on St David's Day Saunders Lewis replied. He would accept the invitation on certain conditions - that the party was agreed on the need for compulsory Welsh, and on the need to cut off all connections with English parties and with Westminster - "no good will ever come to Wales from the Parliament of the English". These conditions were to shape the Party's thinking for years to come.

In reply to H.R. Jones sent a newly-printed leaflet, with a list of officers and a statement of the new party's aims. The list of officers read:

President: Lewis Valentine.

Vice-presidents: Lady Mallt Williams, Saunders Lewis and Meuryn.

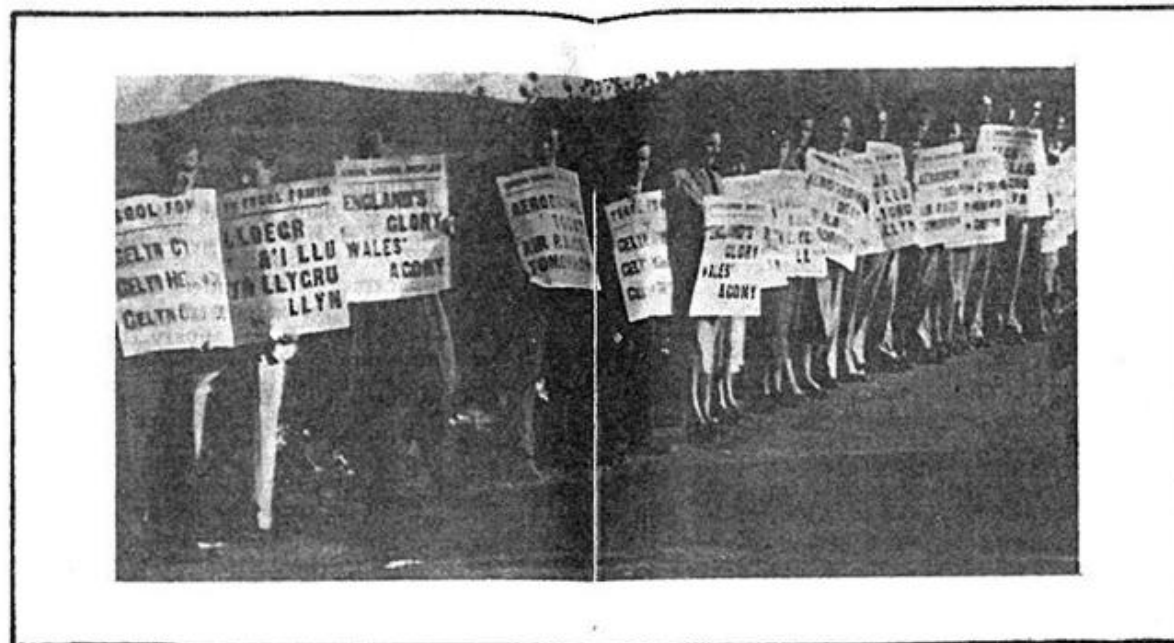
Treasurer: Dr Iorwerth Owain.

Secretaries: Alwyn Owain and Gwilym R. Jones

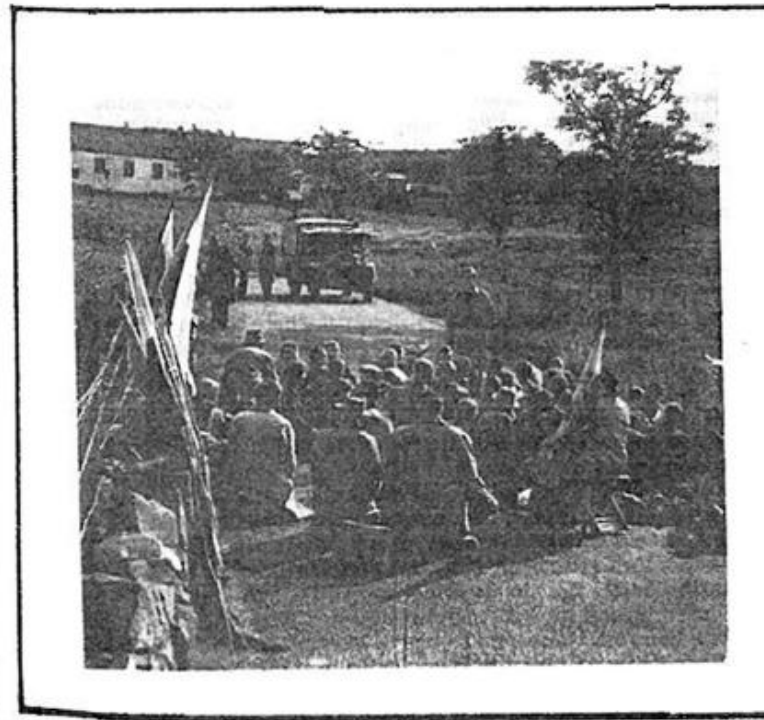
Organiser: H.R. Jones

The aims were the achievement of self-government and the promotion of the Welsh language, with the conditions laid down by Saunders Lewis. Saunders Lewis, however, was far from happy about the leaflet. "Self-government is too vague a target," he wrote back to H.R. in April. Nobody would agree, he thought, on what self-government really was. He also sought to know what the party's general policy was, and deplored the long list of officers.

The ever-willing H.R., always in love with pamphlets and letter-heads, responded with another printed leaflet obedient to these criticisms - and as a result the Welsh National Party did not include any reference to Home Rule or self-government in any form in its official literature. Saunders Lewis had been arguing in public speeches (often at meetings of the Union of Welsh Societies) that self-government should be developed through the transformation of local government, rather than through Westminster, and the future of the Welsh language, which he argued was a political matter, was at the heart of his thinking. This may perhaps have been influenced by the success of Sinn Féin in 1918, when the Irish took over much of the civil administration of Ireland by subterfuge, leaving the British courts empty. But in the mid-twenties, Saunders Lewis was no great admirer of Sinn Féin. When in 1926 H.R. wrote that he wanted to invite De Valera to the



● Plaid members were the focus of protest at the abuse of Wales by the whims of the British military planners. Above, placards line the route to the Llŷn bombing school in the 30s. Below, left, posters protest at takeovers of rural areas for training grounds during the war, and below, right, protest becomes sharper on the road to the Trawsfynydd camp in the 50s. In the trenchcoat? - Gwynfor Evans.



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first party summer school, Saunders Lewis wrote back condemning De Valera and his policies roundly.

At the end of March, 1925, D.J. Williams wrote his first letter to H.R. Jones in reply to what may have been the same letter as that sent to Saunders Lewis. D.J. Williams gave an enthusiastic affirmative, and the party thus recruited the man who must have been - and I think no one will grudge me this opinion - the most loyal and generous of all its members.

H.R. was still dependent on his work as a commercial traveller, but he did what he could to justify his title of organiser. He travelled to South Wales to meet the Cardiff group of Nationalists. He wrote numerous letters, but if any party meetings were held, no record survives in the archives. I have found only one reference, to a meeting on May 23 of the Party's committee, which passed a resolution condemning the appointment of two Englishmen to professorial chairs in the University of Wales, and asking that every lecturer should be able to teach in Welsh in a year's time!

H.R. had also been busy writing. During 1924 and early 1925 he wrote a good deal for the *Herald*, under titles such as "The Message of Wales to her Home Rulers", "Love of Wales", and a description of Wales in 2250AD. His style was visionary, and translation makes it sound stranger than it actually is; anyone familiar with the literature of the Tithe War will recognise this kind of writing:

*Nationalism is our birthright, and the crown of nationalism is self-government..... the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. We have seen the light; we have seen our birth-right shining through the darkness, the right to rule our own country..... Are you ready to make sacrifices for Wales, your own country? Not with sword or gun, and not with gas or cannon, but with unyielding determination to defend the best interests of Wales.....*

By printing these articles, and by vigorous editorial in favour of the new party in February and May, 1925, the *Herald* did what it could to support H.R. and his group; the *Herald* of course was now being edited by Meuryn, one of the new vice-presidents of the party.

During the spring of 1925 a vital decision had been taken, though I have not yet discovered the exact circumstances. It was decided that there should be a meeting in Pwllheli during the National Eisteddfod to establish the party on a new footing. Lewis Valentine wrote on May 1 to a temporarily dispirited H.R. Jones:

*I have just returned from the South. Don't talk of resigning; we'll find things easier after seeing and discussing with the men of the South. I saw some of Saunders Lewis's friends on my trip, and they are expecting something of us..... I attach great importance to what will happen in Pwllheli; the authority of the nation will be behind what we do afterwards.*

This letter, written on May 1, 1925, is the first reference I have found to the plan for a meeting in Pwllheli. In fact there were two meetings, the first private, the second public. The private meeting took place on Wednesday afternoon, August 5, 1925, in the Maes Gwyn Temperance Hotel. Only six of those invited were able to attend - Lewis Valentine, Moses Gruffydd of Dolgellau, Saunders Lewis, D.E. Williams of Groeslon, the Rev. Fred Jones, and H.R. They elected officers - Lewis Valentine as president, Moses Gruffydd as

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Hard Times

WENALLT

WELSH NATION

GAIR RHYDD

Y DINESYDD

ROATH

CASA

TREODA

MEITHRIN

the AUSTRINGER

CARDIFF PEOPLE'S PAPER

Y Ddraig Goch

STAR

AN EVER INCREASING NUMBER OF WEEKLY, MONTHLY AND QUARTERLY PUBLICATIONS HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON.....

bd

..... THE PRINTER

# Poll fight

• H.R. Jones.....his enthusiasm and dedication nursed Plaid through its early years.



treasurer, H.R. Jones as secretary, and three more executive committee members, Saunders Lewis, Fred Jones and D.J. Williams. The meeting's most important decision was to hold a summer school the following year. There was a tradition of holding summer schools to promote aspects of Welsh culture, and it was natural that the committee should choose such a model.

The meeting also decided on a new title - Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, the National Party of Wales, in place of the Caernarfon title.

The public meeting the following day was held in the Baptist Chapel, Penlan Street, Pwllheli, at 5.30. Meurnyn, editor of the *Herald*, was the chairman, and the first speech at a Plaid Cymru public meeting was delivered by D.J. Williams, who had only just arrived on the train from the South, meeting Saunders Lewis on the platform as the latter began his journey back to Swansea. D.J. Williams had no idea he was expected to speak, but did his best. "Wales has been under water up till now," he said, "but we must remember that life began in the water." He went on to speak of the need to prepare Wales for self-government; Fred Jones spoke of the need to insist on better treatment for the Welsh language, and Lewis Valentine spoke briefly on the purpose and aims of the party.

So at last H.R. Jones's efforts were beginning to succeed. Many men had said "There must be a national party", but done nothing. Lacking even this vision at first, H.R. had nevertheless pressed on, working through the press and through invitations to a widening circle of acquaintances. He was woolly in the extreme, and borrowed most of his ideas from others. He had borrowed the idea of an "army" from Lady Malt Williams; it was Alwyn Owen who suggested that it should become a party; it was Saunders Lewis who dictated the terms of its foundation, yet I have no doubt that without H.R. Jones's enthusiasm and dedication, the party would never have got off even to the quiet start which it did manage in 1924-25.

Certainly there was no splash at Pwllheli in the summer of 1925. The press gave little attention to the meetings. The Plaid might qualify as a party in that it had officials, members and had held a public meeting to promote its policies, but the evidence for the months following Pwllheli suggests that the party seemed still-born. There were very few members, there was no membership campaign, and there was no money. The members who did exist had their livings to earn. Only H.R. Jones was active in arranging meetings, sometimes to the infuriation of speakers whom he had forgotten to invite before billing them to speak.

One meeting does deserve special mention; the first public meeting of Plaid Cymru in South Wales. It was held at Capel Als, Llanelli, on the first Saturday in February, 1926. Of the three speakers who were intended to be there, Saunders Lewis couldn't attend, Ben Bowen Thomas didn't get the invitation until after the meeting, and so D.J. Williams, Fishguard, found himself the only speaker, and modest though he was, he loved to be able to boast, quietly, that he had been the first public speaker for Plaid Cymru in both North and South Wales.

Plans were maturing, nevertheless. The executive committee co-opted additional members in 1926 - Ben Bowen Thomas,

# begins

Prosser Rhys, Iorwerth Peate, Miss Mai Roberts, Kate Roberts, and J. Dyfnallt Owen. The committee met in Aberystwyth at the New Year and Easter, and it must have been at these meetings that plans were formed for launching a party journal. H.R.'s letters at first refer to this simply as "the monthly", and it seems to have been Meurnyn who, early in 1926, suggested the title "*Y Ddraig Goch*". It took months to iron out the various problems - finance, printing, editorship, contributions. Meanwhile, the weekly Welsh-language newspapers were willing to print party material, and three editors were closely associated with the party - Meurnyn, Prosser Rhys of *Y Faner* and Dyfnallt Owen of *Y Darian*, the last of the South Wales Welsh-language papers.

I have not been able to reconstruct the story of the establishment of the paper in detail, but obviously Prosser Rhys was a key figure, although his name never appeared in the paper. He arranged the printing of the early numbers, and later on became responsible for much of the work of finance and distribution.

The editorship was a problem, and it is not easy in retrospect even to determine who was the first editor. According to H.R. Jones, writing in 1927, Ambrose Bebb edited the first three numbers, and was then succeeded by Prosser Rhys and Saunders Lewis. At least one of the early members, Moses Gruffydd, had objected strongly to Bebb's position following an article Bebb had written for *Y Llenor* in 1925, showing him to be strongly sympathetic to the extreme right-wing French movement, *L'Action Francaise*. To judge by the correspondence, H.R. Jones seems to have done a good deal of editorial work himself.

The problems were finally overcome with the appearance of the first number of *Y Ddraig Goch*, in June, 1926. It cost twopence, had six pages and 2,500 copies were printed. The printers ran out of material half-way through page six, and the rest was left blank, instead of being used for free party advertising. The number contained articles by Ambrose Bebb, Saunders Lewis and Iorwerth Peate, a poem by Dyfnallt, and some party news. Saunders Lewis's article is the most remarkable of the three, all of which are still remarkably fresh compared with most fifty-year-old political journalism. Saunders Lewis argued that the party did not exist simply for the sake of the Welsh language:

*Language exists for the sake of man. Man is first, and he shaped language for his own use. The reason for defending the language is that we care most of all for the benefit of the ordinary man who lives in this part of the world. The purpose of politics is to succour the life of man. The purpose of the National Party is not to keep Welsh as a fetish in Wales, but to make it possible for every Welshman to live a full, civilised, happy, good life.*

To achieve this, he argued, everyone should have a stake in the life of the nation - the spiritual, intellectual and economic life. He visualised a society of "small capitalists" where everyone would work for the common good and his own good at the same time. Wage-earners with no capital, no investment in society, could not feel any sense of obligation, while competition of the free market kind tended to reduce the number of capitalists to an ever-shrinking number of over-wealthy men. Thus prophetically did Saunders Lewis begin his half-century of political journalism and pamphleteering in the Welsh language, in the first-ever political journal published in the Welsh language.

The paper was the party's first major achievement. Its monthly appearance was proof of the party's existence to its scattered members. The second major achievement was the organisation of the first summer school. The chosen venue was Aberystwyth, but no suitable building was available, so Machynlleth was chosen as a substitute, because it was central, and because of its connections with Owain Glyndwr.

The summer school was ambitious. It lasted from Monday evening, August 23, 1926, till the following Saturday morning. Meetings were held in Owain Glyndwr's Parliament House, and members who were present, about sixty in number, testify to their great enjoyment of the occasion. There were morning and

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Plaid Cymru  
Golden Jubilee



evening meetings, and a concert, which lost money. The speakers were by no means all members of the party; they included William George, L.G.'s brother; T.P. Ellis, Rhys Hopkin Morris, then MP for Cardiganshire, E.T. John, and Kevin O'Sheil, a Fine Gael Deputy from the Irish Dail. H.R. Jones had wanted to invite De Valera as well, but Saunders Lewis squashed this idea firmly; he had met De Valera, and did not like his ideas, and in any case, it would have been discourteous to O'Sheil. Some of the subjects lectured on were the Welsh System of Education, the Law Courts, Local Council Powers, Welsh Finance, and Party Propaganda. The most important address, however, was that of Saunders Lewis at the opening meeting on "The Principles of Nationalism", later printed as the party's first pamphlet.

We must pause to consider this remarkable document, and try to guess how it must have gripped its original audience. This was not Lloyd George's windy rhetoric at an Eisteddfod session; this was the austere passion of a fresh and agile mind. The author began with a paradox - the plight of contemporary Wales was to be blamed on Nationalism, the nationalism of the nation-states of Europe which emphasised unity and strength at the expense of minority cultures. The nationalism he wanted the new party to embrace was essentially a cultural nationalism, rather than political independence, which he suggested could lead to violence and oppression. Freedom and responsibility must be sought - responsibility for the culture of Wales, freedom to join the League of Nations and the Community of European nations. The pamphlet is an astonishing piece of historic and prophetic thought, expressed in pungent, often, paradoxical, Welsh prose.

So astonishing was Saunders Lewis's ability that the inevitable flaws in the argument, especially the lack of any real programme for achieving freedom and responsibility, went unremarked. Lewis Valentine announced his

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## Cofiwch gefnogi'r Blaid yn yr Eisteddfod

I'r dyddiadur nawr!

Nos Fawrth, 5 Awst am 8.00p.m.  
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Nos Fercher 6 Awst  
NOSON LAWEN PLAID CYMRU Tocynnau 70c  
Sidan - John R. Williams - Mona Meirion -  
Gwyn a Derfel - Parch Huw Jones, Y Bala - Joseyn.  
Arweinydd: CHARLES WILLIAMS.

Nos Wener, 8 Awst am 8p.m.  
CYMANFA GODI'R TO Mynediad gyda rhaglen 50c.

Nos Wener 8 Awst am 8p.m.  
TWMPATH DAWNS yn Neuadd Garndolbenmaen  
Tocynnau 50c Galwr: Celt Roberts

Pob tocyn i'w cael gan Elfed Roberts, 2 Tŷ'n Ffridd,  
Penrhyndeudraeth Tel: 621 ac yn Stondin y Ddraig  
Goch ar y Maes

..... "Dwyfor, Angor yr Iaith" .....



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## Plaid Cymru

### Golden Jubilee



resignation as president of the party, and Saunders Lewis was elected in his place, to an office from which he was able to influence the history of modern Wales more than he himself realised, though less than he had hoped.

Other important decisions were made at the Machynlleth Summer School. It was decided to appoint H.R. Jones as party organiser, a full-time post on a salary of £300 a year. An office was to be opened in Aberystwyth. The *Cylich Merched* (Women's Circle) was formed, with Kate Roberts as its President. Already the small group of officers and committee members included those who were to become the greatest Welsh writers of their generation, and the nature of the Party as a language and cultural movement was obvious.

It was not obvious to everyone, however. The little movement was not to remain long in political innocence. The daily press largely ignored it, but during the year 1926 the magazine *Welsh Outlook* began to attack the Plaid with increasing savagery. In March it suggested that the party was unnecessary, since the battles of the nineteenth century had been won. In August it launched the kind of passport/frontier posts/anti-English image of the party which has been the crutch of ignorant critics ever since. In November the attack grew more hysterical:

*We have often, in these columns, denounced the old-fashioned nationalism (the nationalism of Ireland for example) as the chief disturber of the peace of the world, a hundred times more pernicious than Emperors and War Lords.*

It has always been easy for critics to link Welsh Nationalism with any kind of nationalism which may happen to be harmful; the rod of Irish Nationalism was later replaced by the rod of National Socialism. The difference between a small country seeking to rule itself and a large country seeking to rule others has never been obvious to this kind of critic.

So the existence of the new party already began to conform to lines with which all pre-1966 members are familiar - *Y Ddraig Goch*, summer schools, cultural enthusiasm, political innocence, and fatuous criticism. Other familiar features soon became evident. In the September 1926 *Ddraig Goch*, the party's finances were optimistically reviewed, and an appeal was made to members to give a week's wages to the party. The leaders were however judging others by their own standards of generosity, and the money was slow to come. Fortunately, H.R. did not take up his appointment immediately, but by January, 1927, the party's financial innocence was obvious. The paper published a balance sheet (the only time this has happened, as far as I know) showing receipts of £335, of which only £6 remained. H.R.'s love of printing posters and letter headings, and arranging meetings, had run away with £300. *Y Ddraig Goch* managed to pay for itself, but H.R.'s salary and the Aberystwyth office rent became chargeable at this time.

H.R. had not been idle. At Machynlleth he had only been able to report the existence of one branch, at Rhyd-ddu. In October, 1926, the London Branch was started, and was to exercise a powerful influence on the party's development. Other branches were started in Bangor, Pandy Tudur, Talysarn, Abercwmboi and Rhydycymerau. In November, 1926, the party supported a candidate in a local election for the first time, in the village of Llandderfel. A farmer, Charles Lloyd Jones, a party member, stood against his Tory landlord, and against a Liberal. The landlord won, but the Liberal ran a bad third, and this result gave the party leaders some pleasure at the time. Saunders Lewis from the first emphasised the importance of the control of local government, and the party's failure at this level for many years was a vital factor in its lack of electoral success.

At the beginning of 1927, however, things looked bad.

H.R.'s consumption took a turn for the worse, and in March he left Wales for a stay in the Mediterranean. H.R. however, found the idleness of a holiday intolerable, and he soon returned to carry on as best he could. The April number of *Y Ddraig Goch* carried an urgent appeal for money by Saunders Lewis; the Aberystwyth office would have to be closed, the organiser laid off and the paper cease publication unless money was forthcoming. This could well have been the death of the movement. The executive committee cut H.R.'s salary to £200 a year at his own request, and decided to continue his employment and publication of the paper until August, and then review the situation.

The April appeal, however, brought a response from two members which saved the party. £50 was given by the octogenarian Lewis Williams of Nelson, and £100 by Lady Mallt Williams. She is worth a diversion at this stage. She was born in 1867, Alice Matilda Langland Williams, daughter of a Breconshire doctor, and came under the influence of Lady Llanofor. She joined *Urdd y Delyn*, founded by Owen M. Edwards in 1896, and was secretary of *Undeb y Ddraig Goch* in 1903, and in the pages of *Cymru'r Plant* from 1911 she ran a group called the *Queen's Spies in the Army of Wales*, pledged to serve Wales with heart, mind, tongue and hand. She moved between St Dogmaels, Cardigan and a hotel in Dublin. Her letters, written on tiny sheets of paper in an enormous hand, and in idiosyncratic Welsh, betray a fierce anti-imperialistic nationalism. Ignoring the soft mutation, she had *SIARADWCH CYMRAEG* printed on her envelopes. She was in strong sympathy with the stirrings of Indian nationalism. She, it was, who had paid for H.R.'s convalescent trip to the Mediterranean. Her cheque of £100 was the first of a series which went on annually, so far as I know, until her death in 1945. In addition, she bought a hundred copies of *Y Ddraig Goch* every month and distributed them free. Her title, "Lady" Mallt Williams, seems to have been assumed without any right, but she certainly deserves the tribute of the party whose survival she guaranteed at its most critical time.

The April, 1927, number of *Y Ddraig Goch* carried the party's bad financial news, but it also contained something positive - an article on the economic aspects of Welsh self-government by D.J. Davies. D.J. Davies was another remarkable character. Born in 1893, he had emigrated to America after a period in Wales as a miner. He worked as a professional boxer and mining prospector, with a wartime period in the US Navy. On his return to Wales after the war, he joined the Labour party and worked energetically for it in his own county of Carmarthenshire. In 1924 he visited Denmark, and his experiences there particularly of the Danish Folk High Schools, changed his whole philosophy, replacing centralising socialism by diversifying cooperation. Overnight, knowing nothing of H.R. Jones or Saunders Lewis, he became a nationalist, arguing to his friends that there could be no internationalism without nations, and without the control of one's own home. After his return from Denmark, he gained a place in the University College at Aberystwyth in 1925, the year in which he married an Irishwoman, Noelle French, who shared his enthusiasm for Denmark and Danish ideals, and became a great friend of Wales.

In his April, 1927, article, the first of a series, Davies proposed Dominion status as the aim of Welsh Nationalism - itself a major contribution to party policy. He discussed the financial problems which would face a Welsh government in detail quite beyond the range of almost anyone else in the party. All of a sudden Plaid Cymru had acquired an economist, a valuable counter-balance to the literary and historical bias which was natural to most of the party's leaders.

In his articles, D.J. Davies argued that mere devolution would be worthless to Wales, since a Welsh government of the Ulster kind would never master in its own house, but always be subject to London control. He dismissed the idea of Welsh tariffs and customs as being "opposed to all the economic trends of the modern world". A whole range of subjects passed under his pen - taxation, investment, nationalisation of coal and land, and transport. He concluded that under the kind of government he envisaged, both Welsh culture and economic prosperity would be well founded.



• Forty years on..... and the cheer goes up in Carmarthen as the first Plaid MP is elected in 1966. Below, victorious Gwynfor Evans faces a crowd of pressmen after the by-election.



August, 1927, saw the second party summer school, in Llangollen. Again there was an ambitious programme, reviewing subjects like Welsh Finance, Welsh Governmental Methods, Education, and the organisation of parliamentary elections. The lecturers included Principal Emrys Evans of Bangor (whose friendliness towards the party was very brief), Ben Bowen Thomas and D.J. Williams.

H.R. Jones's report on the year's activity was the most interesting product of the summer school. He claimed that there were now 19 branches, of which seven were in Caernarfonshire and four in Glamorgan. Membership was 424, and he offered a breakdown of their occupations; they included seventy students, sixty-five quarrymen, fifty farmers and twenty-five ministers. Seventy public meetings had been held, but nothing was said of the chaotic arrangements inflicted on some speakers. The executive committee established a £1,000 Fund to raise money, organised by Miss Mai Roberts. The Summer School decided that co-operative principles should govern the party's economic policies, and that the party should fight two seats at the next general election. To this end, the Rev. Lewis Valentine was nominated candidate for the Arfon constituency in January 1928, and *Ddraig Goch* proclaimed the need for a candidate for the University of Wales seat.

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Then in the summer of 1928 a by-election was sprung in Carmarthenshire with the removal of Sir Alfred Mond to the House of Lords. Plaid Cymru had no candidate ready and no funds, but it was decided to stage a negative intervention. A series of meetings was held in the constituency with the aim of persuading voters to show their lack of confidence in the English parties by staying away from the polls. Thousands of posters were put up and pamphlets distributed. The result, announced on June 28, showed a drop of 6,000 votes on the 1924 figure, which was elsewhere blamed on the weather and the lateness of the election in the parliament's life, as well as on the lack of personal distinction of the successful Liberal candidate and his predecessor.

Apart from this campaign, and the Llandeilo Summer School, 1928 was a fairly quiet year. There was a ripple when the Rev. Fred Jones, one of the founder-members, won a seat on the Cardiganshire County Council for the village of Tal-y-bont, where he had just moved from the Rhondda. Towards the end of the year a number of members ran a series of meetings in the Rhondda; they were Kate Roberts, then teaching in Aberdare, Thomas Parry, then a lecturer in Cardiff, Cassie Davies, then in Barry, and Kitchener Davies, the poet and minister who was the key party figure in the Rhondda for many subsequent years.

During 1928 the party office moved to 20 North Parade, Aberystwyth. The monthly production of *Y Ddraig Goch* was a permanent drain on the energies of the handful who were willing to work to a standstill for the party. The programme of public meetings was also a strain - H.R. reported in Llandeilo that 180 had been held during 1927-28. H.R.'s health was deteriorating, but he had successfully campaigned for the renaming of his native village, Ebenezer, which thanks to him is now Deiniolen.

The following year was to see H.R.'s last campaign, the Caernarfon election. That is outside my brief, but I would like to jump to 1930 to close this contribution. The prospect is not a cheerful one. The party's first parliamentary election had produced 609 votes, after H.R., using the kind of optimism which characterised the party for many years, had proclaimed his expectation of thousands. The party was in debt, and owed the bank £168, which was really remarkably little considering that the party had been running a professional organiser, two offices, a monthly paper and an election campaign. Nevertheless, the burden of debt was to become a familiar feature of party life from that day to this.

The prospects for the party's future must have seemed mixed indeed. Few votes, few members, debt; on the other hand the party had survived for five whole years. It had printed a monthly journal for five years, it was the first independent Welsh political party; not much of a party, perhaps, and not very political, but very independent and very Welsh.

The man who had done more than anyone else to make Plaid Cymru possible, H.R. Jones, died on June 17, 1930. He had looked and sounded like a sick man for years, and knew that he had not long to live. The knowledge seems to have driven him to work at full stretch. Gwilym R. Jones, writing in *Y Ddraig Goch*, recalled one night during the Caernarfon election when H.R. took him aside to confess that he had misaddressed 1,500 envelopes, and feared that people would say he was no longer up to the job. On another occasion, speaking to Gwilym R. Jones, he said: "We can't awaken a nation which has slept for so long without sacrificing more. We must suffer, we must shed our blood. The movement is too tame, and we are too cowardly."

Even with the party established, H.R. had continued to dream of founding new movements. Sometime after 1926 he was writing Number one, Volume One of "Yr Amddiffynwr", the "organ of the Movement of the Defenders of Wales". This survives among the Plaid Cymru papers, along with a reference in 1927 to the establishment of Gwylwyr Cymru, obviously a Welsh Scout movement.

The 609 votes of the Caernarfon election were not the crushing blow to H.R.'s spirit that one might have feared. In *Y Ddraig Goch* immediately following the election, in one of

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his rare signed articles, he wrote:

*It's worth living in Wales today, but it's worth more to be alive in Wales. Six hundred and nine have embraced the nationalist faith. Six hundred and nine have raised the flag of Wales on the hills of our beloved countryside. Six hundred and nine of Arthur's soldiers have sounded the horn of rebirth, ..... Now Wales will go forward to the promised land, and Arthur himself will come, awoken from his sleep at the foot of Elidir, to lead his people to freedom.*

Within twelve months that unquenchable optimism was silent. H.R. was not a "great man" in any obvious way. He rarely spoke in public; Lewis Valentine could only recall him speaking once, on the subject of Irish nationalism at Trefriw. He was not a great thinker or writer, and he was certainly not a great organiser. Yet there is the true quality of heroism about H.R. He was handicapped by the lack of all those other qualities, by his desperate state of health and early death, yet he had a dream, and he persisted in it. In the way he knew, he sacrificed everything for Wales. At his death, the party's leaders made their tributes, with which I close this lecture. Lewis Valentine wrote:

*Through him my life was given a new direction..... scarcely did I have an hour to myself, since no-one who worked with H.R. had any spare time. Indeed, he hardly allowed me time to get married, since among the wedding telegrams was one from H.R. "Go to Llanfairtalhaearn to address a meeting tonight."*

Saunders Lewis paid him the first of that great series of tributes with which he has honoured the heroes of modern Wales, and which deserve to be collected:

*H.R. was a man with Wales in his heart. I do not think anyone could love her more purely or simply, love her without asking anything in return, loving her with his whole heart. In worldly matters, such as business, he was like a child. He was totally oblivious to his own pocket, his own future, and any matter of bread and butter or pounds, shillings and pence. His fellow-workers were often infuriated by this; but he went on with his love for Wales like a flame in his breast, so that neither the wind of criticism or the tut-tutting of friends cooled his ardour. He was like a saint of the early Church among us, with his eyes on the day of Wales's salvation.*

*He was the purest of us. The only occasions on which I ever heard him criticising anyone were when nationalists took jobs in Wales which prevented them from working in public for the Plaid. H.R. Jones could not understand any of us putting personal, academic or business career before the work of the party. Life for him was very simple - keep body and soul together as long as possible while working for the cause of Wales. It is said sometimes in criticism of us that we are Welsh Sinn Feiners. For better or worse, this is far from true of us. H.R. was the only one of us whom one can imagine being given a job by Michael Collins.*

*H.R. Jones founded the Welsh National Party. He established and began Y Ddraig Goch. He, more than any one, organised the campaign for the National Party in the Caernarfon parliamentary election. These three facts in the short life of H.R. Jones will give him a secure place in the history of Wales.*

## SOURCES

I have not been able to do the research essential for a real history of the origins of Plaid Cymru. This would need a much more thorough study of the Welsh-language Press than I have been able to carry out, and would require a long series of interviews with survivors of the period. The few interviews I have been able to conduct are invaluable for giving impressions of character and discussions of various issues, but they are not at all reliable on facts, due to the distorting processes of memory. Nevertheless, I hope that the facts and impressions in this pamphlet are as accurate as I can make them. I have used the following sources: Plaid Cymru correspondence in the National Library of Wales. The files of Yr Herald Gymreig, Baner ac Amserau Cymru, Y Ddraig Goch and the Western Mail in the National Library of Wales, Tros Gymru: J.E. a'r Plaid. J.E. Jones, Gwasg John Penry, 1970. J.E. Jones's volume of reminiscences contains a valuable survey of the influences that went to the creation of the party. I should like to thank the staff of the National Library for their help in making these sources available to me, with the permission of Plaid Cymru.

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