

Mother Wales, get off me back ?

Gwyn Williams

Folklore is misleading. South Wales is no longer the militant area it once was. But more than that the dominance of Labour could finally be at an end



In 1979, the Welsh electorate wrote finis to two hundred years of Welsh history. They rejected every tradition to which the modern Welsh had committed themselves. They drove into bankruptcy every political creed which the modern Welsh had embraced.

In March, on their St David's Day, they crushed by a four-to-one majority a pallid measure of self-government proffered them in its last Tammany days by a Labour administration under pressure from Scots. They broke spokesmen and mentors, some self-appointed but some quite genuine, like worn-out old pick-handles and they shrugged off Welshness like a shabby old moleskin jacket.

In May, an even sharper shock; they stampeded in such numbers to the Tories that they overthrew a political tradition rooted in Wales for a hundred and fifty years. Welsh political life, unlike English, has been characterised by abrupt revolutions in personnel, ideology and style which inaugurate long one-party eras, virtually *regimes* in the European sense. The long Liberal hegemony reached a climax in 1906, when not a single Tory MP was returned from Wales. After a brief upheaval, it was succeeded by Labour which by 1966 had almost equalled its totality. In 1966, British capitalism began to crack and so did Welsh Labour. The Tories began to inch back. The long, hard struggle of populist, Non-conformist and radical Welsh had expelled landlords and the Church as 'aliens' from the Welsh community and Welsh historiography; not so long ago, it looked as though the Tories were going to follow them clean out of Welsh politics and Welsh history. In 1979, the Tories swept with such force through non-industrial Wales that they obliterated landmarks which had been familiar for generations. Even within the Labour bastions of the industrial valleys of the south, their tide rose menacingly; for the first time, it became possible to envisage a serious two-party confrontation in those valleys. Stalwarts in the all-powerful council chambers who had just beaten back and contained a challenge from the nationalists Plaid Cymru, had to face the spectre of an oncoming English 'normality' (since succeeded by the increasingly corporeal presence of a shadowy SDP). In a spectacular election, it was Wales along with London which provided the Tories with their most spectacular successes, as Welsh Labour shrank back into the coalfields. There was a smell of 1931 in the air.'

And in June the Welsh, particularly in their strongholds of institutionalised Labourism, voting for committed anti-Common Market MEPs, rejected Europe so decisively as to register their region as the most British of all the regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and About a Half of Northern Ireland. In 1979, the Welsh Political Correspondent of BBC Wales considered resignation. 'Welsh politics' had ceased to exist, the Welsh had finally disappeared into Britain. First of the British, they looked like being the last.

A melodramatic history

Since the tenth century, a Welsh nation has generally been a minority among a Welsh people, who have survived by anchoring themselves within successive forms of Britishness. Modern Wales began to take shape within the *Great Britain* formed after the union of England and Scotland in 1707 and realised by merchant capitalism, imperialism, naval power, agriculture transformed into a capitalist industry and its monstrous capital of London.² In eighteenth century Wales, merchant capitalism with its rural proto-industrialisation had already made the country a sector of an imperial economy. Copper and tinsplate, with 90% of British production focused on Swansea and Anglesey, the rural cloth trade directed at the Gulf of Mexico, the beginnings of iron and slate, were all directed to export. The 1790s saw the massive impact of the iron industry. Until 1841, every county in Wales registered a population explosion, with Monmouth and Glamorgan running first and third in the British coun-

ties' growth lists. From 1841, rural Wales entered its cycle of depopulation as the south-east sucked people in, ultimately to lodge nearly four-fifths of the Welsh in that continuously revolutionising and increasingly English-speaking region. Industrialisation in the north-east faltered, though Gwynedd with its slate became another 90% of British production export centre. It was iron, coal and tinplate in the south-east which were the pacemakers to be succeeded by the substantial world empire of south Wales steel and rails and the gigantic world empire of south Wales coal. By the 1870s the marriage rate even in rock-ribbed Merioneth was dependent on the price of coal.

In response a new Welsh working class and a new Welsh nation clawed their way into existence. The first rebellions were directed against capitalism itself: the Jacobin troubles of the 1790s, the Scotch Cattle of Gwent, the Merthyr Rising of 1831, the first unions, the march on Newport and the early phases of Chartism. In the restabilisation and realignment of mid-century, there was a new mobilisation around a Nonconformist People against Anglican and English-speaking gentry and landlords. This created a 'nation' which formed along a language line which was also a religious and a class line and located itself within Victorian imperialism. This 'nation' broke into political life with the franchise reforms; the democratic revolution of the 1880s ended the rule of the squires, entrenched a Liberal middle class which, in its new secondary schools, its university, its museums and eisteddfods erected the framework of a pseudo-nation. Drawing on the realities of small town, village and colliery settlement Wales, it invented the operative myth of the *gwerin*, the classless, Welsh-speaking and cultured 'folk', to confront a new proletariat in a numerical majority, within an industrial Wales increasingly alienated from the institutions and ideologies, particularly the educational apparatus, of the 'Nonconformist, Liberal Nation'.

For this was also the climax of coal and the world empire of Cardiff, that 'American Wales' which carried the rest on its indifferent back. South Wales with its 270,000 colliers had become one of

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the most proletarian regions of Britain; labour, socialism, syndicalism began their revolt against Liberal democracy and its Welshness and the English language was embraced as the language of rebellion and liberation, in a process which intensified during World War 1. By 1921 the new power of Labour seemed poised to take over the dislocated Liberal inheritance. Instead, this victorious and populist Wales marched into an economic blizzard which destroyed it.³

An Imperial south Wales

A melodramatic history which leaves its survivors living through the morning after a night before which lasted four generations. For a critical feature of the whole industrialisation process was the fact that Wales was completely out of step with every other region of the British Isles. The roots of its present crisis lie in the peculiarly *imperial* character of this formation of a Welsh working class.

British capitalism, with its virtual world monopoly and its imposition of free trade on the Atlantic basin, locked the economies of Britain and the USA into an Atlantic unit which worked like a push-pull oscillator. When British capital pulsed out into the New World, the British export sector boomed and so did the US economy, while

the British home sector marked time; the reverse was true when that outward pulse of capital slackened. The continuously displaced rural population, set in motion by the earthquake of industrial capitalism, followed the thrust of enterprise. Those 40 million and more Europeans who crossed the Atlantic to help make the USA the greatest capitalist power in the world accompanied the displaced people of the British Isles during those outward thrusts of British capital in 1847-54, 1866-73, the 1880s and 1903-1913.

Every people in these islands followed that rhythm with the startling exception of the Welsh. There was a drain of people out, despite rapid industrialisation, until the 1860s, but then Wales, unique in the British Isles, breaks from the pattern. From the 1860s Wales moves out of phase from England and Scotland in a continuous expansion to the outbreak of World War 1. During the tense 1880s, when American capitalist agriculture precipitated crisis in

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rural Europe and when over 100,000 people were sucked out of rural Wales, the rate of net loss out of Wales actually falls. It goes on falling until in the remarkable decade before the war, Wales registers the only plus in the migration tables before 1914 outside the USA. In the early years of the twentieth century, south Wales saw immigration of an intensity second only to the USA itself, an immigration which caused a social, linguistic and political revolution and has led some reluctantly to conclude that Wales has become two nations. The postwar depression was the more catastrophic precisely because of the export and imperial character of the previous growth (Fig I).⁴

The south Wales coalfield expanded most when the industrial sector of Britain expanded least. The north Wales coalfield started to lose people from the 1860s, but the holiday districts in north and west began to grow. From the 1880s, the decade of its democratic revolution, the distinctiveness of Wales, which in essence means south Wales, became overpowering, to reach its climax in the oceanic 1900s. At a time when the relative industrial decline of Britain began to register, south Wales experienced a runaway boom in the midst of violent class conflict. Its hegemony over the rest of Wales established by the 1870s, south Wales was located almost wholly in the export sector of British imperialism; it was Britain's American frontier of industrialisation and a heartland of British imperial capitalism.

¹Brief, accurate and striking analysis in the *Economist*, 12 May 1979; note the map.

²I explore this process and cover the whole modern period in a volume of essays, *The Welsh in their History*, to be published next year by Croom Helm. I touch on it in *When was Wales?* the BBC Wales Annual Radio Lecture for 1979 which sold out in a couple of weeks but which BBC London refused to reprint; it will appear in the collection mentioned.

³A major new study of Wales since 1880 is K O Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (University of Wales and Clarendon presses, 1981); a different approach in David Smith, ed, *A People and a Proletariat; essays on Welsh History 1780-1980* (Pluto Press and Llafur, Welsh Labour History Society, 1981).

⁴This graph is taken from Brinley Thomas, 'Wales and the Atlantic Economy' in the volume he edited, *The Welsh Economy: studies in expansion* (University of Wales, Cardiff, 1962) where it is supported by several telling tables. The basis of the analysis is Professor Thomas's monumental study, *Migration and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1954 and subsequent revisions). I tackle the problem in detail in 'Imperial South Wales', to be published in *The Welsh in their History*.



For it was not simply a matter of coal. In 1881, the year Nonconformist Wales won the Welsh Sunday Closing Act, the first recognition of a distinct Welsh people by the modern British state, brash new Cardiff raised its merchant palace of a Coal Exchange; it got its university college two years later. Bute Street became the jugular vein of capitalist Wales. Not only did John Cory's bunkers straddle the world and south Wales coal keep the Royal Navy afloat; the capital, technicians and technology of south Wales acquired world power. They helped to distort the development of Spain, wrenching its heavy industry base away from Asturias into the Basque lands, where Cardiff and its hinterland were entrenched in Bilbao.⁵ South Wales merchants bought up shipping companies and port capital in Le Havre, Rouen, Brest and Nantes. Italy, Argentina, Chile and Brazil for years worked to the rhythms of south Wales exports: for years the real economic capital of Chile was Swansea. The region first launched the steel of the Donetz in Russia and Pennsylvania in the USA.

the major obstacle had become the grip of institutionalised Labourism whose connection with socialism had become as mythical as the Mabinogion

The greatest editor of the *Western Mail* was one of Cecil Rhodes' men and the new Welsh bourgeoisie in its new Welsh press repeatedly compared the Welsh to the Japanese, as an old people finding a new role. Even Scott's mission to the Antarctic found a base in Cardiff which, after the Klondyke climax of the First World War, earned the nickname of Lloyd George's City of Dreadful Knights. In the middle of that war, the economist Stanley Jevons could predict a British world empire centred on south Wales.

Two cultural symbols of this simultaneously Welsh-populist and British-imperialist identity have proved memorable. There was David Lloyd George, leaping like a Magic Goat from the aggressive middle class of north Wales now on the offensive against Anglican landlords and creating a Welsh nation in its own image, into Downing Street and to the pinnacle of British imperialism. And there was Welsh rugby which after an initial struggle became the Welsh game *par excellence*, the only field where it was possible to be simultaneously Welsh and a gentleman (normally a difficult undertaking),

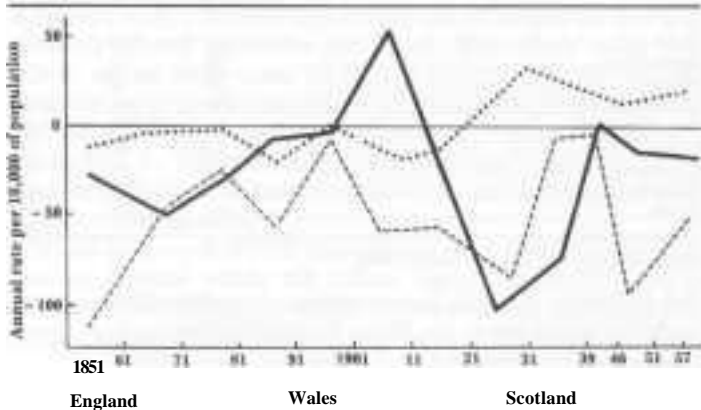
where doctor and lawyer could ruck happily shoulder to shoulder with miner and where Wales, safely lodged as a major directive element within British imperialism, could express its now self-confident identity in a continuous eisteddfod of Grand Slams and a continuous rugby-dinner chorus of God Bless the Prince of Wales. That simultaneously Welsh populist and British imperialist character Welsh rugby has not lost.⁶

It was precisely this export Disneyland which was brought crashing after 1921 by the slump which hit the very industries it was based on. The outlines of that depression are dismally familiar. South Wales was deracinated. Nearly half a million quit, a fifth of the whole population; not until 1961 did the Welsh population precariously regain the level of 1921. The south Wales valleys became and to a degree remain a 'problem area', while into rural west and north began that flow of the largely English middle classes which started their cultural transformation. In terms of social disruption and identity crisis, the depression plays the same role in Welsh history as the famine in Irish.

The Labour Hegemony

But even at the depth of that depression, a new society was adjusting. The anthracite coalfield to the west was less hard hit and generated a largely Welsh-speaking leadership of the miners which swiftly passed to Communists. Together with more numerous Left Labour militants, they re-organised *The Fed*, the South Wales Miners' Federation, and made it an instrument of community survival. In a sequence of battles against non-unionism and unemployment which were epics and in a socialist internationalism vivid and alive during the Spanish Civil War and the era of the Popular Front, they and the people they mobilised saved south Wales as a human community; their experience has become a myth as the Labour Party remorselessly entrenched itself in the south and moved outward into rural Wales.⁷ As the people drew Labour around them like some warm, rough blanket against the winds of the capitalist world, education in the control of Labour councils tunnelled an escape route for three generations of young people out of the pits and into the NUT, 'over-producing' teachers, as Wales had 'over-produced' printers and preachers before them, to make teaching the characteristic Welsh profession. Suburban, small-town and the spiv Wales of the black economy (which expanded mightily during the slump) had their own means and measures; new middle classes nosed their way from this populist tilth into the Labour hegemony in formation.

Fig 1 Wales, Scotland and England: decennial rate of gain or loss by migration, 1851-1957



The reconstruction was started by rearmament and the war, and completed largely by the Labour governments of the 40s, assisted to a degree by Tory governments which embraced a form of social democracy during the long capitalist boom of the 50s and 60s. That social democracy anchored itself within the new forms of multinational capitalism; it civilised that capitalism and sheltered its people within it. It entrenched itself in the Labour establishment, where the myths and memories of the thirties and forties, still alive in the rhetoric and some of the practice of Aneurin Bevan and the small minority of south Wales socialist who fashioned themselves in his image, found institutional form. Three generations of Labour mayors, Labour councils, Labour institutions towered over a rival establishment in education and the media, particularly the nation-conscious Welsh BBC, the minority but strategically placed Welsh-speaking elite (Welsh-Welsh in common parlance) — the post-humous revenge of the displaced chapel ministers effected through their academic sons.

Social democracy became a recognised career structure in the life-cycle of able and ambitious south Walsians; it provided the institutional framework for social life. Its hegemony was virtually as total as that of Liberalism before it and at times reminiscent of the Democratic polities of the southern states of the USA. It was characterised by a more humanitarian, civilised and educated society, by a genuine concern and an effective welfare state, by a genial and easy populism in style. It was characterised also by accommodation snug within capitalism, by the traditional Welsh blend of high thoughts and low thinking, by total dependence on Westminster and by ubiquitous petty nepotism and corruption, by a labour movement, for example, penetrated by Freemasonry

By 1966 only three parliamentary seats in Wales were not Labour, but by 1966, the major obstacle to the advance of socialism in Wales had become the organisations, the traditions, the practice and the

Fig 2 Employment changes by broad sector 1951-1976

Industrial Sector	Employment Change 000s		
	1951-63	1963-71	1971-76
Agriculture.....	-12.2	-10.5	-2
Mining.....	-36.1	-55.0	-9
Manufacturing (Ex. metals/shipbuilding).....	+ 41.3	+40.8	-8
Metals/Shipbuilding.....	+ 2.4	-8.1	-13
Construction.....	+ 14.2	-4.7	0
Transport.....	-18.2	-11.3	-4
Other Services*.....	+ 76.1	+12.8	+71
Total Change.....	+ 67.5	-34.0	+35

*Gas, Electricity and Water, Distributive Trades, Banking, Insurance and Finance, Professional and Scientific Services, Miscellaneous Services and Public Administration.

(Source: 1951-63 and 1963-71, Moore and Rhodes, 1971-76 Digest of Welsh Statistics No. 1979, HMSO).

populist grip of institutionalised Labourism whose connection with socialism had become as mythical as the Mabinogion.

It was in those mid-sixties that the postwar crisis of British capitalism first seriously hit Wales, as the Labour hegemony started to disintegrate, at first under the attack of a new Welsh nationalism. This was the start of the historical process of the realignment of multinational capitalism in crisis which will, unless it is stopped, end by shovelling Wales and the Welsh out of history, as you'd shovel small coal out of a disused cellar.

For look at what social democratic reconstruction within capitalism has made of Wales.

A petty-bourgeois Wales?

The reconstruction of the Welsh working population has been dramatic (Fig 2).⁸ Most visible is the startling drop in the number of miners, now literally a tenth of the 270,000 of their climax and still falling, cut down in a programme of constriction which makes far less British and social sense than it does to a political economy dominated by transnational corporations. Steel, destroying over 40,000 jobs in the last few years, is following. These basic industries are still much more strongly present in Wales than in the UK as a whole but their hegemony has gone. Wales is much less distinctive and much less proletarian.

Scarcely less dramatic has been the rise of diversified manufac-

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turing, largely absent in the past, towards the UK average.⁹ Expressed in terms of a percentage of that average, the trend is clear:

Mechanical engineering: from 58% in 1891 to 62% in 1971

Electrical engineering: from some 50% in 1911 to 70% in 1971

Instrument engineering: from 40% in 1911 to 62% in 1971

Vehicles: from 33% in 1921 to 73% in 1971

Petrochemicals and allied industries: from 60% in 1921 to 102% in 1971

Miscellaneous Manufacture: from 37% in 1911 to 64% in 1971

Construction has naturally fluctuated but broadly has gone from the 95% of the nineteenth century to the 105% of 1971 while

⁵The Spanish population in south Wales is a by-product of this connexion, as indeed was the tragi-comic episode of Cardiff's attempt to break the Bilbao blockade during the Spanish Civil War and the south Wales reception of refugee children.

⁷The record of the Welsh Rugby Union and of several Welsh choirs in their relationship with South Africa is familiar. The spectacle of Welsh choristers in red jackets provided by a capitalist buccaneer singing Hen Wlad fy Nhadau (Land of My Fathers) in the land of Boss and Soweto hardly calls for printable comment. A century earlier, the celebrated Welsh colony in Patagonia in the Argentine where they had gone to establish a Free Wales, at one time seriously considered shipping themselves off to that same stronghold of the free world.

⁸Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: a History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1980).

⁹Wales TUC, *Seventh Annual Report 1980* (Cardiff) p 13.

¹⁰By far the best study of this process, which informs much of what follows is *Cyfalafiaeth a'r Cymry* (Capitalism and the Welsh; English translation in train) published by the Niclas Society, Cardiff, in 1981. The Niclas Society which takes its name from the Welsh-language Communist poet T E Nicholas, is engaged on serious historical and current research to direct action. It was heavily involved in the seamen's actions recently.

transport has risen from the 55% of last century to a peak 125% in 1961 before shuffling back to 83% in 1971.

The trend, at least in times of prosperity, has been towards convergence. During depressions, however, the process is reversed and Wales moves away from the British norm. Told in terms of the gross domestic product by sector, the story is the same: it moves with the British rhythm, rising more sharply in booms, falling more steeply in slumps.

Yet more dramatic, however, particularly since manufacturing has been cut back severely in the current crises, has been the sweep of the tertiary sector of services. Insurance, banking and finance, of course, core of the modern economy, rank now hardly any higher than the 50% of the British average they registered a century ago, but the professions have climbed to a 88% which considerably understates their weight.¹⁰ More striking still has been the irresistible advance of the distributive trades, the entertainment services, professional and scientific sectors (notably education and medical services) and public administration. They some time since surpassed the manufacturing sector. They now dominate the working population.

There are pockets of distinctiveness. The small agricultural sector, 150% of the British average, is declining much less rapidly than elsewhere, perhaps as a consequence of Common Market entry,

The NBC, for example, invests in the expropriated and coal-bearing lands of Australian aborigines even as it closes pits in south Wales

while the self-employed (9% of the working population of Wales as against the UK average of 7.5%) are significantly more entrenched, particularly in farming, forestry and fishing. Moreover between 1974 and 1979, while every sector of manufacturing was cut back in Wales, the distributive trades increased by 3% as opposed to the UK average of 1.7%, miscellaneous services by 13.8% against a British 10.3%, and public administration by no less than 14.7% against a British average of 2.5% (Fig 3).¹¹

In Wales today, out of a little over a million people at work, over 200,000 are in shops, stores, pubs, hotels, betting, restaurants and the like, another 150,000 in education and medical services, another 100,000 in banking and administration. The self-employed and the farmers remain significant. Communities are being turned into dormitories. Among a remorselessly increasing and structurally defined underclass of wasted human beings, those who have jobs cling to the state and the service sector. Can this working population be called anything other than 'petty bourgeois'?

Within the shrinking manufacturing sector, furthermore, multinationals are established in some strength. By 1974 foreign based multinationals accounted for anything from a fifth to a quarter of Welsh manufacturing industry; in chemicals, instrument and electrical engineering, they were near a third. About 90% of them were American, though European conglomerates were present and the Japanese have since penetrated in some force.¹² British based multinationals operate in a manner which is indistinguishable. The nationalised industries have not only been subjected to the service of multinationals, they are enmeshed with them. The NCB, for example, invests in the expropriated and coal-bearing lands of Australian aborigines even as it closes pits in south Wales.¹³

The overall pattern, then, seems clear. Wales is now much less of an imperialist freak than it was. Unemployment, bad as it is at 16%

Fig 3 Employment changes by broad sector 1974-1979

Sector	Estimated employment 000s		Change 000s
	Sept. 1974	Sept. 1979	
Agriculture.....	26	22	-4
Mining.....	43	38	-5
Manufacturing (ex. Metals).....	254	236	-18
Metal Manufacturing.....	84	69	-15
Construction.....	67	69	+2
Transport.....	61	57	-4
Other Services.....	470	521	+51
Total.....	1,005	1,012	+7

(Source: DE Gazette, January 1976 and 1980)

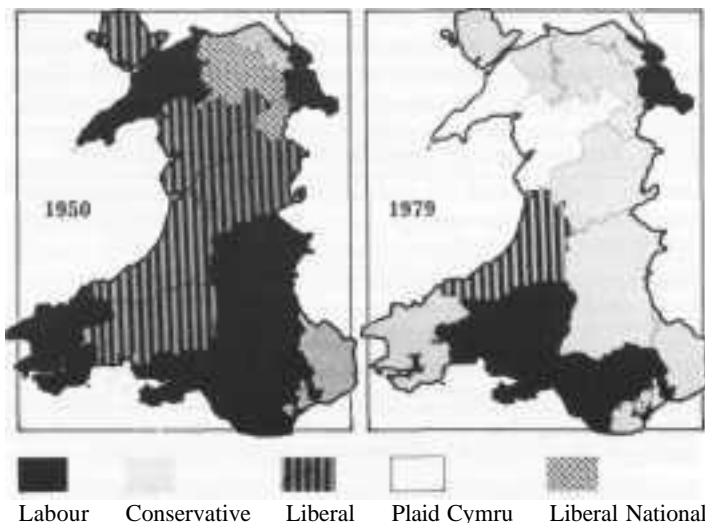
and still worse than the British average, is nothing like as grotesquely worse as it was in the 1930s. Peculiarities remain, in the over-representation of coal and steel and in the above-average shift into the service and state sectors; they become more visible and significant during depressions. But those peculiarities themselves are an exaggeration of a British condition. We Welsh are becoming the exposed nerves of the British.

And these forces do not operate in a vacuum. They play upon a Welsh people and a people in Wales already bizarrely distorted by capitalism in an earlier phase. The western and northern districts, thinly-populated and in slow decay, witness an immigration, largely rentier and non-Welsh, which in some critical places amounts to a colonisation. In this, its very *Bro* or Heartland, Welsh-language culture is in crisis. The first nationalist and social violence has broken out there, the first arson and the first bombs; there will be more.

In the industrial areas so massively peopled in an imperial past, behind the spectacular disasters such as the devastation of Deeside and the degutting of the Merthyr Tydfil dominated by Hoover's, all life is being systematically drained away to those coastal strips which are becoming coasts of the Europe of the multinationals. This seepage empties Wales' hollow heart to the point of vacuum. It sucks life and spirit out of those cordons of working class communities which are being transformed into commuter beds of atomised individuals. These pressures, massively reinforced now by those of a government determined to save British capitalism at the expense of British working people, hammer at the long-established and rival Labour and Welsh-Welsh establishments entrenched among their now disintegrating clienteles, populist and elitist.

They play remorselessly upon the Wales TUC created less than

The Tory advance in Wales: General Election results of 1950 and 1979



ten years ago to advance the cause of socialism in Wales. Of the 75 organisations affiliated to the Wales TUC, 13 have officially reported a drop in membership, notably the NUM and the EEPTU; probably most of them have fallen back. The unions which have grown are the white-collar ASTMS, CPSA, TASS and NALGO (which is not even affiliated, as an organisation, to the Labour Party) and the ambivalent NUPE. The Wales TUC recently published a Social Plan for Wales which is a corporatist and rightwing Labour document. Only an alliance between NUPE and the NUM stopped it, probably temporarily.

Derek Gregory of NUPE who opposed the Social Plan, promptly lost his foothold within the Labour Party. The Wales TUC is enmeshed with the solidly rightwing power of that party, which is committed to Healey in its weighty bulk, with a few bold spirits dipping a toe into Silkinism. The pygmy left of Welsh Labour is the Kinnock wing of Tribune which so effectively blocked the advance of militancy at the last Labour Conference as it had earlier blocked even the most insipid and gormless effort to restore some measure of control over their own lives to the people of Wales.¹⁴

Even as the Thatcherite blitz strikes, as the service sector begins to lose its 13,000 people to accompany the 35,000 recent victims from industry, the response from Wales is puny. There have been explosions of anger and momentary outbreaks; there is a smouldering resentment. The miners staged their brief and brilliant campaign over pit closures and coal imports to force the government into a bizarre and suspicious retreat; there were moments during the strikes of the steelmen and the civil servants. But there was also the humiliating failure to achieve miner-steelworker unity, there was and is the accommodation and the resignation, whether at Hoover's or elsewhere. Anyone who went on the Welsh leg of the People's March for Jobs and other demonstrations in Wales will have become familiar with a dismal routine. Loud and sometimes melodramatic calls for action from leading figures of the Wales TUC and Welsh Labour who were then conspicuous by their absence; a much more sluggish and tortured rally than in England except, characteristically and bracingly, when a march entered a district, however depersonalised, with an inherited tradition of militancy or moved into those inner-city or satellite town districts of unfocused anger and the fraternity of the fragmented. This Gideon's Army was no less familiar: individuals, often well known, often veterans from the mainstream labour movement, the Communists, assiduously practising that polite and self-effacing anonymity which makes them the Invisible Man or Unholy Ghost of the resistance, leftwing Welsh nationalists, usually young, the Marxist groups in distanced but sufficient fraternity, IMG, WRP and the rest, a handful of anarchists and a running flank guerilla, generally reminiscent of a bar-room brawl, with punk rebels proclaiming allegiance to the SWP.

A crisis of representation

Certainly a Britain in structural crisis also suffers a crisis of political representation, of representation in general and class representation in particular. Gramsci analysed just such a crisis in the Italy of the 1920s when parties, the 'nomenclature' of social classes, lost meaning, coherence and purpose, a process visibly at work in Britain. In Wales the crisis of representation is peculiarly suffocating. Any extra-terrestrial observer would surely note that Wales has a minority but potentially effective cadre of socialists, paralysed and negated not only by their fragmentation between the familiar Labour Party Left, Communists and Marxist groups but by the contradictions between all of them and the Welsh national movement.

Plaid Cymru (The Welsh Party) originally Petainist in inspiration, transformed itself into a social democratic party in the fifties, rocked Labour strongholds in the valleys with its protest votes and

took three parliamentary seats; it still holds two.¹⁵ Now pushed back to an electoral 10%, it can still mobilise enough militants to challenge Labour which has long since ceased to be a mass party except in the sense of the passive clientelism of an establishment. Plaid Cymru undergoes a crisis precisely parallel to that of Labour; its Marxist wing grows and presents an at present perplexing concept of a National Left. The same thrust throbs through Cymdeithas yr Iaith Cymraeg (Welsh Language Society), hitherto successful in its militant and extra-parliamentary activity. The trend is visible in the emergence of a Welsh Socialist Republican Movement, ambiguously placed, distinctly ultra-Left in tone and repeatedly at grips with the police.

There are other, less party-centred movements: Cofiw'n (Remember!) which systematically uses a semi-mythical history as a weapon; the Niclas Society, a Cardiff-based group, strongly communist (with a small c) in persuasion and strongly Welsh in character, which seriously uses history as a building tool. Confronting them all is Adfer (Reconstruct!) a sometimes chilling movement. It works to a two-nation perspective; the Welsh-speaking Welsh, the 'real' Welsh are the *Cymry* (the Welsh name for themselves); the rest, unfortunately in a huge majority, are 'Welshmen' (the English name for us). Adfer intends to build a monoglot Welsh Gaeltacht in a western *Bro* (Homeland) from which it will, in the remote future, advance to the liberation of the hybrids in the rest of Wales. In this cause, which commands the allegiance of increasing numbers of Welsh speaking youngsters and intellectuals, it is prepared to use radical means. And

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beyond them all is the shadow-land peopled by small groups with big names, Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (Welsh Defence Movement) Eagles of Eryri (Snowdon), Guardians of Wales, the Meibion (Sons) of some holy place or person, the Workers Army of the Welsh Republic and the recent Rhys Gethin who sounds like a Welsh translation from a Provisional Gaelic, the people who light the fires and plant the bombs.

If the Welsh language had gone the way of Gaelic, Welsh nationalism would probably be stronger and more leftwing. The campaign for the Welsh language, waged largely by young socialists, was a heroic and dedicated crusade. Despite the unappeasable appetite and frustration of nationalists, it has in fact achieved a success in

¹⁰A large proportion of Welsh professionals, particularly teachers, are of course in England. This would also be true of the dread 'polyocracy' of our enemies, who are almost certainly over-represented among the Welsh. This 'over-production' of what Gramsci called 'intellectuals' has been a feature of Welsh life since the 18th century, something of a parallel to the proletarians among the Irish.

¹¹Wales TUC, *Seventh Annual Report 1980*, pp.14, 35.

¹²Glyn Davies and Ian Thomas, *Overseas Investment in Wales; the welcome invasion* (UWIST Cardiff, 1976); information from the Communist Party in Wales and from the Niclas Society, notably Brian Davies.

¹³Of relevance to Wales are the striking Niclas Society pamphlets, *Who profits from coal? Where have all the steelworks gone? Why seamen are angry* and their contribution to the bulletin of the Cardiff NUS Disputes Committee (ed Tommy Hanley) *The Welsh Seamen* no 3 (January 1981).

¹⁴Essential here are the informed and cogent commentaries in *Rebecca*, the socialist and investigative monthly re-launched in September 1981 and now on its third issue.

¹⁵Comments here on the left nationalist movements and the struggle for the Welsh language merely sketch the problem critically for the whole Welsh Left; a study in depth and fraternity is called for and will be produced.

shifting a British state, ruling an indifferent or hostile population, into a positive discrimination in favour of the Welsh language which has few parallels outside the Soviet Union. Wales is today officially and visibly a bilingual country (to the intense irritation of many). Whole structures have been created in education and the media and now in the Fourth Channel. As with all such nationalist movements, it has also served and has been judiciously helped and exploited by an establishment already at loggerheads with Labour and already entrenched in the more characteristic Welsh institutions, themselves already distanced and sometimes divorced by history from a majority of the Welsh people."

To many Welsh working people, what they were confronted with were Welsh schools which seemed to be playing the role of English public schools, whole areas of employment shut off from them and their children, their own demotion to Saunders Lewis' former description of them as 'metics', half-men. They have seen government money pumped out to Welsh language publications and broadcasting while the majority four-fifths of the people were apparently

in between, sheep, holiday homes burning merrily away and fifty folk museums where there used to be communities

considered by BBC Wales and HTV as unworthy of the Welsh language from their sets (scores of thousands trained fixedly on the Mendips to escape even ten minutes of the dread sounds) seems likely to make matters worse. Already cries are heard that the provision of English programmes for the majority will prove difficult, even as film-makers queue at the door of *Sianel 4 Cymru*, already there is the fear that the majority will once more have to hunt out a transmitter across Offa's Dyke. And this anger runs through people many of whom were once steeped in the Welsh language, the Communists of the anthracite, the late Dai Francis, Communist secretary of the Wales NUM who was a member of the Gorsedd of Bards of the Island of Britain and launched the Miners' Eisteddfod (bilingual in sharp contrast to the Welsh monoglot National Eisteddfod — which has also become Royal), T E Nicholas, the Welsh language poet who was a Communist, Idris Cox the veteran Communist hero who never ceases to remind Labour of its Clause IX commitment to home rule all round.

In recent years, this cleavage, which also equips two peoples with two different histories, two different memories, and makes those histories and those memories hallucinatory, has become viciously destructive. During the devolution referendum campaign, it was physically dangerous to wear a Yes button in some Merthyr pubs and I have known dysgwyr (Welsh-language learners) beaten up for their effrontery by exclusivist Welsh-speaking militants whose fanaticism borders on racism. A return to Wales after an eleven years' absence inflicted the shock of seeing whole cohorts of Welsh workers adopt an attitude to the Welsh language and most things Welsh all too hideously reminiscent of the attitude of Protestant workers in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland towards the Irish national movement.

The death of Wales?

The explosion came in 1979 in the 'grand refus' of Wales by the Welsh. Socialists in Wales since have been living through a trauma whether they are aware of it or not.

It is upon this society and these socialists that the blizzard of Thatcherism has broken. Small wonder that some, looking ahead, see nothing but a nightmare vision of a depersonalised Wales which has shrivelled up into a costa burocratica in the south and a costa

geriatrica in the north; in between, sheep, holiday homes burning merrily away and fifty folk museums where there used to be communities.

In more serious terms, it is evident that Wales and the capitalist mode of production cannot cohabit. To the latter, the former is stale, unprofitable and redundant. The capitalist mode of production in its present historic phase makes highly problematical the survival of any decent, human society in these two peninsulas of Britain in which people have lived for a millennium and a half as the Welsh. Certainly, it is fatal to the production and reproduction of Wales and the Welsh as recognisable historic entities. If capitalism in Britain lives, Wales and the Welsh will die. If we are to live, capitalism in Britain must die. The only human force which can save us now is the living force of a libertarian communist revolution, in which hardly anybody in Wales believes.

In Britain, that means a victory for British socialism. The problems we face in Wales are British problems; the difficulties are immense and our enemies are powerful, but the opportunity is now breathtaking. In Wales those British problems assume exaggerated and distorted form. And we Welsh men and women who are socialists and communists and Marxists and Welsh, wrestle with them among a people who, two years ago, apparently tossed into the celebrated trash cans of history two hundred years of struggle, a century of radicalism and two generations of socialist and communist militancy which became a national legend, echoing Brendan Behan's desperate shout — 'Mother Wales, get off me back!' — and Mother Socialism, get off it, too.

What is to be done? •

⁶My 'Ambiguous Hero: Hugh Owen and Liberal Wales' in the forthcoming *The Welsh in their History*.

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