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### **Political change in North-West Wales 1960-1974 : the decline of the Labour Party and the rise of Plaid Cymru**

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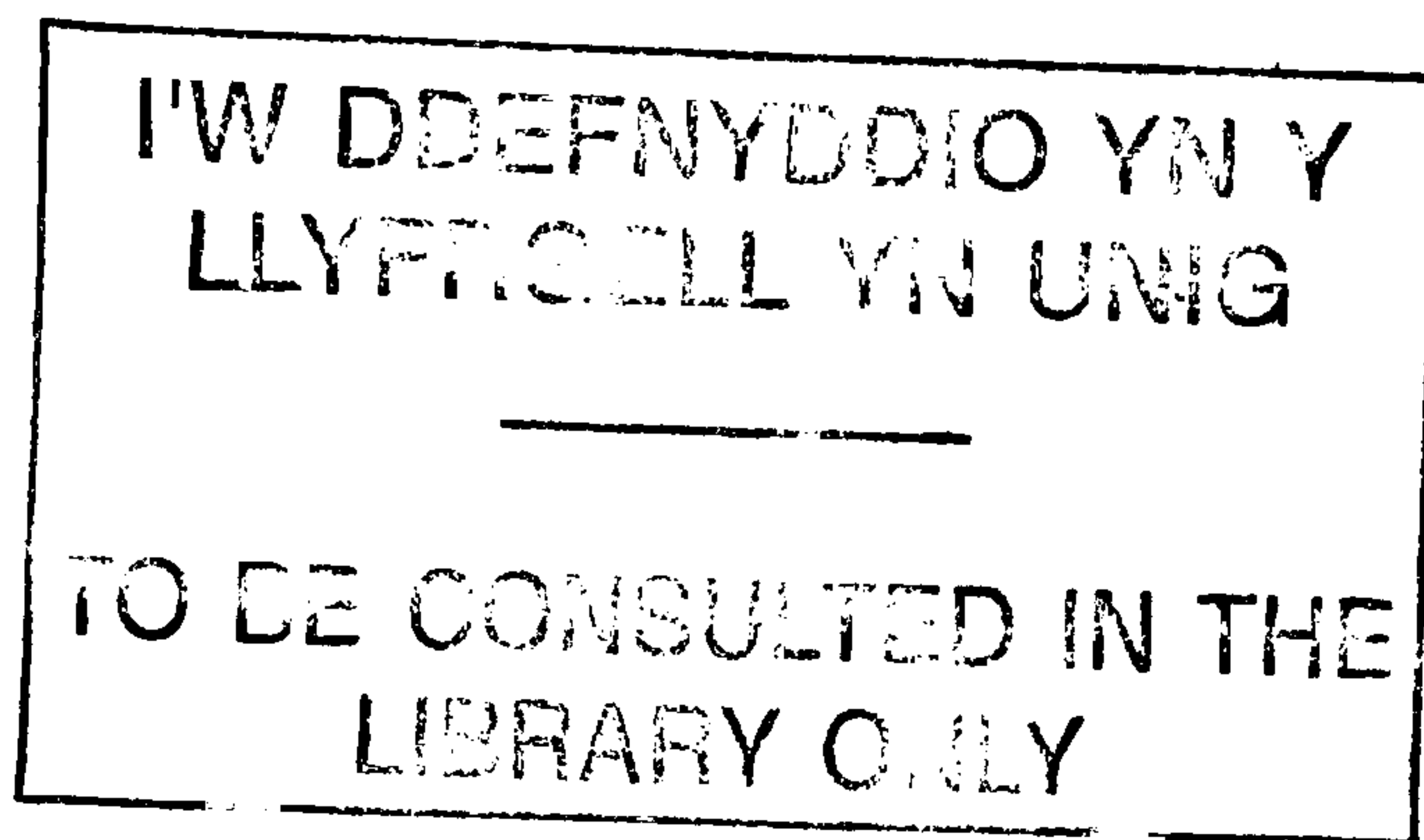
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**POLITICAL CHANGE  
IN NORTH-WEST WALES  
1960-1974:  
THE DECLINE OF THE LABOUR  
PARTY AND THE RISE OF  
PLAID CYMRU**

**ANDREW EDWARDS**



**PhD Thesis, University of Wales,  
Bangor**

**2002**



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the decline of the Labour party in two constituencies in north-west Wales (Caernarfonshire and Merioneth) from the mid 1960s onwards, a decline which culminated in the party's defeat at the hands of the Welsh Nationalist Party – Plaid Cymru – in the general election of February 1974. Whilst the study is essentially local, it places political change in the region within much broader experiences and circumstances. National as well as local forces for political change are examined. Social, economic and cultural factors underpinning those changes are also considered. The structure of the thesis is broadly chronological and is divided into six chapters. The first chapter examines Labour's attempt to embed itself within these unfamiliar, rural, traditionally Welsh speaking communities before and after the Second World War. It shows that after 1945, Labour's (overwhelming) electoral successes were based on a combination of local and national, cultural and linguistic as well as economic appeals. The second chapter examines social and economic change from 1960-74, and shows the socio-economic challenges faced by Labour in the 1960s and early 1970s. These changes were the result of numerous factors, both long term and short term. It shows how national trends such as 'affluence' combined with local concerns such as depopulation and the decline of the Welsh language to present powerful political challenges. The third chapter examines Labour's response to these challenges. It shows that whilst Labour was still successful, its commitment and plans to deliver social and economic reforms were undermined by the economic problems of the mid to late 1960s. Chapter Four shows how a viable political challenger to Labour – Plaid Cymru – emerged in the 1960s. Chapter Five focuses on Plaid's efforts to undermine Labour's credibility in the 1960s and on Labour's response to the emerging nationalist challenge. Chapter Six focuses on the general elections of February and October 1974, on the problems facing Labour in developing 'new' solutions to the regions problems and on the popularity of Plaid Cymru's appeal.



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# INTRODUCTION

## I

The history of the Labour party in Wales has been dominated by two broad concerns. On the one hand, the majority of the literature has concentrated on the period up to 1945. On the other, most of that material has focussed on the history of the party in south Wales. Labour's history is (largely) a tale of overwhelming dominance, powerful trade unions, formidable Labour figures and a bristling and hostile radicalism.<sup>1</sup> Although that electoral domination – if not the union domination and hostile radicalism – is now more apparent than ever at parliamentary level, weaknesses have emerged across the last thirty years that have only recently been highlighted.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the 'rise of Labour' in Wales has produced a huge literature, the 'decline of Labour' in some parts of Wales and its fragility elsewhere, remains to be fully investigated.

The literature that deals with the post 1945 period is comparatively sparse. Leading Labour figures have captured most of the attention. There have been adulatory and romantic studies of leading figures such as Nye Bevan and Jim Griffiths.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, Jim Callaghan has been the subject of a major biography and Neil Kinnock (who still lacks a biographical study of the same depth) has also attracted attention.<sup>4</sup> These studies of national Labour leaders with seats in south Wales draw important attention to one of the ways in which Wales influenced British politics, but their direct examination of specifically Welsh events is necessarily muted. Moreover, none of

these figures 'led' Welsh Labour, in part because of their role in British Labour politics.

As fewer leading figures have emerged from north Wales – with no Labour politicians of the mythical, heroic, stature of Bevan or Hardie or the importance of Griffiths, Callaghan or Kinnock – there is no biographical basis for historians to develop. Despite this, a number of figures from the north were formative and influential figures in the shaping of Welsh Labour politics both before and after 1945. Despite his significant contribution to the implantation and development of the party in the north, David Thomas has only recently been the subject of a biography. Other leading north Wales figures from the post 1945 period such as Cledwyn Hughes, Goronwy Roberts, Huw T. Edwards and T. W. Jones have received little attention.<sup>5</sup> When they do appear, it is largely as devolutionists alone.

The literature on north Wales politics is very good, but not without its weaknesses. Cyril Parry's work on the origins of Labour's success in north Wales up to 1918 was published in the early 1970s. There has been nothing since. Other historians have touched on the institutional history of the party in the north, Merfyn Jones in a study of the north Wales quarrymen and David Pretty on farm workers' trade unions in Wales.<sup>6</sup> Both these works focussed on the period before the Second World War, and reflected the south Wales historians' emphasis on class and trade unions.<sup>7</sup> Whilst evidently recognising unique local circumstances, their explanations of events reflected conceptual emphasis that was more suitable to south Wales. The period after 1945 is virtually virgin territory.



Most studies of post war events focus on devolution – and most also assume that this issue was detached from other aspects of Labour policy. It is regularly treated either as a recent event or as part of a history of struggles by ‘good’ Welshmen against ‘bad’ political forces.<sup>8</sup> Only K.O. Morgan has tried to combine studies of Labour with studies of ‘Welshness’, supporting both with archival research of prodigious depth and quality. Moreover, Morgan’s work set an important, but subsequently neglected, lead in looking beyond class and trade unionism to explain Labour’s success, and in looking at north and south, devolution and other aspects of politics, the ‘Welsh influence’ and the British dimension as forces moulding the pattern of opinion.<sup>9</sup>

Understanding Labour’s power in the south tells only half a story – one of massive majorities, popular messages, powerful individuals and institutions, trade union unrest and allegations of corruption. In the other half of Wales, Labour cultivated unprofitable terrain through advocating unusual and distinctively ‘Welsh’ messages in areas where it lacked either institutional or individual power. This story remains untold.<sup>10</sup> Understanding Labour in the south has, in part at least, been motivated by a desire to understand the basis of Labour’s early success and growth. This thesis – on the north – is motivated, in part at least, by a desire to understand the basis of Labour’s increasingly challenged power – in the area where that challenge was first felt. The thesis is thus an attempt to engage with a challenge posed by Chris Williams to move away from ‘labour with a capital ‘L’, palais de danse and fish and chip shops and cup finals’ and understand also ‘the more exotic strains of British socialism’ – in this case, the ‘peculiar form of socialism’ evident in north Wales.<sup>11</sup>

## II

If studying the Labour politics of north Wales and the circumstances of the party's collapse is a step away from 'normal' Labour history, it is also a step towards a 'newer' history, building on Morgan's initiatives which accepts 'identity' and 'economics' as influences on electoral change, and which sees the collapse of Labour in Wales as part of broader changes in political alignments across Britain and indeed much of Europe. Labour's problems in north-west Wales in the 1960s and 1970s were not unique. The party was being challenged by nationalists across Wales and Scotland and by Liberals across England. In Europe, parties were also emerging which challenged the conventional political establishment, some representing the nationalist aspirations of areas within States, others delivering protests at political complacency, stagnation or corruption. As contemporary voting analysis recognised, there was no longer a blind allegiance to social class. Other forms of identity were of growing importance. Political changes apparently followed in their wake.

These changes are generally examined only at national level, and largely by political scientists. Even pioneering regional studies of Labour's history have concentrated, to a large extent, on local issues, politics, policies and personalities and the period before 1939.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between 'national' politics and appeals and 'local' demands and concerns is often passed over in post-war studies, which assume that politics had become 'nationalised' by 1945. This thesis shows how national (UK) concerns meshed with 'local' issues to create support for electoral changes. It shows that politics did not become entirely 'national', and that allegiances could be challenged when 'national' approaches had no 'local' appeal.



It took some time for historians to recognise that Labour's post-war success could not be taken for granted and that the way it held power needed to be explained. A number of scholars challenged traditional assumptions about class and voting behaviour in doing this. It took even longer for scholars to address the way that the party held power – and eventually lost it – both in Wales and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Recent work on Wales has in some respects set a new agenda for research on Labour's collapse in other parts of the UK, since it has attempted to understand the 'one party States' that Labour created in the 1950s and 1960s, and the challenges it faced thereafter.<sup>14</sup> However, if there are innumerable local case studies of Labour's rise to power, there are very few which throw light on the challenges of the 1960s and after. This thesis thus fills a gap, both in Welsh history and in British history. In doing so, it draws attention to a neglected part of Wales and to themes other than class and trade unionism. It looks at 'Welsh' and 'British' influences on political attitudes, and at both devolution and other aspects of Labour politics. In doing so, it suggests a Labour 'ascendancy' which was much weaker than is often assumed, and more contingent on the capacity to deliver something valued by ordinary people.

### III

To understand political change we need to look not just at a dominant party, but at its rivals. For most of the century, Labour lacked a credible political rival in many of its heartland constituencies. Massive majorities (in south Wales and elsewhere in the UK) were the norm rather than an exception. When the party experienced problems in such areas they were – more often than not – self created. Political rivals capitalised

on these deficiencies in by-elections, but these were generally temporary aberrations by Labour voters who usually returned to the fold in general elections. Labour experienced a realistic and sustained challenge in very few industrial constituencies – at least not until the early 1970s.

It is seldom recognised that this challenge did not emerge from nothing, and that ‘warnings’ sounded in by-elections could become a sustained assault on weakened allegiances. From the mid 1960s onwards, Labour experienced a sustained challenge to its dominance from the emerging political voice of Plaid Cymru. The challenge was eventually successful in north-west Wales. It has not been reversed. It has not been a ‘protest’ vote, but a gradual erosion of a position and the building of a new alignment. The thesis examines the challenge to Labour as well as Labour’s politics, and explains why the challenge succeeded. It is presented as more than a ‘local’ study. It is a study of an electoral competition now common in Wales. It is also a case study of how nationalist politics of the kind that have become increasingly common since the 1960s can challenge the establishment. And it is a study of how ‘apparently’ class based allegiances could in fact prove much weaker than one might suspect – a conclusion that reinforces works which challenge its assured role in twentieth century politics. In order to do this it is necessary to examine the role and development of Plaid Cymru.

The literature on Plaid Cymru is also sparse, although more has been written than on Labour in north Wales. No detailed history of Plaid Cymru has been published. Recent work by Laura McAllister spans the party’s history from its inception in 1925 to 2000, and provides a ‘broad sweep’ analysis of influential figures and events in the party’s history.<sup>15</sup> A. Butt Phillip’s more detailed study of the party is useful only for

the period up to 1970.<sup>16</sup> D. H. Davies's acclaimed study of the party is similarly only useful up to 1945.<sup>17</sup> Other accounts of the party's history have been confined to much shorter narrative articles.<sup>18</sup> For the latter period, we have discussions largely by sociologists or political scientists, focussing on events but without the aid of archival research.<sup>19</sup> Biographical studies of the party's leading figures for the period after 1945 are virtually non-existent. Autobiographical material is more useful. Dafydd Wigley's autobiographies have now reached three volumes.<sup>20</sup> Gwynfor Evans's autobiography has appeared in both Welsh and English.<sup>21</sup> Other autobiographies have also emerged.<sup>22</sup> All of these are useful, but naturally do not see the broader picture.

Apart from Butt-Phillip's work, little attention has been paid to Plaid's development at local level, and virtually none to Plaid's rise in north-west Wales from the 1960s onwards. This is surprising given the party's successes in Gwynedd from the mid 1970s to the present day. Nor have historians recognised the importance of studying the party's activities as a challenge to Labour, rather than as part of a distinctively Welsh set of linguistic and cultural themes. This thesis extends the understanding of Plaid Cymru's development by focussing on the expansion and reorientation of the party's organisation, policies and propaganda campaigns, and by placing Plaid's development within the context of wider (UK) social and political change in the 1960s and early 1970s. Instead of looking back with hindsight and stressing the significance of issues that are now of primary importance (as in some autobiographies), it relocates the challenge to Labour within the concerns and sentiments of the time.

The thesis also places contemporary Welsh political debates in a historical setting. The arrival of the Welsh Assembly in 1997 re-invigorated the interest of Welsh

historians and political scientists in devolution, leading to the publication of a number of studies which offer differing perspectives on its recent history.<sup>23</sup> This thesis adds to the growing literature on the subject by showing that – in the heart of Welsh speaking Wales – support for devolution grew from economic and social, as well as cultural and linguistic appeals. Whilst it highlights historic tensions within the Labour party over devolution, demonstrating the internal problems which led to the party's crisis during the 1979 referendum campaign, it also demonstrates that Labour support for devolution was growing across the period (albeit hesitantly) – and that there was in fact no huge public demand for devolution that the party ignored.

In developing these arguments, the thesis challenges a series of myths which parties and those with deep commitments have perpetuated and turned into popular understandings of the past. It shows that Labour was far more attentive to Welsh cultural and linguistic concerns than has often been chronicled. It was less Labour's 'failure' on these issues than on its own economic and social agenda that sealed its fate – even if such failures were interpreted through the rhetoric of nationalism. Ironically, widespread popular support for linguistic and cultural preservation and for Welsh nationhood was constructed after Plaid's success – it did not cause the party's breakthrough.

## IV

Whilst this thesis develops and builds on some new approaches to Welsh Labour history, it also rests on archival research of an unusual kind. Despite the scarcity of primary documentation for the Labour party in north Wales after 1945, seldom used archives and some un-deposited sources have produced a wealth of material. Un-



deposited material includes the papers of the Merioneth Labour party covering the period from 1948 to 1967, which offer a valuable and important insight into the organisation and politics of an untypical Labour constituency.<sup>24</sup> The papers of the late Lord Goronwy-Roberts, Labour's MP for Caernarfonshire from 1945 to 1974, were kindly made available by the family towards the end of the project. These offer a valuable insight into the political career of this important and influential Welsh Labour MP.<sup>25</sup> Interviews with Labour activists in north-west Wales have shed new and surprising light on the party's local machinery and ideology. The research derives much from the vast Plaid Cymru archive at the National Library of Wales – a surprisingly under-used and important source of material on modern Welsh political history – and from little used Welsh and British Labour party records. Manuscript collections of activists and politicians, alongside some untouched local sources for Caernarfonshire, have produced frank observations on local political concerns. Statements in the contemporary press reflected attitudes which many may now wish to forget. These have helped to recreate a picture of the debates and concerns which is vivid and powerful. Extensive use has also been made of Welsh language sources – in particular newspapers and journals. These offer fresh perspectives and views on Welsh politics which were available to local observers, and which highlighted different themes to 'national' party propaganda. They thus help to unpick the attitudes of some influential local commentators, and to see politics as it was seen by a section of the local electorate.

## V

The structure of the thesis is broadly chronological. Chapter One argues that Labour's success after 1945 was the result of the party's long process of implantation within local society. By 1945 Labour had finally overcome the stubborn resistance from the Liberal party, which had hampered its progress up to the Second World War. Labour's success in north-west Wales was testament to the party's ability to adapt its message and appeal to fit in with the needs and expectations of a distinctive Welsh speaking society, whilst at the same time depending on the party's much wider 'British' appeal as the party of modernisation. The party's emphasis combined a promise to deliver much needed economic prosperity with a concern for Welsh society, culture and the language. A central aspect of the party's appeal was the selection of local candidates who were not only aware that the future of local communities depended on developing a sound economic footing, but who were also prepared to put the needs of those communities above more dogmatic partisan concerns. Success was thus fairly recent, and involved developing values and policies often associated – rightly or wrongly – with other parties.

Labour's dominance in north-west Wales during the 1950s was also aided by the fact that it lacked a credible or powerful political rival. The chapter thus examines why the Liberal challenge faltered in the post-war decades and why neither the Conservative party or Plaid Cymru was in a position to challenge Labour's dominance. Whilst these factors ensured Labour's success in the short term, they raise questions over the scale and depth of Labour implantation and the roots of the party's support. These were to be crucial factors when a challenge to the party's dominance emerged in the 1960s.



Chapter Two examines the impact of social and economic change from 1959 to 1974, focussing on the period of Labour's decline and Plaid Cymru's rise as a political force in north-west Wales. Rather than argue that Labour's decline was 'caused' by socio-economic changes, the chapter shows the socio-economic challenges that politicians had to face. These were the result of numerous factors both long term and short term. These mounting concerns were more 'real' than appeals to class loyalty. They threatened the very basics of life within north Wales. They were capable of conflicting interpretation. They were both emotional and material. The chapter examines such vital interests as employment and housing, and notes a series of broader challenges – from depopulation to the decline of the Welsh language – which may have contributed to a feeling of unease and insecurity.

Chapter Two also assesses the scale of the problems facing policy makers in north-west Wales. In the 1950s the pronounced affluence that had spread across many regions of the UK had largely escaped Wales – particularly the north-west – as it did other regions of the UK. As in those other regions, the decline of 'old' industries was not matched by the arrival of 'new' industries of the type that had ensured prosperity for 'booming' areas such as the midlands and south-east England. The problems that this created – unemployment and depopulation being the most notable – were not 'unique'. However, they assumed a uniqueness when added to a number of distinctively local social and cultural factors and controversies, most notably the decline of local communities and the Welsh language, together with the impact of 'second homes' and in-migrants, on the small towns where most people lived.

Labour was not oblivious to the socio-economic changes and challenges taking place from the 1950s onwards. Chapter Three focuses on its response. It argues that Labour was still an attractive force in the 1960s because of its local and national appeal. By the mid 1960s, the party's personnel were still attentive to distinctive local needs and aspirations, whilst the party also developed policies which recognised and offered solutions to the economic problems faced in the region. In the period up to 1964 the party was frustrated by its inability to implement change, and to build on some of the foundations laid by the 1945-51 Labour governments. Labour's return to power in 1964 therefore met with a huge burden of expectation. The party's commitment to 'regional development' – specifically targeted at the stagnating and decaying areas of the UK – meant that north-west Wales stood to gain much from Labour's innovative and dynamic approach and the 'white heat of technological change' promised by Wilson. Moreover, there was also an enlightened Labour approach to distinctively Welsh issues. The promise of a Welsh Office and Secretary of State for Wales (a long-standing and controversial topic in the Welsh Labour party) was finally delivered in 1964.

Yet much depended on economic success. As it transpired, many of Labour's economic and industrial policies were built on sand. Labour inherited a much worse economic situation than it had anticipated. These problems, bad in 1964, worsened after Labour's convincing electoral success in 1966. As a result, the government lacked the resources necessary to successfully implement many of its programmes. Cuts in expenditure led to growing discontent within the party across the UK, a fact which the party's by-election performances (including those in Wales) regularly highlighted. Neither did the party's representation of 'Welshness' prosper in the way

that some had hoped. As the thesis will show, the Welsh Office and Secretary of State for Wales both came in for sustained criticism throughout the period to 1974. Moreover, policies intended to stimulate a Welsh economic, social and cultural revival proved disappointing. Labour's by-election defeat by Plaid Cymru at Carmarthen in 1966, followed by poor performances in the Rhondda West and Caerphilly by-elections, were symptoms of a much deeper malaise afflicting the party in Wales. These results affected confidence and damaged morale. By the end of the 1960s, the Welsh Office became a symbol of Labour's ineffectiveness and failure, whilst Plaid Cymru's emergence in the late 1960s called into question Labour's status as 'the party of Wales'. Ultimately this set back the cause of devolution within the party and undermined its traditional and 'radical' appeal in north-west Wales.

Nonetheless, throughout the 1960s Labour remained a powerful political force in north-west Wales. Whilst comfortable electoral majorities were a reflection of Labour's local relevance, they were undoubtedly accentuated by the lack of a credible political alternative to challenge the party at the polls. In the 1950s, the dramatic decline of the Liberal party, the traditional unpopularity of the Tories and the political immaturity of Plaid Cymru ensured growing Labour dominance. However, changing socio-economic forces, together with Labour 'failure' in the 1960s, created favourable conditions for Plaid's development as a political force.

Chapter Four examines the development of Plaid Cymru as a credible political party. In the 1950s several factors had marginalized Plaid Cymru's potential as a political rival to Labour. Its image was that of an exclusive society, vying for the support of a Welsh speaking, intellectual, middle class, eisteddfod attending elite. The party's lack



of discernible or credible economic policies and its concentration on linguistic and cultural concerns (notably the Welsh language), together with its romantic quest for a utopian 'independent' Wales, explained meagre electoral returns.

However, and as Chapter Four shows, in the 1960s Plaid began to address those problems by attempting to construct a new image. By developing both organisation and policies, Plaid moulded itself into a 'proper' political party, undertaking the groundwork that would enable it to challenge Labour, not only in Welsh speaking north and west Wales, but also in Labour's industrial heartlands. Immediate successes followed in the south, especially in the by-elections of the late 1960s, but these were temporary achievements. More permanent foundations for electoral success were laid in the north-west, where the party successfully combined an appeal to those sympathetic to traditional nationalist aspirations with a newer concern for economic problems, in particular the need to attract new industry and jobs to the region.

The thesis will argue that Plaid's electoral credibility depended on its ability to construct a range of credible economic policies. At the same time, organisation was vital in building up support for the party at grass roots level, particularly as it attempted to shed its out-dated, old-fashioned image. Chapter Five shows how this was developed through the local press. The nationalist critique of Labour policy not only sought to highlight deficiencies in the Labour government's record and policies, but also an imbalance in Labour's ranks which ensured that distinctively Welsh issues – particularly devolution – were not properly addressed. Despite the support for a nationalist agenda in north-west, Welsh speaking Wales, Plaid Cymru argued that

Labour was still dominated by its southern wing and strong support for UK wide economic initiatives, backed by regional aid for Welsh problems.

Moreover, Plaid's by-election successes in the 1960s and the hostile nature of its anti-Labour, anti-government, propaganda exacerbated divisions in the Labour party over devolution and 'the challenge of nationalism'. Some members of the Labour party sought a positive response. They demanded that Labour undermine Plaid's challenge by re-developing Labour's image as a party sympathetic to both an economic and socio-cultural nationalist agenda. Others, unfavourable to this approach, attempted to undermine the nationalist challenge through hostile counter-propaganda and the development of policies that did not 'encourage' the further escalation of nationalist demands. They believed a robust challenge and denial would block Plaid Cymru's electoral ambitions.

Ultimately, neither of these approaches dampened the growing appeal of Plaid Cymru in north-west Wales. As Chapter Six notes, the general election of 1970 had provided evidence of Plaid Cymru's emergence as a credible political alternative to Labour. In both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, the party amassed a sizeable vote, slashing Labour's majority in the former, and turning the latter into a 'three-way marginal'. Out of power in the period from 1970-74, Labour was in no position to rectify some of the problems that had besieged the party and tarnished its reputation in the 1960s. Labour's success had been built on the party's image as an appealing alternative government to the Tories, and on the party's promise to deliver economic salvation to north-west Wales when it was returned to power. Now it was out of power it had to rebuild that appeal.

The voters' frustration with the dominance of British politics by the Conservative and Labour parties and (in part at least) their ineffectiveness in dealing with fundamental and eventually long-standing problems, led to the collapse of that unchallenged dominance by 1974. In many regions of the UK, the 1974 general elections witnessed a Liberal renaissance, although in both Scotland and Wales there was also a strong nationalist challenge. In Wales, Plaid Cymru's re-invention as a credible political force provided voters with another 'third party' option. The political successes of Plaid Cymru in north-west Wales is thus viewed within a much wider social, economic and political context. However, it is not seen as part of a single (reflex) reaction, but one in which local political and socio-economic circumstances have to be examined in order to explain the pattern of events.

In the early 1970s Labour's promises no longer seemed as credible in areas like north-west Wales. Labour had failed to deliver in the 1960s, even with its comfortable electoral majority after 1966. Economic problems in the early 1970s did not appear to provide the conditions for a more favourable Labour response than in the past. Moreover, Plaid Cymru's campaigns highlighted the fact that political failure in north-west Wales was less to do with the 'ins-and-outs' of the two main parties or the failings of individual Labour MPs, and much more to do with the fact that 'the system' – Westminster governance – did not provide conditions favourable for developments of 'regions' such as Wales. As a result, Plaid Cymru's socio-economic appeal was increasingly combined with support for system changes.



However, support for greater independence was only one strand in Plaid Cymru's electoral assault. As Chapter Six highlights, the general elections of 1974 saw the culmination of the socio-economic changes that had taken place since the late 1950s. Plaid's electoral breakthrough in north-west Wales was not the result of a local protest vote against the Labour party, or against Tory governance, but the result of a much longer process of political change and a much deeper erosion of loyalties to the main parties. Plaid's electoral success in 1974 was mirrored by successes for the Liberal party (mainly in England) and the SNP in Scotland. If not all these lasted, many 'breakthroughs' were not fully overturned thereafter.

Plaid's 'success' – like Labour's earlier – depended on weak opposition. Given the long traditions of the Liberal party in north-west Wales, and what was happening elsewhere, Chapter Six briefly examines why the party was unable to mount a serious challenge in north-west Wales. The organisational and financial problems which helped destroy the party's challenge to Labour in the 1950s had not diminished by the early 1970s. Neither had the party's ability to develop distinctive and dynamic policies. The chapter also shows that these problems were shared by Plaid's other 'rival' in north-west Wales, the Conservative party.

But problems of organisation and finance were not confined to these parties. Labour success in north-west Wales from the 1950s did not mean that the party had developed a powerful local 'machine'. On the contrary, the party's comfortable electoral successes had rendered organisation a secondary consideration, particularly in Caernarfonshire. Under pressure organisationally, and lacking 'new' dynamic policies to captivate the local electorate, the party was not in a position to compete

with the vigorous, youthful and ambitious challenge posed by Plaid Cymru by 1974.

Thus in February 1974, Labour's twenty years of electoral success came to an end.

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2. See for example D. Tanner, 'Facing the New Challenge: Labour and Politics, 1970-2000', in Tanner, *Labour Party in Wales*, pp.264-294.
3. See M. Foot, *Aneurin Bevan* (2 vols: London, 1962 and 1973); Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1993); J. B. Smith (ed.), *James Griffiths and his Times* (Ferndale, 1977).
4. K. O. Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life* (Oxford, 1997); Eileen Jones, *Neil Kinnock* (London, 1994); R. Harris, *The Making of Neil Kinnock* (London, 1984). Michael Foot is another high-profile Welsh Labour member strangely neglected by biographers. See M. Jones, *Michael Foot* (London, 1994).
5. For David Thomas see, A. Tomos, *Hiraeth am Yfory: David Thomas a'r Mudiad Llafur yng Ngogledd Cymru* (Llandysul, 2002); D. Hopkin, 'Y Werin a'i Theyrnas: ymateb sosialaeth i genedlaetholdeb 1880-1920', in G. H. Jenkins (ed.), *Cof Cenedl: Ysgrifau ar Hanes Cymru, VI* (Llandysul, 1991), pp.163-192. There is a popular, narrative account of Cledwyn Hughes's political career, E. Price, *Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos* (Caernarfon, 1990); T. W. Jones has also published an autobiography, Arglwydd Maelor, *Fel Hyn y Bu* (Denbigh, 1970) which, while interesting as an autobiography, offers very little on Labour politics in north-west Wales. See also Huw T. Edwards's autobiographies, *Hewn from the Rock* (Cardiff, 1967) and *It Was My Privilege* (Denbigh, 1957).
6. C. Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics* (Hull, 1970); R. M. Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen, 1874-1922* (Cardiff, 1982); D. A. Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed: Farm Workers Trade Unions in Wales, 1889-1950* (Cardiff, 1989).

7. For the south Wales emphasis on class and trade unions see for example H. Francis and D. Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1998); P. Stead, 'Working Class Leadership in South Wales, 1900-1920', *Welsh History Review*, VI/3 (1973), pp.329-53; C. Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield, 1898-1947* (Cardiff, 1998); J. Parry, 'Trade Unionists and Early Socialists in South Wales, 1890-1908', *Llafur*, IV/3 (1986), pp.43-54.

8. For exceptions see, R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones, 'Labour and the Nation', in Tanner, *Labour Party in Wales*, pp.241-264; P. Stead, 'The Labour party and the claims of Wales', in J. Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandysul, 1985). For recent works on devolution see for example, J. Barry Jones and D. Balsom, *The Road to the National Assembly for Wales* (Cardiff, 2000). For devolution campaigns in the 1950s see, J. Graham Jones, 'The Parliament for Wales Campaign 1950-66', *Welsh History Review*, XVI/2 (1992), pp.207-36.

9. K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1980); *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981); *Modern Wales: Politics, People and Places* (Cardiff, 1995); *'The Red Dragon and the Red Flag': the cases of James Griffiths and Aneurin Bevan* (Aberystwyth, 1988).

10. Keith Gildart's book on north Wales miners adds to the story – but it still focuses on an aspect of north Wales life which is evident in the south. See K. Gildart, *North Wales Miners: A Fragile Unity* (Cardiff, 2001).

11. C. Williams, 'Britain', in S. Berger and D. Broughton (eds.), *The Force of Labour: The Western European Labour Movement and the Working Class in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1995).

12. See for example M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston* (Cambridge, 1987).



13. Welsh political scientists made important – but too often ignored – steps in this direction. See P. J. Madgwick, *The Politics of Rural Wales: A Study of Cardiganshire* (London, 1973); D. Balsom et. al., ‘The Political Consequences of Welsh Identity’. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1984).

14. Tanner, ‘Facing the New Challenge’ and A. Walling, ‘The Structure of Power in Labour Wales, 1951-1964’, both in Tanner, *Labour Party in Wales*. pp. 264-294 and pp.191-215; I. McAllister, ‘The Labour Party in Wales: The Dynamics of One-Partyism’, *Llafur*, III/2 (1981), pp.78-89. For Labour’s collapse in its heartlands during the 1960s – 1980s, see D. M. Tanner, ‘Labour and its Membership’, in D. Tanner et. al. (eds.), *Labour’s First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.257-9.

15. L. McAllister, *Plaid Cymru: The Emergence of a Political Party* (Bridgend, 2001).

16. A. Butt Phillip, *The Welsh Question, Nationalism in Welsh Politics, 1945-1970* (Cardiff, 1975).

17. D. H. Davies, *Plaid Cymru 1925-1945: A Call to Nationhood* (Cardiff, 1983).

18. See for example J. Davies, *Plaid Cymru Since 1960: Welsh Political Archive Lecture, 1996* (Aberystwyth, 1997); D. Williams, *The Story of Plaid Cymru* (Plaid Cymru, 1990).

19. There are numerous studies which deal with the question of Welsh nationalism and support for Plaid Cymru. See for example C. Aull Davies, *Welsh Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: The Ethnic Option and the Modern State* (Praeger, 1989); C. Adamson, *Class, Ideology and the Nation: A Theory of Welsh Nationalism* (Cardiff, 1991); P. Rawkins, ‘An Approach to the Political Sociology of the Welsh Nationalist Movement’, *Political Studies*, Vol.XXVII, No.3 (1979); R. W. Jones (et. al.), ‘A Quiet Earthquake’: The First Elections to the National Assembly for Wales’, *Paper presented to the American Political Science Association Annual Conference* (Washington, 2000).

20. See Dafydd Wigley, *Dal Ati* (Caernarfon, 1993); *O Ddifri* (Caernarfon, 1992); *Maen i'r Wal* (Caernarfon, 2001); see also the forthcoming English autobiography, *Working for Wales* (Welsh Academic Press, 2002).

21. Gwynfor Evans, *For the Sake of Wales: The Memoirs of Gwynfor Evans* (Cardiff, 2001); Evans, *Fighting for Wales* (Talybont, 1991).

22. See for example P. Williams, *Voice from the Valleys* (Aberystwyth, 1981); I. Wyn (ed.), *Cofio Dafydd Orwig* (Caernarfon, 1997).

23. See for example L. Andrews, *Wales Says Yes: The Inside Story of the Yes for Wales Referendum Campaign* (Bridgend, 1999); K. Morgan and G. Mungham, *Redesigning Democracy: The Making of the Welsh Assembly* (Bridgend, 2000); V. Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1999); B. Taylor and K. Thompson (eds.), *Scotland and Wales: Nations Again?* (Cardiff, 1999); J. B. Jones and D. Balsom (eds.), *Road to the National Assembly*. For a sociological perspective see R. Fevre and A. Thompson (eds.), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999).

24. Currently in the author's possession. These will be deposited in the Labour party archive at the National Library of Wales in the near future.

25. Lord Roberts papers are also currently in the author's possession. These papers will be also be deposited in the Welsh political archive at the National Library of Wales in the near future.



## Chapter One

### The origins of Labour's electoral success in north west Wales 1951-1959

**This country (Wales) has shown very definitely that there is no longer any room for the Liberal party in its political life. Liberalism can lead us no further. It won for us the battles of the last century, the political freedom of which we are now the benefactors...(but)...Liberalism is finished. The Labour party has grasped its finest attributes and is striding forwards in search of a bigger and brighter future for its new supporters.**

Ithel Davies, *Y Cymro*, 23 November 1935

During a period described as 'disastrous' for the party in Britain as a whole, the Labour party improved its position in Wales in the 1950s. This was a clear indication of the depth of anti-Conservatism among the majority of the Welsh population and the extent to which Labour's appeal transcended social and cultural divisions. It meant – in particular – that Labour gained support in north Wales. However until recently the north Wales dimension of 'Labour Wales' has either been neglected, or it has been assumed that what made the Labour party popular in south Wales also applied to the north. An index of Welsh Labour history may typically have read 'for north Wales, see south Wales'.

Only recently has the other half of 'Labour Wales' begun to receive attention. As Duncan Tanner has recently argued, there was more to the Labour party in Wales during the twentieth century than the politics of the coalfield, and there is a neglected historiography of Labour's moderate Welsh tradition that deals with it, at least for the 1920s and 1930s. Beyond this period only Andrew Walling has developed the case. His work has identified the neglected efforts of the Labour party's Welsh officials in Cardiff to extend Labour's

position in the north. Yet there is much still to be done in applying theories to new circumstances, and in broadening out the groundbreaking, but necessarily restricted, work on the area.

This chapter adds to this literature. It will argue that Labour's success after 1945 was a product in part of a long term programme of developing its root within local society. Labour after 1945 was the inheritor of a long standing campaign by local socialists and Labour activists from early in the century to install the party as the natural heir to the Liberal party, to become the defender of the social institutions and traditions represented by the Liberals. This had been partially successful in the 1920's and 1930's, but Labour had not overcome all its problems or disposed of its rivals. It needed the credibility that it developed during the war, as well as a material appeal which stressed what Labour led economic modernisation could do for north Wales. Nevertheless, such issues did not translate 'naturally' into electoral support in these semi-rural, and oddly urbanised, seats. Labour's proposals did not have quite the same resonance as in other Welsh constituencies. It worked only when economic modernisation went hand in hand with Labour's defence of local interests and values – when it became the party of 'gwerin'.<sup>1</sup> Its emphasis incorporated an ability to deliver economic prosperity, combined with an ability to defend Welsh cultural, social and linguistic aspirations – arguing that the first could only help the second. Labour would support and sustain the best aspects of local values and culture. The politics of Labour's candidates and MP's after 1945 were a crucial component in this process. Significantly Labour were not averse to placing the needs of the local community above party loyalty in order to create the right 'blend' of appeals.

Yet the strength of this should not be overstated. Labour's success during the period was accentuated by the lack of a credible political alternative. If Labour politics in north Wales is little discussed, Liberal and Conservative politics is virgin ground. The chapter examines how the Liberal party declined during the 1950s. Whilst this was accentuated by organisational failures, it also reflected a political drift to the right and the lack of a political programme to call its own. It will be argued that the Liberal party's failure, combined with the existence of weak third and fourth parties, enabled Labour to achieve significant electoral majorities during the 1950s. Some attempt will be made to explain why the Conservatives – so powerful even in parts of south Wales and certainly in many British seats – made no headway in north Wales. Whilst this process ensured Labour's success in the short term, the chapter hence raises questions regarding the depth of Labour's implantation, and the strength of the party's support. It thus adds to Walling's recognition of Labour's attempt to broaden its appeal, but goes further by questioning its success and strength. It thus prepares for an explanation of how these Labour weaknesses could lead to problems once its rivals gained in strength.

### *The pattern of electoral politics.*

Prior to the Second World War the Labour party had already become the largest party in Welsh politics, but its domination was geographically limited to the areas of the south Wales coalfields and the industrial north-east. By the 1950s the Labour party could justifiably claim to be the party of Wales. Labour gained Welsh seats in the General

Election of 1951, against the trend, and held them throughout the 1950s. As Table 1 shows, in Wales as a whole, first Labour and then the Tories gained from Liberal decline.

**Table 1: Welsh General Election results, 1945-59.**

<b>Election</b>	<b>Seats</b>	<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>LIBERAL</b>	<b>PC</b>
<b>1945</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>1950</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>1951</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>1955</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>1959</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

**Source: B. Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif/Welsh Elections 1885-1997* (Talybont, 1999).**

In 1945 the Labour party won Caernarvonshire. By 1951 it had also captured the neighbouring constituencies of Merioneth and Anglesey, all staunch Liberal seats since the second half of the nineteenth century. Labour won in 1945 because of its wartime image and the attractiveness of its practical policies.<sup>2</sup> Despite the party's electoral defeat in 1951, many aspects of the party's programme remained popular.<sup>3</sup> However, as Walling has argued, because Labour did not win a general election in the period 1951-64, and because Bevan and the left have captured most of the attention, historians have not recognised the way that Labour attempted to build up its appeal during the 1950s. These attempts were surprisingly successful in Wales, bearing in mind Labour's poor general election performances and the distraction of in-fighting within the party.<sup>4</sup>

The value of this approach was especially apparent in north Wales. Labour's role in the wartime coalition brought it prestige, but there were also tangible benefits for north



Wales from that participation. The impact of the war on the economy of north-west Wales was a 'gift of God'.<sup>5</sup> The increased state powers necessitated by war, coupled with geographic and logistical good fortune, ensured that north Wales benefited immensely from the relocation of wartime industry. The benefits offered from an interventionist, 'socialist' wartime government were made clear to north Walians, even before Labour had been elected in 1945. To a large extent the history of north Wales has been a matter of trying to retain the gains made as result of war.<sup>6</sup>

There were several consequences for the local economy. First, war helped to alleviate the burden of unemployment which existed in the 1930s. During the height of the war effort 60,000 were employed in war industries in Gwynedd, 40,000 in new factories. Second, the war witnessed a huge influx of government and military personnel. An Admiralty training camp operated near Pwllheli. A prisoner of war camp was built in Bangor. The RAF base at Valley on Anglesey became one of the largest RAF/USAF bases in the UK. An artillery range was developed in Trawsfynydd on the site of the former First World War training camp, a firing range was developed at Tywyn and an airfield was built at Llanbedr. Coleg Harlech was taken over by the Royal Army Education Corps and an officer training unit was established in Barmouth. Third, and of greater significance in the longer term were the changes in manufacturing industry. Four major factories were set up by the Ministry for Aircraft Production.<sup>7</sup> Smaller enterprises also moved into the area. In Caernarfon alone 657 new jobs were created by five new firms that arrived during the war. The arrival of these new industries, large and small, relieved the emphasis on the 'old' basic industries of north Wales (most notably agriculture and slate) which were



already in decline before the war. The wartime industries were seen as the cornerstone of the economic resurgence of the north-west. Labour activists hoped that the industries brought in for war purposes could be adapted to meet post-war markets, serving alongside other local industries, such as tourism, to stimulate a buoyant employment market.<sup>8</sup>

The dangers were clear. Wartime jobs could vanish once the war came to an end. Many of the new firms experienced considerable difficulty in effecting a smooth changeover. It was not always easy to find peacetime products which these firms were technically equipped to produce at a reasonable price. Raw material shortages added to these difficulties.<sup>9</sup> Moreover the changes did not alleviate the position in rural areas or the quarrying towns. In the former, agriculture was threatened by new international competition, whilst rural industries could easily get squashed by Labour's industrial plans. Furthermore, whilst the economic benefits were tangible, the social effect of wartime industry presented a bag of mixed blessings. Several factors are worthy of note. First, the closing of munitions factories after the war resulted in an exodus of industrial workers from west Wales to the Midlands. Towns such as Caernarfon experienced the same phenomenon. Secondly, the new firms which had settled in the north-west during the war often suffered from a shortage of skilled workers. Whilst non-skilled jobs could therefore be filled by locals, skilled workers continued to be imported. The lack of local technical colleges accentuated the problem. As one industrial development report argued in 1947:

It cannot be stressed too strongly that technical education facilities in rural Wales are quite inadequate to meet the needs of industry already settled there and unless improvement takes place further development will be hindered<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, wartime industries had also produced a partial re-organisation of the local labour market. The new industries had attracted labour from surrounding rural areas as well as the towns. In the aftermath of war, many of these workers were reluctant to return to agriculture after having enjoyed the benefits of assisted travel schemes, welfare facilities, regular hours and relatively high wages in the industrial sector.<sup>11</sup> These were not the only factors. As the Beacham survey pointed out, 'the most disturbing feature in their attitude was the feeling that to go back to the land involved a drop in social status. This, whether justified or not, was deeply felt and merits more serious consideration than it has yet received'.<sup>12</sup> Of little consequence was the fact that 'few realised that they had in many cases experienced industrial employment at its best, i.e. in wartime establishments where welfare arrangements were excellent, wages high, and work assured'.<sup>13</sup>

However, Labour did not rest on its laurels, as an examination of the party's 1950 election manifesto *Labour is Building a New Wales* indicates. Labour was trying to come to terms with its responsibility for rural as well as industrial Wales. The manifesto is significant for its references to north as well as south Wales, and rural as well as industrial economic needs. As the party argued, there was a 'fresh spirit of enterprise in Welsh industry in both north and south Wales, and there is a new prosperity in the farming community of the countryside'. The party also claimed credit for the fact that 'practically the whole of south Wales and the Wrexham area in the north' had been scheduled as development areas under the Distribution of Industry Act. Indeed, local parties in Swansea and Wrexham, at opposite ends of the country, had pushed for and

obtained new industrial estates. Labour claimed credit for attracting public money to bring new industries to 'some of the smaller towns and villages with special employment needs'. Both Caernarvonshire and Merioneth were benefactors, funds having been made available through the Development Committee to build new factories in the Nantlle Valley and at Blaenau Ffestiniog, areas which hitherto had been almost entirely dependent on slate quarrying as a source of employment.<sup>14</sup> A section of the manifesto was devoted *entirely* to that industry. In 1946 the Labour government had established the Rees Committee to consider and make recommendations on the future of slate. In response to these recommendations, Labour claimed 'good progress' had been made, in particular with regard to recruitment and training, welfare facilities and marketing, research on slate by-products, experiments on slate waste and lung disease (the tackling of the dust problem). Crucially, Labour argued that 'the demand for Welsh slate is expected to exceed supplies for some time to come', the industry now being 'free to sell all it can produce, where it wills and at its own price'. Labour's house building programme ensured that demand for slate remained (temporarily) buoyant. Between 1945 and 1950 30,000 Welsh families settled into new homes built by Labour – 1,000 of these especially designated for agricultural workers. The building of a 'new town' in Cwmbran in south Wales, and discussions over the possible building of another in mid Wales offered the potentiality of even greater demand. Furthermore, industrial relations within the slate industry fitted in with the image which Labour hoped other industries would follow. The commitment to promote the well being of this 'essentially Welsh industry' was simplified by good industrial relations and its status as an industry 'remarkably free of disputes'.<sup>15</sup>

Neither did Labour ignore the other weakening industries of north-west Wales. The social and economic importance of Welsh agriculture was paid a significant amount of attention after 1945. The Hill Farming Act of 1946 and the Agriculture Act of 1947 had for the first time 'enabled Welsh farmers to plan with certainty' and provided 'fair prospects of steady employment to farm workers'. Subsidies to Welsh farmers were a significant feature of Labour's programme. Between 1947 and 1949 more than two and a half million pounds was paid to Welsh farmers in sheep, cattle and calf-rearing subsidies, this in addition to other grants for land drainage, ploughing and lime application. Furthermore, and of particular relevance in the mountainous areas of the north-west, the Hill Farming Act saw the investment of a further one and a quarter million pounds in improvements to farm buildings, houses, roads and services on more than 1600 holdings.<sup>16</sup> Labour's social policy, which placed an important emphasis on milk for mothers and children, contributed to a seventy per cent rise in milk production between 1939 and 1955. National wage agreements, combined with smallholding legislation, appeared to make employment in agriculture attractive, whilst the long standing problem of tied cottages was to be addressed.<sup>17</sup>

Labour's attack on agricultural areas was meant to have direct electoral benefits. Labour had been targeting the rural seats since the 1920's, believing that it could not win a UK majority without them.<sup>18</sup> This provided the stimulus for a series of rural campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s. After 1945, the party launched a direct attack on the Tories rural neglect. As the Welsh Council of Labour argued, 'Never have Welsh farmers had such



opportunities for improving not only their land but their own and their workers living conditions. The Tories claim a kind of divine right to speak for landed interests. They have never done so much for the land as the Labour government'.<sup>19</sup> This could equally be applied to the Liberal party, the party of the farming community in rural north Wales. Neither did Labour neglect the problem of the social and economic infrastructure of Wales. North Wales featured prominently in Labour's plans for improved communications. The north-south trunk road (an item which had featured on Labour's agenda since the 1930s) was part of the party's plan to help 'unify the Principality culturally as well as commercially'. Other transport schemes assumed a high priority. Furthermore, Welsh rural areas had also benefited from the 'urgent need' for introduction of water and sewerage schemes 'cheap electricity' as well as from the building of thirty thousand new houses across Wales. Nationalised electricity extended power to many farms and small villages for the first time. Moreover, electricity was not the only utility receiving Labour's attention. The proposed nationalisation of water promised a 'benefit to housewives, farmer and farm workers alike'. The National Farm survey, published in 1943, reported that only 30% of Welsh farms enjoyed the benefit of piped water. Another 60% still had well water as the only source of supply whilst 8% had no water supply at all. As the WRCL argued, this was both unacceptable and nonsensical in a 'land of more than ample rainfall'.

Labour's success after 1945 was achieved through economic centralisation. In its 1955 election manifesto, *Forward with Labour*, the party promised to 'respect and safeguard the distinctive national cultures' of Scotland and Wales. Devolved power received less

attention. The party's policy statement, *Labour's Policy for Wales* (1954), was almost entirely a rationale for centralisation and a challenge to calls for a Welsh parliament from elements within the party. Whilst it clearly stated that the party was 'not unsympathetic to the spirit which animates the proposals for a Welsh parliament' it argued that 'it is a serious error in political thinking to trace the causes of past and present Welsh problems to the constitutional arrangements which exist between Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom'.<sup>20</sup> The party argued that 'the prosperity of Wales is bound up with the prosperity of the United Kingdom as a whole'. Full employment in the rest of the UK meant full employment in Wales. Unemployment in the rest of the UK meant unemployment in Wales. It was therefore 'quite impossible for the UK to cut itself off from Wales or for Wales to cut itself off from the UK'. The measures the party had taken to combat unemployment in Wales after 1945 served to highlight the damage that devolution could do to the re-development of Wales. For example, the Distribution of Industry Act had enabled Labour to move industries into the Welsh development areas, through a combination of public and private enterprises. However, 'a Welsh parliament would not be able to exert any statutory powers over British industry...it would have to rely on its own resources to attract new private investments or to build factories itself'.<sup>21</sup> Nationalisation and universal social services provided further examples of the ways in which Wales benefited from remaining within the UK.<sup>22</sup>

Labour's policy statement also addressed the political implications of a Parliament for Wales. It argued that a Parliament for Wales would actually worsen, not improve, high levels of government bureaucracy. The financial cost of establishing a Welsh parliament

would be considerable. Instead of improving the political and economic infrastructure of Wales it could erode positive work that had already been done. It would mean the enlistment of many 'leading people living in Wales', whose services 'may be more usefully employed in other ways' into the unnecessary thrashing out of detailed legislation. Crucially, instead of uniting Wales, a Parliament could destroy what unity already existed. This was an important and perceptive point. Supporters of the Parliament for Wales campaign had shown that a united Wales would have to be achieved *before* devolution could become a reality. A Welsh parliament could not be expected to unite Wales (see below). As Labour argued, a parliament 'might in fact aggravate existing differences'. Two-thirds of its members would inevitably come from the industrial south. This would cause resentment in mid and north Wales. 'Weighting' regions, which some supporters of the campaign had proposed, was also unacceptable. It would cause resentment in the south and was in any case undemocratic.

This still left a vacuum in Labour's appeal to Welsh speaking areas. Despite the success of policy, the need to address a sense 'Welshness' was still profound. Despite its opposition to a Welsh parliament, Labour moved forward with means of addressing distinctively Welsh issues which concerned rural and Welsh speaking areas through administrative and structural decentralisation. *Labour's Policy for Wales* supported an extension of powers to the Welsh Department of Agriculture and called for the Welsh Department of Education to be moved from London to Wales. It supported calls for a 'Minister of Welsh Affairs, with a seat in the Cabinet', called for more parliamentary time to be allocated to Welsh affairs and committed the party to an overhaul of the

Council for Wales and Monmouthshire 'with the purpose of making it a more representative and effective' organ of Welsh opinion.

*Labour's Policy for Wales* typified Labour's attempts to become 'the party of Wales'. When it had the power Labour had taken steps to 'support the Welsh people in their attempts to safeguard their distinctive heritage'. The influence of the party's new MP's in Welsh speaking areas was also evident. Heightened interest was shown in the cultural interests of Wales. Labour promised to strengthen the cultural life of the nation 'so renowned for its literary, musical and religious activities'. However, north-west and 'rural' Wales continued to pose 'very intricate' and 'difficult' problems for the Welsh Regional Council of Labour. These problems were undoubtedly accentuated by Labour's failure to gain ground in the 1955 general election. A 'Tripartite Committee' was set up in the mid fifties, a direct response to the fact that post-war re-development in Wales had been uneven. Despite Labour's achievements between 1945 and 1951, the WRCL acknowledged that whereas the south and north-east were recovering from the problems of the depression, rural Wales lagged behind in the programme of rehabilitation. Several factors needed to be addressed and recognised. Depopulation was a key concern. This was not a matter which could be ignored or swept under the carpet. The WRCL linked depopulation to the social and economic decay of rural areas. The council was frustrated and alarmed by the fact that depopulation was undermining calls for industrial and economic investment in north-west Wales. Not only the Conservative party, but members of Labour's Tripartite Committee were confused or ignorant of the fact that low unemployment figures were the result of depopulation, a 'positive' consequence of a



sound economy. Peter Shore, the chair of the committee was especially confused.<sup>23</sup> There were also confused political motives. The council saw its attempts to tackle rural Welsh problems on the one hand as ‘an answer to the Welsh nationalist problem...not a negligible force in Welsh politics and a menace to our party and its MP’s’ and as an answer to the Parliament for Wales movement.<sup>24</sup>

The WRCL encouraged research on rural problems. This was carried out by Caradog Jones, Labour’s parliamentary candidate in Montgomery during the 1950s, and one of several ‘rural experts’. Jones’ recommendations, most of which were adopted by the WRCL in its ‘twelve year programme’, were based on the premise that the economic development of rural areas should involve utilising the natural resources of those areas. Jones believed that the problems of rural areas stemmed from the economic imbalance between agriculture and industry. Jones credited Labour with returning prosperity to many farming and rural areas for the first time since 1918. But much work remained to be done. Despite Labour’s house building programme, road improvements, electrification and improved water and sewerage supplies, young people were still leaving the land. Labour could not afford to be complacent. In the mid Wales counties (which included Merioneth) afforestation projects had been expanded and some industrial development had already begun. But these industries had not adequately replaced the vanished leadmining and woollen textile industries, which, alongside slate and agriculture, had been the staple employers. For Jones, the principles of modernisation should be applied to rural areas. This meant reorganisation of holdings, land reclamation and a change of emphasis in production techniques. However, the tendency would still be for more

production, more machines and fewer jobs. The 'strong and growing desire among the younger generation' to have land of their own had to be addressed to keep areas alive. An increase in the number of smallholdings was particularly controversial when economic prudence and the changing shape of markets tended to suggest that larger units were much more economically viable. But even if this could be addressed, only half the problem would be solved. 'Rural industry' had to be established to exploit local production of its raw materials.

Jones argued that existing activity was too simplistic and crude. The days of sawing tree trunks into different lengths, slaughtering animals or 'putting milk into churns to be collected and taken to the big towns or cities' had to end. Instead local industries should be established to use the products. Modern, scientific, techniques had to be applied to defunct industries such as lead-mining, as modern methods of extraction 'might make the revival of the lead-mining industry possible'. Modernisation would also ensure that there was no repetition of the dangerous working practices which had characterised many extractive industries in the past, a situation which meant that 'some of us never saw our grandfathers who died of tuberculosis before reaching the prime of life'. Neither did it mean that rural areas should progressively be destroyed by the forces of industry, turning them into a 'wilderness of bricks and mortar'. On the contrary, proper planning and the application of new techniques would ensure that this was not necessary.

Nevertheless, Jones appreciated that simply addressing material problems would not be enough to alleviate the problems of rural areas or address the problem of depopulation. A

decade after the second world war, attitudes and expectations had changed. No longer could the traditional appeals of rural life satisfy the demands of a young generation, who wanted to enjoy the same quality of life as those living in the towns. An increase in leisure time added to the predicament. Some rural areas enjoyed the benefits of well-equipped village halls and community centres. Others did not. Similarly, a more ambitious populace meant that library provisions had to be substantially improved 'and more opportunities given to people living in rural areas to express and develop their talent'. Children in rural areas had to be given the same educational privileges as those living in the urban centres. Only through strategic planning could the problems of rural areas be addressed, 'Better amenities in the countryside have become necessities. So have opportunities for more varied employment. But these things don't just happen; they must be planned and provided'.

The WRCL's interim report on *Development of Rural Areas in Wales*, published in 1957, incorporated many of the ideas which Jones had expressed. 'The Future of Agriculture', 'Research and Development' and 'Development of the Primary Products' were the cornerstones of Labour's programme.<sup>25</sup> Farming was again the report's primary target. In addition to extra capital for farm buildings, drainage and water, Labour would encourage more co-operatives and enable the majority of small 'family farms' to operate on a larger, more competitive scale. Derelict and marginal land would be reclaimed and let as smallholdings. In addition, 'County Colleges in Rural Areas' providing day release and evening classes would be provided, along with the establishment of an 'Agricultural College'. These would provide two to three year diplomas in agriculture, dairying,

poultry, horticulture, forestry and estate management. In addition, Labour's road building programme would be extended to include a scheme for the improvement of unclassified roads and roads to remote farms 'since reasonable modern transport facilities are a necessity in these areas as they are in industrial areas'.<sup>26</sup>

The need to diversify and attract new industries into rural areas was still deemed essential. As Caradog Jones had argued, the primary products of rural areas were raw materials for industries located long distances away. Whilst re-location would not necessarily create *more* jobs (they would simply be moved from the towns to the rural areas) it would address the problem of depopulation. Among the schemes which Labour hoped would address this problem were the opening of medium sized abattoirs. Again this necessitated (and promised) the improvement of rail and road links for rural areas. The hides and skins of the animals could be dealt with in 'fell-mongering' units, with the pelts and hides being cured and tanned in the local area and used to produce leather goods such as boots and shoes. These light industries would be specifically directed toward rural villages as well as towns. In addition, more creameries would be established. Butter and cheese making, as well as the pasteurising of milk, would be expanded, whilst egg packing would provide another suitable village industry. Another Jones brainchild – the development of forestry industries – would be addressed by Labour. Steps would be taken to establish saw mills and turneries. Again, this would lead to the development of village industries in furniture making, whilst a more ambitious scheme for the production of wood-pulp would be explored as a 'long-term possibility'.



The WRCL were also alive to the challenge of declining industries. The slate industry provided a particularly difficult challenge. Mechanisation stripped jobs from the industry whilst alternative (and cheaper) roofing methods increased competition. New uses for slate were to be researched, notably on the use of slate waste for road building. Moreover, through modernisation, research and development the north Wales slate industry could compete with alternative and cheaper roofing methods. Initial investigations by the WRCL had discovered that slate waste, ground to powder, could itself be used to manufacture roofing tiles and for other purposes. Marketing improvements were necessary. Slates should be produced 'in a variety of colours, shapes and sizes'. Similarly, in the development of 'slate wool' for insulation against fire and weathering, the WRCL would 'expect a Labour government to back and encourage such research, and the establishment of manufacturing, if that should prove to be an economic proposition'.<sup>27</sup>

Of course many towns relied on industries which bore no relation to the resources of rural Wales. Here Labour was less emphatic in its commitments. Light engineering industries that existed in some towns 'were to be welcomed', providing that 'it is kept within bounds' and 'the greater the variety the better'. However, the development of light industries would not be allowed to interfere with the strategy for rural areas which the report had outlined, otherwise 'it will result in an unhealthy concentration of the population in the towns at the expense of the depopulated countryside'. Instead, encouragement would be given to other industries which would stimulate rural life. Tourism, fishing and ship-building were therefore considered better long term and strategic bets. Alongside the commitments to rural industries were promises to address

the problems, highlighted by Caradog Jones, into the quality of life enjoyed in rural villages. However, this was something of a 'chicken and the egg situation', for as the WRCL argued, 'the provision of amenities will not itself bring prosperity to the rural areas'.

Problems remained and began to affect communities. By 1958 Labour's education service was warning of the adverse effects caused to local communities by the halving of jobs in agriculture – largely through the modernisation which was a central Labour aim. At the same time, the decline of slate damaged the 'vigorous democratic communities' which it had sustained in the Nantlle valley, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Bethesda. In 1938 these quarries had employed 38,000 men. Two decades later they provided employment for only a third of this figure.

The depopulation of rural areas was of paramount concern to Labour, both at local and national (Wales) level. For an older generation of Welsh socialists, depopulation served as a timely reminder of capitalist savagery. They pointed out that depopulation was not a new phenomenon. Rural areas (which included large sections of Wales) had always been a 'recruiting ground for industry' – a tradition which stretched back to the Industrial Revolution. For others, depopulation became not only a symbol of an economically unbalanced Britain (where jobs were increasingly generated in the midlands and south-east) but of the inadequacy of Westminster to properly recognise the distinctive needs of Wales. For Labour's new MPs in north-west Wales, the question of depopulation became

inseparable from the need for devolution and the need to defend and preserve an endangered local community.

*Candidates, devolution and the appeal to 'Gwerin'.*

The second side of Labour's appeal in north-west Wales after 1945 was its role as guardian of local interests and of Welshness, and of the values and social institutions which had previously been safeguarded by the Liberal party. Labour is typically portrayed as a party of the working class, as the party of trade unions, but its appeal in north Wales was also based on attracting the support of a local society where the Welsh language, Welsh culture and the local chapels formed the backbone of local communities. The protection of the 'Gwerin' was far removed from the proletarian, industrial politics of the south Wales valleys. This had been an important, but not entirely successful, feature of the strategy adopted by some Labour figures in Wales since the turn of the century. For Labour pioneers such as David Thomas in the period from 1900 to 1939, adapting the party's message to fit in with and express an established view of local society had been as important as converting the local electorate to the gospel of socialism. They established a tradition that was kept alive and extended after 1945.

Much of the (limited) work that has been undertaken on the Labour party in north Wales after 1918 has focussed on the impact of the first world war on local politics. Such work argues that after 1918 Labour became much more 'typically' the party of the local working class as the importance of old social institutions and values were eroded. However, because historians focussed on how 'typical' local Labour politics were after

1918 they have neglected an important feature of the party's history – the continuation of the process by which Labour's Welshness and its status as the party of local 'gwerin' continued to be cultivated. In the period before and after the first world war, David Thomas played an important role in this process, aided by the establishment of a local, Welsh language, and socialist newspaper, *Y Dinesydd Cymreig*. Both are worthy of brief comment as they demonstrate the origins of political approaches which Labour in north-west Wales successfully developed after 1945.

David Thomas is primarily known for his work *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas* (1910) which stated the principles of socialism in the Welsh language. This work was deemed necessary more to help establish the Labour party in an area where ninety percent of the population in 1910 was Welsh speaking. But an equally important and often neglected feature of Thomas's work was to state those principles within a context that was both acceptable and relevant to the close-knit Welsh community for which it was intended. Central to the image which Thomas attempted to convey was a party in touch with, and alive to the needs of a local society where shared interests, values, culture and language outweighed or rivalled class based solidarities. For Thomas, as with a later generation of Welsh speaking Labour activists, it was essential that socialism 'adapted itself to fit the spirit of the individual nation, and before it has any real impact in Wales it must make itself an important element of Welsh national awakening'.<sup>28</sup> This meant establishing both local socialist principles and the Labour party within a communitarian spirit of 'gwerin' – an attachment which was previously associated only with Liberalism and the Liberal party. *Y Dinesydd*, like David Thomas, wished to promote an image of a socialist but classless



Labour party which was attentive to Welsh social, political and linguistic concerns and which respected local political traditions.

For Thomas, labourism, socialism and patriotism were natural bedfellows. In an article 'Socialism and the Welsh People', he spoke of socialism as an international movement which adapted itself to fit the 'national spirit' of individual nations.<sup>29</sup> Like other 'foreign movements', including 'Christianity from Palestine, Protestantism from Germany, Non-Conformity from England and Calvinism from Geneva', socialism had begun to earn the respect and trust of the Welsh people. Not only did socialism follow on from other 'creeds' held dear by the Welsh, but it embodied the values and spirit of Welshness and 'gwerin'. However, and like Goronwy Roberts later on, Thomas argued that the relationship between socialism and Welshness was a reciprocal one. On the one hand Labour (and socialism) was becoming *the* political force which would ensure the future prosperity of the Welsh people. On the other, Welshness and in particular the spirit of 'gwerin', had a positive impact on Labour, a softening approach, ensuring the party was attentive to the needs of Welsh speaking society and culture. It also had a de-proletarianising effect on Labour policy. The latter was crucial. Thomas wished to gently wean traditional Liberal supporters away from their party and into the Labour fold. Labour's inevitable rise had been depicted as an 'organic growth'. Evolution not revolution was the watchword. As a result, Labour was not opposed to any of the fundamental principles of Liberalism, but, on the contrary, was appealing to the same cross-class community values which had inspired its support. These were fundamental Welsh values. The Welsh were inherently socialist (an idea which was later promoted by

other Labourites such as Jim Griffiths). Radical policies – notably nationalisation – were more likely to be accepted by the Welsh because ‘the Welsh mind is already ripe for nationalising the land and mines and other things of the kind because the Welsh people are democratic almost without knowing it’.

The same approach was adopted by *Y Dinesydd* (to which Thomas was a regular contributor).<sup>30</sup> After the First World War the newspaper devoted most of its editorial space to Labour’s attempts at rooting itself in the local community. The community (as opposed to the political) bias of the paper is only one indication of this approach. The major issues which dominated news columns were community news, chapel news and Welsh culture (particularly news of local and national ‘eisteddfodau’). The call for Labour support remained a rational one in that ‘you have to be blind not to see that Labour has the warmest heart, strongest mind and most reasonable approach of all the parties’; it was inevitable that ‘Labour must rule’. Support for Labour candidates standing at general elections was based on the grounds that ‘those who love their religion, who love their nation, care about the workers and care about the ‘werindod’’ should support Labour candidates. Like Thomas, *Y Dinesydd* argued that to see the local Labour only as a class party missed one of its intrinsic strengths. The Labour party was a ‘party of those who use their heads as much as of those who use their hands. It is the party of all who contribute to the good of society. It is the party of all people of all classes who earn their living through honest and worthwhile labour’. Furthermore, community interest was ‘all important. Not person, not class, not trade union. Labour is totally opposite to a class party – that is exactly what Labour is opposed to’.<sup>31</sup>

Given the status of other parliamentary candidates, and the weakness of Labour organisation, to have any chance of success Labour candidates had to fill certain criteria. The personal popularity of candidates was an important feature of politics in north-west Wales, a tradition which spread upwards from roots in 'independent' local politics where reputations were often considered more important than political doctrines. Welsh speaking non-conformists who understood the values of 'gwerin' could fit the bill perfectly – candidates who 'love their religion, who love their nation, care about the workers and care about the werindod' (Labour's candidates after 1945 could confidently tick all these boxes). The selection of 'outsiders' by the Liberal party added weight to these arguments. As *Y Dinesydd* argued of one Liberal candidate standing in 1918, 'he does not speak Welsh and is not a non-conformist...you cannot represent Wales unless you fulfil these criteria'. The only option was for locals to vote for 'one of us', 'one of the werin bobol' who was 'in touch with the workers and also the werindod'.<sup>32</sup>

The new generation of Labour candidates in north-west Wales after the Second World War shared these values and could represent them with conviction. They were generally sympathetic to Welsh, 'nationalist' issues. But unlike many of their counterparts in Plaid Cymru they did not want to fossilise Wales, to safeguard the past and preserve it for a cultured elite. On the contrary, they sought to preserve Wales through modernisation, by allowing it to retain its people and gain the employment and opportunities that were essential to preserving Welsh life, as well as preserving the language and culture. All three Labour MPs in north-west from 1945-59, Goronwy Roberts, T.W. Jones and

Cledwyn Hughes were local, Welsh speaking, patriots. All three supported the Parliament for Wales campaign in the early 1950's and were strong advocates of a Secretary of State for Wales as a pre-requisite to some form of Welsh devolution. These were candidates who a generation earlier may conceivably have been Liberals. Cledwyn Hughes, Anglesey's Labour MP from 1951, was a Welsh speaking radical from the professional classes. Hughes' father had been a prominent and respected Holyhead Liberal. Such were Hughes' 'Liberal' credentials that when he defeated the Liberal Megan Lloyd George in the 1951 General Election, the victory was described by one Welsh newspaper as a 'swing to the right'. His status as a Welsh radical and his ability to arouse support for the Labour party in working class Holyhead – a town which had posed problems for the Labour party in the 1920s – were crucial to his success. Hughes' personal papers include letters from Madoc Jones, Secretary of the Welsh Liberal Party, affectionately addressed to 'the virtually Liberal member for my native county of Anglesey'.<sup>33</sup> Jones was attempting to convince Hughes of the political benefits to be gained from creating a new 'Radical' party in north Wales, a fusion of the radically minded elements from Labour, the Liberals and Plaid Cymru. Even by 1967, when Secretary of State for Wales, Hughes was still treated with some suspicion within Labour circles, where he was seen as one of select band of Labour MPs who were 'nationalists first and socialist second'.<sup>34</sup> Even for some of those actively involved in Labour politics in the north, Hughes was dubbed with a 'little too much green paint' to be trusted completely.<sup>35</sup>

In Merioneth, Labour's MP from 1951 to 1966 was T.W. Jones. Despite emerging from a more typically Labour background, he nevertheless emanated from the same radical,



Welsh speaking roots as both Hughes and Roberts. Jones was a patriot, a lover of all things Welsh. A chapel minister and an active worker on various eisteddfod committees, he was also well known and respected for having been jailed as a conscientious objector during the First World War. This had led him into the local ILP in his native Rhosllanerchgrugog near Wrexham immediately after the war. Like Hughes and Roberts, he used his status as a local preacher to warm chapel audiences to the appeal of the Labour party during a crucial period in its implantation. He was a shrewd and skilled electioneer. Through the chapels and through a network of friends he studied attitudes towards the Labour party in north-west Wales, even going as far as conducting his own unofficial opinion polls to assess progress. Part of his network included other chapel ministers, who were especially useful in gauging opinion in areas of Merioneth where support for the party was weak and/or could not be taken for granted. Once elected, Jones was proud of the fact that he spoke more Welsh at Westminster than any other MP in history.<sup>36</sup> He was devoutly proud of Labour's success in Merioneth, and pointed to the fact that a majority of two thousand, which the party had ground out by 1959, was especially good for one of the smallest seats in the UK.

In Caernarvonshire, Labour's MP from 1945 to 1974 was Goronwy Roberts. During the 1930s Roberts had helped found the 'Grwp Gwerin' movement at the University College of North Wales in Bangor. A left-wing, patriotic group, it was firmly committed to establishing the Labour party as the 'national' party of Wales and espousing a truly balanced and legitimate view of 'national socialism' or 'Labour nationalism'.<sup>37</sup> The movement's strong support for a Welsh parliament reflected Roberts's own views.

Roberts' status as a patriot was unquestionable. As an aspiring Labour MP in the run up to the 1945 election, he campaigned on two fronts, 'as a Labour candidate, but also as a Welsh candidate'. At the heart of this vision was the belief that Labour 'was out to protect and extend the cultural and industrial well being of the nation'.<sup>38</sup>

After 1945 such candidates claimed that Labour was the party most likely to deliver some form of political autonomy for Wales. In their eagerness to install this vision of the Labour party, both Roberts and Hughes were led into a principled but ultimately ill-disciplined campaign in support of a Secretary of State for Wales in 1945, when this commitment did not form part of Labour's programme. In addition to re-affirming calls for a Welsh Secretary, concerns over the preservation of Welsh language and culture were expressed in a renegade Labour newspaper, *Llais Llafur*. Although 'generally speaking' supportive of official Labour policy, the paper was overly 'enthusiastic' about 'nationalist' issues for some Labour stalwarts from the south.<sup>39</sup> In the run up to the election, senior Labour figures had been concerned that 'Welsh candidates' were making irresponsible promises which were 'outside the party line'. In a speech at Llandudno in June 1945, Herbert Morrison re-iterated the party's rejection of calls to appoint a Secretary of State for Wales, arguing that it would 'lower the quality of administration in Welsh affairs'. Morrison favoured 'organisations within every government department staffed with Welsh officers and whose business it would be to understand Wales'. He repeated the warning to 'local Labour candidates' who were in the habit of making 'unorthodox promises'.<sup>40</sup> The local press claimed the speech was 'sufficient in itself to make the Labour party lose every seat in north Wales'.<sup>41</sup> Despite the warning, Roberts

continued to campaign up to the election for 'Welsh control of things that are her own' and 'parity with Scotland' (an enduring feature of the campaign for a Secretary of State). Furthermore, Labour's image of a distinctly 'Welsh' party was aided by party propaganda, published in Welsh. Veteran local activists such as David Thomas were extremely valuable, not only in advising Labour HQ on the 'cultural side' of policy for the north, but also in the preparation of 'some of the most attractive posters ever published by the Labour party'.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the campaign for a Welsh parliament and support for 'Welshness' (in many guises) was an intrinsic element of Labour's mandate in north-west Wales.

The confrontation between Morrison and Labour's prospective MPs in north-west Wales was symbolic of the problems encountered by pro-devolutionists in the Labour party during an era when the belief in centralism, and centralist cures for social and economic problems, was at its most profound. However, the rejection of calls for a Secretary of State did not signify that Labour was disinterested in Welsh matters. Opposition to a Secretary of State was in part based on concerns that this office would lead to less efficient government for both Wales and Britain. The experience of Scotland, where during the war the existence of a Secretary of State was believed to have delayed decision making processes, actually served to reinforce British arguments against devolution.<sup>43</sup> It also reflected a tendency to see nationalism as the cause of the world's problems in the 1930s.

If Morrison's speech had attacked unorthodoxy amongst Labour's candidates, his campaign speech in support of the party in north Wales was in itself somewhat unorthodox. Morrison stressed that Labour was the inheritor of local radical and Liberal traditions. He claimed that even at the party's higher levels there was an appreciation of the local party's attempt to identify itself with long standing political and communitarian traditions. The iron hand of party discipline on devolution was thus mixed with a much more subtle approach. In Morrison's judgement, it was important that:

The Labour party in north Wales should and does inherit the true traditions of Lloyd George. Critics may argue that Lloyd George was no socialist. He certainly never claimed to be one, but he was not afraid of economic change, as are the members of the present government.

It was Morrison's view that the Labour party had absorbed 'all that was highest and best in the Liberal faith'. North Wales could not perpetuate the Lloyd George tradition by voting Conservative, nor could the tradition effectively be carried on by voting Liberal. The choice of north Wales, as in the rest of Wales was now between a Tory government representing reaction and privilege and a Labour government representing progress and the public interest.<sup>44</sup>

During the period after 1951 – when the Labour party underwent an understudied process of modernisation – Goronwy Roberts identified himself with the ideological currents within the party who favoured change, notably the Gaitskellites, but also with an emerging centre-left group of technocrats. In the 1930s he had been a radical. Now he was perceived as being on the 'right'. Such shifts were not unusual within the Labour party. The radicals of the 1930s had been motivated by issues of economic policy, by a



concern to attack poverty and to modernise the economy, and by issues of foreign policy. By the 1950s this was hardly incompatible with support for Gaitskell; and many English radicals of the 1930s were Gaitskellites by the 1950s.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, however, Roberts was a firm believer in the notion that in order for the party to survive it had to keep alive the enthusiasm of the old pioneers. Along with many other Welsh radicals, one of his political icons was Keir Hardie. Another was the devout nationalist O.M. Edwards.<sup>46</sup> Hardie's position in Labour folklore was important in linking the Labour movement in the north with that of the south. For Roberts, Hardie represented the cherished ideal of Christian socialism and a society based on freedom, compassion and understanding. These were all fundamental aspects of his personal and political beliefs. Equally, Hardie symbolised the spirit of radicalism which triumphed over adversity. Hardie's reputation as a supporter of Home Rule was equally inspirational. Roberts felt he followed the same 'moral' pioneering spirit in the 1950s as he had in the 1930s, and that Hardie had proclaimed before 1914. Support for the Parliament for Wales campaign was thus an extension of the radical spirit which had inspired Roberts to form the 'Grwp Gwerin' in the 1930s – it was the spirit too of the party's most famous and internally respected pioneer.

In supporting calls for devolution, Roberts's was not motivated by a desire to be a 'rebel' (unlike some south Wales MP's this was not a position he cherished). He felt that devolution did not necessarily have to damage the Labour party in Wales. On the contrary, devolution could improve the standards of living enjoyed by the Welsh people whilst at the same time establishing the Labour party as the genuine 'party of Wales'.

Despite his status as a rebel within the Labour party at the time of the Parliament for Wales campaign, Roberts believed that devolution for Wales could only be achieved by a united Labour party and within a united Wales, a fact which the failure of the campaign confirmed. Within the Welsh Labour party, he formed close friendships with those like Jim Griffiths who were opposed to the Parliament for Wales campaign during the 1950s. Roberts appreciated that despite his unfavourable attitude to a Parliament for Wales, Griffiths was still a patriot and that 'on every other issue his support is always on the Welsh side'.<sup>47</sup> More importantly he recognised that Griffiths, despite emanating from the industrial south, understood the values and life of the north. Griffiths' support was crucial in ensuring that the needs of north Wales were given a sympathetic hearing within the party, especially after he became deputy leader. When others criticised Griffiths for his increasingly moderate stance and the fact that he had become an establishment figure within the party, Roberts believed that having someone who understood the problems of 'gwerin' in a position of influence was no bad thing. Griffiths assurance that Labour's Welsh rural policy would 'get fair consideration at NEC level' was an example of the important influence which Roberts recognised.<sup>48</sup> Griffiths was respected by all 'sides' of the Labour party in Wales. As a result he was one of only a few people who could unite the party around an acceptable Welsh policy, i.e. one which addressed the needs of the south and the north simultaneously.

Griffiths appreciated that many of his fellow party members in the south did not share his love for the notion of the 'gwerin', indeed 'they dislike the life and language which are characteristic of these areas'. However, in order for Labour's commitment to devolution

to advance, it was essential that those who believed in devolution and in the concept of 'gwerin' should win over the sceptics. Despite his passionate support for Welshness, Roberts was also aware that Welsh language culture excluded the majority of Wales. For example, he was concerned that the cornerstone of Welsh culture – the National Eisteddfod – excluded a large percentage of the Welsh population from participating. The answer was not to 'betray' Welshness. On the contrary, the 'no English' rule, he agreed, 'was essential to the purpose of the Eisteddfod'. What Roberts objected to was the betrayal – the rejection – of those in Wales who had not been born into the Welsh language. Instead of warming people to the Welsh language, the eisteddfod presented a 'cold and contemptuous attitude' to English speakers. It was important that the eisteddfod explain the reasons for the rule. They had been lazy in failing to do so. Similarly, it was important for those who supported a Welsh parliament to understand the views of those Welshmen who did not.

Despite the failure of the Parliament for Wales campaign Roberts was pleased that it had opened up debate within his own party. It had even convinced some sceptics of the need for greater Welsh recognition. Roberts welcomed the publication of Ness Edwards's pamphlet *Is This the Road?* (1956) because it had been written by someone who had not supported the campaign and for whom the values of 'gwerin' were alien. Edwards should not be condemned for his indifferent attitude to devolution (he was attacked by nationalists), for he emanated from a part of Wales where issues of class, poverty and the struggle for daily existence were the issues which had traditionally united communities. His comments should be welcomed because an awakening was occurring even among



those who were not naturally pre-disposed to 'nationalistic' beliefs. It was a 'thoughtful contribution'.<sup>49</sup> He continued:

A country can reach self-government through revolution or through development. Does anyone in Wales believe that revolution is the means to this end? Is that how it should come? Is it not true that development is the only way? We have to develop opinion and feelings (this is the crucial aspect) among people whose lives are as alien as among those who live in the south or live in the north. We must develop our national identity. If your companion comes with you one mile when you wanted him to come two, don't send him back'.<sup>50</sup>

As Roberts pointed out, there was more 'togetherness' on Welsh issues within his party than many outsiders believed. Even though Roberts condemned the Labour party's refusal to back the Parliament for Wales campaign, he welcomed the almost unanimous opposition of Labour members to Liverpool's plans for a reservoir in Tryweryn in Merioneth, because it would 'drown' a Welsh village, Capel Celyn, in the process. There is insufficient space here to elaborate on the Tryweryn controversy. Labour's role in the controversy was met with some derision both at the time and in subsequent Welsh language accounts. It has become a part of nationalist mythology, designed to castigate the party.<sup>51</sup> Much of this criticism rests on the fact that Plaid Cymru and not the Labour party was instrumental in initiating the organised opposition to the scheme, and on the assumption that Labour generally and T.W.Jones in particular, actively conspired with the Labour controlled Liverpool council in allowing the scheme to progress.<sup>52</sup>

Undoubtedly the Tryweryn affair was a difficult political issue for the Labour party – and especially so for both Roberts and Jones. It was an issue where 'socialism' and 'nationalism' came into direct conflict. Roberts the moderniser argued 'supplying people with water is as essential as supplying them with houses, schools and hospitals'.<sup>53</sup>



However, Roberts and Jones the Welshmen bemoaned the affront to Welsh life and independence. This was a classic 'Welsh' community drowned – 'murdered' – because of English needs. Both Jones and Roberts feared the damage caused to rural Welsh life by schemes like Tryweryn. Given their backgrounds it was nonsense to suggest otherwise.

Unlike many Welsh nationalists, Roberts' opposition to Tryweryn was not inspired by racism or xenophobia. On the contrary he attempted to diffuse the anti-English sentiments which the affair had stimulated amongst some fellow nationalists. He was anxious to point to the fact that feelings between Liverpoolians and north Walians had 'always been warm'.<sup>54</sup> It was 'not an anti-Liverpool or an anti-English spirit' which motivated objections over Tryweryn'.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, Liverpool's need for water was the same as anyone else, including those of his own country. The controversy merely indicated the lack of long term planning by previous governments. As a result, Roberts argued that the solution was not the destruction of a viable Welsh community but greater understanding of the growing need for water supplies and the education of the public in the best ways to conserve water. In the long term this was the only way which schemes such as Tryweryn could be avoided. To this end Roberts supported calls for a Welsh Water Board.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless there were concerns over the functions which such a Board would adopt. A Welsh Water Board did not necessarily mean that schemes like Tryweryn would be prevented in the future. Such guarantees could only be achieved through the creation of a Welsh parliament.

Despite this, Labour's support for the establishment of a Welsh Water Board did receive widespread support, even from Plaid Cymru. This did not mean that attacks on Labour relented. T. W. Jones became a particular target for nationalist accusations. Among many concerns was Jones' involvement in discussions with Liverpool over 'agreed schemes'.<sup>57</sup> Plaid Cymru and the Welsh language press condemned Labour for 'circulating the advantages of the scheme to drown Tryweryn'.<sup>58</sup> Both Roberts and Jones were attacked by nationalists for accepting the scheme and airing some of the more positive outcomes for the local community. Yet this was not a betrayal of Welshness nor of their approach. It was modernisation and cold rationalism at work. Jones argued that many of the houses which would be 'drowned' were in fact out-dated and lacking in modern utilities. It was his duty – and responsibility – to ensure that all the options on offer to the residents of Capel Celyn were aired. Jones argued that the offer of a modern, well-equipped house for an old house and a chapel for a chapel (by the local Bala council), was an attractive package for the residents of Capel Celyn. In other words, he emphasised there were important side issues which had to be made clear to the local people. As Jones knew, some village residents were more opposed to the scheme than others. The objection to Tryweryn, he said, was actually a 'minority protest', many locals in fact being indifferent to the ongoing debate.<sup>59</sup> Instead, opposition to Tryweryn was fuelled by a Plaid Cymru propaganda campaign. More importantly both Jones and Roberts were aware of the fact that a reservoir in Tryweryn would help attract desperately needed industry and jobs. The proposed building of nuclear power stations at Ederm and Trawsfynydd was a significant factor in their response. It was part of a series of proposals to use Welsh water as a resource.<sup>60</sup> Plaid Cymru itself encouraged Liverpool County Council to 'repay the debt' to

Tryweryn by seeking assurances from the council that they would support the development of industry in that area. Although meetings between Alderman Sefton (Labour leader of the council) and Plaid Cymru had initially been 'frosty', Gwynfor Evans (the President of Plaid Cymru) found that Sefton had some sympathy with Plaid's cause and shared many of Plaid's aims. Sefton himself favoured devolution for the north-west of England, and after warming to Plaid's protestations over Tryweryn began describing himself as a 'scouse nationalist'.<sup>61</sup> This clearly caused some annoyance within the Labour party, as a letter from the Welsh Regional Office of the party to the North West Regional Office in Manchester suggested:

We have enough trouble from Plaid Cymru as it is without Alderman Sefton giving them additional ammunition. I was wondering whether Alderman Sefton was a member of the Labour party and whether you know him personally. If so I wonder whether it would be possible for you to have a word with him and point out the political implications of his actions to the Labour party in Wales.<sup>62</sup>

For Goronwy Roberts, if nuclear power stations and other industries came to Gwynedd, Tryweryn could be 'sacrificed'. If the loss of one small Welsh community prevented the long term destruction of a much larger Welsh community in Gwynedd, it was worthwhile. As Roberts noted, Trawsfynydd and Edern were already being earmarked as possible sites for new nuclear power stations.

There was still a need to attract other industries. Roberts had little time for those who objected to new industry on the grounds that it would ruin the scenic landscape. Most of these people who objected, he claimed were exiled Welshmen living in Manchester or Birmingham, who saw rural Wales as nothing more than a 'nice' weekend playground.



Their attitude to Wales could be summed up in one word; 'selfish'.<sup>63</sup> 'These people' cared little for the economic problems of rural areas, or the fact that if new industry was not attracted the 'gwerin' would be destroyed. In 1958, Roberts launched a scathing attack on those from outside Wales who sought to influence economic policy in a Commons speech on unemployment in rural areas:

Much of the area to which I have referred lies within the boundaries of the Snowdonia National Park. There will always be objectors to the introduction of any kind of industry to the area, but I would advise the Ministers concerned that no more than a few dozen of these objectors live in the area. They take jolly good care to live somewhere else. They think that because they spend a fortnight's holiday in Snowdonia they own the place and can drive its people out of the area so that they can enjoy it seasonally without being disturbed. They tend to regard Snowdonia as a kind of Red Indian reservation, set aside for tired Manchester stockbrokers. We deserve a better fate than that, and we shall insist upon it. Our duty is to see that human nature as well as nature has a chance of survival in this area.<sup>64</sup>

Roberts had not insisted that Gwynedd should be turned into another Rhondda or Sheffield. On the contrary, there was no need for this. New industry would have to adapt to its surroundings. It should 'blend in' to the local environment.<sup>65</sup> But the need for jobs had to be addressed. Unemployment in Gwynedd was double the national average. The 'old' industries (most notably slate) which had sustained the local communities for several generations were in decline. Fall in demand and mechanisation meant that even with economic planning and capital investment (which would help) these industries were spent forces as mass employers. The infrastructure of 'old' industry therefore had to be adapted and 'new' industry attracted. The central purpose of industrial planning was to end the process of depopulation in the area. As he argued in 1957:

At the moment the situation is awful. Every week, and almost every day I hear about people leaving Arfon, many for Wrexham, the south, England and some to



the far corners of the World. Hunger drives them out of Wales, but it is a physical hunger. The other hunger- the hunger to return once more to their 'gwerin' deepens with very passing moment that they have to survive in their new alien environment.<sup>66</sup>

It was not only the loss of one generation which troubled Roberts. A large percentage of those who were leaving local areas were young, depriving the local 'gwerin' of further generations of its community. But there was another side to the problem, 'As the native Welsh leave their cottages the English immediately buy them. But these are middle aged people. Professionals or those who have retired. They have no children or their children have grown up'. He argued that these new residents – without children – would not readily integrate into the Welsh community. Children would pick up the language at school and would make friends with Welsh speakers. It was more difficult for those who were set in their ways. If traditional values and culture were to survive, Wales had to live in the present, not the past, and alter the pattern of migration.

Roberts took this so seriously that he even countenanced protest actions. He supported marches by the local unemployed (such as the one from Penygroes to Caernarfon in 1957) which highlighted their plight, and argued that the long term effects of unemployment affected the whole of the community, not only those who were unemployed. Whilst he acknowledged that in one sense the local 'gwerin' had flourished almost because of the harsh realities of life in these areas, long term unemployment was a different matter. It was 'contagious'. Sooner or later there would not be a member of the community who remained unaffected, 'In every direction, economically, culturally and spiritually the fabric of *all* our lives will decline'.<sup>67</sup>

For Roberts, economic policy was crucial to the future of the local community. There was little point in worrying too much about cultural issues if there was no longer a Welsh community left to sustain that culture. As the WRCL also argued, there was little point in Labour building community centres if there were no communities left to use them. It was therefore important for new industry to employ local labour. Roberts argued that the proposed power stations would collectively lead to the creation of around 800 jobs, which would 'break the back of the unemployment problem from Caernarfon to Aberdaron'.<sup>68</sup> However, the government's 'Report on Industrial Development in Caernarfonshire', published in June 1956, assumed that skilled workers would come from outside the area. As the report argued. 'the possibility of living in the country rather than in an industrial area may be expected to offer considerable attraction to skilled workers and scientific employees'.<sup>69</sup> This did not address Roberts' concern over the fact that 'intelligence is being drained away from these areas at an alarming rate'.<sup>70</sup>

Building nuclear power stations and chemical works promised to create local jobs during the construction phase, but in the long term the very antithesis of what Roberts hoped was likely to occur. The new industries would not nourish the needs of the local community, but would actually serve to undermine it. They would not provide high paid jobs for locals, but lead to in-migration and the decline of Welsh communities. The remedy for this predicament, Roberts insisted, would be the establishing of local technical colleges, teaching the skills which the new industries would demand. If this was achieved, new employers would not have to look outside the local area for their skilled labour. There

was also still the problem of attracting more industries to the area, which would also increase demand for skilled labour.

The answer was to provide facilities for an influx of small to medium sized factories. This work had begun during Attlee's administration. Trading Estates were believed to have proved their worth 'socially and economically'.<sup>71</sup> Goronwy Roberts was 'disappointed' that Harold Wilson's 1950 initiative for the development of Trading Estates, which had included provision for Gwynedd (in particular Penygroes<sup>72</sup>) had not materialised. There were other disappointments. Despite being a member of the WRCL's Tripartite Committee on rural areas, Roberts did not agree wholeheartedly with the party's policy for rural Wales. For example, he was concerned that the schemes which Caradog Jones and the WRCL had in mind did not seem to be schemes of mass employment, which areas like Gwynedd needed. Rather, they focussed on skilled employment in small units. In this respect, as Roberts was to suggest, the Conservative government's schemes for the economic development of 'depressed' areas such as Gwynedd were as radical as the schemes which Labour had in mind.<sup>73</sup> He was even more concerned at Labour's enthusiasm for developing tourism in Gwynedd. There were evident disadvantages so far as this 'industry' was concerned. As Roberts argued:

There are two ways of looking at this industry. On the one hand it is the largest industry that we have in north Wales. On the other hand it is the least satisfactory, since it is busy for a couple of months in the summer but then increases levels of unemployment in the winter months. I will say it once again...no good will come from this industry in north Wales. Indeed, the sporadic nature of the industry only weakens our argument for new, permanent and regular industry and work.<sup>74</sup>

Roberts was nonetheless encouraged by the government's attempts to bring work to Wales in the late 1950s. It was, he argued, a sign that a process of modernisation was also occurring in the Conservative party as well as his own.<sup>75</sup> Never before had a Conservative government 'gone as close to accepting the socialist assertion that it is only through purposeful and careful planning that work can be found in the depressed areas of Wales. In gradients only do the parties differ in principle'.<sup>76</sup> The Tories had accepted that it was a government's duty to create work for the nation's unemployed. They accepted 'that those without work should no longer have to go and look for it'.<sup>77</sup> This was a positive feature for counties like Gwynedd who had lost the 'cream' of its people.

The government planned to use Treasury money to create new industries and thus new jobs in 'depressed' areas. 'New Development Areas' were to emerge. Anglesey and large areas of Gwynedd qualified for help under the scheme. Nevertheless, as the scheme was for the whole of Britain, it did not include separate or special budgets for Wales. It wasted an opportunity to grant Wales the responsibility for economic planning which Roberts and others within the Labour party, such as Tudor Watkins, had been campaigning for since the early 1950s.<sup>78</sup> However, whilst there was criticism over the fact that the government did not intend to develop their own industries under the reconstruction programme, Roberts perhaps surprisingly argued that state owned industrial development was not necessarily a good thing. His arguments here explain his support for the ideological changes (especially moves towards the repeal of Clause Four) which were taking place within the Labour party. For Roberts, many government factories which had been built in Gwynedd had ended in 'shambles'.<sup>79</sup> Industry therefore had a greater chance



of succeeding when 'industrialists themselves ask for assistance in building them' – a fundamental feature of the Conservative's policy on regional development (see below).<sup>80</sup> The construction of government owned factories often involved false economies which were a menace to re-employment programmes.

Roberts was not the only sceptic in relation to nationalised industries in Wales. The 'on-off' process of government control of steel was not good propaganda. The Welsh language press stressed that nationalisation and then de-nationalisation of industry had done harm to Welsh industry. For example *Y Faner* pointed to the case of 'Cwmni Dur Llansawel' (Briton Ferry Steel Company) which had established close and fond links with the local community. However, having been nationalised and then de-nationalised by the Tories, ownership passed out of local hands and into the control of the Duport Company. This was 'another example of old Welsh ownership maintained in a co-operative and kindred spirit having been destroyed. A system which had lasted for two generations before the government interfered with it' had now disappeared.<sup>81</sup>

Criticism of Tory governance was, however, constructive. Where credit was due, Roberts was willing to give it. He praised Henry Brooke (Minister of State for Wales) for his more positive attitude to Welsh affairs. Brooke's own credibility in rural Wales had been mortally injured by the Tryweryn controversy. But Roberts was eager to show that the office of 'Minister for Welsh Affairs' could prove beneficial to the interests of Wales, even if it was held by a nonentity and a Tory. How many nationalists, Roberts argued, 'would say no to the suggestion that an Economic and Industrial Board be set up for the

purpose of bringing new industry to Wales?’ – as Brooke had suggested.<sup>82</sup> In principle, the creation of a Board acting without governmental interference, but with its financial backing was an appealing notion. However, as Roberts argued, less appealing was the thought of yet another ‘body’ dealing with Welsh affairs. As he was to note, ‘We already have so many bodies in Wales that I sometimes think that I am living in a cemetery’.<sup>83</sup>

Obtaining – and advocating - economic progress was therefore crucial to the Labour party’s success in many parts of Welsh speaking rural Wales. This was underlined by Roberts’s own election campaign in 1959, which was dominated not by cultural nationalism but by economic arguments, with a lesser emphasis on constitutional change and Labour’s policy for peace. He noted that a Labour government, if elected, would re-develop and extend the Dalton Industrial Dispersion policy, which had been successful under the 1945 Labour government.<sup>84</sup> If this suggested that Labour had no *new* ideas on economic rebuilding, Roberts argued that this would be backed up by a ‘radical and progressive agricultural policy’(along the lines suggested by the WRCL). He re-iterated the WRCL’s plans to extend water and electricity supplies to remote rural areas. There were promises of radical education packages, technical colleges, and the extension of NHS health services. Pensions would be increased. It was only after the presentation of economic, social and welfare policies that Roberts presented Labour’s case for constitutional reform. Here can be noted a marked shift in his own position following the lessons of the Parliament for Wales campaign. He defended Labour’s record on Wales, disagreeing with those who argued that Labour’s colonial policy and its Welsh policy demonstrated duplicity, on the grounds that ‘Wales is not ready for self-government’.<sup>85</sup>

The reason for this was the north-south divide and the absence of a single notion of nationhood which would unite the Welsh along social and cultural lines. The Parliament for Wales campaign had proved this fact.

Goronwy Roberts success as a representative of the nationalist and radical tradition was based quite firmly on the modernising appeal of the Labour party in Welsh speaking Wales. It was based on the premise that a Labour government could and would deliver economic reforms that would stimulate industry and solve the unemployment problems in many of the rural areas (and on his capacity to 'serve' the local community even if Labour did not form a government).

Labour's popularity was therefore twofold. In addition to an attractive package of policies for rural north Wales, the candidate's support for Welshness (including devolution) and an overwhelming desire to preserve and protect the local 'gwerin' was clearly attractive. These were all ingredients in Labour's success after 1945. The final ingredient which cemented that success was the failure of rival political parties to mount a sustained challenge.

#### ***The lack of a credible political alternative.***

Labour's victories in Merioneth and Anglesey in the general election of 1951 confirmed the party's new found dominance of north-west Wales. Such was the scale of its dominance in Caernarvonshire by 1951 that the seat, won only six years earlier, was

being described in the national press as an 'impregnable' Labour stronghold.<sup>86</sup> As Table 2 indicates, this dominance continued throughout the 1950s.

**Table 2: Caernarfonshire General Election Results, 1945-59.**

YEAR	LABOUR	LIBERAL	CONSERV	PLAID	TURNOUT
1945	22,043 (55.3)	15,637 (39.3)	No Candidate	2,152 (5.4)	77.7
1950	18,369 (49.1)	7,791 (20.9)	6,315 (16.9)	4,882 (13.1)	85.9
1951	22,375 (62.4)	No Candidate	13,479 (37.6)	No Candidate	82.5
1955	17,682 (50.2)	3,277 (9.3)	8,461 (24.0)	5,815 (16.5)	82.4
1959	17,506 (51.0)	No Candidate	9,564 (27.8)	7,293 (21.2)	83.4

Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.

Labour's results in Caernarvonshire were now more typical of those expected in south Wales. Roberts was proud of the fact that the margin of his victories were all the more notable for the fact that this was 'not Rhondda or Llanelli'.<sup>87</sup>

In Merioneth the picture was less spectacular but no less impressive, for this was an unlikely Labour constituency. The popularity of T.W. Jones and of Labour's interest in rural, Welsh speaking, areas were important aspects of the party's success. As Table 3 indicates, Labour's success in Merioneth could not be taken for granted. Yet despite this, the party's tenure was not seriously challenged in the elections of 1955 and 1959.



**Table 3: Merioneth General Election Results, 1945-59.**

YEAR	LABOUR	LIBERAL	CONSERV	PLAID	TURNOUT
1945	8,383 (35.4)	8,495 (35.8)	4,474 (18.5)	2,448 (10.3)	82.2
1950	8,577 (34.6)	9,647 (38.8)	3,846 (15.5)	2,754 (11.1)	88.8
1951	10,505 (42.9)	9,457 (38.7)	4,505 (18.4)	No Candidate	87.3
1955	9,056 (38.3)	6,374 (26.9)	3,001 (12.7)	5,243 (22.1)	86.2
1959	9,095 (40.8)	8,119 (36.3)	No Candidate	5,127 (22.9)	84.5

Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.

The political parties it faced at General Elections were either politically, financially or organisationally incapable of mounting effective, realistic challenges to Labour's dominance.

#### *The Conservative party*

Ironically, Labour's victories in north-west Wales in 1951 occurred against the trend for the party's fortunes at UK level. Labour lost the 1951 election to the Conservative party despite obtaining its highest vote ever, (fourteen million, or 48.8 per cent). This was the beginnings of the party's first 'wilderness years', a turbulent period of internal debate and disunity. Having won in 1951, the Conservatives consolidated their position with further victories in 1955 and 1959. However, the party failed to capitalise on this success, with

no real improvements in Wales. As Table 4 shows, whilst the Conservatives obtained 25-30 per cent of the vote in Wales, it did abysmally in north-west Wales. With the exception of its performance in Caernarfonshire in 1951, when a (rare) two-way contest saw the party poll an impressive 37.6 per cent, it performed below the Welsh average in Caernarfonshire and well below the average in Merioneth for the entire period.

**Table 4: Conservative party electoral performance, 1945-59 (% of vote)**

Year	UK	Wales	Caernarfonshire	Merioneth
1945	36.2	16.5	No candidate	18.5
1950	40.0	21.0	16.9	15.5
1951	44.3	27.6	37.6	18.4
1955	46.6	26.7	24.0	12.7
1959	46.6	29.6	27.8	No cand.

**Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.**

The party's performance in the north-west was at best typical and frequently worse than its performance at Welsh level. During the 1950s, the Conservative party won 19 of a possible 144 constituency seats in Wales at general elections. Its best performance came in 1959 when it won 6 seats out a total of 36. The party's core support – and its (comparative) failure to build on this in Wales after the Second World War is a crucial but much understudied area of Welsh political history.<sup>88</sup>

The Conservative's failure to convert its UK popularity into success in Wales was not a new phenomenon. These problems dated back to the nineteenth century, specifically to the extension of the franchise in 1885. Increased democracy was a disaster for the party in

Wales. Its dismal showing in the 1950s showed little change from its equally poor performance in the period from 1885 to 1910, when it had won only 32 out of a possible 272 seats. In 1906 the party failed to win a single Welsh seat, a feat which was not repeated until 1997. Hostility towards the party was deeply rooted. During the second half of the nineteenth century it developed a reputation as the party of the often despised landed elite and of the Anglican church. As a result, Welsh society thus became deeply divided with several cleavages – class, culture, language and religion – tending to reinforce each other. As a consequence, the Liberals and Radicals came to speak for the vast majority – the Welsh non-conformist middle and working class and the peasantry – whilst the Tories represented the interests of the Anglican, anglicised, property owning minority. This could create (neglected) pockets of strength; but no real domination.

Neither did the party's position in Wales improve in the inter-war period. In marked contrast to Scotland, where fear of socialism consolidated the middle class vote behind the Conservatives and a mixture of Protestantism, Orangeism and Unionism, the Tory cause in Wales remained enfeebled and marginalized until the 1930s.<sup>89</sup> Electoral performances remained poor. In seven general elections between 1918 and 1939, the party secured only 37 victories out of a possible 252.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, despite the changes occurring in Welsh society, the party's strength remained very localised, this strength being confined to the coastal strip from Swansea to Newport, Monmouthshire and Breconshire, and among voters in north Wales coastal resorts.<sup>91</sup> Even when the Labour party was in crisis, the Conservative party offered little attraction to Welsh voters. If any event in the inter-war period signalled the redundant nature of Conservatism among the

Welsh, it was the collapse of the Labour government in 1931. Whereas support for the Labour party in Britain as a whole decreased from 37 per cent in 1929 to 30.8 per cent in 1931, support for the party in Wales actually increased from 43.9 per cent to 44.1 per cent.

When the party enjoyed success, it was in borough constituencies – constituencies which typically contained a higher percentage of prosperous, English speaking, voters. There were certainly Tory farmers, but seldom enough to provide a strong electoral platform. Lack of support for the party in the 1950s was perhaps partly based on traditional suspicions. As work by Jones et al has suggested, one of the party's long standing problems so far as attracting Welsh voters is concerned, was its status as 'an English party in Wales'.<sup>92</sup>

Recent research suggests that 'the Conservatives share of middle class support in Wales was 15 percentage points lower than in any other region of Britain'.<sup>93</sup> Not only, therefore, could Conservative difficulties be understood by the fact that Wales had a proportionately larger working class than the rest of Britain, but also by the fact that the Welsh middle class was more strongly anti-Conservative than in the rest of Britain. Jones et al. argue that there was a 'specific, deep rooted perception of the Conservatives among the Welsh population as being a fundamentally 'English' party'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, anti-Conservatism may now be a part of 'Welshness' and an element in Labour's appeal. However, these comments provide an uncertain guide to opinion in the 1950s. The Conservative's policy statements on Wales during the 1950s did not demonstrate a neglect of Welsh values or



interests. In *The Conservative Party and Welsh Affairs* (1951) the party argued that it was not an anti-Welsh spirit which animated objections to devolution. Rather, it argued that those who campaigned for a Welsh parliament were irresponsible, careless and impractical. In other words, those who sought a Welsh parliament were raising false hopes among the Welsh people. Devolution was not a 'quick-fix' solution to the problems of Wales. Only through practical policies could these problems be solved. In contrast to official Labour policy, the Conservatives acknowledged that Wales did have 'special problems' and 'national aspirations' that had to be addressed. The Tories argued that Labour's centralism had gone too far in making local authorities the tools of Whitehall. But rather than proposing devolution (which would weaken government and the union) it favoured strengthened local authorities. In particular it sought to extend local control for the humane and effective operation of social services.

Neither did Conservative candidates neglect local issues. Like Labour and the Liberal parties, prospective candidates talked of the need for 'vigorous policies of expansion' in north-west Wales. Better roads, water supplies and electricity were high on the party's agenda. Depopulation was also a concern. Like Labour, the Conservative party was concerned over the loss of 'young people' from Welsh rural areas. In a speech which could well have been made by his political opponent, the party's candidate for Caernarfonshire, J. E. Bryn Davies, argued in 1951:

Our tradition, our culture and our language are in the hands of the young people. We must by all means encourage them to safeguard and improve upon the heritage of our forefathers<sup>95</sup>

As Goronwy Roberts conceded, the Conservative party had gone a long way in recognising the distinctive needs of Wales. For many pragmatists and technocrats within the Labour party, like Roberts, the Conservative party's plans for balancing private and public initiatives as a means of attracting industry to rural Wales were often more attractive than those which placed the entire burden on government. In the party's 1959 general election manifesto *The Next Five Years* the party argued that local unemployment, brought about by a combination of 'markets, methods and machines', could only be attacked through positive government intervention. This would involve capital grants for building new factories combined with subsidised rents for government built factories. Both these policies were designed to be of 'particular help' to Scotland and Wales.

However, as the party's dismal electoral performances indicated, the message was not getting through to the local electorate. This was again despite the fact that the party selected distinctly 'Welsh' candidates to contest the north-west constituencies. Like its political rivals, the Tory party increasingly opted for local and Welsh speaking candidates. In 1951 the local press described the party's candidate for Caernarfonshire, a Welsh speaking farmer from Pwllheli, as 'the best candidate the Conservative party have had for years...a patriotic Welshman'. Davies increased the party's share of the vote, but this was largely due to the transferred loyalties of many local Liberals. At times, the views held by these candidates on local issues differed little from those held by Labour's candidates. In 1955 the local Liberal Association went as far as to present both Labour and Conservative candidates with a list of key questions which would enable their own

supporters to decide who to support in the general election. This was not conducive to retaining the party's 'core' support.

Social and economic realities were more important as explanations of the Tories' limited appeal to middle class voters and farmers at least. Wales still differed from England by being, on aggregate, poorer and more working class. North-west Wales was one of several regions of the UK which did not enjoy the benefits associated with economic growth in the 1950s. During the 'affluent years' of the 1950s when many English voters had 'never had it so good', voters in north-west Wales had suffered due to the fact that many of the factors which ensured support for the party in England, and other parts of Wales, either did not apply or did not apply in large enough measures to ensure electoral success.

What undermined the party was its failure to bring 'British' levels of prosperity to north-west Wales. This accentuated the voters alienation from a party they already mistrusted. The Tryweryn controversy, which had been a burdensome issue to the Labour party, added to its problems. The party's installation of a Minister of State for Welsh Affairs was no more successful. Affectionately known as 'Dai Bananas', Sir David Maxwell Fyfe and Henry Brooke, both unfortunate incumbents of the office in the 1950s, were treated with derision by rival Welsh politicians and the Welsh language press. The party's lack of interest in the issues surrounding Tryweryn were more a symptom of its failure than a cause. The Conservatives' London leaders did not seem able to comment in ways that attracted sympathy in north-west Wales.

However, despite its many problems, the end of the 1950s saw the emergence of a new generation of young Conservative activists (including the party's prospective candidate for Caernarfon, Tom Hooson, and the prospective MP for Aberafon, Geoffrey Howe). They pioneered a more enlightened attitude towards Wales in the 1960s and 1970s. This new spirit of 'radicalism' is worthy of note because it identified weaknesses in the Conservative case during the 1950s, and because the new radicals strengthened it in the 1970s.

In 1959 a section of the 'Bow Group', the 'Young Conservatives in Wales' published a mammoth 35,000 word pamphlet, *Work for Wales: Gwaith i Gymru*. This was openly critical of the party's policies and record in Wales. Shrewd in its analysis of Tory failure in Wales, it argued that the party had failed to address itself purposely to a Welsh audience. The party's poor record was symptomatic of its image as an 'English' party. However 'quaint' this assertion was – the authors pointing to the fact that 97% of the Welsh electorate actually voted for 'English' parties – it was an electoral noose. A positive step towards addressing this problem would be the creation of a 'Conservative Party of Wales'.<sup>96</sup> This would not be achieved overnight, but it might create the 'gradual growth of the Welsh Conservative vote'. A change in attitudes was required socially and politically. The people of Wales had to come to terms with the realities of economic change. Tough decisions lay ahead. These decisions could not be made with one eye on 'the romantic policy of preserving industries', on 'cherishing decay', but by coming to terms with reality and the future.



Diversification of industry should be a vital component of a new Tory strategy. Private investment, attracted by 'positive inducements' and combined with 'special investment allowances' to encourage industrial investment in areas of high unemployment, would help to encourage new industry. However, it was also essential that Wales 'sold' itself in an increasingly competitive industrial arena. Industrialists had to be convinced that Welsh workers were second to none in terms of loyalty and co-operation. The authors noted that 'the long traditions of industrial strikes in coal mining and the migration to England of militant Welsh trade unionists' had created a 'dismal and unjust' perception of Wales.

The pamphlet also offered specific proposals for dealing with the problems facing north-west Wales. In agriculture, Welsh farmers would have to come to terms with reality. In the long term, 'Welsh agriculture will support fewer people at higher standards'. Whilst acknowledging the fact that amalgamation aroused strong feelings in Wales, the authors fundamentally rejected the conservation of small units, the Welsh hill farm or 'tyddyn', on cultural grounds and in defiance of economics:

This type of argument is frequently advanced by literary Welshmen living comfortably in Cardiff, Aberystwyth or London. This is the wrong ground to pitch a battle in defence of the Welsh environment.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, new innovative approaches had to be taken in the slate industry. A roofing service, supplying and fitting slates anywhere in the country, was one option. Another was to promote the sale of slate in terms of quality rather than price. Twenty-five year guarantees on slate roofs would help the industry to counter the fact that alternative roofing products were cheaper. Tourism was also to be welcomed. On the one hand,

tourism was an excellent means of promoting 'a busier Wales', whilst on the other 'the throb of increased spending' would help to stimulate the Welsh economy.

The scale of the task facing government was vast. This was no time for sentimentality. Ten thousand jobs were needed in the Welsh countryside. Half of these were needed in Gwynedd, the other half in mid Wales. To tackle the problem, parts of Gwynedd should be made development areas. However, the onus on development should not be the sole responsibility of central government. On the contrary, the authors were highly critical of the fact that local authorities had 'failed to take the elementary steps necessary for the establishment of new industry'. Weak local authorities should therefore be abolished, with six large counties established to replace the present thirteen. Again, however, these were not problems that could be solved overnight – nor problems with the state could solve by trying to 'buck' the market. The slow emergence of a 'Thatcherite' approach – identified by historians of the British Conservative party – had its parallels in Wales.<sup>98</sup>

If the future for the Conservative party in Wales was potentially more encouraging, its short term prospects in north-west Wales continued to look bleak. During the 1950s it had failed to dent Labour majorities in north-west Wales. Despite some promising policies and commitments, tradition or traditionalism had ensured that the party remained deeply unpopular among a large section of the local electorate. Economic and social changes (including the perceived growth of the middle class), which had ensured the party's success in England, were invisible in most part of Wales – particularly in poor, Welsh speaking regions, such as the north-west. Even in the early 1950s, the Conservative party

relied heavily on its ability to attract the votes of discontented centre-right local Liberals to mount a serious challenge at election times. Although politically unsuccessful, this strategy had a more profound impact on the ailing Liberal party than on the Tories.

### *The Liberal Party*

The decade after 1945 was particularly painful for the Liberal party. A decline which was well advanced before 1945 came to fruition after 1945.<sup>99</sup> Across Britain the party paid the price after the war for mistakes it made in the inter-war period – in particular the excessive support it gave to the National Government of 1931 and the Conservative government thereafter. This association posed both political and organisational difficulties for the Liberal party. In many constituencies, local Liberal associations were left to act as little more than auxiliaries of Conservative organisations, and as a result were usually defective and in many places rudimentary.<sup>100</sup> In the period after 1945 the party (in the UK as a whole) was ‘squeezed out’ in the shires by Conservatism and by Labour in Britain’s industrial heartlands. In north-west Wales it was also ‘squeezed out’ by Labour’s appeal to rural areas and to both Labour and Plaid Cymru’s challenge to its status as a representative of Welsh ‘nationalist’ interests.

The decline of the Liberal party after 1945 has been afforded surprisingly little historical attention. There is a limited literature on the party at UK level, but these works pay little specific attention to Wales. Literature specifically on the fate of the party in Wales is even more sparse. The overwhelming image of the party after 1945 is depressing. John Stevenson argues that the 1945 election was a ‘disaster’ for the Liberal party. The decay

of grassroots organisation, well advanced before the war, worsened during the 1950s as the party 'faced extinction'.<sup>101</sup> The party was also in trouble politically. Roy Douglas aptly entitles a chapter on the post 1945 period 'Between the Millstones', and describes a party squeezed-out by a two party antithesis at UK level.<sup>102</sup> In Wales the party was either dead or mortally wounded after the Second World War. David Roberts views the post 1945 period as 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales'.<sup>103</sup> The party was in turmoil, lacking a coherent or credible strategy and political message. The 'strength' of the party at Welsh (as opposed to UK) level disguised the fact that the party's members were in fact a 'disparate team', divided ideologically to the left and right of the political spectrum. Other Welsh historians also view the party's fortunes after 1945 pessimistically. As J. Graham Jones has argued, the party failed to become a radical-nationalist alternative to Labour. Problematically, the Welsh Liberal party increasingly appeared 'a relatively conservative party' and as a result drove 'radical thinkers disillusioned with Labour into the arms of Plaid Cymru'.<sup>104</sup>

As Table 5 indicates, support for the party slumped dramatically after 1945, both at UK and Wales levels. Despite this, rural Wales remained one of only a handful of Liberal strongholds throughout Britain. Only twelve Liberal MP's were returned in the general election of 1945, but seven of these represented Welsh constituencies. In 1950, when the party's representation at Westminster fell to nine, five came from Wales. However, these figures often flattered to deceive. In Wales, the party had lost Caernarfon Boroughs – Lloyd George's seat until his death in 1945 – to the Conservatives in 1945, along with Caernarfonshire. By 1950 both Anglesey and Merioneth were tantalisingly close to



Labour's grasp, Merioneth eluding Labour by only 112 votes. In 1951, the party's share of seats in Wales fell to three, Labour victories in Merioneth and Anglesey providing the latest casualties.

**Table 5: Liberal party's percentage share of the vote in General Elections, 1945-64.**

	United Kingdom	Wales	Caernarvonshire	Merioneth
1945	9.0	15.2	39.3	35.8
1950	9.1	12.6	20.9	38.8
1951	2.6	7.7	No Candidate	38.7
1955	2.7	7.3	9.3	26.9
1959	5.9	5.3	No Candidate	36.3

**Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections***

Following its defeat in 1945, the Caernarfonshire Liberal Association fell apart. As in Anglesey, bitter in-fighting characterised the 1950s. However, in Merioneth the party declared following its defeat in 1951 that 'there would be no question of the abandonment of the Liberal cause in Merioneth'.<sup>105</sup> This symbolised a dogged, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to marshal the forces of Liberalism during the 1950s.

The 1950s were a stagnant period for the party in north-west Wales. Despite the party's slight resurgence following Jo Grimond's accession to the party leadership in place of Clem Davies in 1956, the party remained divided, despondent and defeated. Bitter internal fighting, reflecting disagreements over party strategy and policy. Together with organisational and financial problems, this blighted the party's attempts at rebuilding. Under six per cent of Welsh voters remained 'loyal' to the party by 1959.<sup>106</sup> Even in

constituencies like Merioneth, where support for the party remained strong, it was still incapable of winning. By the end of the 1950s, the party in north-west Wales was in a sorry state. As a report on party organisation, written in 1960, argued 'the position in north Wales is unimproving'. An accompanying list of north Wales constituencies confirmed the diagnosis. These ranged from Anglesey – 'dead beat', Caernarfon 'ticking over', Conwy, 'no enthusiasm', East Flint 'first executive meeting for two years held this month', to Merioneth 'not yet adopted a new candidate'.<sup>107</sup>

Disagreements over the political direction of the party after the war were profound. It was not surprising that the Liberal party in Wales lacked a clear strategy after 1945. Divisions over aims and values were brought into sharp focus by Labour's increasing dominance and the advent of a Labour government with a commanding majority. A major problem for the party was its inability to devise policies that were *distinctly* different from those offered by Labour and the Tories. 'New Liberal' ideology was safely housed within Labour's philosophy whilst 'Old' Liberal ideology was accommodated by modern Conservatism. As the 1945 Nuffield study noted:

There was a very decisive verdict against the Liberal party, but it might be rash to state that there was a verdict against Liberalism, the beliefs and prescriptions of which found so large a place in the propaganda of other parties<sup>108</sup>

The party's policies had the potential to please, but they failed to provoke or challenge. Lacking distinct economic arguments, and a basis of support which could be used to challenge the Labour party in most areas, in Wales the party over-relied upon and over-estimated the importance of devolution as a political weapon. In 1945 Emrys Roberts, the

party's candidate in Merioneth, had been 'seriously concerned' that the party should include a 'proposal in regard to Wales' in its election manifesto, suggesting that the establishment of a Secretary of State and a Welsh National Development Council would not be inappropriate.<sup>109</sup> In the event, the party's manifesto advocated only 'suitable measures of devolution' which would enable both Scotland and Wales 'to assume greater responsibility in the management of their domestic affairs'.<sup>110</sup> In July 1946 six Welsh Liberal MP's sponsored a new clause in the National Health Service Bill, which would transfer to Wales the administration of its own hospitals and specialist services. The party's leader, Clem Davies, was also a firm supporter of Welsh devolution, consistently supporting devolutionary solutions to Welsh social and economic problems. Assured by these positive attitudes and support at the highest level, by the late 1940s some sections of the party in Wales were pushing hard for a firm commitment to devolution and in particular a Parliament for Wales.

However, Welsh issues – particularly the question of devolution – brought uncertainties over Liberal policy into sharp focus. In north-west Wales the party was determined that it should continue to carry the beacon of Welsh 'nationalist' aspirations. Support for devolution was an intrinsic feature of the party's desire to develop specifically 'Welsh' and 'radical' policies. This made nonsense of the party's association with the Tories (see below), but it also highlighted differences of opinion over devolution within the Liberal party and the extent to which the party was dominated at UK level by conservative elements in the decade after 1945. In 1947, the Liberal party's statement of policy on the machinery of government had confirmed a firm commitment to devolution for Scotland



and Wales, with, in the case of Wales, a separate Secretary of State. However, an amendment by Solihull Liberal Association attempted to water down the policy. Whilst agreeing on the need for Welsh control over matters such as housing, education, electricity, gas and public health, it opposed control of trade, commerce and industry and called for the 'strengthening and more effective operation of all Government departments in Scotland and Wales' rather than devolved parliaments. There was little doubt among some Liberals that the success of the Solihull amendment would deal a fatal blow to the party in north-west Wales. Martin Rees, general secretary of the Merioneth Liberal Association, wrote thus to the chairman of the Liberal party in London:

1. The deletion of the devolution clause by the adoption of the Solihull amendment would, without a shadow of a doubt, be a serious blow to Liberalism in Wales. Large numbers of us – and I say this very deliberately – would have to reconsider our attitude and our allegiance if the party goes back on its election manifesto declaration on devolution.
2. What Solihull propose as Liberal policy in this particular matter is precisely what Prime Minister Attlee offered the Welsh Parliamentary Party last year when he summarily declined to consider the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales. If the Liberal Assembly endorses Attlee's attitude by passing the Solihull amendment, what are we going to tell our people, and what will be our reply to the very active Welsh Nationalist Party? You will agree that a big question of principle is involved.
3. The rejection of Clause (i) in favour of the amendment would gravely jeopardise the position of the Liberal Federation of Wales in the efforts it is ably making in North, and particularly in South Wales, to rally the forces of Liberalism, not only against Socialism and Tory infiltration but against the reactionary Nationalist elements whose strength must not be underestimated.<sup>111</sup>

With Clem Davies at the helm, the appeal to Liberal HQ did not fall on deaf ears. The Solihull amendment was 'overwhelmingly' defeated. However, the incident is crucial in understanding the anxieties of the Liberal party in Wales during the period. Even for members in south Wales, it was evident that leading the way on devolution was vital in holding off the growing threat posed by Plaid Cymru. As J. Walter Jones from the Neath



Liberal Association pointed out, in 'at least five constituencies' there was a danger 'that the Nationalists might wreck Liberal representation in North Wales'.<sup>112</sup> Commitment to devolution was therefore both an attempt to retain an intrinsic element of the party's traditional radicalism and a political move aimed at staving off political rivals and preserving the party's remaining seats in north Wales. The Liberal party's influential role in establishing the ill-fated Parliament for Wales campaign in 1950 was another strand in the party's effort to 'push the boat into the water' and lead the way on devolution.<sup>113</sup>

However, support for devolution could also be problematic inside Wales. The Parliament for Wales campaign highlighted the party's political and organisational difficulties. Two factors are particularly worthy of note. The campaign itself had been initiated by the Liberal party on New Year's Eve 1949,<sup>114</sup> but it lacked the resources and organisational infrastructure to capitalise on its involvement. Only Megan Lloyd George generated any real interest. Instead, media attention was hijacked by Labour's new generation of MPs and candidates, who (successfully) built their own reputations around their Welshness, and whose defiance of party in support of the campaign won a number of admirers. Moreover, it was not only the Labour party who capitalised on the interest afforded to the Parliament for Wales campaign. Plaid Cymru did the same. This caused irritation within the Liberal party. As one member of the party in Merioneth wrote to Emrys Roberts, 'It will be difficult to get Merioneth's Liberals to wholeheartedly back the campaign, but it should be made clear that it is not the 'Blaid's' campaign, but a Liberal one'.<sup>115</sup>

The party's involvement and role in the Parliament for Wales campaign complicated (and dominated) its electoral strategy. The campaign was clearly part of an attempt by the party to ward off Plaid's growing popularity in Merioneth and was a tactical move to ensure the preservation of the party's seats in Merioneth and Anglesey. The Liberal party suggested it would not oppose Labour MP's who supported the Parliament for Wales campaign, if in return Labour would allow Liberals a free run elsewhere. In the north-west this would have guaranteed a Labour victory in Caernarfon and Liberal victories in Merioneth and Anglesey. However, this suggestion paid little attention to facts often highlighted in the local Liberal press: that Labour HQ opposed the campaign; that the two Liberal constituencies were high on Labour's list of target seats and that Labour enjoyed a commanding majority in Caernarvonshire – Liberal candidate or not.

This was a complex but ultimately weak strategy. The party's defeat in Merioneth was facilitated by Plaid Cymru's decision to withdraw its candidate, Gwynfor Evans, at a late stage in the election campaign. Although officially Plaid's decision was justified on the grounds that Emrys Roberts was a supporter of the Parliament for Wales campaign, one Welsh historian has argued that it was in fact a 'tactical manoeuvre to hasten the demise of the Liberal party in Wales'.<sup>116</sup> The party's defeat in Merioneth not only confirmed its total eclipse in north-west Wales, but also the extent to which 'nationalist' sentiments were comfortably contained in the Labour party. As Jo Grimond, writing to Emrys Roberts, regretfully recognised, 'I thought that with no nationalist standing you were safe. It seems to have been a most cruel stroke that Labour should have gained the votes'.<sup>117</sup> These sentiments were shared by local Liberals. As one party supporter argued, 'It was

the nationalist wolf in sheep's clothing that was responsible for the result. We did not even consider such a possibility before the election, or even when we travelled around on polling day'.<sup>118</sup> The party no longer seemed capable of controlling its own destiny. Instead it relied on the participation or non-participation of other parties or on electoral pacts to preserve its own position. In this respect, its relationship with the Conservative party was particularly problematic. The image of close association with the Tories, whether real or imagined, was difficult for the party to escape during the 1950s.

In the early 1950s the Caernarvonshire Liberal Association resisted persistent Tory overtures to reach electoral 'understandings'.<sup>119</sup> When the Liberal party's grave organisational and financial position meant it failed to field candidates in 1951 and 1959, it was difficult to escape rumours that a pact with the Tories had been arranged. Its promise that 'not fighting does not mean co-operation with other parties' fell on deaf ears.<sup>120</sup> More problematic was the fact that when it had no candidate, the party actively encouraged local supporters to vote for other parties. In 1951 the party was keen to ensure that supporters made the right decisions. It sent a questionnaire to both Labour and Conservative candidates in the Caernarfonshire constituency, which the two candidates subsequently answered through the local press.<sup>121</sup> However, the major concern was the damage caused by failing to field Liberal candidates, financial difficulties or not. The minority who opposed the decision not to contest the 1951 election pointed to the huge 'political error' which the party had made. In particular, they argued that in areas where the party's roots were strong, the decision would be devastating. An example cited was

the Lleyn Peninsula (a highly agricultural area where the party remained strong) where 'the decision would do nothing for the party'.<sup>122</sup>

Yet the appeal of political association with the Tories was not the only option aired by the Liberals in the early 1950s. More 'Welsh' Liberals considered the merits of political pacts with Plaid Cymru. Having lost Caernarvonshire in 1945, the subsequent loss of Merioneth and Anglesey in 1951 were priceless defeats for the party, eroding even further a diminishing radical image. Even without the presence of a Plaid Cymru candidate, the party had been unable to sustain its 'Welsh' vote in Merioneth. In Merioneth and Anglesey, where Liberal voters deserted to the Conservative party in 1951, Plaid support turned towards Labour.<sup>123</sup> This did not augur well for the revival of the Liberal party in north-west Wales. As *Y Cymro* argued, 'If Liberals can turn their backs on their candidates in Anglesey and Merioneth, why should they not do so in Caernarvonshire, and, if so, what is the point of selecting a candidate?'<sup>124</sup> For some, the answer was to unite the forces of liberalism with other 'radical' parties. Prominent local Liberal figures encouraged discussion of an 'agreement' with Plaid Cymru. Unlike association with the Tories, this would be a much more natural affiliation for local Welsh speaking, non-conformist, and radical Liberals.

Shared support for the Parliament for Wales campaign demonstrated the logic behind the move. Rather than divide the forces behind Welsh devolution, such an agreement could mean an extra five thousand votes for whichever party carried the banner, whether it was 'Welsh Liberal Party' or 'Nationalist Liberal Party'. Others took the suggestion a stage



further, suggesting a more implausible pact with both Plaid *and* the Tories. As *Y Cymro* noted, the idea of a 'Welsh Liberal Conservative Party' was not only bizarre but akin to 'mixing milk and vinegar'.<sup>125</sup>

Despite the failure of these attempts, the fermentation of 'radical' elements within a 'Welsh Radical' party (or similar) were a regular feature of attempts to fuse pro-devolutionist elements within one party. Several forces were at work. First, as has already been argued, many criticised both the Liberal party and Plaid Cymru for opposing local Labour candidates who supported the Parliament for Wales campaign. Such people questioned the logic of often fielding three candidates who supported the principle of Welsh devolution (and thus splitting the vote) against Conservative candidates who were opposed to devolution. A sensible solution was therefore to fuse pro-devolutionists into one camp. These were discussions which extended throughout the 1950s. Senior local Liberal figures tried to persuade political rivals in the Labour party to adopt the idea.

One of the major supporters of a new radical party was Madoc Jones. For Madoc Jones it was clear 'that in north Wales the Labour party and the Liberal party have much in common, springing from the same parent roots'. He regarded Megan Lloyd George's decision to join Labour as odd for a 'professed radical', bearing in mind Labour's 'strained attitude' towards devolution. Labour had become 'insensitive to the rights of minorities and intent only upon centralisation of executive power in HQ'. Labour 'instead of becoming great had become massive'. He urged Labour MPs not to resign their seats in protest at their party HQ's attitude towards Wales, but encouraged them to work more

closely with 'radical elements in the Liberal party', not only on the issue of devolution but also on economic reform and welfare. However, Jones' aspirations for a new radical party were not well received in the upper-echelons of the Liberal party. As Jones wrote to a political friend:

I have got myself into trouble up here by suggesting consideration of a United Radical Party in Wales. It did not go down well in the last Liberal Party Wales executive.<sup>126</sup>

As a result, Jones lost interest in his personal campaign, explaining to another political friend that his flirtations were due to him being 'frustrated and bored' with the Liberal party.<sup>127</sup>

Organisational problems were another reason for the party's decline. In the years of success, organisation had not been maintained efficiently or adequately. In the party's hour of need it could not be relied upon to stand up to the rigours of political battle. Organisation, like support, had been taken for granted when times were good. When organisation became a serious problem after 1945, party divisions made them difficult to solve. There were fundamental differences over what caused organisational problems and how they should be overcome.

There were two proposed remedies. On the one hand, party loyalists and stalwarts asserted that 're-organisation from top to bottom' was the only means of staging rehabilitation.<sup>128</sup> Others were less prepared to accept the long and painful process of recovery that this entailed. Instead a 'quick-fix' solution was deemed preferable, electoral pacts and co-operation being high on this agenda. For the latter, poor organisation was

regarded as the result, not the cause of the party's problems. As the Caernarfon Association argued:

It is no use talking about organisation, and even if you get the best organisation in the world we can never win the seat unless we get co-operation with the Conservative and perhaps the Welsh Nationalist Party. If these forces combine we can easily win.<sup>129</sup>

Political alliances were also a means of shoring up the party's grim finances. In the run up to the 1950 election, the Caernarfon association admitted that it had 'no funds' to fight the coming election. A sum of five hundred pounds was required to contest the election. However, at an emergency meeting to address the problem, donations immediately raised £340 from those present – proof in itself of the middle class orientation of the party in the early fifties. The party's financial situation locally and its lack of organisational planning and common sense at national level was, however, a source of great irritation to the party's members and activists. An example of this was the national party's tendency to fund candidates in hopeless constituencies, whilst at the same time being unable to fund campaigns in traditional heartlands. Elwyn Thomas, the party's prospective candidate in Caernarvonshire, argued that it was 'disgraceful that the party can put up a candidate in Aberafon where it is fighting a 30,000 majority, but not somewhere with deep Liberal traditions'<sup>130</sup> – perhaps missing the point that Caernarfonshire was now just another lost cause.

Even in Merioneth, where the party still performed well, organisation was a problem. As one party activist argued in the aftermath of defeat in 1951:

It is all very well blaming Plaid Cymru, but the truth is that we have not kept our organisation in order. We did less work than any of the other parties between elections and therefore a lot of blame should be placed on the Liberals of Merioneth, myself included.<sup>131</sup>

Money mattered because without it there was no local activity and no parliamentary contest. By the early 1950s the estimated cost of putting up a candidate (£800) could no longer be justified in many constituencies, including Caernarfonshire.<sup>132</sup> No longer was the party in a position to compete 'against two wealthy parties'. Lacking the financial resources of the Conservatives or the backing of the unions, the party 'was unusually dependent upon unpaid, amateur, and often makeshift assistance'. Moreover, as contemporary psephologists argued, this was not helped by the very nature and traditions of a party that expressed a great aversion to central direction and a limited esteem for the benefits of organisation.<sup>133</sup> Good intentions were not matched by the drive and determination to see change through. Crucial time and ground was lost as the party dabbled with different strategies.

The Caernarfonshire Liberal Association provides a classic example of the inability to force through organisational improvements. Following defeat in 1945 and a sorry performance in 1950, the local association decided to review and modernise its organisation. By 1951 nothing had happened. As a senior member of the local Liberal association argued, 'it was surprising that the party had done nothing about organisation since the last election'. As he continued, 'the result is that thousands of Liberals in the constituency have been left without a voice'. Inactivity between elections was a major problem for a party that had to make up ground. As Elwyn Thomas argued:



We cannot hope to win an election with only three weeks work. If we are to have any chance of victory we have to work in the months and years when there is no election. The trouble is that the association leaves all the work to a dozen or so people. It would be totally unfair to ask any candidate to stand with organisation as it is.<sup>134</sup>

Yet when 're-organisation' did eventually take place it bordered on the farcical. In 1951 the Caernarfon Liberal Association decided to 'spring clean' the local association, with the aim of injecting new blood. However, when re-organisation took place, the association reported that 'all the former members had been re-elected'.<sup>135</sup>

This was not just a sign of mis-management. Finding new blood was not easy. As Elwyn Thomas had pointed out, the party had become increasingly reliant on a small band of workers and popular incumbent MPs. Madoc Jones, the North Wales Liberal Federation's press and publicity officer and honorary secretary, was a prime example. Jones ran the NWLF virtually single handedly. As the NWLF's papers show, he was the party's eyes and ears, judge, jury and executioner, a shoulder to cry on and a referee for the party's many quarrels. In 1954, when the party was at a low ebb, Jones launched a series of newsletters entitled *Liberal Lighthouse*, which he described as a 'monthly message of comfort and enthusiasm for a party sorely in need of both'.<sup>136</sup> Neither did Jones' commitment to the Liberal cause go unnoticed by the party's leaders. As Clem Davies opined, 'I believe that the North Wales Liberalism would die of inaction were it not for your enthusiasm, vigour and drive'.<sup>137</sup> The party's MPs also carried a huge organisational and motivational burden. Before her defeat in 1951, Megan Lloyd George had 'carried the Anglesey Liberal Association on her back' – support for the local association being

confined to 'the waving of handkerchiefs' at election times.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, Emrys Roberts carried a significant personal vote in Merioneth – a major factor in the narrow victories of 1945 and 1950.

Following defeat in 1951, Emrys Roberts decided to retire from politics. It was difficult for the party to find a candidate who held the same radical, leftist, Liberal beliefs. As one party activist claimed during a failed attempt to get Roberts to stand again, 'I am afraid that you are the only Liberal who can win the seat for the party without going into partnership with the Tories'.<sup>139</sup> As the decade progressed, the party came to rely on young, inexperienced, candidates who found it hard to cope with the rigours of electoral battles. Geraint Williams, the party's candidate in Caernarfonshire in 1955, was one unfortunate victim of this trend. As *Y Cymro* noted, in a meeting at Groeslon, Williams discussed unions and monopolies with the assembled meeting, but 'failed to get to grips with the audience...and started a fire that he could not put out'. Trying to smother the flames, Williams succeeded only in 'making matters go from bad to worse'. As *Y Cymro* noted, 'in areas like these a parliamentary candidate has to be a political encyclopaedia' – something Williams clearly was not.<sup>140</sup>

Confusion within the party reigned supreme. By the mid the 1950s the Liberal party had become distinctly middle class and had been stripped of most of its former radicalism. At national level the party's appeal was largely limited to the professional middle classes who were not attracted by Labour or Tory doctrines. Unlike its political rivals the party could not rely on an unquestionably 'loyal' vote. Towards the end of the decade the North

Wales Liberal Federation found it increasingly difficult to find candidates to contest the north-west constituencies. The party had lost its radical elements to the Labour party. Others supported pressure groups or left politics altogether. The Liberals' status as the party of 'Welshness' withered away at the hands of both Labour and the emerging Plaid Cymru. Unlike elsewhere in the UK, where the party became a useful third force following Grimond's rise to the party summit, in Wales it had to fight even for this status against the locally significant challenge of Plaid Cymru.

### *Plaid Cymru*

Despite growing interest in Plaid Cymru, its electoral challenge to Labour has not received much attention. Recent work by Laura McAllister describes the period from 1945-59 as 'the modern party's youth', a period when it increasingly acquired the responsibilities and hallmarks of the adult party.<sup>141</sup> John Davies views the same years as ones of modernisation, a period when the party began to break from its founding fathers mould by 'jettisoning' its 'ideological baggage'.<sup>142</sup> Yet the extent of this shift, and its implications for electoral politics, remains unclear from accounts which focus on the party's central leaders and aims.

In the 1920s, the founding fathers of Plaid Cymru had been ill-prepared to lead a conventional political party. A complex aggregate of individuals representing different organisations, they were united (in theory at least) by the common goal of establishing a Welsh government.<sup>143</sup> The dilemma for the party in the inter-war period was to consider how this aim could be achieved. The party in the inter-war years embraced a plethora of

political, cultural and religious concerns (some of which were intertwined). Consequently, it party lacked a regular of distinctive platform upon which electoral foundations could be built. Of these strains, cultural nationalism dominated. Defence of Welsh culture – in particular the Welsh language – became a moulding and motivational factor in the construct of the early party and bore the hallmark of the party's pioneers, notably Saunders Lewis.

The interest in cultural nationalism had profound political implications for Plaid. It led Plaid to adopt a 'pressure-group' philosophy (which permeated the party's political philosophy throughout the twentieth century). In the inter-war years, Plaid was content with its own political ineffectiveness – on condition that it was more successful in its attempts to place the defence of 'Welshness' on other parties political agendas. The importance of pressure-group politics meant that the party's political philosophy and ethos was developed very loosely. This was also considered a vital component of the party's efforts to attract members of other political parties into its ranks. As Saunders Lewis pointed out in 1923: 'Adopting a definite policy would tie us down before we can start work'.<sup>144</sup> The party's active and competitive participation in the political arena was regularly and inconclusively discussed in the inter-war period. Plaid's indifference to Westminster (which the early party blamed for Welsh economic problems) led to a commitment that Plaid MPs would boycott Westminster when elected. Plaid members were also banned from voting for other political parties when Plaid Cymru candidates were not standing.



As a result of the party's narrow platform, its size and its general indifference to the political arena, little progress was made in the period up to the Second World War. Neither did the party present an electoral threat to the Labour party in north-west Wales, or anywhere else in Wales, in the period from 1945-59. As Table 5 shows, support for Plaid Cymru did not rise above 22 per cent in north-west Wales, or a feeble 3.1 per cent in Wales during the period.

**Table 5: Plaid Cymru electoral performance Wales, Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, 1945-59 (% of vote).**

<b>Election</b>	<b>Caernarfonshire</b>	<b>Merioneth</b>	<b>Wales</b>
<b>1945</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>1950</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>1951</b>	<b>No candidate</b>	<b>No candidate</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>1955</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>1959</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>4.8</b>

**Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.**

However, as Table 5 also shows, Plaid did make steady progress in north-west Wales after 1945. In Caernarfonshire an upward trend in party support was discernible, whilst in Merioneth the party began to amass a respectable poll. However, as Table 6 shows, saving deposits rather than winning seats was a more realistic objective for the party across Wales as a whole in the 1940s and 50s.

**Table 6: Number of Plaid Cymru candidates and deposits saved in general elections, 1945-59.**

Election year	No. of candidates	MP's	% of the vote	Deposits saved
1945	7	0	1.2	1
1950	7	0	1.2	1
1951	4	0	0.7	0
1955	11	0	3.1	4
1959	20	0	5.2	6

**Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.**

Yet there was progress. The number of seats the party was able to contest increased, and the average vote for the party also grew. There had always been some potential. In 1945 *Y Cymro*'s assessment of Plaid's electoral performance had been pessimistic:

After twenty years of work and propaganda the harvest has not been fruitful. For better or worse one Welsh mystery has been settled – that is the level of support which the people of Wales want to give to the Welsh Nationalist Party.<sup>145</sup>

However, as it intuitively noted, 'it would be a disaster for any Welsh or Englishman to assume that the Welsh have no interest in their own problems'. This was a view also expressed in the 'Nuffield' study of the 1945 General Election, which argued:

The ill success of these two parties (Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party) may tempt people in England to underestimate the anxiety of so many Scots and Welshmen over the state of their nations, more especially as the political acumen of Englishmen becomes somewhat obtuse in dealing with this problem of nationality within the United Kingdom, a nationality that is inferior but not subordinate, an inner loyalty that has no counterpart in English regional patriotism.<sup>146</sup>

The danger of misinterpreting the levels of support given to Plaid Cymru was not lost on political rivals during the 1950s. As has already been argued, both Labour and the Liberal parties were well aware of the fact that support for Welsh nationalist issues should not be underestimated. There was much potential to be exploited. In 1950, as the Nuffield study almost contemptuously noted, its appeal was restricted to the 'idealist and emotional'. Crudely it categorised Plaid's voters as coming from five elements in Welsh society, 'the Liberal-radical chapel element, some Catholics, old socialists with syndicalist memories, young intellectuals and the sporting vote'. This, at least, was progress. However, for the authors of the 'Nuffield' election study, this was in part a consequence of an amateur approach. Plaid's poor performance was hardly surprising given the fact that its seven candidates were made up of 'one farmer, one minister, three schoolmasters and two poets'; and the fact that the party had only two full time organisers hardly helped.<sup>147</sup>

Plaid took some steps to develop this potential after the war. First, in the aftermath of the 1945 election, the party changed its name from the Welsh Nationalist party to Plaid Cymru, thus dropping the 'nationalist' tag which had been equated with disastrous European events in the period up to 1945. Second, in August 1945 Gwynfor Evans replaced Abi Williams, becoming the party's fifth president (a position he would hold for thirty six years). Evans' rise to the party summit coincided with some definitive shifts in the party's development, notably its internal modernisation, its external reputation and its political direction.<sup>148</sup> Despite the fact that Evans admired and was influenced by individuals who had such a formative influence on the party's establishment and survival, notably Saunders Lewis, his ascendancy allowed Plaid to develop a more modern image,

and to break with the imagery of Welsh intellectualism which had been an burden to the party's development in the inter-war period. A young, non-conformist, pacifist and a self-confessed radical, Evans vision for the party fitted in more appreciably with the political traditions of north-west Wales than the conservative, catholic, reputation which surrounded the party under the tenure of previous presidents.<sup>149</sup> However, as John Davies has argued, despite the apparent modernisation of party philosophy and the 'jettisoning of baggage', 'that baggage had been mislaid rather than consciously abandoned.'<sup>150</sup> The party was still dominated by a cultural and linguistic emphasis – by the shadow of Saunders Lewis. As Davies rightly notes, the contrast between Evans and Lewis (or even Plaid in the 1950s as opposed to the 1930s) was more apparent than real. Like Lewis, Evans feared a rootless and cultureless proletariat (or 'gwerin'), and likewise feared the concentration of economic power in the hands of the state.<sup>151</sup>

However, there were discernible differences. Under Evans leadership, Plaid began to shift notably to the left during the 1950s. Despite being intellectually influenced by Saunders Lewis, Evans (a Welsh learner) was also influenced by English socialists, notably G.D.H. Cole and R.H. Tawney. Under Evans leadership, Plaid's electoral strategy changed. The party committed itself to fighting elections on a much broader geographic scale. As a result, its status as a successful pressure group was developed during the 1950s, as Plaid began to hound the 'big' political parties, notably Labour, when they failed to deliver, or when they dragged their heels on Welsh issues. Plaid's more ambitious electoral strategy immediately bore promising rewards. At by-elections in Ogmere and Aberdare in 1946, Plaid polled 29.4% and 20.0% of the poll, saving deposits and slashing Labour majorities.



In both instances, economic discontent and support for devolution and local issues were notable factors in Plaid's improved performances. However, despite another reasonable performance at another Aberdare by-election, this time in 1954, (when the party polled 16% of the vote and again saved its deposit), Plaid's performances in other by-elections in the 1950s were disappointing. In Wrexham (1955), Newport (1956), Carmarthen (1957) and Pontypool (1958) the party was 'wooden spooned' and lost its deposit on each occasion.

Moreover, Plaid's electoral strategies also lacked refinement. Curiously, the party did not contest the Ogmere seat, where it had performed so well in 1946, in the 1950 election. It failed to even *try* and capitalise on its earlier investment. The reason for this was straightforward. Organisationally, Plaid was severely handicapped at election times. As its by-election performances had suggested, it could perform quite well when a disillusioned electorate could be mobilised through concentrating financial resources and personnel on single seats (factors which were evident again in the 1960s). However, at general elections it lacked both the finances and the manpower to compete adequately. Even in its strongest constituencies, like Caernarfonshire, organisation was still problematic, particularly at election times. In 1955 *Y Cymro* reported that Plaid were guilty of several organisational flaws, which included 'no adverts in the press, no loudspeakers going round the houses, and no posters in shop windows'. Plaid meetings were amongst the poorest attended, and often descended into farce. *Y Cymro* reported that one meeting in Talysarn had attracted an audience of only six, which included two communists. Even the chairman of the meeting had not been aware of the meeting until

earlier in the day. The late arrival of the Plaid candidate ensured that the press were treated to impromptu speeches by the communists as they waited for him to arrive. As the report noted, 'there is a lot of sympathy locally for Plaid's aims but in this campaign in Caernarfon the wheels of the party machine are squeaking'.<sup>152</sup> A party that looked amateur and got no publicity was unlikely to convert opinion.

Lack of finances severely handicapped the party's development in the 1950s. The contradictions evident in pursuing pressure groups politics on the one hand, and attempting to develop as a political party on the other, was not without its problems. If putting all its energies into the Parliament for Wales campaign had brought frustration to the Liberal party's political aims, it also caused Plaid some problems. Plaid failed to contest the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth constituencies in 1951. In part this was a political move. More importantly it also reflected the party's inability to finance and organise support for the Parliament for Wales campaign, *and* two general elections in some twelve months. Overall, the party's emphasis on the Parliament for Wales campaign, as opposed to fighting elections, highlighted the tensions between its status as a pressure group and as an aspiring political party.

However, unlike the Liberal party, Plaid's performance in 1955 indicated that it had not suffered from failing to compete in 1951. In both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, the party improved on its 1950 showing. In Merioneth it doubled its vote. Plaid's respectable performance was also accompanied by a new, more respectable image. In the ten years after the Second World War, it had transformed its reputation in north-west Wales. No

longer was the party associated with the narrow, extreme nationalism of the inter-war period. As *Y Cymro* noted, Plaid's improved performance across Wales, and its presence in the industrial south, gave the party a weapon that 'they can and must use to wake the Labour movement to the scale of Welsh consciousness and nationalism'.<sup>153</sup> This was an important point. Plaid's strength was seen as a pressure group, not a 'proper' political party. The dilemma for the party was that when it competed in electoral contests it (potentially) jeopardised the things which the party ultimately stood for (in particular devolution). As *Y Cymro* astutely pointed out in a preview of the 1955 general election:

The greatest mystery and paradoxes are in Anglesey, Merioneth and Caernarfonshire where three Labour members who supported the Parliament for Wales campaign are fighting for their lives against a party who also support the Parliament for Wales campaign and the cause of peace...as Plaid Cymru have no chance of coming first or second in these constituencies, the attacks on the Labour party and on those particular seats will weaken the cause of both...Plaid Cymru have not made their stand to help the Liberals...it is the Tories that their presence helps in Conway and Caernarfonshire.<sup>154</sup>

Moreover, the party's progress was stalled by the fact that its policies still fell short of addressing the serious political issues of the period. Materialism, rather than the 'higher' political issues which political scientists believe led to 'third-party' surges in the late 1960s and early 1970s, still dominated local politics.<sup>155</sup> As *Y Faner* pointed out in, whilst Plaid Cymru was 'popular' on the Llyn peninsula in Caernarfonshire and whilst it was 'making ground in the quarrying districts', the fact was that 'cheap medicine, glasses and false teeth prevent Labourites from supporting Plaid Cymru'.<sup>156</sup>

The ravaging effects of local depopulation and the question of a Welsh parliament dominated Plaid Cymru's local election campaigns in the 1950s. The party did not



present a well developed economic case, but as Butt-Philip has argued, favoured conservative economics for cultural reasons.<sup>157</sup> Preservation of Welsh communities was accompanied by a concern for traditional Welsh industries (particularly the preservation of the small family farm). Butt Philip views the 'preservationist' streak in Plaid Cymru's politics as vital in understanding the party's 'furious opposition' to periodic plans to turn Welsh farming valleys into water reservoirs in the 1950s.

There is insufficient space here to elaborate on the controversy surrounding one such scheme – the 'drowning' of the Welsh village, Capel Celyn (see above). This is one of the few areas of post 1945 Welsh history to have generated a substantial literature, and a great deal of that literature focuses on Plaid's involvement in the controversy.<sup>158</sup> As has already been argued, Plaid's 'defence' of Capel Celyn and Labour's failure to prevent the scheme from developing has become part of nationalist mythology. It is still regarded by senior Plaid Cymru figures, such as Dafydd Wigley, as *the* key to understanding the party's later successes in north-west Wales from the 1970s onwards.<sup>159</sup> It would be wrong to understate the significance of Tryweryn in boosting Plaid's popularity, especially among young voters. The building of the Tryweryn mythology has also been a crucial factor in maintaining and building up local nationalist consciousness. Yet, at the same time it is important that Tryweryn is seen in its historical context. What is worthy of note here is that Tryweryn did not lead to a 'surge' of support for Plaid Cymru in north-west Wales in the early 1960s. On the contrary, support for Plaid Cymru in Merioneth (where Capel Celyn was situated) actually declined in the 1964 general election. As the party's candidate Gwynfor Evans argued, 'the Tryweryn controversy did not significantly



strengthen the party in Merioneth',<sup>160</sup> a fact collaborated not only by the falling vote but also declining party membership. As the literature that deals with the subject suggests, Tryweryn *was* important to Plaid's development. But with or without Tryweryn, the party still had to address fundamental problems if it was to make progress. For one thing the party still lacked credible and coherent social and economic policies. For another it lacked the organisational structures which would allow it to get its message and appeal across to ordinary voters. It was not Tryweryn but the pragmatic and systematic attention paid to these problems which accounted for Plaid's development in the subsequent decade.

Despite the achievements of the 1945-51 Labour administration, the 1950s were ultimately a frustrating period. North-west Wales had not experienced the warm sun of the 'affluent fifties'. Instead it had faced the bleak realities of continued depopulation, unemployment, declining industries and a Tory government. This had served to make Labour strong. A Tory government perceived to be delivering the goods for Britain as a whole, and failing to do so in north-west Wales, made the party as alien and unattractive to the local electorate as it ever had been. Labour on the other hand was perceived as the only party capable of delivering economic salvation. By the end of the decade, Labour had comfortably established its reputation as the inheritor of the Welsh radical political tradition – a fact aided by the local Labour MPs renegade support of the Parliament for Wales campaign, support for Welsh language issues and Welsh culture, and its concern over the future of the local 'gwerin'. Even in the north-west, where it had been subjected

to hostile attacks over its role in the Tryweryn controversy, the party did not suffer an electoral backlash.

Nonetheless, the long period of Tory dominance, along with events like Tryweryn, had a considerable impact on the Labour party in Wales. They made nonsense of Labour's dominance at election after election. Not a single Welsh MP had supported the Tryweryn project, yet the same MP's lacked any power to prevent the project from taking place. In 1959 Labour's election manifesto committed the next Labour government to installing a Secretary of State for Wales. However, as the 1950s drew to a close, Labour's chances of being in a position to implement this promise, and to put its policies to the test, seemed remote. The party's defeat in the 1959 election was a calamity for the party. Yet it also provided an opportunity for renewal – a chance for the party to re-group, and to present the Tories with a fresh, dynamic challenge, hoping that when it finally achieved power it would inherit an economy that would allow these policies to flourish. In the meantime at least, its position in north-west Wales was safe. However, the 1960s and early 70s would present Labour with even greater challenges, as the economic problems of the 1950s gave birth to new, inter-related problems, the development of which were to have an immense impact on the social and political climate of north-west Wales. These issues will be examined in Chapter Two.

## REFERENCES

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2. See for example, K. O. Morgan, *Labour in Power 1945-51* (Oxford, 1984); H. Pelling, *The Labour Governments 1945-51* (London, 1984); R. Coopey, S. Fielding and N. Tiratsoo (eds.), *The Attlee Years* (London, 1991); M. Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour 1945-51: Building a New Britain* (Manchester, 1997). For the Welsh dimension see K. O. Morgan, 'Power and Glory: War and Reconstruction, 1939-51', in Tanner (et.al.), *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2001), pp.166-89.
3. There was of course continued support for Labour initiatives such as the NHS, government re-direction of industry and (to a lesser extent) nationalisation. Labour won 27 out of 32 Welsh seats in the 1951 general election. For more on the 1945-51 period see Morgan, 'Power and Glory'.
4. A. Walling, 'Modernisation, Policy Debate and Organisation in the Labour Party 1951-64', unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 2001, Chapter Five.
5. J. Lovering, *Gwynedd: A County in Crisis* (Harlech, 1981), p.26.
6. Ibid.
7. These factories continued to operate under various guises well into the 1980s.
8. Huw. T. Edwards, *Dyfodol Diwydiannau Gogledd Cymru* (no place of publication, 1946).
9. A. Beacham, *Industries in Welsh County Towns* (Oxford, 1951), p.63.
10. Ibid., p.34.
11. Ibid., p.38.
12. Ibid., p.40.
13. Ibid., p.40.

14. *Labour is Building a New Wales* (1950), p.4.
15. Ibid., p.8.
16. Ibid., p.10.
17. The legislation introduced by Labour offered loans of up to 75% for the purchase of smallholdings.
18. C. V. J. Griffiths, 'Labour and the Countryside: rural strands in the British Labour Movement, 1900-1939', unpublished Oxford D. Phil thesis (1998), pp.10-15. I am grateful to Duncan Tanner for this reference.
19. This section is based on *Labour is Building a New Wales* (1950).
20. *Labour's Policy for Wales* (1954), p.3.
21. Ibid., p.4.
22. Ibid.
23. Peter Shore was 'fooled' by the fact that unemployment was not a problem in Welsh rural areas because local unemployment figures were low, missing the point that unemployment led to depopulation and hence the low unemployment figures. For more see Walling, thesis, Chapter Five.
24. 'Memorandum on Rural Development', September 1955, D. Caradog Jones MS, File 1, National Library of Wales.
25. Welsh Regional Council of Labour, 'Development of Rural Areas in Wales Interim Report', Annual Meeting 1957, Labour Party Wales Archives, NLW.
26. Welsh Regional Council Of Labour, 'Development of Rural Areas in Wales', p.2.
27. Ibid., p.8.
28. D. Thomas, 'Socialism and the Welsh People', *Labour Leader*, 1912.
29. Ibid.
30. As items in his papers show, this was without payment.
31. *Y Dinesydd Cymreig*, 15 November 1922.



32. Ibid., 4 December 1918.
33. Madoc Jones to Cledwyn Hughes, 11 February 1962, Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos MS, File B1, NLW.
34. Ness Edwards to Richard Crossman, 25 June 1967, Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos MS, File B4, NLW.
35. Author's interview with Owen Edwards, 25 February 2001.
36. For more see Jones's autobiography, Arglwydd Maelor, *Fel Hyn y Bu* (Denbigh, 1970). Jones would quote Welsh 'sayings' and then hurriedly translate them into English before being brought to order. This was part of a game of 'one-upmanship' which endeared Jones to the House and earned him a reputation as an excellent and entertaining speaker.
37. Although it should be pointed out that the 'national socialism' was not of the Fascist or Nazi variety.
38. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 8 June 1945.
39. C. Prothero, *Recount* (Ormskirk, 1982), p.36.
40. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 22 June 1945.
41. Ibid.
42. Prothero, *Recount*, p.55.
43. D. Tanner, 'The Union Jack and the Welsh Dragon: British influences in Welsh Labour politics, 1900-2000', unpublished paper presented to the Centre for Advanced Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, 2000.
44. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 22 June 1945.
45. For the economic debates of the 1930s see E. Durbin, *New Jerusalems: The Labour Party and the Economics of Democratic Socialism* (London, 1985). Supporters of Gaitskell who had been on the left of the party included G. P. Strauss – an ally of Stafford Cripps – and Patrick Gordon Walker, from 1959 Gaitskell's 'chief of staff'. I am grateful to Duncan Tanner for this information.
46. *Y Cymro*, 29 May 1958. During the 1950s Roberts had portraits of both men hanging above his desk.

47. 'Portread', *Y Cymro*, 9 February 1956.
48. James Griffiths to J Cardaog Jones, 4 March 1955, J Caradog Jones MS, File 1, NLW.
49. 'Portread', *Y Cymro*, 28 June 1956.
50. Ibid.
51. L. Gwilym, 'Cynllun Dwr Tryweryn a Chenedlaetholdeb Cymreig', unpublished M.A thesis, University of Wales, 1997.
52. Ibid., pp.71-72.
53. *Y Cymro*, 6 December 1956.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 24 January 1957.
57. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 6 February 1957.
58. Ibid.
59. Arglwydd Maelor, *Fel Hyn*, pp.160-61.
60. *Y Faner*, 6 February 1957.
61. For more on this see Gwynfor Evans, *For the Sake of Wales: The Memoirs of Gwynfor Evans* (Cardiff, 2001).
62. C. Prothero (Welsh Regional Office) to Labour Party North-West Regional Office, Manchester, 19 November 1965, Labour Party Wales Archives, File 31, NLW.
63. *Y Cymro*, 25 April 1957.
64. Goronwy Roberts, 'Speech on unemployment in the House of Commons', 24 February 1958, Caernarfon RO, File XM/2161/4.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.

67. *Y Cymro*, 30 January 1958.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. 'Memorandum on Rural Development', September 1955, D. Caradog Jones MS, File 1, NLW.

72. Penygroes was one of a slate quarrying villages which had suffered substantially from the decline of the industry. Its unemployment problem was one of the worst in the area at the time.

73. *Y Cymro*, 21 August 1958.

74. Ibid., 15 August 1957.

75. Roberts had been committed to modernising Labour's policy on rural areas since the late 1940s. He was the author of a Labour Party pamphlet *Llafur a'r Bywyd Gwledig* (1948) – appropriately published in Welsh – which indicated his concerns over jobs, health, housing and education in rural areas.

76. *Y Cymro*, 7 August 1958.

77. Ibid.

78. The Welsh Labour group, of which Watkins and Roberts were members, called for 'departmental estimates and a Welsh Grand Committee to oversee how this money is spent'. Welsh Labour Group Sub-Committee Minutes, 13 May 1952, Lord Watkins MS, File 3, NLW.

79. *Y Cymro*, 7 August 1958.

80. Ibid.

81. *Y Faner*, 6 February 1957.

82. *Y Cymro*, 21 August 1958.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., 24 September 1959.

85. Ibid.

86. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 26 October 1951.

87. Ibid., 2 November 1951.

88. Little has been written on the fate of the Conservative party in Wales after 1945. Felix Aibel's recent work on the party only covers the period up to 1935. F. Aibel, 'The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1835', in M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996). K O Morgan has also and unusually commented on the party's fortunes in general works on Wales after 1945. See for example, K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981). There is little else to go on. General histories of the party for the UK have paid Wales little or no attention. A classic example of this neglect is A. Seldon and S. Ball's *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford, 1994) which devotes a whole chapter to Scottish Conservatism, but devotes two pages to Wales. Wales hardly gets a mention in other accounts. See for example, P. Norton and A. Aughey, *Conservatives and Conservatism* (London, 1981).

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90. *ibid*, citing Aibel, 'The Conservatives in Wales'. It should be noted that these figures underestimate Tory strength, given the complexities of inter-war electoral politics and the close connection between the Conservatives and the National Liberals.

91. Morgan, *Rebirth*, pp.281-2.

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93. *Ibid*.

94. *Ibid*.

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98. For more on this see E. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), pp.214-40.
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102. R. Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party 1895-1970* (London, 1971).
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105. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 2 November 1951.
106. Of course even this did not necessarily mean loyalty. The six per cent could well have comprised protest votes as well as 'loyal' votes.
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109. J. Graham Jones, 'The Liberal Party', p.327.
110. *ibid*, p.328.
111. Martin Rees to Philip Fothergill, 21 April 1947. Roger Roberts MS, File 1, NLW.
112. Unreferenced cutting from the North Wales Liberal Federation Papers, File XM/5470, Caernarfon RO.
113. *Y Cymro*, 6 January 1950.
114. *Ibid*.

115. This was an amusing play on words – ‘Blaidd’ (as opposed to ‘Blaid’ or ‘Plaid’) is the Welsh word for wolf.

116. J. Graham Jones, ‘The Liberal Party’, p.338.

117. Ibid., citing Grimond to Roberts, 7 November 1951, Emrys Roberts MS, File 31, NLW.

118. Alfred Hughes to Emrys Roberts, 3 November 1951, Emrys Roberts MS, File 31, NLW.

119. *Y Cymro*, 5 October 1951. The deal was based on the candidate’s ‘unconditional’ support for the Conservative party in the House of Commons.

120. See for example, *Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 19 November 1951, *Y Cymro* 5 October 1951.

121. These questions related to a number of issues including electoral reform and proportional representation, monopolies, nationalisation, African affairs, international trade and liberty. Replies were remarkable only for their similarity. See *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 10 October 1951.

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141. L. McAllister, *Plaid Cymru: The Emergence of a Political Party* (Bridgend, 2001), p.30.
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143. McAllister, *Plaid Cymru*, p.22.
144. *Ibid.*, citing *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 6 September 1923.
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150. J. Davies, 'Plaid Cymru in Transition', p.134.
151. Ibid., p.135.
152. *Y Cymro*, 19 May 1955.
153. Ibid., 2 June 1955.
154. Ibid., 26 May 1955.
155. For more on this see Chapter Two and Chapter Six.
156. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 22 February 1950.
157. Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question*, pp.178-79.
158. See for example J. Davies, 'Boddi Capel Celyn', *Journal of Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, Vol. XIII (1999), pp.166-81; E. Thomas, *Capel Celyn: Ddeng Mlynedd o Chwalu, 1955-65* (Bala, 1997); L. Gwilym, 'Cynllun Dwr Tryweryn a Chenedlaetholdeb Cymreig', unpublished MA thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1997.
159. Author's interview with Dafydd Wigley, 16 April 2000.
160. McAllister, *Plaid Cymru*, p.103.



## Chapter Two

### Problems, Opportunities and Challenges, 1959-74

One of the latest so-called sciences is one called psephology – flourishing in one of those new Colleges – the study of how people voted last time, how they will vote next time; all apparently capable of mathematical calculation, irrespective of the political campaign or the issues at stake. This sort of political Calvinism is only redeemed by the recent discovery that their predetermined anticipations are generally wrong. The electors do show, from time to time, a regrettable outbreak of political free will.

Harold Macmillan, 1959

This chapter focuses on the impact of social and economic change at both UK and local levels in the period 1959-74. In so doing it evaluates the social and economic climate surrounding the period of Labour's decline as a political force in north-west Wales. This period ended with the party's defeat in both the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth constituencies in the February 1974 General Election. As a result the chapter also focuses on the period of Plaid Cymru's growth as a force in local politics.

The chapter is not intended to demonstrate that Labour's decline was 'caused' by socio-economic change. Rather, the chapter is based on the following perceptions which reflect newer approaches to the analysis of electoral change. Political changes are the result of a number of factors, some long term, some short term, some political, some non-political. Social and economic factors can have an impact on political fortunes. They present opportunities and challenges to political parties and political actors. Social and economic factors do not in themselves cause political change, but they set the parameters in which political decisions are made and provide the turf on which political battles are fought out. Post-modernist studies that stress the constructive role of politics accept that local structures – local ways of seeing politics – influence the ways in which national images are received. Those cultures are not

structured from nothing. Moreover, for the language of politics to be accepted, it has to cater for changing needs and expectations. Whilst recent political science does not deny the role of the language of politics, it recognises that certain features of changing socio-economic landscapes are frequently correlated with the erosion of Labour support. Too few historians (and too few post-modernists) recognise this fact. Thus, this chapter notes particular social and economic circumstances that have been associated with particular political developments, as a preliminary to discovering how parties coped with these issues. It thus escapes the trap of seeing change as the 'inevitable' outcome of class changes or shifts in identity, but does not assume that voting patterns are purely a consequence of political discourse.

The chapter deals with social and economic factors at local level. In doing so it identifies the key social problems facing policy makers in the period up to 1974. First it will attempt to place the changes occurring at UK level within a local perspective. It will argue that UK 'affluence' was less apparent in north Wales, where a variety of structural changes in the economy were not matched by strong new developments. Secondly, it will attempt to show that whilst national social and economic trends cannot be neglected, political change at regional level should not ignore often unique local social problems and challenges and the failure or inability to tackle these problems by local political actors and parties. In particular, it looks at second homes as an issue which could both have an economic impact (forcing up house prices) and a cultural resonance (diluting Welsh language and culture).

There is certainly something to explain. UK politics in the second half of the twentieth century can be divided into two major periods. Firstly, the era of two-party

dominance or alignment from 1945 to 1966 and secondly, the era of de-alignment and emergence of a 'moderate multi-party system' from 1970 onwards. Labour's general election performances in the 1950s were poor, but the party's role as one of the UK's two main political parties was never in question. Its failures in elections underestimated its strength as a political force. Both the Conservative *and* Labour parties dominated UK politics in the 1950s. The zenith of two-party dominance was reached in 1955 when the two main parties amassed a combined poll of 96.1 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The early to mid 1950s witnessed the overwhelming demise of the Liberal party as a political force, whilst nationalist parties in both Scotland and Wales remained at the periphery of parliamentary politics.

However by 1974 the dominance of the two main political parties had been eroded. In the general election of February 1974 only 75% of the UK electorate supported one of the two main parties, a decline of over 21% over two decades. First, from the early 1960s onwards there was a revival in the fortunes of the Liberal party. From depressing returns of 2.6% and 2.7% in the general elections of 1951 and 1955, the party recovered to record respectable polls of 19.3% and 18.3% in the general elections of February and October 1974. Second, the recovery of the Liberal party was accompanied by the emergence of both the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru as a political force. By October 1974 support for the SNP had climbed to 30.4% of the Scottish vote, whilst Plaid Cymru's share of the Welsh vote grew to 11.4%. The decline in support for the two main political parties in regions such as north-west Wales was therefore part of a wider UK trend in the period up to 1974. In north-west Wales, though, it was taken further, with Plaid Cymru gaining both the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth constituencies in the February 1974 election, and



consolidating on these victories in the October election. The decline of two-party dominance in the UK in the two decades after 1955 is therefore beyond doubt. The explanations remain controversial. In examining a *local* area and embracing both the ideas of the 'new' electoral historians and a concern with the socio-economic variables noted by political scientists, this chapter adopts an approach which is still unusual in British history.

### ***Social, Economic and Political Change in the UK, 1959-74***

That the 1950s and 1960s were a period of profound social and economic change is beyond doubt. The standard of living enjoyed by the majority of the British electorate was at a level unimaginable in the 1930s and unobtainable in the 1940s. Income levels rose substantially during the fifties and continued to rise in the sixties. The shift from a 'blue collar' to 'white collar' workforce was characterised by a rise in better paid, supervisory, skilled, technical and managerial posts. The declining 'old' or 'traditional' industries were slowly augmented by 'new' light, manufacturing industries and a growing service sector. In these industries, substitution of a male for a largely female workforce became common in some sectors. As a result, by the mid 1960s two-income families were a common feature of domestic life. Such was the transition in the shape of the workforce that as early as 1962 it was reported that:

The whole industrial and commercial structure of the UK would be severely jolted, perhaps temporarily dislocated if all the working wives gave up their jobs and went home.<sup>2</sup>

With higher incomes came higher spending. Consumerism boomed during the fifties and sixties. Sales of durable goods rocketed. From washing machines to motor cars, consumer spending reached new heights. In 1959 240,200 cars were registered in



Wales. By 1974 the figure was 705,200. Between December 1957 and July 1959 hire purchase credit for durable goods rose by £294 million. Better pay was accompanied by better working hours – and hence more leisure time. Holidays became a feature of family life. By the early 1970s, foreign travel had come within the reach of the many. Motor cars stimulated the domestic tourist trade (with north Wales one of the largest benefactors). Fear of ‘debt’ was cushioned by a welfare state safety net which provided social security at levels unimaginable in the means test years of the 1930s. Aided by improved food intake and the NHS, standards of health improved considerably by the 1970s. As early as 1960, boys and girls aged fourteen were, on average more than half an inch taller and three to four pounds heavier than schoolchildren of the same age a decade earlier.<sup>3</sup> In addition to free school milk (and meals for the less privileged) home cupboards were stocked with supplies from the ‘supermarket revolution’ which began in the mid 1950s. By 1960, spending on food had risen by twenty per cent over a decade. Housewives were buying ‘more meat, bacon, sugar, fruit, vegetables, beverages and manufactured foods’ than they had a decade earlier. Symptomatic of the affluent shopping trolley was the absence of bread and cereals, once an important and cheap dietary supplement of the less privileged.<sup>4</sup>

Housing conditions were also a contributory factor in improving health. Housing became a symbol of affluent post-war Britain. By 1959 around a third of the population owned – or was buying – its own home. Owner-occupancy increased from 29% in 1950 to 52% in 1973.<sup>5</sup> For those who could not afford to buy, council house building continued to grow through to the end of the 1970s. Around 18% of the population lived in council houses in 1950. By 1973 the figure had risen to 31%. Council housing provided quality accommodation at affordable rents. Of the unfit

dwellings that remained in the UK in 1971, only 4.7% were provided by local authority housing, compared to 51.8% for privately rented and 28.5% for owner-occupied housing.<sup>6</sup>

Educational advancement was also profound. Shifts in the working patterns of the UK stimulated both the desire and necessity for learning. With the demise of unskilled, manual, jobs came the demand for better qualifications, required to meet the needs of new, technical and scientific employers. Numbers staying on at school beyond the compulsory age of fifteen trebled between 1950 and 1960. At the turn of the decade some 600,000 pupils chose to stay on at school.<sup>7</sup> As a result, numbers attending further and higher education rose sharply in the 1960s. Comprehensive education – pioneered in north Wales – theoretically at least, provided the necessary grounding to facilitate post-compulsory education. Higher numbers attending university helped towards the emergence of a young social group possessing enlightened liberal attitudes towards contemporary events. As a result, the growth in student numbers – represented in north Wales by the expansion of the University College of North Wales, Bangor – was accompanied by a growth in student activism, evident not only in the UK, but across Europe by the late 1960s.

The quality of family life was also stimulated by the new society of the 1960s. Sociologists became intrigued at the ways in which the social and economic changes impacted on family values. Car ownership, higher disposable incomes and profound changes in living arrangements were believed to have had a huge effect on the functioning of family life. As a result of these changes a ‘home centred’ society emerged by the early 1960s, signalling a shift in the interests of husbands and wives

towards a greater interest in the standards and style of domestic living which they could achieve for themselves and their offspring. Families, it was noted, now 'tended to keep themselves to themselves'.<sup>8</sup> Housing was again a central feature of this 'home centred' society. Crucially, home ownership and the burdens of mortgages also meant that members of the 'home centred' society became much more concerned over issues such as job security, and perhaps much less willing to engage in industrial disputes than a previous generation had been. Individualism (as opposed to collectivism) became the ethic of the new society.

### *Social and Economic change in north-west Wales, 1961-71*

As was discussed in Chapter One, the social and economic climate of north-west Wales was blighted by many problems in the 1950s. In the subsequent decade it changed for the worse. Part of Labour's appeal had been its promise and commitment to deal with many of these problems. It now had to deliver 'affluence' against the trend of market forces. The central issues facing policymakers in Wales were the decline of key industries, the resultant and continuing trend of depopulation and the difficulties of attracting new industries into the local area. All these trends continued to be problematic into the 1960s and early 1970s. In addition, the prevalence of these problems in turn led to the development of new problems and challenges, the most notable of which was the growth of in-migration, 'second homes', and the decline of the Welsh language. These were all factors challenging local political policymakers in the period up to 1974. Population trends in north-west Wales in the period up to 1974 was dominated by one issue – migration. Of major concern to policy makers was the continuing trend of outward migration – depopulation which had blighted local



society since the 1930s. In addition was the accompanying, and by the 1970s increasing, trend of inward migration.

Of all regional resources, population is fundamental, for it is related to the size of the labour force and thus represents the labour force's capacity for expansion. The total population of north-west Wales during the period amounted to just over 300,000, although the combined populations of Caernarfonshire and Merioneth amounted to just over half that figure. Population statistics for the region are an important indicator of the problems and challenges facing local political leaders. First, the small size of the local population is worthy of note. The total population of north-west Wales was less than that of an average city such as Nottingham. The size of the population was an important consideration when considering the requirements of industrial expansion. Large scale industrial plans and projects, designed to suit areas containing millions of people within narrow geographical limits, were unworkable in north-west Wales. During the 1950s some of the more ambitious proposals for the area paid little attention to this question of scale.<sup>9</sup> The sparse population of the area had led the Labour party to advocate 'rural' solutions to the problem of depopulation in the 1950s (see Chapter One). This 'rural' view of the region was not without substance. North-west Wales was devoid of any large, urban settlements capable of offering a full range of social and professional services or of providing substantial reserves of labour within easy journey to work distance from the principal towns. The region even lacked any towns with a population of more than twenty thousand people. In Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, only Caernarfon sustained a population of ten thousand. Other towns which had previously sustained populations of ten thousand at



the turn of the century witnessed declining populations throughout the twentieth century.

The larger towns in both constituencies were largely created and sustained by the slate industry. With the decline in the slate industry (see below) these towns also declined. As Table 1, showing the population of the slate town of Ffestiniog in Merioneth demonstrates, the depressed nature of the slate industry had a major impact on the local population by the early 1970s.

**Table 1: Population of Ffestiniog, 1901-1971**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>
<b>Population</b>	<b>11,435</b>	<b>8,138</b>	<b>9,078</b>	<b>6,920</b>	<b>6,708</b>	<b>5,751</b>

**Source: Taken from J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics* (1985)**

By 1971 the population of Ffestiniog was only 48 per cent of its 1901 figure. This was an extreme, but not uncommon, example of the decline of slate quarrying towns in the region. As Table 2 shows, the population of Caernarfon remained stagnant throughout the century, despite the growth of the tourist industry and the movement of the population towards urban centres.

**Table 2: Population of Caernarfon, 1901-1971**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>
<b>Population</b>	<b>9,760</b>	<b>8,307</b>	<b>8,469</b>	<b>9,271</b>	<b>9,055</b>	<b>9,260</b>

**Source: Taken from Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics* (1985)**

The populations of these two principal towns were indicative of the general population trends evident in the two constituencies. As Table 3 shows, the population of Merioneth continued to decline steadily from 1959 onwards:

**Table 3: Populations of Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, 1959-1974<sup>10</sup>**

	1959	1964	1969	1974
Caernarfonshire	121,200	119,820	120,620	123,400
Merioneth	38,600	38,870	37,700	34,400

**Source: Taken from Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics* (1985)**

It fell by just over four thousand (8.9%) in the period from 1959-74. By contrast, the population of Caernarfonshire, despite falling consistently in the period up to 1969 had recovered by 1974, showing an increase of around two thousand (1.8%) on the 1959 figure. Employment trends were a major reason for outward migration (see below). However, the true impact of out-migration is softened by the reverse trend of in-migration, which grew steadily in the period up to 1974.

As a result of in-migration patterns, populations shifts were not evenly spread across either county. In Merioneth, depopulation affected both quarrying and agricultural areas alike. The rural (agricultural) districts of Deudraeth, Dolgellau, Penllyn and Bala as well as the urban (quarrying) district of Ffestiniog were all victims of continuing depopulation trends in the period up to 1974. However, the urban districts of Tywyn, Dolgellau and Edeyrnion all showed a small amount of population growth during the same period. Similarly in Caernarfonshire, the population of the quarrying/farming district of Gwyrfai and the heavily agricultural Llyn Peninsula

both declined, whilst towns such as Caernarfon, Pwllheli, Criccieth, Porthmadog, Abersoch and Barmouth had increased populations by 1974.

Two factors were responsible for this patchwork of population trends. On the one hand, the decline of slate and agriculture as staple employers was accompanied by a rise in small manufacturing industries located near the larger towns. At the same time, there was also a growth in public sector employment and white collar work in the larger towns. Many of these towns also doubled-up as tourist centres. As a result, jobs in the tourist industry were generally centred around the larger coastal towns. On the other hand, many of the towns that witnessed population growth were those which had proved attractive to a elderly, retired and largely English group of in-migrants. Quite simply, trends in outward migration and in-migration often depended on the attractiveness of the area as a retirement retreat. For example, the bleak, damp surroundings of industrially decayed Blaenau Ffestiniog held less pulling power than the tranquil sands of Barmouth in the same county. Scenic beauty rather than signs of industrial decay attracted the retired classes to north-west Wales.<sup>11</sup>

In-migration was a contentious social, economic and political issue (see below). However, as Table 4 shows, the impact of in-migration went some way to balancing sharp declines experienced in natural growth rates.

**Table 4: Migration statistics for Caernarfonshire, Merioneth and Wales, 1951-71**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Natural</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Net</b>	<b>Migration</b>
<b>Caernarfonshire</b>						
<b>1951-61</b>	<b>-2,373</b>	<b>-1.91</b>	<b>-1,925</b>	<b>-1.55</b>	<b>-448</b>	<b>-0.36</b>
<b>1961-71</b>	<b>+1,297</b>	<b>+1.07</b>	<b>-1,284</b>	<b>-1.05</b>	<b>+2,581</b>	<b>+2.12</b>
<b>Merioneth</b>						
<b>1951-61</b>	<b>-3,155</b>	<b>-7.61</b>	<b>-199</b>	<b>-0.48</b>	<b>-2956</b>	<b>-7.13</b>
<b>1961-71</b>	<b>-2,980</b>	<b>-7.78</b>	<b>+138</b>	<b>+0.36</b>	<b>-3118</b>	<b>-8.14</b>
<b>Wales</b>						
<b>1951-61</b>	<b>+45,348</b>	<b>+1.75</b>	<b>+86,960</b>	<b>+3.35</b>	<b>-41,612</b>	<b>-1.60</b>
<b>1961-71</b>	<b>+87,181</b>	<b>+3.30</b>	<b>+107,782</b>	<b>+4.08</b>	<b>-20,601</b>	<b>-0.78</b>

**Source: Welsh Council, *Economic Strategy for North-West Wales* (1974)**

Despite a growth in the population of Caernarfonshire up to 1974, 'natural' population increases declined in both the 1951-61 and 1961-71 periods. The picture for Merioneth was more striking. Net migration, already treble the Welsh average in the decade up to 1961 shot to ten times the Welsh average in the following decade. This occurred at a time when the Welsh average was itself causing some concern to social commentators, economists and politicians (see Chapter Four). The attraction of the north Wales coast as a haven for the retired is borne out not only by the fact that the population of Caernarfonshire (a depressed industrial region) defied overall Welsh trends in the period up to 1971 but also in the changing age structures of the county when compared to Welsh and UK averages for the same period. Tables 5a and 5b show the effects of depopulation and in-migration on population age trends.



**Table 5a: Age structure of population 1951 (%)**

Area	0-14	Working age	Retired
Caernarfonshire	20.6	61.7	17.7
Merioneth	19.6	63.9	16.5
Wales	22.7	63.8	13.5
UK	22.4	64.0	13.6

**Table 5b: Age structure of population 1966**

Area	0-14	Working age	Retired
Caernarfonshire	20.2	57.6	22.2
Merioneth	23.2	57.8	19.0
Wales	23.1	60.8	16.1
UK	23.3	61.3	15.4

Source: Welsh Council, *Economic Strategy for north-west Wales (1971)*.

As these tables show, the local population already showed signs of ‘ageing’ as early as 1951. Caernarfonshire at some 4% and Merioneth at some 3% above the Welsh average. By 1966, Caernarfonshire’s retired population was 6-7 per cent higher than both UK and Welsh averages, whilst Merioneth’s averaged around 4 per cent higher.

During the 1960s, growth in the urban centres of the region was actively encouraged. As part of plans to stimulate the economy, the Welsh Council backed initiatives made in the late sixties and early seventies for the development of selected ‘growth centres’ in both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth. ‘New Towns’ were an integral feature of this strategy. Among the towns targeted for expansion were Caernarfon and Bala, although Bala’s inclusion was controversial (see Chapters Three and Five). Attempts to stimulate the local economy and the growth centres were not helped by lower than

average activity rates (a lower percentage of the population available for employment). Activity rates in north-west Wales were the lowest in Wales throughout the 1951-71 period. Table 6 compares the activity rates for north-west Wales with figures for the whole of Wales from 1951 onwards.

**Table 6: Activity rates for north-west Wales and Wales, 1951-71**

<b>MALES</b>			
	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>
<b>North-West Wales</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>76.5</b>	<b>67.1</b>
<b>(Coast)</b>	<b>77.4</b>	<b>73.9</b>	<b>64.2</b>
<b>(Remainder)</b>	<b>79.4</b>	<b>77.6</b>	<b>68.5</b>
<b>Wales</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>73.2</b>
<b>FEMALES</b>			
	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>
<b>North-West Wales</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>29.4</b>
<b>(Coast)</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>29.6</b>
<b>(Remainder)</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>29.3</b>
<b>WALES</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>33.0</b>

**Source: HMSO, *Welsh Economic Trends* (1974)**

As the table shows, whilst the trend of economic activity in north-west Wales corresponded with a general decline across Wales during the period, the decline in this region was more advanced. The lower level of female activity compared with the national average is characteristic of trends in rural areas, although this discrepancy was being reduced dramatically as suitable employment opportunities for women in appropriate locations were created.<sup>12</sup> As the table shows, north-west Wales also contained a substantially smaller active population than both Wales and the UK. North-west Wales contained a substantially smaller 'young' working age group than

the Welsh average (71.8% as compared to 78.8%). Rural areas of the region were also characterised by a higher proportion of older workers – 19.2% of the labour force was over 65 compared to 17% for Wales. This was accounted for by the large than average percentage of self-employed persons, normally farmers and small business owners, who worked beyond typical retirement age. The lower activity rates in the 15-24 age group was due to the proportionately higher tendency to stay on at school and college, a factor accentuated in the north-west Wales figures by the presence of students in Bangor.

Unemployment figures reflected the depressed nature of the region during the period. As Table 7 shows, unemployment levels in the non-coastal areas of the region were on average double to one and a half times the Welsh average throughout the period up to 1970. This was at a time when the Welsh figures were consistently higher than UK averages and caused some concern among policy makers. Moreover, as was discussed earlier, unemployment figures for the region distorted economic realities, for they do not (obviously) reflect the numbers of persons leaving the area in search of work.

These statistics are backed up by unemployment figures for the region in the period 1964-70.

**Table 7a: June unemployment figures for Wales, north-west Wales and the UK, 1964-70.**

	1965	1967	1969	1971	1973
North-West Wales	2.6	4.3	4.4	5.8	3.7
(Coast)	1.7	3.2	3.2	4.0	3.6
(Remainder)	3.3	4.9	5.1	6.8	5.3
WALES	2.2	3.6	3.6	4.2	3.3
UK (Average)	1.3	2.2	2.3	3.2	2.7

**Table 7b: December unemployment figures for Wales, north-west Wales and the UK, 1964-70.**

	1965	1967	1969	1971	1973
North-West Wales	4.3	6.0	6.5	8.4	5.1
(Coast)	3.3	5.2	5.8	7.1	4.7
(Remainder)	4.9	6.4	6.9	9.2	5.3
WALES	2.9	6.4	6.9	9.2	5.3
UK (Average)	1.3	2.2	2.3	3.2	2.7

Source: HMSO, *Welsh Economic Trends* (1974)

As Tables 7a and 7b demonstrate, unemployment in north-west Wales was consistently higher than both Wales and UK averages throughout the period from 1965 to 1973. Moreover, the area of north-west Wales encompassing both the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth constituencies (the area identified as 'remainder' above) had higher average rates than Wales as a whole. Lastly, the real extent of unemployment in this region is clearly highlighted by the much more serious problem of unemployment in the winter months. When local seasonal employment in the tourist industry had been terminated, unemployment increased from 5.4 to 8.4 per cent in coastal areas during the worst year of 1971.



However, unemployment statistics are even more striking when disaggregated. In Merioneth the Blaenau Ffestiniog area was an unemployment blackspot by 1975, showing high unemployment figures for both sexes. In 1973 the male and female unemployment rates for the area stood at 9.4 and 10.4% respectively. Two years later the figures had increased to 12.6 and 11.2%. Blaenau's troubles reflected the general shortage of male, unskilled and semi-skilled jobs by the early 1970s. The transition of the workforce from a pre-dominantly male to increasingly female workforce was also apparent. In the Porthmadog/Pwllheli area where male unemployment stood at 8.4 and 10.9% in 1973 and 1975, female unemployment amounted to only 2.7 and 4%. The Caernarfon/Bangor/Bethesda/Penygroes area was similarly afflicted by male unemployment of 7.7 and 11.9% respectively, whereas female unemployment remained constantly low at 2.1 and 2.6%.

### *Employment*

As population trends have demonstrated, a declining industrial base continued to blight the economic infrastructure of north-west Wales after 1959. As has already been stated, this was largely the result of the decline of the region's two major employers – slate and agriculture.

The decline of the slate industry, well advanced after the Second World War, reached epic proportions in the 1959-74 period. In 1938 the quarries of Caernarfonshire produced 160 thousand tons of slate, Merioneth 54 thousand tons. By 1946 slate production for the whole of Wales had slumped to just 103 thousand tons. By 1962 this figure had fallen to 40 thousand tons, and by 1972 to 18 thousand tons. In the six

years between 1966 and 1972 slate production in Wales was halved. By this stage efforts to revive the industry had proved ineffective. Exports to France, where slate became a fashionable roofing material in the early 1960s and the exploitation of slate waste as a marketable commodity, proved to be ineffective. As a result, 1968 saw the closure of Dinorwic quarry in Caernarfonshire (once one of the largest slate quarries in the world). The Oakley quarry in Blaenau Ffestiniog closed some two years later. With the decline of output came the demise of jobs. The decline of the slate industry devastated many communities in both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth. In 1951 the industry had employed four thousand workers. In the decade that followed this figure was halved to just over two thousand. By 1971 the figure was just over six hundred. In Merioneth, a county once dominated by slate and farming, only 190 workers held jobs in the slate industry by 1971, this just 17% of the 1951 number. The decline in Caernarfonshire was more profound. In 1951 the local quarries employed 3,607 workers. By 1971 only 430, 12% of the 1951 figure remained. Slate had become little more than a fringe industry, employing just 1.3% of the Caernarfonshire workforce and 2% of the Merioneth workforce. The slate industry was little more than a potential attraction in the growing tourist industry.

The decline in agriculture was equally striking, although somewhat less advanced by 1974. As in the case of slate, agriculture was hard hit by changing markets. Advances in mechanisation and competition from cheaper, imported goods were particularly damaging. Added to this was the threat posed to small-scale farms by the trend towards amalgamation and larger units. In 1951 agriculture accounted for just under six thousand or 16% of the Caernarfonshire workforce. By 1971 this figure had fallen by more than half to just over two and a half thousand, 8% of the local workforce. In

neighbouring Merioneth agriculture accounted for 3,493 jobs in 1951. By 1971 this figure had also been halved to 1,780, although it still accounted for 19.2 as opposed to the earlier 24.3% of the total workforce – testament itself to the shortage of replacement industries and their failure to absorb the lost jobs. Moreover, changes in the structure of local agriculture were also detrimental as far as jobs were concerned.

The declining numbers employed in slate and agriculture, combined with the difficulties of attracting new industries, had a significant impact on employment statistics for both counties. The number of workers employed in Caernarfonshire and Merioneth both fell by five thousand between 1951 and 1971. The loss of slate quarrying and agricultural jobs inflicted the greatest damage, accounting for over six thousand jobs in the former and two and a half thousand in the latter. The fate of those losing jobs in staple industries were threefold; i) to swell the ranks of the unemployed; ii) to swell the ranks of outward-migrants; iii) to stimulate a shift in the structure of the local workforce from 'old' to 'new' industry. However, it is easy to over-state the impact of this transition. Table 8 shows the structure of the workforces of Caernarfonshire and Merioneth in 1951 and 1971.

**Table 8: Structure of the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth workforce. Numbers employed in selected industries (percentage) 1951 and 1971.**

<i>Industry</i>	<b>Caernarfonshire</b>		<b>Merioneth</b>	
	<i>1951</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1951</i>	<i>1971</i>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>14.1</b>
<b>Metal Manufacturing and Engineering</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>9.4</b>
<b>Mining and Quarrying</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Building and Contracting</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Transport &amp; Communication</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Labourers</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>5.8</b>
<b>Clerical Workers</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>7.3</b>
<b>Sales Workers</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>Services, Sport &amp; Recreation</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>16.2</b>
<b>Professional &amp; Technical</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>9.2</b>
<b>Inadequately Described Occs.</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Leather, Wood, Textiles, Food</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>4.1</b>
<b>Armed Forces</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>Other Manufacturing inc. Plastics</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>Total Workforce</b>	<b>49,947</b>	<b>47,400</b>	<b>18,203</b>	<b>14,000</b>

**Source: Taken from Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics* (1985)**

As this table shows, there was a distinctive trend in occupational change in both counties. Agriculture, quarrying, building and transport and communication all declined between 1951 and 1971, whilst growth was to be found in metal manufacturing and engineering, labouring, clerical work, sales work and the service



sector and in professional and managerial occupations. However, the slump in traditional industries was absorbed by a wave of new construction work at the end of the 1950s, rather than by a shift towards permanent and better paid posts. In addition to the building of the Tryweryn reservoir, work on the pumped storage scheme at Ffestiniog began in 1959. These were followed by the construction of nuclear power stations in Trawsfynydd and Wylfa in Anglesey. Trawsfynydd employed two and a half thousand workers during its construction phase. Later these were followed by the building of the CEGB underground pumped storage station in Dinorwig and the rebuilding and conversion of Britannia Bridge following a fire in 1971. In the short term these projects helped to alleviate local unemployment problems. However, in the long term they came to be regarded as 'Cuckoo' projects, completely disrupting already problematic local labour markets. A particular problem was the in-migration of workers during the building phases, who subsequently stayed on locally to swell the ranks of the unemployed. Another was the fact that whilst these projects provided some local jobs during the construction phase, they were less likely to absorb local labour in the longer term, as the scientific, technologically advanced and highly educated workforce required to operate the industries thereafter was disproportionately drawn from outside the area.

However, these large scale projects were also accompanied by a trickle of new factories during the late fifties and early sixties. Between 1945 and 1963, twenty six new manufacturing projects were set up in Caernarfonshire, creating up to four thousand new jobs. Between 1966 and 1978, over fifty more manufacturing firms came to north west Wales, creating over 2,500 jobs. Within this batch of new industries were long term success stories and short term failures. For example, the

Greengate and Irwell Rubber Company in Llanberis was a notable success. Set up in 1958 and employing only seven workers, a decade later the factory employed a total of 250 workers, all but fifty of whom were women. Greengate and Irwell not only demonstrated what industrial initiatives could achieve. They changed the shape of the local workforce to include a higher percentage of female workers. These jobs were particularly welcome in former slate quarrying areas like Llanberis, where creating jobs for the male workforce proved to be problematic.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s many larger firms had entered the region. Ferodo (brake linings) opened a new £2.5 million factory near Caernarfon in 1960; Aro Corporation opened a factory in Caernarfon in 1969. Bernard Wardle (plastics) eventually brought eight hundred jobs to Caernarfon during the 1960s, whilst the more modest Gaskell Footwear brought valuable jobs to Pwllheli by the end of the same decade. Caernarfon's industrial estate opened in 1966 and others followed in both counties. These allowed a number of smaller concerns to open across the region. However, many of these estates failed to live up to expectations. Less than half the number of small firms that opened survived as long term employers. Moreover, the emerging manufacturing sector had a peculiar character. As one economist has argued., 'it was *in* north Wales, but was not *of* it'.<sup>13</sup> Most of the firms which were established in north-west Wales were 'satellites' of larger firms operating elsewhere. Linkages between the local firms themselves were few, despite the fact that local firms often shared common markets. For example, both Ferodo and Bernard Wardle in Caernarfon were major suppliers for British car manufacturers. At a time when the British car industry boomed, this was not problematic. However, the slump in the car

industry provided ominous problems for these two major employers (see Chapter Three).

North-west Wales appealed to industrialists for two major reasons. One was the abundant supply of clean air and water. The other was the equally abundant supply of cheap, routine, mainly female labour. As John Lovering has argued, 'there is a limited truth in the claim that Gwynedd was rather like an underdeveloped country courting the favours of international - or at least national - firms'. For example, Ferodo was only one example of local subsidiary firm 'with branches in underdeveloped countries all over the world'. Few of the local firms were actually owned by local people. Exploitation of the local workforce occurred in other ways. Small businesses (mainly involved in construction and tourism) notoriously expected workers to put up with conditions which, it is argued, would not have been tolerated in other parts of the country.<sup>14</sup> Trade union membership was often prohibited among this section of the workforce and pay scales were largely ignored.

Neither was the development of local manufacturing industry enough to fulfil the demand for jobs. As a result, tourism continued to expand as a crucial local employer throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As was argued in Chapter One, reliance on tourism as a major source of local employment was a matter of some controversy. On the positive side, the industry provided a large number of full-time and part-time, unskilled jobs. On the negative side, these jobs were generally low paid and seasonal. They also generally interfered with the efforts made by local politicians to attract attention to the serious nature of local economic problems and the need to create 'proper' jobs. Tourism became a massive and modern industry during the 1960s. Car



ownership meant that the beaches and countryside of north Wales were more accessible to the affluent, car owning classes of Cheshire and the Midlands than ever before. By 1973 three million tourists visited Gwynedd every year, pumping over £40 million into the local economy.

However, in reality, tourism flattered to deceive. The sporadic and temperamental nature of this industry has already been highlighted. But there were other deep-rooted problems associated with the industry. First, the numbers of day trippers entering north Wales did not always provide the economic injection which many anticipated. Critics argued that day trippers often contributed little to the local economy. Some believed they filled up their cars with 'English' petrol and made up picnic baskets with produce from 'English' supermarkets – thus contributing little to the Welsh economy. Among the negative effects on the Welsh economy was the wearing out of already poor local roads and the job of clearing litter, which hit the budgets of local councils. There was also the more serious question of how much money from the tourist trade actually seeped out of the region. Tourism, like manufacturing, was largely controlled from outside the local area. This was partly a result of a series of massive investments from the mid 1960s onwards, which included the marina developments at Porthmadog, Pwllheli and Port Dinorwic and the construction of larger hotels owned by national concerns (as were many of the local tourist attractions). As a result it is estimated that up to two-thirds of the income generated by tourism poured out of the local area. Moreover, despite the significant numbers employed by the industry, many of the larger concerns were often reluctant to employ locals. Butlins in Pwllheli was a prime example of a local employer that chose to import English seasonal labour. The larger hotels followed the same trend, especially



in managerial and supervisory positions. Where local labour was employed the work was generally of an unskilled, low paid and laborious nature.<sup>15</sup>

These occupational changes led to profound changes in the socio-economic structure of both counties by 1971. Table 9 shows the socio-economic structure of Caernarfonshire and Merioneth in 1971.

**Table 9: Socio-Economic structure of Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, 1971**

	<b>Caernarfonshire</b>	<b>Merioneth</b>
<b>Employers &amp; Managers</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>11.1</b>
<b>Professional</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Skilled Manual</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>30.9</b>
<b>Other Non-Manual</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>20.4</b>
<b>Semi-Skilled Manual</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>22.8</b>
<b>Unskilled Manual</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>6.6</b>
<b>Armed Forces</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>

**Source: D. Balsom, *Political and Electoral Handbook for Wales (1971)***

Both constituencies had a higher than average percentage employed in the professional and managerial sector and a lower than average percentage of unskilled manual workers. These occupational changes presented a serious challenge to the Labour party and new opportunities which could be exploited by its political opponents. The 'old' industrial base was being eroded, whilst insecurity was increased.

### ***Language and Culture***

The impact of increasing numbers of in-migrants is also reflected in figures for the number of local Welsh speakers in the area. Table 10 shows figures for Welsh

speakers in Caernarfonshire and Merioneth from 1951 to 1971, another highly-charged and contentious political issue from the late sixties onwards.

**Table 10: Welsh speaking population of Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, 1951-1971**

CAERNARFONSHIRE		MERIONETH	
1951	71.6	1951	75.4
1961	68.3	1961	75.9
1971	61.9	1971	73.5

**Source: Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics* (1985)**

Merioneth had the highest percentage of Welsh speakers of any Welsh county by 1971, and at first glance the shift seems small. However, this was a declining share of a declining population. Of 30,000 Welsh speakers in 1951, only 25,000 remained by 1971. In other words, Welsh speakers were leaving and ‘Welsh’ communities were less ‘viable’ – a factor which would have a significant impact on political debates surrounding ‘second homes’ and the impact of in-migrants on Welsh language and culture. However, the decline in the percentage of Welsh speakers living in Caernarfonshire was dramatic, falling almost ten per cent in the two decades after 1951. From a total of 85,115 Welsh speakers in 1951, just over 73,000 remained in 1971. In Caernarfonshire, Welsh speakers were thus a *declining* percentage of an *increasing* population. Due to the changing age structures, there was little hope of this situation improving in the late seventies and early eighties. Children (who would learn Welsh) were being replaced by the elderly (who did not). As a result, the fate of the language was an enduring feature of local political debates from the mid sixties onwards.

Moreover, debates in the early seventies revealed that these trends were irreversible – in the short term at least. The Welsh Council's *Economic Strategy for north-west Wales*, published in 1971, dismissed out of hand an earlier optimistic projection made by the Registrar General which estimated that the population of north-west Wales would grow in accordance with UK natural growth rates in the period up to 1991. The Council pessimistically noted these forecasts were 'unrealistic', pointing to the 'long established trends of migration into the coastal area and the propensity to migrate from the more remote parts' of the region. As a result, the earlier predictions were altered to take into account previous migration trends and the effects of current regional policies. New figures assumed a net inward movement of 2,000 people a year from 1968 to 1981, increasing to 3,000 a year in the following decade. However, most of this increase would be confined to 'old age groups' as a result of inward migration for retirement. The same report predicted that trends among the 15-44 age group would remain the same as those in 1968, since it was assumed that there would be a continued outward movement of this group. Outward migration of the child bearing generation could be expected for the foreseeable future. This would have the effect of depressing the rates of natural increase initially predicted by the Registrar General. In all a population increase of some 60,000 was anticipated for the region in the period from 1968-91, but this figure would largely be made up of an elderly and economically inactive populace.<sup>16</sup> Population trends could therefore be summed up as that of a substitution of a young, Welsh speaking, economically active population for an old, economically inactive, largely English speaking population. Such a region could therefore realistically expect death rates to be high and birth rates low. This had a profound effect on political debates concerning social services and healthcare, as well as the wider debates concerning the survival of language and culture (see

Chapters Three and Four). Changes in the distribution of the population was also problematic. The attractiveness of coastal towns for retired in-migrants has already been noted. The same towns also grew in size due to the growth of the tourist industry. In addition, as the Council for Wales predicted, the population of rural Wales would continued to redistribute itself during the same period. This put an increased pressure on urban centres, not only in the need to provide employment, but also in regard to the infrastructure of these areas. In north-west Wales, as in the rest of the UK, increasing demands would be made of shopping, recreational and housing facilities as standards of living rose into the 1970s. A viable economy was therefore crucial on several grounds.

Housing provision in Wales underwent a significant transformation after 1945. Changes in the structure of housing for Wales as a whole were largely positive, with investment in both public and private sector housing growing steadily after 1945. The effects of these changes in north-west Wales were substantial. Both local authority and private housing building grew significantly in the period between 1960 and 1973. However, the increasing trend was towards home ownership. By 1971 Caernarfonshire's owner-occupation ratio accounted for 55.5% of all housing, whilst Merioneth's figure was slightly lower at 51.8%. Local authority housing accounted for 22.6% and 29.5% of the housing stock respectively. These were amongst the lowest figures in Wales by 1971.

Housing has been identified as an important influence on political affiliation by many political scientists. Table 12 shows the ten Welsh constituencies with the least number of local authority houses in 1971.



**Table 12: Welsh constituencies with the lowest percentage of population occupying council houses in 1971 and correlation with political orientation of constituency in October 1974.**

CONSTITUENCY	POLITICAL PARTY	% LA INHABITANTS
	OCT. 1974	1971
Caernarfonshire	PLAID CYMRU	22.6
Gower	LABOUR	22.6
Barry	CONSERVATIVE	22.4
Merioneth	PLAID CYMRU	21.9
Carmarthen	PLAID CYMRU	21.5
Flint West	CONSERVATIVE	19.2
Denbigh	CONSERVATIVE	19.1
Cardigan	LIBERAL	17.4
Rhondda	LABOUR	15.8
Cardiff North	CONSERVATIVE	9.0

**Source: Taken from Balsom, *Political and Electoral Handbook for Wales* (1971).**

Again, Table 12 suggests that there was a tendency for Labour to perform less successfully in counties with a low number of local authority housing. Similarly, the opposite trend is also persuasive. In other words, there is some evidence to suggest that home ownership may have been a factor in understanding the drift away from Labour in some Welsh constituencies from the early 1960s onwards. However, it must also be borne in mind that home ownership was not a new phenomenon in many areas of Wales. As the case of the Rhondda somewhat surprisingly demonstrates, several Welsh constituencies had long traditions of home ownership, stretching back into the nineteenth century. Therefore, although a dramatic rise in home ownership cannot in itself explain political change, changes in housing tenure and decline in support for the Labour party in Wales in the early 1970s may have been related.

However, the most significant feature of housing trends impacting on politics in north-west Wales by the early 1970s was the issue of second homes. It was not just unfavourable socio-economic variables but the politicisation of these as a cultural threat that became so significant. By that time the growth in the numbers of second home ownership aroused debate at both local and national levels. However, it would be wrong to interpret second homes as a purely 'housing' issue. The second homes controversy was at the epicentre of local concerns over social, cultural, economic and linguistic issues from the early 1970s onwards. The issue tended to highlight many of the problems faced in north-west Wales. Such was the concern over second homes that in the early 1970s a number of Welsh local authorities undertook surveys to assess the nature and extent of the phenomenon and to ascertain the kinds of problems which second homes generated. Among these were studies by both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth County Councils, two of the counties hardest hit by the trend. At a national level, second homes were regarded as part of the 'leisure explosion'.<sup>17</sup> The flexibility afforded by car ownership, together with a shorter working week, was accompanied by a desire for greater freedom in accommodation arrangements - expressed not only in the upsurge in tourism but also in the growth of self-catering and caravanning. The tendency for more people to acquire a permanent base for self-catering holidays and weekends (in the form of second home ownership) was a parallel development.

As the Welsh Council highlighted, the trends in Wales were part of a wider European experience.<sup>18</sup> In Britain, as in these European countries, the phenomenon was part not only of materialist change but also a desire felt by many to escape urban congestion.

The proximity of north west Wales to large English cities such as Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham meant that it became an attractive locality for second home ownership. By 1971 Caernarfonshire County Council estimated that 7% of the total housing stock was made up of second homes. However, distribution within the county varied dramatically. In rural areas such as Betws Garmon and Beddgelert and in coastal areas such as Llanbedrog and Abersoch on the Lleyn Peninsula, it reached 30% or higher. In general, most of the second homes were actually situated in coastal areas. Merioneth County Council reported a similar trend. In 1971 it estimated that second homes comprised 14% of the housing stock, although the majority were to be found in the southern part of the county (especially Towyn) where second homes made up 24% or more of the total housing stock.

In Merioneth 80% of second homes were made up of old properties. Local distribution was determined by economic change, principally the decline of the slate industry and agriculture which led to the availability of property formerly occupied by workers. However, as the supplies of these properties dwindled the trend moved towards the building of new second homes. This trend was particularly marked in some areas of Caernarfonshire, notably the Lleyn Peninsula, where in areas such as Llanbedrog (67% second homes) and Criccieth/Porthmadog (57% second homes) the supply of old and available properties had been used up by 1971. It is important to note, therefore, that the growth in owner-occupied housing was not made up entirely of locals moving up the social spectrum. Second home owners in Merioneth tended to emanate from the West Midlands, those in Caernarfonshire largely from the north-west of England. During the 1960s the first batch of second home owners tended to derive from the middle to higher income groups, although by the early 1970s second



home ownership among the less wealthy had increased.<sup>19</sup> This said much about the value of local property in the second home bracket.

Some second homes were owned by those who had left the local area from the 1930s onwards. As in France, ten per cent of second homes in Merioneth were acquired through inheritance, whilst another 60% quoted family links as one of the major reasons for second home ownership – English jobs (and ‘affluence’) providing the necessary capital. In Caernarfonshire, some 30% of second home owners had been born in Wales, 25% had lived in Wales previously and 37% had relatives in Wales.<sup>20</sup> Even among the younger owners, homes were purchased with retirement in mind. This was the case in 59% of Caernarfonshire’s and 48% of Merioneth’s owners – again impacting on long term activity rates. However, the short term economic impact of second homes was also a central feature of local social and political debate.

In both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, surveys suggested that second homes were occupied on average for between 117 and 123 days per year. Whilst homes occupied for one-third of the year were not insignificant economically, the social and cultural impacts were more severe. Like tourism second homes had a seasonal impact on the north Wales economy. The costs and benefits of second homes to the local community were an important aspect of the local authority reports. Expenditure by the newcomers on improvements to the dwellings and the subsequent provisioning of the household were important considerations. Second home families in Merioneth were believed to spend £610 p.a. on provisions and general services (of which £350 was spent in local shops or the nearest village) whilst Caernarfonshire estimated a spend of some £400 (although this did not include spending when the home was let to



visitors other than the owner). Based on these figures, second home ownership resulted in the creation of 990 jobs in Merioneth and 480 jobs in Caernarfonshire.<sup>21</sup>

Other economic benefits brought by second home ownership were more difficult to assess. For example, the initial purchase of the second home brought substantial local benefit if the sale price was invested locally, although there were no means of establishing the extent to which this was occurring. Moreover, as the Welsh Council noted, second home owners generally contributed substantially more in rates than the equivalent of the services they utilised, particularly in regard to education which was not called upon at all, or social services (which were called on very little). The latter situation changes appreciably when the owners became retirees and moved to the area permanently. Other benefits included the fact that second homes extended the 'holiday season', as well as the fact that second homes acted to redistribute regional wealth, from conurbations to largely rural areas.<sup>22</sup>

The problems created in north-west Wales by the growth of second home ownership were generally regarded as social and environmental as well as economic. Essentially, the growth of second homes was seen as a two-stage process. In the first instance acquisitions had predominantly been made up of derelict cottages, abandoned by depopulated former quarrymen or farm workers. Investment in these properties did not affect the local housing market to any appreciable extent. However, as this supply was exhausted, the situation became more problematic. As demand for second homes increased this put pressure on local housing markets. Moreover, as the supply of remote housing dwindled, second phase housing was increasingly sought in local towns and villages. As a result, prospective second home purchasers (with generally

higher incomes) competed with often young, low income locals for available housing. House prices were pushed beyond the means of the young. This became a highly charged social and political debate, especially as it was feared that locals who could not afford property would be driven out of the area, forced to live in sub-standard housing themselves, or place increasing demands on local authority housing.

Another social cost was the effect of second homes on local communities. As the Welsh Council noted, the overriding feelings of locals was that rural depopulation should not be blamed on second home owners, as depopulation had for the most part resulted from the decline of basic industries over a long period. Some of the houses empty in winter would not necessarily be occupied even in summer without the 'holiday' appeal of second homes. However, the impact of second homes on Welsh language and local customs and culture was a matter of some concern by the early 1970s. What is worthy of note here is the impact of second homes on the policies of local councils. Several local councils sought ways and means of restricting second home ownership by the early seventies. There were practical, moral and political forces at work. For example, Arfon Borough Council vehemently argued that second homes contributed to the dilution of the 'Welsh way of life' and that permanent non-Welsh residents had an even worse effect on the Welsh language. Moreover, the Council was committed to old slate quarrying towns and villages where 'an essentially Welsh culture needed to be preserved'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Merioneth County Council, which consistently argued that their own second home problem was worse than in neighbouring Caernarfonshire, pointed to the dilution of Welsh culture as one of the most prominent factors in a hit-list of concerns.

Local authority financing was another contentious area. Controversy surrounded the question of improvement grants. Legally, housing authorities in Wales were obliged to make standard grants of 75 per cent for providing basic amenities to houses and a further discretionary grant of 75 per cent towards the cost of more extensive improvements. However by 1974, a number of Welsh authorities had adopted policies of not approving discretionary grants on second homes, Lleyrn Rural Council achieving notoriety for not approving standard grants either (even though this was illegal at the time). The rationale for these policies was 'the unhealthy economic background created by weak housing legislation'.<sup>24</sup> Whilst it was clear that the lack of grants had little impact on the growth of second homes (especially after first phase ownership had been completed) social and political tensions also emanated from the fact that local residents supposedly subsidised an often unwelcome influx of second home owners through grants which then took house prices beyond the reach of locals.<sup>25</sup> By the early 1970s even the politically diverse Welsh Council argued that:

Our own view is that the use of second homes as isolated properties which are not in demand from local residents is in general to be welcomed. This helps to prevent properties from falling into dereliction, provides a 'cared-for' appearance and thus adds greatly to the attraction of the countryside. However, we share the views which have been widely expressed that it is undesirable for too great a proportion of the properties within any one village to be used as second homes, as is undoubtedly occurring in some parts of the country.<sup>26</sup>

As a result the Council dabbled with several ideas aimed at halting and reversing the problem of second homes.<sup>27</sup> Again, the impact of the second homes crisis on political change is difficult to assess, as was its impact on the perceived re-birth of national or nationalist consciousness in the 1960s and early 1970s. What is clear, however, was that it did have an immense impact on local social and political debate, and served to highlight many of the inter-related problems afflicting north-west Wales.



There is insufficient space here to elaborate on all the social and economic problems facing the region, and insufficient data in some areas. One factor which this chapter has not dwelt upon was the measure of poverty still existing within the region by the early 1970s, although by definition, the high rates of unemployment and the social problems in the area suggest that to discover indices of poverty and deprivation would not be surprising. A couple of factors underline the problem. First, whilst housing provision underwent substantial improvement from 1945 onwards, north-west Wales was one of only five regions of the UK where sixteen percent or more of houses were still without a fixed bath or shower by 1971.<sup>28</sup> Housing provision may have improved, but it was still amongst the worst in the UK. Second, the existence of poverty within the region was highlighted by the numbers of children receiving free school meals by 1971. The number of children receiving free meals in Caernarfonshire (20%) was higher than any other Welsh county, and nearly five per cent higher than the second highest, Merthyr (15.4%). As a Caernarfonshire County Council report into the question of free school meals reported:

The very high percentage of free dinners in Caernarfonshire is mainly attributable to that fact that the level of earnings is generally low and many parents are dependent on state benefits as a result of the serious unemployment that exists within the County.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, within the County there were evidently poverty blackspots. Caernarfon had a particular problem, the Segontium School in Caernarfon reporting that 47% of its pupils received free school meals. Pwllheli was similarly depressed, Ysgol Botwnnog reporting a rate of 46% and Penrallt School 40%. The old quarrying areas were also evident. Brynrefail School on the outskirts of Dinorwic reported that 37% of its pupils



received free meals, whilst Dyffryn Nantlle School in Penygroes reported a rate of 41%.

### *Voting behaviour, social conditions and the Welsh context*

The experience of changing social and cultural conditions provided a potential challenge to Labour's dominance. How the varying parties attempted to construct that local experience was vitally important. It is dealt with in depth across several later chapters. However, political scientists suggest that particular individual or collective circumstances may predispose voters to perceive political messages in particular ways. Those experiencing certain conditions may have been more 'receptive' than others to any one particular approach. This literature has to be considered in discussing the relevance of socio-economic and cultural circumstances to political change in north-west Wales.

Unfortunately, this is particularly difficult for the 1960s and 1970s in general and for Wales in particular. Most detailed UK studies of partisan realignment cover the period from the mid 1970s onwards. Like many political science projects, they do not seek to understand where the shift originated; nor has there been much work on Wales. Political scientists in the period under question were still focussing on social class as the main determinant of electoral behaviour, and on 'affluence' as a challenge to Labour's position. They thus provide few clues to the impact of these other changes on political support.

The problems of applying later analysis to Welsh politics of the 1960s and 1970s are considerable. Social data, surveys of attitudes and spending patterns, and data from

opinion polls, does not exist for Wales as a unit and certainly not for north-west Wales as a sub-unit. Hence, what will be offered here is an extrapolation from later studies of the UK and Wales to identify the type of influences which may have encouraged people towards particular political appeals.

As has been noted earlier, Labour's appeal was based on a 'nationalist' and cultural rhetoric and on economic modernisation. Political scientists have argued that traditions of voting for a party are not easily broken.<sup>30</sup> So why might conditions have changed? Some allegiances were quite recent. In the case of north-west Wales, the Liberal party had been dominant until the 1940s. Labour had therefore only been dominant for a short while (in comparative political terms). Moreover, some of its support may have stemmed less from a positive commitment to its policies and values, but from opposition to the Tories. This was what some political scientists describe as 'negative partisanship'.<sup>31</sup> Another key factor was the impact of 'affluence'. The 'affluent worker' was not a mythical creation. Labour's support in north-west Wales was quite firmly based on the promise to deliver affluence and on an anti-Tory backlash which resented the fact that the region had 'missed out' on the boom years. Labour's failure to reverse these trends was a crucial issue and an important factor in understanding the meltdown of its support.

'Partisan dealignment and 'class dealignment' also impacted on Labour's fortunes. The period from the mid 1960s onwards witnessed a 'freeing-up' of political allegiances.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the period also witnessed the emergence of a number of new influences – notably home ownership. Some analysts suggest that the number of employers and managers in a constituency have an impact, because they 'set a

tone' and have a disproportionate influence. In Wales, however, it was a local middle class, with its own voice and press, which had a far greater capacity to be heard.<sup>33</sup>

All these issues potentially created a difficult position for the Labour party in north-west Wales. But there were also other distinctively local and Welsh issues which may also have shaped new voting allegiances. Language was undoubtedly a significant factor. Language has been used as a key variable in understanding political attitudes and national identity in Wales. It now correlates closely with support for devolution. Only recently have political scientists begun to question whether primary support for the protection of the Welsh language was actually a consequence, not a cause of Plaid support.<sup>34</sup> Little attention has been afforded, for example, to the role of the 'educated Welsh' on the growth in support for Plaid Cymru.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, it has been argued, the new professional class of public service workers were likely Labour voters – due to their employment in services and a 'professional' commitment to Labour values.<sup>36</sup> What needs to be examined is whether the same holds in areas where the 'middle class' had a rather different occupational base and set of cultural values.

The political implications of this was a transition towards a workforce which was perhaps less favourable to the Labour party than to rival political parties. Welsh electoral evidence from 1974 tends to support this argument. As Table 13 suggests, there was a strong correlation between the proportion of professionals and managers in a constituency and poor Labour performance in Wales in October 1974.

**Table 13: Welsh constituencies with the highest number of Professional and Managerial occupations as a % of the population in 1971 and political orientation of the constituency in October 1974.<sup>37</sup>**

Constituency	Political party Oct.74	% professional and managerial in 1971
CARDIGAN	LIBERAL	17.3
CARDIFF NW	CONSERVATIVE	16.9
CARDIFF N	CONSERVATIVE	16.4
BARRY	CONSERVATIVE	16.3
DENBIGH	CONSERVATIVE	16.1
CONWAY	CONSERVATIVE	15.5
MONMOUTH	CONSERVATIVE	15.2
ANGLESEY	LABOUR	14.9
SWANSEA W	LABOUR	14.7
PEMBROKE	CONSERVATIVE	14.2
FLINT WEST	CONSERVATIVE	14.1
MONTGOMERY	CONSERVATIVE	14.0
CAERNARFON	PLAID CYMRU	13.5
MERIONETH	PLAID CYMRU	13.2
CARMARTHEN	PLAID CYMRU	11.9
BRECON & RADNOR	CONSERVATIVE	11.4

**Source: Taken from Balsom, *Political and Electoral Handbook for Wales* (1971).**

Of the top sixteen constituencies shown above, only two (Anglesey and Swansea West) were still held by Labour in October 1974. The reverse trend is also the case. As Table 14 shows, constituencies with the lowest number of unskilled manual workers were also unfavourable to Labour by October 1974.



**Table 14: Welsh constituencies with the lowest number of unskilled manual workers, 1971 and political orientation in October 1974.**

Constituency	Political party Oct.74	% pop. Unskilled man.
CARDIFF N W	CONSERVATIVE	4.7
BARRY	CONSERVATIVE	5.4
DENBIGH	CONSERVATIVE	6.1
CARDIGAN	LIBERAL	6.3
CARMARTHEN	PLAID CYMRU	6.4
MONMOUTH	CONSERVATIVE	6.6
MERIONETH	PLAID CYMRU	6.6
MONTGOMERY	LIBERAL	6.8
CONWAY	CONSERVATIVE	6.9
CAERPHILLY	LABOUR	6.9
BRECON & RADNOR	CONSERVATIVE	7.0
FLINT WEST	CONSERVATIVE	7.2
GOWER	LABOUR	7.2
CARDIFF NORTH	CONSERVATIVE	7.5
CAERNARFON	PLAID CYMRU	7.5

**Source:** Taken from Balsom, *Political and Electoral Handbook for Wales* (1971).

Of the fifteen constituencies with the lowest number of unskilled manual workers, only two (Caerphilly and Gower) were held by Labour in October 1974. Moreover, Caernarfonshire and Merioneth once again conform to a sub-section of Welsh constituencies which were generally unfavourable to Labour by October 1974. The decline of slate and agriculture (both employers of large numbers of unskilled workers), and the influence of both affluent 'incomers' and Welsh-speaking 'professionals' would make life more difficult for Labour.

In addition, both constituencies had a high percentage of self-employed workers. The structure of the self-employed workforce was similar to that in Wales as a whole by

the mid 1970s. As psephologists have shown, this category of worker was less likely to support Labour than other parties. As Table 15 shows, there is indicative evidence from Welsh electoral results that suggests that constituencies with a high level of self-employed workers were unfavourable to Labour.

**Table 15: Self employed as a % of population and political persuasion of constituency in October 1974.**

<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Party Oct.74</b>	<b>% self-employed</b>
<b>CARDIGAN</b>	<b>LIBERAL</b>	<b>30.1</b>
<b>MONTGOMERY</b>	<b>LIBERAL</b>	<b>27.3</b>
<b>CARMARTHEN</b>	<b>PLAID CYMRU</b>	<b>25.9</b>
<b>MERIONETH</b>	<b>PLAID CYMRU</b>	<b>21.7</b>
<b>CAERNARFON</b>	<b>PLAID CYMRU</b>	<b>20.7</b>
<b>DENBIGH</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>20.5</b>
<b>PEMBROKE</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>20.4</b>
<b>BRECON &amp; RADNOR</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>19.4</b>
<b>ANGLESEY</b>	<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>16.7</b>
<b>CONWAY</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>13.7</b>
<b>FLINT WEST</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>13.7</b>
<b>MONMOUTH</b>	<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	<b>11.4</b>

**Source: Taken from Balsom, *Political and Electoral Handbook for Wales* (1971).**

Of the twelve Welsh constituencies with the highest percentage of self-employed persons, only one (Anglesey) was held by Labour in October 1974.

The period from the fifties through to the mid seventies therefore witnessed significant changes in the social and economic fabric of British society. The impact of these changes on the shape of local and national politics were not insignificant. Social and economic change was accompanied by political change from the late 1960s

onwards. The relationship between social and economic factors and political change is therefore compelling. But these factors do not provide the whole story. They provided a challenge. How parties reacted to that was all-important.

Labour's relationship with a changing British society was mixed. The party's electoral successes in the 1960s would depend on its ability to appeal to 'affluent' Britain, whilst at the same time both retaining and expanding support in disadvantaged areas of Britain where its support had remained loyal during the turbulent fifties. In Wales the party would be forced to confront many of the new social issues and pressures which came to the fore in the 1960s, not least of which was increasing local decay and the political challenge of nationalism. As this chapter has attempted to show, economic decline would be the major task facing Labour. But it would also have to confront some 'side-effects' of that economic decline – notably concerns over the Welsh language and culture and the continuation of depopulation. Out of power in the 1950s, Labour had begun to develop a response to these problems. However, political power in the 1960s would mean that the substance of these policies would be put to the test. The development and limitations of these policies will be discussed in the next chapter.

## REFERENCES

1. The Conservative party's share of the vote was 49.7%, Labour's 46.4%.
2. *New Society*, 27 December 1962.
3. J.H.Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood, 'Not so Bourgeois after all', *New Society*, 18 October 1962.
4. Ibid.
5. HMSO, *Social Trends*, No.4, (1973), p.27.
6. Ibid.
7. *New Society*, 27 December 1962.
8. Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 'Not so Bourgeois'.
9. S. Jones and G. P. Smith, *Employment and Unemployment in north-west Wales* (Bangor, 1960), p.6.
10. These are estimated mid-year populations. See J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics* (Aberystwyth, 1985), Vol.1, pp.50-51.
11. Large numbers of second home owners acquired their properties with retirement in mind: Caernarfonshire 59%, Merioneth 48%, Carmarthen 65%. See Welsh Council, *Second Homes*, p.30.
12. Jones and Smith, *Employment*, p.6.
13. J. Lovering, *Gwynedd – A County in Crisis* (Harlech, 1983), p.34.
14. Ibid., p.35.
15. Ibid., p.37.
16. Welsh Council, *An Economic Strategy for north-west Wales* (HMSO, 1971), p.46.
17. Welsh Council, *Housing*, p.26.
18. Whilst 2% of British households owned second homes, other European countries such as Sweden (20%), France (11%) and Denmark (10%) all had higher second home ratios. More usual was the position in the United States, where a 5% second home ratio disguised the concentration of second homes in the north-eastern states. See Welsh Council, *Housing*, p.26.



19. Ibid., p.29.

20. Ibid. This ratio was obviously affected by the fact that many of the properties were inherited.

21. Other counties like Denbighshire estimated a ratio of one job per six second homes. The Caernarfonshire and Merioneth figures were arrived at using the employment multiplier recommended by the Economics Dept. at UCNW, Bangor (.00036). See C. B. Pyne, *Second Homes*, (Caernarfonshire County Council, 1971), p.30.

22. Welsh Council, *Housing*, p.31.

23. For more see Pyne, *Second Homes*.

24. Pyne, *Second Homes*, p.60.

25. Welsh Council, *Housing*, p.33. In fact the subsidy element from local ratepayers was small or non-existent. At least 90% of grant was actually paid by central government.

26. Ibid., p.34.

27. Ibid., p.36. These included legislation which would require permission for properties to be used as second homes; legislation to enable differential rates to be applied to properties used as second homes; compulsory purchase orders which would enable local authorities to prevent properties being used as second homes and the development of 'holiday villages' (in the form of chalets) which would 'take the strain' off the property market. Most, if not all of these were suggestions which had been formulated in various County Council reports.

28. HMSO, *Social Trends*, No. 5, (1974), p.161.

29. Caernarfonshire County Council School Services Committee Minutes, 7 July 1971, File XC/2/3/233, Caernarfon PRO.

30. The classic account of voting allegiances is still D. E. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London, 1974). Butler and Stokes argued that 'many electors have had the same party loyalties from the dawn of their political consciousness', and this led to deep-rooted loyalties (see page 47). Social class was considered the most powerful factor in understanding these allegiances. The authors argued that some British voters went as far as changing their own political views to 'fit' those of the party they supported.

31. Ivor Crewe, who developed the idea, argued that support for political parties was often based on negativity and did not mean endorsing what a party stood for. This may have been an important consideration in north-west Wales.

32. See for example B. Sarlvik and I. Crewe. *Decade of Dealignment* (Cambridge, 1983); A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice, *How Britain Votes* (Oxford, 1985). Sarlvik and Crewe revealed that in the period from 1966-74 the proportion of voters identifying 'very strongly' with political parties declined from 42% to 26%, and Labour and Conservative 'identifiers' declined from 40% to 23%. This helped to explain the (slow) demise of the British 'two-party' system. A plummeting of party membership, a weakening of party identification, a wavering and prevarication among major party supporters, 'negative' voting and a growing instability and unevenness of electoral change were all signs of 'dealignment'.

33. Many studies deal with these new elements. See for example Heath et al., *How Britain Votes*; P. Norris, *Electoral Change since 1945* (Oxford, 1997), pp.73-118. Heath et. al. argue that these were all factors which cut across class. Housing had always been an important consideration in psephology as it backed up simple class based voting assumptions (i.e. people who lived in council houses were believed to vote Labour, in private houses Conservative). However, as Heath et. al. highlighted, housing was actually far more complex and was one of a wide range of other 'formative' factors, especially education and occupation.

34. See for example, R. W. Jones and D. Trystan, 'A Quiet Earthquake': The First Elections to the National Assembly for Wales, *Paper presented to the American Political Science Association* (Washington, 2000). For a more traditional view of the political implications of the Welsh language see C. J. Thomas and C. H. Williams, 'Language and Nationalism in Wales: A Case Study', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1978); D. Balsom, *The Nature and Distribution of support for Plaid Cymru* (Glasgow, 1979).

35. This is surprising given the 'intellectual' origins of support for Plaid Cymru. Moreover, as a result of education, Ingleheart argues that from the late 1960s a new voting 'class' emerged who possessed 'post-materialist' values. This was a new generation, born and brought up in a period of 'formative affluence', a period not afflicted by 'want or war'. As a result, the voting preferences of this new generation were influenced by 'higher' political issues than materialism (social rather than economic radicalism). Others refer to the same process as 'second dimension voting', 'new-class voting' or 'post-class voting'. For more on this see Heath et al., *How Britain Votes*, pp.58-71.

36. Butler and Stokes, *Political Change*. See Heath (et.al.), *How Britain Votes*, p.82.

37. Professional and managerial employment is the key variable used in William Miller, *Electoral Dynamics in Britain since 1918* (London, 1977).

## Chapter Three

### The Development and Limitations of Labour Policy

**A New Britain – mobilising the resources of technology under a national plan; harnessing our national wealth in brains, our genius for scientific invention and medical discovery; reversing the decline of thirteen wasted years; affording a new opportunity to equal, and if possible surpass, the roaring progress of other western powers...**

*The New Britain.* Labour party election manifesto, 1964.

Every concession to the ‘Nats’ only increases their appetite.

Ness Edwards to Richard Crossman, 25 June, 1947.

This chapter focuses on the development of Labour policy at UK and Wales levels in the period 1960-70 and at the appeal and limitations of that policy in north-west Wales. Whilst Welsh Labour politics in the 1950s and early 1960s has finally started to attract attention, we have only suggestive analysis for what happened in the subsequent period.<sup>1</sup> The chapter argues that Labour continued to be attractive in north-west Wales into the mid 1960s not only because it became more attentive to the distinctive needs of Wales, but because it combined its image as ‘the party of Wales’ with its growing national image as the British party most committed to modernisation and innovation. It will argue that many in north-west Wales felt they might benefit from UK-level policies which aimed to revive the nation’s depressed regions. On the other hand, north-west Wales also stood to benefit from the creation of a Welsh Office, a Secretary of State for Wales with a seat at the Cabinet table and distinctively Welsh politics aimed at reviving Wales both economically and socially.

However, the second half of the chapter deals with the problems faced by the party in attempting to fulfil this promising potential. After attaining power in 1964 Labour inherited a host of problems which escalated thereafter. Most of the policies



developed by the party, both national and local, depended on economic success. Once in power after 1964, Labour found that it lacked the resources necessary to implement many of its policies. As a result of enforced and conservative fiscal measures, Labour's economic policies became unpopular and led to rumblings of discontent within the party across Britain, Wales and north-west Wales. Moreover, Labour's efforts to become more attentive to Welshness and its status as 'the party of Wales' also ran into difficulties. Because of its successful attempts to become more sympathetic to the needs of Wales in the period up to 1964, it came under increasing pressure to deliver the goods on Welsh issues. By 1966 the party had made considerable progress in restructuring both policy and personnel to fit in with its new image. The result of the 1966 general election, when Labour won 32 of a possible 36 Welsh seats, symbolised the Welsh public's approval of this new image. However, only months later, Plaid Cymru's breakthrough in the Carmarthen by-election challenged the shape of Welsh politics. This defeat damaged morale within the Labour party and halted its progression as a distinctively Welsh party. Moreover, spending cuts undermined hopes that under the Welsh Office, strident steps would be taken to tackle Welsh problems. As a result, towards the end of the decade, Labour became squeezed on the one hand by its inability to deliver economic prosperity to north-west Wales, and on the other by its failing credibility as 'the party of Wales'.

### *Preparing for office: the early 1960s*

Labour's electoral record in north-west Wales in the early 1960s shows it built on the successes enjoyed by the party in the 1950s. As Table 1 demonstrates, electoral majorities in both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth increased between the general elections of 1964 and 1966.



**Table 1: General Election results, 1964 and 1966: Caernarfonshire and Merioneth.**

Party	Caernarfonshire		Merioneth	
	1964	1966	1964	1966
<b>LABOUR</b>	17,777 (54.4)	17,650 (56.1)	8,420 (38.4)	9,628 (44.2)
<b>PLAID CYMRU</b>	6,998 (21.4)	6,834 (21.7)	3,697 (16.8)	2,490 (11.4)
<b>LIBERAL</b>	No candidate	No candidate	7,171 (32.7)	7,733 (35.5)
<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	7,915 (24.2)	6,972 (22.2)	2,656 (12.1)	1,948 (8.9)
<b>MAJORITY</b>	9,862 (30.2)	10,678 (33.9)	1,249 (5.7)	1,895 (8.7)

Source: B. Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif: Welsh Elections 1885-1997* (Talybont, 1999).

The party's electoral majorities in Caernarfonshire continued to match trends associated with south Wales. The party's performance in Merioneth, whilst more modest, demonstrated its increasingly comfortable control of a small and difficult constituency. There was every reason for Labour optimism at this time. Labour's rising majorities not only reflected the popularity of the party's messages, both local and national, but also the fact that its political opponents were making few inroads. Both Plaid Cymru and Conservative challenges fell away in Caernarfonshire in the period up to 1964, whilst the challenge of Plaid and the Liberal party also withered in Merioneth.

In 1966, Labour once again increased its majority in both constituencies. There were few signs that the Tryweryn controversy (regarded as a potential turning point in the development of a nationalist consciousness) had made a significant impact on voting patterns. Both the Liberal party and Plaid Cymru performed well, but their support was not increasing. As a result of the battles between these 'third' and 'fourth' parties, Plaid Cymru's vote remained static in Caernarfonshire and fell in Merioneth. Labour's reputation as the party of the local 'gwerin' and as 'the party of Wales' remained intact.

As in many other areas of the UK, Labour's commitment to economic planning, job creation, the modernisation of the welfare state, housing, education and the rhetoric of 'white heat' and 'technological change' were a powerful political aphrodisiac for areas like north-west Wales, which had suffered continued economic decay during the 1950s. Whilst 'modernisation' has rightly been seen as the key element of Labour's programmes in the 1960s,<sup>2</sup> this was especially apparent after the party's dismal defeat in the 1959 general election. The twelve months that followed the election of 1959 saw the party embroiled in rows over the causes of its defeat. These rows and recriminations 'sapped energies' and 'damaged morale' within the party.<sup>3</sup> Journalists envisaged a long period in opposition for the party. Some believed that Labour would 'certainly need two or three elections' to nibble away at the comfortable majorities built up by the Tories during the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Clause four and unilateralism dominated inner-party quarrels. On the surface at least, forward planning did not appear to be high on Labour's agenda. However, the scale and impact of Labour's defeat in 1959 restarted attempts to unify the party behind an acceptable domestic programme. The scale of Labour's defeat and its prolonged period out of office ensured that the left,

which might otherwise have objected more vociferously, accepted Gaitskellite 'modernist' innovations much more readily. Crossman and Wilson's influence can be seen behind a re-emphasis of the role which planning could have in modernising the economy. As a result, Labour policy by the mid 1960s straddled both sides of the 1950s divides.<sup>5</sup> This reunification – and an acceptance of aims and values which were deeply rooted in the party – was a positive step forward. In Labour's electoral heartlands, Labour members had become fed-up with internal conflict. Wales was not untypical. Sections of the party in Wales tired at the ways in which 'apathy and complacency' and 'anti-Toryism' had engulfed the party by 1961. For Labour to advance 'renewed enthusiasm and activities' were vital.<sup>6</sup>

Labour attempted to sweep away the anti-Tory, anti-affluence, tone of its 1959 election manifesto *Britain Belongs to You* in favour of a pro-socialist dynamic. The aim of senior party members and propagandists was to rid the party of 'unfavourable issues and attitudes'. However, this did not mean that the party had to abandon long standing goals in order to succeed. Nationalisation might in the past have been seen as a typical example of a long term policy aim which had become an electoral handicap. However, even the revisionist Anthony Crosland was among those who argued that it was not public ownership itself but the 'utterly frivolous' manner in which the party had handled and 'chopped and changed' its mind on the issue that had rendered the policy a political handicap.<sup>7</sup> As with many other issues, the party's commitment to public ownership lacked clarity, but was now being redirected. 'Revisionists' and 'radicals' – never as far apart as some suggest – were coming together.



Labour success also depended on its attitude to 'booming' Britain. The party's attitude towards the affluent society had been a handicap. There was a concern that those moralists within the party who condemned affluence Britain as rotten and evil had failed to distinguish between the fact of affluence – which was unreservedly welcomed, since it widened the range of choices and opportunities available open to the average family – and the less favourable and avoidable attributes of that society, such as vulgar commercialisation and the neglect of social spending. For Labour to advance, revisionists argued, the party would have to rid itself of the image of being pro-austerity and anti-prosperity.<sup>8</sup> Labour could not expect to win by waiting for the new society to collapse, or as Crosland put it, 'to wait for the ranks of the unemployed to swell so that Labour could climb to power on their backs'. It had to win by showing that in its hands the fruits of affluent Britain could be directed into even more positive and equitable directions. Again this pleased the party's 'left' and 'right' alike. However, Labour had to appeal to affluent Britain without betraying its 'core-support' in regions which had remained faithful to the party during the 1950s. As the experience of north-west Wales highlighted, many of these areas did not experience affluence on a scale comparable to that of the affluent south. Labour was committed to addressing this problem. Wales was ideally situated to benefit from this Labour approach. Recent literature on the history of the Labour party in Wales has largely ignored this dilemma. It has concentrated on constitutional issues and on Labour's internal dilemmas over the question of devolution in the 1960s and after. Although such issues were important – and make Welsh Labour's dilemma different – the problems of regions such as north-west Wales were clearly very similar to problems experienced in many other depressed regions of the UK. In Wales, Labour stood to benefit if it offered an enlightened Labour attitude towards devolution and combined



it with a more 'old fashioned' Labour approach, which still pursued affluence through centralised state planning and regional development. This was a powerful (and appealing) combination which proved popular with the local electorate in both 1964 and 1966.

National Labour policy statements such as *Labour in the Sixties*, *Signposts for the Sixties* and the party's 1964 election manifesto *The New Britain* re-iterated the party's commitment to tackle the problems of forgotten or 'unaffluent' Britain. The fact that many 'Welsh' problems were shared by other regions of the UK has escaped many of the party's nationalist critics, both at the time and in historical accounts. The basic premise behind Labour's regional policies was simple. It was 'to see that employment is spread more sensibly throughout the country' and to ensure that there was 'effective public control over the siting of offices as well as factories'.<sup>9</sup> The party's ambitious 'National Plan' provided a framework around which regional and industrial policies could be built. Labour's 'Plan for the Regions' would allow the party to tackle problems at a local level. The 'regional' approach to the problems facing the UK attempted to address the 'stagnation, unemployment and under-employment' which had become endemic features of many regions under the Tories.<sup>10</sup>

The 'Signposts' policy statements of the early 1960s included versions specifically for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This was not part of a 'nationalist' approach. The regions of England were not neglected. On the contrary, along with the three nations they too would be allowed 'control over the location of new factories and offices and inducements to firms to move into areas where industry was declining'.<sup>11</sup> Across the UK, regional planning boards would be created, equipped with

'technocratic', expert staffs working under the general guidance of a Ministry or Department of Economic Affairs. This would also tackle a key Labour concern – the fact that many local councils were already over burdened. Regional Planning Boards would help to alleviate those burdens. Significantly, and in line with Galbraithian philosophy, the drive to attract new industries would involve public/private partnership – a policy which had already been favoured by Labour spokesmen in north-west Wales in the 1950s. Labour thus offered an alternative 'modernisation' programme to nationalist separatism – better governance within a UK framework.

The imperative need to tackle the problems of depressed Britain was central to Labour's vision of a 'New Britain'. The importance of regional planning reflected Labour's concerns not just for the socio-economic problems left behind in the wasteland of depressed areas, but also for the effects of regionally confined growth on affluent areas. The economic problems of depressed areas often entailed the creation of a different but equally troublesome set of problems elsewhere. For example, the movement of workers out of depressed regions (like Wales) and into the south-east, Midlands and especially London became a major concern for Labour. Depopulation meant, on the one hand, that many parts of the UK were 'being drained of their younger and more vigorous elements'. On the other it meant that 'big cities, particularly London' were 'bursting at the seams'.<sup>12</sup> This accentuated the problem of urban congestion, sent land prices in the big cities rocketing and stifled attempts by Labour controlled councils to implement town planning to 'clear up the ugly, scarred face of industrial Britain'.<sup>13</sup> The flood to the cities played havoc with Labour's plans for slum clearance and overcrowding, both of which featured in the party's 1964 election manifesto *The New Britain*.<sup>14</sup>

Among the more radical solutions for relieving congested areas was the proposed building of new towns, including one in mid-Wales. The need for new towns reflected the fact that the solution offered by the building of high-rise flats in major cities was partial and unsatisfactory, as was continued building in 'green belt' areas, which only served to worsen traffic congestion and ruin the countryside. New towns therefore provided a practical solution, tackling two problems simultaneously. On the one hand they would ease urban congestion, whilst on the other easing the problems of depressed areas, anxious to retain their populations.

Little attention has been paid by Welsh historians to debates surrounding proposed 'new town' developments. Where attention is afforded, it has concentrated on the unpopularity of a 'new town' in mid Wales from the mid 1960s onwards. Yet it is important to note that 'new town' development was initially welcomed, especially in north Wales. Moreover, there was competition within the region over where a new town could be situated. In addition to plans for a new town in 'mid' Wales, there were also demands for a new town in north-east Wales and another in Merioneth.<sup>15</sup> Supporters of a new town pointed to two promising aspects of the proposed developments. First, a new town would provide employment for young Welsh men and women who would otherwise be forced to leave the country in search of work. Whilst this would do nothing to alleviate the problems of rural areas, there was still some consolation in the fact that Welsh language communities would be preserved. Second, promoters of the scheme, in particular Jim Griffiths, saw the new town idea as a financial lever to secure improvements in the Welsh industrial infrastructure, and particularly in the quality of Welsh roads. Whilst it was difficult to justify and obtain



the finances for a new A470 linking north and south Wales directly, the possibilities of improving roads from the north and south to a new town in mid Wales were more easily explained. A new north-south road link would thus be provided indirectly.

Wales would also benefit from Labour's commitment to other 'shared' UK-wide problems. Labour's 'National Plan for Transport', identified in *The New Britain*, permitted regional authorities to draw up transport plans for their own areas, a policy which included a further commitment to safeguard public transport provision in rural areas. This included a promise to halt 'major rail closures'.<sup>16</sup> Again this was particularly appealing in areas like north-west Wales, which had been subjected to the sharp end of the 'Beeching Axe' in the early 1960s.

Moreover, Labour campaigned with a promise to re-invigorate the welfare state that it had created in 1945. By the early 1960s the party estimated that around eight million people lived under or on the margins of poverty in Britain. Modernisation of the welfare state was therefore deemed vital. Education was a primary target of change, particularly as it reflected 'in vogue' debates on how to tackle long-term poverty.<sup>17</sup> Class sizes were typical of concerns expressed across the UK. In Wales the party expressed concerns over the fact that 667 schools in Wales had class sizes of over forty. This was part of a 'national scandal' which the party sought to address. The situation in Wales was not untypical. Labour estimated that around a quarter of primary school children and two-thirds of secondary school children were taught in oversize classes and/or in school buildings which were in need of renovation. Labour's radical plans for education – centred around a determination to conquer 'elite' education and introduce a system of 'comprehensive' education (which



included abolishing the 'eleven plus') would conquer some of these problems. Plans to raise the school leaving age to sixteen addressed a long standing Labour goal and also filled the needs of the advancing 'technological' society.

Housing was another important component of Labour policy at both UK and local levels. The building of 400,000 new houses a year was regarded as a 'reasonable' target in 1964. The drive for new house building was envisaged as a public private initiative, addressing the needs of both affluent and depressed Britain. Housing was a real priority in Wales. In 1967 the WCL argued that housing was the 'most important social problem' facing the country.<sup>18</sup> Addressing long waiting lists for council houses and housing for the elderly were top of a list of priorities. In 1967 the Welsh Office initiated subsidies for local authorities to help stimulate house building.<sup>19</sup> Housing was hailed as a 'blue ribbon' Labour policy in Wales, and was one of the party's major success stories in the 1960s.

Labour's health package was similarly attractive. This included plans for the restoration of a 'completely free health service' as soon as conditions allowed – a policy aim which was achieved in 1965 – and a programme of hospital building, together with plans for more doctors, dentists, nurses and radiographers. These again addressed problems which were prominent in Wales. In 1963 the WCL had carried a resolution condemning the Conservative government's record on health in Wales and calling on the government 'to re-examine hospital expenditure in Wales, so that hospitals do not have to make reprehensible staff cuts'.<sup>20</sup> Shortages of doctors, nurses and dentists topped a list of concerns. In 1965 the party called on the Welsh Regional Hospital Board to introduce a radical programme which would include: more new

hospitals; the development of health centres in all parts of Wales; a new medical school in Swansea; a new Welsh research centre for occupational health and a Welsh mentally handicapped centre.<sup>21</sup> Care for the aged, attention to the question of industrial disease (another important social and political issue in north-west Wales), attention to the escalating problem of single mothers and cervical cancer screening, addressed a number of other perennial and 'new' health problems in Wales.<sup>22</sup>

In office, and despite the latter financial constraints placed on the Labour government (see below), initial spending on welfare was impressive. By 1967 Labour was spending 44% more on the elderly sick and disabled, 42% more on education, 45% more on health, 55% more on housing and slum clearance and 45% more on social services as a whole than had been spent in 1964.<sup>23</sup> There were also important moves in other directions, especially with regard to social legislation which kept Labour in tune with the changing values of British society. Homosexuality, abortion, hanging, divorce and religion were all issues which received Labour's attention between 1964 and 1970, although it is not clear that these were especially prominent in policy statements in 1964 and 1966, nor were they always helpful in all parts of Wales.

Alongside this, there were still attempts by Labour to devise distinctively *Welsh* policies. In 1958 Labour drew up a discussion document entitled *Problems of Wales*. Goronwy Roberts played a central role in writing the draft.<sup>24</sup> This acted as a sounding board for potential Labour policies, many of which were developed in the early 1960s and formed the basis of the party's main policy statement of the 1960s, *Signposts to the New Wales* (1963). Economic and industrial problems, local government and finance, public services and the constitutional question were all placed in a Welsh

context. Questions relating to the preservation of the Welsh language and culture were also addressed.

Of particular significance – given Labour’s divisions over this policy – the party embarked on an extensive consultation exercise. Cardiff HQ drew up a list of questions on which local parties were intended to gather feedback. For example, it sought suggestions on how the Distribution of Industry Act could be strengthened to attract new industries to both south-west and north-west Wales. More significantly it paid attention to troublesome local issues. It sought ideas on how industry and amenity could be married in the Welsh National Parks, and on the extent to which industrial development in National Parks should be permitted. The party expressed concern over ‘the tendency of present legislation to ‘sterilise’ national park areas and to deprive their areas of much needed industry’ as well as the ‘apparently unchecked encroachment of caravan colonies’ on Welsh coastlines. Views on the nationalisation of water were also sought. These focussed on how Labour could construct policies which would ‘prevent the emergence of problems such as the Tryweryn controversy?’.<sup>25</sup> Transport and communication provision in Wales had also been addressed. The party sought advice on a number issues, ranging from the priorities which a ‘Welsh road building’ programme should engage to views on whether rural bus and rail services should be subsidised. Moreover, it had questioned not only whether improved communications between north and south would improve Wales economically but would benefit the ‘cultural unity of the country’.<sup>26</sup> Education and language received considerable attention.<sup>27</sup> The party sought feedback on Welsh language education. Local groups were asked to discuss whether ‘the provision for the teaching of Welsh (was) satisfactory in your area’ and whether ‘you are in favour of



(a) no Welsh teaching whatever in schools or (b) the extension of the Welsh language school'. Other topical 'nationalist' issues were considered. On the issue of broadcasting, the party argued that whilst 'few Welshmen would press for the economic separation of Wales from England, equally few would deny that Wales has a cultural individuality which deserves proper expression'. As a result, the widespread development of television with its 'profound cultural implications' made the establishment of Welsh TV an issue 'of obvious urgency'.<sup>28</sup>

The attention afforded to distinctively 'Welsh' issues confirmed the Labour party's growing confidence as the 'party of Wales'. Inevitably, the 'constitutional question' came to the forefront of party discussions. The party talked of 'a widespread feeling in Wales' that the constitutional position should be reviewed to give Wales 'due recognition as a distinct nation with appropriate control over its own affairs'. Whilst the party admitted that the attitudes towards the problem and suggested solutions varied greatly, they shared the common theme of 'dissatisfaction with the present inadequate provision both for the Parliamentary discussion of Welsh affairs and for the supervision and protection of Welsh interests'.<sup>29</sup> As the draft discussion document noted, the policy favoured by the party, from a list of possible outcomes, was the establishment of a 'Minister for Welsh Affairs with a seat in the Cabinet'. However, it had also sought views from party members on more radical forms of devolution. For example, it had sought advice on 'the extent of the feeling in Wales in favour of some form of devolution?'; what form of devolution (would) best meet the needs of the Principality as an integral part of the United Kingdom; which directions national customs and aspirations be encouraged, and what forms and expressions of nationalisms should be deplored?'.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Labour had lagged behind its



political rivals in its attitude and approach to devolution had (by the end of the 1950s) become an embarrassment to the party's pro-devolutionist representatives in north-west Wales. The need to address this problem when Labour returned to power was acute.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Welsh Office*

Not surprisingly, the installation of a Secretary of State for Wales in 1964 was an important symbol of Labour's commitment to Welsh distinctiveness, although the creation of the Welsh Office was also an intrinsic and essential feature of Labour's regional development policies for the UK. The installation of a Welsh Secretary was a radical advance on the position held by the party a decade earlier and one unimaginable under Attlee's post 1945 government. It was under Gaitskell's leadership that the party had warmed the idea of a Secretary of State. As Gaitskell, speaking at the WCL's annual conference in 1961 argued:

The present situation made by the government seems to be to be profoundly unsatisfactory. How can Mr. Brooke who is the Minister for Welsh Affairs give adequate time at all to this side of his work? Wales has to be squeezed in between rents, rating, housing subsidies and chalk pits in Essex...education, health and agriculture are a priority for a Secretary of State.<sup>32</sup>

These formed part of sea changes in the party both inside and outside Wales. In 1959 the change of attitudes led the Welsh Regional Council of Labour to change its name to the Welsh Council of Labour – thus re-enforcing the 'national' identity of the Welsh Labour party.<sup>33</sup> Money was made available to publish party leaflets and pamphlets in Welsh in time for the 1964 and 1966 general elections, re-enforcing the party's bi-lingual image. The party's Welsh language literature proved to be 'very successful' and was said to be an important factor in Labour's continuing success in Welsh speaking constituencies.<sup>34</sup>

The burdens of expectation placed on the Welsh Office were high. It came to be seen as a 'cure-all' solution to a wide range of Welsh problems. Labour spokesmen were among those who played up the important roles which the Office would perform. Goronwy Roberts was among those who believed that the Welsh Office and Secretary of State would make a significant difference. Roberts saw the former as an essential tool in transforming the Welsh economy, the latter as a essential means of uniting opinions within both factions of the Welsh Labour party. Both were regarded as important first steps on the road to 'proper' devolution. The need to build on the functions performed by the Welsh Office was a frequent feature of Roberts's rhetoric. The desires were shared by other senior party figures such as Cledwyn Hughes and Emrys Jones. Under Hughes's stewardship of the Welsh Office, plans to further Labour's commitment to devolution gathered momentum. The re-organisation of local government in Wales, and the modernisation of the Council for Wales were both important first steps in this process. Emrys Jones's appointment as the party's organiser in Wales in 1965 was also an indication of changed attitudes within the party and another important piece of the pro-devolutionist jigsaw that was being constructed. Jones's role has received little historical attention. Yet, his pioneering work in organising conferences across Wales in 1965/66 to 'sell' the ideal of an elected Welsh Council and his role in ensuring that the resolution in favour of an elected Council was adopted in the WCL annual conference of 1966 was immeasurable. The appointment of a Royal Commission on the Constitution and installation of a new Welsh Language Act in 1967 furthered optimism in this direction. Within north-west Wales, these aspects of Labour's appeal were given considerable, but by no means exclusive, attention.

The creation of a Welsh Office promised Welsh solutions to Welsh problems. These were backed by debates within the party which reflected increased sensitivity to distinctively Welsh issues. Moreover, efforts at creating distinctively Welsh policies also led the party to question the value and relevance of Labour's UK policies in Wales. *Problems of Wales* clearly reflected concerns that many 'English' Labour policies did not fit the needs of Wales. For example, the party questioned whether the policy statement on agriculture, *Prosper the Plough* (1958), could be applied to Welsh conditions. Similarly it questioned whether the party's policy statement on education, *Learning to Live* (1958), 'broadly' met the needs of Wales. In particular it questioned whether the elimination of the 'Welsh' Grammar School in favour of wholly Comprehensive schools necessarily met the needs of Wales, despite the fact that comprehensives had been pioneered in Wales. This stimulated debates in the party over the number of grammar school places in Wales, and especially a concern that quality of education was inadequate compared to the standards of schooling in England.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, on the question of National Parks, Labour policy had largely been constructed around the need to preserve and protect the beauty of rural areas in England, not Wales. In Wales, national parks legislation, put through by Labour, stood in the way of the party's belief that the people of those areas should enjoy full employment, and contradicted support for new industries in Snowdonia.

The question of National Parks became an enduring feature of debates within the party from the late 1950s onwards and had a particular significance in north-west Wales. National Parks were regarded as a massive burden to industrial development in north-west Wales. In Wales, 16.8% of land was designated a National Park, as



compared with 4.6% in England and 4.8% in Scotland. The Snowdonia National Park, which covered eight hundred square miles, took up three-quarters of Merioneth.<sup>37</sup> As a consequence:

It prevents the proper economic development of the area because under the National Parks Acts, individuals and scenic beauty organisations even from outside Wales can protest against any form of development for economic and social purposes and demand a public enquiry even for a building of a school<sup>37</sup>

As a result, the party called for the Snowdonia National Park to be 'substantially reduced in size' and for amendments to the National Parks legislation to stop people from outside Wales interfering in and obstructing industrial and social development. National Parks were a headache in Labour's plans to bring industry to north-west Wales.

This was a particular concern because unemployment remained a regular feature of Welsh life. From the mid 1950s onwards Labour had accused the Conservative government of 'mishandling and lack of planning in the industrial affairs of Wales'<sup>38</sup> and ridiculed the government over its 'pathetic inability' to tackle the problem of unemployment.<sup>39</sup> In accordance with the ideas outlined in *Problems of Wales*, Labour policy from the early 1960s onwards was formulated around more effective use of industrial redistribution. This entailed ambitious 100% grants for factory building and a low rent policy for government built factories. However, although not explicitly noted in Labour literature, many of the ideas being formulated were based on expanding and improving the programme of 'advance factories', implemented by the Conservative government from the late 1950s onwards in areas which included north-west Wales.<sup>40</sup> Factory building in 'Central Wales' (which included parts of Merioneth) was to be supported with even larger financial inducements.<sup>41</sup>



The transition from 'old' declining industries to 'new' industries was a major problem for the Labour government. Unemployment amongst the young was another prominent problem which Labour policies sought to address, particularly as depopulation was worst among the younger elements of the local population. There were a combination of old and new remedies to tackle the problems. Promoting the building of technical colleges and expanding the number of apprenticeships available to school leavers topped a list of priorities aimed directly at Welsh youth, whilst 'training workers in new technological processes' addressed both young and more mature elements of the workforce.<sup>42</sup> Anticipating the decline of 'old' industries became a major pre-occupation. The need to bring in 'new' industries before traditional industries collapsed was paramount, not only in terms of economics, but also in terms of social and cultural consequences, notably depopulation.

The attempts to bring in new industry after 1964 were not without success.<sup>43</sup> In 1970 Labour compiled a summary of its achievements in north Wales.<sup>44</sup> In north-west Wales the party reported that industrial planning approvals had been given to 94 projects, totalling 2,867 square feet. Two advance factories had been established in Caernarfonshire, three in Merioneth. Moreover, the party was confident that a total of 2,200 additional jobs would be created over the next four years, when other advance factories were completed and filled.<sup>45</sup>

Welsh industries such as slate and agriculture were to be defended by the Welsh Office. Labour was still hopeful that a future could be secured for traditional industries. Special help was promised for Welsh agriculture, in particular for hill farming (which constituted much of the farming in north-west Wales), whilst the

more positive aspects of mechanisation and technology promised to promote a more efficient, viable, farming industry. There was similar optimism over the future of the slate industry.

Despite the fact that like agriculture, slate could no longer employ thousands, the fact that jobs remained for hundreds was not to be dismissed. Local MPs played up the potential of the industry to provide jobs for up to two thousand workers. Two factors gave reasons for optimism. As Goronwy Roberts argued, four million British homes had slate roofs. So would a 'large percentage' of the houses planned by Labour. Moreover, 'red' slate had become a fashionable roofing commodity in mainland Europe by the early sixties. This raised expectations over future slate exports. Also, mechanisation in the slate industry would serve to make the industry more efficient – keeping production costs down and productivity high. Welsh local authorities which had deviated away from using slate had done so because of the unavailability of slate – not necessarily because of the price.<sup>46</sup> However, even with a more encouraging future there was still the problem of attracting workers to an industry which was seen as dangerous, unhealthy and low-paid. By the early sixties, Goronwy Roberts argued that increased wages and better working hours meant that 'security of tenure in the quarries was as good as anywhere'. Those who had left the industry to join manufacturing industries were now returning, due to the fact that they 'missed the camaraderie' of the quarries.<sup>47</sup> Wages were higher than ever, health conditions had improved and workers were treated more fairly by the management. Moreover, from the early 1960s, local quarries had developed a more positive, modern, approach to the industry. They were aware that problems had been exacerbated by the industry's poor image, which included the unattractive use of slate by architects and the damage

wrought by inferior and imported slate.<sup>48</sup> As a result, advertising agencies were employed to market local slate and a public relations officer was hired in London.<sup>49</sup> Roberts was optimistic over the future of the industry.

Action to prevent the exploitation of other valuable Welsh commodities such as water were also addressed. The question of a Welsh Water Board featured in continuing discussions. Despite opposition from 'one or two' Labour controlled authorities and some 'public declarations' which were potentially embarrassing for the party, plans for a Welsh Water Board were re-affirmed by Labour in 1962.

The need to modernise a chronically poor local infrastructure was also addressed. The merits of the party's transport and communication policy were aired in the run-up to the 1964 election and given a distinctively 'local' feel. In 1961 the WCL also carried a resolution supporting the development of 'good communications' in north Wales. There were ambitious plans not only for the development of road and rail communications but also sea and air communication. Local labour parties took Labour's 'jet-age' rhetoric quite literally. Among the more radical policies broached was the expansion of airfields in north Wales to cater for civil air services, as well as the developments of ports, especially along the river Dee. The development of air and sea projects were regarded as particularly appealing ways of attracting new industry to north Wales.<sup>50</sup> The Welsh Labour Council were unanimous in their condemnation of proposed cuts in railway provision. As the Council argued, the proposed closure of railway lines in Wales would 'cause hardship, increase unemployment and aggravate the depopulation of rural areas'.<sup>51</sup> In the short term the party called for a deferment of the line closures pending formal investigations into the wider implications of the



proposed closures.<sup>52</sup> More importantly, plans for the development of the A55 linking north Wales with the north of England and the Midlands were also aired. These, rather than more ambitious plans for improving the A470 (which linked north and south Wales) were crucial and more pragmatic options in the attempt to develop industry in north Wales – a fact highlighted by Labour figures there from the early 1950s. Promised improvements to the A55 (from Holyhead to Queensferry), amounting to a cost of up to £3 million promised by the Welsh Board for Industry in 1964, gave further cause for optimism even before Labour had been returned to power.<sup>53</sup> By 1970 progress had been made. Plans for the development of the A55 were well advanced, as were plans to improve the north-south A470 trunk road. Firm commitments to extend the twelve miles of dual carriageway in north Wales to eighteen had already been made. A further eight schemes to provide a further twenty miles of dual carriageway were at ‘preparation pool’ stage.<sup>54</sup> In the period from 1964 to 1970, £3.3 million was spent on roads in Caernarfonshire and a further £2.4 million in Merioneth.

Other elements of *Problems of Wales* were followed up enthusiastically in the early 1960s. Television became a prominent concern – such was the fascination with the ‘TV age’ in general and the assumed impact of TV on voting habits and political beliefs. Poor TV reception in many parts of Wales meant that Wales was again socially excluded from one of the joys of affluent Britain. As a result, the Labour party called for ‘booster stations’ to improve reception. However there was also the more profound concern that even with good reception, programmes did not cater for the needs of the Welsh people. In 1959 the party passed a resolution calling for authorities to make more ‘intrinsically Welsh programmes’.<sup>55</sup> By 1961, when this



objective had clearly not been achieved, a resolution 'deploring' the quality of TV in Wales was remitted to the party's executive. Moreover, the party expressed concern over the way that Welsh TV programmes were shown at 'inconvenient' times and called for the party to lobby both the BBC and ITA to ensure that 'the Welsh are catered for'.<sup>56</sup>

The attention afforded to the problems facing the youth of Wales encapsulated the major impact of the 'new society' on Labour's thinking, not only in Wales but across the UK. Attention was afforded to policies which would prove attractive to a younger generation of voters. There were also attempts within the party to adopt new, enlightened, attitudes towards its youth sections. 'Recruitment of young people' was intended to be the main organisational task of the party in the early sixties. In many areas party organisation was being left to a small and ageing membership. The age structure of the party at grassroots level was 'dangerously unbalanced'. As a result, Labour's appreciation of political views among the young was weak, at a time when 'the pace of social change had never been so rapid'.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Labour was concerned that it lagged behind its political rivals in terms of youth recruitment. The party's aim was to equal and surpass the successful Young Conservative organisation of the 1950s, although in Welsh speaking Wales the greater challenge of the 1960s would be posed by the growing appeal of Plaid Cymru. The formation of the YS (Young Socialist) movement in 1960 was an 'exciting' attempt to meet the challenge. There were fifty four YS branches operating in Wales by 1962. From the early 1960s onwards, Labour parties in both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth encouraged the development of youth sections. This was not without success. Small but committed youth sections functioned in both counties. The Caernarfon Labour party in particular

attracted the support of an articulate youth section, which included Betty Williams – later to become Labour’s MP for Conwy in 1997. The youth section helped the CLP win Labour’s ‘national speaking contest’ in both 1966 and 1969.

These changes were reflected at higher levels within the party. Labour’s overwhelming Welsh success in the general election of 1966 was attributed to the fact that:

Fortunately we had the right candidates in the right places. In the marginals, Labour candidates were admirably suited for those constituencies – young, earnest and enthusiastic. This rallied our supporters, produced lively campaigns and attracted the support from the doubtful, uncommitted section of the electorate<sup>58</sup>

The emergence of new faces in the 1966 general election typified quite literal attempts to modify the image of the party in Wales. The new Labour’s MPs were generally sympathetic to ‘Welsh’ or ‘nationalist’ demands. Figures such as Ednyfed Hudson Davies (Conway), Wil Edwards (Merioneth) and Elystan Morgan (Cardigan) were among the most notable new arrivals within the Welsh PLP.<sup>59</sup>

The shaping of Labour policy for Wales therefore formed an important aspect of party activity in the period after 1959. At the same time, there was an attempt by the party to improve its own infrastructure and organisation in Wales. The targeting of marginal constituencies and the safeguarding of less ‘safe’ Labour seats formed part of the party’s electoral strategy. For the 1959 election, Merioneth had been one of seven ‘key’ Welsh constituencies to which the party gave special attention both before and during the election.<sup>60</sup> Merioneth was a particular concern not only because of Labour’s ‘small’ majority, but because the seat had been targeted by Plaid Cymru and had been touted by many Welsh political pundits as a winnable seat for either Plaid or

the Liberal party. In the event Labour held on to Merioneth, increasing its vote by forty despite a reduction of one thousand in the electorate. In a constituency where local Tories were believed to have supported the Liberal candidate, and where grass roots support for Plaid Cymru was believed to be growing, this was an impressive Labour performance.

Yet, such performances actually served to stifle modernisation of the party's infrastructure. The major problem was that in many Welsh constituencies Labour performed well without punching its weight. In the aftermath of the 1959 election the WCL were concerned that in 'one or two cases' general management committees of constituency parties 'met too infrequently', when they had been asked to meet quarterly.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the membership ratio of one member per eight votes (recommended in the 'Wilson Report'), whilst achieved in 'a few' constituencies was ignored by the majority of CLP's, where 'serious membership campaigns' had never been conducted. This was a problem in constituencies like Merioneth. Organisation in constituencies covering 660 square miles, and with 58 polling booths on election day, was crucial. Suggestions on how this problem could (in part) be solved were basic and pragmatic. Included in Merioneth CLP's advice to canvassers at election times were warnings to 'refuse invitations to enter a house for a chinwag and a cup of tea' and to 'not enter into any arguments' – both of which would waste valuable canvassing time.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the Merioneth executive were proactive in an attempt to make the job of party workers less difficult in Welsh speaking areas. Meetings between Merioneth CLP's executive and Hugh Gaitskell in 1959 were instrumental in securing the early publication of bi-lingual literature, plus the appointment of a Welsh speaking press and publicity officer for the party.<sup>63</sup> In addition, Merioneth were also



instrumental in securing TGWU funds for the publication of Labour party adverts and maps showing the progress made by the party in the Welsh language press, as well as additional funding for Welsh publications. Such was the impact of Welsh language literature that newspapers which normally 'disregarded' Labour views, such as *Seren*, were perceived by the local Labour party to have taken 'democratic action' to ensure that the Labour point of view had been put across.<sup>64</sup>

### *The Limitations of Labour policy*

The problems facing the Labour party in north-west Wales after 1964 were profound. Some of these reflected difficulties across the UK, others related to Welsh social and economic problems, some were intrinsically 'local' in shape and scope. At a UK level, Labour's problems were overwhelmingly linked to the economic problems facing Britain. From 1965 onwards the issues of deflation and devaluation dominated British politics and scuppered many of Labour's plans for modernisation. The knock-on effects of devaluation on Welsh Labour politics were substantial. Most historical agree with contemporary accounts – that devaluation was a political disaster for the Labour party. The mantra of devaluation dominated the economic programmes of both the 1964 and 1966 Labour governments. It became 'the great unmentionable' in the corridors of Labour power. The decision not to devalue in 1964 when the party first came into power was influenced by the ghost of Ramsay MacDonald and the 1929-31 Labour government and then the 1945-51 Labour government. Labour declined to take this decision – at a time when responsibility for the crisis could have been deflected onto the outgoing Tories – because it feared that Labour would be seen as 'the party of devaluation' and that it would weaken Britain's standing as a world leader.<sup>65</sup> Others, consumed by Wilsonian rhetoric were seduced by the belief that



‘socialist measures could make the economic water flow uphill’. For some party members, the decision not to devalue in 1964 meant that the Labour party was ‘damned from the start’. This was a ‘great mistake’. Others have suggested that the decision not to devalue in 1964 demonstrated Labour’s lack of confidence in its own economic policies. In part, it is argued, Labour’s programmes had been based on an overly-optimistic view of the British economy. Quite simply, Labour inherited an economy which was in a far worse state than the party had anticipated. When devaluation eventually arrived in 1967 it was ‘a great national and party disaster’.<sup>66</sup>

Labour’s commitment to its election manifesto promises and its need to tackle Britain’s economic problems were largely irreconcilable. By 1967 some believed that Labour could only have avoided devaluation by scrapping its manifesto.<sup>67</sup> In the event, the implications of devaluation on Labour’s manifesto commitments was profound. Labour’s National Plan, ‘signposted’ as the epitome of Labourism in the 1960s, was abandoned in 1966. The DEA (Department of Economic Affairs) and its National Plan were to have been ‘the greatest contribution of the Labour party to the recasting of the machinery of government to meet the needs of the twentieth century’.<sup>68</sup> The failure of the DEA symbolised not only the demise of a crucial Labour ‘tool’ to tackle regional development, but a failed ‘social revolution’. Labour lacked an acceptable alternative. The party was forced to rely on ‘piecemeal’ reforms. Moreover, devaluation was accompanied by a series of measures which had profound local consequences. For example, hire purchase on new cars was slashed (hampering industries dependent on the car industry in areas like north-west Wales). Interest rates were increased to 8% (thus discouraging new investment and hampering house building). Public expenditure was cut by £100 million (with the return of prescription

charges in 1967 being perhaps the most publicly visible and embarrassing sign of Labour 'failure'). Attempts by the party to deflect attention from the problems caused by devaluation were generally unconvincing.

Despite the ambitions of the National Plan and the faith placed in regional planning, creating jobs proved an uphill struggle for Labour after 1964. Labour's return to power coincided with a significant rise in unemployment rates in north-west Wales. This was largely due to the fact that large scale local projects such as the building of nuclear power stations in Trawsfynydd and Wylfa had been largely completed by 1964/65. Labour therefore inherited an acute unemployment problem in both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth.

The obstacles which stood in the way of Labour's reconstruction of north-west Wales were profound. On the one hand, local authorities were not always attentive to Labour's plans. On the other, as has already been argued, Labour faced the even greater obstacle of attempting to reconstruct industry in an area dominated by a National Park. Combined, these posed a powerful obstacle to Labour's plans for the modernisation of north-west Wales. The long local tradition of local councils being dominated by Independents became a problem when the party was trying to get things done. With no Labour groups functioning on most of the local councils, Labour was often powerless to fight against the wishes of local councillors who opposed change.

Labour believed that co-operation with local authorities was vital in efforts to attract new industry. Ironically, Labour often received more support from conservationist bodies than local councils when it came to building factories. Caernarfonshire County

Council were particularly guilty of lacking forward planning in the early sixties, despite the prevalence of unemployment in the area. For example, when a former RAF station in Llanberis was touted as a possible site for a small industrial estate and tourist centre in 1964, the council refused planning permission on the grounds that the area was on the fringe of the Snowdonia National Park and thus 'the view from the surrounding area of Snowdon of terraces of factory roofs would be the most objectionable development which could be contemplated'.<sup>69</sup> Paradoxically, the local branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales were actually in favour of the development, arguing that 'the branch has always accepted the reasonable need for industry in the right setting, and has frequently urged the use of previously developed sites or derelict land for such re-conversion for new purposes'. Moreover, it preferred attracting industry to Llanberis, to accepting more 'chalet, motel or caravan parks'.<sup>70</sup> Overall, local bodies lacked cohesion when it came to the need to attract industry. Another attempt to build an industrial estate in Bangor met with objections from the National Farmers Union, although on this occasion the scheme was allowed to go ahead.

Such obstacles clearly caused annoyance to local Labour parties. As Goronwy Roberts pointed out, the introduction of new industries depended on the availability of suitable sites. The government would not consider plans for advance factories unless guaranteed local sites were on the table. The policies of some local authorities – who insisted that industries be developed in the immediate vicinity of towns – was even more frustrating, given Labour's attempts to halt depopulation from the more rural sections of the two counties. In areas such as the Lleyn peninsula and in parts of Merioneth, the exact location of the industry came second to the primary aim of



creating jobs. The Ferodo factory, built on the outskirts of Caernarfon provided a fine example of how jobs had been created for the entire region – not just for Caernarfon.<sup>71</sup>

Roberts was concerned ‘that we do not become too parochial in our approach to new industry in these areas’.<sup>72</sup> Even by the late 1960s Caernarfonshire County Council’s attitude to industry remained unchanged. One company – Enston Brothers – announced in 1967 that they would wind up their business interests in Caernarfon because they were ‘weary and frustrated’ by the constant refusals of the county’s planning committee to allow continuation of a £0.25 million development of their business, which would include the building of a new factory. Moreover, the company asserted that ‘they were not alone’ in being hampered in their efforts to bring in work.

As it argued:

The history of numerous planning refusals by the county council to allow development of what is already, and has been for many years an industrial site is truly appalling. The attitude has resulted in the loss of jobs for up to 200 men living in the surrounding villages...we have never had the difficulties in any other area that we have had with Caernarfonshire County Council. In our business dealings with other counties of north Wales and Cardiganshire it has been a pleasure to experience their co-operation...in strong contrast to the treatment we have received from this council.<sup>73</sup>

This precipitated a string of letters to the local press, all of which were in entire agreement with the criticisms made by Enstons. Arnold Builders, a company with roots in Nottingham, wrote arguing that ‘of all the local authorities we have dealt with, Caernarfonshire is the most backward’, and that Anglesey ‘was twenty years ahead of Caernarfon’ when it came to industrial initiative. The company made another important point. Caernarfonshire had developed a bad reputation as a potential area for industrial development:

Planning appeals from Caernarfonshire must be the highest from any Welsh county. Developers are reluctant to come. The word goes round, and the opportunities during the last twenty years that have slipped through their fingers must be enormous. Without doubt the Welsh Office should now,



without delay, institute an urgent enquiry into the whole affairs of Caernarfonshire County Council and planning authority.<sup>74</sup>

Some local ratepayers shared in the condemnation. As one argued:

Hundreds of people are experiencing the frustrations that this firm has had to put up with. Many enterprises are refused by these bureaucratic little martinets and the most popular phrase in Caernarfon is 'if planning will let us.'

Another local company (Schofields) argued that Enstons had been wrong to say that Anglesey was 'twenty years ahead of Caernarfon'. In fact 'forty years was closer to the mark'.<sup>75</sup>

These attitudes did nothing to alleviate problematic unemployment blackspots within the county. The problems of the Llyn peninsula were particularly poignant. Llyn became *the* major hotbed of depopulation and one of the most difficult areas for attracting industry. Mechanisation of agriculture and the closure of local stone quarries had left a sizable hole in the local industrial structure. Despite Labour's plans for the 'creative development' of south Caernarfonshire, job creation proved difficult, particularly amongst the young. If building factories was hard, filling them often proved impossible. Advance factories were built, but were often left to stand empty. These problems were not confined to Llyn. Of the 24 advance factories approved in Wales from 1964-66, only four were actually up and running by November 1966.<sup>76</sup> Llyn merely provided a profoundly serious example of the kind of problems that Labour was experiencing elsewhere. In 1968 the Llyn area employment office reported that youth unemployment in the Pwllheli area stood at 16 per cent, whilst overall rates had risen to their highest levels for almost two years.<sup>77</sup> Depopulation continued unabated. Moreover, the lack of success in attracting industry led to an over-reliance on tourism. By the late 1960s the government was giving 'active'

consideration to plans put forward by the Economic Development Committee for Hotels and Catering for the building of 'advance hotels'. These plans were condemned by the local community. One local Tory councillor ironically commented that this was an excellent idea – since empty advance hotels would perfectly compliment the empty advance factories.<sup>78</sup>

Empty advance factories became a prominent symbol of Labour's problems. There were infrastructural problems to contend with across the region. As a result, advance factories took too long to build. It was estimated that factories took on average two and half years from planning to completion. Attracting tenants to advance factories depended on the improvement of local roads. Plans for the development of an A55 dual carriageway from Queensferry to Holyhead to complement the building of factories stagnated. By 1965 Labour was being criticised by local councils for the deferment of local road improvement projects, including an important flyover at Llandudno Junction which was vital in linking north Wales to the north west trade and tourist routes.<sup>79</sup>

Spending cuts and devaluation and a downturn in the economy also hurt the economy in other ways. The arrival of large local factories such as Ferodo and Bernard Wardle in Caernarfon had demonstrated what could be achieved in north-west Wales. In July 1965 Bernard Wardle opened a new extension, which created more jobs. The company was hailed as a 'top class manufacturing firm which has won worldwide repute'.<sup>80</sup> As a major supplier to BMC and Ford, the factory appeared to be on a sound footing. However, the recession in the British car industry hit the company hard. Only a few months later the factory was shedding staff. This was only the start

of the company's problems. Further job cuts followed in 1966, when it axed a further 65 jobs – redundancies which embarrassingly coincided with the visit of George Thomas (Minister of Welsh Affairs) to the factory. As Thomas was forced to admit, the job losses demonstrated that 'the car industry was showing signs of feeling the restrictions imposed by the government'.<sup>81</sup> Ferodo (which supplied brake linings to the British car industry) was in a similar predicament, although its dependence on both the new and second hand market restricted the impact of the credit squeeze. Ironically, one of the major problems was again that the 'new' industry – just like the old – had come to rely too heavily on a single consumer – on this occasion the car industry. Problems in the British car industry hit north-west Wales hard, especially after 1970 (see Chapter Six).

The difficulties in filling advance factories and in creating jobs put Labour under intense pressure. Party spokesmen became embroiled in conflicting, often contradictory, statements over the future of existing industries. The fate of the slate industry was a prime example of the way in which Labour mishandled difficult situations. In the late fifties, Labour had appeared to come to terms with the fate of the industry – accepting the fact that there was little future for the industry as a mass employer in an age of mechanisation and market competitiveness. In the early sixties, the hope of new industries cancelled out the fears posed by the demise of slate. However, as new jobs failed to materialise in sufficient quantities Labour once again turned to slate. To some extent Goronwy Roberts and others were guilty of shirking responsibility and fudging Labour's policy. Despite the fact that research had been carried out in the mid 1950s, Roberts was still promising to 'take a good look at the industry' in 1964. Whilst Labour accused the Tories of 'wasting thirteen years' it has



been argued that the same could be said of the Labour party. Policies went undeveloped during the 1950s or melted without trace under the intoxicating 'white heat' rhetoric of the early 1960s.<sup>82</sup> In truth, Labour either lacked ideas on how to revive industries like slate or over-estimated the impact of 'modernisation' on job creation. Throughout the sixties, Roberts and others played up the importance of the slate industry and its future in the hope of securing substantial government grants which would aid the industry.<sup>83</sup> He thus raised false hopes in the urban areas which had grown around the industry. Often the local public were misinformed over the 'progress' being made. In 1965, when further job cuts were made, Roberts talked of a 'brighter future' for the industry, of the redundancies which had just been made as 'by no means the pattern of the future' and of the fact that the 'real problem' of the industry was the need to attract and retain young workers with adequate wages, security of employment and modern conditions of work.<sup>84</sup> A great deal of hope was invested in the use of slate bi-products. Hopes were pinned on the export of 'red' slate to countries like France, where it became a fashionable roofing commodity in the 1960s. In reality, however, as slate owners were well aware, the use of bi-products, whilst a marketable possibility, involved the creation and sustenance of few jobs, whilst 'red' slate exports from Dinorwic and Penrhyn quarries used up existing stocks, did not require any additional extraction, and thus again did not lead to the creation of jobs. Neither was the impact of modernisation (and mechanisation) as clear-cut as some believed. Mechanisation (as well as declining demand) was believed to have led to a substantial loss of jobs. In truth, however, the reverse was often true. For quarries like Dinorwic, mechanisation had been severely restricted because of the age and construction of the quarries. As a result, in a highly competitive market, it could not feasibly hope to compete with its rivals.<sup>85</sup> The reality of the situation facing



the slate industry was rarely faced in public announcements. The hopes pinned on the future of the industry by those like Goronwy Roberts ultimately lacked credibility. The closure of most of the local quarries by the late 1960s – Dinorwic and Oakley being the most notable – did little to aid Labour’s credibility or the personal reputations of local Labour members.

Moreover, despite the promising and optimistic rhetoric which had accompanied Labour’s plans for agriculture, the policies developed by the party did not fit the needs of the farming community in north-west Wales. As has already been argued, Labour’s policy statement on agriculture published in the late 1950s, *Prosper the Plough*, had generated some reservations in the Welsh Labour party. These concerns were justified by the content of Labour’s White Paper on Agriculture, published in August 1965 and the Agriculture Act 1967. This legislation advocated the development of large scale, cost-efficient, farm units at the expense of the small scale units which dominated local agriculture. Instead of promoting the titled theme of the White Paper – ‘Development of Agriculture’ – many perceived the Act as a threat to the small farmer, and one that promised to scupper traditional local farming practices. The fact that farming had to change – to keep abreast of another highly competitive market – was drowned out by the overwhelming desire to conserve traditional local farming methods and with it local farming communities. Nonetheless, Labour’s credibility as a party with concern for rural areas was again questioned. As one Welsh political commentator argued:

The term ‘development’ is now in doubt as all the White Paper, and especially the Act seem to imply is that what is entailed is not a development of rural areas but a re-organisation to meet market forces...this will only lead to further depopulation.<sup>86</sup>

Neither did the new factories that were created compensate for the jobs lost by the decline of old industries. By the mid 1960s the Caernarfonshire employment service expressed concerns over the high levels of unemployment in villages surrounding the slate quarries such as Llanberis, Deiniolen, Bethel, Brynrefail, Cwm-y-Glo and Llanrug. Finding jobs for 'older' men and the disabled was particularly problematic. Labour's political opponents scored valuable political points by appearing to be more attentive to these kinds of problems.<sup>87</sup> Ironically, one of the problems faced by some of the small factories that came into the area was that they could not recruit new workers – despite the constant existence of unemployment. Finding female workers was particularly problematic, but there was also the problem of attracting young male workers into the new industrial sector. By the mid 1950s local manufacturing industries were crying out for more female workers. Greengate and Irwell in Llanberis employed 220 women by 1965, but could not find women to fill another fifty vacant posts.<sup>88</sup> In a drive to attract workers, the company arranged crèche and nursery care for young children, but were forced to abandon the scheme because of a lack of interest. Moreover, despite Labour's plans for technical colleges and closer co-operation with the local university, local firms often found it difficult to attract young talent. Bernard Wardle was only one firm frustrated by the fact that local school leavers did not find industry an appealing career option.<sup>89</sup> As the employment services were aware, many local firms found it difficult to compete with the tourist industry, especially where women's jobs were concerned. The seasonal and sporadic nature of tourist related jobs had an appeal as well as drawbacks. Many local women apparently found the notion of a summer job attractive, as it lacked the long term commitments associated with a 'proper' job. Flexible, part-time, working hours which could include

evenings and weekends suited the needs of many local women with families, whilst the 'cash in hand' nature of some jobs mitigated the problem of low pay.

Moreover, tourism itself had come to be regarded as a much more viable and respectable 'industry' by the mid 1960s – in part at least due to the problems encountered in attracting alternative 'new' industries. During the 1960s Labour had a change of heart over the values of tourism. The 'unsatisfactory' status of the industry, described by Goronwy Roberts in the 1950s, gave way to a new approach – understandable in view of the fact that 78 per cent of local workers were believed to be in jobs that relied on the tourist industry in one form or another. However, whilst there were concerted attempts by Labour to promote the tourist industry (including close co-operation with the Welsh Tourist Board and the creation of a new Countryside Commission) contradictions within the remit of regional planning backfired on the party. As has already been argued, Labour's plans for stimulating the depressed regions of the UK had been emphatic. However, not all the policies met with either the success or approval which the party had hoped for. A classic example was the Selective Employment Tax. SET was introduced by Labour as part of its Regional Employment Premium. This in itself was an important aspect of the party's regional development plans. SET aimed to stimulate manufacturing industry by allowing employers concessions on tax paid on behalf of employees in addition to receiving a premium for every employee.<sup>90</sup> Manufacturers in development areas were entitled to claim a further tax concession of 30s a week. The tax was modified after 1967. Following these measures only employers inside development areas were allowed to claim the 7s 6d SET premium. By 1968 SET was therefore directly targeted at development areas.



SET was not well received in north-west Wales. Criticism of the tax came not only from Labour's political opponents, but also from factions within local parties. Critics of the tax argued that in supporting manufacturing industry, the government penalised local service industries. Instead of encouraging local industries such as tourism and agriculture, the Labour government was hampering their growth. Critics also argued that the premiums paid encouraged employers to treat workers contemptuously – taking workers on to receive SET concessions, but then laying them off as soon as orders took a downward turn. This was another example of a policy designed for UK needs that did not fit local circumstances in Wales – or an example of a poor (or poorly thought out) policy.

Attempts to ensure that Labour's image as the 'party of Wales' were substantiated also caused problems. Despite the party's attempts to deal with problems within both industrial and rural Wales, it found it difficult to shake-off the image of a party which was predominantly interested in the problems of south Wales. There was some truth in these perceptions. There was a general consensus within the Welsh Office in the 1960s that the real and urgent problems of Wales were those of the industrial south – where the bulk of Welsh jobs were situated.<sup>91</sup> However, the Welsh press, political opponents and some party members tired at the ways in which south and 'mid' Wales dominated the party's plans. This led to criticism over Labour's handling of north-west Wales. Essentially these revolved around the perception that whilst the party gave sufficient attention to the needs of south and mid Wales, the north was neglected. It was not difficult for the press or Labour's political opponents to latch on to examples of bias. 'Welsh Day' debates in the House of Commons were rich



pickings, dominated as they often were by the problems of south Wales.<sup>92</sup> Labour's concerns over the future of 'mid' Wales also caused annoyance. Local newspapers were prominent in attempts to expose the Labour governments complicity in the 'propaganda' which stressed the problems of mid-Wales. As one newspaper argued in 1965:

We who are living in Anglesey and Caernarfonshire are getting rather tired of the constant propaganda over the problems of mid-Wales...the problems are no different from our own. The propaganda comes mainly from the Mid-Wales Industrial Development Association but when we look closely to find what the Association is doing we find that it mainly fishes in the same water as we do – namely in the Liverpool and Manchester areas. Rivalries of this kind make no sense...Mid Wales is a shadowy land where communities dream dreams among the rushing waters. One does not know where it begins or ends. One moment it includes Welshpool, the next Penrhyndeudraeth, the next Aberystwyth or even Llandrindod Wells.

Due to the attention given to 'mid' Wales there was therefore concern that the problems of north Wales would be neglected. The *Caernarvon and Denbigh* expressed those concerns when it argued:

North Wales is just dragging along. The futility of 'mid-Wales' is a plain hindrance to us. We need to press very hard for the recognition of the whole of north Wales as a single region.<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, local Labour MPs were forced on the defensive following criticism of the government's manipulation of trade figures. Critics argued that the tendency to use 'all Wales' figures in press releases and announcements tended to disguise the fact that most of Labour's industrial development successes had come in south Wales, not the north.

Press concerns over the domination of the party by the south were replicated within the party. Party members in the north felt meetings were constantly scheduled at southern venues, whilst committees were filled with south Wales members as a result. The feeling was so pronounced by the mid 1960s that senior party members and MPs

from the north took little interest and seldom participated in many crucial WCL meetings.<sup>94</sup> This did little to prevent the problems from escalating. Even when the WCL was prompted to address north Wales they tended to miss the point being made. In 1964 the WCL conference appeared to grab the bull by the horns, stressing that it viewed with 'continued concern' the 'citing of conferences in the Cardiff and Porthcawl areas' and urged the WCL to give consideration to 'other areas in Wales'. By this it meant 'Swansea and adjacent areas'.<sup>95</sup> Whilst Welsh conferences did rotate on a three year cycle after 1964 – visiting north, mid and south Wales in equal measure – committees continued to operate largely from the south.<sup>96</sup> This may have been logical, given that most of the population was in the south, but it was hardly diplomatic or good for party morale.

A great deal of hope had been pinned on the creation of a Secretary of State for Wales and a Welsh Office in 1964. Even amongst Labour's political opponents there had been widespread support and approval for this landmark decision. However, the question of a Secretary of State brought Labour as many problems as it did successes. The record of the Welsh Office flattered to deceive. First, there was almost continual discontent over the lack of power vested in the hands of the Welsh Secretary and the Welsh Office, not only from Labour's political opponents, but also from party members, senior civil servants and often the post-holders themselves. Second, and at the same time, the political credentials of those post-holders was often problematic for the government. Third, the policies pursued by Welsh Secretaries often proved less than popular with local political audiences.

Getting things done in the Welsh Office proved problematic. There was not just due to the problem of expenditure cuts outlined above. Progress was also held back by bureaucratic back-biting and the territorial control imposed by some senior civil servants. Some Whitehall Departments had been hostile to the creation of a Welsh Office in 1964.<sup>97</sup> Sir Idwal Pugh expressed his belief that the Welsh Office was 'rubbish'.<sup>98</sup> As a result of this hostility, and other problems, the Welsh Office did not function particularly well in the period from 1964-70. Permanent Secretaries at the Welsh Office at the end of the 1960s still saw establishing the credibility of the Office, making it a 'proper' Department, as a priority. For these senior civil servants, the Welsh Office did not begin to perform well until the 1970s, some of the notable achievements being made under the Conservative Secretary of State Peter Thomas in 1971 and Labour's John Morris in 1974.

### *The latter 1960s*

The problems encountered in the latter 1960s were diverse. In the period from 1968-70, George Thomas felt that the Welsh Office 'had difficulty prioritising the problems of Wales' and complained of too many delays when trying to get things done. For example, a 'planning survey of rural Wales' had still not been initiated by 1969, despite being on Labour's agenda for half a decade. The lack of powers vested in the Welsh Office was another major problem. This was not lost on members of the Labour party from across the border. Richard Crossman opposed it as inefficient – another bureaucratic hurdle. The Welsh Office did not have power over many areas of policy (a problem for Wales) but it had to be consulted on UK policy (a delaying fact for the UK).<sup>99</sup> An entry in Benn's diary for 7 February 1965 refers to a meeting with Brian Faulkner, the Northern Ireland Minister of Commerce and continues:



I realised the scope that Northern Ireland Ministers had, unlike for example, the Scottish Secretary or the Welsh Secretary in this country, because not only does Northern Ireland get more than Scotland and Wales as result of the Imperial Settlement following the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, but also because Faulkner was able to concentrate all his money where he needed it and didn't have to spend it in accordance with the rigid rules laid down from London.<sup>100</sup>

Along with the limitation of power came the limitations of sympathy within the UK Labour party over the particular problems faced in Wales. Cledwyn Hughes felt Transport House less than sympathetic to the uniquely 'Welsh' repercussions of devaluation. In March 1968 Richard Crossman wrote to Hughes, enclosing a 'brief on Labour's 'post-devaluation strategy', asking Hughes for 'errors' and/or 'suggested improvements'. The reply from Hughes was straightforward – 'Yes – the Welsh extrapolation'. In early April Crossman wrote again. The reply from Hughes – 'Yes – I want the Welsh dimension'.<sup>101</sup> The Welsh dimensions or extrapolations are not visible in Hughes' papers.

There were problems both political and personal. Whilst the hope that a Secretary of State for Wales would wield a magic wand had been unrealistic, few expected that a Secretary of State would be seen to actively conspire against the interests of Welsh business. Jim Griffiths's selection as the first Welsh Secretary had been widely touted since the early 1960s. Griffiths was a natural choice – a 'party man' and neutral who despite emanating from the south was sympathetic to the Welsh language and to the problems of the north. Griffiths' appointment, along with that of Goronwy Roberts as Minister of State, was symbolic of Labour's attempts to live up to its image as 'the party of Wales'. Yet even this combination was not without its problems in north-west Wales. The controversy over Caernarfonshire County Council's policy on roofing was especially embarrassing for Labour in general and Goronwy Roberts in particular. In



1965 Caernarfonshire Council had imposed a planning condition stipulating that new houses under construction in Bangor had to be built with slate roofs. However, following a public enquiry, Jim Griffiths overruled the council, varying the condition to read 'the dwellings may be roofed with slates or tiles'. This led to widespread condemnation of Griffiths, Labour, and the government from quarrymen. As a local TGWU spokesman argued:

The Secretary must remember that there are people who live on making slates, a fact that he seems to have forgotten since he was here a few weeks ago forecasting a bright future for the industry.

Other prominent members of the local Labour party, such as Idwal Edwards, found the decision 'difficult to understand in view of the recent statement from the Welsh Office regarding the slate industry'. As he continued:

We find, after over a century of roofing with slate only, right in the heart of the Ogwen district, that the Secretary of State has decided to authorise the use of roofing other than slate in the area, and this at a time when the industry needs a boost and the employers are struggling to modernise it to increase production not only for the home market but also with the view of possibly entering once again the export market.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, from 1966 onwards the selection of Welsh Office political leaders did not go smoothly for Labour. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, but is worthy of brief note here. Cledwyn Hughes' appointment as Griffiths' successor, was decidedly unpopular with some sections of the Welsh Labour party. Many felt that Hughes was too sympathetic to Welsh nationalism and nationalist sentiments – one of those Labour figures who put nationalism first, socialism second.<sup>103</sup> This mirrored the enormous gulf that existed within the Welsh PLP between the interests of south and north Wales Labour members that some Labour MPs found quite shocking.<sup>104</sup> Neither was antipathy towards 'nationalism' confined to south Wales constituencies. Hughes and Roberts may well have been some of the figures who the Merioneth Labour party

had in their sights in 1959 when it complained to Hugh Gaitskell that the Labour party in north-west Wales was being undermined. Hostile nationalist propaganda was one fact but:

The problem is complicated by prominent Labour party members having a foot in both camps – Labour and Welsh Nationalist.<sup>105</sup>

Anti-nationalism, and suspicion of nationalist intentions, were deeply ingrained within sections of the Merioneth CLP, where a belief in centralism and ‘Britishness’ remained strong. In the 1970s this led some of the party’s members into an unstudied, and deeply committed, support for the anti-devolutionist ‘No’ camp during the 1979 Welsh devolution referendum campaign.<sup>106</sup> This did little to sustain Labour’s local image as a party concerned for distinctively Welsh issues – which included devolution.

On the other hand, when George Thomas arrived at the Welsh Office in 1968 the pendulum swung in entirely the opposite selection. Despite being close to members of the party in the north, such as Goronwy Roberts, Thomas was regarded as ‘very much a southwalian’ with little interest for the problems of north Wales, particularly the language, and with a particularly hostile attitude towards Welsh ‘nationalism’. His hostile attitude to devolution was potentially damaging for the Labour party in Welsh speaking Wales. Moreover, Thomas and Goronwy Roberts both hated Welsh nationalists, and the former in particular waged a war against its advocates.<sup>107</sup> Instead of presenting a united front on the question of Welshness, the Welsh Office and its incumbents became a symbol of the way in which the Labour party was once again become divided over the issue, particularly after Plaid Cymru’s by-election success in Carmarthen (1966), and near successes in Rhondda (1967) and Caerphilly (1968) (see below). The dismay felt by some Labour supporters over the record of the Welsh

Office was typified in an attack by the young academic Labourite Dr. K.O. Morgan, which was published in *Socialist Commentary* in 1967. According to Morgan the Welsh Office was an 'administrative desert' and its record woeful. Time-wasting and a general lack of decision making were its main feature. Moreover, despite policy commitments, there had been no development of an economic plan, no elected council, no equality for the Welsh language, no Welsh Water Board, no planning board, nothing to capture the imagination and nothing which remotely measured up to Labour's own vision of a 'New Wales'.<sup>108</sup>

In fact, George Thomas's arrival at the Welsh Office reflected efforts to subdue the rising importance of 'nationalist' issues within the Labour party following Labour's poor performances in the mid 1960s by-elections. These performances had wide repercussions for Labour policy and for the long term fortunes of the Labour party in north-west Wales. Defeat in the Carmarthen by-election in July 1966 was a heavy blow for the Labour party in Wales. Coming months after the party's overwhelming success in the General Election of 1966, Carmarthen had a crushing and demoralising impact on sections of the party who believed that steady progress was being made on the party's Welsh policies in general and devolution in particular. Carmarthen was (falsely) portrayed both at the time and in historical accounts as an indication that a grand nationalist awakening had occurred in Wales. Yet combined with the results in Rhondda and Caerphilly it provided Labour with a far more serious message. First, failure to deliver the goods on both local and national social and economic policies rendered the party open to a political challenges, even in its traditional Welsh heartlands. Secondly, Labour was now confronted with a new, credible political challenge in the form of Plaid Cymru. In the wake of these by-elections the dangers of



under-performing should have been made clear to the Labour party. As Gwilym Prys Davies, Labour's candidate in Carmarthen has recalled, campaigning in the by-election had very little to do with traditional 'nationalist' issues. Moreover, Davies himself had impeccable nationalist credentials. The by-election could indeed have been interpreted as a battle between two different types of Welsh nationalism – one which was housed in the Labour party, the other in Plaid Cymru.<sup>109</sup> However, in fact local and national issues relating to Labour's incomes and economic policies and the seaman's strike dominated the by-election. The contradictions evident in Labour's egalitarian policies were a particular problem. Granting pay rises to doctors and not to seamen, Davies recalled, was a difficult policy to defend and accounted for the disaffection of many traditional Labour supporters. The resignation of Frank Cousins was another untimely embarrassment. Local Labour policies such as the closure of rural schools, planned by the Labour controlled LEA, were also deeply unpopular.<sup>110</sup>

Similar factors accounted for another poor Labour and good Plaid Cymru performance in the Rhondda by-election of 1967. As contemporary political pundits pointed out, the Rhondda result was perhaps more significant than the one in Carmarthen, coming as it did in a 'safe' Labour seat. As they also argued, a similar decline in Labour's vote would be enough to lose Labour eight seats in less-safe constituencies. Both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth were among the eight.<sup>111</sup> Frustration at the failure of Labour policy initiated a series of hostile attacks on the party in the Welsh press. These will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, yet the tone of those attacks is worthy of brief note. As an editorial in *Y Faner* commented, it was:

Hard to understand why this government has strayed so far from socialist ideals or from its promises to the electorate...there are psychological reasons



for the peoples loss of faith in the government. Harold Wilson is unable to present himself as a fair and honest politician...we in Wales, and Scotland, have even more reason to reject the government. They gave us the Welsh Office (with lesser powers than Scotland) and a Secretary of State; they refused to give us an elected council even though there was a demand for it throughout the nation; it refused to give us a Water Board; it refused to give us an Assembly like Northern Ireland; it played down the principle of equal status for the Welsh language...we can assume therefore that we will have a change of government at least when the election comes. The nationalists will make big holes in Labour's shield.<sup>112</sup>

The Carmarthen, Rhondda and Caerphilly by-elections were part of a generally poor Labour party by-election record in the period between 1966 and 1969. Labour's performances in Welsh by-elections were no worse than others in England and Scotland during the same period. However, as one political commentator observed, changes in Wales and Scotland, where swings towards nationalist parties had also been evident, were the most notable political development in the UK in the late 1960s.<sup>113</sup> The differing implications of Labour's performances in Wales and Scotland (as compared to England) was not lost on Welsh political commentators. The point was astutely made in 1967. The slump in Labour's vote in Rhondda had been virtually identical to the slump in another by-election in Nuneaton (35% as opposed to 34%).

However, as one commentator argued:

Most of the old Labour voters in Nuneaton showed their displeasure simply by not voting. In Wales, thousands turned to Plaid Cymru. This is what separates the Welsh by-election results from the English ones. It is perhaps easier to appease the dissenters in Nuneaton with some policies for 'development areas' but it will be more difficult to undo the permanent influence which the results in Wales have manifested in the nation...it is obvious to many people that nationalist sympathy in Wales is much stronger than the Plaid Cymru vote over the years has suggested, but that loyalty to the Labour party and especially loyalty to the leaders of the Labour party has kept it under the surface.<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, apart from the local issues which dominated those by-elections, and Labour's failing image at national level, there was still a much more basic element to

those poor performances. Importantly, they represented disappointment with Labour's image as the party of Wales, and at the unfulfilled potential which carried Labour into power in 1964 and 1966. As *Barn* went on to argue, in 1964 'Wales had every right to believe that this was her government'. Labour's successes in Wales had an important impact on Labour's slim electoral majority. The huge success of 1966 had indicated the continuing faith placed in the party. Yet, for many, 1966 had the opposite of the desired effect in that 'since Labour has increased its majority...it no longer has to appease Welsh members'. This culminated in a series of disappointments. The Welsh Office served to be a white elephant. Through its creation, 'Labour inadvertently raised the hopes of a nation'. The problem was not the Welsh Office, but the fact that the 'existing machinery of government' was ill-equipped with the demands placed on it. However, this was not helped by Labour failures, including lack of leadership, poor vision and weak decision making.<sup>115</sup> None of this was helped by Labour's weakness in north-west Wales – weaknesses made worse by declining membership and activity rates, as well as limited local organisation.

Attacks on the personal credibility of Labour MPs in north-west Wales also intensified towards the end of the decade. Their failure to address the decline of the slate industry and 'failure' to bring in 'new' industries was increasingly blamed on them as individuals as well as their party. Moreover, the alleged commitment made by local MPs to their own Westminster political careers sometimes served to undermine their credibility as dedicated constituency members. Goronwy Roberts' personal popularity and credibility suffered as a result of allegations of personal political ambitions. Following his period as Minister of State at the Welsh Office from 1964 to 1966, Roberts remained a government minister, with periods at the Department of

Education and the Foreign Office. However, Ministerial responsibilities led to Roberts being seen as something of an absent father, neglecting serious constituency matters in search of a political career. One example of the problems facing Roberts is worthy of note. In 1969 he promised Welsh Office attention to the need to attract a new factory in Talysarn, to alleviate the problems of the decaying slate districts. The new factory in Talysarn was intended to complement another new factory which had already been opened in neighbouring Penygroes. However, before the Talysarn project went ahead, the new factory in Penygroes had already closed. When an emergency meeting was held to discuss the crisis, Roberts was absent, sending his wife, Marion, to the meeting instead. Condemnation of Roberts's absence was profound and precipitated a series of letters in the local and Welsh press. As one constituent argued:

Does this sad situation not call for his personal attention? Mr. Roberts was not too busy to go to the Investiture in Caernarfon...but I wonder if he realises that there are men in his constituency who are desperate for work because industries in this area are closing down?<sup>116</sup>

These attacks, and Roberts's absence from his constituency because of Ministerial commitments, were a major factor in the decline of his personal popularity and were believed by some local figures to have been a significant factor in Labour's defeat in 1974.<sup>117</sup>

### *Labour organisation and the collapse of its appeal in north-west Wales*

Despite the fact that measures had been taken to improve the organisation of local Labour parties from the early 1960s onwards, there were still evident deficiencies at the end of the decade. First, Labour was unanimously unsuccessful in its attempts to create Labour 'groups' within local councils. Despite calls in the early 1960s for 'Labour' councillors to show their true colours at election time, little progress was



made on this front. Members of the Caernarfon Labour party who stood as councillors did so as independents. This was on the grounds that they were councillors for their respective villages, not the Labour party.<sup>118</sup> Goronwy Roberts were also aware of the fact that in rural Wales, some voters were influenced by personalities, not party politics (a factor which had aided Roberts's own popularity). Whilst this factor comforted Roberts when Labour under-performed in local elections, it nevertheless obscured an important aspect of Labour performance and popularity at a local level. By 1965 the Caernarfon Labour party's irritation at the nature of the problem was profound. In a letter to Emrys Jones the CLP argued:

You are probably aware that there is no great tradition of politics in local government in this part of Wales. I feel that now is the time to do this, and it would be facilitated if the Labour government and individual ministers began to show that they feel that local Labour party organisations were important. Patronage is not a good thing, but I believe it is time for the Labour movement to get its own people into positions of responsibility in these areas.<sup>119</sup>

Ironically, the Secretary of the CLP, Bert Thomas, was one of those 'Labour' councillors who stood as independents.<sup>120</sup> Disappointing local election results in 1966 added to the anxieties felt within the party over this perennial problems. As the WCL pointed out in 1966:

Many seats, particularly in rural areas were not contested by official Labour party candidates. It is hoped that constituency Labour parties through local and ward parties will contest every possible seat with Labour candidates in the future.<sup>121</sup>

There is little evidence to suggest that these attempts were successful. On the contrary, it was Labour's main opponent – Plaid Cymru – which had greater successes, making inroads into the 'independent' tradition during this crucial period (see Chapter Four).



Despite attempts to modernise local organisations, local parties were still dominated by 'cliques' at the end of the 1960s. In Caernarfonshire, Goronwy Roberts's 'political machine' was reportedly a personal one, and by the early 1970s run by an ageing, close-knit band of Goronwy Roberts loyalists.<sup>122</sup> There is little reason to dispute this claim.

The lengths taken by Merioneth CLP to defend the power and privilege of these select factions is worthy of note. In 1959 the party had met with Hugh Gaitskell in a bid to extract increased organisational grants. At the time the party argued that:

The constituency is one of the best organised in north Wales, but it is felt that the voluntary work of the undertaken was stretched to breaking point – from the point of finance and also the pressure of work.<sup>123</sup>

However, when the party promised additional funds for the party to employ a full-time organiser, this was rejected. Preservation of the clique appeared to be an instrumental factor. A similar situation developed in Caernarfonshire. Increasingly, constituency meetings occurred on an 'ad hoc' basis. Organisation was largely neglected between elections. Attempts to establish new branches and to revive branches which were flagging were notably weak in the period up to 1970.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, Roberts' position as a government minister served to dampen his old radical fervour. His election campaigns during the 1960s contained little of the radical rhetoric of the 1940s and 1950s, and were instead infused with a defence of government policies and strategies. For example, Roberts became a staunch defender of devaluation in 1967, arguing that 'this has been advocated for many years by people of all parties'. The same edition of a local newspaper which argued that:

The devaluation of the pound is an admission of the government's abysmal failure to deal with Britain's economic problems over the last three years.

Chaos...has followed meddle and muddle...we have had no constructive thought, let alone vision.<sup>125</sup>

By the end of the 1960s Roberts was busy defending Labour's beleaguered leader, Harold Wilson, calling for 'steadfast loyalty' to Wilson at Caernarfonshire CLP's AGM (which was reported in the local press). According to Roberts, Wilson had been subjected to 'incessant political abuse' designed to 'shake his nerve' from 'day one'. He argued that Wales owed much to Wilson, 'constitutional recognition, a commission to examine devolution and modern new industry through development area regulations'.<sup>126</sup> Such observations said much for his loyalty, but they paid scant attention to the predicament facing north-west Wales or the government's troubled record over devolution. In fact they seemed politically over-confident if not simply incorrect.

Moreover, the party's failure to deliver the goods in north-west Wales in the 1964-70 period was difficult to disguise, even in the party's own literature. *Labour's Record in North Wales* (1970) provided a classic account of how key policy aims from the early 1960s had largely failed. As has already been argued, advance factories proved to be little more than a 'white elephant'. The problem of attracting firms to these factories was clear. As the party argued of one advance factory in Anglesey:

Although the Amlwch factory has been suggested to 44 firms only 2 firms have visited it and there is still no tenant in view. The factory was authorised in June 1967 and was completed in May 1969. The small number of visitors to the factory reflects Mintech's difficulties in persuading industrialists at present to consider more remote locations.<sup>127</sup>

Neither did north-west Wales enjoy a proportionate share of other industries that had been attracted to north Wales. As the party's literature demonstrated, the majority (22 out of 36) new factories, projects and extensions had actually arrived in north-east

Wales, not the north-west. Moreover, ‘improvements’ to communications in north Wales were generally disappointing, but particularly so for the north-west. There were few visible signs of what had been achieved in the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth constituency areas. In actual fact, none of the trunk road improvement programmes undertaken by Labour from 1965 onwards touched on roads in either constituency. The schemes that did were still in the pipeline in 1970 when Labour was removed from power. On classified and principal roads, the party could only ‘boast’ of a 0.63 mile improvement in Caernarfonshire – but nothing for Merioneth. Little mention was made by 1970 of the plight of local railways.<sup>128</sup>

Despite Labour’s efforts at addressing long-standing Welsh concerns, its increased commitment to devolution and to Welsh linguistic and cultural concerns, the popularity of the party in north-west Wales had waned towards the end of the decade. The limitations of Labour policy and criticism aimed at the party in north-west Wales resulted in a dramatic reversal of the party’s fortunes in the General Election of 1970.

**Table 3: 1970 General Election results, Caernarfonshire and Merioneth**

Party	Caernarfonshire	Merioneth
<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>13,627 (40.0)</b>	<b>8,861 (39.8)</b>
PLAID CYMRU	11,331 (33.4)	5,425 (24.3)
LIBERAL	2,195 (6.5)	5,034 (22.6)
CONSERVATIVE	6,812 (20.1)	2,965 (13.3)
<b>MAJORITY</b>	<b>2,296 (6.6)</b>	<b>3,436 (15.5)</b>

Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.



As Table 3 demonstrates, Labour's majority in Caernarfonshire was dramatically reduced. The party's vote dropped by 4,000 (even given a larger electorate). Its share of the vote dropped from 56% in 1966 to 40%. Most of Labour's lost votes were undoubtedly lost to Plaid Cymru, whose share of the vote rose by 11.7% to 33.4%. There was also a renaissance in Liberal fortunes, which also affected Labour's majority. The Liberal party fielded a candidate in Caernarfonshire for the first time since 1959. Whilst modest, the party's accumulation of just over two thousand votes was significant. By 1970 Caernarfonshire was no longer a 'safe' Labour seat.

The picture in Merioneth was somewhat more confusing. Labour's majority in Merioneth actually increased from 8.7% in 1966 to 15.5%. However, its actual vote declined by some eight hundred, whilst its share of the vote declined by 4.4% to just 40% in 1966. The most significant changes in Merioneth occurred within the fortunes of Labour's opponents. Again, the rise of Plaid Cymru was a significant factor. As with the position in Caernarfonshire, Plaid's vote rose by 12.9% from 11.4% in 1966 to 24.3%. However, whilst the fortunes of the Liberal party in Caernarfonshire had improved (in line with national trends) the Liberal vote in Merioneth went in the opposite direction. The share of the party's vote declined by exactly the same percentage as Plaid's rise – 12.9%. Therefore, whilst the decline of the Labour party in Merioneth was not as apparent as in Caernarfonshire there were nevertheless worrying signs for the party. Not only had Labour's actual support and the party's share of the vote declined, but the election had also witnessed a substantial redistribution in the balance of political power within the county.



As results in both constituencies demonstrated, the period from 1966-70 witnessed growing problems for Labour. The UK party's policies in government thwarted heightened expectations. The emergence of a credible political alternative to Labour in the form of Plaid Cymru meant that these weaknesses could now be exploited. The development of this challenge will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

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1. See for example A. Walling, 'Modernisation, Policy Debate and Organisation in the Labour Party 1951-64, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 2001.
2. For more on this see S. Fielding, 'White Heat' and White Collars: The evolution of Wilsonism', in R. Coopey, S. Fielding and N. Tiratsoo (eds.), *The Wilson Governments 1964-70* (London, 1993), pp.29-48. For a contemporary view of modernisation see D. E. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London, 1965), pp.57-76. For a revisionist analysis of modernisation see I. Favretto, 'Wilsonism' Reconsidered: Labour Party Revisionism 1952-64', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2000), pp.54-80.
3. Labour Party, *Labour in the Sixties*, (London, 1960), p.3.
4. Ibid., p.57.
5. See Walling, PhD thesis, Conclusion.
6. Welsh Council of Labour, *Annual Conference Report* (1961), p.9.
7. A. Crosland, *Can Labour Win?* (London, 1960), p.15.
8. Ibid.
9. Labour Party, *Signposts for the Sixties*, p.23.
10. Labour Party, *The New Britain: The Labour Party's Manifesto for the 1964 General Election* (1964), p.10.
11. Ibid., p.10.
12. Labour Party, *Labour in the Sixties*, p.7.
13. *The New Britain*, p.10.
14. 'Advance copy of *The New Britain*, the Labour party manifesto for the 1964 General Election'. p.10, National Museum of Labour History, Box 329.12.
15. Tom Jones of the TGWU promoted new towns in north Wales, favouring the expansion of Wrexham and Caernarfon and the construction of a new 100,000 population development between Saltney and Flint. This was preferred to Jim Griffiths' 'African groundnuts' scheme for mid-Wales by the local press. See for example *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald* 6 November 1964. Plans for the building of a new town in Flintshire were endorsed by the WCL in 1965. See WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1965), pp.10-11.

16. *The New Britain*, p11.
17. There was general agreement on both sides of the Atlantic during the early to mid 1960s that the most satisfactory ways of tackling long-term, endemic poverty was through a better educated society. These beliefs were highly influential in the development of Wilson's 'New Britain' rhetoric and Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' in the United States.
18. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1967), p.
19. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1967), p.4.
20. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1963), p.8.
21. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1965), p.8.
22. *Ibid.*, p.9.
23. T. Burgess, *Matters of Principle: Labour's Last Chance* (London, 1968), pp.8-12.
24. Roberts was assisted in writing the draft by Eirene White, Labour's MP for East Flintshire. See Arthur Box to Goronwy Roberts, 16 April 1958, Lord Roberts MS. Box was Labour's Press and Publicity Secretary.
25. 'Draft discussion notes for *Problems of Wales*', General Secretary's Papers, File GS/WAL/78, NMLH, Manchester.
26. *Ibid.*, p.23.
27. Roberts's role in drawing up the document was not surprising given his personal interest in Welsh educational provision.
28. 'Draft Discussion notes on Problems of Wales', p.17.
29. *Ibid.*, p.24.
30. *Ibid.*, p.25.
31. The Tories had of course established a Minister of State for Welsh Affairs in the 1950s. For the 1959 general election the Liberal party promised to deliver a Secretary of State with responsibility for health, housing, local government, education and culture and ultimately the objective of a 'Welsh Legislative Assembly'. See *New Deal for Wales*, the Liberal party's 1959 election manifesto.
32. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1961), p.10, Film 688, NLW.
33. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1959), p.4, Film 688, NLW.
34. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1965), p.5, Film 688, NLW.

35. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1959), p.3, Film 688, NLW.
36. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1958), p.4, Film 688, NLW.
37. *Ibid.*, p.4.
38. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1958), p.3, Film 688, NLW.
39. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1959), p.6, Film 688, NLW.
40. The policy was based on the idea of building factories 'in advance' of when they were actually required. The policy of building advance factories was continued by the Labour government of 1964.
41. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1961), p.12, Film 688, NLW.
42. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1965), p.11, Film 688, NLW.
43. For more detail on jobs created after 1964 see Chapter Two.
44. Labour Party, *Labour's Record in North Wales*, (1970), Caernarfon RO, File XD/36/89/9.
45. *Ibid.*, p.1.
46. *Y Cymro*, 13 February 1964.
47. A major concern in the early 1960s was that the slate quarries could not compete with the attractive package offered by 'new' industries, either in terms of health and safety issues or of salaries.
48. Dinorwic quarry bemoaned the fact that 'the established reputation of good roofing slate has been further damaged by the dreary application of slate to unplanned and poorly designed industrial and suburban developments, and also the 'unfortunate association' of slate with 'dirt and squalor' which had 'done great harm to the industry'. See *Dinorwic Data: Information sheets on the architectural use of slate*, No. 1, Lord Roberts MS.
49. Dinorwic Slate Quarries to Goronwy Roberts, 19 November 1960, Lord Roberts MS.
50. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1961), p.11, Film 688, NLW.
51. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1962), p.12, Film 688, NLW.
52. *Ibid.*, p12.



53. These included plans for a 'motorway'. A sum of £300,000 was reportedly allocated by the government towards the development of the project. For more see *Y Cymro*, 20 February 1964.

54. *Ibid.*, p.4.

55. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1959), p.10, Film 688, NLW.

56. *Ibid.*, p.5.

57. *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.

58. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1966), p.7, Film 688, NLW.

59. However, the emergence of these new 'nationalist' minded members was largely confined to north and rural Wales, and bore the hallmark of Emrys Jones's influence. For more on the emergence of these MPs, see Chapters Five and Six.

60. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1960), p.9, Film 688, NLW. The others were East Flint, Pembroke, Cardiff South-East, Cardiff West, Swansea West and Carmarthen.

61. *Ibid.*, p.19.

62. Report of the Executive Committee regarding the 'Into Action Campaign', Merioneth CLP minutes, 24 January 1959.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Merioneth CLP EC minutes, 6 November 1959.

65. Numerous works deal with devaluation. For general analysis see for example, R. Coopey et. al., *The Wilson Governments*. For the major players see K. O. Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life* (Oxford, 1997), pp.260-90; B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992), pp.408-26 and 469-79. For excellent first hand accounts of this turbulent period see, A. Mitchell and D. Wienir, *Last Time: Labour's Lessons from the Sixties* (London, 1997).

66. Mitchell and Wienir, *Labour's Lessons*, p.155, quoting Roy Jenkins.

67. *Signposts*, p.155.

68. G. Brown, *In My Way* (London, 1971), p.96.

69. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 10 January 1964.

70. *Ibid.* Goronwy Roberts believed that pylons were far more attractive than 'empty ice-cream cartons' littering the countryside. Draft speech notes (no date), Goronwy Roberts MS.

71. Ferodo provided work for a large 'travel to work' area. It did not simply provide jobs for the residents of Caernarfon and surrounding villages.
72. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 13 March 1964.
73. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1967.
74. *Ibid.*, 9 June 1967.
75. *Ibid.*, 16 June 1967.
76. *This Week*, Vol. 8, No. 24, 18 November 1966.
77. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 12 January 1968.
78. *Ibid.*, 16 February 1968.
79. *Ibid.*, 5 November 1965.
80. *Ibid.*, 2 July 1965.
81. *Ibid.*, 16 September 1966.
82. Burgess, *Matters of Principle*, p.8.
83. Author's interview with Bert Thomas, 10 April 2001.
84. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 5 February 1965.
85. Dinorwic quarry pointed to the fact that two hundred year old ledges and galleries could not handle new machines. It was also 'alarmed' at the consequences of a new factory opening locally which would draw men out of the quarries (for higher wages) and believed that this showed that the industry was not 'an economic proposition'. See Dinorwic Slate Quarries to Goronwy Roberts, 19 November 1960, Lord Roberts MS.
86. *Barn*, May 1968.
87. In the face of Labour's fudging over the future of slate, Plaid Cymru's calls for the building of a small manufacturing firm which would absorb this generation of displaced workers may have appeared more realistic. See *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 16 July 1965.
88. *Ibid.*, 16 July 1965.
89. Low pay, combined with poor local transport networks and the need to travel long distances to work were contributory factors. See Caernarfonshire Education

Committee, Youth Employment Service Report 1969-70, Caernarfonshire County Council Papers, File XC/2/3/3, Caernarfon RO.

90. Under Selective Employment Tax an employer in manufacturing industry was able to claim back the full value of the tax paid on his employees, plus a premium of 7s 6d per man per week, with smaller sums for women and juveniles. In so doing, SET aimed to encourage the development of manufacturing industries before service industries. Not only north-west Wales, but also the highlands of Scotland, the Lake District and Cornwall complained of being 'heavily penalised' by SET. See G. McCrone, *Regional Policy in Britain* (London, 1969), pp.136-8.

91. Interview with Sir Idwal Pugh, conducted by Professor Merfyn Jones as part of the Cymru 2000 series. I am grateful to Professor Jones for this material.

92. For Plaid Cymru's criticism of Labour, see Chapter Four. For local criticism of the 1965 Welsh day debate, *Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald*, 12 November 1965.

93. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 2 July 1965.

94. Author's interviews with Owen Edwards, 25 February 2001 and Bert Thomas.

95. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1964), p7, Film 688, NLW.

96. WCL minutes for 1964-70 clearly demonstrate that the majority of party meetings during the period were held in the south.

97. Interview with Sir Idwal Pugh, Cymru 2000 archive.

98. Ibid.

99. For more on the controversies surrounding the limited powers afforded the Welsh Office, see Chapter Five.

100. T. Benn diary, 7 February 1967, T. Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries 1963-67* (London, 1987), p.488.

101. R. Crossman to Hughes 21 March 1968 and 4 April 1968, Lord Cledwyn MS, File C6, NLW.

102. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 11 June 1965.

103. Interview with Cledwyn Hughes, Cymru 2000 archive.

104. Interview with Leo Abse, Cymru 2000 archive.

105. Merioneth CLP minutes 6 February 1959, 'Notes of the meeting on 6 January 1959 between Hugh Gaitskell and officials of the Merioneth CLP'.



106. Author's interview with Owen Edwards. Merioneth CLP actually donated funds to the 'No' campaign, and supported Neil Kinnock's campaigns in particular during the 1979 referendum campaign.

107. Private information, Lady Marian Goronwy-Roberts. Thomas's antipathy to Welsh nationalists was highlighted in his infamous *Daily Post* column of the early 1970s (see Chapter Five). Roberts' is partly corroborated in Gwynfor Evans autobiography, where he recalls Roberts as one of a number of Welsh MPs who were hostile to his presence at Westminster. See G. Evans, *For the Sake of Wales* (Cardiff, 2001), p.139. Roberts was one of a majority of Labour MP's who, Evans argued, 'wouldn't lower themselves by speaking to a fascist'.

108. K. Morgan, 'Inaction for Wales', *Socialist Commentary*, May 1967.

109. Interview with Gwilym Prys Davies, Cymru 2000 archive.

110. Ibid.

111. *Barn*, April 1967.

112. *Y Faner*, 18 April 1968.

113. Brian Lapping, *The Labour Government 1964-70* (London, 1970), p.18.

114. *Barn*, May 1967.

115. Ibid.

116. *Barn*, August 1969.

117. Author's interview with Dafydd Wigley 10 April 2001. Wigley argued that Roberts's spell at the Foreign Office was particularly damaging, especially given press reports of Roberts' presence at exotic foreign destinations when serious problems remained unresolved at home.

118. Author's interview with Bert Thomas.

119. Bert Thomas (Caernarfonshire CLP) to Emrys Jones, 4 December 1965. Labour Party Wales Archive, File 31, NLW.

120. Author's interview with Bert Thomas.

121. WCL, *Annual Conference Report* (1966), Film 688, NLW.

122. Author's interview with Bert Thomas. For more on this see Chapter Six.

123. Merioneth CLP EC minutes, 6 February 1959.

124. Author's interview with Bert Thomas.



125. *Caernarvon & Denbigh Herald*, 19 January 1968.

126. *Ibid.*, 9 May 1969.

127. *Labour's Record in North Wales*, p.1.

128. *Ibid.*, p.8.

## Chapter Four

### The Emergence of a Political Alternative: The Development of Plaid Cymru's Organisation and Policies, 1964-70.

In a word, there is every cause for optimism. It would be foolish to say that losing eighteen contests was in some contrived form a victory. The situation is difficult. But there is every cause for realistic optimism. There is a future for Plaid Cymru.

*Y Ddraig Goch*, 1966 General Election post-mortem

This chapter focuses on the development of Plaid Cymru as a political force during the 1960s. It will be argued that like the Labour party, Plaid Cymru underwent a significant process of modernisation from the early 1960s onwards. This programme of modernisation focussed on two areas where Plaid had traditionally been weak – organisation and policy. The chapter will argue that whilst Plaid's electoral breakthrough in Carmarthen in 1966 was significant in helping to establish the electoral credibility of the party, the impact of this success has often been overstated in nationalist mythology and has served to obscure more profound and important changes that were taking place within the party both before and after that success. This chapter focuses on the way that Plaid became a more credible alternative to Labour, subsequent chapters at the way in which this manifested in an anti-Labour assault across Wales and specifically in north-west Wales.

Despite the impact of Carmarthen in 1966, there were still many obstacles which could stifle Plaid's development as a serious rival to the Labour party in Welsh speaking constituencies. As election results after 1945 had demonstrated, the appeal of a moderate nationalism based on cultural and linguistic ideals and practical economic policies had been hampered by Plaid's narrow views and virtually

nonexistent policies on the latter. Labour, not Plaid Cymru, combined a form of Welshness with modernising, Welsh, economic policies.

There were other problems. First, Plaid was handicapped by ineffective organisation. It lacked the financial strength of the big political parties and the personnel to spearhead local campaigns. Plaid's best electoral performances always came in by-elections, when the party could rally its limited forces from across Wales in one-off battles. In general elections, when these forces were scattered, Plaid found campaigning more problematic. Second, whilst the activities of the Welsh Language Society and the Free Wales Army may have gained approval from a pseudo-intellectual Welsh speaking elite, they were not consistent with a traditional 'radical' Welsh culture. The perceived association of the party with a fanatical fringe which had little respect for law and order was an electoral handicap.

However, as the chapter will show, there was a positive Plaid response to these and other challenges. Firstly, whilst Plaid could not match the Labour party financially, it was capable of countering this problem through the modernisation of local organisation. Modernisation concentrated on attempts to place the party at the heart of local communities. These included demolishing the 'independent' tradition of local council politics by ensuring that 'Plaid' councillors stood under the party's colours. This was an area where Labour had traditionally enjoyed little success.

Secondly, the party also began to shake off its image as the party of the intellectual, Welsh speaking elite. It abandoned the ideological purity of the founding fathers.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the party began to portray itself as a young, dynamic, organisation pursuing

modern and relevant political aims and ambitions. From within this new, youthful 'set' emerged a dedicated group of individuals committed to initiating an ambitious review of the party's economic policies, alongside the construction of a viable and credible programme. As a result of these changes, Plaid's image as a middle class, fringe party, devoid of coherent policies, was partially eroded. In its place the party was increasingly attentive to both local and national problems and began to develop its position as a credible political alternative to the Labour party in north-west Wales.

Whilst the Labour party continued to gain comfortable electoral victories at both Welsh and local levels in the General Elections of 1964 and 1966, the same elections brought more disappointment for Plaid Cymru. Despite the image changes that had accompanied Gwynfor Evans's period as president after 1945 the party continued to perform woefully. As Table 1 shows, even in Welsh speaking heartlands the party did not come close to challenging Labour's superiority;

**Table 1: General Election results, 1964 and 1966: Caernarfonshire and Merioneth,**

Party	Caernarfonshire		Merioneth	
	1964	1966	1964	1966
<b>LABOUR</b>	17,777 (54.4)	17,650 (56.1)	8,420 (38.4)	9,628 (44.2)
<b>PLAID CYMRU</b>	6,998 (21.4)	6,834 (21.7)	3,697 (16.8)	2,490 (11.4)
<b>LIBERAL</b>	No candidate	No candidate	7,171 (32.7)	7,733 (35.5)
<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>	7,915 (24.2)	6,972 (22.2)	2,656 (12.1)	1,948 (8.9)

Source: B. Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif/Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (1999).



### *Building a local base*

General election results showed little signs of the grand nationalist awakening which events such as Tryweryn were meant to have precipitated. Instead, the early 1960s were a difficult period for the party. A. Butt Phillip describes the early sixties as a period of 'drift and fragmentation'.<sup>2</sup> The creation of the Welsh Language Society in 1962 demonstrated the extent to which 'old' and 'new' factions within the party clashed over the party's role and purpose – particularly on the question of the Welsh language. The emergence of other marginal nationalist groups such as the Free Wales Army (however limited in terms of actual membership) nonetheless created an unfavourable 'nationalist' image which Plaid was forced to deal with. Yet the notion of 'drift and fragmentation' should not be over-stated. As influential party activists from the 1960s such as Phil Williams have argued, the Carmarthen by-election victory of 1966 was the result of positive changes that had already taken place – not the catalyst for the start of those changes. Williams sees the early 1960s in a much more positive light, arguing that insufficient attention has been paid to the 1959-66 period when Plaid 'gathered its strength' and was in the process of becoming a force in Welsh politics.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the 1950s when Plaid had been satisfied with its role as a potent political pressure group, elements within the party had become dissatisfied with the party's inept electoral performances in both local and general elections. There were attempts to rectify this situation. Emrys Roberts' arrival as the party's secretary was just one of a series of changes which precipitated the party's modernisation. Others included the growth of the party in south Wales in the late 1950s and the entrance of a 'new wave' of English speaking patriots into the party

fold. As a result, from the early 1960s onwards, Plaid Cymru became 'more of a denomination than a sect'.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1960s the party began a process of maturation – a period when the party renewed both its electoral strategy and organisation in a bid to become a 'proper' political organisation. In the 1950s Plaid had been an 'umbrella group' containing many ideologically diverse strands of Welsh nationalist sympathies under one cover.<sup>5</sup> The changes from the early 1960s onwards had been precipitated by the party's decision to fight more seats in the 1959 election. Electoral incursions into English speaking, Labour territories in south Wales were particularly influential in engaging a new generation of articulate English speaking activists, who might otherwise have been lured into Labour politics.<sup>6</sup> Many of these new members were to become influential members of the party's executive. Three distinct wings of the party emerged by the early 1960s; those who wanted Plaid to remain as a language pressure group, who felt that too much time was being wasted on elections whilst the language died; new members from the south who believed that too much attention was paid to the language issue; and those who wanted Plaid to get involved in direct action campaigns. If the 1960s were a turning point for Plaid Cymru this was largely the result of the victory of the middle group over the other two. The language issue became less problematic for Plaid following the formation of the Welsh Language Society in 1962 (see below). Direct action campaigns were not considered a viable option. In 1961 when a motion calling for 'direct action to meet acts of aggression' was put before the party's summer school it was heavily defeated.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of English speaking activists from Labour backgrounds was believed to be particularly influential in modernising the party. They, unlike the idealists of the 1940s and 1950s,

had been immersed in the belief that 'politics was about power'. This was a crucial ingredient of the change of attitude and emphasis within the party during the 1960s and 1970s.

Attempts to modernise the structure of the party, to make it more responsive and accountable to its supporters had therefore begun before the party's disappointing showing in the 1964 General Election (although the party's performance in both that election and the 1963 Swansea by-election re-enforced the need and urgency for those changes to take place). The Swansea by-election was a significant factor in forcing the pace of change. Despite the pooling of resources (both financial and physical) from across Wales, a well known and popular Plaid candidate had only received 1,600 votes. Whilst some satisfaction could be taken from the fact that intervention had forced rival parties to address local issues during campaigning, the by-election highlighted serious organisational deficiencies. For some within the party the by-election showed that Plaid was neither one thing – a potent political pressure group or the other – a credible political party. The latter, especially, was impeded by organisation factors. As the *Welsh Nation* noted:

Despite the considerable growth in Plaid Cymru activities, penetrating areas where the party's message had not previously been heard on the doorsteps and street-corners, and influencing in the most unmistakable manner, the thinking and proclaimed policies of parties far from Welsh in spirit, yet the solid achievements and obvious advances that betoken widespread public acceptance are still to seek. Wherever Plaid Cymru made its mark during the last twelve months, it was emphatically not in the electoral field, where some hard won bridgeheads were lost, no advance was recorded, and where previous promise turned to dead-sea fruit...Many in Plaid Cymru have stubbornly refused to face the problem of practical political organisation or serious political thinking. Byzantine dialects and the taking of perfectionist positions must give way to the less spectacular duties that press in on the months immediately preceding a general election.



The seemingly aimless drift of the party was an area which required major attention. As Emrys Roberts, in a shrewd and sober assessment of the party's performance in 1964 argued:

In the past we have tended to think that all we had to do was put up candidates every five years, and each time they would get a few thousand more votes until the great day dawned. We've been shaken out of this complacency. We shall not succeed until we have earned success; we realise that extra hard work during an election campaign is no substitute for constituency hard work, year in, year out.<sup>8</sup>

For Roberts, one of Plaid's fundamental electoral handicaps was the conservative, parochial and old-fashioned image of the party. One of the main obstacles in Plaid's development as a credible political force was the 'image we have of a party always fighting a rearguard action to preserve a decaying past, almost irrespective of the value of what we are defending'. Instead, a more confident, modern approach was required. As Roberts continued:

Instead of always being on the defensive, we must move on to the attack. Instead of trying to rebuild a nineteenth century Wales, we must build a twenty-first century country with all our traditional values but also with all the exciting new materials and patterns that this will involve.

Roberts' imagery did not go down well with traditionalist factions of the party. Some believed Plaid was being drawn in to the commercial and cosmetic game of politics – not only reducing the party to the levels of 'English' parties, but distracting Plaid from its 'spiritual' mission. Of concern to these traditionalists was the fact that Plaid, in an effort to conform to a more popular image, had watered down its 'nationalist' credentials. As one critic, H.W.J. Edwards, argued:

"The image" is a journalistic effigy of probably Yankee provenance. It seems to be of quite recent invention and may be traced to the publicity hounds and the advertisement dogs...do we, that is, decline a little in uttering the word 'nationalism'? Has nationalism, perhaps, become a dirty word because some pious prigs in the Labour Unionist Party tell us we ought to be more humanitarian and internationalist?...I am so averse from the use of the word 'image' in this context that for years I have been trying to persuade people to



be nationalists because nationalism is right rather than because it is something that attracts them.<sup>9</sup>

However, for modernists within the party, these beliefs had been the cause of the party's electoral failures. At an ideological level the criticism reflected concerns over the future of long standing Plaid policies – especially the ultimate question of whether the party should water down its traditional objective of dominion status or independence for Wales (see below). However, Roberts chose to avoid this issue, arguing that only through thorough planning and organisation could modernisation of the party be achieved. Financially, the party could not continue 'drifting from one crisis to another'. Branch, district officials and election agents would all have to be trained to ensure maximum efficiency. Moreover, every member's 'capacity' would be utilised to the full.<sup>10</sup> The party's propaganda would also receive attention:

Our propaganda must be more up-to-date and professional in its presentation – none of this cramming everything into a small dull space in the best nineteenth century style; more attention to design and layout – to eye appeal. And all this must be backed up with proper research in forward looking policy and with properly directed field work.

The need to generate activity between elections was paramount. Topping a list of priorities was the need to promote the communitarian appeal of the party. This involved a determined and ambitious attempt to establish the party at the forefront of local politics, from community to county councils. Modernisation involved some shrewd political manoeuvring. Despite the fact that Plaid had been unable to challenge Labour in parliamentary elections in north-west Wales, it was capable of exploiting a void in local electoral politics. As has already been argued, the independent orientation of local councils in north Wales had been a feature of local politics throughout the twentieth century. Plaid's attempts to break this mould followed

similar, unsuccessful attempts by other political parties (notably Labour) for most of that period.

The need to address local concerns echoed the ideas expressed by local Labour parties since the 1930s. The desire to break the independence of local councils emanated from the belief that this long-standing tradition delayed and disrupted decision making processes and prevented Labour from demonstrating its capacity and commitment. Like Labour, Plaid believed that independence led to inefficiency. Getting things done would involve forming partisan groups on local councils. Plaid, like Labour, had also been frustrated by local attempts to ensure that the party's voice was heard on local councils. In the early 1960s the party was dismissive of this 'small scale effort', which fell well short of the 'great effort that was needed' at local level.<sup>11</sup> Elfed Roberts believed that Welsh problems could only be solved (for the time being) through local government. For example, in areas like Merioneth, where native Welsh speakers were being anglicised in local primary and secondary schools, the absence of a Plaid group on the county council had not helped matters. Although fourteen 'independent' members of the local council had strong nationalist sympathies, they did not act as a group.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the decade the importance of communitarian politics permeated Plaid policy. As the party was to argue:

Local government represents a measure of self-government for Wales and we have to capitalise upon this for both the sake of the community and as one of the means of winning Welsh freedom.<sup>13</sup>

Re-drawing the map of local governance could therefore open a new chapter in the history of Welsh politics (see below).

Building up the party's local council base was also important to the party's organisation and ultimately to its political future. Plaid believed that Labour's strength in the south reflected the fact that the party was immersed in the social and political life of valley communities. In the south, it argued, local Labour figures were well known leaders of their communities. Labour's success emanated from its implantation in local politics – not because of Westminster politics.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, unlike the Labour, Liberal and Conservative parties, (who were able to try out various electioneering methods at UK level) Plaid only had Welsh elections. It was thus vital that the party contested as many of these elections as possible. This would provide essential training in organisation, and an opportunity to gather feedback on popular reactions to party policy.

Plaid believed that local politics would help the party build efficient local branches and district committees. Effective work and accountability at community level would serve to build up confidence in the party's ability and the opportunity to prove the viability of the fundamental changes taking place in the party's ideology and ethos. Local politics would also provide the training ground for party members, spokesmen and potential MPs. Leading party figures would (eventually) emerge from this background, steeped in a knowledge and understanding of local issues, concerns and political attitudes. This was a significant area of Plaid's development in the 1960s and one of the cornerstones of the party's later electoral successes.<sup>15</sup> Plaid councillors would play a prominent role in local branch activities, acting as branch secretaries or chairmen and promoting themselves as effective local community leaders. However, these efforts would be wasted if maximum publicity was not extracted. As a result, councillors would be encouraged to develop responsible, pro-active relationships with



the local press – who in turn would help the party sell the new compassionate, committed, image.<sup>16</sup> This in itself addressed a traditional party concern – the fact that the Welsh press had too little interest in Welsh social and economic problems. Moreover, the importance of establishing a local government foothold was essential to the financial viability and ultimately the future of the party. Electoral failure meant financial crisis. Finance thus became a major party pre-occupation and an important facet of the need to modernise the party.

The party appreciated that these efforts would be met with resistance in some quarters. These plans were more likely to be welcomed in the south (where partisan local politics dominated) than in the north, where old habits would be hard to break. Up until the 1960s, the party's propaganda had obscured the real state of the party at local level. In an effort to exude a buoyant image of the party, membership figures had been 'hopelessly optimistic'. Many of Plaid's branches existed 'on paper only'. During the 1960s the party became strong enough to face realities.<sup>17</sup>

The party tried the stick and the carrot. Inducements for local parties to conform to modernisation centred around a tightening up of branch 'privileges'. Under new arrangements introduced in 1966, Plaid branches would not be recognised or given branch rights in district committees or annual conferences unless they satisfied more stringent conditions regarding local government elections, meetings, finance and membership. This combination of carrot and stick was not without its spectacular (if sometimes dubious) successes. Some Plaid branches undoubtedly exaggerated membership figures in order to satisfy the new demands. The Merioneth constituency party provides a classic example. In October 1966 membership stood at forty. By July



1967 it had increased to a thousand. However, in propaganda terms rising membership, exaggerated or not, raised morale within the party.

Even before Carmarthen, positive changes had also occurred within the party's campaigning efforts, although the rewards for these efforts had not been forthcoming in the 1966 general election. Despite stagnant election results in 1966, there was a determination within the party that it should not renege on the commitment to modernisation. Some feared that factions would once again appear, calling for either a return to traditionalism or for the party to engage in more vigorous displays of nationalist protest. These alternatives were neither acceptable or feasible. As one party spokesman argued:

The next phase in the campaign is clear. It does not lie in abdicating from politics either by becoming a non-election fighting do-good society, a sort of political Cymrodorion; or by resorting to the imbecility of blowing up installations with all its dangers to life.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, there had been some forward momentum. The determination to embed the party at the bosom of local communities was reflected in the party's tactics for that election. There was a profound shift of emphasis, which broke away from local electioneering traditions. The 'cnoc ar y drws' ('knock on the door') dominated Plaid's campaigning for the election. This was similar to the successful 'operation knocker' carried out by the Merioneth Labour party in the late 1950s.<sup>19</sup> Largely abandoning the traditional election meetings in damp village halls, Plaid instead launched an energetic campaign of home-visits. Local branches were encouraged to vary the ages and gender of canvassing teams, to encourage new, enthusiastic, members to take a prominent role in campaigning and to listen to the concerns of local voters. It strongly opposed the practice of leaflet dropping – believing that this created

as much antipathy as sympathy for the cause. The success of these campaigns was noticeable. As one advocate argued, this new approach:

Ensured that we held our ground in twenty constituencies, won more new members than ever before in such a short space of time, raised more money but more than that to show that Plaid Cymru was serious enough about its politics to go out with its message, to answer question, face its opponents, get the neutrals thinking and to convince those who already sympathise with Plaid aims to take that crucial extra step.<sup>20</sup>

These efforts were considered a major factor in the Carmarthen victory a few months later.<sup>21</sup> However, as has already been argued, Plaid was adamant that these efforts should not be suspended once elections had passed. Efforts made in the party in the aftermath of the 1966 were indicative of the way in which organisational efforts combined with efforts to modernise party policies. Local constituencies were encouraged to select candidates well in advance of actual elections. Candidates would then be encouraged to canvass 'samples' from each constituency, concentrating not on 'typical' areas of Plaid Cymru support but also 'suburbia, council estates, industrial villages, market towns and seaside towns'.<sup>22</sup>

By the late 1960s the new wave of party activists who had entered the party in the early 1960s had begun to make their mark in constituency activities and politics. Often, these candidates were very different to those who had represented the party in past – they entered parliamentary elections with the intention of winning. Too often in the period up to 1966 the party had been represented by candidates who stood to make a political point. They had no intention of winning. One candidate had even stepped down when he realised that winning was feasible.<sup>23</sup>

### *An emerging generation of leaders*

The new generation of Plaid candidates were aware of these problems. New faces in the party included Dafydd Wigley, Phil Williams and later Dafydd Elis Thomas. 'Political to their fingertips' they represented a new desire for power and success.<sup>24</sup> They were also aware of the importance of personality in the local party's popularity, especially in north-west Wales. Dafydd Wigley provides a classic example of how this new generation of Plaid candidates were acutely aware of the political game. Having been touted as Plaid's prospective candidate in Merioneth in 1967, Wigley had been eager to discover whether his selection received the democratic approval of the local party. He would not be seen as an 'outsider'. Despite the fact that he emanated from Caernarfonshire, Wigley had been educated at Manchester University and then worked in London as an industrial accountant – traditionally the kind of candidate who had been out of touch with the values of 'gwerin'. Wigley knew that his knowledge of Merioneth was limited. He was particularly concerned that his knowledge of agricultural problems was not up to scratch. Moreover, because of his career, he was unable to live in the county – another factor which may have been an electoral handicap.<sup>25</sup>

These concerns were quashed. Wigley was informed that his selection had been democratic. Largely through the salesmanship of Emrys Roberts, Wigley had received seventeen out of eighteen selection committee votes. Local party workers and activists were to work closely with the candidate, introducing him to influential local figures and educating him in the nature and scale of local problems. Living outside the county would not be a problem.<sup>26</sup> A press release announcing Wigley's selection hammered



home not only his connections with the county but also his connections with Welsh culture:

Mr. Wigley is not a newcomer to Merioneth, since he lived at Dolgellau for two years in his youth. His wife, Eleanor Bennett, the well known harpist, also comes from the county, and her parents, Mr and Mrs Emrys Bennett Owen, reside at Dolgellau. It was in Llanuwchllyn that Mr and Mrs Wigley were married last year...he was for two years leader of the London Aelwyd of Urdd Gobaith Cymru.<sup>27</sup>

Even those in the local Labour party who despised Plaid Cymru admired Wigley for his determined effort at embedding the party in Merioneth, particularly in 'Labour' towns like Blaenau Ffestiniog.<sup>28</sup> Wigley became the lynchpin not only of the development of party policy but also in the expansion of organisation in the county in the late 1960s. Among these developments was the publication of 'Triban Meirion' – a party newspaper distributed free every other month from 1968. The development of a local policy group also produced distinctly local versions of party policy.<sup>29</sup>

Local election results in 1967 justified the faith placed in Plaid's modernisation strategies. The party had fought more local elections and had been more positive. As a result, across Wales the party boasted a total of four hundred county, town and borough councillors following the local government elections. 'Most' of these councillors had stood as official Plaid candidates. Those who had not had done so were in areas where there was an established 'independent tradition'.<sup>30</sup> Plaid was also happy with the fact that most of these councillors were younger than councillors of other parties – thus re-enforcing the young image which the party sought to convey.<sup>31</sup>

In reality the progress made at local level was minimal. However, breakthroughs in Labour dominated councils were still satisfying and made good propaganda. Most of these successes occurred in the south, although there were notable victories in the north, particularly in Blaenau Ffestiniog, where three councillors were elected. There



were also successes also in other unlikely places, including Rhyl and Wrexham.<sup>32</sup> 'Disappointing' results followed in the May 1968 local elections, when from a total of sixty five 'official' candidates only six were elected. None of these successes were in north-west Wales. But as the party argued, in terms of the party's modernisation, these were still 'early days'.<sup>33</sup> In general, however, the battles with the independents had not been successful. These problems would not be resolved until the 1970s (see Chapter Six).

Membership campaigns and fund raising activities re-enforced Plaid's plans for community integration. The array of activities organised by local branches was overwhelming. Plaid activities often provided local communities with much needed (and indeed their only) sources of entertainment – a factor which helped to warm sceptics and counteract the image of Plaid supporters as 'extremists, fanatics, hotheads, dreamers, exhibitionists' and 'intolerant people with chips on their shoulders'.<sup>34</sup> There was the expected organisation of traditional Welsh cultural activities – folk dancing and concerts being the most notable – but there was another new, modern, dimension and one that appealed to those turned-off by the 'old fashioned' face of Welsh cultural 'nationalism'. The party went out of its way to appeal for new ideas and initiatives which would increase its popularity.<sup>35</sup> Quiz nights and fashion shows provided two popular examples of this 'new wave' of party activity, whilst growing and increasingly active local women's sections. These successfully set up local market stalls which again promoted Plaid within small local communities and demonstrated its eagerness to attract female activists. The diverse range of social and cultural activities were not only important from a financial viewpoint, but potentially enabled the party to embed itself across local generational

and class boundaries. Membership campaigns, local activities, and growing dissatisfaction with Labour policy ensured that Plaid had broken through even in the most unpromising local towns like Blaenau Ffestiniog by 1967. As *Y Ddraig Goch* was proud to announce:

At last it seems that the party is breaking through in Blaenau Ffestiniog, Labour's major bastion in Merioneth. The branch meets regularly every month...the job of canvassing and finding new members is going ahead happily. A youth branch has been established and the branch has already organised a folk dancing evening that was very successful.

The incursion into Labour strongholds was not confined to Merioneth. In Caernarfonshire a branch was reformed in Llanberis in 1967. Other traditional Labour areas such as Pontllyfni, Dyffryn Nantlle and Llanrug all reported buoyant branches by the late 1960s. In Porthmadog a local newsletter was distributed – an idea which was later adopted by several other branches in north-west Wales.<sup>36</sup>

However, the growth of the party after 1966 put a strain on the party's fragile finances. Party literature highlighted the fact that finances had to grow in line with membership. Sustaining a growing party involved larger financial responsibilities. In order for the party to grow even further it needed funds to employ full-time party workers. Organisation (both central and local), publicity, finance and administration (in particular typists) were all needed. In 1966 the party's fundraising activities had generated a total income of just £25,000. This was insufficient to fund the ambitious infrastructure which the party had in mind. As the party was aware, it could not continue to evolve as a modern political force in the long-term whilst relying on the impassioned and committed support of under-paid members of staff.<sup>37</sup> Still, commitment to the cause was undoubtedly a major party strength. As the *Welsh Nation* argued in the aftermath of the 1966 election:

There is no exaggeration: those who work for Plaid Cymru have no illusions as to the immediate outcome; they can expect no honours; no titles or invitations to fashionable official functions for themselves and their wives; no trips abroad on public funds; or fat Parliamentary salaries; no hope of “plums”; in fact quite the reverse. Plaid Cymru workers can only expect “sweat and tears” in the service of their fellow countrymen.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, Plaid’s improved by-election performances also demonstrated the importance of financial strength to the party. Rhondda provided a classic example of the power of money in electioneering. In the 1966 general election the party had spent a total of £70 on its Rhondda campaign – and performed miserably. However, in 1967 the party spent £600 – and performed respectably. Of course, the expenditure does not explain the performance, but a more professional approach to organisation gave the party an edge and self-confidence. The party was not afraid to learn from the established tactics and electioneering skills of its political opponents, even if the ‘lessons’ the party extrapolated were a little naive. For example, Plaid believed that Labour won the Rhondda by-election in 1967 between 7 and 9pm on polling day, its superior organisational skills in every ward meaning that last-minute supporters were rounded up and transported to the poll. By contrast, Plaid bemoaned the fact that lack of party personnel, transport and organisation in general had let the party down. Some three hundred party members from across Wales had aided the Rhondda campaign, but even with a small army of party workers, Plaid argued that campaigning was ineffective because misdirected. Rhondda provided an example of this. As the party admitted, the campaign had got off to a bad start. The first meeting had attracted a grand audience of one. This was attributed to the fact that meetings were advertised by loudspeaker only, and not backed up with leaflets and posters. When this problem was addressed, attendance at Plaid’s meetings boomed.



Plaid also recognised that systematic 'core' organisation was necessary for the party to perform well in the 'normal' conditions of General Elections. It could not rely on the kind of support it had received in Carmarthen and Rhondda when there was a contest everywhere, and when voters were less likely to protest at their 'normal' party's performance. It was therefore important for individual constituencies to improve organisation, becoming more self-sufficient and independent.<sup>39</sup> In other areas, however, the lessons were being learned a little quicker. The level of planning going into the organisation of public meetings suggested that the party was getting to grips with the political game. For example, in preparation for a public meeting in Caernarfon in 1966, organisers and party members were given strict guidelines to 'stage-manage' the event. Organisers were warned that the hall must be full; that the atmosphere at the meeting had to be enthusiastic and up-beat and that questions from the floor had to be 'responsible' and 'relevant'.<sup>40</sup>

Plaid's willingness to learn from its opponents also carried over to its policies for the development of youth sections. Ironically, whilst Labour was concerned at the attractiveness of Welsh nationalism to sections of Welsh youth, Plaid was attempting to understand how to develop its youth sections by following Labour's model. The need to develop youth sections became a high priority after the 1966 General Election. As *Y Ddraig Goch's* youth editor admitted, the election had given the party little cause for celebration, apart from respectable performances in Caernarfon and Carmarthen. However, building up viable youth sections came to be seen as an integral component of the party's modernisation, an attempt to set the foundations on which future party growth could be based. Moreover, attention to youth became even more crucial as the voting age was lowered to eighteen in time for the 1970 election.



especially as this created a new voting class which Plaid believed it could monopolise in some parts of Wales.

The party was dismayed by the fact that even in potential electoral target constituencies like Caernarfonshire, no youth branches existed in 1966. The geography of the county, the fact that many locals went away to college and/or left home for jobs outside Wales, was part of the explanation.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand it was also aware of the fact that its political rivals, notably Labour, had active youth branches within the county. It pointed to the fact that Labour was much better at publicising youth activities, and used its youth sections positively in propaganda. Goronwy Roberts provided a fine example of shrewd political gamesmanship at work. Roberts was among those who had attributed his convincing electoral success in 1966 to support received from young voters. As Plaid argued:

It is very doubtful that this was true when one looked into the matter...but perhaps Plaid's leaders should try this sometimes...I am not saying that Plaid should soft-soap youth members, but it could give an emphasis that appeals to youth, something that shows that it is a party of the future, a young party, a party of new ideas.<sup>42</sup>

Plaid was aware of the fact that its efforts in the past to sustain youth membership had backfired. Too often, youth members served as little more than glorified pamphlet sellers, who were rarely involved in 'serious' party activities or decision making processes. Efforts were made to address this problem. South Wales branches led the way in organising 'Saturday Schools' in the winter of 1965. These formed the model for more ambitious 'all Wales' Schools from 1966 onwards. Whilst these schools acted as a force for positive change, the negative impact had also to be considered. The clashes between modest and more vigorous forms of Welsh nationalism, as well as the difference in ideological emphasis between members from the north and the

south, had to be addressed. For example, organisers were reminded that the purpose of the Schools was to educate youth members in party principles. It was imperative that meetings did not degenerate into 'flaming rows'. As *y Ddraig Goch* stressed, there was always an onus on Plaid's youth to 'disagree courteously and respectfully'.<sup>43</sup> There was a serious point to the message. Sections within the party were very aware of the way in which various 'nationalist' organisations were 'tarred with same brush' by the general public. It was therefore important for Plaid's 'Saturday Schools' to act as a forum for serious political discussion, to demonstrate that Plaid's young members were responsible democrats and thus to distance the party from the more unsavoury forms of youth activism and protest.<sup>44</sup>

The emergence of 'student' activism in demonstrations and protests and the renaissance of nationalist agitation in the mid 1960s was often difficult for Plaid to handle. Despite deep-rooted, traditional, sympathy for 'nationalist' causes and concerns in Welsh speaking Wales, the emergence of 'non-violent' direct action protests, particularly when involving the setting off of explosive devices, were publicly unacceptable. The electoral implication of such 'nationalist' activism for Plaid Cymru was profound. Throughout the 1960s (despite sympathy within some sections of the party) Plaid sought to distance itself from these forms of protest – and particularly from 'lunatic fringe' movements such as the Free Wales Army.<sup>45</sup> In 1967 the party's executive committee presented a motion at the party's annual conference instructing 'branches, sections and committees' to 'expel anyone who is connected in any way to the organisation or activities of the FWA or Patriotic Front' as these organisations were 'harmful to the best interests of Wales and the growth of the party'.<sup>46</sup>

The association of the party with the activities of the Welsh Language Society was more complex. In many ways it was a double-edged sword. This was a particularly delicate area for the party after 1962 and one which the party was forced to handle with care. As Phil Williams has highlighted, a great deal of mythology surrounds the 'birth' of the WLS:

Several writers have suggested that *Cymdeithas* was a breakaway from Plaid Cymru...it is important to put on record that *Cymdeithas* was set up following a resolution to the annual conference of Plaid Cymru and was very much a child of the Blaid.<sup>47</sup>

On the one hand the sign painting activities of *Cymdeithas* lost the party potential voters. On the other hand, many youthful members of *Cymdeithas* could be regarded as almost certain Plaid voters. It was therefore important not to alienate this support, whilst attacking it could cause internal difficulties by alienating traditionalists within the party. As many Plaid spokesmen were aware, many youthful members had been attracted to the party through the Welsh Language Society and the dynamic, strident, 'trendy' activism which these activities promoted. Dafydd Iwan was just one young member who felt he had 'no choice' but to join the WLS in 1963, representing as it did a 'new spirit' among one section of Welsh youth.<sup>48</sup> More to the point, despite the fact that there was tension between the movements in the mid 1960s, many members of the WLS were also members of Plaid Cymru. For Iwan, Plaid and the WLS were natural bedfellows:

Two sides of the same coin...for the WLS there was...a definite purpose, one which was to fight directly to change people's attitude towards the Welsh language...Plaid's role was different in terms of means and tactics...and the road had to be followed differently...but the aims and directions were still the same.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Plaid and the WLS worked in harmony in terms of traditional nationalist pressure group politics. Both were important in alleging duplicity and contradiction in the policies of the 'British' political parties over Welsh social and economic issues –



not just language. Whilst Plaid Cymru itself often came in for criticism from the WLS over its position concerning the Welsh language (which led to the formation of the WLS in the first instance) the propagandist work conducted by the society undoubtedly aided the already influential critique of 'British' political parties conducted by Plaid.

Moreover, there was a great deal of sympathy within Plaid Cymru, especially in the north, for the principled stand made by *Cymdeithas Yr Iaith*. There were still many who wanted Plaid to develop a closer relationship with the society. In 1969 the party's Dyffryn Ogwen branch attempted to table a motion at the annual conference which called for the party to give 'all possible support to the Welsh Language Society – including financial support'. The motion was not presented before the conference.<sup>50</sup> Others welcomed the existence and tactics of the WLS (and FWA) because, by comparison, Plaid Cymru came to be seen as moderate and respectable.<sup>51</sup> If *Cymdeithas Yr Iaith* focussed on language, Plaid did not have to. Of course, there was a danger that it might be forced to do so, by party members who did not see Plaid's 'retreat' as a division of labour but as a betrayal, but there was some potential in this approach.

The *Ddraig Goch* actually encouraged Plaid's youth movement to arrange and engage in more protests. It also encouraged young Plaid members to join *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*.<sup>52</sup> A significant concern addressed in one article dealing with the issue was not the electoral repercussions of nationalist activism on Plaid's electoral fortunes, but the fact that the party's budding young protestors lacked protest songs which could be sung at demonstrations – a problem addressed by Iwan.<sup>53</sup> The aim was to create a



‘Welsh’ movement that was as democratic and fashionable – as much a part of 1960s culture as broader protest movements. By contrast, Labour appeared old and old-fashioned.

By the end of the decade the party had made significant organisational progress in north-west Wales. As has already been argued, new branches were established throughout the region. Merioneth became the party’s fastest growing constituency party from 1967 onwards, and the party’s major fund raising constituency before the end of the decade.<sup>54</sup> Youth branches were buoyant in Bro Dysynni, Llanbedr, Barmouth, Penrhyndeudraeth, Dolgellau, Llangynog, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Edeirnion by the end of the decade. Branch offices were established in Dolgellau and Blaenau Ffestiniog by 1969.<sup>55</sup> Caernarfonshire was not far behind. Redundant branches were reformed in important centres (including Caernarfon) by 1968, whilst incursions into Labour territories continued. These were aided by the rapid development of the ‘Merched Y Wawr’ women’s movement. Thirty three ‘Merched Y Wawr’ branches were functioning by 1968, the majority of these in Caernarfonshire and Merioneth. Branches of one hundred members or more were not uncommon. Not only, as Plaid argued, did ‘Merched Y Wawr’ ‘demonstrate the party’s support for Welsh women’, but they also served to re-enforce Plaid’s community integration.

Despite the modernisation of organisation much work remained to be done. The party’s canvass of 94 homes in Aberystwyth in 1968, reported in the party press to inform the movement, indicated some of the problems still facing the party. Of the 94 homes only 9 were supporters of the party. A total of 41 stated that they would ‘consider’ supporting the party. The remaining 44 were less likely to do so. The

reasons for reservations and indifference towards the party underlined the problems it faced. Visits to twelve homes revealed that householders did not consider self-government to be a viable option. Ten refused to support the party because of its strong links to the language – some fearing that television would become flooded by programmes in Welsh. A further nine pointed to ‘extremism’ as a turn-off. However, by far the most prominent reason, expressed by thirty six homes, was the fact that they ‘knew nothing about Plaid Cymru policies’.<sup>56</sup> As the report concluded:

This is a sign of the task that still faces us, even after Rhondda and Carmarthen. If people don’t know our policies, we have no chance.

Modernisation of party policy, as well as organisation was therefore vital, and an area where – without altering or questioning key areas of Plaid’s activity – progress could be made.

### *The Development of Policy*

Along with the need to modernise the party’s organisational machinery came the need to modernise the party’s policies. In reality the two sides of modernisation were intertwined. Organisational modernisation had to be backed up with the development of serious, coherent and credible policies. At the same time, policy development could not be ‘sold’ by a party machine which was out of touch with the realities of modern political campaigning. By the early 1960s some believed that the lack of definitive policy undermined Plaid’s reputation. As one party spokesman argued in 1963:

In the first place, nationalism in a vacuum, divorced from social issues of the day is an impossible concept and an impossible position to maintain...how can Plaid Cymru object to the closure of Welsh railways without expressly or by implication advocating the kind of transport system it would like to see in a self-governing Wales? How can we criticise our present educational system or our present TV service without suggesting what we would like to see in their place...and to suggest what we would like to see in their place is to take up a positive position on social issues of importance. It is to take up general

political attitudes which, although they are intimately connected with our nationalism are not exclusively nationalist.

However, the ideological transition required to develop Plaid's policies was not always smooth. Even by the late 1960s some members of the party still believed its fundamental strength was as a powerful pressure group, raising the profile and interest of 'English' political parties in Welsh social, economic and political issues. This was an area where Plaid believed it had achieved a modicum of success. Through the 1950s and early 1960s the party believed that it had helped ensure the growing recognition of Welsh needs among its political rivals, especially the Labour party.

As a result of its pressure group mentality, the design of coherent and competitive policies had often come second to the need to criticise or condemn the policies offered by its political rivals (this approach will be examined in greater depth in Chapter Five). Due to the party's limited development and popularity in the 1950s this often placed it in a fortuitous position, for whilst it could criticise solutions offered by its rivals and could point to its prophecies when those policies failed, it was unlikely that its own 'policies' would be put to the test. As one political commentator argued in the 1950s, Plaid's pressure group status was enhanced by the fact that it did not have to suffer 'the vulgarisations ennui of power'.<sup>57</sup> This was an important and perceptive point. As Vic Davies, Plaid's candidate in the 1967 Rhondda by-election noted, Plaid often straddled the pressure group/political party divide. If Labour solved the unemployment problems in the Rhondda before the next general election, then Plaid could justifiably feel that its role as a pressure group had been successful. If, on the other hand, Labour failed to deliver then Plaid could benefit electorally. Even if



theoretically weak, this thinking was valuable in terms of propaganda and inner party morale.

During the 1950s much of Plaid's own rhetoric concentrated on the need for Wales to be given greater political autonomy – and ultimately independence. Welsh 'freedom' was regarded by propagandists as a 'cure-all' solution to Welsh social and economic problems. The intricacies of policy content were rarely elaborated in party statements. A great deal of the party's propaganda concentrated on the extent to which other countries (of roughly equal or smaller size to Wales) managed to survive independently. The work of leading economists from both inside and outside Wales (who concurred with many of the party's arguments) gave (some) credence and credibility to the party's declarations. As electoral results clearly demonstrated, Welsh voters were not convinced. Moreover, the need to develop policy was made implicitly clear from Plaid's experiences in local politics. The party had too often taken 'one step forward and two steps back'. Seats won were too easily thrown away when up for renewal, largely because party representatives lacked firm and definite policies on key issues.<sup>58</sup> The party could not hope to progress at national level whilst it entertained the same problems.

Nonetheless, this negative emphasis remained popular in the early 1960s. For example, the election addresses of Plaid candidates in the 1964 general election focussed on the ways in which Wales was not receiving a fair return for its contribution to British taxation, with the result that other small countries similar to Wales enjoyed far higher standards of living. The exploitative nature of Wales's 'colonial' status thus formed an important strand of the party's campaigns. Plaid



argued that the Welsh tax bill of £300 million was double that paid by many larger countries. Moreover, even small countries like New Zealand and Austria enjoyed a much higher standard of living than Wales. As the election literature of R.E. Jones in Caernarfonshire noted, old age pensions in New Zealand were paid at a younger age than those in Wales (60 not 65) and were then paid at a higher rate (married couples being paid some £3 a week more than couples in Wales). Within Britain, Plaid argued that Wales was treated as a 'second class citizen'. Wages in the coal industry provided a classic example of this disparity – even for voters in north Wales. As Jones highlighted, wages in the Welsh coal industry were the lowest in Britain – despite the 'fact' that south Wales valleys contained some of the richest coal seams.

However, this concentration on the benefits of independence obscured some more fundamental policy aims which were developed in the early sixties and which formed the basis of the more elaborate policies developed by the party towards the end of the decade. A growing realisation within the party of the need to compete with Labour, was portrayed in a Plaid policy statement published in 1963. The socialist appeal and agenda of the party was clearly defined, in both economic and social policy. Plaid embraced state control of industry, close co-operation with trade unions, a commitment to a welfare state, internationalism and high degrees of public spending. Social equality became a watchword for the party. Equal status for the Welsh language in Welsh education and in public and civic life was a more traditional commitment, expressed as part of a modern agenda, based on justice and equality.<sup>59</sup>

Whilst the party was attentive to the appeal of socialist policies within Wales, it also sought to extend their appeal. The party's industrial policy was influenced by more

than a hint of Welsh 'syndicalist' traditions. Whilst the party was not dismissive of the principles of state control it argued that 'stringent' controls or control by 'remote bureaucratic boards' were to be condemned. In their place, Plaid favoured 'real co-operative ownership', with industrial controls being located in the hands of 'workers and technicians' together with 'suppliers, consumers and local authorities.' National Industrial Boards would be created. These would co-ordinate the efforts of the nation and work in close co-operation with government agencies whose role would be to stimulate industrial development. Trade Unions would also play an active role. The formation of a Welsh T.U.C would be 'actively encouraged.' Welsh trade unions would be encouraged to work closely with international workers' organisations. All sides would work together towards the successful adoption of co-operative ownership and workers' control. As workers' control was achieved, and the need for trade unions regressed, the unions would take on a new role, ensuring that social amenities were provided in the workplace, offering advice for members on a range of issues and undertaking technical, scientific and medical research connected with their industries and providing representation on local bodies. Traditional Welsh industries, such as agriculture, were afforded considerable attention. Under a Plaid government, a National Land Board would be created. The Board would control the disposal of all Welsh land. However, the party's agriculture policy also contained a strong element of traditional party beliefs and aims. The conservative desire to protect the shape and structure of small Welsh farms was profound. Food production would become Welsh agriculture's major responsibility. A considerable amount of self-sufficiency would 'protect the country from the fluctuations of international trade'. Countries like Wales, which were geared primarily for export trade, were at the same time being forced to rely on imported goods for many of their basic raw materials. However, the drive for

self-sufficiency would be accomplished not through restructuring traditional smallholding methods but through consolidating them. As the party argued 'emphasis will be placed on the traditional unit in Welsh agriculture – the small farm'. The desire to protect and promote traditional farming methods was not only driven by parochial conservatism but by pragmatism. As Plaid argued, smallholdings would be encouraged:

Not only because it is the traditional unit but also because small farms spread ownership of land and reduced hired labour to a minimum, because they encourage the application of the principle of co-operation and because production per acre is higher on small farms than on large farms. (Production per man is higher on large farms, but we need greater production and more jobs, not fewer jobs and less production).

The internationalist spirit of the party was also evident. Plaid called for Wales to be given a seat in the United Nations as a prelude to full Welsh involvement in bodies such as UNESCO and the WHO. The party supported the development of a 'World Government'. Such a government, it argued, could only come about when national governments developed a willingness to devolve some of their power to international bodies such as the UN. A central factor in the need for such a government was to restrict 'the making, testing and using of nuclear weapons'.

Problems closer to home also received some consideration. The party's policy on social services was both basic and pragmatic. Equality was the guiding principle. Benefits, pensions, etc. would be provided equally for men and women. These would be paid at a rate which would provide a 'reasonable standard of living' and without the need to resort to 'other means of assistance'. All social service payments would automatically be index-linked. This would relieve the bureaucratic burdens attached to increasing levels of benefit and would ensure that payments never fell below levels of



acceptability. Housing provision was also addressed. The principal aim was that all Welsh men and women would become homeowners under a Plaid government. Tenants would be given the right to purchase their homes at current market values after they had lived in a property for ten years. The leasehold system would be abolished. Local authorities would be encouraged to provide 'generous' grants and loans for the improvement of property. Until the aim of total home ownership was achieved, Welsh tenants would be afforded protection against unreasonable rent increases and eviction. Whilst the party was now discussing social and economic policies, it was still in part campaigning by promising a better life. It did not address practical issues such as the impact of such policies on taxation.

Neither were 'typical' Plaid considerations ignored. Education was to be a vital area of interest for a Welsh parliament. Educating children in the importance and values of 'full citizenship' at community, local, national and international levels was a priority. So too was the need for children educated in Wales to be fully conversant with all aspects of Welsh history. As the party argued, only through understanding Welsh history could a new generation make 'a full contribution towards its future development'. English and Welsh would be taught in both primary and secondary schools. Smaller classes would be encouraged to develop a 'real human relationship between teacher and pupil'. School curricula would include 'practical preparation for life in the surrounding area'. Vocational training as well as subjects 'providing a more liberal education and subjects that will provide openings for other and more specialised careers' would be encouraged. The need to protect and promote Welsh culture and the language would be facilitated by the development of Welsh TV and radio, government aid for the publication of Welsh books, a National Theatre.



Orchestra, National Art Gallery together with academies which would 'provide tuition in all aspects of the arts in both languages'. Amateur organisations would be given full governmental support. In particular the National and International Eisteddfodau would receive 'full support and increased grants' for the extension of their activities.

Plaid's policies in the early 1960s therefore combined a brand of populist socialism with respect and attention for more traditional, conservative aspects of the party's appeal. The development of policy was already underway by 1964 – although too late to influence the party's programme for the 1964 general election. The party's conference in 1964 indicated the kind of issues which the party sought to address. Oil prospecting off the Welsh coast, a Welsh Water Board, a Welsh Power Board and a co-ordinated transport policy were all afforded attention. So too were farm prices, local government reform, broadcasting and television. An indication of policies developed by the Research Group towards the end of the decade were also aired – notably the idea of a 'Welsh Economic Development Authority' – later changed to become 'Welsh Development Authority'. This was an important feature of the Economic Plan of 1969 and a similar concept to Labour's 'Welsh Development Agency', which was established in the mid 1970s.

However, the influx and influence of a young generation of 'power brokers' from the early sixties onwards ensured that a dramatic transformation of policy aims was taking place by the end of the decade. The primary aim of policy development was initially to plug the huge gaps in Plaid's policies. New groups such as the 'New Nation Group' made a start at sorting out these problems. Among the achievements of the New Nation Group was the development of a concrete and detailed policy

statement on local government, which was presented to the party's summer school in 1965. The development of the local government policy demonstrated the impact made on the party by the English speaking, university educated, political activists who had permeated the party. The policy is noteworthy not only for its thoroughness but also for its content. Whilst emphasising and re-enforcing the communitarian 'feel' of the party, it moved away from the strident support given to 'syndicalism' only a few years previously.

The development of policy on local government was not accidental. Rather, it was a response to Labour's plans for restructuring Welsh local government, in particular the proposed development of larger authorities. Here Plaid was sceptical. Whilst not dismissing Labour's proposals out of hand, the desire to 'keep government as local as possible' meant that any Labour alternatives would require in-depth research before they could be supported.<sup>60</sup> Whilst keeping clear of the controversial waters of local government re-organisation, the party developed seemingly practical alternatives to the problems affecting the smooth running of Welsh local government. Plaid envisaged greater co-operation between Welsh local authorities. Encouragement would be given to authorities to set up their own industries (for example the manufacturing of bricks, paving slabs etc.) eventually leading to self-sufficiency. Authorities would be encouraged to take the initiative as regional developers, not to sit around waiting for industry to be attracted by central government and then taking steps to improve local infrastructures (notably roads). They would have greater responsibility for attracting industries themselves, especially by improving local infrastructures *before* attempting to secure new industries.<sup>61</sup>

More complex were arguments surrounding the political role which local authorities should adopt. Here there were evident contradictions which reflected the new difficulties experienced by having to construct policy around north *and* south Wales. Rather than endorsing the need to politicise Welsh local authorities who were dominated by independency – a problem in the north – the party expressed the need for local authorities to ‘be above party policy’ – thus addressing a problem in the south.<sup>62</sup> These dilemmas had not been resolved by the end of the 1960s.

More change came with the formation of the ‘Research Group’ of which Phil Williams, Dafydd Wigley and Gareth Morgan-Jones were the most influential members. The Research Group was officially born in 1966. Stimulus for the group was provided by Nevin’s *Structure of the Welsh Economy* (1966) and a speech given by the author at Plaid’s summer school in Dolgellau in 1965. As with the New Nation Group, the initial aims of the Research Group had been to sort out basic flaws in party policy and ‘to clear the myths out of party propaganda’.<sup>63</sup> From the outset the group focussed on areas of policy where figures and statistics quoted by the party in its literature were fundamentally flawed or out of date. However, the urgent need for the group to develop more comprehensive policies came after the party’s success in Carmarthen in 1966, when Plaid found itself ‘in the first division but wasn’t even sure it could field a full team’.<sup>64</sup>

However, some of the ideas which were incorporated in the Economic Plan were initially developed to tackle local problems. Wigley was a key player in this process, developing a local research group in Merioneth in 1968 which focussed on distinctively local policies, most notably the idea of ‘growth centres’ in Merioneth (an



idea which was applied to other areas in the Plan). This provided a response and an alternative to Merioneth County Council's widely condemned scheme for the development and expansion of Bala in the late 1960s.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Economic Plan*

In the historical accounts that exist of Plaid Cymru's development during this period, the *Economic Plan* developed by the research group has received some attention.<sup>66</sup> Yet, few of those accounts have actually discussed the content of the *Plan* or explained its significance within the context of Plaid's evolution as a political force.

The *Economic Plan*, published in 1969, provides the clearest picture of the ways in which Plaid policies had developed by the end of the decade. The plan also provided the credibility which was to help sustain political success in north west Wales in 1974. The economic plan was in many ways a natural outcome of the changes occurring within the party during the decade. It was also a response to the political developments taking place in Wales in the 1960s, in particular the Commission on the Constitution, and Plaid's promising by-election performances. However, it was also a response to Labour policies, in particular the *National Plan* (1965) and *The Task Ahead* (1969), coupled with Labour's 'failure to produce a plan, or even a realistic economic assessment of the Welsh economy'.<sup>67</sup> As with the development of Plaid's ideology earlier in the decade, the plan was inspired by the economic philosophies of Edward Nevin, Roy Thomas and Leopold Kohr.<sup>68</sup> Some have rightly described the economic accounting that underlay many of the policies in the plan as 'a little naïve'.<sup>69</sup> For example, the Commission on the Constitution, which examined the plan as an integral part of Plaid Cymru's evidence in support of devolved governance,



thought that the budget calculations and projections, 'achieved' in the plan's blueprint, were a little fanciful – as generations of Chancellors had not managed to balance the budget for the UK; Plaid offered huge expenditure targets for Wales and a balanced budget at the first attempt. Neither was the plan without basic logistical faults. For example, whilst in condemned SET on the one hand – and was committed to scrapping the tax – it also used the money earned from the tax within its projections for the Welsh budget. Nonetheless, Lord Crowther, who chaired the Commission before his untimely death, described the plan as an impressive achievement and a genuine and thought provoking contribution to the devolution debate.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, simply by having a plan, Plaid was declaring itself as a 'practical', left of centre party, and not just a cultural pressure group.

The *Economic Plan* was not an attempt to hijack the political case for self-government by presenting a powerful economic argument. On the contrary, as the party argued:

If experts were to prove that Wales would benefit economically from self-government, then of course we would demand the right to enjoy increased prosperity; but if they were to prove that Wales was heavily subsidised by the rest of the United Kingdom, then true to our pride and with even more determination we would demand the right to stand on our own feet.

However, as it also argued, the plan represented a maturation within the party – a realisation that:

A party like Plaid Cymru (must be) prepared to accept the responsibilities of national government, must realise that economic control is one of the most important powers that such a government can exercise... (and that) the economic consequences of a transfer of control from Westminster to Cardiff must be carefully anticipated.

This was a carefully worded if blunt attack on traditional party ideology. If the creation of the research group had marked a turning point within the party, the *Economic Plan* marked a significant departure from traditional Plaid economic

policies. The plan had been formulated to drag the party forward into the sphere of modern politics. It initiated an assault on those in the party who wanted to re-establish a traditional, old fashioned, nostalgically based Wales under the guidance of a parochial Plaid Cymru government in an independent Wales. Those who sought to drag Wales back in time had to realise that:

An underdeveloped country, where the majority of the population live in self-sufficient life on the land, may be able to survive years of economic chaos, a modern industrial country, where, for example, 16,000 men are employed in a single plant cannot survive economic disruption. For this reason the economic policy of Plaid Cymru must be carefully developed.<sup>71</sup>

However, whilst the plan did, in part, represent an effort to construct a definitive economic policy for the party, it readily admitted that the solutions offered within the plan were, in some areas, partial and patchy. As with other areas of the party's development, lack of resources ensured that some necessary research was not completed. Some feasibility studies were not developed. However, the patchiness was passed over as Plaid claimed it was anxious not to fall into the trap of political parties who constructed grandiose, abstract economic plans without undertaking feasibility studies to discover whether the plan might work. The *Plan* reinforced the co-operative and responsible image which the party sought to develop. As the plan also drew on the policies recommended by other parties – where these were deemed suitable and appropriate to the needs of Wales – the authors argued that it should not be taken as a 'distinctive Plaid Cymru policy in every detail', the rationale being that 'the future of Wales does not lie with Plaid Cymru alone: it lies with the people of Wales'.

The writing of the *Economic Plan* reflected the extent to which the creation of the Welsh Language Society had lessened the language burden which had earlier

dominated Plaid's policies. With the Welsh Language Society now 'looking after' Welsh language issues, Plaid was free to concentrate on other (more serious) economic and social matters. It also reflected the extent to which the party's development and modernisation in the 1960s had been driven by south Wales. Some historians and political scientists suggest that the plan was developed specifically to win the party support in Labour's south Wales heartlands. Adamson has argued that the plan not only marked a watershed as the first Plaid Cymru policy statement that was almost entirely economically orientated but:

More significantly it was directly relevant to the economic needs and political debate in industrial south Wales rather than the means of support in the north on which Plaid Cymru had historically depended.<sup>72</sup>

Yet this argument misses the important point that the plan aimed precisely to 'tackle' *the* big social and economic problems which afflicted north Wales. As Adamson acknowledges, the main objectives of the policy was dealing with the major challenges of unemployment and depopulation. These were as much a problem in the north as in the south.

Other historians have argued that the development of, and interest in, economic policy was indicative of Plaid's adaptation of the 'growthmanship ethos' of the Labour party. The establishment of new growth areas, and the need to attract capital investment were vital components of the party's 'managerial' approach to policy, which blew away the old syndicalist tendencies.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, whilst the plan was a dynamic reflection of ideological change within the party it still drew on some old fashioned methodology and thinking. The disparity between the economic situations of Wales and England was afforded its usual dose of attention. As Plaid admitted, one of the remits of the plan was to address the imbalance between Wales and England.



Unemployment ratios were a particular concern. The plan sought to address the fact that ‘When England has a chill, Wales gets pneumonia’.<sup>74</sup> The comparison of Wales with other small nations was also present – an indication of Nevin and Kohr’s influence in the writing of the document. Again, in terms of unemployment, the experience of other small countries like Switzerland (whose unemployment rate was 0.01%), Luxemburg (0.1) and New Zealand (0.1) proved that full employment and self-governance could be bedfellows in a ‘New Wales’. However, there was a modicum of realism. As Plaid was aware, Switzerland was fortuitous in the fact that two of its major industries – agriculture and tourism – complemented each other seasonally. In Wales this was not feasible as ‘the delights of Pumlumon in mid January are appreciated by too few people for this to occur in Wales’. The document was not just about accepting growth. It was an economic, but also a political document, an indication of change and internal development shrouded by traditional ideas and the defence of the small nation state.

The problems associated with depopulation were given considerable attention. Whilst the party argued that 16,000 new jobs were required to get unemployment in Wales down to English levels, it also argued that Wales suffered from a higher level of ‘hidden unemployment’ than was evident elsewhere in the U.K. Two factors were particularly worthy of note. First, Welsh employees were forced to retire at an earlier age than was evident in England. When ‘old’ industries expired, few opportunities were available for men aged over 50. As a result, 55 had become a common retirement age in Wales. In England on the other hand, in areas like the Midlands, 25 per cent of those over 65 continued to work. Second, Wales had a higher percentage of young people staying on at school. This did not reflect higher intellectual



attainment in Wales, but instead the lack of opportunities available to school leavers. In certain parts of Wales. Children who lacked the intellectual capacity to stay on at school inevitably faced the dole queue.<sup>75</sup> In Gwynedd alone, 'hidden' unemployment stood at 3,400 – 9,300 if women were also included.

The future of some traditional Welsh industries was addressed. A large amount of space was afforded to the problems facing the steel and coal industries (lending weight to the belief that the document was drawn up with south Wales in mind). There is insufficient space here to elaborate on the plans for those industries in detail. However, it is worth noting that the party's projections for these industries was overwhelmingly gloomy. Coal was in trouble because of the competition offered by gas. Reductions in coal consumption had come about because 'elimination of the Welsh coal industry was...so clearly a government policy'.<sup>76</sup> Few solutions to those problems were offered. Steel, similarly, faced a mountain of problems. The demise of the steel industry was also well advanced. As Plaid argued:

In our long term planning we must not assume that the steel industry is guaranteed to survive the 1980s as a major component of the Welsh economy.<sup>77</sup>

As with coal, competition from rival products had dealt a serious blow to the industry. An extensive and 'massive' research programme would have to be undertaken to explore the possibilities of salvaging some sort of future for the industry. To some extent the party clutched at straws. One of the more interesting suggestions was that one of steel's major 'problems' – the fact that it rusted – could be the saviour of the industry, since this was 'essential in a consumer economy that dare not produce everlasting goods'. This was hardly attentive to the political need to win the south.

However, other traditional Welsh industries were offered even less constructive attention. The future of the slate industry was not mentioned in the plan. Neither were discussions over the future of agriculture much clearer. Few solutions were offered to the problems facing the industry. As Plaid argued, the lack of a coherent agricultural policy emanated from the fact that too many 'uncertainties' surrounded the industry. Plaid argued that the development of agricultural policy was impeded by two distinct factors. Firstly it argued that the Agricultural Act of 1967 had caused chaos in Welsh farming. The government's backing for large, cost-efficient units meant that up to 83 per cent of Welsh farms faced extinction. As a result, whilst agriculture was not a declining industry it 'was a rapidly declining source of employment'. Secondly, the U.K.'s proposed entry into the E.E.C. further complicated matters. Here, the party drew on research undertaken by the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in reaching its conclusions. These conclusions were cloudy to say the least. At best entry into the E.E.C. would increase Welsh farm income by 5%. At worst it would result in a 'catastrophic' drop of 24.<sup>78</sup> These concerns re-enforced calls for a Welsh government which would represent distinctively Welsh needs in E.E.C. negotiations. The lack of attention afforded to slate caused some concerns in Plaid's north Wales heartlands. At the party's annual conference in 1969 – when the *Economic Plan* was considered – the Merioneth District Committee presented a motion calling on the government to nationalise the Welsh slate industry, for the industry to be run as a co-operative with a Welsh national organisation ensuring efficient management and development.<sup>79</sup> Despite this, slate was still not included in the remit of the plan.

Other 'Welsh' industries like tourism were afforded more concrete attention. As Plaid admitted, tourism made an important contribution to the Welsh economy. However, it was adamant that service industries (which were dominated by tourism in areas like the north-west) should not be a substitute for manufacturing industries. However, the party was reluctant to force change from service to manufacturing, as S.E.T. had attempted to do. Reductions in the number of service sector jobs among men (from 52% in 1969 to 41% in 1976) was a specific target. On the other hand, service sector jobs for women were to be welcomed, the party envisaging a 70% ratio of female to male service sector jobs by 1976. The future shape of the industry was also afforded some attention. Whilst tourism was to be encouraged, Wales had to be more selective in the kind of tourism it encouraged. High class tourism was to be supported, 'cheap' tourism rejected. Extended stays in expensive Welsh hotels which offered a distinctively Welsh experience were good. Day trippers and the vulgar attractions of seaside resorts (and places like Rhyl) were to be discouraged.

Tourism offered a partial solution to the unemployment problem in north-west Wales, but not all Welsh regions. There were still huge problems to overcome across Wales. Plaid argued that the greatest problems faced Denbigh, East Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Monmouth and South Brecon – traditional coal, steel and agriculture areas. Anglesey and Pembroke 'were also facing major difficulties'. In mid and rural Wales, the party argued that emphasis should be placed on creating a 'relatively small number of well-paid jobs'. Low activity rates – a particular problem in rural areas would also have to be addressed as 'the potential workforce among women represents an important asset that Wales can offer new industry'. Where to locate new industry in each Welsh region was an area of policy afforded significant attention. Ideally Plaid favoured



industrial locations ‘which reflects the existing community pattern and attempts to maintain full economic life in each town or village’ – an approach inspired by the de Valera administration in Ireland.<sup>80</sup> However, as Plaid argued, whilst appealing, this was impracticable because of ‘budget constraints’. The answer to the problem was to develop a limited number of ‘growth centres’, situated a maximum of thirty miles from each Welsh district. In selecting where the growth centres would be developed, the party would not be swayed by nostalgia or sentimentalism. As it argued:

It is essential that we choose areas with natural economic advantages, even if our sentiments would suggest centres with a richer historic association.

As it continued:

The ideal spot for a new industry would be an area with existing urban and industrial amenities, at a nodal point for communications, with plenty of room for building, preferably near a deep water port. Additional advantages would be an attractive climate and access to areas of outstanding natural beauty.<sup>81</sup>

Development of ‘green-field’ sites was fundamentally rejected, not only on environmental grounds but because ‘community is fundamental to the political philosophy of Plaid Cymru’ and emphasis therefore had to be placed on strengthening and expanding existing towns. Consistent with the party’s critique of Labour’s plans for a new town in mid Wales, it rejected ‘any economic plan which up-roots tens-of-thousands of people’ – in particular the suggested development of Caersws to reach a population of 80,000. However, there was support for other government plans. The development of Newtown from a population of five to ten thousand was welcomed, as was the proposed development of Swansea Bay.<sup>82</sup>

The development of ‘freestanding communities’ was preferred. Freestanding communities were described as those which were not ‘parasites’ on nearby, larger communities for any services considered, i.e. they did not depend on any other



community for secondary schooling or hospital services. Growth centres were preferred where populations within ten miles were between thirty and three hundred thousand people. To address the fact that this was unrealistic in mid and rural Wales, the minimums were adjusted to fifteen thousand people. Other factors would also be taken into account. Existing road provision was important. So was the potential to develop roads. Areas where it was impossible to improve or expand roads for geological reasons, or because of perennial fog and snow problems, should also be rejected. Similarly, suitable industrial sites could not be taken for granted. This applied to both south and north Wales. In the industrial south, communities had found difficulty in finding a level surface to lay a rugby pitch. This did not bode well for the construction of modern factories requiring sites which were level, well drained and big enough for expansion. In former coal mining areas subsidence was also a serious problem which had to be overcome. Errors in attempting to build factories in unsuitable places had been made in the past. Hirwaun provided a classic example of a site chosen by the Board of Trade for industrial development, which was then hampered because of marshy ground. As Plaid argued:

This mistake would, of course, have been avoided if civil servants responsible had had any understanding of Welsh – sufficient at least to understand the meaning of “Hir-waun”!<sup>83</sup>

Whilst northern areas shared some of these problems, industrial development in the north had to contend with additional problems. Climate was a particular problem. In England new town development was only considered in regions with less than forty inches of rain annually. In Wales such a target was unrealistic. Regions with averages of fifty inches or less still had to be considered. Only sites with over sixty inches of rain should be ignored – as should sites a thousand feet above sea level. Natural beauty was another problem area. Like Labour, Plaid insisted on the need for

development to take place in areas of 'outstanding natural beauty'. At the same time, the opportunities afforded of living in such a scenically and recreationally rich area was one of Wales's greatest economic and industrial assets. As the party argued:

If we look forward to the time when the majority of people work four days a week, ready access to the coast, to mountains and to rivers will become an important part of the total life of any community. In all these respects Wales is at a tremendous advantage. About 97% of the population live within 30 miles of the coast, and nowhere is more than 60 miles away. Similarly almost the whole population live within 30 miles of a National Park.<sup>84</sup>

However, there was still an obvious clash between the beneficial and detrimental impact of natural beauty. Nowhere was this more evident than in the north-west. Yet, Plaid's plans for the economic regeneration of the area show how it hoped the two aspects could be accommodated. Plaid considered Holyhead, Bangor, Caernarfon, Llandudno Junction, Penrhyndeudraeth and Corwen as possible growth centres. However, the Menai Straits area between Bangor and Caernarfon (the area described as 'Glan Menai') provided the greatest potential for development. The area was selected for its population (100,000 people living within a twenty mile radius) and the fact that it was served by four trunk roads, six principal roads and a railway. It would be conveniently situated for the proposed dual carriageway linking Holyhead with Wrexham and major English cities (described elsewhere in the plan). Moreover, development along the Menai Straits 'below a two hundred foot contour' would not spoil the scenic beauty of the area. Development of the B4366 trunk road (as a tourist route) would ensure that 'panoramic' views of Anglesey and Snowdonia would be preserved, with industrial development out of sight. Secondary growth centres – including one in the 'Deudraeth' area (which included Blaenau Ffestiniog, Porthmadog and Trawsfynydd) – would also be created specifically to cater for a 'far smaller' population. 'Special efforts' would be made in addressing the problems caused in this particular area because of depopulation, and the decline of quarrying

and agriculture. A thousand new manufacturing jobs – divided equally between men and women – was an initial target.

Considerable thought was put into the question of establishing the right industries in the right areas. In selecting industries for the north-west, as with other parts of Wales, consideration would have to be given to viability, whether the industries were economically feasible or desirable and suitable geographically. The close proximity of a university in Bangor (in addition to a technical college) was an important consideration in selecting suitable industries. As a result, north-west Wales was deemed a suitable area for the development of electronic industries. The University's electrical engineering department provided an exciting opportunity for the region to develop major electronic industries. The development of electronic industries would also provide several important functions. First, they would provide a number of highly paid jobs for the cream of local talent – the kind of people who had traditionally been forced out of the area in search of quality, well paid jobs. Second, and simultaneously they would cater for another key aim of the economic plan – to ensure a better distribution of jobs through the socio-economic classes. They would help address the 'marked deficiencies' in managerial, technical and administrative opportunities evident in areas like the north-west. Thirdly, they would provide a number of semi-skilled jobs for the large number of local women without employment. Last, these were the kind of industries which would offered training opportunities to employees and apprentices – courses which could be facilitated in the nearby technical college at Bangor. Moreover, encouragement and financial inducements for the development of a new technological faculty within the University would be forthcoming. Close links between local industries and the local colleges would be encouraged. Moreover, in



addition to electronic industries, marine food processing, manufacturing of metal goods and specialised yacht building were also on a hit list of 'suitable' manufacturing industries for the area.

### *Other aspects of policy*

As has already been argued, the *Economic Plan* was an important strand of Plaid Cymru's evidence to the Commission on the Constitution in 1970. Moreover, Plaid's evidence provides another important insight into the development of policies at the start of the decade. Despite the focus on economics, language remained an important consideration within the party. Whilst Plaid felt the Welsh Language Society led propaganda campaigns to ensure that equal validity for the language was observed by private and public bodies, there were still those within the party who saw language as the key area of party policy. The most prominent of these spokesmen was Robyn Lewis, Plaid's candidate in Caernarfonshire in the 1970 general election and a former Labour party candidate.<sup>85</sup> Lewis led a strident attempt to locate language at the epicentre of the devolution debate. He combined condemnation of government policy (in particular the 'permissive' Welsh Language Act of 1967) with legal and moral justification for preserving the language.<sup>86</sup> Yet, despite the linking of language with the devolution debate, Lewis' statement to the Commission on the status of the language was indicative of the fact that there were still those within the party who saw Plaid's role fundamentally as guardians of Welsh language and culture, rather than as an important political party with an all-round programme. For this faction, language, rather than the emotive quest for devolution, explained Plaid's growing popularity in Welsh speaking Wales during the late 1960s. As Lewis argued:



It would be no exaggeration to say that the Welsh language has become, and is, the major talking point in Wales today – possibly to a greater extent than any other major issue, the issue of a Parliament for Wales.<sup>87</sup>

Yet, whilst some traditional party aims were kept alive, the quest for modernisation continued unabated. The need to develop a dynamic, modern Wales was made clear in the party's developing educational policy. Plaid's educational policy in the 1960s was influenced by the devout nationalist Professor Jac L. Williams of Aberystwyth, who as early as 1963 highlighted the deficiencies of technical education in Wales. As Williams argued, it was essential that Welsh education adapted to modern demands for 'economic prosperity is more closely linked with education in our time than ever before'. Williams had been highly critical of the 'eleven plus' examination – and highly supportive of comprehensive education because 'stratification and status groups are alien to the Welsh social structure'. He had also been critical of the Robbins Report, with its 'essentially English and Conservative' concern for the education of an elite entering universities and colleges at a certain age. Again this did not fit in well with Welsh needs which would demand the acquisition of new skills and retraining at an older age. Moreover, as Williams argued, 'Wales must aim at educated communities, not an educated elite'. Bilingual education was also essential, not only on cultural but also on economic grounds, for knowledge of both languages placed those seeking employment in Wales at a distinct advantage to non-Welsh speakers. These beliefs formed the cornerstone of Plaid's education policies at the end of the decade.<sup>88</sup>

A shortage of skilled labour was regarded as a key disincentive to industrial development in Wales – a factor which industrialists had confirmed.<sup>89</sup> Educational provision was partly responsible. The distinctively Welsh tradition of manufacturing

generations of schoolteachers as opposed to technicians now stood in the way of progress. As the party argued, 'emphasis given to academic, rather than technical education...is wrong'. As it continued:

Sending 46% of school leavers to tertiary education is of no use at all if factories that establish themselves in Aberystwyth find a shortage of capstan lathe operators and find that they cannot expand...the sad thing is the enormous expansion of teacher training in Wales has been far greater than in industrial retraining centres.<sup>90</sup>

Planning also became an influential feature of evolving Plaid policy. Whilst the party wholeheartedly favoured devolved governance, it also promoted the development of close links with the rest of the U.K. where industrial planning was concerned. This would ensure that 'we were not cutting each other's throats'. The same principle applied to the development of tourism. Lack of planning had ensured a 'haphazard' development of the industry – of an industry which now attracted four to four and half million visitors 'who spent very little' – and of local authorities who were 'too lax' in allowing the development of caravan sites. Planning would ensure the development of manufacturing industry to acceptable levels. This would mean that tourism could develop as a high class industry, providing 'icing on the cake'. As Plaid argued, tourism could not be regarded as '*the* basic staple'.<sup>91</sup>

The rethinking of policy was reinforced by the results of the 1970 general election. The party fought all thirty six Welsh constituencies. It also made significant inroads into Labour majorities. As Gwynfor Evans argued after the election, this was crucial in Plaid's development as it reinforced the party's credibility. Even more satisfaction could be taken from the fact that, according to Evans, 1970 was the first real 'T.V. election'. Plaid had held its own in an election largely dominated by U.K. rather than local issues.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, a perennial Plaid concern – underexposure in the media –

had been exacerbated by television companies who had afforded inferior air time to the party. The national (U.K.) press, whose coverage had (naturally) been dominated by the 'big' parties, was matched by a more enlightened attitude towards the party in Wales by the Welsh press, which had given the party 'fair' coverage. Plaid had done well against the odds. Those who supported the modernising strategy had their commitment reinforced.

Moreover, calls for devolved governance had also been enhanced by the result of the 1970 election. The Conservative party's UK victory was hardly endorsed by the people of Wales. Despite 'ruling' Wales, the party enjoyed the support of only 27.6% of Welsh voters. Thus, over 70% of Welsh voters, who according to Plaid found the Tories 'repugnant', had to stomach up to five years of alien governance. Whilst the new government had increased the powers bestowed on the Secretary of State for Wales (adding responsibility for education), Plaid pointed to the fact that the Secretary still did not answer to a Welsh government. To add 'insult to injury', neither 'the Secretary of State or the Minister of State was elected by a Welsh constituency'. According to Plaid, the government were 'interlopers' in Wales. The 1970 result highlighted the need for devolution – a central facet of Plaid's policies. For those within the Labour party who were still sceptical or fundamentally opposed to devolution the message was clear:

We shall make the point that the Labour party seem to prefer a Tory government in London to a Welsh government in Wales.<sup>93</sup>

For Evans, the 1970 election marked the 'coming of age' of Plaid Cymru. Whilst Plaid had relied heavily on disgruntlement with the Labour party and the Labour government in its by-election 'successes' in the period from 1964 onwards, Plaid's



vote in 1970 was perceived as a reflection of the party's popularity rather than of Labour's unpopularity. According to Evans, it was natural that Plaid had taken votes off the Labour party in those by-elections, especially as both Labour and Plaid were 'radical' parties and thus competed for 'radical' votes. Moreover, as Plaid was aware, it benefited from being able to attract protest votes from Welsh voters who could not bring themselves to vote Conservative, and who increasingly often were not given the option of voting Liberal. Plaid Cymru were thus a 'safe' protest vote. However, in 1970 the party felt that it had not benefited from protest votes. Plaid argued that morale within the Labour party had been high both before and during the election. Plaid's canvassers had not found evidence of unhappiness among 'core' Labour supporters. As Evans argued, 'people who voted for us were people who largely supported our policies'.<sup>94</sup>

As this chapter has shown, Plaid Cymru underwent a significant process of change after 1959. It began to talk about a broader range of political issues and constructed policies which it felt were designed to deal with the social and economic realities of mid twentieth century Wales. Importantly, as far as the party's chances of electoral success were concerned, the party began to shed its exclusive, middle class, Welsh speaking and elitist image. In Welsh speaking Wales, the party began to permeate staunch Labour areas. Development of policy meant that Plaid had begun to talk the language of the unemployed and of council estates, as well as that of lecturers, schoolteachers and eisteddfod-goers. As the results for the 1970 election demonstrated, the modernisation of organisation and policy after 1959 seemingly did not go unrewarded.



The 'modernisation' of policy had several significant aspects. It convinced young activists that Plaid was a serious political party that was starting to reflect their views. It contributed to the public images of Plaid as a party which could provide alternatives, and which was interested in more than the language. It meant Plaid was publicly participating in the business of 'proper' politics. There was certainly a serious attempt to sketch the outlines of policy areas, something which could and did reflect a blend of intellectual influences from 'small is beautiful' to varieties of socialism. Yet pragmatically this had to be married with traditional concerns, such as the protection of agriculture, and with a negative critique of 'the British'. In some respects, policy proposals were there to show that Wales (if independent and under Plaid) could do better. Yet the proposals were largely uncoded, and depended on very dubious assumptions and some very sketchy ideas. There was still a strong 'negative' element to the party's ideas, whilst prominent members (like Robyn Lewis) still stressed the language as a primary concern. These holes and disagreements only 'mattered' if they were exposed – or in the extremely unlikely event of Plaid achieving power.

The significance of this reorientation was enhanced by another powerful contribution to Plaid's growing reputation and popularity. Despite the commitment to become a competitive political party, Plaid did not abandon its pressure group tactics. In actively seeking inclusion in the game of power politics from the mid 1960s onwards, Plaid could draw on its experience as a pressure group – and especially the propaganda machine that had facilitated success for the party in this area – for political gain. This approach provided a third dimension to undermining Labour's

superiority in north-west Wales, - a powerful emotive critique, in which the presence of a 'practical' Plaid alternative was just ammunition to be simplified and fired. Increasingly strong frustrations aired by Welsh political commentators through the columns of the Welsh press, and devoid of 'hard' alternatives, served to undermine Labour's credibility in areas like north-west Wales. The development of this critique of Labour will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## REFERENCES

1. John Davies, *Plaid Cymru since 1960* (Aberystwyth, 1997), p.3.
2. A. Butt Phillip, *The Welsh Question* (Cardiff, 1975). See Chapter
3. For more on this see Williams's autobiography. P. Williams, *Voice from the Valleys* (Aberystwyth, 1981), p.61. Recent work by Laura McAllister has challenged Williams's assertion that the 1959-66 period was quite as positive. See L. McAllister, *Plaid Cymru: The Emergence of a Political Party* (Cardiff, 2001), p.
4. Davies, *Plaid Cymru*, p.2.
5. See Chapter One.
6. Phil Williams was a good example. Williams had been at the forefront of Labour politics at Cambridge University during the late 1950s, but converted to Plaid Cymru during the 1959 election campaign. He later led a Plaid group in the same University.
7. Williams, *Voice*, p.64.
8. *Welsh Nation*, November 1964.
9. *Ibid.*, January 1964.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Emrys Roberts to party members, (n.d.), Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Plaid Cymru, *Polisi Plaid Cymru* (Cardiff, 1969), p.16.
14. Elfed Roberts to party members, (n.d.), Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58.
15. Author's interview with Dafydd Wigley, 16 April 2000.
16. *Welsh Nation*, February 1966.
17. Williams, *Voice*, p.70.
18. *Welsh Nation*, May 1966.
19. 'Operation Knocker' was a successful 'no short-cuts and no gimmicks' house-calling membership campaign strategy conducted by Merioneth CLP in the early 1960s. See Merioneth CLP minutes, 1960 and 1961.



20. *Y Ddraig Goch*, June 1966.
21. *Ibid.*, September 1966.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Williams, *Voice*, p.70.
24. *Ibid.*, p.71.
25. Dafydd Wigley to Pwyllgor Rhanbarth Merioneth , 12 October 1967, Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58, NLW.
26. Minutes of the Merioneth Rhanbarth Committee, 2 November 1967, Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58, NLW.
27. 'Press Release' (n.d.), Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58, NLW.
28. Interview with Owen Edwards, 25 February 2001.
29. Apart from the political aspects, the communitarian concerns of the party were re-enforced through the paper. These included a 'Merioneth Diary' which detailed all events taking place in the county every month. This helped publicise Plaid Cymru activities alongside other non-partisan activities, thus reinforcing communitarian integration.
30. *Y Ddraig Goch*, July 1967.
31. *Ibid.* A report published in June 1967 reported that only 20% of councillors in the UK were aged 45 or under, with the majority being over 55. Plaid boasted that the majority of its councillors were under 45 years of age.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Y Ddraig Goch*, June 1968.
34. P. J. Madgwick, *The Politics of rural Wales: a study of Cardiganshire* (London, 1973), p.20.
35. *Y Ddraig Goch*, January 1966.
36. *Ibid.*, July 1967.
37. *Ibid.*, March 1967.
38. *Welsh Nation*, May 1966.
39. *Y Ddraig Goch*, June 1967.

40. Plaid Cymru to party members, 6 October 1966, Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58, NLW.
41. Again south Wales branches led the way as far as youth organisation was concerned. Swansea was held as a shining example of how one Plaid youth section had worked diligently and exhaustively for the party cause. See *Y Ddraig Goch*, May 1966.
42. Ibid.
43. *Y Ddraig Goch*, October 1966.
44. Ibid., May 1966.
45. Although it should also be noted that the Welsh Language Society also went to great lengths to distance itself from the activities of the FWA following the latter's use of explosive devices.
46. Carmarthen District Committee, Draft Conference Resolutions, 1967 (n.d), Plaid Cymru Archive, File C68, NLW.
47. Williams, *Voice*, p.67.
48. For more see Dafydd Iwan's autobiography, *Dafydd Iwan* (Caernarfon, 1981), p.48.
49. Ibid., p.49.
50. Plaid Cymru, *Annual Conference Report* (1969), p.95.
51. Although this does not deal with the fact that for many voters the WLS and the FWA were seen as 'wings' of Plaid Cymru, and that the three were therefore indistinguishable.
52. *Y Ddraig Goch*, October 1966.
53. For an excellent institutional history of Cymdeithas yr Iaith, see Dylan Phillips, *Trwy Ddulliau Chwyldro: Hanes Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg, 1962-1992* (Aberystwyth, 1998).
54. See *Y Ddraig Goch*, April 1968, November 1968 and June 1969.
55. Pwyllgor Rhanbarth Merioneth minutes, 31 October 1968 and 29 November 1968. Plaid Cymru Archive, File C58, NLW.
56. *Y Ddraig Goch*, March 1968.

57. These 'vulgarisations' of course included 'tried and tested' policy failure. It was thus easy for Plaid to adopt a 'higher' political position, knowing that the party's policies (unlike Labour's or the Tories') would not be put to the test.

58. Williams, *Voice*, p.72.

59. See *Welsh Nation*, July 1963 for more details of Plaid's policy statement 'This is how it will be in a future Wales' (1963).

60. Plaid Cymru, *Polisi Plaid Cymru* (1969), pp.15-16.

61. Although, of course, small units could not afford to do this, suggesting that the Labour's plans for restructuring Welsh local authorities into larger units made more practical sense.

62. In other words, whilst councils in the north were believed to suffer because the 'independent' tradition was not conducive to the creation of influential, decision making 'blocs', the problem in the south was that these 'blocs' (usually Labour) often became too powerful (and sometimes corrupt).

63. Williams, *Voice*, p.72.

64. Ibid.

65. The expansion of existing small to medium sized towns was an integral part of the government's new town strategies. Bala was earmarked for expansion in the government's *New Town for Mid-Wales* report, published in 1966. Whilst Plaid's plans for 'growth centres' were not dissimilar to the government's own plans, they theoretically paid greater attention to safeguarding local Welsh communities and culture (largely by proposing development on a much smaller scale). The party's opposition to the expansion of Bala included the publication of a pamphlet *The Future of Bala* (1968). Opposition to the expansion of Bala featured prominently in Wigley's 1970 election campaign in Merioneth.

66. The plan has received a mixed response. Some historians highlight the fundamental budget flaws in the plan. See for example, H. M. Drucker and G. Brown, *The Politics of Nationalism and Devolution* (London, 1980), p.47. Others have compared the economic plan to Labour's 'National Plan' and argue that it provides 'evidence of the way in which the internal rhythms of Plaid Cymru move in concert with those of the Labour party'. See J. Davies, *Plaid Cymru since 1960*, p.6.

67. Plaid Cymru, *Economic Plan* (Cardiff, 1969), p.i.

68. Edward Nevin's *The Structure of the Welsh Economy* (Cardiff, 1966) was highly influential (see above), so too was Leopold Kohr's *The Breakdown of Nations* (London, 1957). Both featured prominently in Plaid Cymru's economic propaganda.

69. Adamson, *Class, Ideology and the Nation* (Cardiff, 1991), p.133.



70. Crowther was succeeded by Kilbrandon, with whose name the Commission is normally associated.
71. Plaid Cymru, *Economic Plan*, p.2.
72. Adamson, *Class*, p.133.
73. Drucker and Brown, *Politics of Nationalism*, p.47.
74. Plaid Cymru, *Economic Plan*, p.11.
75. There was the third factor, i.e. the way in which the partially handicapped were not included in unemployment figures. In a self-governing Wales such people would have a valuable contribution to make to the Welsh economy.
76. Plaid Cymru, *Economic Plan*, pp.45-50.
77. *Ibid.*, p.60.
78. *Ibid.*, pp.32-58.
79. Plaid Cymru, *Annual Conference Report (1969)*, p.13.
80. Plaid Cymru, *Economic Plan*, p.77.
81. *Ibid.*, p.81.
82. For more detail on Plaid Cymru's objections to the building of a new town, see Chapter Five.
83. Plaid Cymru, *Economic Plan*, p.85.
84. *Ibid.*, p.88.
85. Lewis had stood as Labour's candidate in Denbigh in 1955, but had resigned from the party a few years later.
86. As a lawyer, much of Lewis's propaganda focussed on legal justification. For more on Plaid's condemnation of the Welsh Language Act, see Chapter Five.
87. Royal Commission on the Constitution, *Minutes of Evidence, V, Wales. Evidence of Plaid Cymru, 23 July 1970* (HMSO, 1970), p.83.
88. *Welsh Nation*, February – March 1965.
89. Commission on the Constitution, *Evidence of Plaid Cymru*, p.114.
90. *Ibid.*, p.116.

91. Ibid., p.123.

92. Ibid., p.92.

93. Ibid., p.98.

94. Ibid., p.97.

## Chapter Five

### **Undermining Credibility: The Nationalist Critique of Government Policy and Images of the Labour party 1964-73**

Studies show that people do not even select 'the most important issues' in an election; by far the most important factor is the party image, which is in effect a mental set or impression of 'what a party stands for' gathered from impressions, propaganda and discussion.

*New Society*, October 1964

For any challenger, the problem is that Labour could win at least half the Welsh seats with candidates proved to be polygamous, atheistic, alcoholic and tone-deaf.

Mervyn Jones, *New Statesman*, 1966

After 1966 there were significant changes in the structure of Welsh politics. Despite Labour's overwhelming success in Wales at the 1966 election, Labour's dominance was unchallenged in many constituencies thereafter. The period saw Plaid Cymru's emergence as a credible political challenger to Labour. Plaid Cymru's victory in the Carmarthen by-election was followed by dismal Labour by-election performances in Rhondda and Caerphilly, where Plaid again provided a surprising, but formidable challenge. Labour was rocked in its heartland.

This chapter examines Plaid Cymru's attempt to build on this potential, and on the party's attempt to exploit some of the issues which could undermine Labour's reputation. Although Plaid had undertaken a thorough review of its organisation and policies in the 1960s – understanding that it needed to refine both if it wished to become a serious 'player' in Welsh politics – its propaganda was less cerebral. Its main attack was on the sentiments expressed by Labour's Secretary of State for Wales from 1968-70, George Thomas, that 'no government has ever done so much for Wales as this Labour government'. Nowhere was this critique more apparent than in Welsh language newspapers and journals, where Labour's attention to distinctively Welsh



social and economic problems was rigorously examined, satanised, distorted and refuted. As in the 1950s, this campaign was led by Plaid Cymru, largely through the columns of the party's two newspapers, *Y Ddraig Goch* and the *Welsh Nation*.

The purpose of the critique was two-fold. On the one hand its purpose initially was to apply pressure on the Labour party to live up to its image as 'the party of Wales'. Thus, the Welsh press often saw its role as an important Welsh political lobby, reminding Labour of the responsibilities that came with its dominance of Welsh politics – particularly when Labour policies disappointed or fell short of expectations. On the other hand, and as time went on, there were also more concerted efforts to undermine Labour's credibility. Among these more openly hostile attacks were attempts to highlight the alleged duplicity of Labour policy; to argue that the Labour party in Wales was little more than an irrelevant 'branch' of the 'English' party; to stress the inefficient and corrupt nature of Labour's personnel and the general 'failure' of Labour policies. Labour's response was far less potent or unified (as the final part of the chapter indicates), a reflection of internal divisions and a declining organisational capacity to fight back.

### ***The Nationalist Critique of Labour and Government Policy***

During the 1950s Plaid Cymru had – to a large extent – focussed on the perceived duplicity of Labour policies on Welsh issues. From supporting Labour's MPs who were sympathetic to 'nationalist' issues, the Welsh language press and Plaid Cymru became highly critical of those within the Labour party whose attitude towards 'Welshness' was less favourable. Labour's members from the south were particular and frequent targets of indignation. In the 1950s these had included senior party

members such as Ness Edwards, Cliff Prothero, George Thomas, James Callaghan and more surprisingly, Jim Griffiths. Exceptions to the rule included S.O. Davies and Tudor Watkins.<sup>1</sup>

Labour's handling of the Parliament for Wales campaign – probably more than Tryweryn – had led to widescale condemnation of the party in the Welsh language press.<sup>2</sup> Discomfort within the Labour party over the campaign – especially threats to expel its supporters from the party – had provided both Plaid Cymru and the Welsh language press with bountiful ammunition to attack the contradictions and inconsistencies evident in Labour's policies for Wales. They viewed the Parliament for Wales debacle as a symptom, not the cause, of Labour's problems. In spite of the arrival of new Labour MPs who were sympathetic to nationalist causes in the period after 1945, anti-devolutionists and those allegedly unsympathetic to 'Welshness' continued to dominate the party throughout the 1950s. The Welsh language press, especially those sympathetic to nationalist demands or to Plaid Cymru, felt their concerns were marginalized by the south Wales, anglicised, leadership of the Labour party. The nationalist critique attacked the validity of Labour's democratic values, the impact of the party's 'socialism', its paranoid reaction to the 'rise of nationalism' (especially given Labour's dominance of Welsh politics), the deficiencies of Labour policy and the general lack of interest afforded to Wales by Labour's London leaders.

Despite Labour's positive attitude to Welsh issues, signified by the installation of a Secretary of State for Wales and its continued success in Welsh speaking areas, the Welsh language press stressed that such people were still a minority of the party.

Labour's return to power in 1964 was thus welcomed – but sceptically. As *Barn* noted:

Wales should be grateful for a Labour government. It should be remembered that more than half Welsh voters have supported Labour for thirty years. It will be interesting to see how grateful Labour will be for this support. Without doubt, this government has given Wales more in two days than in its previous six years of government. No doubt Plaid Cymru and the Liberals will argue that this is, indirectly, a sign of the pressure exerted by them.<sup>3</sup>

Appointing a Secretary of State was a step in the right direction, a fact enthusiastically supported by younger Labour MPs, who began proclaiming the virtues of Labour's status as the real 'party of Wales'.<sup>4</sup> For nationalists, the real battles still had to be fought. Labour's overwhelming grip on Welsh politics merely demonstrated its potential. Delivering the goods would be more difficult. As the article continued:

It is not administrators that are lacking in the Labour party but vision. There are no leaders in the party who are prepared to organise a united effort to stand up for Welsh causes. Many Welsh socialists are prepared to defend the Welsh language and make a stand against the building of an English new town in mid Wales. The leadership is not there because too many talented young Welshmen decided to fight outside the Labour party.

Labour did indeed face a problem. On the one hand, its electoral victory placed the party in a favourable position to deliver policy commitments on regenerating Welsh economic and industrial infrastructures. On the other hand, its victory placed Plaid Cymru in a stronger position. In the 1950s and early 1960s Labour had been the popular anti-Tory, anti-government force. Mismanagement of the Welsh economy had been blamed on Tory inefficiency and incompetence. But as nationalists pointed out, Labour now had to deliver on those promises if its reputation was to remain intact. As Plaid argued:

For thirteen years the majority of Welshmen have blamed the Tories for every weakness. When the government's shortcomings become obvious now, they will be unable to say that things will be better when Labour is in.<sup>5</sup>



Moreover, some nationalists felt that Labour's small majority was an added bonus. They hoped that Labour's MPs, sympathetic to the nationalist agenda, could use the government's small majority as a lever to extract concessions in return for continued backbench support.

In reality, as many were aware, this was an unlikely prospect. Whilst nationalists were correct in assuming that the Labour party in Wales remained deeply divided, after a long period in opposition it was unlikely that even the most patriotic of Welsh members would undermine the government supporting the nationalist cause. The motivation for Plaid to continue its important pressure-group role was therefore clear. Plaid believed that without its existence and its pressure-group tactics, the pro-Welsh faction within the Labour party would be weakened.

Initially, these tactics did not change. Condemnation of the 'powerful (anti-Welsh) local bandit chieftains' who controlled the party in the south continued.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, some elements of the Labour party were more commendable than others. The problem was that the commendable elements of the Welsh Labour party were a minority force.

As the *Welsh Nation* noted:

We admit that the Labour party in Gwynedd is not what it is in some parts of our southern valleys and that there is a world of difference between, say, Goronwy Roberts and Iori Thomas. But the Gwynedd tail has never wagged the Labour dog, and it is where Labour is most powerful and longest established that we must look for its true image.<sup>7</sup>

No credit could be taken for apparently enlightened attitudes towards some form of devolution in some quarters of the party. The sceptics had not been won over. On the contrary, for Plaid Cymru, Labour would use its pro-devolutionists to stifle the growth of nationalism. Demonstrating a continuing belief in the importance of Plaid's pressure group role, the editorial continued:

In support of this it is argued that there are many good men in that party whose attitude is very close to ours, and who are doing good work. This we readily concede. Few in numbers they certainly are, and beset by all kinds of difficulties. And it is precisely for their sake, among other considerations, that we must refuse to join them. For if Plaid Cymru ceased to function these patriotic spirits would have nothing to threaten or reproach Labour with and their influence would be even less than it is now.

The political beliefs of Goronwy Roberts, T.W. Jones and Cledwyn Hughes were untypical. Much more typical of Labour's real views were the views of members from the south, where sympathy and support for 'Welshness' – notably devolution – was still found wanting. By 1966 *Barn* estimated that of thirty two Welsh Labour MPs, only half – 'eighteen or nineteen' – could be relied upon 'to understand the national point of view'.<sup>8</sup>

The appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales was explained away, rather than recognised as a sign of positive change. Some thought it was a cynical political move, aimed at cutting off the supply line of nationalist sentiment. Plaid Cymru clearly believed that it forced Labour's hand. It was 'slowly succeeding in establishing Wales as a political entity'. Establishing the post was 'another tribute to nationalist strength'.<sup>9</sup> If some saw the establishment of the post as a crucial first step toward the much more significant goal of Welsh devolution, others were concerned that the installation of a Secretary of State was an example of Labour 'fudging' an attempt to find a cheap and painless 'final solution' to the 'Welsh problem'.<sup>10</sup>

Attacks on the people appointed as Secretary of State were frequent and often savage. Positive representations of the powers of the Welsh Office – and its achievements – declined rapidly when Labour was in power and worsened under the Tories. In part, at least, this was an indication of Labour's deteriorating relations with the press in Wales

up to the mid 1970s.<sup>11</sup> The weak and ineffective marketing of the Welsh Office – not allowing for its many faults and failures – was described in the Kilbrandon report as a key factor in the growing support for further devolution.<sup>12</sup> Nationalist pressure undoubtedly played a significant role in this process, for the Welsh language press increasingly acted as a nationalist voice.

Initial criticism of the Welsh Secretary focussed on the limited powers given to the incumbent.<sup>13</sup> To Plaid this demonstrated Labour's lack of faith in Wales' ability to control its own affairs. It was portrayed as a de-centralist gesture which ensured that real power remained safely housed in Westminster. Neither was the image of the office aided (in north-west Wales at least) by seemingly inappropriate and inconsistent decision making. As has already been argued, Jim Griffiths had come under fire in 1965 for his refusal to back the interests of the slate industry in north Wales (see Chapter Three), and the critique intensified under Cledwyn Hughes. Hughes' spell at the Welsh Office (1966-1968) coincided not only with the low-point of the 1964-70 Labour governments, but also the (associated) pinnacle of Plaid Cymru's 'surge'. Hughes' status as one of those Labourites sympathetic to a nationalist agenda raised expectations and hopes among many nationalists; but economic constraints, poorly constructed government policies and lack of support (particularly among the PLP and within the Cabinet) made it difficult for Hughes to deliver popular Welsh reforms.

Some nationalists grudgingly saw Hughes's appointment as a sign that Labour intended to live up to its status as the party of Wales.<sup>14</sup> Yet, almost immediately the government was placed on the back-foot by economic problems and Plaid's electoral



success. The former made policy commitments almost impossible to achieve. The latter helped intensify unfavourable attitudes within the party.<sup>15</sup> In time, Hughes was redesigned as a ‘disappointment’.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as Plaid propaganda stressed, this was no more than many in nationalist circles had predicted. Individuals could do nothing. For some, Hughes’ appointment was part of the arch-villain Harold Wilson’s plan to push through more unpopular measures in Wales. He wanted ‘a popular and able Welshman to do it’.<sup>17</sup>

Events after 1966 lent credibility to the proposition. There were plenty of ‘unpopular measures’ to go around. Hughes’ period at the Welsh Office coincided with several controversial policy issues; a new town for mid Wales; the re-organisation of Welsh local government; the Welsh Language Act and growing pressures on the Welsh economy, to name but a few. More sceptics and cynics began to describe Hughes’ appointment as a smokescreen, which disguised ambiguities in Labour’s Welsh policies. Contrary to the image which Hughes helped to convey, they argued that support for a ‘nationalist’ agenda and respect for ‘Welshness’ remained weak within the party. Despite ‘the successes of conscientious Welshmen in the Labour party and in Wilson’s appointments’, there were ‘dark clouds’ on the horizon. The party’s anti-devolutionism provided high profile examples of this ‘betrayal’. However, the rot had also set in at local level. As *Barn* argued, those willing to support a ‘nationalist’ agenda on local councils had deteriorated in number. Up until the 1960s, Welsh local councils – often dominated by Labour – had incorporated an ‘older brigade’. Often Welsh speaking and typically emanating from radical, non-conformist backgrounds, they were sympathetic to ‘Welshness’. However, an emerging generation did not possess the same values. Instead, ‘anti-Wales Welshmen, English Welshmen’ or

‘Welshmen with little knowledge of Wales’ were becoming worryingly familiar. Labour not only had to address its status as ‘the party of Wales’ at Westminster, but also on local councils. This was ominous, especially in light of plans for local government re-organisation. As *Barn* argued:

It is at this level rather than at Westminster that the Labour party needs more enthusiastic Welshmen. The work of Emyr Currie Jones as Labour member of Cardiff City Council, for example, deserves more respect than the sudden rise of Elystan Morgan.<sup>18</sup>

Even when Labour appeared to respond to its Welsh responsibilities, the critique of the party continued. Instead of accepting Labour’s Welshness, nationalists accused the Labour party of trying to manipulate the growing sympathy for nationalism for political gain. According to *Barn*, Labour used ‘nationalist’ candidates to win important seats, and to consolidate its power, whilst still remaining unsympathetic towards nationalist demands. In Conway, Merioneth, Denbigh and Maldwyn, Plaid Cymru believed it had lost votes to ‘attractive’, ‘nationalist’ Labour candidates in the 1966 general election. Conway was a prime example. In taking 506 votes from Plaid Cymru, Labour had won the seat with a majority of 581. Ceredigion was another. There, Labour had selected a candidate who had been one of Plaid Cymru’s ‘leading lights’ only nine months earlier, and until joining Labour had ‘shown very little interest in socialism’. For *Barn* this was a cynical Labour tactic, reminiscent of Cliff Prothero’s backing for Lady Megan Lloyd George’s candidature in Carmarthen in 1957, only a couple of years after his bitter opposition to the Parliament for Wales campaign (led by Lady Megan). This was not a sign that nationalism or Welshness were being respected, but yet another sign of Labour skulduggery and politically motivated cynicism. For Plaid, Labour – just like the Liberal party before them – exploited nationalist sentiments that already existed, whilst at the same time showing

little interest in developing those sentiments. However, as the Liberal party's experience had shown, the Welsh public would not be fooled by this. Plaid Cymru would continue to build its machine and wait for 'the call.'<sup>19</sup>

Others on the left of Plaid Cymru saw the influx of former 'non-socialists' into Labour ranks as less surprising, given Labour's increasingly right-wing stance on a number of policy issues. According to these nationalists, Labour was betraying its socialist roots. Foreign policy (especially government support for US involvement in Vietnam) defence spending and deteriorating relations with trade unions, provided just three examples. These were all issues which were subject to intense and sustained anti-Labour propaganda in the period up to 1974.

Plaid pointed out (at great length), that Labour's neglect of its roots, betrayal of socialist principles and failure to address popular discontent had all contributed to the party's defeat in the Carmarthen by-election. T. Glynne Davies argued, that, in the aftermath of Carmarthen, Plaid Cymru's position had never been stronger given that:

It was probably easier now than ever before for any Welsh socialist who has had a bellyful of government policies to turn to the radicalism of Plaid Cymru.<sup>20</sup>

Some nationalists still feared that by challenging the Labour party more vigorously, Plaid could split the pro-Welsh vote and thus let in parties who were less sympathetic to 'the cause'. However, sections of the Welsh language press pointed to the fact that any Plaid's victories would not 'ruin Labour's chances of forming an administration'.<sup>21</sup> This was fine whilst Labour had a majority, but it might not be valid at the next election. Davies noted that if Plaid was right in arguing that the Carmarthen result demonstrated that a 'new spirit' of Welshness had been aroused,



and that it would be fighting every seat in the next general election, there was a danger that seats occupied by prominent 'nationalist' Labour MPs might be endangered. These were not seats that Plaid Cymru had a chance of winning, but 'ones that could be won by candidates who had not a bit of sympathy for Welshness'. Inserting pro-nationalist Labour men was a half-gain for 'the cause'. Labour was bad – but not half as bad as the Tories. As Davies continued:

Can Wales afford to lose the likes of Elystan Morgan, Ednyfed Hudson Davies, Goronwy Roberts, Emlyn Hooson, Geraint Morgan, Wil Edwards and, come to that, Gwynfor Evans himself?..the danger is that all the hard work that has been put in lately will go to waste because Plaid will be more important to some people than the principles its stands for.<sup>22</sup>

This stimulated a political debate over Plaid's *raison d'être*. If the party's aim was to improve the long-term condition of Wales – socially, economically and culturally – it had to be a political party. However, the party's active participation as a 'proper' political party, especially as it grew in strength, could threaten the Welsh cause in the short-term. This was a difficult problem to reconcile, especially in Plaid propaganda.

If nationalist sympathy in Westminster weakened because Labour 'nationalists' were defeated, policies could then be developed that paid scant attention to, and showed little understanding of, Welsh needs. However, some nationalists argued that this was already happening. Despite the existence of a number of MPs who were sympathetic to the nationalist cause, government policy had demonstrated that those voices were ineffective. Numerous examples were cited, but the controversies surrounding the Welsh new town became one of the most prominent. This was a largely economic policy which, nationalists argued, paid scant attention to Welsh social and cultural needs.

Few government policies aroused more hostility from nationalist quarters than plans to build a new town near Caersws in mid Wales. The New Towns Act of 1946 was considered by many contemporaries as one of the post-war Labour government's 'most exciting achievements', a 'truly socialist conception'.<sup>23</sup> Modern housing, new community services and a new set of surroundings would be among the attributes of a new town development. In Wales, as has already been argued, a new town also promised to make a valuable and important contribution to the development of a Welsh economic and industrial infrastructure (see Chapter Three). However, new town developments were also seen as a classic example of a policy designed largely for England which did not fit Welsh needs – particularly the needs of Welsh speaking, rural Wales. A new town, as developed by Labour, would cause immense damage to Welsh culture, the language and traditional Welsh communities.

Concerns over a new town had been aired by Plaid Cymru well in advance of the commissioning of the government's official report, *A New Town for Mid Wales*, published in 1966.<sup>24</sup> As early as 1964 the new town idea had been met with suspicion. Whilst acknowledging the positive aspects of the desire to breathe life into rural Wales, Plaid spokesmen such as Pennar Davies had expressed concerns that, without a Welsh government, the town would become a 'pathetic cipher in the disproportionate distribution of British economic power'.<sup>25</sup> Others shared the same concerns. As Iorwerth Peate argued, the new town idea was another example of mis-directed attempts to tackle the problem of depopulation. Labour's plan did not concentrate on the need to expand job opportunities, whilst at the same time preserving communities. It was another large scheme which paid scant attention to local needs. This theme was expanded upon by T. Glynne Davies:

This is an opportunity for Birmingham to share its smoke with Wales...it is not an attempt to put mid-Wales on its feet. Politically, spiritually and for the community it can do no good in the long term. At a time when people inside and outside the Labour party are attempting to make people discover the Welshness in their hearts, here is Welshness being drowned by a flow from England which couldn't care less about Welshness and as figures count in a democracy, here is an eternal blow to Welshness. In one blow the percentage of Welsh speakers will decline dramatically. In one blow a county which is solidly religious will turn into a materialistic mess, the 'werin' being swallowed up by the proletariat.<sup>26</sup>

In one short critique, Glynne Davies summarised the fears of Plaid's traditional supporters, but infused it with a populist rhetoric. The critique of the new town developed by Plaid was aided by the Welsh press. As *Barn* argued, the new town was another example of Labour policy which looked good on paper.<sup>27</sup> However, the party's limited interest in the views of local people in mid Wales was used once again to suggest Labour's arrogance and detachment. So too was the fact, admitted in the report, that the decision to build a town in mid Wales was a purely political decision.<sup>28</sup> It provided a fine example of the Kilbrandon Report's conclusion that approval for devolution had flourished, in part because 'government is remote and insufficiently sensitive to the views and feelings of the people'.<sup>29</sup> If one of the potential consequences of a new town development was that a substantial number of new jobs would be created, the official report made little secret of the fact that these would not be catering for Welsh needs. The new town would help to solve 'overspill' problems in the midlands rather than unemployment in rural Wales.<sup>30</sup>

In 1966 Plaid Cymru published a propaganda pamphlet, *Develop all Wales*, which dealt exclusively with the issue of a new town. The pamphlet combined condemnation of government policy with constructive views on how similar types of development could be made to work in a self-governing Wales. Plans for the new town to serve as



an ‘overspill’ area for Birmingham were dismissed as ‘a plan hatched by gentlemen sitting in London’.<sup>31</sup> *Develop all Wales* and other nationalist literature on the issue focussed on a few key issues. It dismissed government claims over the value of the development. It argued that the new town would not halt depopulation in rural areas. Neither would it relieve the burden of local ratepayers or tackle the serious problem of unemployment. On the contrary, it would exacerbate the problems of depopulation by ‘seducing’ young from other rural areas of Wales. It would not mean improvement for the Welsh, simply because the town was ‘a gift for England’.<sup>32</sup> Labour’s plan was about England, not Wales, would not bring economic benefit to the Welsh poor, Plaid’s critique was infused with a language implying that a new town would involve the corrupt and immoral contamination of the Welsh people.

Even though Plaid Cymru admitted that the idea of a ‘growth centre’ was sensible, the problem was that this was yet another example of the ‘English’ government exploiting (or showing little regard for) Wales. It provided further evidence that ‘government still did not treat Wales as a nation’, but as another problematic region of the UK. It might attempt to aid Wales with a patchwork of policies, but these showed little regard for traditional Welsh communities, culture and the language. Instead, like Scotland, Wales was treated as a ‘fringe province’ of England – abused in the same way as Brittany was by the French. Policies rejected in England could be imposed on the Welsh ‘from above’. Plaid argued that new town developments had been rejected by Hereford, Warwick and Shropshire, but had been ‘dumped’ on mid Wales.<sup>33</sup> The solution was devolution. As Plaid argued, the only way to save rural areas was to bring work to every region, town and village. This was not an impossible feat, since it had been achieved by other small nations such as Switzerland and Denmark.<sup>34</sup>

Although the plan was postponed because of economic cuts in May 1967, Plaid feared that the government would resurrect the new town project at a future date. Plaid pledged to 'bury the report' by continuing to highlight its inefficiencies and contradictions. Second, it proposed to 'offer something better instead'. Of the two, Plaid considered the former much easier than the latter – not only because of the gaping holes which littered the report, but also because of their own limited experience of policy development. However, using the research group's findings and policy ideas Plaid were able to present a more 'practical' solution for developing 'growth centres', which still recognised the distinctive social and cultural needs of Wales. Plans for such growth centres had featured prominently in the 'Economic Plan' published in 1969 (see Chapter Four). Plaid now tried to go one stage further, marrying rhetorical attacks with its own constructive suggestions – and trying to become a more credible force in the process. Parallel developments were part of the party's growth in north-west Wales, and in Merioneth in particular. As has already been argued, Plaid's opposition to government plans to expand Bala allowed the local party (through the influence of Dafydd Wigley) to develop policy ideas that would later feature in the Economic Plan.

There were also numerous other propaganda opportunities which arose from the nature of Labour's policies, although on most of those occasions 'constructive alternatives' were hardly to the fore. The local Labour MP, Wil Edwards, was at the centre of these controversies. Edwards was one of the young, emerging 'talents' in the party, having replaced T. W. Jones as Merioneth's MP in 1966. However, unlike his predecessor, who had been cautious on cultural issues, Edwards was less astute.

Given local concerns over depopulation, the emergence of the 'second homes' debate, the growth of Plaid Cymru and the 'Welshness' of the county, Edwards' views on Bala's development provided local reinforcement for the doubts raised by Plaid over Labour's plan for the mid-Wales new town development.

Edwards (showing honesty unbecoming of a politician) readily admitted that 'growth centres' would be used to attract English in-migrants. Unlike Goronwy Roberts and Cledwyn Hughes, who claimed that the economic development of north-west Wales could lead to the 'repatriation of migrants', Edwards was less certain. His arguments also seemed to imply that in-migration was necessary because the Welsh were materialistic and lacking in 'energy'. According to Edwards, the new wave of in-migrants:

Would not come from the slums of Birmingham and Liverpool. Those people are going nowhere. The people who will be moving will be those with a bit of go in them. It is nonsense to talk of boys from Wales coming here. They are all doing too well in England to want to come back...the English who will come into the area will be a benefit to the local community. They are people with energy. We have to accept in-migrants – and they will be English.

For Plaid Cymru this was a sign of the Welsh Labour party's 'politics of deceit'. It was a sign that the local Labour party had lost all faith in the ability of local communities to fend for themselves. The government's solution to the problems of north-west Wales was to build factories that were so unsuitable to the local area that they would destroy local communities or new towns that would swamp them. Like his party, Edwards refused to acknowledge that the problems facing Merioneth could be solved by Plaid's alternatives:

The 'madcap' schemes of 'the new towns' are built on this principle: 'Let us turn small towns into big towns and agricultural communities into industrial communities and we will have solved the problem'. These are the ideologies of 'quack doctors' who don't know how to treat the 'flu so give the patient typhoid and try to treat that instead.<sup>35</sup>



In reply, Plaid suggested that a much larger conspiracy was at hand. It claimed that Labour's scheme for Bala was only one strand of a much larger project, which had little to do with providing jobs for local people. On the contrary it was part of a much grander scheme to make central Wales a 'Birmingham backyard'. As the article continued:

Mr. Edwards's speech has shown that he is quite willing to see Welsh communities destroyed for the sake of Birmingham. Even though he is an MP for a Welsh constituency, he is merely a pawn in the game of those who see eradicating Wales as a feasible answer to the problems of Wales.<sup>36</sup>

Language was another divisive and highly controversial issue which was used in anti-Labour, anti-Westminster, propaganda. Whilst language has often been over-stated as one of the driving forces for Plaid Cymru's development as a political force, it was nonetheless an important factor. In addition to reinforcing the sentiments addressed above, its preservation appealed on another level to traditional, culturally minded and educated Welsh speakers. It was also one of several driving forces behind support for Plaid Cymru and the quest for devolution by the early 1970s – and a particularly important political factor in north-west (Welsh speaking) Wales. It was an issue which Labour had to treat with care, given that most of its supporters spoke English and were concerned about the domination of Welsh speakers. As the Kilbrandon Report recognised:

The attitude survey suggests that, although there is a notable degree of sympathy among non-Welsh speakers for the idea of preserving and teaching the Welsh language, there is also a feeling that those who speak Welsh would be the ones to gain most from devolution.<sup>37</sup>

Labour was certainly alive to the importance of the language issue in the 1960s. The Welsh Language Act of 1967 symbolised the government's concern to address the

issue. However, the Act was another example of a Labour policy 'achievement' that failed to please Plaid Cymru. The Act was another 'milestone' government policy which, like the Secretary of State for Wales and the new town, met with a torrent of criticism from Plaid Cymru and some sections of the Welsh press. Plaid Cymru's leading propagandist on the language issue was Robyn Lewis, the party's candidate for Caernarfonshire in the 1970 general election. Lewis was a former member of the Labour party, having stood as the party's candidate for Denbigh in the 1955 election. Having joined Plaid Cymru in the early 1960s, he was one of those who sought to revive language as a feature of Plaid Cymru's appeal. However, this was not an old-fashioned, cultural concern for the language reminiscent of the party's founding fathers. On the contrary, he used the language issue as a symbol of much wider governmental contradictions and failures.<sup>38</sup>

There is insufficient space here for a detailed discussion of those controversies, but some aspects of the debate are worthy of note. Lewis – and Plaid's – condemnation of the Welsh Language Act emanated from its failure to deliver equal validity for the Welsh language.<sup>39</sup> Labour's shoddy handling of the Welsh Language Bill was touted as one of the reasons Lewis left the party. Alongside Labour's desertion of the campaign for devolution, and the party's plans for a new town, the Language Bill showed:

The lip-service which Labour's Welsh Ministers have given to the equality of our (and their) language, and their utter inactivity when young Welshmen of impeccable character were being thrown into prison for putting that so-called equality to the test.<sup>40</sup>

Equality for the language had taken on an Orwellian dimension. Thanks to Labour, 'both languages (were) equal, but one language (was) more equal than the other'.<sup>41</sup>

Some of Lewis' points of contention were complex, technical and related to the finer points of British law (in keeping with the author's legal training). However, more basic points developed Plaid's critique of government inefficiency and duplicity. Lewis, and other critics of the act, bemoaned the contradiction between granting 'equal validity' and listing thirty one 'recommendations' over language use which unpicked and qualified the commitment. As a result, the government opened up more discontent and provided the platform for a series of campaigns which would keep language high on the political agenda well into the 1970s. Government forms in Welsh, tax discs, passports and TV licences were just some of the issues which kept language at the epicentre of nationalist debates in the early 1970s, a period which also witnessed one of the high-points of *Cymdeithas Yr Iaith* activism and 'show trials'.

Two of the recommendations made by Hughes-Parry (in the report that preceded the Welsh Language Act) and rejected by the Labour government provided more bad publicity. The first was the proposal that 'heads of government departments in Wales should be Welsh speaking', the second that 'where proficiency of the language is essential for the efficient discharge of duties in the office, an extra allowance should be paid'. In the atmosphere of the 1960s, the former attracted great attention. Labour's decision not to implement the recommendation may have been shrewd – it was probable unworkable and hardly meritocratic – but it became a stick used by nationalists to beat the government during the high tide of language activism. Related criticism followed Labour's attitude to appointing staff at the Welsh Office. Wilson's selection of George Thomas as Secretary of State, and Eirene White as Minister of State were deemed 'totally unsatisfactory', given that they were not Welsh speakers.<sup>42</sup>



However, this was portrayed as a symptom of a malaise afflicting all of Wales, one that called for more positive government intervention in Welsh education:

The truth is that a non Welsh speaking Welshman is no more suitable to rule Welsh speakers than a non-English speaking Englishman would be ruling the English. Mr. Thomas acknowledges this by saying that he is learning it, or that he has 'Rhondda Welsh', but until we demand a Welsh educational policy and that Welsh is taught to every child, it is only in exceptional circumstances that we can judge a Welshman who does not speak his mother tongue.<sup>43</sup>

Neither did Labour MPs in constituencies with a large Welsh speaking population do themselves any favours when it came to the language issue. Given the traditions of the Labour party in north-west Wales, the press capitalised on instances when Labour MPs appeared ignorant of those traditions. Wil Edwards was again a culprit. He demonstrated his political inexperience in 1967 when, during a Commons debate on the use of language in schools, he admitted that 'bilingualism was not a priority for the government'. *Barn* felt it unsurprising bearing in mind 'the traditions of the party he represented'. Providing the essentials in life – such as shelter, food and medical care – had always been the priority of socialists. These concerns were understandable. However, the problem was with other 'priorities' which had concerned Labour since it returned to power in 1964 – homosexuality, sexual offences, national sweepstakes, Scottish policemen, and wild birds – to name but a few. The question was who decided where Labour's priorities lay. The answer was that all these issues had been addressed because of 'English' pressure on the government – the same pressure that had forced the government to go ahead with re-nationalising steel before addressing other key Welsh concerns. The article concluded by suggesting that Edwards – like Labour – may have been playing a political game, attacking nationalism by exploiting the fears of the south, placing a concern with economics (and south Wales) over the language (and north Wales):

It is hoped that Wil Edwards presented his own opinions not those of his government or the Welsh Office...for playing one half of Wales off against the other really would be treacherous.<sup>44</sup>

Local government re-organisation provided further ammunition for Labour's critics, especially as the debate over local government reorganisation in Wales tied in with the debate over devolution. Under Cledwyn Hughes, the Welsh Office had hoped to use local government re-organisation as a lever towards gaining an elected Welsh Council. In the event, Hughes was allowed only to put forward a form of co-opted council, the Economic Council for Wales.<sup>45</sup> The failure to gain approval for an elected council was the result of hostility from major figures in the Cabinet and south Walian MPs.<sup>46</sup> However, some nationalists blamed Hughes for 'turning his back on an elected council'.<sup>47</sup> Others took a more balanced view, seeing it as a classic example of Labour's (continued) domination by anti-devolutionists. This was again exploited by Plaid. As Plaid argued, this was not simply a matter of anti-devolutionism but of anti-Welshness, a long-standing government 'disease' which had been accentuated by Plaid's by-election successes.<sup>48</sup> Others, like Dafydd Wigley, argued that Labour's rejection of an elected council, and its negative attitude towards devolution in general, had resulted in an upsurge of nationalist extremism, and had made it easier for extremist groups to recruit. This was 'making the job of those who favour conventional or democratic means more difficult'.<sup>49</sup> Along with Wigley, other Plaid candidates from the north-west, such as Robyn Lewis, regularly attacked local Labour MPs for 'going quiet' on devolution. Adopting scathing and populist rhetoric, they argued that Labour MPs had been seduced by the trappings of power, had lost their radicalism and put the interests of the party's whip above the desires of their own constituents.<sup>50</sup> These arguments were not dissimilar to those used by youthful Labour

radicals, and were no doubt part of a rebellious 1960s culture – but they had a particular, popular, resonance in north-west Wales.

Widespread support for an elected council from local authorities provided more negative publicity for Labour. Some authorities demonstrated their opposition to plans to another nominated body by refusing to nominate representatives to serve on the re-designed council. This campaign (which originated within Cardiganshire County Council) received support in north-west Wales, particularly from Caernarfonshire County Council, and provided Plaid Cymru with valuable anti-Labour propaganda in the local press. Not surprisingly, nationalists serving on the council were the most vociferous opponents of the nominated council, none more so than the ageing stalwart W.R.P. George.<sup>51</sup> An address by George to the council (which received prominent coverage in the local press) articulated a much wider body of concern.

George argued that the government's rejection of a Royal Commission on local government reform had led many to believe that its White Paper would reflect a commitment to action, including 'radical' reforms. Amongst these was the widely anticipated delivery of 'an elected council for Wales, with executive powers' to deal with 'urgent and pressing matters'. In the event, all the government had managed to come up with was:

A timid, unoriginal and undemocratic proposal as this so-called 'New Welsh Council', which is neither new, nor Welsh, nor a Council.<sup>52</sup>

Again, the 'timidity' of the government's proposals was blamed on the Welsh Office.

As George continued:

The real explanation for this timid White Paper is that the Welsh Office is itself merely an Agent of the central government and Whitehall. The Secretary of State for Wales is not a master in his own house – but give him a



democratically elected council with executive powers and there would be altogether a healthier set-up in Wales.<sup>53</sup>

The problem was also one of priorities. Once again, as George argued, Wales played ‘second fiddle’ to ‘special legislation to legalise abortion...and homosexual acts between consenting adults’. Here again, rhetoric was populist, and infused with comments which struck a chord with the traditionally minded.

In early 1968 Caernarfon County Council wrote to the Welsh Office, confirming that it was ‘against the setting up of a nominated Welsh Council as proposed in the White Paper either now or in the long term’, and re-iterating its view that ‘the only democratic basis for a Welsh Council is that it should be an elected council with executive powers’.<sup>54</sup> The reply from the Welsh Office showed a modicum of sympathy for the council’s view. As it argued:

The Secretary of State...has asked me to say that he does not believe that there are significant differences of opinion between him and your council.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the sympathy, the controversy demonstrated that the Welsh Office had been out-manoeuvred by the Labour ‘machine’. Local authorities refusing to nominate members for the new council were to be advised that even in the event of changed government policy, ‘some time – hardly less than three years’ would have to elapse before an elected Council came into being.<sup>56</sup> In the meantime, Labour’s opposition to devolution was exploited by the party’s nationalist opponents, whilst its faltering responses to Council’s provided more evidence of vacillation and ‘cowardice’.

Whilst Labour’s ‘nationalist’ credentials came under attack, so too did its position on some ‘left-wing’ issues that had a wider basis of support amongst a liberal intelligentsia. This included national and international Labour policies, especially

defence spending and US policy in Vietnam. Labour's (deteriorating) relations with trade unions and cuts in government spending were a vital component of a critique developed, in part, by Plaid's more radical elements. As *Y Faner* noted, government spending once again highlighted that prioritisation was not one of its strengths:

The government cannot afford to give teachers a pay rise or adequate buildings to work in, provide old people with pensions and give Welsh motorists good roads despite the tax we pay...yet they can afford arms, and developing planes like Concorde, originally supposed to cost £500 million but now close to £800 million...a gamble played with taxpayers money...there are no ideas of priorities, no talk of putting important things first...it is wrong that Wales is tied so close politically and economically with such an ideology.<sup>57</sup>

The distribution of government spending across the UK was also a matter of considerable debate. Plaid Cymru and the Welsh press bemoaned the fact that infrastructural spending in England was allegedly not matched in Wales. As *Y Faner* pointed out, even given that Wales was one-sixth the size the England, the disparities between the two were still vast and 'unfair'. For example:

Road improvements: England 1000 miles, Wales 27; £3.7 million spent on Coal Board development and research, but only 1 per cent of this in Wales; During 1966/67 Mintech spent £480 million in England, £6 million in Wales; Since 1948 £235 million spent on electrifying railways in England, £6 million in Wales; the government spends £6 million advertising in English newspapers, £2,000 in Welsh ones; in 1965/66 the government spent £2,250 million on defence, 74 per cent of this in England, 3 per cent in Wales; since 1945, 60 per cent of English children have gone to new schools, 25 per cent in Wales.<sup>58</sup>

Industrial strife, and Labour's deteriorating relations with the unions provided ample opportunity for nationalists to further condemn the 'rightward' road taken by the party. *In Place of Strife*, widely criticised inside the Labour party, was also exploited by Labour's opponents. Some sections of the Welsh press saw the policy as 'the final nail in Labour's coffin', and a 'disgrace to a party with such a large majority'. In days gone by, *In Place of Strife* would have led to a rebellion in the ranks of the PLP, but no longer, 'all the boys are in on this and it makes you think that the whole thing

(Westminster) is nonsense – a circus – with the working class like show horses’.<sup>59</sup> As one columnist argued, what was needed was a spirit of rebellion among the workers. ‘more strikes, not less...to hammer the Labour party’.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, if this was an element in Plaid’s critique, it was surprisingly not one developed in official, all-Wales, propaganda. The party did not shift this far to the left, and at local and national level attacked largely on the lines outlined above.

Labour’s removal from office in the 1970 general election naturally influenced Plaid’s attacks. Plaid’s propaganda now focussed on the way in which Labour’s contempt for devolution had led to a further period of unpopular and undemocratic Tory rule in Wales, combining this with a continuing assault on the duplicity of Labour policies and increased attention to the inefficiencies of the party’s personnel. Some Plaid Cymru figures viewed the aftermath of the 1970 election as the beginning of a ‘five year war’.<sup>61</sup> Others in the party saw the result of the 1970 election as ‘Welsh voters getting what they deserve.’<sup>62</sup>

Elements within the party were concerned that the Conservative victory would strengthen Labour’s appeal as an anti-Tory force. Propaganda thus focussed on the ‘fact’ that successive Tory and Labour governments had proved that there was little difference between the rule of either party so far as Wales was concerned. Labour’s own anti-government and anti-Tory rhetoric was viewed by Plaid as ‘little more than a scheme devised to try and resist the advance of Plaid Cymru’. As the party argued:

For the fact is that the years of Labour rule were every bit as devastating as those of Tory rule.<sup>63</sup>

Labour attacks on the failings of Conservative government were simply not credible.

*As Y Ddraig Goch* noted:



It would be better if Labour kept quiet about Tory governance in Wales, because it is Labour stubbornness over Welsh devolution that ensured that we now have to suffer a Conservative government...a high price to pay for government posts for Cledwyn Hughes, Elystan Morgan, George Thomas and Goronwy Roberts is having to suffer the government from a party that only a minority of the Welsh people support.<sup>64</sup>

From the early 1970s Plaid's reconstruction as both a 'radical' and 'socialist' party enabled it to stress Labour's 'desertion' of radicalism and socialism. 'Welsh radicalism' was interpreted by Plaid to have always entailed a notion of decentralisation. Unlike Labour and the Tories – 'bureaucratic, centralist, unionist parties' – Plaid argued that it was the only credible political party in Wales to support Welsh political traditions (the Liberal party was not deemed worthy of inclusion in the equation). Stressing decentralisation located Plaid within a form of 1960s radicalism which also permeated the Labour party. As a propaganda tactic it provided a 'political' rather than a 'cultural' case for change, which might appeal to Labour voters. Finally, it saw devolution as a 'Welsh' policy, again potentially rooting it in 'acceptable', almost 'idealist' sentiments.

The desire to portray Plaid as a 'socialist' party was confirmed in discussions at the party's annual conference in 1970. Deemed by the Welsh press as a 'left-turn', it was an indication of the increasing importance placed on communitarian politics. As the party announced:

Plaid Cymru is a socialist party...it has always been vitally concerned with the social conditions of the people and has always pointed to the capitalist system as being divisive, destructive and oppressive. But the socialism that it adopted was a people's socialism and not the state socialism which the Labour party – that breeding ground of bureaucrats – proudly claimed as its own.<sup>65</sup>

### *Labour's response to the nationalist critique in the 1960s*

The challenge posed by Plaid Cymru in the 1960s and early 1970s provoked a diverse response from the Welsh Labour party. Some in the party sought to beat Plaid Cymru at their own game. They wanted Labour to live up to its reputation as the party of Wales by delivering policies which were attentive to distinctively Welsh aspirations. Others advocated a more defensive position, proposing hostile attacks on nationalist doctrine and even Plaid's conception of 'Welshness.' Even for 'neutrals' there was a problem. The party's abject by-election performances and condemnation of government policy by large sections of Welsh society led many in the party to question the party's political strategy, organisational machinery and personnel. Some in the party, like Ted Rowlands, wanted special help in countering the nationalist threat.<sup>66</sup> Increased action – at the very least – was essential.

The 'nationalist' element in the party had grown in strength. The mid 1960s witnessed the emergence within the Welsh Labour party of a number of young prospective MPs, whose sympathies for 'nationalist' issues was unquestioned. Among the most prominent of these were Gwilym Prys Davies and Elystan Morgan, both of whom had been active in Plaid Cymru before switching to Labour.<sup>67</sup> The growing challenge of Plaid Cymru made it imperative that Labour kept its traditional integrity in Welsh speaking constituencies. The selection of candidates who were 'able', 'attractive', Welsh-speaking and (perhaps more importantly) 'loyal' was a major concern.<sup>68</sup>

Many of these candidates were products of a more 'nationalist' environment. Switching between Plaid and Labour in the 1950s and 1960s was not uncommon. Those who left Plaid Cymru for the Labour party had often stressed the greater

likelihood of making progress on Welsh affairs (notably devolution) within the Labour party. In the 1950s, Megan Lloyd George had provided a high-profile example of such a shift when she abandoned the Liberal party in favour of Labour, arguing that it was 'only through the Labour party that I can do my best for Wales'.<sup>69</sup> This stimulated an intellectual debate over the ways in which the forces of 'radicalism' in Welsh politics were being divided. A new generation of patriotic political activists was emerging which was sympathetic to nationalism and socialism.

Sympathy for a more 'nationalistic' approach had been especially evident among radical university students, some of whom moved into Labour politics. In the early 1960s the journal *Aneurin* appeared as a direct response to a changing climate. *Aneurin* sought to convey 'student socialist opinion in Wales'.<sup>70</sup> There were several aims: to contribute to contemporary debates on the principles of socialism, but also, and more importantly, to further nationalist support and increase nationalist consciousness within the Labour party. The main concern, however, was to channel nationalist sympathies away from Plaid Cymru and into the Labour party.

This theme was developed by several contributors to the journal. The first edition of the journal contained a contribution from W. John Morgan entitled the 'Welsh Nationalist Party from a Socialist Standpoint'. Morgan was concerned with the fact that Plaid was becoming an increasingly potential threat to the Labour party in Wales. He viewed Plaid as youthful, ambitious, enthusiastic and highly skilled at attracting media attention. Its potential threat was more serious because:

Plaid has cornered some of the spirit and fire which in Wales – and I'm sure the Nationalist party members will find this a comic, back to front way of putting it – one would always hope would express itself within the Labour party.<sup>71</sup>



This was a challenge which the Labour party could not afford to ignore. *Aneurin* claimed it would draw the attention of the Labour party in Wales to the need to ‘capture the radical spirit among the young people’. As Morgan argued, this was ‘no small service’. For Morgan, the longevity of the Labour party depended on its ability to be seen as a modern, radical party that recognised and respected the demands of Welsh society. It was also important for Labour to recognise the traditional spirit of radicalism:

It is quite possible to have...historical sense, to have passion for *yr hen wlad*, to want a greater degree of devolution, to want to preserve the Welsh language, without being a member of Plaid Cymru. The Labour party still seems to me the most likely to achieve what we want to see done in Wales

Aneurin’s ambitions exceeded its circulation, but it worked hard to show it was a legitimate part of a Labour tradition. In another edition of *Aneurin*, the paper gave space to the views of the veteran ‘nationalist’ socialist, David Thomas. As the article made clear, Thomas’s ‘nationalist’ credentials were second to none. Like many within Plaid and a minority in his own party, what worried Thomas most about Wales in the 1960s was the ‘nuclear bomb’ and ‘seeing so many English people coming to live in rural areas’. *Aneurin* wanted to show that ‘prophets’ like Thomas had not lost their faith in the Labour party as *the* party of Wales. Thomas had not abandoned his hope of seeing a Federal Wales. Also, unlike other influential Labour figures such as Huw T. Edwards, he had not been tempted to join Plaid Cymru. For David Thomas the problem was not with Labour, but with other parties who distracted Labour from their spiritual mission. Parties like Plaid Cymru actually slowed down the process that would eventually lead to self-government:

Plaid are a bit of a nuisance...because they do their utmost to draw nationalists out of the Labour party, and to some extent they are successful. This weakens nationalism in the very places where it needs strengthening.<sup>72</sup>

*Aneurin* provided a medium for some young Labour figures to express their views. However, it is significant not for its direct results, but as a symbol of changes that were taking place in some areas of Labour politics.<sup>73</sup> From the mid 1960s onwards, the Labour party's organiser, Emrys Jones, tried to ensure that a new 'breed' of Labour candidates, mostly sympathetic to devolution, made their way rapidly through the party system.<sup>74</sup> Even amongst those for whom electoral success was the main concern, nationalism was a challenge to be addressed. This committed and confident young generation was anxious to mould the party in its own image.<sup>75</sup> Ideology, pragmatism, generational change and organisational influence helped to ensure changes in Labour's orientation. The party increasingly sought candidates who could 'deal' with nationalism.

Yet such changes did not transform the party. Carmarthen, Rhondda and Caerphilly were more important ingredients in the evolving debate over devolution. As has already been argued, local issues and discontent over Labour policies dominated all three by-elections. 'Nationalist' agendas (notably devolution) were, in the main, peripheral issues. Yet, the impact of these by-elections on Labour's devolutionist strategies was profound. Some contemporary political commentators from outside Wales suggested that up to 1966, 'the government previously thought that it had quieted Welsh separatist feeling through the appointment of a Secretary of State'. By-election performances in both Wales and Scotland (where support for the SNP also grew) were 'a considerable surprise' to the government.<sup>76</sup> The question was whether Labour would address the problem by incorporating devolution, or see 'nationalism' as a force to be stamped on and stamped out.

Those who had entered the Labour party in the hope of influencing the party's Welsh policy were alarmed at the nationalist challenge. Writing to Richard Crossman in 1966, Gwilym Prys Davies highlighted difficulties within the party. For Davies, the Welsh Labour party faced a crisis. His concerns reflected a number of those which had already been aired by Plaid Cymru:

Manned by too many opportunists and non-thinkers at local government level and parliamentary level the Labour party in Wales appears to have been pre-empted of its radical idealism and to have transformed itself into a domineering caucus in local affairs and into a permanent alternative government in the set up of ins and outs.<sup>77</sup>

This was not the kind of party which supporters of Welsh radical politics had traditionally favoured. Too often the Labour party took its superiority for granted, either underestimating or treating political opponents with contempt. The dangers of this continuing were clear. As Davies continued:

There is a very ancient Welsh attitude of not trusting such a party. In these circumstances we cannot afford the delusion that the Welsh people will continuously support Labour candidates where sermons are hollow...there are only a few thousand Welsh nationalists who accept no limitations to the demands nationalism makes on them, but they should not be dismissed too lightly.

For Davies, sociological changes had two potential impacts – both beneficial to the 'nationalist movement' and detrimental to Labour. The impact of world-wide technological and cultural change had a powerful impact on the 'ideas and beliefs at the base of Welsh society'. Consequently:

For many of the elderly cherishing the past, Plaid Cymru stands for that which they regard as being best in their heritage.

However, if this implied that Plaid support was limited to the narrow, old-fashioned 'cultural nationalists' who had supported the party in the 1930s and 1940s (see Chapter One), this was not the case. On the contrary, support for Plaid was also



enhanced by the impact of the same processes on a younger generation. As Davies continued:

As the older generation passes on a younger, forward looking generation is coming to the fore which is thinking and reacting in terms appropriate to the decades in which they grew up. The young Welshman knows nothing of the heyday of Methodism, or the struggle against the savage exploitation of labour, he is uninterested in the stale controversies of history and shows none of the profound respect for his elders for established authority. It is a generation which is in revolt against authority and the values of a by-gone age.<sup>78</sup>

Importantly, Davies argued that it would be mistaken for Labour to see Carmarthen and Rhondda as ‘the result of a temporary political climate’, brought about by ‘an unpopular government’. Much more fundamental (and permanent) changes were underway. It would be a mistake to think that the ‘nationalist tide’ would subside when ‘the climate improved’. The party ‘faced a crisis’, largely because it had ‘given no systematic thought to Wales as a national community’. There was hope of renewal, but for this to occur serious re-thinking would have to be undertaken:

It is my submission that the Labour movement in Wales can only recover its dynamic and *raison d’etre* by precipitating inside itself a newer distillation of the spirit of socialism intimately related to and inspired by our national heritage.<sup>79</sup>

In the aftermath of Carmarthen, Davies was unsure whether Plaid’s success was a positive or a negative development, especially in furthering the case for devolution. Attempts to attract Davies back to Plaid Cymru failed despite his misgivings over Carmarthen as, ‘this was not the time to preach Welsh politics.’<sup>80</sup>

If the Crossman letter clearly articulated Davies’s dismay at Labour’s predicament, an extended version of the letter, published in *Barn* demonstrated that his real concerns were much more profound. Some important ingredients were added. On this occasion Davies was more critical of Plaid Cymru – and the Labour party. He argued that

support for Plaid Cymru was aimless, and typical of the support given in England to movements like CND. As he argued, young people:

See in Plaid Cymru a chance to undermine the institutions which their parents generation were over respectful of, but without thinking what kind of institutions should take their place.

More interesting still were his views on the Welsh Labour party. Davies argued that Cledwyn Hughes' period at the Welsh Office was crucial. So too was the influence of senior Welsh civil servants such as Goronwy Daniel, 'the power behind the throne'. It was imperative that the functions of the Welsh Office were strengthened, and it was vital that the Welsh Office be seen to be actively re-building and re-designing the Welsh economy, whilst at the same time establishing policies to protect and preserve the Welsh language. However, the signs were not good. Fear of a nationalist surge meant that a nervousness had engulfed the Labour party. The Welsh Office and the Secretary of State were easy targets. But problems ran much deeper. As Davies argued:

Cledwyn Hughes's task would be a thousand times easier if the majority of Welsh Labour MPs supported what he was trying to do. This is without doubt the saddest fact. In criticising the Welsh Office's lack of achievement, you cannot ignore the mentality of the majority of the Labour party in Wales. The sad fact is that the suspicion of nationalism and Plaid Cymru within the party has certainly deepened over the last eighteen months. This is one of the direct consequences of the blind efforts to move Labour out of Welsh political life like it was an enemy and a font of every evil.<sup>81</sup>

Gwilym Prys Davies was not alone in voicing these concerns. Similar observations were made by Ednyfed Hudson Davies, Labour's MP for Conway. As Hudson Davies argued, Plaid's by-election performances had given the party 'a degree of credibility it had not previously possessed to the nationalist cause'.<sup>82</sup> This was an astute point. Victories had not only added to Plaid's credibility with voters, but also to the business and industrial community in Wales.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, he was anxious that neither Plaid, or

its representatives, were under-estimated by Labour. He argued that Gwynfor Evans was 'an astute politician', highly skilled in maximising Commons debates as a propaganda platform to reach the Welsh press, bodies which in return gave Plaid's views 'extensive coverage'. This was aided by the 'fact' that Plaid had 'the best party machine in Wales'.

Whilst well aware that the by-elections were a backlash against unpopular Labour government policies, Davies was concerned that 'grievance based voting' might go on to become a firmer allegiance to Plaid. Labour should not assume that protest voters would return 'faithfully to the fold' at the next general election. For one thing, Davies was concerned that many of the grievances that prompted the protest vote would still exist when the election was called. He was also concerned that having taken the considerable step of supporting Plaid for the first time, many Labour voters would no longer feel so 'committed' to the party. Significantly, Davies suggested that Plaid's development as a political force depended as much on Labour as it did on the party itself. As he concluded:

It may well prove to have been easier for the nationalists to demonstrate that they could, in certain circumstances, win seats than it will be to convince the electorate that they have a viable, constructive policy. But they may be saved this trouble and will thrive on negative grounds of discontents if Labour cannot produce, to meet positive and proper demands, a policy for a significantly greater degree of self-determination in Wales and cannot achieve considerable improvements in the standard of living and the level of employment in Wales.<sup>84</sup>

These concerns were not unusual within the Welsh Labour party at the time. The threat posed by Plaid Cymru was deemed both real and dangerous. The party's reaction to the result of the Rhondda by-election was symptomatic of those concerns – and of Labour's ability to resist the slide. The WCL launched a detailed investigation



into the causes of the Rhondda collapse. The activities and propaganda deployed by Plaid Cymru were of particular interest, but the council also examined local factors which it felt had led to a downturn in support. Unemployment at nine per cent had 'doubled over the last nine months'. This was the key issue. As a result, the WCL wrote to the Welsh Secretary demanding that steps be taken which would help the party re-establish its electoral superiority. This included a demand for new industries to be brought in and that 'every effort should be made to have the Royal Mint cited near the Rhondda'.<sup>85</sup>

The same concerns were aired after another near disaster in Caerphilly in 1968. On this occasion, the party's poor performance led to a flood of motions calling for the government to tackle the problem of unemployment. At the party's annual conference a motion was carried expressing:

In strongest terms its protest and condemnation at the unemployment which has been allowed to develop in Wales, amounting to nearly double the national average, and which will be further seriously affected by pit closures and the pending re-organisation of the steel industry. This conference demands that the Secretary of State take immediate steps to provide alternative employment prior to further pit closures; that industry be directed into areas of mass unemployment; that industrial estates be established – and owned by the government – throughout Wales.<sup>86</sup>

Alarm over the party's perceived decline in its heartlands was also evident in the north. If Labour was in danger where it had traditionally been strong, the implications for the party in marginal seats was profound. Merioneth Labour party called on the government to conduct 'pilot schemes of re-habilitation...to revive the fortunes of such Welsh towns as Blaenau Ffestiniog which have declined in conjunction with the decline of basic industries', as well as urging the WCL to hold 'as soon as possible a one-day conference of all the CLP's in Wales to discuss the strengthening of organisation' and 'the present political climate in Wales'.<sup>87</sup> Others also demanded

drastic action. At a meeting of the WCL executive in July 1968, Brynmor John argued that the party's abject by-election performances 'added strength to the case for change to the party's constitution'. According to John, by-election failures were the result, not only of a decline in the individual membership of the party, but also the collapsing 'strength of the party...which was especially noticeable at constituency levels.'<sup>88</sup> John pointed to three key weaknesses in the structure and power of the WCL. Firstly, there were insufficient funds coming into the WCL for it 'to do the work that should be done'. A possible solution was to raise affiliation fees and call for donations from within the party. As John pointed out, Plaid generated an annual income of £25,000 from its 'May Day' appeal. Labour should attempt to do the same. Secondly, he argued that the WCL 'was not as prominent as it might be'. This was:

Partly due to the opposition of newspapers in Wales and to the fact that we have no organ of publicity such as a monthly or even a quarterly news sheet or propaganda broadsheet.

This was particularly galling given the fact that 'the nationalists have two regular publications, *The Welsh Nation* and *Y Ddraig Goch*'. These were concerns shared by Emrys Jones, who also identified the 'weakness in the propaganda activities of the Labour party'.<sup>89</sup> This ultimately led to the establishment of the (eventually unsuccessful) party journal *Welsh Radical*.<sup>90</sup> It was also noted that Plaid was more attentive to the need for research on Welsh affairs – especially as the work of the 'Research Group' became known. John claimed that Labour suffered because there was 'insufficient information on Welsh affairs' and called for 'specialist groups...co-opting persons with special knowledge'.<sup>91</sup> Yet if such people wanted to fight back, they did so by stressing Labour's need to become a more effective 'Labour' party. There was less emphasis on 'Cymruising' the party or on devolution.

An even more widespread concern was the attitude of the Welsh press. As Secretary of State, Cledwyn Hughes had become concerned over 'tendentious' and 'rather cruel' reports relating to the government's handling of the Welsh Language Act and nationalist issues. Whilst this was a general problem, it was especially evident in *Y Cymro*. In a letter to the paper's publishers, Hughes complained that figures relating to the use of Welsh forms were inaccurate and detrimental to the government. So too were reports that Hughes had made 'personal and discourteous attacks on Welsh students'.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Hughes was irritated by what he perceived to be the indulgent amount of free publicity afforded to Plaid Cymru in the paper. As he continued:

There is also in last week's *Cymro* a diary of the year's events. I note that 37 of the entries are Welsh nationalist in character or spirit...frankly this is of little moment to me, but I think it is right that you should know about these things...it is of course true that the *Cymro* does publish from time to time unbiased and constructive features, but a great deal of it is written by Welsh nationalists who are obsessed with their cause...I am not asking you to do anything about this, nor do I mind criticism – and I get plenty of this as you know – but I do object to unfair comment.<sup>93</sup>

Hughes' genteel response was combined with a desire to address real problems – for others a hostile media became Labour's excuse. Labour's capacity to fight back against Plaid was undermined by lack of leadership and personal divisions at the top. Appointments to the Welsh Office served to 'sour' relations within the minority, pro-devolutionist or 'nationalist' camp. As Minister of State for Wales under Jim Griffiths, Goronwy Roberts had been hopeful of succeeding Griffiths in 1966. In the event, Cledwyn Hughes was appointed. This soured relations between Roberts and Hughes, and ultimately weakened the north-west axis within the Welsh Labour party.<sup>94</sup> Hughes' departure, and the arrival of George Thomas in 1968, was considered a 'disaster' by the emerging generation of pro-devolution prospective candidates in the party, and a serious setback to Emrys Jones's attempts to mould a new party



image.<sup>95</sup> If some members of an older generation – like Thomas and Roberts – still found much in common outside devolution, they found it difficult to act as a united block on Welsh policy as well as dealing with ministerial issues in London.<sup>96</sup>

Hughes' appointment ahead of Roberts as Secretary of State in 1966 was a controversial issue. Wilson's decision to appoint Hughes was justified on the grounds that it was not government policy to promote from within the same department. It was explained to Roberts on the grounds that Wilson wanted him to gain broader experience.<sup>97</sup> Roberts was moved to the Department of Education. Contemporary Welsh political commentators were less than convinced with this explanation. One of these commentators, John Gay Davies, could not understand the logic behind Wilson's decisions. Before an official announcement had been aired, Davies gave his sceptical views on subject:

The man I think is logical (for the post) would be Goronwy Roberts. He has, after all, understudied Jim Griffiths and has a very good grip on what the problems of Wales are. I heard a curious story that there is a tradition that a number two in a department cannot succeed his number one, which seems to me crazy. I've also heard that there's a possibility that Cledwyn Hughes may be brought over from the Commonwealth Relations Office...this seems to me to be absolute nonsense.<sup>98</sup>

At the same time, it perhaps came as less of a surprise to Roberts than some believed. Whilst at the Welsh Office, Roberts was held responsible for its 'overly nationalist' attitudes by 'a number of Welsh MPs' from the south, 'particularly Cardiff, Monmouth and Glamorgan'.<sup>99</sup> They accused Roberts of exerting undue 'nationalist' pressure on Jim Griffiths, pushing Griffiths 'too hard and too fast along the lines of a separate culture'.<sup>100</sup> Roberts' papers reveal that he was less than happy with the limited responsibilities afforded to the Welsh Secretary, and made determined efforts to see those powers extended. Memos to Jim Griffiths reveal his concern that the

Welsh Office be seen as a progressive institution. He was concerned that Labour was inattentive to 'what Welsh opinion has supported and definitely expects' and was alive to the implications of these decisions on 'the political situation in Wales'.<sup>101</sup> He supported the 'gradual transfer of Ministerial authority' in 'well thought out phases' and 'full consultation on any matter relating to Wales' by all other government departments. This included a demand for 'all relevant departments to provide separate statistical returns for Wales'.<sup>102</sup> If these appeared (and were) conservative, given Roberts's impassioned reputation, drafts of the same memo reveal that Roberts had considered a more ambitious approach. This included a much more strident (and characteristic) demand for the Welsh Secretary to 'have overall supervision of all matters relating to Wales'.<sup>103</sup> In the event, the latter was unlikely to have made a difference since, according to Griffiths, 'the PM still remains adamant against transfer of any Dept as a whole'.<sup>104</sup> If the memo sent to Griffiths was conservative, a speech delivered by Roberts at the National Eisteddfod at Newtown was more indicative of long-standing beliefs. As Roberts argued:

Our aim is, by agreement of all sections of the Welsh people, to build an effective system of devolution which retains our economic link with the rest of the kingdom whilst enabling the Principality to mobilise its material and cultural resources...<sup>105</sup>

By 1966, Roberts's 'strong views in favour of a federal constitution for Great Britain' had not diminished.<sup>106</sup> This did not go down well in all quarters of the party. Rumours of Roberts's departure had been circulating before 1966 – as Roberts was aware. As one local union official, Tom Jones, wrote to him:

I was naturally sorry that you hadn't been given the job of Secretary of State for Wales, but I gather from what you told me some time ago that other forces had been at work.<sup>107</sup>

However, not all those sympathetic to the 'Welsh' cause were sad to see Roberts go. As Huw. T. Edwards (back in the Labour party following a spell with Plaid Cymru) wrote to Cledwyn Hughes:

I think Goronwy has been appointed to a post that will suit him far better...education is much more up his street than his previous post...old Harold is doing his job wonderfully, and he knows his people well.<sup>108</sup>

At the same time, civil servants were said to have been 'very happy' with Hughes' selection.<sup>109</sup> Others like Michael Foot thought that Hughes was Labour's finest Secretary of State for Wales, since he not only understood the north and south Wales dimensions of Welsh Labourism, but also knew how the Welsh party machine operated.<sup>110</sup> Members of the Welsh establishment were also content. As R. E. Griffith of *Urdd Gobaith Cymru* wrote to Hughes:

Things are improving. Elystan's victory was excellent, and so was Ednyfed's in Conway. The Labour party has never been healthier, and with you at the helm in Wales I believe that we are starting a new and important period.<sup>111</sup>

In reality, however, Hughes found the Welsh Office a difficult ship to steer. He became frustrated by his inability to see through desirable changes and was disappointed that the Welsh Office did not live up to its potential. In 1964, Hughes had hoped that the Secretary of State would act as an important link in creating a 'healthier, happier and 'Welsher' Wales'.<sup>112</sup> A more prominent Welsh Council, a new town, a Welsh Water Board and an Industrial Planning Board, answerable to the Secretary of State, were all part of his strategy. Most of these plans had fallen by the wayside by 1967. Indeed, this had turned into a frustrating period for the government.

Writing to the devout nationalist Alwyn D. Rees, Hughes bemoaned the fact that:

I had a hard time when I came to this post, having to pull everything through thorns as it were...it is one thing to promise to do things, another to translate those promises into practical policies.<sup>113</sup>



The reply showed sympathy for Hughes, but not for the government he represented.

As Rees pointed out:

I do sympathise with you for having to work in a situation were it is obvious by now that it is impossible to do what should be done. But I do not sympathise with you for having to defend the authorities and people who do not desire change.<sup>114</sup>

Unable to reply with constructive action in the way they wished, and faced with unfailingly populist attacks in the press, even Welsh Labour 'nationalists' resorted to counter-propaganda. Hughes produced an uncharacteristically hostile attack on Welsh nationalists in a speech at Colwyn Bay in 1967. He was reported to have labelled Plaid Cymru supporters as 'unchristian', 'bad people' who were 'harming the best interests of Wales'.<sup>115</sup> Hughes was unhappy at the constant criticism of the government, and of his efforts to deliver constructive Welsh policies. There was little sympathy for this reaction in the ranks of Plaid Cymru. As *Y Ddraig Goch* noted:

Of course we are critical – the government is a failure. We were critical of the White Paper on the economy because it lacked any sort of plan...Nevin – a special consultant to the government was also critical of it – we were critical of the White Paper on local government reform because it did not give Wales an elected council...several Labour members were also disappointed by this...we were critical of the language act...David Hughes-Parry himself admitted that it did not give equal status to the Welsh language...we were critical over Europe...so were many Labourites...quite simply the Secretary of State is a disappointing man, scraping the bottom of the barrel to distort Plaid Cymru's contribution to the political discussion of Welsh problems and needs.<sup>116</sup>

The desire to fight fire with fire became more evident towards the end of the decade, when George Thomas became Labour's new Welsh Secretary.<sup>117</sup> Thomas was unhappy with the emerging conclusions of the party's working party which was preparing a submission to the Commission on the Constitution. The timing of these conclusions (which favoured the establishment of an elected Welsh council) was inconvenient for the party. Writing to Emrys Jones, Thomas argued:

As I said to you last Sunday the Welsh Nationalist Party are in a state of considerable disarray at present and I have a deep conviction (not unsupported by evidence) that there is a move back towards us in Wales. In my judgement it would be a tragic blunder if at this stage we exposed the party to bitter internal battles on the nature of our constitutional proposals.<sup>118</sup>

Thomas became the doyen of anti-nationalists within the Labour party. He was credited in nationalist circles with a cynical attempt to undermine the nationalist cause by staging the Investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle in 1969. Little attention has been afforded to the Investiture by Welsh political historians. This is surprising given that reactions to it were symbolic of much wider Welsh political debates and controversies during the late 1960s. Contemporary political commentators from outside Wales (approvingly) observed that the Investiture was an orchestrated political attempt to use the monarchy to ‘prick the bubble of Welsh nationalism’.<sup>119</sup> As the *Financial Times* argued, the Investiture was:

Most importantly a political act. All the symbolism of Westminster and the monarchy...in particular the popularity of the Queen...is being used to sell the unity of the UK against the separatist demands of the Welsh nationalists.<sup>120</sup>

Other political commentators also viewed the Investiture an ‘idiosyncratic’ event, aimed at consolidating Labour power in Wales.<sup>121</sup> As *Y Faner* also claimed:

The policy of the English political parties was made perfectly clear. To an English party like the Labour party the Investiture was a wonderful (if expensive) attempt to tie Wales closer to London. The Labour government did not realise it was disturbing a bees nest.<sup>122</sup>

The long term impact of the Investiture on the fortunes of the Labour party in north-west Wales is difficult to gauge. In the short term, it was viewed as a considerable Labour success. As one Plaid activist has pointed out, the Investiture awakened Plaid to the fact that British nationalism still had support even in the heart of Welsh speaking Wales. Sympathy for the Welsh language, culture and, to a point, devolution were mixed with strong attachments to the monarchy and ‘Britishness’.<sup>123</sup> This was



something which Plaid had previously under-estimated and had to address in the early 1970s, both in terms of policy and propaganda.

Plaid's official policy on the Investiture was neutrality.<sup>124</sup> However, this did not prevent the Welsh press from launching scathing attacks on Labour's orchestration of the event. The national and local controversy may have fuelled disillusion with the conduct and politics of local Labour MPs. For example, Goronwy Roberts received considerable negative publicity over his support for the event. Roberts's own 'Britishness' clashed with his support for 'Welshness'. In a speech at Caernarfon in 1969, Roberts clearly stated his support for the event, arguing that the Prince had already 'shown Wales more respect than those who sought to ridicule him'. Moreover, Roberts' strong support for the establishment was also aired in a call for Caernarfon to respond to the Investiture in 'the spirit of a royal town, a royal country and a royal people'. For some these views demonstrated Roberts' betrayal of his status as a radical and a socialist. As *Barn* argued:

We could not believe our ears when we first heard this...who would have thought that a staunch royalist would have spent so many years representing the 'gwerin' as Caernarfon's Labour MP? And we always thought that he was one of us!

This was seen as another sign that Roberts had become an establishment figure. In a desire for status and importance, it was claimed, his 'radicalism' had been abandoned. The same was true for the Labour party in general. Like others in the Labour party, Roberts had betrayed long-standing socialist principles by condoning a vastly expensive charade:

We might hazard a guess that the Tories came up with the idea when nationalists started finding their feet...what is surprising is that the Labour government have gone along with it. No true socialist has any sympathy with royalty and imperialism – which we saw in support for the Investiture – and it must have dismayed real Welsh socialists to see Jim Callaghan, T.W. Jones,



George Thomas and I. Bowen-Griffith courting with all the snobs and the aristocrats...and among the guests were other Welsh socialists Cledwyn Hughes, Goronwy Roberts, John Morris and Elystan Morgan...proof that this was a circus aimed at undermining nationalism.<sup>125</sup>

At a local level, concerns were expressed that the monies spent on modernising facilities in Caernarfon for the event could have been better spent on renovating council houses in the town – expenditure which the local authority could not afford. Moreover, at a time when Welsh industry was crying out for support and assistance, the Investiture had granted contracts to only eleven Welsh firms (from a total of 150) manufacturing souvenirs for the event. As *Y Faner* reported:

This is the state of our country. Ninety nine per cent of the merchandise sold to visitors will have been made outside Wales

Increasingly stung by such attacks, which in south Wales were often viewed as examples of nationalistic xenophobia, Labour responded in ways which did little to enhance the party's reputation among borderline 'nationalist' voters. The 1970 election campaigns are remembered as 'dirty' campaigns, notable for the vociferous and, at times, over-enthusiastic exuberance of Plaid Cymru's local campaigns, and memorable in Caernarfonshire for a Nazi salute delivered by Goronwy Roberts to Plaid supporters at the count.<sup>126</sup>

Labour's chief protagonist was George Thomas. Thomas' anti-nationalist views were regularly aired through his column in the *Liverpool Daily Post*. This continued in the early 1970s. These were, in his words, 'deliberately provocative'.<sup>127</sup> Some, such as Dafydd Wigley, believed that the column had a hugely negative impact on the image of the Labour party in north-west Wales and played a significant part in Labour's downfall.<sup>128</sup> This is a view shared by party activists and MPs from north-west constituencies.<sup>129</sup> Thomas was one of a group of south Wales Labour MP's who

feared nationalists in the way that some in the party had feared communists.<sup>130</sup> The response was not popular. Some within the Labour party have gone as far as arguing that Thomas' sentiments were not simply anti-nationalist, but anti-Welsh.<sup>131</sup>

Thomas's attacks emphasised (and exaggerated) the racism of Plaid Cymru.<sup>132</sup> For example, the Immigration Bill, presented by the Conservative government in 1971 provided Thomas with an opportunity to launch a largely unsubstantiated, scare-mongering tirade against those who favoured devolution. It was according to Thomas 'a blueprint of what we could expect from a Parliament for Wales if we were ever crazy enough to support the separatists', for 'crude nationalism drips from every clause in the Bill as freely as it spouts from the mouths of our Welsh language extremists'.<sup>133</sup> According to Thomas, a Parliament for Wales would provide a breeding ground for anti-English sentiments. 'English haters' in Wales 'would love the Bill'. As the Immigration Bill sought control over immigration into the UK, so a Welsh parliament would see population control as a top priority. They would 'stop once and for all the threat posed to Wales by skilled tradesmen moving here from Lancashire and the Midlands' and, in the process, 'destroy all hopes of economic growth and full employment' – a consideration unlikely to trouble Plaid's 'academic dreamers'. Neither were watered-down forms of devolution acceptable to him. Even local government re-organisation (still under discussion at the time) was also dismissed. Here, more logical points were made. Just like Goronwy Roberts and others in the 1950s (see above), Thomas was not convinced by the notion of Welsh identity. As he argued:

Nationalists in Carmarthen scream like tormented souls in hell at the proposal to link their county with Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire, 'we have nothing in common with them' they wail at every corner. In the north, Anglesey looks at Caernarfonshire with as much affection as a rabbit looks at a stoat. They



fear being swallowed up. Merioneth may love the thought of combining with Flintshire but they are singularly coy about saying so...to talk of Wales as a united country is as foolish as talking of hell in terms of hymn singing...We know which side our bread is buttered.<sup>134</sup>

There was much more sympathy for extending Welsh representation at Westminster. An unlikely duo – Ness Edwards and Goronwy Roberts – were credited for their roles in forming the Welsh Grand Committee and for showing a determination akin to ‘a Welsh terrier clinging to a bone’.<sup>135</sup> Countering the views of nationalists who were dismissive of Westminster, Thomas argued that both Roberts and Edwards:

Are aware that the Welsh examine (parliamentary) deliberations as carefully as chapel-goers scrutinise sermons.

As a result, it was not surprising that members of his own party were ‘getting more aggressive’ and showed ‘growing resentments’ in their probing of (Tory) government policy.<sup>136</sup>

In this aggressive defence of a certain type of Labour politics, Labour turned the tables and accused Plaid of duplicity. The National Eisteddfod – to be held in Bangor in 1971 – became an unexpected concern. According to Thomas, nationalists were making determined efforts to take control of the eisteddfod’s council. The outcome, if they succeeded, would be ‘tragic for Wales’. The strength of the eisteddfod lay in its non-political ethos. Competitors arriving at Bangor would come from Labour, Conservative, Liberal and nationalist homes – united only by their Welshness. Unlike those in the Welsh Language Society, who saw Welsh culture as the preserve of Welsh speakers, Thomas argued that:

The major lesson that the Bangor eisteddfod can teach the Welsh Language Society is that Wales is one nation with two rich languages. If the Welsh Language Society could shed their persecution complex and abandon the adolescent belief that those opposed to their tactics are automatically enemies of the language they could yet serve Wales well.



The annual report of the Welsh Tourist Board provided another opportunity for Thomas to espouse the dangers of nationalism. The achievements of the tourist board had been 'remarkable', visitors to Wales spending £100 million in 1970. According to Thomas, 'few things tickle Welsh fancy more than the ceaseless music of cash registers'.<sup>137</sup> However the most significant aspect of the WTB's report was that ninety per cent of Welsh visitors came from other parts of the UK, less than ten per cent from overseas. Thus, 'Welsh bank accounts are healthier because English, Irish and Scots purses have made their contribution'. The danger was that nationalists could ruin this:

Tourism can succeed here only when our traditional Welsh warmth is felt by those who do not share our heritage. Anti-English sentiments are more damaging to tourism than our wet weather.<sup>138</sup>

By contrast to this populist rhetoric, official Labour propaganda was limited and delayed. In 1970 the party had stressed its work for Welsh jobs, including £60 million spent on grants to aid development in the Valleys, use of industrial development certificates to attract new private industries and direct relocation of state organisations to Wales (the Royal Mint to Llantrisant, the Census Office to Newport, the DVLA to Swansea, the RAF to St Athan).<sup>139</sup> Yet the shock of defeat delayed further action. In 1973 Gwynoro Jones, Labour's MP for Carmarthen, and a devolutionist, wrote a pamphlet defending the record of the 1964-70 Labour governments. *The Record Put Straight: Labour's Record in Wales, 1964-70*, showed more than a little irritation at the criticism levelled at Labour, not only from nationalists, but also from the Tories. It combined an outdated (and now stale) repudiation of 'the Tory legacy' of 1951-64 with condemnation of nationalists 'who had allowed hostility to the Labour movement to take priority over the interests of the country they purport to serve'.<sup>140</sup> Whilst defending Labour's record in government it also conceded weaknesses. The

pamphlet was not only a defence of Labour's past but a clarion call for the party in Wales to embark on a new future. As Jones argued:

The Labour government made mistakes. They did not find final solutions to the Welsh problem. The tragedy is that they were not given the opportunity to build on the foundations which they laid...they were unfortunate in their economic inheritance and the adverse balance of payments which constrained them, even though they overcame that in the end. What is remarkable is that they did so much in spite of this. The Tory Government which inherited a favourable balance, and who far from fulfilling the promises that won them the election, have by their neglect, set the clock back a decade in Wales...our chief task now is to build for the future; to create new policies which will match Welsh aspirations and to work for a Labour government that will implement them.<sup>141</sup>

Behind the scenes, Labour officials in Cardiff had been striving to give Labour a new and positive approach – supported by some of Labour's younger MPs and some of those with 'nationalist' sentiments. Their attempts to get a pro-devolution submission to the Royal Commission on the Constitution was hardly uneventful, but was ultimately successful.<sup>142</sup>

The publication of the Kilbrandon Report in 1973 raised the stakes of Welsh devolution and placed the issue firmly on the agenda for the 1974 general elections. The Commission on the Constitution was left with a negative impression of the Secretary of State system. As it argued:

(The) system has been criticised as giving an inadequate degree of devolution to Scotland and Wales. The freedom it confers...is largely illusory. The main complaints are...that the functions are too restricted...that although the system may give Scotland and Wales more funds, it does not enable best use to be made of those funds, the budgets being subjected to detailed Treasury control; that the system gives too much power to officials...that politics and democratic influence remain concentrated in London, with Scotland and Wales being political voids...to the extent that these criticisms are valid they might call for a quite different form of devolution.<sup>143</sup>

At long last, some argued, the party was beginning to address such concerns. However, what appeared was un co-ordinated, contradictory, and probably too late.

This chapter has outlined the nature of Plaid Cymru's increasingly virulent attacks on Labour during the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst the content and tenor of criticism changed once Labour fell from office, and also shifted to the left, there were significant continuities. These included the use of emotive language, the exploitation of individual issues to make much broader points (about Labour or the British state) and a shift away from the idea that benefits could be gained by reinforcing the nationalist element in the Labour party. By contrast, Labour's response was muted, a reflection not of a limited analysis or complacency, but of limited energy and disunity. Over time, and as Plaid's attacks became more exaggerated and personal, Labour's response became more combative and opposed to change. Although Labour's 'nationalists' worked for a different approach, these divisions were unresolved when another election was called in 1974.



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2. For more on this see Chapter One.
3. *Barn*, November 1964.
4. John Morris was one of those who began to describe Labour as 'the party of Wales'. See *Barn*, November 1964.
5. *Welsh Nation*, November 1964.
6. *Ibid.*, February 1963.
7. *Ibid.*, February 1963.
8. *Ibid.*, August 1966.
9. *Ibid.*, November 1964.
10. See *Barn*, December 1964.
11. D. Tanner, 'Facing the New Challenge: Labour and Politics, 1970-2000', in D. Tanner et. al., (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2001), pp.264-94.
12. Royal Commission on the Constitution, *Report, Volume One* (HMSO, 1973).
13. *Ibid.*, pp.116-18. The Commission noted that only 56% of those surveyed were aware of the Welsh Office's existence, 30% did not think it existed and that 'very few people had much idea of the responsibilities involved'.
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15. See below.
16. *Barn*, October 1967.
17. See for example *Y Ddraig Goch*, March 1967. Quite what 'unpopular measures' were entailed was not always clear, but plans for more reservoirs in Welsh valleys seemed to be among Wilson's sinister plans for Wales.
18. *Barn*, June 1966.

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., September 1966.
21. Ibid., August, 1966.
22. Ibid.
23. 'Demos', *Labour in Power: The Go-Ahead Year* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 97-99.
24. See HMSO, *A New Town in Mid-Wales: Consultant's proposals* (HMSO, 1966).
25. *Welsh Nation*, September 1964.
26. T. Glynne Davies, 'Golwg ar Y Blaid Lafur', *Barn*, July 1966.
27. *Barn*, September 1966.
28. The report argued that 'to choose a Welsh location in preference to one on the English side of the border is partly a political one'. See HMSO, *A New Town in Mid Wales: consultants proposals* (HMSO, 1966), p.1.
29. Commission on the Constitution, *Report*, p.471.
30. The report argued that 'the viability of a new town will depend on its being treated primarily as an outlet for West Midlands overspill and only secondarily as a solution to the internal problems of Mid-Wales'. See HMSO, *New Town*, p.1.
31. Plaid Cymru, *Develop All Wales: Stop Carve-Up and Overspill Ham* (Bangor, 1966), pp.8-9.
32. See Ibid., and *Y Ddraig Goch*, April/May 1966.
33. *Y Ddraig Goch*, April/May 1966.
34. Ibid.
35. *Y Ddraig Goch*, May 1967.
36. Ibid.
37. Commission on the Constitution, *Report*, p.110.
38. Lewis was a regular contributor to the language debate, not only in Plaid's newspapers but also in other Welsh newspapers and journals including *Barn* and *Y Cymro*. However, his greatest contribution to the debate was his book, *Second Class Citizen*, published in 1969.

39. For more detail on why it did not, see R. Lewis, *Second Class Citizen* (Caernarfon, 1969).
40. Lewis, *Second Class Citizen*, p.14.
41. This of course was an adaptation from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where 'all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than the others'. Orwell, quoted in Lewis, *Second Class Citizen*, p.30.
42. *Barn*, May 1968.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., February 1967.
45. See K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), pp.390-91.
46. Ibid., p.390.
47. *Y Ddraig Goch*, June 1967.
48. Ibid., June 1967.
49. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 27 February 1969.
50. See for example *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 10 July, 1967.
51. George was, of course, Lloyd George's nephew and a prominent member of Plaid Cymru locally. He was Dafydd Wigley's main challenger as Plaid's candidate for Caernarfon in the early 1970s.
52. Caernarfon County Council General Purposes Committee, 'Address by councillor W.R.P. George in support of notice of motion of Caernarfon County Council, 7 September 1967', Caernarfonshire County Council Papers, File XC2/3/61, Caernarfon RO.
53. Ibid.
54. Caernarfon County Council to Welsh Office, 12 January 1968. Caernarfon County Council General Purposes Committee, Caernarfonshire County Council Papers, File XC2/3/3, Caernarfon RO.
55. J. Orme (Welsh Office) to J.E. Owen-Jones, Caernarfon County Council. 29 January 1968, General Purposes Committee, File XC2/3/3, Caernarfon RO.
56. Ibid.
57. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 24 April 1969.



58. Ibid., 17 July 1969.
59. Ibid., 10 July 1969.
60. Ibid.
61. *Y Ddraig Goch*, July 1970
62. *Welsh Nation*, 17 December 1971.
63. Ibid., August, 1970.
64. *Y Ddraig Goch*, July 1970.
65. *Welsh Nation*, December 1970.
66. D.M. Tanner, 'Facing the New Challenge', pp.276-77.
67. Davies was also a former member of the Welsh Republican movement. For more on this see his autobiography, G. P. Davies, *Llafur y Blynyddoedd* (Denbigh, 1991). Morgan had been at the forefront of Plaid politics in the early 1960s.
68. Cledwyn Hughes to Emrys Jones, 27 July 1967, Lord Cledwyn MS, File 4, NLW.
69. *Y Faner*, 20 February 1957.
70. The journal was formed at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1960. It was, in part at least, both an attempt to stimulate contemporary ideological debates on the principles of socialism and revive nationalist consciousness in the Labour party. For more on this see Edwards, MA thesis, Chapter Three.
71. W. John Morgan, 'The Welsh Nationalist Party from a Socialist Standpoint', *Aneurin*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p.4.
72. 'Y Gwr Gwadd: David Thomas', *Aneurin*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp.48-51.
73. The journal also included contributions from political 'nomads' such as Gwyn Alf Williams and Plaid stalwarts such as T. E. Nicholas. Other contributors included Roy Thomas, an Oxford graduate and 'one of the most promising young intellectuals in the Labour movement', D. Ben Rees and 'young English socialists' such as Bill Norton. Financial support came from the TGWU (mainly due to the influence of Prothero and Ron Mathias) and personal donations from Labour MPs such as S. O. Davies (Merthyr) and James Idwal Jones (Wrexham).
74. Author's interview with Emlyn Sherrington, 21 August 2002.
75. Tanner, 'Facing the New Challenge', p.277.

76. Brian Lapping, *The Labour Government, 1964-70* (London, 1970), p.198.
77. Gwilym Prys Davies to Richard Crossman, 12 November 1967. Lord Cledwyn MS, File C7, NLW.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Gwilym Prys Davies to Alwyn D. Rees, 26 July 1966, Alwyn D. Rees MS, File FF19, NLW.
81. *Barn*, July 1967.
82. Ednyfed Hudson Davies, 'Welsh Nationalism', *Political Quarterly*, No.69 (1968), pp.332-334.
83. For example, Davies pointed to the fact that Evans had been invited as a guest speaker to the annual dinner of the Swansea Institute of Bankers 'where his name would previously never have been considered'. Ibid., p.229.
84. Ibid., p.332.
85. Welsh Council of Labour Executive Committee Minutes, 20 March 1967, Labour Party Wales Archive, File 12, NLW.
86. WCL, 'Report of Annual Conference, 24/25 May 1968', Labour Party Wales Archive, File 12, NLW.
87. Ibid.
88. WCL EC minutes, 22 July 1968, Welsh Labour Party Archive, File 12, NLW.
89. Ibid.
90. For more on this see Chapter Six.
91. Ibid.
92. Cledwyn Hughes to Eric Thomas, Woodalls Newspapers, Oswestry (publishers of *Y Cymro*), 5 January 1968, Lord Cledwyn MS, File 4, NLW.
93. Ibid.
94. T.W. Jones (Merioneth) retired at the 1966 general election and was replaced by Wil Edwards, thus accentuating the break-up of this influential 'three-line whip'.
95. Author's interview with Emlyn Sherrington, 21 August 2002.

96. Despite being at odds over devolution, Thomas and Roberts were good friends, brought together (in part at least) by a hatred of the nationalist movement. Author's conversation with Lady Marian-Goronwy Roberts.
97. Author's conversation with Lady Marian-Goronwy Roberts.
98. Transcript of the 'Good Morning Wales' radio programme broadcast 4 April 1966, discussion between Vincent Kane, Trevor Evans and John Gay Davies. Interestingly, both Davies and Evans dismissed George Thomas as a possible Welsh Secretary. Lord Roberts MS.
99. Andrew Roth, 'The Earnest Welsh Don: New Minister at Curzon Street', *The Teacher*, 15 April 1966, Lord Roberts MS.
100. Ibid.
101. Memo, 'From Minister of State to Secretary of State, Welsh Affairs'. (n.d.). Lord Roberts MS.
102. Ibid.
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104. Note, apparently from Griffiths to Roberts (n.d.).
105. Roth, *Welsh Don*.
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107. Tom Jones (TGWU) to Goronwy Roberts, 6 April 1966, Lord Roberts MS.
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109. Ibid.
110. Interview with Michael Foot, Cymru 2000 archive.
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115. *Y Ddraig Goch*, October 1967.



116. Ibid.
117. George Thomas replaced Cledwyn Hughes as Secretary of State for Wales in 1968.
118. George Thomas to Emrys Jones, (n.d), CHECK, NAD Reports Welsh Region, NMLH.
119. *Sunday Times* (n.d.) cited in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 4 September 1969.
120. *Financial Times*, 4 July 1969, cited in *Baner* 27 July 1969.
121. Brian Lapping, *The Labour Government, 1964-70* (London, 1971?), p.199.
122. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 12 June 1969.
123. Author's interview with Gwyn Matthews, 20 April 2002.
124. Gwynfor Evans believed that to oppose the event would 'have been sure to damage Plaid Cymru', and to repeat the 'error' of 1936 when the party had boycotted the Coronation, and lost support as a consequence. See G. Evans, *For the Sake of Wales: The Memoirs of Gwynfor Evans* (Cardiff, 2001), p.194. Party stalwarts believed that the policy of neutrality was supported by 99% of the party's members. See J. E. Jones, *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 4 September 1969.
125. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 27 July 1969.
126. Author's interview with Bert Thomas, 10 April 2001.
127. George Thomas, Cymru 200 interview. 'In those days I used to write a column in the *Daily Post* which was deliberately provocative and I believe that it created so much ill-feeling and anger towards me'.
128. Interview with Dafydd Wigley, 16 April 2000.
129. Author's interview with Emlyn Sherrington 20 August 2002. Cledwyn Hughes was among those most dismayed by the content of Thomas's column, regularly complaining to the party's leadership of the perceived damage caused to the party's fortunes in north Wales.
130. George Thomas, Cymru 2000 interview. 'Whereas lots of people in those days used to look under the bed at night for a communist, I'd be looking under the bed for a Welsh nationalist'.
131. Author's interview with Emlyn Sherrington, 21 August 2002.
132. For more details see *Liverpool Daily Post*, 1971 and 1972 or Viscount Tonyandy MS, NLW, File 457, Press Cuttings 1969-71.

133. *Liverpool Daily Post*, 30 March 1971.
134. Ibid.
135. Ibid., 4 May 1971.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid., 26 October 1971.
138. Ibid.
139. Tanner, 'Facing the New Challenge', p.281.
140. Gwynoro Jones, *The Record Put Straight: Labour's Record In Wales, 1964-70* (Carmarthen, 1973), p.6.
141. Ibid., p.6.
142. For more on this see D. Tanner, 'Facing the New Challenge'.
143. Commission on the Constitution, *Report*, p.312.

## Chapter Six

### The Culmination of Political Change: The General Elections of 1974

The people of Wales are fortunate to have an alternative to the two tired, punch-drunk English parties. The Labour party is too riven by dissension to know which way it is going. Plaid Cymru offers a real change to the people of Wales.

Dafydd Wigley, *Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald*, 8 February 1974.

This chapter takes a broad look at the circumstances surrounding Plaid Cymru's victories and Labour's defeats in the 1974 general elections. It argues that Plaid's electoral victory in February 1974 was not the result of a protest vote but the culmination of a much longer process of political change, stretching as far back as the 1950s. In so doing, the chapter will argue that the general elections of 1974 witnessed the manifestation and political impact on politics of the social and economic changes (identified in earlier chapters) and of Labour's inability to address them and to refute Plaid's attacks. As a result of these changes, loyalties to the main political parties were much weaker by 1974 than at any point since the Second World War. Across the UK these trends meant much improved performances for the Liberal party, but in Scotland and Wales nationalist parties made a substantial showing.

Plaid Cymru's improved performance locally during the 1970 general election had suggested that an alternative to Labour was emerging. Local and national issues in the early 1970s compounded Labour's problems and consolidated Plaid Cymru's growing appeal. Long-standing social and economic issues such as depopulation and unemployment continued to be at the forefront of local political debates. Added (and related) to these were a number of 'new' issues (such as second homes) and 'old' issues which assumed a 'new', resonance in the climate of the early 1970s



(particularly the question of the Welsh language and, most notably devolution). As the chapter will show, these were powerful issues, demanding serious attention. Added to this was the unpopularity of Labour's programme for the UK, in particular the party's attitude to social welfare. By 1974 Labour's commitment to such issues no longer seemed as credible. In power for most of the 1960s, Labour had failed to deliver on a number of its promises. Moreover, under the surface the party was weak. It lacked an organisational infrastructure which could stabilise its decline once it was under pressure. The conversion of a large middle class Welsh element to Plaid Cymru – evident in the attitude of the Welsh press – made it even more difficult to oppose a more organised and 'socialist' assault from a much changed nationalist party.

### *Perceptions of Political Change*

The general elections of 1974 were seen by contemporary political scientists as a turning point in British political history. As the authors of the February 1974 Nuffield electoral study argued:

The result – despite an unexpected Labour success of sorts – was a snub to both major parties and the increased strength of third parties nationally and regionally suggested the possibility of a turning point in the British party system.<sup>1</sup>

To other observers, the general elections of 1974 focussed (more than was usually the case) on social and political events and debates, in particular industrial unrest and management of the economy (see below). Yet, as these observers were eager to point out, the impact of short-term influences can be over-stated:

The outstanding features of the outcome – the decline in two party dominance and the lack of a clear winner (in February) – must not be seen as the outcome of events of early 1974; they were the fruits of a decade of political change.<sup>2</sup>

As previous chapters have highlighted, political change in north-west Wales in this respect conformed to a much wider pattern of change occurring elsewhere in the UK. What requires explanation is why this resulted in a Plaid upsurge – and an upsurge leading to victory – when elsewhere the increase was more temporary and less successful.

During the 1951-55 period, the government lost over 20% of its vote in just 2% of by-elections. This figure grew to 10% in the 1955-59 period, to 18% during 1960-64, and 34% during 1966-70. It remained high at 24 per cent during 1970-73.<sup>3</sup> ‘Punishing’ poor government performances therefore became a common feature of British voting tactics and habits after 1966. Two often forgotten features of public opinion in this period merit attention. The Kilbrandon report, published in 1973, highlighted the ‘remoteness’ of government from the electorate.<sup>4</sup> Opinion polls in the period up to 1974 also supplied ‘devastating’ evidence on how poorly politicians were regarded by the public, particularly politicians associated with the two main parties. This was one of the attractions of ‘third parties’ like the Liberals, who ‘won support because they appeared as a party least like a party’.<sup>5</sup> Across the UK voters were believed to have become disillusioned with the ‘fact’ that not only the policies but also the personnel of the two main parties had become too alike (another factor stressed at length in Plaid Cymru propaganda). Both parties were believed to have suffered because of the ‘professionalisation’ of politics, a process which witnessed the emergence of cloned ‘University educated meritocrats’ lacking either the passion, personality or commitment of an earlier generation of MPs.<sup>6</sup>

There was, however, a more serious concern over the thin line that divided the Conservative and Labour on key policies, and the failure of both parties to devise distinctive solutions to problems. As the Nuffield studies somewhat sarcastically noted, divisions within the two main parties over policy were often more marked than those between them. Popular discontent was fuelled by the fact that ‘each party when in government turned to policies they had earlier attacked when out of office’.<sup>7</sup> However, one of the most fundamental complaints was that changes in government had little impact on policy output, particularly in economic terms. As Butler and Kavanagh argued;

When one party in government inherited the problems of the party it displaced, it also seemed to inherit the solutions – notably over Europe, over incomes policy, over industrial relations and over industrial intervention.<sup>8</sup>

Discontent with the failure of successive governments to tackle the crucial issue of unemployment (and economic problems generally) was not confined to north-west Wales, but given that economic problems here were more acute than in many other areas, it would be unwise to minimise their significance.

For many voters, therefore, there was little to choose between the two main political parties at national level. In the past the ‘third party’ in north-west Wales had lacked credibility, whilst anti-Tory sentiment was profound, entrenched (and perhaps a badge of ‘Welshness’). Labour had therefore entered campaigns with several advantages. However, Plaid Cymru became increasingly successful as a third force across this period. Mobilising popular discontent was a key element of Plaid Cymru’s election strategies in the period up to 1974.<sup>9</sup>



Plaid propaganda sought to ensure that the industrial, economic and social problems of the 1970-74 period were channelled into frustration with the British system of government and with the ability of the two main parties to implement effective change. This assumed an added resonance in Wales, coinciding as it did with a period of Conservative rule in a country which was decidedly anti-Tory. Industrial strikes also became a feature of the early 1970s. There is insufficient space here to elaborate on the political events surrounding those strikes, but it is clear that they had a detrimental effect on the image of government. Labour's relations with the unions in the late 1960s had deteriorated, notably over *In Place of Strife*. Heath's Conservative government was no more popular. The Industrial Relations Act (1971), the unpromising start made by the new DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) and the government's clumsy handling of the Rolls-Royce financial crisis provided high profile examples of the government's difficulties and caused alarm among its critics.

Among the most prominent strikes were the electricity work-to-rule and 'blackouts' (1970); UCS (Upper Clyde Shipbuilders) liquidation, followed by a work-in (1971); fines of unions, British Rail work-to-rule and dock strikes (1972); a miners overtime ban, and ASLEF work-to-rule. This culminated in a 'three day week' (1973) and the miners strike (1974). These were all accompanied by a constant (and failing) process of negotiation between government and the unions. Labour might suggest it was better at handling such disputes, but its claims now lacked credence. To others, Labour's potential support for such action was worryingly radical. Even on this 'Labour' issue, Plaid could develop a potentially popular critique.

Some of these strikes had a knock-on effect in north-west Wales. For example, problems in the car industry had a devastating impact on local factories, such as Bernard Wardle and Ferodo, which were 'branch' suppliers to the British car manufacturers. As 'branch' factories they were particularly vulnerable to poor trade conditions, such as those in the period up to 1974. They also relied heavily on British consumer markets, where competition was strong. Economic recession and industrial disputes hit existing local factories hard, whilst at the same time making the development of similar 'branch' factory initiatives extremely difficult. As a direct result of the Ford strike in 1974, one hundred jobs were lost at Bernard Wardle in Caernarfon, adding to a growing number of jobs lost in this factory alone since the late 1960s. Moreover as branch factories, local workers were often 'dragged' into industrial action which they did not understand.<sup>10</sup> Labour's economic 'solution' form employment problems in the north-west – new industries – and its association with industrial discontent were increasingly problematic for its electoral appeal.

High levels of local unemployment in the early 1970s were portrayed as symbols of government failure. By the early 1970s unemployment in north-west Wales had reached crisis point. Local authorities became increasingly concerned and agitated by the problem. In 1971 and 1972 Caernarfonshire County Council were involved in a series of emergency meetings which aimed to find solutions to these 'serious' difficulties. Council members, Welsh Office representatives, local MPs and industrialists all attended. There was widespread agreement locally that the problems of the early 1970s were of much older origin. The completion of large and labour intensive building projects, such as the nuclear power station in Wylfa on Anglesey and the Anglesey Aluminium plant in Holyhead, had 'disguised' the (even greater)

need for sustainable, long-term, permanent employment. 'Heavy redundancies' in local factories, together with the continued demise of 'old' industries (including jobs still being lost in local quarries, in the forestry industry and in farming), exacerbated those problems. Finding jobs was difficult. As one report noted, finding jobs for forty six men, most of whom were over the age of 45 (which the closure of the Trefor quarry precipitated) was almost impossible. A Caernarfonshire County Council report on unemployment argued that 'the situation has worsened considerably since August 1970' with the loss of a further thousand local jobs, bringing the total local jobless figure to over two and a half thousand.<sup>11</sup> Central and southern parts of the county (where quarrying and farming jobs were being shed) were of particular concern. These 'old' industrial areas were also the hardest affected in neighbouring Merioneth.

Industrial decline fed other forms of discontent. These were discussed in Chapter Two, but need to be stressed as influences underlying political change. The second homes controversy was an obvious symbol of regional problems in the early 1970s. The fact that outsiders could purchase local houses (at low prices) simply and graphically demonstrated contrasting incomes, with affluent (English) incomers benefiting from local (Welsh) economic collapse. The issue was accompanied by huge media exposure, and led to the development and publication of a series of reports by local councils, highlighting both the causes and effects of second home ownership. Whilst the former highlighted government failure and inefficiencies in providing jobs, the latter lent support to distinctively nationalist concerns (especially the preservation of the Welsh language and Welsh speaking communities).



Some of the (partial) solutions offered to those problems had distinctive political implications. In the early 1970s *Cymdeithas Tai Gwynedd* was formed to secure local housing for Welsh speaking families, whilst another association, *Adfer*, financed a small furniture factory in one attempt to 'restore' local Welsh communities. These organisations were significant because of their close relationships with the nationalist movement. Housing associations received substantial publicity in Plaid Cymru propaganda. Party members were encouraged to invest personal money in the associations. Moreover, issues such as the closure of small rural schools also became highly politicised. There were conflicts over language use in schools and controversial plans for separate English and Welsh speaking comprehensive schools. The following sections show that only Plaid Cymru offered a positive alternative – at least in propagandist terms – to Labour's largely unaltered policies, whereas the Liberals and Conservatives did not.

### *The Liberal Party*

As Table 1 shows, the Liberal party was not a serious political force in Caernarfonshire after 1945 and thus was in no position to benefit from a UK-wide Liberal upsurge. Despite a more prolonged and dogged resistance in Merioneth, the party's challenge there was also falling away by the early 1970s. Indeed, in Merioneth, the Liberals were as much the party of a (failed) establishment as Labour.

**Table 1: Liberal share of the vote in general elections, 1964-74**

	UK	Wales	Caernarfon	Merioneth
1964	11.2	7.3	No candidate	32.7
1966	8.6	6.3	No candidate	35.5
1970	7.5	6.8	6.5	22.6
1974(F)	19.3	16.0	7.2	18.4
1974(O)	18.3	15.5	10.7	15.4

Source: B. Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif/Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (1999).

This is not to say that the party was devoid of ambition. On the contrary there were frequent attempts to 'revive' the party at both Welsh and local levels. In the early 1960s there had been attempts to revive ailing Welsh Liberal Associations (which were considered a 'disgrace' by Madoc Jones).<sup>12</sup> A chief organiser was appointed to tackle the problem, but little progress was made (in fact, the appointment made matters worse by depleting the party's already weak finances). By-elections, such as the one in Swansea East in 1963, demonstrated that enthusiasm within the party was limited. Unlike Plaid Cymru which turned by-election 'crusades' into a fine art in the 1960s, Welsh Liberals bemoaned the fact that help from across Wales was often promised but seldom materialised: 'more action and fewer words' was required from party members.<sup>13</sup> The 1964 general election did not witness a Liberal recovery in Wales (as it did in England). The party fielded only twelve candidates and won 7.3 per cent of the Welsh vote. The situation in Caernarfonshire, where no Liberal candidate stood, was worryingly familiar. Lack of funds, enthusiasm and organisation hampered a political recovery. In the early sixties new branches had been formed in Caernarfonshire, especially on the Llyn peninsula, where support for the party remained strong.<sup>14</sup> Criccieth's Liberal association provided a fine example of the

party's potential in the area, given that the party's 'spring membership campaign' in 1963 enrolled a total of 470 new members.

However, these foundations were largely illusory. Poorly attended executive committee meetings symbolised a much deeper and more fundamental malaise, which eventually undermined the party's efforts to field a candidate in 1964. As a party report noted:

The meeting discussed the state of the party in the constituency. It was felt that the poor attendance at this meeting indicated a lack of interest in the prospects of the candidate and it was decided to inform Mrs. Pritchard that the executive had become despondent about the chances of the candidate at the general election in October, and it was decided that the decision on whether to withdraw should be left to her.<sup>15</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the candidate withdrew.<sup>16</sup> The party's position in Merioneth – where it offered a stubborn (but ineffective) challenge to Labour – was the exception rather than the rule.

Little headway had been made by 1966, despite further attempts to re-invigorate organisation and policy in the intervening period. In 1965 the party had embarked on a programme to develop a distinctive Welsh Liberal Policy – 'Brave New Wales'. Included in this was a blueprint for rural areas, the 'Plan for Mid-Wales'. But there were few distinctive or different policies in the plan. 'Radical' offerings were confined to a 'rural development corporation', and a promise to 'radically overhaul' transport facilities and links between north and south Wales – all policies with a distinctly familiar (Labour) theme. Moreover, whilst the plan's concern for retaining agriculture as the basic industry of rural areas may have pleased 'traditional' voters, plans for the 'new town' expansion of Aberystwyth may have served to dampen that enthusiasm.



As it transpired, the 1966 general election was a disaster for the Liberal party. Another Welsh seat – Cardiganshire – was lost, reducing the party’s Welsh representation to one. Candidates were fielded in only eleven constituencies and the party’s vote in Wales declined to 6.3 per cent. Subsequent changes within the party’s structure in 1966 fuelled optimism. A purge of the party’s organisational structure meant that both the north Wales and south Wales Liberal Federation were scrapped and replaced by ‘regional committees’, whilst the party officially became known as the Welsh Liberal Party. This was an obvious attempt to fight back against the growing challenge of Plaid Cymru.<sup>17</sup> Like Labour, the Liberal party became preoccupied with the nationalist threat after 1966, reflecting Labour’s concern with the ‘excessive’ attention paid to Plaid by the Welsh media. Madoc Jones was at the forefront of Liberal attempts to address the ‘dynamic’ nationalist challenge.<sup>18</sup> As Jones argued, only through a fundamental reform of the party could such a challenge be met:

Liberalism in Wales is in need of drastic reform both as to its organisation and its fighting potential as a progressive political entity. And we allow this unhappy image to continue – at peril of its decay and final extinction.<sup>19</sup>

The formation of the Welsh Liberal party reactivated a number of loyal Welshmen, who welcomed the commitment to develop policies with a consistent Welsh dimension.<sup>20</sup> A more enthusiastic spirit permeated the upper-echelons of the party by the late 1960s. As a result of this optimism the party appointed a general secretary in 1968. Plans to build-up local organisations and select parliamentary candidates were also developed. Some also favoured reaching electoral understandings with Plaid, but these did not materialise. However, in the Welsh by-elections of the mid to late 1960s the party performed woefully. Welsh voters expressed discontent by voting for Plaid.

not the Liberal party. In the Carmarthen by-election of 1966 the party polled a respectable 20.8 per cent of the vote, but this was down on its 26.1 per cent poll in the 1966 general election. In Caerphilly the party polled an embarrassing 1,257 votes, 3.6 per cent of the poll. The Liberals failed to put up a candidate in Rhondda West. As a party report noted of the Caerphilly debacle:

This was frankly a shambles...nearly every basic mistake that could be made was made.<sup>21</sup>

These performances demonstrated the kind of difficulties that faced the party at constituency level. Financial difficulties were an indication of the crisis. Local finances were so bad in 1967 that the Caernarfonshire Liberal Association could not afford to pay its 'dues' of £5 to the Welsh Liberal party.<sup>22</sup> As a result of these financial problems, the association became reluctant to nominate parliamentary candidates unless they were 'top drawer material' – a rare Liberal commodity in the late 1960s – whilst 'bringing the vote up' rather than actually winning became the only electoral ambition.<sup>23</sup> Local associations became agitated when the Welsh Liberal party was 'extravagant' in trying to re-build its position. The appointment of a Welsh Liberal general secretary in 1968 was just one example of the party spending money that it could not afford, whilst a new headquarters in Aberystwyth running at a loss of £300 a month was also attacked.<sup>24</sup> Some felt that this was a classic example of an over-ambitious party executive. Only by a 'miracle' did the Welsh Liberal party remain £3,000 'in the black' by 1969. Abolition of affiliation fees, 'local views of financial re-organisation' and 'apparent lack of communication as to what Welsh Liberals are doing' all hit fundraising hard by depressing local activity.<sup>25</sup>

Other ambitious schemes also caused dismay within the party. In an effort to contest all thirty six Welsh seats in the 1970 general election, local associations were told to

raise minimum campaign funds of £1,000. Martin Thomas, the secretary of the Welsh Liberal party, believed this scheme to be 'nonsense...absurd', bearing in mind that 'many constituencies' especially in south Wales could be fought 'for £400, given a young candidate'.<sup>26</sup> Senior party figures, such as Lord Ogmores, believed that 'unless we watch things, the present WLP executive will bankrupt us very quickly'.<sup>27</sup>

It was also felt that 'delusions of grandeur' affected policy formation. The Liberals attempted to replicate a successful Tory attempt at appealing to industry, which had raised over two million pounds. This attempt 'failed miserably'. The reason was that 'industrialists (felt) that the Welsh Liberal industrial policy was non-existent or non-credible'.<sup>28</sup> As a result Lord Ogmores urged the party to adopt a more realistic approach, arguing that 'the Liberals should engage in jungle warfare, and not act as if they were forming the next government'.<sup>29</sup>

The policy of trying to field candidates in all thirty six Welsh constituencies was unsuccessful. However, a larger number of candidates (nineteen) were presented by the party in the 1970 general election. This included a candidate in Caernarfonshire, who polled 6.5 per cent of the vote. If this was progress, the opposite was true of Merioneth where the party's share of the vote fell to 22.6 per cent – votes clearly lost to Plaid Cymru. At UK level the party's fortunes continued to wane, whilst at Welsh level the additional eight Liberal candidates only accumulated an additional 14, 639 votes for the party.

Changing social, economic and political circumstances made conditions more favourable for the party in the 1970-74 period. Yet the signs of renewal were not



obvious in Wales. In the Merthyr by-election of 1972, Plaid Cymru again captured the third-party vote, the Liberal candidate polling a disastrous 765 votes or 2.1 per cent of the poll. A 'shoe string budget' and 'enthusiastic chaos' once again hampered the party's efforts.<sup>30</sup> However, a significant recovery was made in the February 1974 general election. A total of thirty one candidates were fielded. The party captured an additional seat, doubling its Welsh representation. A quarter of a million Welsh votes were secured for the first time since before the Second World War. However, this progress was not evident in north-west Wales. On the contrary, whilst there was a modest rise in the party's share of the Caernarfonshire vote (7.2% as compared to 6.5% in 1970), the party's support in Merioneth fell to 18.4 per cent (and 15.4% in October). Votes were once again lost to Plaid Cymru. Whilst across Wales the Liberal revival (of sorts) hurt Plaid Cymru, in north-west Wales quite the opposite was true.

At a time when the Liberal party found a new appeal in other parts of the UK, it did itself few favours in north-west Wales. Some of the party's opponents felt quite sorry for Liberal candidates, chosen as they were at the last minute and thrown into the heat of local political battles.<sup>31</sup> Local Liberals were anxious that a realistic approach be taken to the party's political future. As one member of the Caernarfonshire Liberal Association argued:

A start has been made, which in comparison with previous elections shows the importance of organisation...but please don't let kid ourselves, we have as yet only scratched the surface.<sup>32</sup>

Others believed that the party's performances in 1974 gave cause for optimism. Some believed that 'Caernarfon could once again become a Liberal stronghold', pointing to the fact that 'whilst Plaid Cymru lost 26 out of 36 deposits, we only lost 6 out of 31'. In reality, however, 1974 was a false dawn for the Welsh Liberal party, and did not

spark a renewal for the party in north-west Wales. In the 1979 general election, the party's vote in Caernarfonshire slumped to under two thousand, its share of the vote falling to 5.7 per cent. In Merioneth the party's decline also continued, the party's share of the vote reaching only 12.1 per cent. This was not a platform from which a serious challenge to Plaid Cymru could be mounted. In the 1970s the Liberal party was not a credible political alternative to Plaid Cymru in north-west Wales.

### *The Conservative party*

It would be a mistake to ignore Conservative support in north Wales, or to dismiss it as the party of 'incomers'. The party had a strong base in some parts of both north-east and north-west Wales, including support from powerful and influential farming families and small property owners.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, its support was lower than in Wales as a whole across the 1960s, and collapsed dramatically – and aberrantly – in the 1970s.

**Table 2: Conservative party's share of the vote in general elections 1964-74.**

	<b>UK</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Caernarfonshire</b>	<b>Merioneth</b>
<b>1964</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>12.1</b>
<b>1966</b>	<b>41.3</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>8.9</b>
<b>1970</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>13.3</b>
<b>1974 (F)</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>15.0</b>
<b>1974 (O)</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>11.2</b>

**Source:** B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.

As with the Liberal party, lack of finance, organisation and candidates were visible symbols of the party's problems, although unlike the Liberal party, the Conservative also had to contend with the weight of traditional local antipathy towards the party.

and its association with families like the Penrhyns. Most local Conservatives were realistic about the party's prospects. As one party agent noted, the party at election times was generally consumed by the desire to finish above the Liberal party in the poll.<sup>34</sup> However, there were others who held higher ambitions. In the early 1960s there had been more concerted electoral efforts. For example, the Caernarfonshire Conservative party selected its prospective candidate – Tom Hooson – in 1963, (unusually) well in advance of the actual election. These were combined with efforts to resurrect and build-up local Young Conservative organisations.<sup>35</sup> However, try as it did, the party's efforts ended in disappointment. By September 1963 the party was concerned that Hooson had not begun to formulate plans for the election, or been visible in the constituency. By October 1963, he had withdrawn his candidature, citing 'Lord Home's selection as Prime Minister' as the official reason for his decision.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the party's campaign for the 1964 (typically) fell into disarray, the party (whilst 'succeeding' in coming second to Labour) actually losing over 1500 votes. As a party report on the election noted;

Transport was weak...meetings in general badly attended throughout the constituency...the party has lost nearly all the farmers votes in the constituency, largely due to the candidates inability to speak Welsh...posters were not colourful enough, and there were too many words...too many people away on holiday.<sup>37</sup>

These were trends which hampered the party for the next decade. Getting Conservative Welsh speakers to fight seats in Welsh speaking areas was 'quite impossible'.<sup>38</sup> However, the report perceptively noted that that this was only partly responsible for the party's fortunes, bearing in mind that some 'good local candidates had been selected in Wales...and *both* had lost their deposits'.<sup>39</sup>



Finances were also a problem. By the mid 1960s the party's financial position was in a 'very serious' state.<sup>40</sup> It had not improved by the end of the 1960s.<sup>41</sup> This constrained the local party's attempts to sustain organisation, let alone develop policy. In 1969 the Caernarfonshire Association bemoaned the fact that whilst it was 'essential to get a full-time agent if we are to win the next election' it could not do so because of 'present inadequate salary' and the impossibility of offering higher wages.

Further attempts were made to revive the party in the early 1970s, largely through the Young Conservatives. However, these efforts were met with a disillusioned and apathetic response. As party officials reported, attempts to fire-up the Young Conservative movement had faltered largely because:

The Welsh nationalist party seemed to have a hold of the local young people...organisers had tried to make a go of the Young Conservatives, but apparently had not succeeded.<sup>42</sup>

Problems encountered with the young were replicated at senior level. As the party also reported, there was 'a general difficulty in creating enthusiasm' and 'no possibility of forming a men's branch in Caernarfon'.<sup>43</sup> By 1971 Caernarfonshire had no agent and no secretary, rendering any plans redundant. When the party sent invitations to sixty local members in the hope of kick-starting the organisation, 'disappointingly' only twelve turned up for the meeting.<sup>44</sup>

The party's annual report for 1972 confirmed the party's malaise when it 'regretfully' confirmed the closure of the Abersoch men's branch – the only men's branch still active by that stage. By 1974 dramatic revivals were out of the question, although greater attempts had been made to put up candidates in keeping with local requirements. In Merioneth, the party's candidate for the February election was a

Welsh speaking man from Tremadog. As the candidate proudly announced (inadvertently reflecting the party's problems in the process), this was:

The first time for the Merioneth Conservatives to choose a local candidate who was genuinely Welsh and genuinely local...this will be a big help.<sup>45</sup>

However, as *Y Cymro* astutely noted;

This will of course be ruined by local representatives who are as much members of 'y werin' as the House of Lords, and about as Welsh as the blue stickers proclaiming 'back Heath, vote Roy Owen'.

The paper also argued that the Conservative party's support in Merioneth was largely confined to English 'in-migrants' who had settled in the county's coastal towns and idyllic rural areas. This was also claimed to be the case in Caernarfonshire, where another Welsh speaking candidate appeared. Before the election *Y Cymro* predicted the party's fate, 'anti-Kilbrandon...7,000 votes...and that will be it'.<sup>46</sup> In reality Welsh speaking candidates made little difference to the party's fortunes. Even with a Welsh speaking candidate, the party's share of the vote in Caernarfonshire still declined from 20.1 per cent to 16.7 per cent, whilst Roy Owen's 'genuinely' local appeal in Merioneth attracted only 427 extra votes for the party. When Owen stood again in October, these extra votes were lost – and a few hundred more beside – the party's share of the vote falling from 15 per cent to 11.2 per cent in the process. In Caernarfonshire, candidature was again a problem. Another new candidate – Robert Harvey, a twenty-one year old non-Welsh speaking journalist – was installed for the October election. As *Y Cymro* noted, Harvey was 'an impressive candidate who knows his stuff'. However:

He undoubtedly has a glittering political career ahead of him...but it won't be in Caernarfonshire, where knowledge of Welsh is as essential as any other political attribute.<sup>47</sup>

Only in 1979 did the Conservative party begin to make inroads in north-west Wales. It came second to Plaid Cymru in Merioneth, capturing an impressive five thousand votes or 23.6 per cent of the total. It also improved its position in Caernarfonshire, with a much improved 19.9 per cent of the poll, and a total of just under 7,000. Whilst this did not allow the party to mount a serious challenge to Plaid Cymru's dominance, it did allow it to mount a challenge to Labour's position as the second force in north-west Wales – a feat which it achieved in the 1980s.

### *The Labour Party*

Even less has been written on Labour policy in the 1970s and in particular on the opposition years of 1970-74, than on the 1950s and 1960s. Whilst some authors highlight a shift to the left in the 1970s as the beginning of Labour's descent into the electoral abyss of the 1980s, few have examined the party's efforts to provide a practical alternative. Left-wingers within the party were apparently able to produce policy proposals which were 'virtually unopposed' and 'with obvious consequences for the tone of party policy statements on economic and industrial strategy'.<sup>48</sup> The party's policy statement, *Labour's Programme* (1973), provided a clear indication of the extent to which party policy was shaped by socialist thinking. It stressed an ambitious programme of public ownership initiatives, backed by a more extensive assault on capitalist enterprise. As the party argued, because 'social reform (could) not itself bring about effective progress towards equality', economic power 'must be transferred from a small elite to the mass of the people'.<sup>49</sup> Some in the party saw the rise of the left in the 1970s as a direct consequence of the malaise which engulfed the party following its failed 'Gaitskellite' adventure under Wilson in the 1960s.<sup>50</sup> Others, believing that the party's message was stale, had urged it to 'find a fresh rhetoric'.<sup>51</sup> In



Wales such debates were accompanied by a desire to rebuild which nonetheless produced little that was fresh.

One example of this desire to fight back was the launching of a new party newspaper, *Wales Radical*, in 1970. It was intended that *Wales Radical* should act as a forum for inner-party debate and as a medium through which internal party differences could be thrashed out. As the first edition of the paper argued:

The Labour party has a tradition of frank discussion. Our columns will often be controversial. You will often read things that make your hackles rise. Please don't swear and throw the paper away. The debates will be about your future and your children's future, so join in to keep the party moving on the right lines...above all, remember that *Wales Radical* is a paper for socialists of every hue, in every part of Wales...let's go on educating ourselves so that we can properly decide the priorities and avoid selfish squabbles within Wales.<sup>52</sup>

Getting the party to understand the concerns of rural areas – of the north as well as the south – was an important consideration for some early contributors to the paper, who saw this as a higher priority than internal ideological discussions. As Caerwyn Roderick argued:

On those occasions when a tug-of-war develops between them, both town and the country are the losers...I hope *Wales Radical* will provide a forum which will lead to a better understanding of each other's point of view. For instance we complain about bus services in the towns – but how many townsfolk realise there are no buses at all on the roads of Radnorshire and Breconshire?

There was a serious point political point to these complaints. As Roderick continued:

In the past we have seen nationalists capitalise on the fears of the people in rural areas...there are so many issues where the interests of the industrial areas and the rural areas clash, and where one side can neither see or understand the needs of the other.<sup>53</sup>

Others such as Emlyn Sherrington (Labour's candidate in Caernarfonshire in October 1974) used the paper as a forum to launch scathing attacks on the party's domination by south Wales. As Sherrington pointedly argued:

With some trepidation I launch myself at the Welsh Council of Labour on the grounds that mid and north Wales are inadequately represented on that body! Mid and north Walianians are becoming increasingly alienated from the Welsh Council of Labour. To most members of the Labour party outside the industrial complex of south Wales, the council is about as meaningful as the Soviet of Outer Mongolia.

Sherrington was acutely aware of the nationalist threat and of the 'anti-establishment' dimension of Plaid support. He was impressed by the 'heartening aspects' of S. O. Davies's victory in Merthyr in the 1970 general election, arguing that 'here the electorate could punish the establishment without voting Plaid. Here they voted for socialism against machine politics'.<sup>54</sup> Accountability was the key to future Labour success. Labour had to live up to its status as the party of Wales and wake up to the needs of the whole country:

In asking for more representation for north and mid Wales, therefore, I am not advocating a Llewelyn type invasion of Deheubarth. It is not a matter of hordes of wild men from Gwynedd, Powys and Ceredigion imposing their will on the south. Rather it is a question of bringing the WCL closer to the people of those regions...<sup>55</sup>

However, *Wales Radical* failed to live up to its early potential. Subsequent editions of the paper were dominated by south Wales issues and politics. Not surprisingly, circulation figures fell. By early 1971 the Caernarfonshire CLP had become concerned over the falling sales of *Welsh Radical*.<sup>56</sup> Running at a loss by late 1971, the party abandoned the venture. Plaid Cymru exploited this fact. As the *Welsh Nation* argued:

It is a blow, a mortal one, to those who believe that the Labour party can in any way be turned into a party that truly believes in Wales and is willing to give that nation something for the votes that have helped it to power in Westminster in the past. Make no mistake, large sections of the party in Wales are crowing over the paper's demise. The paper had a nasty habit of, even under the censorship of party officials...of looking under the carpet and picking out those Welsh issues that had been kicked out of sight (until the next election). The paper was started by that small group in the Labour party that wished to do good for Wales...it has taken this Welsh minded group in the Labour party eleven months to realise what others have known for years: the institution will NOT be changed.<sup>57</sup>



Finding new solutions to old problems was not easy for the party in the early 1970s. There was not much 'fresh rhetoric' in the party's policies developed after 1970. Yet the party's left-turn in the early 1970s should not be over-emphasised as a 'reason' for Labour's defeats in north-west Wales. In fact, perhaps the most damaging feature of the party's leftward drift in the early 1970s was that it served to reinforce many of the (failed) solutions to regional problems which had been offered in the 1960s. For example, the renewed belief in state intervention meant that the 'regional development' formulas of the 1960s remained largely unchanged. State encouragement for the redistribution of industry and 'advance factories' were just two policies that remained prominent in Labour's programme. Labour's Welsh policy statements for the 1974 general elections did not mark a drastic departure from what had gone before, except that was for the fundamental support given to the proposal for an elected Welsh council (at the February election) and for full-scale devolution and a Welsh Assembly (in the October election). If the rhetoric that accompanied *Labour's Programme* indicated a significant change of ideology and policy, the party's Welsh and local policy statements adopted a more cautious, moderate, approach.

Some Welsh problems did feature in the February and October manifestos. The Welsh Labour party was unhappy with the powers invested in the Welsh Office (a criticism aired at length in the 1960s), whilst devolution (fundamentally rejected in the 1960s) was now (tentatively) seen as a viable and pragmatic solution to long-standing problems. The party argued that Welsh transport faced a 'growing crisis'. Public transport was in decline – thus requiring increased subsidies – and private transport was booming. However, the absence of an 'integrated transport system' was 'aggravated by the split in Ministerial responsibility'. It was impossible for



improvements in transport to be achieved given existing Welsh Office powers. Instead, the party called for the Welsh Office to 'have sole responsibility for all road transport...and joint responsibility with the Department of the Environment for rail transport'.<sup>58</sup> Housing was another policy area where there was a significant change of emphasis. The party called for a 'progressively larger' council house building programme, for privately rented accommodation to be brought into public ownership, for steps to be taken to 'nationalise' building land (due to the fact that house purchase prices were being pushed beyond the means of 'average' families). Of importance to north-west Wales, there were calls to abolish tax relief on holiday homes.<sup>59</sup> Labour's new education policies were also attentive to Welsh problems. Additional nursery schools were viewed as 'a particular boon to working wives in Wales', as the activity rate among women was lower than in most other parts of the UK. In addition, the party promised to 'reconsider' the policy of closing schools in rural areas in view of 'the disastrous impact given by such closures to the further depopulation of the countryside'. Poor youth and further education provision was also addressed, through plans which included the establishment of a new polytechnic college to serve 'north and central Wales'. Moreover, Labour pledged to support 'devolved power' to LEA's which, under a Labour government, would be 'free to devise and implement' Welsh language policies 'best suited to their areas'. Parent Teacher Associations would 'promote the spirit of co-operation between school and home and between diverse linguistic elements in a school district'.<sup>60</sup> Whilst this addressed 'Welsh' problems, it also seemed (in part at least) a confirmation of Plaid's own analysis. It admitted problems Plaid had identified. It sought solutions in structural changes in governance – but of a less clear-cut and dramatic kind to those proposed by Plaid.

Social welfare policy was also addressed with a new, compassionate, emphasis. As Labour argued, Wales had a heavier dependency on social security provision in proportion to its population than other parts of the UK.<sup>61</sup> As a result, 'special Welsh problems' would be addressed including increased weekly benefits (which reduced dependence on means tested benefits) and increased provision of social services administered by local authorities. Other policy initiatives on a UK level – such as the plan to redesign family allowances and thus eliminate FIS means-tested benefit – were also supported. Yet the shift to the left was not necessarily to the party's advantage. As the Tories later success was to demonstrate, high welfare payments did not attract support from employed voters – whilst even those on benefit might aspire to jobs, not welfare.

Whilst Labour was still attentive to Welsh needs and circumstances, 'new' policy initiatives were also accompanied by rather older, out-dated, ideas. For example, plans for transport included 'improvements between north and south Wales', a 'priority' which the party had seminally failed to address in the 1960s when it had the power – but lacked the finances – to do so. Agricultural and rural policies also had a familiar tone. Worryingly a problem from the 1950s still existed – the fact that 'an agriculture policy for Wales will largely depend upon the party's policy for the UK as a whole'.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, plans to re-establish the Rural Development Board (disbanded by the Tories) symbolised a belief in an old solution to a long-standing problem and faith in a policy initiative that had enjoyed only limited success in the 1960s. Other promises, such as those to provide more subsidies to hill farmers and to cut down imports of high-priced produce from the Common Market, signified another inconsistency (given that the party had previously exalted the virtues of Common Market membership).



The most significant policy shift was the party's support for devolution. Throughout the 1950s, support for a Welsh parliament had been a distinctive feature of local Labour politics, and one that marked local Labour MPs from some of their counterparts in south Wales. In the 1960s, and particularly after 1966, Labour seemed in a position to deliver an extended form of devolution, but as has already been argued, this attempt fell apart. In the early 1970s, Labour's renewed passion for devolution seemed less credible. As nationalist propaganda highlighted, Labour's interest in devolution seemed to coincide with election campaigns. The idea of an elected council – abandoned in the late 1960s – re-surfaced for the 1970 general election, again in the Merthyr by-election of 1972 and for the party's February 1974 manifesto. But the commitment to devolution lacked conviction. In February 1974 Labour argued that:

In recognition of the natural expression of Welsh identity we consider that the Welsh nation could and should contribute more effectively towards its own governing

However, it still rejected full-scale devolution on the grounds that it was:

A wasteful duplication and inevitable confusion which would arise from a separate Welsh Assembly with legislative powers.<sup>63</sup>

However, only seven months later, in October 1974, the party had performed a u-turn.

On this occasion 'wasteful duplication' and 'inevitable confusion' had been forgotten.

Now the party argued:

Labour supports the unanimous view of Kilbrandon and rejects talk of an independent Wales or a federal structure for the UK...weakening democracy can only be addressed by radical reform of the machinery of government...(involving) a wide range of decision making.<sup>64</sup>



In addition to the party's UK and Welsh policies, Labour's popularity in north-west Wales was also based on distinctively local policies and appeals. Defence of the 'gwerin' had formed an important aspect of the party's appeal throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Goronwy Roberts and T.W. Jones had both been vociferous defenders of Welsh culture and the Welsh language, and committed advocates of traditional Welsh speaking communities and values. However, by the early 1970s, Labour's reputation on several of those issues had been undermined. Depopulation had not been halted. Successive governments (not only Labour but also the Conservative) had failed to address the unemployment problem in north-west Wales. With outward migration came inward migration, and with it fears concerning the decline of Welsh communities. Many of those 'traditional Welsh speaking communities' which Labour purported to represent, felt threatened. By the early 1970s Plaid Cymru, not Labour, appeared more in tune with the concerns of locals than the Labour party (see below).

There were few dynamic and original Labour responses to the problems of north-west Wales. Regional employment premiums, special development area status and plans for advance factories were still favoured as solutions to the problem of attracting industry into the region.<sup>65</sup> The success record of these policies in the 1960s cast a large question mark over their actual effectiveness, especially bearing in mind that UK economic conditions were still less than favourable. Only after Labour defeats in the north-west in the February election were commitments to tackle the problems of rural areas made more evident. More plans for advance factories were accompanied by the promise of seven thousand civil service jobs (some of which would be in the north), an £8 million derelict land programme, a Welsh Development Agency and a

Railways Act which promised a ‘major investment in Welsh railways’. Moreover, public expenditure would be used to implement schemes of ‘rural development’. As Labour argued, rural areas were:

Still being impoverished by the drain of young people with the result that those communities are no longer self-supporting.<sup>66</sup>

‘New initiatives’ to ‘use and develop the social fabric and economic resources of rural areas to the full’ were promised. Again, Labour’s comments seemed to confirm Plaid’s analysis – whilst also lending support to its claim that Labour only responded because Plaid’s support was growing.

Labour’s past popularity was not just about policies. The importance of personality – often at the expense of partisan concerns – had been a long standing feature of politics in north-west Wales, particularly on local councils but also so far as local MPs were concerned. Both Goronwy Roberts and T. W. Jones had cultivated large ‘personal’ votes in their respective constituencies. Roberts claimed he had a personal following which guaranteed him nine thousand votes at election time.<sup>67</sup> Party workers were told to go out and get the rest.<sup>68</sup> However, there were problems. T. W. Jones’s successor in Merioneth Wil Edwards, whilst young and the type of new candidate favoured by Emrys Jones, lacked the personal appeal and the political craft of his predecessor.<sup>69</sup> Edwards was prone to stating outspoken and controversial views on local issues.<sup>70</sup> As *Y Cymro* perceptively noted:

The big plus is the personal appeal of Wil Edwards. The big problem is his tendency to put his foot in it, and lose friends as easily as making them.<sup>71</sup>

Senior Labour party figures in Merioneth also bemoaned the fact that Edwards ‘lost his head’ after his election to parliament in 1966 and, as a result, failed to cultivate the



constituency.<sup>72</sup> These observations are borne out by official Labour party reports. As a party report into the results of the 1974 general elections noted:

The Labour MP did not devote enough time to this constituency and in an area like this, this is a fatal mistake. It was enough to let in the nationalist who, while he is as active as he has been since February, will be difficult to shift.<sup>73</sup>

When attempts were made to dissuade Edwards from standing again in October, these failed because of the MP's successful attempts to lobby for continued support from various constituency branches. This was a 'disaster' for the local party. Inevitably, Edwards's vote deteriorated even further as a result.<sup>74</sup>

Difficulties were also encountered in Caernarfonshire. Roberts' considerable personal reputation showed signs of ageing by the early 1970s. As a young MP in the 1940s, Roberts had turned down the offer of a junior government post from Clement Attlee, stating that he wished to concentrate on the considerable problems facing his constituency.<sup>75</sup> Despite Plaid's claims to the contrary, he evidently did so. Ironically, during the 1960s, the understandable distraction of government posts were instrumental in undermining his personal popularity and reputation. Government responsibilities meant that he was often absent from the constituency when 'crisis meetings' discussing the demise of the quarries were taking place. His spell at the foreign office was seen as particularly damaging.<sup>76</sup> Roberts also suffered from the longevity of his 'reign' as Caernarfonshire MP. Policies, doctrine and personal reputation aside, some believed that he had simply become a stale commodity, especially when confronted with a credible challenge from a young and enthusiastic candidate.<sup>77</sup> However, the biggest problem facing Roberts was that the party lacked the local organisational capacity which would enable it to counter the emerging challenge of Plaid Cymru.



Organisation was an acute problem within the Labour party in the early 1970s. Left-wing Labour members felt that across the UK, the Wilson government had created ‘great disillusionment’ within the party’s rank and file.<sup>78</sup> If, as Tiratsoo has shown, this was an exaggeration, there were problems in Wales with even moderates reacting against government policies. Recent work by Steven Fielding on Labour’s organisation in the 1960s has highlighted ‘the ability of active members to subvert officials’ plans to improve the effectiveness of the party’s organisation’, showing that the UK party elite ‘was not as powerful as some suggested at the time’.<sup>79</sup> Others have shown that across Wales, Labour’s dominance from the Second World War onwards was not matched by organisational rigour.<sup>80</sup>

One of the key problems facing the Labour party in north-west Wales – and particularly in Caernarfonshire – was the commanding electoral majorities enjoyed by the party in the two post-war decades. Goronwy Roberts believed that this was a safe seat with loyalty to him (and Labour) created and sustained by his work for the constituency, Welsh culture and Wales. This also meant that the local party became afflicted by some of the organisational problems common in the south. The ease with which Labour swept to electoral successes did not encourage the local CLP to embark on energetic membership campaigns or maintain an efficient election fighting machine.

Organisational problems were not new to the Caernarfon constituency. When the Welsh party had launched organisation drives in the past, Caernarfonshire was one of the constituencies typically found wanting. As a WRCL report commented of one such effort in 1954: ‘Caernarfon – little activity in the form of a campaign. There have

been constituency meetings, but the main problem is that of membership'.<sup>81</sup> Alarmingly, Labour found difficulty forming branches even in larger urban centres. As the same report noted, branches had been difficult to sustain in Caernarfon and Porthmadog. During the same period, the North Wales Sub-Committee of the WRCL bemoaned the fact that of the region's constituencies only Caernarfonshire and Merioneth had failed to submit regular constituency party reports.<sup>82</sup> Hubert Morgan, the party's organiser, complained that 'organisation in north Wales constituencies left much to be desired'.<sup>83</sup>

The party's continued successes in the 1960s hid a similar set of problems. In Caernarfonshire, organisation was largely non-existent between elections.<sup>84</sup> When meetings were held, these were often arranged at very short notice. According to his agent, these meetings were normally conducted when Goronwy Roberts 'wanted to get something off his chest'.<sup>85</sup> Despite overwhelming electoral success, party support remained weak in many areas of the county. Poor organisation (and the lack of active branches) meant that the problem was never addressed.<sup>86</sup> There were few opportunities for branches to act on their own initiative and demonstrate Labour's real local concern. By the end of the 1960s and early 1970s the party was run by a small (and largely ageing) group of stalwarts, who were ill-equipped to cope with the vigorous and energetic challenge posed by Plaid Cymru. The independent tradition of local councils, and Labour's failure to address this problem, did not help the party to develop sustainable 'roots' in local communities. With the Welsh language press increasingly hostile, Labour had little opportunity to develop its case.



Serious problems faced the party well before 1974, but they became more evident in the early 1970s. Correspondence from senior members of the Caernarfon Labour party to Goronwy Roberts and Hubert Morgan (Labour's assistant regional organiser for Wales), provide a valuable insight into the scale of the malaise. The over-riding problem troubling the party were those of finance and organisation. In a letter to Hubert Morgan in October 1973, J. C. Williams, the Caernarfonshire CLP's vice-chairman, expressed concerns over the financial state of the party:

As you are aware, the financial affairs of the constituency were found to be in a sorry mess when Idwal took over as treasurer, how this came about is altogether too obvious, and the only reference I can make is that the dire consequences of stirring dirty water only achieves the end product of dirtier water emerging.<sup>87</sup>

Such was the financial state of the party that it could not afford to pay its 1973 affiliation fees without 'going into the red'. Lack of financial support from local trade unions was one serious problem. These were worsened by poor organisation. As Williams pointed out:

Whilst two or three branches who are progressive in field work have made donations from their fund-raising activities, others have not been forthcoming...the ugly fact is that this constituency is in distress financially and it should not expect Goronwy to do the spade-work on its behalf, no man can do the impossible.

Lack of money hit the party hard in other areas. Labour had won in 1970, but this was no thanks to financial or organisational efforts. As Williams continued:

Our efforts in the last general election were pathetic and mediocre...Idwal and I had to hide at the back of Caernarfon institute to escape embarrassment by the appearance of the 'Blaid' with their sophisticated broadcasting equipment blaring away on the move, contrary to the Noise Abatement Act.

Williams was anxious that machinery (and financial support) be put in place before the next election. He was concerned that Goronwy Roberts could no longer rely on his 'parliamentary and constituency record' to ensure continued electoral success. This



was especially important as Roberts faced the prospect of a 'three party fight'. Worse still Williams 'had a sneaking feeling that the Liberals may also emerge'.<sup>88</sup>

Given the severity and urgency of the CLP's predicament, the lack of response from Morgan to Williams' concerns was surprising (and perhaps signified that a much deeper problem existed across all levels of the party). A month later, Williams wrote again, re-iterating and expanding on his earlier concerns. For Williams, the lack of response to his earlier letter was symptomatic of the problems facing the Labour party not only in Wales but the country in general. 'Over-centralisation' and 'the bedevilment of distances' were contributory causes to Labour's organisational difficulties. Politically, the party 'were over relying on old doctrines'.

The 'shambles' which Williams identified within the Caernarfon CLP bordered on the farcical. Despite his efforts to address problems, he was alarmed to find 'a secretary who completely failed to work with me or answer any of my letters', and meetings attended by senior party members 'who were not aware of the reasons for the meetings'. Moreover, when an attempt were made at reforming a party branch in Caernarfon in 1973, it ended in embarrassment for the party. At a meeting held in a local hotel, and designed to generate support from Caernarfon:

Two-thirds of those present were from outside Caernarfon, that is from surrounding villages, and the occasion being of course for the formation of a branch in Caernarfon itself, the end-product of the meeting was that a lot of Labour supporters from the town were left out in the cold, disastrous in its implications.<sup>89</sup>

This was particularly distressing as 'Caernarfon represents one-sixth of the electorate'.<sup>90</sup> These were problems that continued in the February 1974 election campaign. For example, on one occasion the CLP's secretary was unaware of an

electoral meeting – starring Goronwy Roberts and Cledwyn Hughes – that was taking place in Caernarfon, until she read of the meeting in a local newspaper.<sup>91</sup>

Unsurprisingly given Labour's organisational problems the party's campaign in February lacked the energy of its main rival (see below). Labour lacked the manpower to compete effectively with Plaid's vigorous approach. Caernarfonshire was a widely anticipated Labour casualty. The Welsh Labour party's post-election report argued that 'the only real surprise was Pembroke'.<sup>92</sup> Cardiff's reports on the malaise in the north-west claimed that organisation, rather than the rejection of Labour policy was the main reason for the party's demise. As was the case with Wil Edwards, Goronwy Roberts was seen as the architect of his own downfall. As a Labour party report argued:

The constituency was held in check (by Goronwy Roberts)...no one was able to work without his consent or backing...now, freed from this restraint, they are pushing forward – with our help and encouragement.<sup>93</sup>

Letters written to Goronwy Roberts in the wake of his defeat reveal the views of other party supporters on the origins of that defeat. One correspondent pointed to the fact that 'nationalist sympathies, signs, pictures and propaganda' in local government offices had been evident 'some two years before the election'.<sup>94</sup> This was a significant factor bearing in mind the large number of local voters employed in local government. Moreover, public sector workers were often Labour supporters elsewhere. Plaid's growing base in local government may have been useful to its appeal.<sup>95</sup> Other correspondents blamed young voters for the party's demise. In the 1970 election (when the voting age had been reduced to eighteen) Labour's majority in Caernarfonshire had declined dramatically. By 1974, local Labourites were adamant that Labour had not captured the local youth vote. As one supporter wrote to



Goronwy Roberts, 'they should never have given the vote to eighteen year olds. What do they know about the issues of the day?'. Others shared the same sentiments:

Who brought it into force that children of 18 could vote, as they don't know what it means...all they know is how to hold a pencil and put a cross on a piece of paper.<sup>96</sup>

Another commented that:

The majority of their (Plaid) votes came from ill-educated 18 year olds...this is one thing that should never have gone through, I hope the age goes back up to 21, because 18 is too young to understand what politics are all about.<sup>97</sup>

The same outcome was blamed by others on schoolteachers who had 'indoctrinated' young voters with nationalist values.<sup>98</sup> Whilst this analysis may have reflected the age and prejudices of the party members, collapsing Labour support amongst the young, and in local government was plausible enough. Labour had been weakened as a community organisation. The press and other organisations had helped nationalism permeate the community. Some of Roberts' political friends commented in ways which indicate a failure to understand nationalism, and a tendency to malign it (perhaps understandably given the bitter campaign). One local journalist described Plaid as 'so many zanies operating on the fringe'. He continued 'we are in for years of lunatic politics'.<sup>99</sup> The problems facing Labour were accentuated by its slim electoral majority in Parliament:

The main thing that worries me about the situation in Wales is that the Nats are now in better position to extract concessions than they dared contemplate, than if they had won a thumping string of seats...I've already written to Cledwyn telling him that I think anything you concede to them will be danegeld, and heaven help us at the end of the road.<sup>100</sup>

There was thus support for the type of anti-nationalist rhetoric produced by George Thomas.



Labour's position deteriorated still further between February and October 1974. In Merioneth this was blamed on Wil Edwards. However, a new candidate, Emlyn Sherrington was selected as Labour's candidate in Caernarfonshire, when Goronwy Roberts moved to the Lords. Like his predecessor, Sherrington was a local man and a firm advocate of devolution who also favoured a 'communitarian' form of Labour politics. A historian and a passionate orator, his culture was European rather than Welsh, nationalist rather than religious.<sup>101</sup> If on the one hand speeches which contained references and rhetoric relating to the 'gwerin' seemed to signify that Sherrington was a 'natural' successor to Roberts, some of his other political views, and particularly his views over how the constituency should be organised, were a radical departure from the old regime.

Sherrington's adoption may have been influenced by Emrys Jones. He was also one of an increasing number of 'left-wing' candidates selected by the party after 1970. Like others, he had been influenced by Gwyn Alf Williams at Aberystwyth, and by the 'red dragon and red flag' political views of Cledwyn Hughes and Aneurin Bevan.<sup>102</sup> Such people were actively supported by Emrys Jones – at least if he felt they would 'pep-up' the seat. Sherrington was a self-confessed 'extremist', backing up this profound claim by explaining:

I am an extremist when it comes to injustice and failure. I am an extremist when it comes to the living standards of the 'werin'. What's wrong with being an extremist when it comes to fighting against injustice?

His political platform for the October election emphasised his 'left-wing' beliefs. In line with Labour manifesto pledges (see above), Sherrington supported government intervention in industry and economic affairs, arguing that small, semi-industrialised regions such as north-west Wales could not compete with 'giants' like the Midlands,

and could only do so through positive government intervention in industrial affairs. This, Sherrington believed, was a key point which marked Labour's campaign apart from the other parties. As he argued:

All the other candidates are against this because they believe in free markets. Free markets are all well and good when the competitors are equal. But what do you do when one is a giant, the other a dwarf, when one is Birmingham the other Cesarea.<sup>103</sup>

Other strands of Sherrington's campaign focussed on Labour's plans for Caernarfonshire including 'special development status' for the constituency to attract 'investment, factories and work', a strengthened rural development board, a 'National Enterprise Board' to direct industry into Gwynedd, government contracts for factories in Gwynedd, 'equalisation' of water rates and an elected 'senate' for Wales to supervise the work 'of forty nominated bodies and deal with delegated legislation', the 'most revolutionary development in Wales for four hundred years'.<sup>104</sup> The campaign also focussed on Labour's delivery of promises after February. The end of the three day week, the social contract with trade unions, subsidies on food, increased pensions and special development status for Gwynedd were all notable achievements, whilst a 'start' had also been made on a number of other promises including a 'new deal' for pensioners, more houses, 'saving the health service', the re-negotiation of Common Market entry, an oil development commission for Wales and equal status for women.<sup>105</sup>

Sherrington's approach to local organisation differed radically from his predecessor's. Like many on the left, Sherrington believed in the political expediency of organisation and of youthful energy. Not surprisingly, a radical overhaul of local party organisation took place after the February defeat. With the help of a team of young activists (many of whom like Betty Williams were 'Young Socialists' in the 1960s), new branches



sprung up across the constituency.<sup>106</sup> This, together with ‘outside help’ provided by the party including ‘guest speakers’, ‘bi-lingual literature’ and members from outside constituencies, all contributed to a significant improvement in Labour’s challenge to Plaid Cymru. As a Labour report argued:

We had a really first-class campaign – the best in the constituency in the memory of those active there. There was a strong reaction to losing the seat in February – membership increased dramatically and there was a quick growth in local branches...our hope depends on this growth being maintained.<sup>107</sup>

The significant progress made after February was also confirmed by the Welsh press.

As *Y Cymro* pointed out:

Labour’s effort is much more energetic than last time. They have followed Plaid’s pattern of campaign songs, one of which ends ‘give your vote to Sherrington’. Wigley’s songs are also being played, but they are not as dominant as they were in February.<sup>108</sup>

However, despite these efforts, Labour’s vote continued to decline. The party’s share of the vote fell from 35.6 to 34.1%, with an actual loss of over a thousand votes. This was a pattern replicated in Merioneth, where the party’s share of the vote fell from 32% to 30.9%. In Caernarfonshire, the party attempted to find scapegoats for its failures. As with Roberts a few months earlier, the Welsh party placed some of the blame for the party’s demise squarely on Sherrington’s shoulders:

The candidate Emlyn Sherrington worked extremely hard. He is a first class speaker, but not ideal for this constituency. He can’t resist attacking the individual – but he is not above reproach himself – so he opened the way for his nationalist opponents and in some way suffered for it.<sup>109</sup>

In a ‘dirty’ campaign, Sherrington was portrayed by Plaid Cymru as a communist and an atheist. This had led to some unpleasantries being returned in the opposite direction (see below). But these were not the real reasons for Labour’s defeat. Labour’s problems were deep-rooted. As Sherrington himself has pointed out, organisational effort – whilst valiant – required four years work, not six months. Labour’s problems could not be fixed overnight. The steps taken to ‘repair’ the damaged party between



February and October 1974 collapsed thereafter. They stemmed the tide, but did not turn it back. As a result, Labour was not a credible challenger to Plaid Cymru in the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s.

Eventually Plaid and Labour – natural enemies and bitter antagonists in 1974 – shared some similarities. However, Plaid – like all nationalist parties – had the capacity to draw on a broader base. Between February and October 1974, Plaid made little impression on the Labour vote, but gained from Liberal and Conservative defections in Merioneth and from the Conservative decline in Caernarfonshire.

**Table 3: General Election Results, February and October 1974 General Elections, Vote and (% Vote): Caernarfonshire.**

<b>PARTY</b>	<b>FEBRUARY 1974</b>	<b>OCTOBER 1974</b>
<b>Conservative</b>	<b>5,803 (16.7)</b>	<b>4,325 (12.6)</b>
<b>Labour</b>	<b>12,375 (35.6)</b>	<b>11,370 (34.1)</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	<b>2,506 (7.2)</b>	<b>3,690 (10.9)</b>
<b>Plaid Cymru</b>	<b>14,103 (40.5)</b>	<b>14,624 (42.5)</b>
<b>Turnout</b>	<b>34,787 (82.4)</b>	<b>34,004 (80.8)</b>

**Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.**

**Table 4: General Election Results, February and October 1974 General Elections, Vote and (% Vote): Merioneth.**

<b>PARTY</b>	<b>FEBRUARY 1974</b>	<b>OCTOBER 1974</b>
<b>Conservative</b>	<b>3,392 (15.0)</b>	<b>2,509 (11.2)</b>
<b>Labour</b>	<b>7,235 (32.0)</b>	<b>6,951 (30.9)</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	<b>4,153 (18.4)</b>	<b>3,454 (15.4)</b>
<b>Plaid Cymru</b>	<b>7,823 (34.6)</b>	<b>9,543 (42.0)</b>
<b>Turnout</b>	<b>22,603 (85.1)</b>	<b>22,367 (84.0)</b>

**Source: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections*.**

At least at this stage, it was not Labour's weakness that mattered, but Plaid's ability to present a broader appeal.

### *Plaid Cymru*

Plaid's victory in 1974 was testament to the significant advances made the party, both in terms of organisation and policy, from the early 1960s onwards. Some historians have viewed the result of the 1970 general election as disappointing for Plaid Cymru.<sup>110</sup> Defeat in Carmarthenshire was matched by huge Labour victories in both Rhondda and Caerphilly. They also view the Caernarfonshire and Merioneth results as disappointing, given the rumoured expectation of Plaid breakthroughs in the region at the time. But as this study has shown, such observations do not take into account the difficulty of eroding political loyalties, the (still) formidable reputations of local Labour MPs or the fact that Plaid organisation and policies were still in an embryonic condition in 1970. Plaid built up its position skilfully and to great effect over a substantial period of time, exploiting opportunities with populist propaganda.

Organisation was felt to be a key contribution to potential success. Having the right candidates in the right constituencies was deemed essential if the party was to make

electoral breakthroughs in 1974. Somewhat inadvertently, this had been achieved before the 1974 general election. Dafydd Wigley (the party's candidate in Merioneth in 1970) was selected as prospective candidate for Caernarfon in 1972, whilst a young local academic, Dafydd Elis Thomas, had replaced Wigley as the party's candidate in Merioneth. These were both crucial factors in the party's success. Wigley had felt decidedly uncomfortable in Merioneth (see above). By comparison, he felt 'more at home' in Caernarfonshire.<sup>111</sup> He had experience of the Plaid 'machine' there, having worked for the party in the 1964 general election and having been touted as a prospective candidate for the constituency in 1965.<sup>112</sup> Given the long traditions of the party in Caernarfonshire, the strength of the local organisation and his familiarity with the constituency, Wigley did not find Caernarfonshire difficult to cultivate. Plaid's organisation was also well advanced by the early 1970s. In 1972 the constituency had two thousand members and twelve thriving branches.<sup>113</sup> Family in the seat, football contacts and a mother who was an active member of the local Women's Institute were all important in getting Wigley known in the constituency.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, and significantly, he believed that his local reputation had also been enhanced because of his involvement in the party's research group and his co-authorship of the 'Economic Plan', which had attracted valuable local as well as national media attention.<sup>115</sup>

Dafydd Elis Thomas in Merioneth was an equally attractive local candidate. Like Wigley, Thomas's youthfulness may well have been an electoral asset. Also like Wigley, Thomas inherited a local organisation which was in good shape. As has already been argued, Merioneth had been Plaid's fastest growing constituency in the



1960s and generated the party's highest income. Policy development, put in place largely through Wigley's efforts in the late 1960s, was also well advanced.

Of course, Plaid Cymru was not without its own problems in the early 1970s. For example, despite attempts to break the 'independent' stranglehold of local government politics in the region, progress made on this front was patchy. Local parties had been encouraged to fight as many local elections as possible, and to persuade 'unofficial Plaid' candidates to stand in the party's name. As local branches reported, finding candidates willing to represent Plaid on local councils was not a problem. However, even Plaid officials were less prepared to break with local 'independent' traditions. As Elfed Gruffydd (the secretary of Plaid's Pwllheli branch) pointed out in a letter to the party's secretary Dafydd Williams in 1971:

I am quite willing to stand...but of course I will be standing as an independent, in keeping with the traditions of this part of the world.<sup>116</sup>

Things had not improved by the end of 1972. As the secretary of the party's Arfon branch also wrote to Williams:

There are only one or two prepared to stand as official Plaid Cymru candidates in the local elections, although, of course, many will stand as independents.<sup>117</sup>

These problems precipitated an agitated response within the party. Some demanded radical action. A National Council memo in 1973 demanded that:

Plaid should not be blackmailed by independent council candidates in favourable areas where there is a good alternative ready to fight...we should ensure that there is no money or manpower for 'Plaid' independents.<sup>118</sup>

As local election results for 1973 highlighted, Plaid was far from resolving these problems. In the 1973 county council elections, whilst the party won more seats than Labour (six as compared to four) the independent tradition triumphed, with 56 independent councillors elected in all. In district council elections the story was the

same. In Arfon, whilst Labour won more seats than Plaid (eight as compared to five), 27 independents were elected. In Merioneth all 39 seats were won by independents.<sup>119</sup> Only in 1976 was some progress made in district councils, Plaid winning a total of 13 seats in Arfon and Labour five (independents falling to 22). In Merioneth the independent tradition was finally broken, with Plaid winning eight seats, Labour three and independent representation falling to 28.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, whilst local branches and the party's membership in the region had grown spectacularly since the 1960s, some branches had also gone into decline and members had been lost. For example, in 1972 there had been efforts to form a new branch in the Llanbedrog and Mynytho area of Caernarfonshire. Dafydd Williams supplied a list of 'lapsed' members, showing that Plaid had lost a total of 51 'paid-up' members in the area, one having last paid 'dues' in the 1950s, 36 in the 1960s and fourteen in the 1970s.<sup>121</sup> Other local branches were also concerned at the loss of members. In 1971 the Nefyn branch of the party had tabled a motion at the party's annual conference calling for subscription fees to be reduced, fearing that 'it (was) unattractive to those people on the fringes of the party and might become members' and that 'there (would) be far fewer members because of the increase – and this may have a great effect on the number of Plaid votes in the next election'.<sup>122</sup> Others were concerned that the party had grown too quickly and that it lacked the infrastructure to deal with this. The danger was that Plaid would lose its 'homely' feel. Losing contact with new members was a real concern.<sup>123</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s it was not uncommon for party officials to know all of the party's branch members on first-name terms.<sup>124</sup> This was no longer feasible by the early 1970s. There was also the fear that because of its increasing size, party organisers 'tended to think of organisation in terms of



distributing leaflets'.<sup>125</sup> In order to rectify this the party's national council stressed that 'straightforward contact with people is far more important than leaflets' and suggested that a local candidates attendance at 'non-political functions' (such as football or rugby matches) was 'more important' than political meetings in making communities familiar with the face of the party.<sup>126</sup>

Despite a growing membership, Plaid was also far from being a wealthy party by the early 1970s. It still lacked the money (and manpower) to fight effectively on a 36 constituency basis – a policy adopted by the party for the 1970 general election. This caused tensions within the upper-echelons of the party. For example, some believed that fighting elections in the south Wales valleys was a wasteful venture and that the party could 'do without another expensive battle in this unpromising territory'.<sup>127</sup> For general elections, modernisers within the party, including Dafydd Wigley and Phil Williams, believed it was essential to focus financial and organisational resources on a number of 'key' seats – a suggestion opposed but eventually endorsed by the party's executive.<sup>128</sup> These were not necessarily seats which Wigley and Williams believed Plaid was capable of winning, but ones where Plaid would obtain maximum publicity for its campaigns. As a result, in addition to target seats like Carmarthen, Rhondda West, Caerphilly, Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, others were selected because attacking the sitting MPs 'provided good press copy'. Seven further seats were contested to capture media attention. These included Anglesey (Cledwyn Hughes), Montgomery (Emlyn Hooson), Merthyr (S. O. Davies), Cardigan (D. E. Morgan), Pembroke (Desmond Donnelly), Llanelli (D. J. Davies) and, of course, Cardiff West (George Thomas).<sup>129</sup> Yet the party also recognised what it was to learn in Caernarfonshire – levels of Liberal support would also determine its prospects.



Caernarfonshire was the only seat which Plaid realistically expected to win in 1974.<sup>130</sup>

‘Beyond Caernarfon’ the party’s ambitions were relatively modest.

The result of the February general election confirmed the party’s limitations across most of Wales. As a party report into the contest noted, Plaid’s performance and support had been at best ‘patchy’. As it went on to argue:

Sweeping gains were made in north-west Wales...little progress in south Glamorgan, a few gains in the Gwent valleys and slump in the cities...weak seats became noticeably weaker.<sup>131</sup>

The Liberal revival which was evident in England made no real impact on the party’s fortunes in Wales. Nonetheless, Plaid believed that it had done enough to disturb its progress in many constituencies. Ironically, and as the party’s founding fathers had envisaged, the 1974 elections had confirmed Plaid’s status as the party of Welsh speaking, rural Wales. Outside these ‘heartland’ constituencies, the party struggled to capture the ‘third party’ vote from the Conservative and Liberals. Plaid argued that the existence of Liberal candidates had a ‘big influence’ on Plaid’s performance, as was the ‘presence of very good local Conservative candidates, many of whom were Welsh speaking’.<sup>132</sup> Tristan Garel-Jones, the Tory candidate in Caernarfon, was cited as a prime example. This, Plaid argued, led to ‘the Conservatives recovering the vote from both Liberal and Labour in strongly held Labour seats’.

Plaid’s in-house psephology revealed that in ‘anglicised areas’, the ‘third party vote went to the Liberals’, leaving only ‘hard core’ support for the party. This was especially true of eastern counties, where ‘mainly English TV channels were received’ and ‘where voters never even hear of Plaid Cymru in the media’.<sup>133</sup> These were also areas where Plaid organisation ‘was at its weakest’ (many constituencies

only being fought for the second time), and where ‘candidates were chosen at the last minute’ – a problem shared by both the Liberal and Conservatives in constituencies across Wales. In some seats where Plaid had not saved its deposit, such as Gower, Ogmore and Rhondda, the party’s performance had been woeful.

Yet in the longer term, as Plaid was also aware, the chances of continued Liberal renewal were slim: ‘the Liberals have no organisation outside Cardiff and the rural areas of east and mid Wales’.<sup>134</sup> Plaid on the other hand was ‘much stronger in terms of membership and organisation’ and more cohesive politically, considering that ‘the old fashioned Liberalism of rural Wales is very different from the new Liberalism of south Wales’. Comfort was thus taken from the fact that ‘this was a media election par excellence – and Plaid Cymru survived it’.<sup>135</sup> Some of this belief in organisation – and in attracting non-Labour voters – had influenced tactics in north-west Wales. In Caernarfonshire, Dafydd Wigley’s campaign had officially started in March 1973.<sup>136</sup> Publication of local party newspapers and the canvassing of large sections of the local electorate were both initiated during that year. Organisational effort was seen as vital if the party was to win the seat. As Wigley argued in the first edition of *Triban Arfon*, published in September 1973, a massive effort was required from the local party:

We can win Caernarfon in the next election, but only through activism of a kind which we have never seen before in this constituency...I am willing to do all I can...but this is beyond the work of one man.<sup>137</sup>

At the same time, as Wigley was also aware, the importance of personality was vital. This was addressed by Wigley’s personal canvassing campaign, which involved meeting three thousand local voters during the eleven months before the February election.<sup>138</sup> As was the case with Thomas in Merioneth, Wigley became an active and prominent spokesman in local social and economic debates. A key component of



Thomas' election strategy in Merioneth was to act as the local MP before he was elected. This entailed dealing with 'constituents' concerns and problems, a tactic which fitted in with his 'communitarian' ethos.<sup>139</sup> Conservatives and Liberals were not neglected. Close links were formed with the local farming community – winning the party admirers in rural areas – whilst Thomas' active membership and active involvement in local TGWU affairs had a positive impact in the county's urban centres – particularly Blaenau Ffestiniog.<sup>140</sup>

Whilst personality, community and sheer graft demonstrated the local party's respect for traditional electioneering methodology, there was more than a hint of 'Americanisation' and 'razzamatazz' in other features of the campaign strategies. As has already been noted, local party campaigns from the 1950s onwards had become renowned for their vociferous and enthusiastic nature. Enthusiasm – in all its guises – mushroomed in the early 1970s. Noisy, up-beat campaigns became the norm.<sup>141</sup> In preparation for the general election, local branches had been encouraged to prepare for their campaigns by purchasing 'radio-cassettes' and 'loud-speakers', both of which were essential for the (loud) repetition of 'recorded messages and up-beat songs' in local markets, towns and remote country areas.<sup>142</sup>

Brian Morgan Edwards (the party's director of communications) encouraged the carnival mood of campaigns with plans for 'PA systems', 'cassettes of election tunes', together with 'dayglo green' beer mats, 'balloons', 'sticker badges', 'tin badges', 'car stickers' and 'paper caps'.<sup>143</sup> There had been concerns that winter campaigns would hamper Plaid's efforts at generating a carnival atmosphere.<sup>144</sup> These concerns were quashed in both February and October. 'Scores' of canvassers braving the elements



became a feature of Plaid's campaigns. Such was the enthusiasm of Plaid's workers that it was not uncommon for a house to be visited 'three or four times'.<sup>145</sup> In Caernarfonshire, Wigley's canvassers conducted 'poster counts'. In local villages Wigley's distinctive 'dayglo green' posters 'grew with every visit':

Even in the council estates which had been loyal to Labour, the poster campaign was being won by the end of the campaign.<sup>146</sup>

The same was equally true of Merioneth where, as *Y Cymro* reported, Plaid 'had more canvassers than the rest of the constituencies put together'.<sup>147</sup>

Large, well-attended meetings were also a feature of Plaid's campaigns. Wigley believed that Plaid attracted large crowds in Caernarfonshire partly because of rumours that the seat was about to change hands. Plaid estimated that around four thousand people attended various party meetings in the constituencies. Large meetings were not confined to Plaid but Labour's well-attended meetings Plaid claimed, were 'artificial' and 'constructed':

The difference between their audiences and ours was that they had to depend on well-known figures to attract supporters, whilst we, apart from the last night, capitalised on the hundreds of voters who came to listen and consider before making up their minds.<sup>148</sup>

The political side of the campaigns focussed on local and national Welsh issues. Wigley's election campaign for the February election was given a valuable (and appropriate) kick-start because it coincided with a Parliament for Wales rally in Bangor – planned before the election had been announced. Kilbrandon and devolution obviously featured prominently in the party's campaigns (see below), but it was far from being its key component in either Caernarfonshire or Merioneth.

Obviously there was some mileage in the Kilbrandon debate, and this was exploited by Plaid's propaganda machine during the election campaign. In February, Labour's timid support for an elected council was regularly pilloried. In October, after Labour had abandoned plans for an elected council in favour of an assembly, Plaid's propaganda exploited the fact that Labour's planned concession to Wales was less than that offered to Scotland. According to Plaid, Labour had 'shocked Wales' by offering it an 'inferior' assembly.<sup>149</sup> The party's press releases also utilised Labour's discomfort over the issue. As one, citing the opinion of a 'Labour candidate' argued:

The feeling that Wales is getting something less (than Scotland) is political dynamite of a kind that Wales will find hard to handle.<sup>150</sup>

Although devolution was obviously the central mechanism for delivering all Plaid's policies, it was these policies, rather than devolution *per se*, that were emphasised during the election campaigns. In both constituencies jobs – and economic issues generally – dominated. Distinctively local adaptations of national party policies were aired. As *Y Cymro* noted of Wigley's campaign in Caernarfon, 'all his arguments corresponded with Plaid's national arguments'.<sup>151</sup> The economic plan (which Wigley had helped to write) still provided the main thrust of Plaid election manifestos in 1974, although policies developed after 1970 were also evident (see below).

'Decentralisation' and 'democratisation' were the themes of Plaid's manifestos.<sup>152</sup> Plaid's solutions to Welsh problems still obviously revolved around the proviso of a Welsh parliament. Economic problems were blamed on the failure of 'the system'. The proposed solution to these problems demonstrated the influence of 'socialist' or 'leftist' thinking within the party. At the same time there were also appeals to more traditional party concerns and aspirations.



Rhetoric that had featured prominently in Plaid's propaganda in the late 1960s and early 1970s featured prominently in the manifesto. As it argued:

Our system of government has failed. Failed to involve people in the decisions which affect their lives. Little thought has been given to sharing wealth more fairly or to establishing a system of industrial democracy which would lead to harmony or co-operation instead of industrial unrest...successive Labour and Conservative governments failed to recognise the nature and severity of the problem. They have attempted a series of mechanistic controls in the hope that the problem would go away...these policies have failed. The present crisis is fraught with danger...some politicians and newspapers are calling for 'firm leadership' – without asking where such leadership might take us. Under the present government it could lead to authoritarianism, totalitarianism and dictatorship, always a threat when a declining empire becomes obsessed with previous 'glories'.<sup>153</sup>

The manifesto argued that industrial decline was the result of massive structural problems. Wales was 'one of the oldest industrial nations in the world' with an industrial base that was still 'very strong'. However, it had never:

Been able to attract the wide range of profitable manufacturing industries that would create full employment and a high level of income.

The reasons for this were obvious:

Roads are out of date and over crowded, our rail network has been mutilated, not a single mile of railway has been electrified and facilities for technical education are inadequate.

In line with the economic plan, 'growth centres', 'industrial parks' and a 'National Development Agency' were proposed as solutions to those problems. Agriculture was also a key theme. Pleasing traditionalists, Plaid called for 'medium sized family farms' to be the 'basic unit of Welsh farming'. It also called for the sale of agricultural land to be restricted to 'genuine' farmers and for the development of a 'land development bank' to assist young farmers.



Plaid's social policies had a much more radical feel. In addition to plans for a national minimum wage tied to the cost of living, a 'reduction of the wealth gap' and 'effective controls of prices and unearned incomes', there were also plans for an 'Incomes Maintenance Policy' to replace social security and entailing the scrapping of national insurance contributions and the means test. The IMP, financed directly from taxation and tied to the cost of living, was intended to include a wide range of recipients.<sup>154</sup> Under the IMP the unemployed would be encouraged to do 'socially useful work' of a kind that 'would not deprive anyone of a full-time job' in return for the national minimum wage – a policy which reflected more than a hint of the TVA programmes that had captivated the party's attentions in the late 1930s and 1940s.<sup>155</sup>

Leftist sympathies were also evident in the party's 'industrial democracy' policies which included the immediate repealing of the Industrial Relations Act, workers rights to representation on management boards, the abandonment of the 'stocks and shares' system and the 'nationalisation of industries vital to the nation'. Housing was also addressed. The manifesto called for 'the municipalisation of all privately rented property and second homes' where there was an 'urgent need' in local communities. Healthcare was also addressed. 'Community health centres' and 'community hospitals' were favoured means of delivering health services, with responsibility for health services 'devolved' to county and district councils. Here support for local (public) services was the key, with little mention of the steps necessary to pay for them.

Plaid's education policies combined the modern and the traditional. The rapid expansion of nursery and technical education (paid for by the money that a Welsh

government would not 'waste' on defence) topped a list of priorities. Others included a national craft apprenticeship scheme, and a radical overhaul of higher education in Wales. The University of Wales came under scrutiny. It would be enlarged to include polytechnics, colleges of education and the Open University. The federal scheme of the university would be strengthened with 'one or two colleges at most' designated as 'centres of excellence' in each discipline 'to avoid wasteful duplication'. A college of 'business and industrial affairs' would also be established, together with a second medical school (in Swansea), a veterinary school and a 'centre for transport studies'. More controversially a desire was expressed to:

Prevent money from being wasted on university expansion for the sake of reject English students.

Local government was also addressed, with expansion of powers for local authorities, 'open governance' and 'new powers to establish industry' all featuring prominently. Concerns relating to the use of language in government were also addressed.<sup>156</sup> Bilingual documents, 'instantaneous translating equipment in all areas of public debate, as well as 'officials capable of transacting business in Welsh as well as English' in all departments of public service, combined pragmatic solutions with others which were much more controversial. Europe (a contentious issue in the party from the late 1960s onwards) was also addressed, the party advocating a referendum as a favoured solution to a troublesome issue, whilst support for a 'fourth' channel completed the party's package.

Distinctively local themes were also developed in the campaigns through local publications. Plaid – unlike Labour – could seek to set its own agenda, despite limited coverage in the UK dominated media. In addition to the publication of *Triban*, Plaid's activists in Caernarfonshire produced another newspaper, *Yr Herald Ni*, which



focussed on local issues and aimed to undermine the local *Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald*'s traditionally anti-nationalist rhetoric.<sup>157</sup> Twenty thousand copies of *Herald Ni* were distributed on the last weekend of the February election campaign.<sup>158</sup> For the October election campaign the party produced 'special election editions' of the *Welsh Nation* for both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, distributed free as election newspapers. In Caernarfonshire, housing was the main concern. Plaid pointed to the fact that the local housing waiting list consisted of 1,800 people, amongst the highest in Wales. 'Housing Action Areas' – to include Llanberis, Trefor and parts of Caernarfon – would be created to solve the problem.<sup>159</sup> Further aid in the form of 100 per cent mortgages charged at an interest rate of five per cent to those earning less than £50 a week would also be provided by a State Advances Corporation. Moreover, Gwynedd County Council would also be encouraged to buy houses that went up for sale in the private sector to ensure that local housing needs were met. This initiative aimed at expanding the highly visible and successful work done by local housing associations, such as Tai Gwynedd.<sup>160</sup>

Silicosis, poor TV reception, pensions and 'the crisis of local authority rates' which had been 'brought about by grant allocations' (and ultimately second homes) tapped into an emotive and highly charged local issue. Jobs were once again addressed, but with a few new ideas – Wigley discussing 'Japanese contacts', 'an electronics industrial park' and an 'economic development officer' employed by the local council.<sup>161</sup> Similar themes were also addressed in Merioneth, although agriculture received a more prominent billing. Here, in addition to local party newspapers, Plaid produced a pamphlet, *Success to Merioneth Farmers*, especially for the constituency. It utilised themes that were also aired in a draft pamphlet on agriculture, *Protect our*



*Farms*, also written in 1974.<sup>162</sup> The 'problem' of the Common Market – 'a disaster for Welsh farmers' – provided most of the propaganda for these pamphlets. As Plaid argued:

Faced with the rapidly rising costs (especially cereal prices sanctioned for the benefit of the big French and English producers) our livestock, dairy and poultry farmers are actually unable to cover their costs, whilst home prices are kept down by subsidised imports from the EEC.<sup>163</sup>

Rising farming costs in the 1973-74 period such as 'fuel – 80 per cent', 'feed 50 per cent', 'fertiliser 40 per cent' and 'machinery 15 per cent' also provided valuable propaganda in Merioneth.<sup>164</sup>

The content of Plaid policy statements did not vary from February to October. The only discernible difference in October was that Thomas and Wigley were new constituency MPs and thus had their own records to defend. Thomas compared his campaign to being 'hailed in front of your bosses after a six month probation period'.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, both Thomas and Wigley's record in the intervening months was impressive. Both quickly established themselves as effective community MPs. Their energetic activism placed Labour in a difficult position. When Labour was attentive, and found solutions to local problems, Plaid claimed the credit. When the government did not, the Plaid propaganda machine attacked its failures. Press reports of Thomas and Wigley's activism provided valuable election propaganda for the party in October. Thomas's 'achievements' after February had surpassed expectations. Eight Commons speeches, three hundred Commons questions and dealing with a thousand constituents' letters (on themes varying from farming to silicosis, pensions, social security and devolution) as well as campaigns for new factories aptly fitted in with his campaign slogan 'On with the work'. As *Y Cymro* reported, 'his record since

February will help him defend the seat'.<sup>166</sup> The same was true of Wigley, who also received credit for an energetic approach. As *Y Cymro* again reported, Wigley had delivered an equal number of commons speeches, dealt with five thousand constituents' letters and dealt with another 175 problems through his local 'surgeries'. Agriculture, local rates, new factories, silicosis were prominent constituency concerns.

However, as the local press reported, the October election was notable not only for the fact that 'there were far more green badges than red ones around', but also for the hostility of the campaign, 'the bitterest election fought by Labour for twenty years'.<sup>167</sup>

There had been 'local difficulties' in Caernarfonshire in February. Plaid had responded to those problems with an approach that was more common in Chicago than Cesarea. When the local Conservative candidate attempted to 'smear' Wigley by associating Plaid Cymru with Cymdeithas 'antics', he was warned by a local Plaid official that continuing the attacks might be detrimental to his health. They stopped.<sup>168</sup>

But these were minor problems compared to the hostile Wigley-Sherrington confrontation in October, when 'smear' campaigns were launched by both sides and when one political confrontation ended in a mass brawl in Caernarfon's 'square'. As the election results indicated, this had little impact on Plaid's reputation. In fact, one or two of the incidents caused amusement. For example, Emlyn Sherrington's left-wing reputation was irresistible to quick-witted Plaid supporters who 'adjusted' his posters to read 'KREmlyn Sherrington'.<sup>169</sup> Labour leaflets proclaiming that Wigley intended to 'sabotage' local tourism by cutting off water supplies to caravan sites. This backfired when Plaid demanded a bundle of the leaflets so that they could deliver them to villages like Rhosgadfan and Rhostryfan which suffered water shortages.<sup>170</sup>



Plaid's victories in Caernarfonshire and Merioneth were the result of a long process of political change, stemming back to the 1960s. Plaid did not win because of one-off protest votes (as its continued success in the region from 1974 to the present day confirms). Victory was the result of a deep-rooted capacity to express the economic and social as well as cultural, interests of the local community. This was built up through unobtrusive attacks which exploited changing circumstances and promised 'national' solutions. But success was not just about Plaid popularity. Like Labour in the 1950s and early 1960s, its success depended on the unpopularity or inefficiencies of its political opponents. The Conservative and Liberal parties (whilst contesting local elections on a more regular basis by the early 1970s) did not present a realistic challenge. Labour's domination was undermined by its lack of roots, organisation and credibility by the mid 1970s.



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61. Despite the fact that the Welsh population only amounted to 5% of the British total, spending on sickness benefit was 8.5%, unemployment benefit 5.2%, invalidity allowance 9.0%, industrial injury benefit 11.9%, supplementary benefit 6.0% and retirement benefit 5.2% in 1971-72.

62. In the 1950s there had been concern that Labour's agriculture policy statements 'ill-fitted Welsh needs'. See Chapter Three. In the early 1970s Labour's Welsh agricultural and rural policies were designed by Cledwyn Hughes, Gwynoro Jones and Caerwyn Roderick.

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84. Author's interview with Bert Thomas.

85. *Ibid.*

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88. *Ibid.*

89. J. C. Williams to Cledwyn Williams, 19 November 1973, Lord Roberts MS.

90. *Ibid.*

91. Mair Ellis to Goronwy Roberts, 1 March 1974. Lord Roberts MS.

92. 'Report on the General Elections of 1974', Labour Party Wales Archive, File 95. NLW.

93. *Ibid.*

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95. For more on this, see Chapter Two.



96. G. Dudley to Goronwy Roberts, 1 March 1974. Lord Roberts MS.
97. Elizabeth Edwards to Goronwy Roberts, 1 March 1974. Lord Roberts MS.
98. 'Edith' to Goronwy Roberts, 1 March 1974. Lord Roberts MS.
99. Charles Roberts (*Liverpool Daily Post*) to Goronwy Roberts (n.d.). Lord Roberts MS.
100. Ibid.
101. Interview with Emlyn Sherrington, 21 August 2002.
102. Interview with Emlyn Sherrington. Sherrington was also an admirer of Tony Benn.
103. *Y Cymro*, 8 October 1974.
104. Emlyn Sherrington, election pamphlet, October 1974.
105. Ibid.
106. This organisational 'drive' was based on a successful programme carried out by the Conway CLP during the 1960s, one which was in no small measure responsible for Ednyfed Hudson Davies's victory there in 1966. Author's interview with Emlyn Sherrington.
107. 'Report on the General Elections of 1974', Labour Party Wales Archive, File 95, NLW.
108. *Y Cymro*, 15 October 1974.
109. 'Report on the General Elections of 1974', Labour Party Wales Archive, File 95, NLW. Bert Thomas has argued that the Welsh Labour party were largely to blame for this, given that Sherrington's was a political selection, inappropriate in a constituency where personality was equally as important as politics. Sherrington himself has admitted that Caernarfonshire 'was not a socialist seat' but in the words of his predecessor 'a haystack surrounded by boarding houses'. Interview with Emlyn Sherrington 21 August 2002.
110. A. Butt Philip argued that the 1970 general election 'crushed the hopes of success that the Blaid had nurtured since 1966'. A. Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics 1945-70* (Cardiff, 1975), p.123.
111. Wigley, *Dal Ati*, p.203. Wigley writes that he actually wanted to stand for the party in a south Wales constituency.
112. Ibid., p.202.



113. Ibid., p.205. See also author's interview with Dafydd Wigley.
114. Wigley's father was also well known in the constituency as the treasurer of Caernarfonshire County Council.
115. Ibid., p.211.
116. Elfed Gruffydd to Dafydd Williams, 3 April 1971, Plaid Cymru Archive, File C233, NLW.
117. Phyllis Ellis to Dafydd Williams, 8 October 1973. Plaid Cymru Archive, File C233, NLW.
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131. Ibid.
132. Ibid.

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136. Wigley, *Dal Ati*, p.205.

137. *Triban Arfon*, September 1973, Plaid Cymru Archive, File C233, NLW. *Triban Arfon* was the local party's newspaper.

138. Wigley, *Dal Ati*, p.205.

139. See *Y Cymro*, 26 February 1974.

140. *Y Cymro*, 1 October 1974.

141. As has already been suggested in Chapter One, these noisy campaigns were part of Plaid's heritage, formulated initially to circumvent the broadcasting bans imposed on the party after the Second World War.

142. Dafydd Orwig to Dafydd Williams, 19 September 1973. Plaid Cymru Archive, File J235, NLW. Orwig demanded that all branches in the north-west be equipped with 'two or three' loudspeakers, 'radio-cassettes' and 'up-beat music'.

143. Brian Morgan Edwards to Constituency Parties 9 February 1974, Plaid Cymru Archive, File J235, NLW.

144. See *Y Cymro*, 19 February 1974 which argued that 'the weather will make it difficult for Plaid Cymru to cultivate the carnival atmosphere that it needs'.

145. Wigley, *Dal Ati*, p.211.

146. Ibid., p.212.

147. *Y Cymro*, 26 February 1974.

148. Wigley, *Dal Ati*, p.213.

149. Plaid Cymru press release, 23 September 1974, Plaid Cymru Archive, File J235, NLW.

150. Plaid Cymru press release, 12 September 1974, Plaid Cymru Archive, File J235, NLW.

151. *Y Cymro*, 8 October 1974.

152. 'Rich Welsh or Poor British: Plaid Cymru's Manifesto for the 1974 General Election'.

153. Ibid.

154. This was clearly an attempt to reduce the stigma for benefit claimants.

155. The minimum wage was to be set at a higher rate than NIP. For more on Plaid and the TVA see Chapter One.

156. For more on this see Chapter Five.

157. In the 1960s and early 1970s, *Caernarvon & Denbigh's* editor was John Eilian Jones, a regular Conservative party candidate on Anglesey and a renowned opponent of Plaid Cymru.

158. Wigley, *Dal Ati*, p.211.

159. *Welsh Nation: Special Caernarfonshire Election Edition*, October 1974.

160. Ibid. In the early 1970s Plaid Cymru members had been encouraged to invest money in these housing associations. See Plaid Cymru, *Annual Conference Report* (1971), p.43.

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162. Draft pamphlet, 'Protect our Farms', 1974, Plaid Cymru Archive, File J235, NLW.

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164. 'How farmers costs have risen in a single year', no date, 1974, Plaid Cymru Archive, File J235, NLW.

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166. Ibid.

167. Ibid., 15 October 1974.

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# CONCLUSION

## I

This thesis has been largely concerned with the decline of the Labour party in north-west Wales up to 1974. This is not, of course, the end of the story. In the 1979 general election Labour's share of the vote in Caernarfonshire fell to 24.8 (from 34.1% in 1974), and in Merioneth to 24.8 per cent (from 30.9% in 1974). Just four years later in the 1983 general election the party was no longer even a realistic challenger to Plaid Cymru. In Caernarfonshire Labour slumped to third place in a four-way contest, polling under 20 per cent of the vote. In Merioneth Labour came last (also in a four-way contest) polling just 15 per cent of the vote. It was a position from the which the party has still not fully recovered.

By the end of the 1970s Plaid Cymru had thus consolidated its electoral position in the region, extending its majorities in both Caernarfonshire and Merioneth. By the 1983 general election Plaid had gained further and established commanding electoral majorities in both constituencies. It was a position which the party has since preserved, returning substantial majorities in all subsequent elections and developing a strong base in local government.

It has been argued above that these changes were more than a referendum on 'Welshness'. The determinant of change was not simply the growth of Welsh identity. In 1979 – whilst Plaid Cymru was winning electors in Gwynedd – voters even in Gwynedd were rejecting devolution in the referendum on this subject. Plaid Cymru's support was not simply based on devolutionist or separatist sympathies, but on its

capacity to exploit a broader range of grievances and to offer an economic 'solution' wrapped up in a nationalist rhetoric. In the UK and across Europe, 'two-party' political systems were in decline. In Wales this was reflected in the decline of the Labour party but also in the spectacular rejection of the Conservative party. This decline presented new opportunities to credible 'anti-Labour parties'. In England this meant the Liberals. In Wales this meant Plaid Cymru. Yet if Liberal support proved transient, Plaid's support was not. It was built up. Support was (gradually) accumulated.

This emphasis on the erosion of Labour support may seem odd given Labour's success in the 1997 general election (when the party won 34 out of 40 Welsh seats) and its similar success in 2001. The 1997 result reflected the party's unprecedented popularity at UK level, and once more reflected a potent desire to end eighteen years of Tory rule. Yet if Labour did well on the back of this, even in Plaid Cymru heartlands, it only dented Plaid majorities in Caernarfonshire, Merioneth and other parts of north-west Wales. It was only when Plaid committed electoral errors – as in Anglesey in 2001 – that Labour regained some of its support.

The two results are not contradictory because Labour's 'strength' across Wales in 1997 and 2001 disguised many intrinsic weaknesses. Although the party had supported – and delivered – devolution in 1997, it was subsequently trounced in the 1999 assembly elections, losing traditionally safe southern seats in the process. These results, like the extraordinarily low turnout in 2001 – signified a reaction – a disappointment – with the veracity of 'New' Labour's apparent commitment to Wales, which paralleled the disappointment shown after 1970. In north-west Wales,



Labour's support had been based on more than support for devolution, and Plaid's growth was based on more than this as well. Nationalism was a language of discontent, used to erode Labour's base.

This is not to deny the importance of language and culture as influences on voting. Nor is it to claim that voting patterns now are the same as in the past. In 'post-colonial' Wales, in the elections of the period since 1997, some voters are expressing anti-Tory views by voting Labour in UK elections, whilst displaying 'Welsh' concerns by voting Plaid Cymru in National Assembly elections.<sup>1</sup> Plaid Cymru has been working at combining economic and cultural appeals since the 1960s. Labour – sporadically buoyed up by its UK-wide appeal – has done little to re-establish its Welsh credibility in the 1990s. Without a full 'Welsh' appeal – without a pledge to tackle economic and cultural as well as constitutional issues – it has been difficult for Labour to fight back. The 'Welsh' Labour appeal of the 1950s and 1960s has faded.

## II

The pattern of political developments in Wales after 1979 is important as it highlights several themes of this study. As Chapter One noted, Labour's support in north-west Wales was always based on a combination of pro-devolutionist sentiment, support for Labour's 'local' policies, the popularity of the party's programme at UK level and an appeal to local or national identities.<sup>2</sup> These were vital and inter-related strands of Labour success. In the 1940s and 1950s support for Plaid Cymru had been limited by the party's over-emphasis on cultural and linguistic concerns and its almost complete lack of attention to 'serious' social and economic insecurities. This was not a stance



which would enable Plaid Cymru to challenge Labour in north-west Wales – or anywhere else.<sup>3</sup>

However, as Chapters Two, Three and Four demonstrated, a series of changes (both political and non-political) enabled Plaid Cymru's challenge to flourish. Chapter Two showed how changing social and economic factors, evident across the UK, created opportunities to challenge political attitudes in ways which gradually impacted on political loyalties and allegiances in north-west Wales.<sup>4</sup> These, combined with other distinctively local forces<sup>5</sup>, provided the context in which Plaid's challenge developed.

Nevertheless, political allegiances are not built on sand. Chapter Three showed that whilst Labour had been attentive to social and economic change in the 1950s, and to the challenges it faced at local level<sup>6</sup>, its 'solutions' to those problems proved largely ineffective in the 1960s, not only because of economic problems, but also because of poorly constructed policies. Cuts in expenditure, problems with regional aid and other aspects of the Labour government's programme undermined the party's image – and unity – within Wales.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter Four identified the second component of political change. It showed how in the 1960s, Plaid Cymru modernised of both its organisation and policies. These changes provided the platform from which a challenge to Labour's dominance could be made.<sup>8</sup> However, the party's rethinking still had to be conveyed to the electorate. Chapter Five showed how Labour's credibility in north-west Wales was undermined by hostile nationalist propaganda, instigated not only by Plaid but also by an influential local press which had become despondent with the failure of Labour

policy. The chapter thus demonstrated that Welsh politics was not only a matter of policies and personalities, or even of the ‘national question’, but also one of images. Plaid Cymru tapped into local fears over the survival of the Welsh culture and language, and over economic prospects, in order to undermine Labour’s image as a party concerned with ‘Welsh’ aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter Six focussed on the culmination of political change. It showed how Plaid Cymru’s electoral success in 1974 was not the result of a ‘one-off’ protest vote against either Labour or the Conservative government, but instead was the final component of a slow process of changing political allegiances, evident not only in north-west Wales but also in the rest of the UK, where other ‘third parties’ also performed well in 1974.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis has consistently indicated that elections are a competition – and that success is sometimes the result of both a party’s strengths and its competitor’s weaknesses. Attention has thus been paid to the declining credibility of the Liberals and Conservatives as challengers to Labour – but also to Labour’s inability to strike back against its opponents, especially after 1970. Crumbling local Labour organisations declining support among those who tried to ‘set’ local opinions and perhaps the lack of a credible programme for Wales, meant Labour only began to compete once it was too late. The nature of Labour’s campaign in 1974 was not the cause of Labour’s collapse; it reflected a much deeper malaise. Moreover, Plaid’s capacity to combine ‘traditionalism’ with elements of Labour appeal meant it could draw support from Conservatives and Liberals. Contradictory appeals were reconciled by seeing Welsh home rule as a solution to all ills.



### III

As there is no existing account of Labour's decline in north-west Wales, this study has tried to engage with a broader historiographical literature. Historians and sociologists in Wales and elsewhere have displayed a growing concern for 'national identities', their 'construction' and their impact on politics.<sup>11</sup> It is often assumed that Plaid Cymru's growth reflected a renaissance in Welsh national identity, beginning with the linguistic revival of the 1960s. This study contributes to such debates by arguing that a cautionary approach should be taken to these assumptions. As the study demonstrated, it was still feasible to 'feel' Welsh, support the language and vote Labour in 1974, as it was to oppose devolution and support Plaid Cymru in 1979. Plaid Cymru did not win in 1974 because it had cultivated a naturally developing 'nationalist' community, the product of a cultural 'Welshness'. On the contrary, it won and then developed it – a factor which was vital in ensuring continued electoral success in the north-west for the remainder of the twentieth century. In the 1970s, much was challenged which is now accepted. In particular, issues relating to the language – prominent among Plaid activists but less so among voters in the 1970s – have since been elevated into prime features of Welsh identity. Language was not a major 'cause' of Plaid's support – outside a cultural elite.<sup>12</sup>

This study also contributes to historical and psephological debates over the importance of 'national' as opposed to 'local' factors in determining or influencing political choices. As several chapters of the study demonstrated, 'local' experiences and issues were still important in understanding political loyalties in the early 1970s. As Chapter Five stressed, this was particularly so when the importance of those issues



were explained to voters by effective political campaigning. Even in the age of 'TV elections', old-fashioned political approaches remained alive and proved effective. Politics was not suddenly 'nationalised' by the arrival of TV sets in living rooms across the UK. It is possible that some regions of the UK (including north-west Wales) were more susceptible than others to 'local' issues, not because the Welsh were 'different', but because of the continued existence and importance of a distinctive local (especially the Welsh language) press. As the study noted, Plaid Cymru believed that its political message and appeal in 'border' constituencies was severely restricted by a dominant 'English' local press, and by TV aerials tuned to 'English' stations. In north-west Wales 'the media' presented a pro-Plaid face, undermining Labour's attempt to stress its local relevance and 'Welshness'. It is clear from this study that Labour's problems stemmed from the inter-action of 'local' and 'national' (meaning UK wide and Wales-wide) policies and approaches which merged to determine a party's local credibility. The influence of a local Welsh elite, and the local press, in creating a climate of opinion should not be under-estimated. The latter at least provided a vehicle for a political language which provided easy solutions to complex problems, in a rhetoric as attentive to local concerns as Labour's had been in the 1950s.

If there is little literature on Labour's decline in north-west Wales or Plaid's growth to 'revise', there is a substantial literature on Welsh politics which this thesis augments. Much of that literature has focused on class, trade unionism, Labour success and the south, with the literature on north Wales offering a pale reflection of that agenda. This study shows that the history of north Wales should not be an afterthought, a 'footnote' to a history dominated by south Wales. Instead it should be seen as central to the

experience of contemporary Wales. The political history of north Wales in the 1950s-1970s offers insights with a broader relevance. It shows that social class and trade unions are not the only valuable themes in Welsh labour history, a factor which is becoming increasingly obvious even, and perhaps especially, in south Wales now that the veracity of social class as a unifying 'bond' have been questioned by industrial decline. Thus the experience of north Wales – and the approach used in this study – could perhaps be applied in studying political change in other parts of Wales in the 1960s and 1970s.

Devolution has naturally cast a large shadow over the study of recent Welsh history, creating a substantial and often very unhistorical literature. This study suggests that devolution is too often seen as a single issue and studied out of context. There was much more to Welsh politics in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s than devolution. Devolution was just one part of a package of policy proposals and debates which helped shape political change; even if it preoccupied a section of the Welsh speaking elite, it did not preoccupy voters. This study has thus attempted to relocate devolution within its contemporary world, to understand political change by considering UK, Welsh and local social, economic and political images, trends, themes and issues. Equally, it has also emphasised that local trends were part of a much wider and shared European experience. Doubts about the appropriate location of power were part of this. A cultural renaissance and belief in a Welsh identity had a role, but that role needs to be studied, not assumed, and set against other experiences.

## IV



In a field as uncultivated as the recent history of north Wales, some issues inevitably remained under-developed within this thesis. There has been insufficient time to fully evaluate the role of individuals such as Goronwy Roberts, or to compare him with other influential Labourites from the area, such as Cledwyn Hughes.<sup>13</sup> Neither was there sufficient time to compare the rise of Plaid Cymru in Caernarfonshire and Merioneth with the experience of neighbouring constituencies in north Wales, such as Anglesey (which became a Plaid Cymru seat in 1987) or Conwy (which still has not).<sup>14</sup> The way in which Plaid Cymru built up allegiances (and encountered problems) in north-west Wales *after* 1974 sadly remains virgin territory.

In other areas, evidence was tantalising, but sparse. Evidence of support for the Investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1969 and of opposition to devolution in 1979 raised the issue of 'Britishness' and its appeal within Wales. Given the rejection of devolution by local voters in 1979, and the narrow margin in favour of devolution even in 1997, the question of a persistent 'British' identity in the heart of Welsh speaking Wales is both fascinating and compelling. Recently found opinion polls, privately conducted over the last thirty years for the Conservatives, may well shed important light on attitudes to 'Britishness' and the monarchy within Welsh speaking Wales. Recently opened records at the PRO may place debates over the Investiture in a fresh perspective.<sup>15</sup>

Neither was there enough time to develop a full analysis of Labour's Welsh policy problems in the 1970-74 period. As has already been noted, preliminary evidence indicates that Labour became too pre-occupied with devolution after 1970, or that activists were so disillusioned by the failure of the Wilson governments that the



development of new domestic policies and a fresh approach was beyond the party's capabilities. As Chapter Six suggested, the only distinctive elements of Labour's Welsh manifestos in 1974 related to devolution. Other policies lacked the energy and originality of those offered by Labour a decade earlier. Much work remains to be done in understanding why this was the case.

Indeed, much remains to be done on many areas of Welsh social and political history, especially from the early 1970s onwards. The history of the Labour party in Wales is not a closed book. As research for this study has demonstrated, new sources can still be uncovered which shed light on 'older' aspects of the party's history, whilst devolution and the challenge of Plaid Cymru, now spreading to Labour's southern heartland, offers fresh challenges to a new generation of Welsh political historians. Neither has the story of devolution been fully told. To borrow a classic devolutionist phrase, writing the history of devolution, like devolution itself 'is a process not an event'. Placing devolution, national identity and the growth of Plaid Cymru back into a broader context should be a significant part of that process.

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2. See pp.23-66.

3. See pp.94-105.

4. See pp.119-22 and 152-59.

5. See pp.122-55.

6. See pp.164-89.

7. See pp.189-219.

8. See pp.228-88.

9. See pp.289-347.

10. See pp.348-414.

11. See for example R. Fevre and A. Thompson (eds.), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999); J. Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandysul, 1985); D. Balsom, 'The Political Consequences of Welsh Identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1984), pp.160-81; R. W. Jones 'On Process, Events and Unintended Consequences: National Politics and the Politics of Welsh Devolution', *Scottish Affairs*, No. 37 (2001), pp.34-57.

12. If language was not seen as it is now, neither was the environment, with National Parks being seen as an impediment to growth. See pp.???? above.

13. During the course of this thesis, the Goronwy Roberts papers and the papers of the Merioneth Labour party for the 1950s and 1960s were made available. Other unpublished sources no doubts exist.

14. This is now even more interesting given Plaid Cymru's defeat in Anglesey – at the hands of Labour – in the 2001 general election. By contrast, Plaid Cymru's unexpected victory in Conwy in the 1999 Welsh Assembly elections.

15. See for example PRO files series BD43 and BD25 (Welsh Office); PREM 13 (Prime Minister's Office); CAB 164 (Cabinet Office); HO 325 (Ministry of Home Security).



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