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*A Profile*

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GEORGE THAYER

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## 9 *Plaid Cymru & Mebyon Kernow*

*'Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi . . .'*<sup>1</sup>

*'Nyns yu Marow Myghtern Arthur'*<sup>2</sup>

The pacifist tradition of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is also found in many of the Celtic nationalist groups. According to those who are familiar with the activities of the Welsh, Cornish, Irish, and Scottish nationalists\*, the degree of pacifism found in any one of these groups varies in the same proportion as the generally recognized relevancy of its demands and complaints. That is to say, the Welsh and Cornish nationalists, the most docile of the groups, tend to concentrate on the more pertinent problems of their areas while the Irish nationalists, the most pugnacious of the nationalist sects, seem to spend most of their time arguing the merits of outdated questions. Somewhere in between these two extremes are scattered the Scottish nationalists who, because of their diversity, have a capacity not only for pacifism and pugnaciousness but for pragmatism and irrelevance as well.

This rule, however, is not absolute. The Welsh nationalists, although predominately pacifist by conviction, are still capable of violence and, conversely, the Irish nationalists upon occasion can articulate a few reasoned thoughts. Furthermore, every British nationalist sect has its blind spots, its phobias, its idiosyncracies, and its ideological convolutions; but, as a general rule of thumb, the point still applies: that the more relevant and legitimate the claims of a nationalist party, the more pacifist it is.

Contemporary Welsh nationalism was born in 1886 with the establishment of an organization called the *Cymru Fydd* (the Welsh

\* There once was a fifth nationalist group of sorts. Willian Brownrigg, a farmer from Kirkbampton, stood as an independent candidate for Penrith and the Border in the 1951 and 1955 General Elections. He campaigned under a banner of 'Home Rule for Cumberland'. He also advocated the return of land confiscated from Jacobites to their descendants, the increase of mole-catchers' salaries, restrictions on the docking of Clydesdale horses' tails, and legalized cock-fighting during the month of December. He received very little support for his views in either election.

Federation), one of whose founding members was David Lloyd George. The Federation had two aims: the disestablishment of the Church in Wales (which was eventually realized in 1920) and the securing of Home Rule for their country. Coming at a time when the Irish Question was beginning to dominate the political conscience of Britons, these Welsh nationalists hoped to benefit from any concessions granted to Ireland. However, their efforts were fruitless and they made no impact on the Government in Westminster. In 1895, the Cymru Fydd was superseded by the Cynghrair Cenedlaethol Cymru Fydd (the Welsh National Federation) which attempted to bind together all the local nationalist groups into one organization. However, at the inception of this new organization, a split took place between the 'nationalists', represented by the rural Welsh who favoured a clean break with England much in the manner of the Irish, and the 'cosmopolitans', represented by the urban Welsh who wanted to tie their nationalism to English Liberalism. This split destroyed whatever momentum the Movement had and for nearly a quarter of a century, from 1900 to 1924, the Welsh nationalist cause fell by default to the Liberal and Labour Party candidates in Wales who used Home Rule as a means to win the bitter electoral contests in which they were engaged.

During this period, the Welsh nationalists were plagued by a vagueness of attitude towards Home Rule. It was best exemplified in their favourite slogan of the day: 'Codî'r hen wlad yn ei hol' (To raise the old country to its pristine glory). No one ever bothered to define precisely what was to be restored nor did anyone ever clarify what was meant by 'Home Rule' or 'nationalism'. These terms were usually expressed as a jumble of Liberal, jingoistic, and sentimental thoughts that seldom went deeper than a self-righteous demand for independence.

All this changed, however, in 1925 when Plaid Cymru (the Welsh National Party) was established. Its founders realized that no one would ever take their demands seriously unless they organized themselves into a responsible and broad-based political party whose sole interest was the welfare of Wales. They recognized the impossibility of imitating the Irish (who had received their freedom in 1921), because, unlike Ireland, Wales was not an island where rebellion could be carried on under favourable conditions. They also knew that they could not be as intransigent as their Irish cousins and that the only way to success lay through political and economic pressure, reasoned arguments, and electoral activities – all of which they hoped would be backed by a subtle *threat* of violence.

The paramount goal of Plaid Cymru (pronounced Plide *Cum-ree*) has always been Home Rule which its members define today as

complete independence from England. The desire for Home Rule is based on many real or imagined ills. First and foremost, these nationalists believe that all their country's wealth – its coal, iron ore, steel, tin plate, and water – is being removed to England by the English for the benefit of England with no apparent compensation to the Welsh. This, they say, has had many disastrous effects on their country; it has turned many of their valleys black with soot; it has disfigured the topography of the land; it has maintained an unemployment rate that, for over a century, has usually been double the English rate; it has, they claim, debased Welsh traditions; and it has forced over three-quarters of a million Welshmen to emigrate since the First World War. They claim that the only remedy for this situation is to put Welshmen in charge of their own affairs. A distant and impersonal bureaucracy in Whitehall and Westminster, they believe, is unfit to govern Wales properly, particularly since those bureaucrats are predominately Englishmen, with English ideas, English plans, and English goals.

In addition, the Welsh nationalists claim that the English tradition of primogeniture, which guarantees that wealth remains in the hands of the few, is alien to the Welsh tradition of 'perchenthaeth' which roughly translated means the owning of one's home, and infers a co-operative society where everything is owned either by the family or the community. They assert as well that Wales has a tradition of pacifism – based, they claim, on religious beliefs rather than on any inherent Welsh characteristics – which is similarly foreign to the 'nuclear-imperialism' that has been imposed upon them by the English.

Because it does not like this situation, Plaid Cymru has drawn up on paper – as far as is feasibly possible – a complete plan for an independent Wales. Home Rule is no longer a vague ethos that revolves around the mumbo-jumbo of 'pristine glories' but involves the establishment of a political, economic, and social system which these nationalists feel is indigenous to Wales. If they ever came to power, they would set up a parliamentary government in Cardiff (their capital city) whose authority would be decentralized among the communities. This phobia for decentralization stems from a reaction to the apparently 'All-Wise London Government' and also from what seems to be a genuine belief that no amount of centralized cleverness is an adequate substitute for local participation. As a reaction against London's apparent indifference to the safeguarding of Welsh assets, Plaid Cymru would set up a National Industrial Board, a Welsh TUC, a National Development Authority, a Land Board, a Land Bank, a Marketing Board, a Forestry Board, and a Water Board to ensure the proper use of their country's wealth. In addition, the

nationalists would revive the co-operative spirit where all assets would be owned by 'the people'; they would print their own money, fly their own flag, join the UN, issue their own passports, resign from NATO, reorganize the tax structure, and alleviate many other 'inequities' too numerous to name here.

A surprisingly small amount of space is reserved in their policy for that one subject that all outsiders are convinced is the dominant driving force behind all Welsh nationalist activities: the preservation of the Cymraeg language. Nationalists want to preserve it because it is a part of their heritage like their Eisteddfodau, theatres, and art. They do not believe that it should be scrapped just because so few people speak it. Even to these nationalists, the English language would be vital to an independent Wales just as it is vital to Japan, Sweden, and Germany; but they complain that the English, in their desire to discredit Welsh nationalism, play up their desire to preserve their own language as the only policy they have. Nationalists point out that there is no harm in having a multi-language society such as is found in Belgium and Switzerland (which has four) if it does not divide the people and at the same time can preserve some of the country's heritage.

I asked Emrys Roberts, Plaid Cymru's young and dynamic General Secretary, whether a free Wales could afford its independence. He replied that there was no doubt that it could. He pointed out that, between 1948 and 1956, over £40,000,000 more was paid in taxes by Wales to the Exchequer than was returned to Wales in the form of expenditures.<sup>3</sup> Whether or not this figure is actually a true reflection of the situation is difficult to prove but there is no doubt in the minds of the Welsh nationalists that the Exchequer is taking more out than it is putting back. The English critics of these claims point out that Wales receives many services from England that cannot be measured in terms of taxes versus expenditures such as defence, preferential prices, economic protection, freedom of mobility between the two areas, and so forth. To Roberts, this is an absolutely valid argument but it does not outweigh the feeling that Wales could do better on her own. Roberts added that, if independent, Wales would not be saddled with the heavy expenses of defence which burden England as a nuclear power. A free Wales, under Plaid Cymru leadership, would have no army, navy, or air force to support; only an internal police force. The savings from this would, to the nationalists, far outweigh the losses incurred by cutting themselves off from England.

Much of Plaid Cymru's electoral support comes from Welshmen whose view of Wales is as pessimistic as that of the Party. The nationalists have taken advantage of these feelings and their success

in exploiting them has been reflected in the steady growth of support for them at the polls. The Party fought one seat in Caernarvonshire in 1929 and ended up at the bottom of the poll with 609 votes. In 1931, it fought two seats, doubling its vote in Caernarvonshire and winning 30 per cent of the vote for the university seat at Aberystwyth. By 1945, it could claim 6.5 per cent of the vote in the six constituencies in which its candidates stood. By 1959, the Party was confident enough to fight 20 seats (out of 36 in Wales) and it was able to secure 77,571 votes or 5.2 per cent of the total Welsh vote. This total was more than double the Communist Party vote in the entire country for the same election. In 1964, Plaid Cymru fought 23 seats. This time their vote shrank to 69,507, or 4.8 per cent of all Welsh votes cast. However, Plaid officials blame this decline on the high Liberal Party poll. This, they claim, took away whatever gains their party might otherwise have expected and that it represents only a temporary set-back.

The Party's electoral strength is found primarily among the rural Welsh voters. Those people living within a general sweep of land stretching from Anglesey in the north and moving south along the western reaches of Wales to Carmarthen will give nationalist candidates approximately 12 to 21 per cent of their votes. The three rural counties of Pembroke, Radnor, and Brecknock, however, are so thoroughly Anglicized that they will give Plaid Cymru candidates only about 5 per cent of their votes. The same percentage applies to the two populous and industrialized counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth (a county that Welshmen claim as their own but which Englishmen claim is neither English nor Welsh). Over half the population of Wales lives in these two southern counties and, with few exceptions, return Labour Party candidates to Parliament with huge majorities. It is in these two counties that Plaid Cymru realizes that it must make a significant break-through if it ever hopes to establish itself as a potent political force in Wales. It claims it is making some inroads on the Labour vote in this area but, so far, the rush to the nationalists there has been imperceptible.

At this moment, there are approximately 15,000 members of Plaid Cymru and they can be divided roughly into three ideological groups: romantics, pragmatists, and revolutionaries. One of the primary reasons why Plaid Cymru has remained the sole nationalist voice in Wales is that these three groups and their derivatives are allowed to remain within the Party. Plaid Cymru does not toe a narrow, dogmatic political line – so prevalent among the Scottish and Irish nationalists – which encourages split after split.

The romantic Welsh nationalists comprise the smallest faction within the Party, which is unusual for a British nationalist party.

These people are the ones who dream of a Wales that never was and seek a Wales that never will be. For the most part, they are either hold-overs from the old 'pristine glory' days or expatriate nationalists living in England. Together they number no more than 10 to 15 per cent of the Party's membership.

The largest single group within the Plaid – perhaps 80 per cent of all members – are the pragmatists, those members who concern themselves with the relevant problems of Wales. The Party's leadership comes from this group. The President, David Gwynfor Samuel Evans, is perhaps the best-known personality in the Party. He is youngish (mid-forties), a pacifist, a market farmer by trade, a trained lawyer, a Congregationalist, and one of the Party's best vote-getters. Every time he comes into contact with the English authorities, he insists on speaking Welsh; he makes a practice of filing his election papers in Welsh and takes the oath of secrecy in his native tongue as well. The President of the Party since 1945, Evans has been the recipient of a personality cult by his loyal followers. For instance, in *Welsh Nation*, Plaid Cymru's English-language newspaper (its Welsh version is called *Y Ddraig Goch – The Red Dragon*), a double-page spread celebrating his return from an American tour contained six photos of him and such quotes as: 'On television he looks wonderful – strong, handsome, dignified, distinguished and reasonable'. The development of the cult stems in part from what one member described as the Party's 'love of polish'.

Another well-known leader of the Party is Huw T. Edwards, a long-time member of the Labour Party who bolted to Plaid Cymru because, he claimed, the Labour Party in Wales is 'useless'. For many years, Edwards has been known as 'the Prime Minister of Wales'. Harri Webb, the Editor of *Welsh Nation*, Dr R. Tudur Jones, the Party's Vice President, and Emrys Roberts, one of Plaid Cymru's chief tacticians, are also part of this pragmatic group.

The thousands of rank-and-file within this group, from all the indications I have seen, are composed primarily of students, schoolteachers, pacifists and those Welshmen with a sense of history. Unlike other nationalists in Britain, they are quite spirited, fairly free of rancour, and not without a sense of humour.

The revolutionaries within the Party are small in number and operate under a variety of names. One group, approximately 120 strong, is known as 'Cymru Ein Gwlad' (Wales Our Country) and believes in direct action. Its informal leader is Raymond Edwards, a bald, plump and seemingly mild man who teaches mathematics to girls. He speaks disparagingly of the 'Gwynforites' – the Evans pragmatists – because he and his few followers do not believe that standard political tactics are effective. Exactly for what acts of violence

this faction has been responsible is not clear.

Another revolutionary sect within the Party is 'Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru' (Movement for the Defence of Wales) which is otherwise known as 'MAC'. A third faction is the 'Welsh Freedom Army'. The last two groups are of unknown size and strength but it is thought that the membership in all three groups is generally one in the same and that they use different organizational names for different operations. For instance, the Welsh Freedom Army was supposed to be responsible only for the destruction of equipment at the Tryweryn damsite in 1963.

The fourth group, although not strictly revolutionary, would include the operators of the 'pirate' radio station that is known as either 'Radio Wales' or 'Radio Free Wales'. It is a bucket-shop operation that jumps from site to site to avoid the authorities. The transmitters themselves – it claims to have at least fifteen – are weak and can reach listeners only within a five-miles radius. In the hills, this distance is sometimes reduced to less than a mile. The broadcasts are usually 20 minutes long and come on at irregular intervals at the end of the evening just before BBC-TV Channel 5 is about to close down. The programme usually starts with 'Do not turn off your sets . . . you are about to hear the Voice of Freedom! . . .' which is followed by a rendition of 'Men of Harlech' and then by recordings of recent speeches by Gwynfor Evans. The programme closes with the Party's own version of the news.

At one time, Plaid Cymru was considering the possibility of informing the police of the location of one of its transmitters so that the radio operators could be arrested. The Party then planned to test through the courts both the monopoly of the BBC and ITV and the ban on Plaid Cymru party political broadcasts. There is some indication that they may not have to bother. The wireless monopolies are already under fire from off-shore 'pirate' radio stations and informed quarters seem to think that the '50 seat Rule' (which denies party political broadcasts to parties contesting less than 50 seats) may be revoked in the near future\*.

Emrys Roberts claims that the violent actions of a few do not herald a shift in emphasis away from the traditional course of the Party. 'We have chosen the ballot box', he said. 'Any campaign of violent

\* In early 1965, a joint committee from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Parties allowed Plaid Cymru five minutes per year of party-political TV time in Wales. The three major Parties allocated for themselves one hour, one hour and 35 minutes respectively. The radio time is slightly less for the big three but the same for Plaid Cymru. This break has failed to pacify the nationalists. They say they received seven-tenths of the Liberal vote in the 1964 General Election and should therefore be given the same proportion of time.

action in Wales today would be morally unjustifiable and politically foolish. It would alienate rather than win support.' But, he continued, 'that does not mean that Plaid Cymru must remain a timid party, always keeping within the letter of the law. We cannot be expected automatically to bow the knee in milk and water fashion when the rights and wishes of our nation are trampled under foot. Violent action cannot be justified if it is a case of a minority trying to force its views on the majority in Wales. But when it is undertaken in an attempt to force the Government to respect the wishes of the people of Wales, it has ample justification.\*'

He went on to cite the few instances of violence or non-standard political actions in which the Party has been involved. It was, for instance, responsible for the destruction of a bombing station in Llew, Caernarvonshire in 1936. Three members of the Party, one of whom was Saunders Lewis, a noted Welsh poet, playwright, and the Party's President at the time, went to gaol for nine months as a result. In addition, many Welsh nationalists went to gaol during the Second World War for refusing to fight for Britain. They protested that as pacifists they should not be forced to fight; nor did they feel that England had any right telling them - Welshmen - that they had a duty to serve in a 'foreign' army.

In 1958, the leading members of Plaid Cymru turned down an invitation to a garden party for the Queen in protest over the then Minister for Welsh Affairs', Henry Brooke's, remark in the Commons that Wales was legally a part of England. And on one occasion, a group of Plaid Cymru militants organized what can only be described as a 'law-breaking outing' where they descended on to Aberystwyth and committed petty offences. They then ignored the summonses because they were not printed in Welsh.

The two new dam sites at Tryweryn and Clywedog have also been the targets of provocative acts by the Party. In 1963, two nationalists were convicted of destroying equipment at the Tryweryn site. One was sent to prison for 12 months and the other, because of his age (19), was bound over for a year. (Emotions ran so high among the nationalists during the trial that it moved one elderly gentleman to leap to his feet in the courtroom and shout: 'Cymru Am Byth!' (Wales For Ever!), whereupon he was forcibly bundled out of the room.) Officials of Plaid Cymru hasten to point out, however, that they did not officially sanction the activities of the two convicted men and that their actions were directed only against the English authorities and not against the English people. The destroyed equipment

\* Shortly after the 1964 elections, Emrys Roberts resigned as General Secretary and moved to Middlesbrough where he is organizing an industrial Eisteddfod. His successor's name is Elwyn Roberts.

apparently were symbols of Government authority to which they took exception.

At Clywedog, some of the nationalists have bought three acres of land in the area to be drowned by the dam and have subdivided it into 75 lots. Each lot has been sold to four joint owners some of whom live out of the country. All of them have tied up their property in trust or in complicated legal webs so that when the authorities come to negotiate for the purchase of the land they will be dealing with 300 separate owners all of whom are willing to drag their cases through the courts. The Bill which authorized the construction of that dam becomes null and void in December, 1966, and the nationalists are confident that these legal tactics will outlast that date.

Another organization within Plaid Cymru calling itself 'Meibion Glyndwr' (Sons of Glyndwr) claimed in 1963 that it had secreted a large bottle of poison in the Clywedog area that was potent enough to kill anyone who drank the water. Gwynfor Evans, for one, thinks the story a hoax. 'On the fringe of every movement', he said, 'you get loonies'.