

TERROR WITHIN

Terrorism and the Dream
of a British Republic

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

War in the Valleys

Since the 1830s, Wales had remained dormant as a centre for revolutionaries. However, Methodism, temperance and socialism did create the background for the appearance of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, with the coming of the Celtic Revival, independence was again debated. During his tour of the British Isles on behalf of Irish land reform, Michael Davitt spoke at a meeting on Welsh independence. He was thanked by a Welsh lawyer, David Lloyd George. That same year, Thomas Ellis won a 'Welsh Nationalist' seat and joined the Welsh Independent Movement, *Cymru Fydd*. He was joined on 10 April 1890 by Lloyd George, now MP for Caernarfon, who spoke on Welsh independence on 13 June 1890: 'The current of the time is sweeping to nationalism. Wales, in throwing in her lot with Ireland in the self-government struggle, has struck a blow not only for the national rights of another Celtic country, but also for her own.'¹ Lloyd George went on to form 'Young Wales', but the victory of the Liberal Party in 1906 and Lloyd George's acceptance of a Cabinet post killed the 'dream of an independent party for Wales' and, from then on, especially in his treatment of the Irish, Lloyd George proved himself an enemy of Celticism and was regarded as a traitor to his Welsh roots.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party, aware of the value of Home Rule as a way of cadging votes, declared in 1918 its belief in 'self-government', but in their terms of office during 1923 to 1934 and 1929 to 1931 did nothing to further the cause. The result of this frustrating betrayal was the founding of *Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru* (Home Rule Army of Wales) in 1924 and then, a year later, the creation of *Plaid Cymru*, created from self-government groups and dedicated to '[releasing] Wales from the grip of the English'. Nowadays it stands for the promotion of the 'constitutional advancement of Wales' with a view to obtaining 'full national status' in the European Union, but their first aim was to restore the Welsh language. 'We can aim at nothing less than to do away with the English language in Wales.' So wrote John Saunders Lewis, *Plaid Cymru*'s founder. Yet words seemed to achieve nothing; fire was needed.

In 1936 the Air Ministry had established a Royal Air Force bombing school at Penrhos on the Llyn peninsula, right in the centre of a Welsh-speaking area, an action that was seen as an English provocation. Welsh

nationalists were incensed. 'It is a plain historical fact that . . . Llyn has been Welsh of the Welsh, and that so long as Llyn remained un-Anglicised, Welsh life and culture was secure. . . . For Wales, the preservation of the Llyn Peninsula from this Anglicisation is a matter of life and death.'² Protests followed but to no avail. The bombing range committee had already rejected a number of English sites, including the Wash and Holy Island. Then there was an arson attack on the Pen-y-Berth farmhouse on the aerodrome. On 8 September, Lewis, a lecturer at University College, Swansea, the Revd Lewis Valentine and D.J. Williams, a teacher of English literature, reported to Pwllheli police station and handed themselves in for the arson attack.

At the trial under English law at Caernarfon, the jury failed to agree a verdict, and so the three accused were hauled off to the Old Bailey so that their version of 'militant pacifism' should go neither unexplained nor unpunished. Finally found guilty by an English jury, they were each sentenced to nine months; it was the first time since 1839 that Welshmen had resorted to violence in defence of their homeland. It would not be the last. Lewis's speech from the dock of Caernarfon on 13 October 1936 was the first great independence speech in Wales since the fifteenth century. In it, he firmly blamed the English for the actions of the Welsh, 'yet we hold the conviction that our action was in no wise criminal, and that it was an act forced upon us, that it was done in obedience to conscience and to the moral law, and that the responsibility for any loss due to our act is the responsibility of the English government'.³ At the centre of all this was the survival of the Welsh language: 'Welsh literature', said Lewis, 'is one of the great literatures of Europe. . . . And it is a living, growing literature, and draws its sustenance from a living language and a traditional social life. It was my sense of the inestimable value of this tremendous heirloom . . . that first led me . . . to the establishment of the Welsh National Party.'⁴ Lewis also reiterated that independence must come through peaceful means: 'I have repeatedly and publicly declared that the Welsh Nation must gain its political freedom without resort to violence or physical force.' Yet there remained a threat, which carried with it a memory of the Irish troubles: 'Had we wished to follow the methods of violence . . . nothing could have been easier for us than to ask some of the generous and spirited young men of the Welsh National Party to set fire to the aerodrome and get away undiscovered. It would be the beginning of methods of sabotage and guerrilla turmoil.'⁵

Lewis himself, with his receding hairline, long face and beaky nose, was born in Cheshire, England, in 1893, but brought up among the Welsh community there. It seems it was his experience of fighting in the First World War alongside Irishmen whose loyalties were split that convinced

him of the significance of Welsh independence. Twice nominated for the Nobel Prize, a fierce advocate of the Welsh language (the Welsh Language Society, *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*, was founded after his radio lecture in 1962⁶) and a moving force behind S4C (the Welsh-language television channel), he was also posthumously influential on the Welsh Language Act of 1993. He finally converted to Catholicism, the ancient religion of Wales, and died in 1985.

Despite Plaid Cymru's stand for independence, some felt it was too 'cultural' in its interests and pushed for a more overtly political stand. At the annual conference in September 1949, fifty members walked out. Thus the Welsh Republican Movement started, with its paper *Y Gweriniaethywyr*, which ran between 1950 and 1957 under the editorship of Hari Web and Cliff Bere. This was followed by another paper, *The Welsh Republican*, also edited by Bere. He was born of Welsh parents but brought up in Burnley, Lancashire. He studied at University College, Swansea, but this was interrupted by the Second World War and service in North Africa. Afterwards, he worked for a time in the National Museum of Wales but became radicalised and thereafter fought for Welsh independence, despite a brief period in jail following the burning of a Union Jack. Bere went on to produce a manifesto for the Welsh Republican Movement in 1950.

The document argued for a free, independent Wales, a republic of the 'common people' where 'the king of England [then George VI] . . . shall have no jurisdiction . . . or dominion'. Welsh would be restored as the first language and 'cooperatives' would be the means of production. In order to 'take its place and play its part in the international community of nations' and 'live in close cooperation with the other Celtic peoples', it would be necessary to declare Wales a 'sovereign democratic republic'. It was a powerful piece of rhetoric but it rallied few to the cause and Bere returned chastened to Plaid Cymru. Ironically, he was arrested again during the arson campaign of 1980 and died aged 82 in Glamorgan on 16 September 1997.

In 1952 it was decided that a bombing campaign would be initiated to disrupt water supplies from Wales to the Midlands of England. The Welsh Republican Movement decided to blow up the pipeline from the new Claerwen reservoir to Birmingham. Although this was not finally undertaken, on 19 October 1954 there was an attempted bombing on the Fron Aqueduct, also taking water to England. Then in 1957, despite angry and prolonged protests, Liverpool City Council came up with a plan to flood the Tryweryn valley to create yet another 'English' reservoir. It was bitterly opposed but went through parliament on 31 July 1957. Together, Owain Williams and Emyr Jones, one a former British Columbian logger turned café owner, and the other a poet-student,

decided to dynamite the reservoir. It was the first action of Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (MAC), the Movement for the Defence of Wales. The whole affair was a farce and both men were arrested and imprisoned. Another small bomb blew up a power cable, and that seemed to be that.

That was, until the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, with crass indifference, came to Tryweryn to open the reservoir. Here he was met by a large, angry crowd and men in a green uniform sporting an eagle flag – the Free Wales Army (FWA), founded by Julian Cayo Evans, a horse breeder from Lampeter. On the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising in Dublin, the FWA even marched with its colours flying and in uniform alongside IRA men. The apparent closeness to the IRA was a constant worry to the police and Special Branch. There were also links with the Scottish Liberation Army. Much of the activity of the FWA centred around the formation of the theoretical 'international Celtic guard', which remained a powerful concept. Yet the FWA's activities had practical results, for, at their first meeting with representatives of the IRA and independence fighters from Scotland, it was decided to begin a campaign of expropriation and gun theft.

The Free Wales Army and MAC regularly went on manoeuvres in the hills with their limited arsenal and Nazi-style uniforms. Indeed, they resembled an uneasy mix of the IRA and British National Front, but were, for all their noise, too small, too weak and too well known to the police to be much trouble. Further bombings, of Inland Revenue offices and pipelines, continued. Meanwhile, Plaid Cymru had expelled the flag-waving, uniformed nationalists from its ranks. From now on, MAC and the FWA would represent the armies of Welsh independence and Welsh resistance. MAC and the FWA continued an occasional war of attrition with the British until July 1969, when they prepared for a showdown. On 1 July, Charles would be made Prince of Wales at a ceremony at Caernarfon Castle.

The FWA and MAC trained together, but planned operations separately. The FWA (and Patriotic Front, made up of English-speaking Welshmen) came up with a plan to invade the town and hold it by force until overwhelmed. It would be a 'blood sacrifice' for Wales in the same vein as that of 1916 in Dublin – futile in itself, but possibly the catalyst to bigger events. It would certainly focus the world's attention on Wales. The FWA was reasonably well organised but it was scattered and had few weapons or decent transport, its 'columns' no more than three or four men. Nevertheless, plans were laid of a spectacular order. Keith Griffiths wrote to Evans, 'The plans are fixed for Caernarfon, we rise! . . . we march and take Caernarfon at all costs. Arm ourselves with shot guns, guns, bows, slings, pikes, weapons of all sorts . . . we fight our way into the town!'⁷ Evans fantasised that 'specially trained and equipped volunteers

of 'Cilmeriad' squads will be active throughout the battle. These squads will be responsible for special services and lead the attack on the castle and other key positions in the town held by the enemy [that is, the English]; and also the task of assassinating the Pretender [Charles] if necessary and other key people on the black list.⁸ If all else failed (so the fantasy went), '[Evans was] calling in the IRA'. Unfortunately, the IRA were not about to ride over the horizon and save the day. Infiltrated by spies and Special Branch, the desperate but comic-opera insurrection was trapped by a series of major arrests. All the leaders were rounded up, their trial coming to court in May and their sentencing to occur on the very day of the Investiture. Evans received fifteen months, Keith Griffiths nine, and so on through the other eight defendants who had been due to lead the uprising. The FWA and Patriotic Front were finished for good.

The commander of MAC, until then unknown to the authorities, had the perfect cover – he was serving as a member of Her Majesty's armed forces. John Jenkins was a sergeant in the Army Dental Corps and later the non-commissioned officer in charge of a Territorial Army drum band whose travels around the country proved perfect cover for MAC reconnoitring. More importantly, Jenkins was one of a handful of professional, dedicated revolutionaries, with a theoretical as well as a practical sense of what needed to be done. He had been brought up by English-speaking parents in Merthyr Tydfil and did not hear Welsh spoken until he left school. Somewhere, his Welshness took hold:

There was no logical reason that could be accounted for environmentally why I should turn out the way I did. . . . As I grew older my feelings of Welshness grew stronger. . . . I am not even Welsh speaking.⁹

Even though a member of the army, Jenkins had an inherent dislike of violence, but he also had a patriotic fervour for an independent Wales:

I took up arms because . . . I felt instinctively that the Welsh national identity, our sacred soul . . . was in the last stages of survival. The military, political and economic wars have long been lost in Wales and the final cultural annihilation [had] . . . gathered momentum. . . . The strategy was military, to achieve a short term mental attitude leading to a long term political settlement. The fight was not to win a military victory, but to create a state of mind.

So, on Investiture Day, MAC's plan was to cause as much mayhem as possible, but without assassinating Charles, which, they believed, quite rightly, would have caused a massively unfavourable reaction in Wales

that might have killed the independence movement.¹⁰ Meanwhile, on 30 June 1969, the day before the investiture, the first bomb went off in a post box in Caernarfon. Then two members of MAC, Alwyn Jones and George Taylor, laid a bomb in an alley between government offices.¹¹ Misconnecting the bombs' wires, the two men were blown apart – MAC's first casualties and the first deaths in the whole campaign since the 1950s.

As part of 'Operation Cricket', thousands of police, soldiers and Special Branch were in the town, two Royal Navy minesweepers swept the Menai Straits and a large boom was laid across Caernarfon harbour. Frogmen and patrol boats also guarded the Royal Yacht. It did not prevent another bomb going off just as the twenty-one gun salute occurred. Twenty-two detonations were counted by onlookers but edited out of television's footage. Other bombs either failed to detonate or went off mysteriously, as when a soldier was killed when his truck blew up for no apparent reason. The police realised they had a second threat to deal with. Clues were scarce but they had interviewed Jenkins before and knew one of his associates, Frederick Alders. In September 1969 they interviewed Jenkins again but found nothing. However, ever persistent, they raided the two men's homes on 2 November, only now to find several sticks of dynamite. Alders, newly married, turned Queen's evidence; Jenkins was sentenced to ten years on 20 April 1970 (and released in 1976). The war was over but the struggle continued.

Indeed, with Plaid Cymru's disappointing showing in the election of 1970, things seemed to have quietened down, but in 1979 an arson campaign began against English holiday homes. Meanwhile, another bombing campaign had been organised by the Workers' Army of the Welsh Republic, whose acronym 'WAWR' also meant 'Dawn'. Yet another group had left bombs during 1981. This group, called Meibion Glyndŵr (Sons of Glendower), also bombed the Welsh Office in Cardiff. Yet again the police and Special Branch had to go into action, and eight suspects were arrested. One, Dafydd Ladd, was given nine years for possession of explosives; he had been helped by Jenkins, who again went to prison, again for two years.

Republican views were not confined to Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but included the wider Celtic community: Cornwall and the Isle of Man also have long associations with republican nationalism. In Cornwall this was first associated with Tyr ha Tavas (Land and Language). In the 1930s Henry Jenner founded the original organisation, which became Mebyon Kernow in 1949. Agitation followed, especially around the use of the Cornish language and the Cornish flag. In 1966 the 'party' (more properly a pressure group) erected a statue to An Gof, a Cornish rebel who had finally been defeated by the English at the Battle of Deptford Bridge in 1497. In 1967 Mebyon Kernow won its first-ever seat on

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1. Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Revolution* (Ceredigion: Y Lolfa Cyf, 1993), p. 83.
2. Saunders Lewis, 'Why we Burnt the Bombing School', in Reginald Reynolds (ed.), *British Pamphleteers*, vol. 2 (London: Allan Wingate, 1951), pp. 289–300, at p. 291.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
6. The talk was called 'The Fate of the Welsh Language' and was broadcast on 13 February 1962.
7. Roy Clews, *To Dream of Freedom* (Ceredigion: Y Lolfa Cyf, 1980), p. 225.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
10. A bombing campaign told the police that, although the FWA were out of action, another force was active. Actually there were two forces, as a lone bomber, more violent than MAC, was also on the loose during 1969. When caught, he turned out to be Robert Trigg, a Sheffield student from Cardiff. He was sentenced to five years.

Notes

11. George Taylor and Alwyn Jones (neither of whom spoke Welsh) were known as the 'Abergele martyrs'.
12. *Western Morning News*, 133, vol. 47, p. 70.
13. Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Revolution*, p. 40.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
15. *Celtic and Republican Nations Magazine*, vols 1-2 (Summer 1973), p. 9.
16. Manx Museum archive, L6/MNP.
17. Manx Museum archive, MS09618
18. *Celtic and Republican Nations Magazine*, vols. 1-2, p. 9.
19. Manx Museum archive, MS09618
20. Manx Museum archive, L3/POB.