



DENIS COSLETT

1939-2004



Denis Coslett, RIP

Welsh Republican, Free Wales Army Commandant, Political activist; born Carmarthen 12 September 1939; married Averil Webb (one daughter and two sons deceased); died Llanelli, Carmarthenshire 20 May 2004.

In Wales during the troubled decade of the 1960's, men and women attempted to turn the dream of freedom into reality. For the first time since the days of Owain Glyndwr, armed Welshmen stood beneath the ancient flag of their forefathers and challenged English rule.

Despite united opposition in Wales to the flooding of the Tryweryn Valley in Meirionydd in 1965, Liverpool Corporation was nevertheless able to turn it into a reservoir, with the loss of a Welsh-speaking community called Capel Celyn. If Welsh anger at the flooding had been the stone to start the threat of an avalanche of militant nationalism, then the bombing of the Clywedog Valley in response to attempts by 13 English local authorities to turn it into a reservoir acted as the boulder which sent the whole mass crashing down the mountains. All over Wales, groups of young men formed into columns of the Free Wales Army. One particular recruit who was to become a commandant was Denis Coslett.

Coslett was born in Carmarthen in 1939. Short, dark-haired, lean, and hard-bodied, he seemed the archetypal Welshman. He had considerable reserves of nervous energy and his speech, in both Welsh and English, was fluent and excitable. His reasons for joining the FWA were expressed simply: "The future of the Welsh language and nation looked bleak, and I believe that the FWA was born from a love of our language and our country." Coslett was of the opinion that an independent Wales would never be won by constitutional means alone because the only language understood by the British State was one backed up by violence. "Force is to diplomacy what bullion is to banknotes", he said, quoting John Jenkins, a sergeant in the British army who was subsequently sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for his part in carrying out explosions in the name of Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru ("Movement for the Defence of Wales").

Having been conscripted at the age of 18, Coslett did his military service as an infantryman with the Royal Welch Fusiliers and later sailed the world as a merchant seaman. Returning to Wales, he worked as a shot-firer in the small private mines that proliferated in the anthracite coalfield of west Wales after nationalisation of the industry in 1947. It was an accident underground that had cost him the sight in his left eye.

In 1966, Sinn Féin sent the Free Wales Army an invitation to attend its parade in Dublin to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising. In response, a contingent of 80 uniformed FWA men marched behind Coslett who carried the Red Dragon Flag.

Coslett and the Free Wales Army offered their services to the stricken villagers of Aberfan near Merthyr Tydfil where, in October 1966, a coal tip slid into the valley, killing 116 schoolchildren. The relatives of the deceased were only given financial assistance after the FWA intervened on their behalf. The gratitude of the Parents Association towards the FWA was tangibly expressed when Coslett was presented with an engraved gold watch. He considered the watch to be his most treasured possession.

The leader of the Free Wales Army was a charismatic young man named Julian Cayo Evans, a breeder of Palomino horses and an accomplished accordionist who had a flair for publicity.

The FWA's military campaign was to eventually result in the arrests of several of its members in dawn raids. They were roughly handled by the police and brought to trial at Swansea. Some of them were sentenced at the end of a 53-day trial, which culminated (too neatly to be a coincidence, some observers thought) on the very day of the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon on 1 July 1969. Denis Coslett was among the nine men charged under the Public Order Act with a variety of offences that included membership of a paramilitary organization and the handling of firearms and explosives. One was dismissed, two were found not guilty and six sentenced to terms of imprisonment, with three sentences suspended. Commandants' Cayo Evans and Coslett were each given 15 months.

In Coslett's speech from the dock, which he delivered in Welsh before sentence was passed, he reminded the judge, Mr Justice Thompson, that he had learned violence in the British army, ending with a typical flourish: "I sought to serve Wales and now I am prepared to suffer for Wales. I am ready for your sentence. Free Wales!" The veteran nationalist Saunders Lewis, who had served in the First World War and was no pacifist, regarded the FWA as soldiers fighting for Wales and made a point of attending their trial, while many others showed sympathy for the accused men.

Having set his face against the constitutional approach of Plaid Cymru, Coslett was to remain outside mainstream politics for the rest of his days. His last years were spent in practicing the martial arts at which he was adept and writing Rebel Heart

(2000) and Patriots and Scoundrels (2004), in which he collected his poems and speeches and gave his own defiant account of the turbulent events in which he had played a part.

Stephen Coyle



Cymru Rydd

On 19 June 2004 in Aberystwyth, *Cymru Rydd*, a Welsh Republican party was established. The new party incorporated the membership of Cymru Annibynnol / Independent Wales Party as well as signing on new members to the Welsh Republican cause.

Some Plaid Cymru members voiced their concern over what they see as a rival on the national political stage. Cymru Rydd's organiser, Steve Curry, clarified the situation when he said, "A growing number of patriots have become dissatisfied with Plaid Cymru's murky constitutional aims, apologetic and compromising approach, and the willingness of its elected members to swear allegiance to the Anglo-British Crown. Cymru Rydd is a natural home for those who want a genuinely democratic and self-governing Welsh Republic. What we offer is straightforward - power back to our people, the Welsh Nation."

The constitutional Aims of the party are:

- 1) To democratise power in Wales; and
- 2) To secure independence for Wales as a Republic.

Cymru Rydd intends to deliver the message that Wales' continued powerlessness and subsequent social and economic deprivation at the hands of the British State can be overcome when enough people demand change. It happened in the former Soviet Union. It can happen in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Simon Gruffydd Foster
Cadeirydd, Cymru Rydd
www.freewales.info