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## THE LIBERAL PARTY AND WALES, 1945-79\*

'To a marked degree, Liberalism and nationalism were fused, and in a real sense the Liberals were the party of Wales and the vehicle for its growing national consciousness.'<sup>1</sup> Professor Kenneth O. Morgan's graphic words convey the intrinsically close relationship between the Liberal Party and Welsh issues and aspirations from the 1860s until the First World War, since the growth and success of the party in Wales at both parliamentary and local level had coincided with the evolution of a powerful sense of Welsh national identity. From the 1880s onwards in particular, it was the Liberal Party which had taken up Welsh issues—land reform, temperance, education reform and, above all, the disestablishment of the Welsh Church. The *Cymru Fydd* movement, which attracted much attention and support to Welsh home rule for a decade from 1886, remained throughout its life an integral, unquestioned group within the wider Liberal Party, perhaps a major reason accounting for its eventual downfall and failure.

During the 1920s all this was to change. The impact of the depression, particularly the ravages of unemployment and social deprivation, which hit south Wales so hard, made traditional Liberal issues appear anachronistic. Moreover, the acrimonious split between Asquith and Lloyd George in 1916 lived on in the post-war world, particularly in rural Wales. The Liberals' failure to evolve relevant economic, social and international policies in the early twenties, above all the post-war coalition government's failure to implement the majority recommendations of the Sankey Coal Commission in favour of nationalising the mines, drained the party's dwindling support in south Wales, and made it appear an increasingly rural movement, constantly harking back to nineteenth-century issues and controversies. The decline of the Liberal Party in Britain between the wars was an intermittent process, subject to varying influences in different regions. In Wales, the party sharply retreated to the rural mid-, north and west of the country. The formation of the National Government in 1931 saw further dissension and fragmentation within Liberal ranks nationally, reflected in rancour and disarray in Wales. The 'doctor's mandate' election of the following October saw the return of four Simonites, almost indistinguishable from the Conservatives, four mainstream Samuelites, who were in the event to leave the government in

\* I am most grateful to Professor Kenneth O. Morgan for a great deal of assistance in the preparation of this article, and for a number of most helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The new Liberalism and the challenge of Labour, 1885-1929', ante, VI (1972-73), 290.

1932, and a curious Lloyd Georgian family group, also four in number (Lloyd George, his daughter Megan, son Gwilym, and Major Goronwy Owen, whose sister-in-law Gwilym had married), who were in fact the sole Liberals in the Commons to oppose the National Government throughout.

By this time it had become apparent that Lloyd George's personal influence and charisma in Wales were visibly in decline. The dramatic new programmes to tackle the scourge of unemployment which had poured from Liberal presses during the second half of the twenties—culminating in the famous 'Orange Book', *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, in 1929—had little, if any, Welsh dimension. Lloyd George's advisers and confidants were all Englishmen, and Liberal politicians in Wales frequently distanced themselves from his pledges, unable or unwilling to associate the policy statements with their own localities.<sup>2</sup> During the 'thirties, Lloyd George's personal appearances in Wales became increasingly infrequent, his influence more and more in decline. His British 'New Deal', which he unveiled to his Bangor constituents in January 1935, proved to be little more than a damp squib. Ironically, in the general election of June 1945 his seat of Caernarfon Boroughs, retained by the Liberals in the by-election held three months previously after his death, fell to the Conservatives by 336 votes, a grim portent for the future.

Even so, rural Wales remained one of the few Liberal strongholds in 1945. Some within the party's ranks, fully sensitive to an invigorated *Plaid Cymru* challenge and to an array of nationally-minded Labour candidates like Cledwyn Hughes, Huw Morris-Jones, Goronwy Roberts and Eirene Jones, were anxious that it should draft specific Welsh proposals. Emrys Roberts, a thirty-five-year-old barrister, firmly on the left-wing of the party and standing in Merioneth, set out his views:

I am seriously concerned that the Liberal Party should include in its Election Programme a proposal in regard to Wales. Its Welsh Members and candidates do advocate the recognition of the special interests of Wales in post-war reconstruction, the need for the treatment of Wales as a whole, and in particular the establishment of a Secretary of State and a Welsh National Development Council. It is essential for the official Liberal programme to back these demands.

In many constituencies Liberals will be fighting Welsh Nationalist candidates; in all the constituencies they will be fighting Labour candidates. The Labour Party will be considering at its Whitsun Conference a proposal regarding self-government for Wales. It will little avail Liberal Candidates to put forward their

<sup>2</sup> J. Graham Jones, 'Wales and "the new Liberalism", 1926-1929', *The National Library of Wales Journal* XXII (1981-82), 321-46.

own views unless the Party endorses these views. Failure to do so will seriously weaken the case for Liberalism in Wales.<sup>3</sup>

In the event, the party manifesto advocated only 'suitable measures of devolution' which would enable the Welsh and the Scots 'to assume greater responsibility in the management of their domestic affairs'.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout Britain the Liberals were badly equipped in 1945: party organization had ground to a halt during the war, finances were low, and the party was racked by dissension over the number of candidates which it should put up. In the event, 307 Liberals stood (87 per cent of whom had never previously contested a parliamentary election),<sup>5</sup> and of whom a mere twelve were elected. A number of the party's most prominent public figures were defeated, among them Sir Archibald Sinclair, the party leader, Sir Percy Harris, Dingle Foot and Sir William Beveridge. Seven of the re-elected Liberal M.P.s represented Welsh constituencies, although Caernarfonshire fell to Labour and Caernarfon Boroughs to the Conservatives. 'My very hearty congratulations on winning Merionethshire', wrote Professor D. J. Llewelfryn Davies of Aberystwyth to Emrys Roberts. 'When one thinks of the crushing disaster which has overcome the Liberal Party elsewhere, your success is all the more striking.'<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, it had become clear that post-war Liberalism had its own distinctive social composition. Its parliamentary exponents represented a handful of scattered rural areas: mid- and north Wales, Cornwall, Dorset, Suffolk, Cumberland, and the Orkneys and Shetlands. Taken together they had a marked peripheral appearance, giving an impression of remoteness from the centre of power. The party was reduced to dependence almost entirely on agricultural seats, where Labour was inherently weak, above all in mid- and north Wales, north-east Scotland and the south-west. During the fifties, Liberal candidates were to poll more than 20 per cent of the vote in a sprinkling of rural seats throughout Britain, but showed little strength in suburban middle-class constituencies until the general election of 1964. There was also some correlation between areas where Nonconformity remained strong and districts where Liberal support was still buoyant. Traditionally, Nonconformists had flocked to the Liberal camp at a time when church schools and Welsh disestablishment were major political issues, but the close

<sup>3</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers D1/35: confidential memorandum by Emrys O. Roberts, 23 April 1945. I am grateful to Mr. Stanley Clement-Davies, London, for permission to consult these papers.

<sup>4</sup> F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966* (Chichester, 1970), p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> J. S. Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party: a Study of Retrenchment and Revival* (London, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> N.L.W., Emrys Roberts papers, file 31: D. J. Llewelfryn Davies, Aberystwyth, to Emrys Roberts, 30 July 1945.



ties between the Liberals and the Nonconformists remained alive even after 1945, perhaps sustained more by habit than conviction. Of course, during the fifties Labour gradually but surely captured most of the old Welsh Nonconformist radical vote, mopping up middle-class, working-class and agricultural constituencies alike.

Sinclair's unexpected defeat left vacant the party leadership, which led to a prolonged discussion in the party's ranks. Eventually, Clement Davies, M.P. for Montgomeryshire since 1929 and at sixty-one by far the oldest of the Liberal members, was chosen to succeed Sinclair as something of a compromise choice. The Welsh influence was, therefore, strong in the post-war Liberal Party. Congratulating Emrys Roberts on becoming 'one of a very select group in the new House', the chairman of the Radical Action movement commented, 'It does seem as though to get to Westminster as a Liberal one has got to learn to speak Welsh and live in Wales, but perhaps the day will come when Welshmen will carry out the Liberal mission of conversion to their heathen brethren'.<sup>7</sup> The seven Welsh members were certainly a disparate team, lacking cohesion and a common political philosophy,<sup>8</sup> 'a motley group', as one historian has described them.<sup>9</sup> Roberts and Lady Megan Lloyd George (Anglesey) stood firmly on the left wing of the party; the former declared himself in favour of 'Radical Liberalism' and might easily have stood as a Labour candidate.<sup>10</sup> Victor Thompson was to describe him in 1950 as 'stocky, pale-faced, black-haired' and 'nearer to the Labour point of view than anyone else in his tiny party'.<sup>11</sup>

Close to Roberts's political standpoint was Lady Megan, who warmly applauded most of the more radical enactments of Attlee's governments, although in 1945 she had commended herself to the electors of Anglesey as 'a Liberal pure and simple standing for Liberal principles, with a Liberal programme',<sup>12</sup> sharply denying rumours of a pact with local Conservatives.<sup>13</sup> The government's National Insurance Bill, and plans to set up the National Health Service, she described as 'travelling along a great high

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Lancelot Spicer to Emrys Roberts, 7 August 1945.

<sup>8</sup> See the comments in D. M. Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales', in John Osmond (ed.), *The National Question again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandysul, 1985), pp. 78-79.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, 'Clement Davies and the Liberal Party, 1929-56' (unpublished University of Wales M.A. thesis, 1975), p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, 'Strange Death . . .', p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1950.

<sup>12</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 26 June 1945.

<sup>13</sup> *Evening News*, 18 June 1945.

road carved out and laid down by Liberal pioneers'.<sup>14</sup> She remained a staunch supporter of the national rights of Wales, consistently pressing for the appointment of a Welsh secretary of state.<sup>15</sup> 'What Wales is crying out for is not a little titivation or tidying up, but for someone who will fight our battles at a high level', she asserted in the Commons in October 1946.<sup>16</sup> Arguing that there were specific problems 'peculiar to Wales', she quipped of Aneurin Bevan, 'I am not sure that the Minister of Health himself is not a peculiarly Welsh problem'.<sup>17</sup> She dismissed the government's refusal to print the highway code in the Welsh language as 'an outstanding example of official pig-headedness'.<sup>18</sup>

There were persistent rumours that Lady Megan was likely to join the Labour Party.<sup>19</sup> Describing her as 'the only . . . radical left in the Liberal party' in October 1948, Huw T. Edwards appealed to her to throw in her lot with Labour.<sup>20</sup> She remained on friendly terms with Attlee throughout the lifetime of the post-war Labour governments,<sup>21</sup> and it appeared possible that she would fall prey to Herbert Morrison's persuasive overtures to join his party.<sup>22</sup> She would undoubtedly have been a valuable recruit to a party somewhat devoid of talented women members, but she resisted Morrison's persuasion. In an attempt to create an impression of party unity, Clement Davies in January 1949 appointed Lady Megan deputy leader of the Liberals.

In contrast, her brother Gwilym, who had represented Pembrokeshire in 1922-24 and again since 1929, was quite clearly out of tune with his party. He had served in the wartime coalition government, eventually as minister of Fuel and Power from 1942, and continued in office during the 'caretaker' government formed at the conclusion of hostilities, pending the holding of a general election; his Liberal colleagues had by then stood down, reflecting their party's determination to fight as an independent body. His position was most ambivalent by the time the election results became known. He was approached by Sinclair and Sir Percy Harris as a possible Liberal leader, and at about the same time was offered the chairmanship of the Liberal National Party and, also, a place on the Opposition front bench by Winston

<sup>14</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 9 May 1946.

<sup>15</sup> J. Graham Jones, 'Socialism, Devolution and a Secretary of State for Wales, 1940-64', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1989, pp. 139-40.

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1946.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 January 1948.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-1951* (Oxford, 1984), p. 293.

<sup>20</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 November 1948.

<sup>21</sup> N.L.W. MS. 20475C, nos. 3165-66: Attlee to Lady Megan Lloyd George, 4 September 1948 and 10 March 1949.

<sup>22</sup> *The Observer*, 2 January 1949.

Churchill.<sup>23</sup> In 1946 the Liberal whip was withdrawn from him.<sup>24</sup> He rarely associated with the Liberals in the new parliament, and became to all intents and purposes a Conservative, enjoying Tory support in his constituency, where he termed himself a 'National Liberal and Conservative'. 'Gwilym is speaking with Harold Macmillan etc.', reported Lady Violet Bonham-Carter to Lady Megan Lloyd George in November 1947.<sup>25</sup> During the 1950 general election campaign, he supported Conservative candidates even in constituencies where Liberals were standing,<sup>26</sup> and was publicly disowned by the Liberal Party. 'Gwilym of course has caused us a tremendous lot of worry', lamented Clement Davies to Sir Archibald Sinclair.<sup>27</sup> Re-elected by the Pembrokeshire electorate by the slim margin of 168 votes in 1945, he was defeated by Desmond Donnelly for Labour in 1950 (by a mere 129 votes) and (rather like Ramsey MacDonald in 1929) Gwilym ventured north in search of a safer haven, eventually securing election as the Conservative member for Newcastle on Tyne North in 1951, and serving with some distinction as Home Secretary and minister for Welsh Affairs from 1954 until 1957.

Carmarthen's Liberal Member was Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, who had already served as the Liberal M.P. for Cardiganshire from 1923 until 1932, when he had displayed marked independence of spirit and judgement, in particular taking a consistent anti-Lloyd Georgian stand.<sup>28</sup> He was a highly religious and principled individual, a Liberal in the traditional vein, who courted neither ambition nor popularity, ever prepared to take a line of his own. As his wife wrote privately after his death, 'The fact that he did not attain the great heights was due to his lack of interest in the heights themselves. . . . he was not interested in office; all he cared for was the furtherance of Liberal beliefs'.<sup>29</sup> 'He has serious eyes', wrote Thompson in 1950, 'a lean forefinger, which he aims at his listeners, and a school masterly voice.'<sup>30</sup> Jo Grimond recalled Sir Rhys as 'the most delightful and original

<sup>23</sup> Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party, 1895-1970* (London, 1971), p. 249.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>25</sup> N.L.W. MS. 20475C, no. 3168: Lady Violet Bonham-Carter to Lady Megan Lloyd George, 17 November 1947.

<sup>26</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers J3/11: Sir Archibald Sinclair to Clement Davies, 9 January 1950.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* J3/10: Clement Davies to Sir Archibald Sinclair, 6 January 1950 (copy).

<sup>28</sup> See Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Cardiganshire Politics: the Liberal Ascendancy, 1885-1923', *Ceredigion*, V, no. 4 (1967), 335-38; J. Graham Jones, 'Wales and "the new Liberalism"', pp. 330-31; P. J. Madgwick *et al.*, *The Politics of Rural Wales: a Study of Cardiganshire* (London, 1973), pp. 45-52. See also John Emanuel and D. Ben Rees, *Bywyd a Gwaith Syr Rhys Hopkin Morris* (Llandysul, 1980), and T. J. Evans, *Rhys Hopkin Morris: the Man and his Character* (Llandysul, 1957).

<sup>29</sup> House of Lords Record Office (H.L.R.O.), Samuel papers A/155 (XIII) 749: Lady Hopkin Morris to Lord Samuel, 3 August 1957.

<sup>30</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1950.

man I ever met in Parliament. . . . he had upheld the purest doctrine of traditional Liberalism. . . . Hopkin would neither manoeuvre nor compromise himself, nor had he much tolerance for those who did. He had no ambition for office, nor indeed even to hold his seat on any terms other than his own'.<sup>31</sup>

Clement Davies had represented Montgomeryshire ever since 1929. Originally viewed as a radical and an avid supporter of Lloyd George, he remained within the ranks of the Simonite Liberals from 1931 until 1942, subsequently veering sharply to the left in the political spectrum.<sup>32</sup> At his adoption meeting in June 1945 he asserted, 'Members of the Labour Party and myself can walk side by side for a long way. There are many things on which we agree.'<sup>33</sup> Consequently, he faced no Labour opponent in the election, 3,000 local trade unionists receiving a communication from Huw T. Edwards,<sup>34</sup> on behalf of the Transport and General Workers' Union, urging them to support Davies as 'the only progressive candidate'.<sup>35</sup> In August 1945 he became 'Chairman of the Liberal Parliamentary Party' in succession to Sinclair,<sup>36</sup> and immediately set up a Liberal Reconstruction Committee to set in hand the sorely needed reform of the party's organization. He faced an appallingly difficult task; because of his Simonite past, and because of some of the opinions he had enunciated during the war, there was much reluctance in certain quarters to accept him as the leader of the party. Interviewed on his role in 1950, he commented, 'The trouble is I'm acting as Whip as well as Leader. That's roughly like being sheepdog as well as shepherd'.<sup>37</sup>

The two remaining Liberal M.P.s from Wales were less dynamic and charismatic individuals. Roderic Bowen (Cardiganshire)—'a plump Welshman with a polished manner'<sup>38</sup>—had, rather surprisingly, been chosen

<sup>31</sup> Jo Grimond, *Memoirs* (London, 1979), p. 147. Dr. Alan Butt Philip describes Hopkin Morris as 'an individualist in an individualist party, and he held his constituency by virtue of his towering personality rather than because of the effectiveness of his political organization': Alan Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics, 1945-1970* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> J. Graham Jones, 'Montgomeryshire Politics: Clement Davies and the National Government'. *Montgomeryshire Collections*, LXXIII (1985), 96-115.

<sup>33</sup> *Montgomeryshire Express*, 9 June 1945.

<sup>34</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers C3/11: Huw T. Edwards to Clement Davies, 2 July 1945.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., C3/12: circular letter from Huw T. Edwards, Shotton, area secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, 2 July 1945.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 3 August 1945.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1950. Jo Grimond, who succeeded Davies as Liberal leader in 1956, was to write, 'Loyalty, gratitude and admiration bound me to Clem, but I was never quite sure on what branch he would finally settle'. Grimond, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1950.



as Liberal candidate in 1945 in preference to Sir Ifan ab Owen Edwards and Alun Talfan Davies. Like Clement Davies and Emrys Roberts, he was a barrister, who proved himself an eloquent public speaker and a fine debater in the Commons. Finally, the University of Wales was represented by Professor W. J. Gruffydd, a highly respected Celtic scholar and prominent poet and literary critic, with strong nationalist leanings, who had first won his seat in an acrimoniously fought by-election in 1943 when his major opponent, for *Plaid Cymru*, was none other than former party president Saunders Lewis.

When Attlee's government took office in July 1945, Clement Davies declared: 'I pledge myself,—as long as the Labour Government works for a permanent peace throughout the world, and works for the ordinary common man,—I pledge myself to work alongside that Government'.<sup>39</sup> Yet for the small group of Liberal M.P.s, the course of the post-war Labour governments proved to be fraught with tensions and problems, and they found themselves seriously divided time and time again over Labour's legislative proposals. All too often they voted in conflicting ways on the second and third readings of many bills. They supported, for example, the second reading of the Trade Union Bill in April 1946, and subsequently voted against the third reading.

In many ways, Wales benefited immensely from the array of radical industrial and economic policies adopted by the Attlee government, above all its valiant attempts to diversify the structure of the lopsided Welsh economy, its unremitting efforts to secure stable and acceptable employment levels, and its bold initiatives in health and welfare provision. This dynamic range of commitments secured for Labour the support of a large proportion of the Welsh electorate, reflected in increased polls in 1950 and again in 1951 when, as will be shown, the party finally wrested Anglesey and Merioneth from Liberal hands. Even so, it was apparent that the government entertained little sympathy for devolution and administrative changes, a weakness which annoyed many Welsh Liberals. In July 1946 six Liberal M.P.s from Wales sponsored a new clause in the National Health Service Bill which would transfer to Wales the administration of her own hospital and specialist services, a move which evoked some sympathy from Aneurin Bevan, the Minister of Health, who commented, 'God has divided Wales in very unfortunate fashion—although with great beauty'.<sup>40</sup> Clement Davies remained a firm advocate of Welsh devolution. At the Welsh Liberal

<sup>39</sup> *Montgomeryshire Express*, 28 July 1945.

<sup>40</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 July 1946.

Federation rally in May 1947, he claimed that the government's anxiety to rush through legislation was threatening to destroy the House of Commons. 'What is the remedy?', he asked, 'The time has obviously come for a proper system of devolution. There must be a Sub-Parliament for Wales . . . on a true democratic basis. . . . We refuse to be the Cinderella treated with snobbishness and patronising contempt by the two bigger but not older sisters.'<sup>41</sup> He consistently supported devolutionary solutions.<sup>42</sup> When, in the autumn of 1948, the government announced its plans to establish the Council for Wales, a nominated body, Davies and Lady Megan Lloyd George were venomous in their condemnation of the proposal, the former describing the Council as 'a paltry secret chamber' representative of the 'new Soviet of Wales',<sup>43</sup> and the latter dismissing it as a 'scraggy bone, without meat or marrow in it'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, during 1948 the Welsh Liberal Members, incensed by the empty comment of Sir Stafford Cripps, the Chancellor of the Exchequer ('The Government know that in dealing with Wales they are dealing with a nation, not an area'<sup>45</sup>), devoted much energy and attention to Welsh affairs, a pre-occupation which attracted considerable interest, indeed envy, north of the border in Scotland.<sup>46</sup>

'I think that if we press long and hard enough we shall get the Government to see reason—Welsh reason', asserted Lady Megan in February.<sup>47</sup> She herself favoured 'a hetero-political Welsh conference—provided we go there to talk business and not party prejudices'.<sup>48</sup> Later in the year she advocated joint action by Welsh and Scottish M.P.s in the Commons: 'Separately we can be swamped, but joined in a Celtic alliance we should indeed be formidable. It would not be for the first time in our history.'<sup>49</sup> Lady Megan and Clement Davies also led a deputation to Alfred Barnes, the minister of Transport, to press for a north-south road link.<sup>50</sup> Welsh Liberal politicians constantly reminded their fellow-countrymen of their party's role in securing Welsh political reforms over the previous century. In 1946 Hywel Rhys had been appointed Welsh Liberal agent and secretary, a position which had lain

<sup>41</sup> *Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 16 May 1947.

<sup>42</sup> See the *Montgomeryshire Express*, 4 January 1947, for Davies's New Year message as president of the Liberal Federation of Wales.

<sup>43</sup> *Parl. Deb.*, 5th series, Vol. 458 (24 November 1948), cols. 1277-83.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 1337-44.

<sup>45</sup> *News Chronicle*, 26 January 1948.

<sup>46</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 April 1948.

<sup>47</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 10 February 1948.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *News Chronicle*, 4 December 1948.

<sup>50</sup> *Cambrian News*, 14 May 1948.

vacant for a decade.<sup>51</sup> The chairman of the Liberal Party in Wales, Major Parry Brown, asserted, 'The spirit of 1906 is beginning to develop. . . . Our spirit is such that if the Liberal Party died elsewhere it would still go on in Wales.'<sup>52</sup> But beneath the surface friction and tension still abounded, increased by manifold financial and organizational weaknesses. Lady Megan's appointment as deputy party leader had been deeply resented by some in the party's ranks,<sup>53</sup> a resentment increased by her insistent appeal for 'a true Radical programme', to which she added, 'Of course that means shedding our Right Wing', a statement immediately interpreted by many in the party as 'a declaration of war against . . . a substantial majority of its members'.<sup>54</sup> 'No one knows better than you what a hard struggle it is', lamented Clement Davies to Sir Archibald Sinclair, ' . . . I have no end of trouble here, as you can well understand.'<sup>55</sup> Even so, he was optimistic: 'I am convinced that we are on the up grade. . . . There is a new spirit and with it comes confidence. At last they are expressing their pride in the Liberal faith.'<sup>56</sup>

As the term of office of the Labour government drew to a close, Liberals looked to Wales as the scene of a 'renaissance'.<sup>57</sup> The party's manifesto in 1950 promised parliaments for Scotland and Wales 'to deal with matters of particular concern' to those countries.<sup>58</sup> Nationally the 1950 election proved 'an unrelieved débâcle' for the Liberals, who were reduced to 'a music-hall joke', losing 319 deposits out of 475, securing 9.1 per cent of the poll and winning a mere nine seats.<sup>59</sup> Clement Davies had been deeply concerned about his own seat and the prospects of his Welsh colleagues. 'I do not know whether I shall be back here. . . . Even if I do pull it off, it will be "a damned near thing"'. . . . Each of us in Wales will have a very tough fight.'<sup>60</sup> 'No one knows who will be here.'<sup>61</sup> His pessimism proved unfounded. W. J. Gruffydd had been deprived of his seat by the abolition of the university franchise, and Gwilym Lloyd-George, defeated by Desmond Donnelly, had

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, 'Strange Death . . .', p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> *News Chronicle*, 19 December 1949.

<sup>53</sup> *The Observer*, 2 January 1949.

<sup>54</sup> *Western Morning News*, 12 January 1949.

<sup>55</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers J3/3: Clement Davies to Sir Archibald Sinclair, 16 February 1949 (copy).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *News Chronicle*, 19 December 1949.

<sup>58</sup> Craig, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>59</sup> Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party, 1900-1984* (London, 1984), pp. 132-33.

<sup>60</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies Papers J3/10: Clement Davies to Sir Archibald Sinclair, 6 January 1950 (copy).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* J3/12: Davies to Sinclair, 17 January 1950 (copy).

really defected to the Tories long before. But the other five Liberal M.P.s from Wales retained their seats, Hopkin Morris by only 187 votes. Lady Megan increased her slim majority by 848, and Emrys Roberts, his campaign invigorated by a visit from Lord Samuel which he saw as 'a memorable event. . . . No other party had anything like it',<sup>62</sup> lifted his majority from 112 to 1,070. 'Your triumph and Clem's in Montgomeryshire as well as Jo Grimond's and MacDonald's in Scotland are a comfort to us in our defeat here', wrote Sinclair, who was again defeated at Caithness and Sutherland by the agonizingly small margin of 269 votes.<sup>63</sup> Roderic Bowen's majority of 8,038 was the largest of any Liberal member, while Clement Davies was returned by 6,780 votes, writing self-effacingly to Sinclair, 'I am frankly surprised at my return and especially at the support that was ultimately forthcoming in Montgomeryshire'.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1950-51 parliament, Lady Megan and Emrys Roberts, supported by two Liberal members from the west country, Dingle Foot and Philip Hopkins, began a rearguard action against what they regarded as Clement Davies's inclination 'to veer towards the Tories'.<sup>65</sup> The Liberal leader found it necessary to make a public statement that he had 'no intention of compromising the independence of the Liberal Party',<sup>66</sup> a standpoint he maintained in his speech to the annual meeting of the Liberal Party of Wales in May: 'The Liberal Party will not jeopardise its independence or restrict its freedom of action for any price, however great'.<sup>67</sup> Even so, the party was consistently losing major figures to the ranks of both the Conservatives and Labour.<sup>68</sup> Rumours persisted that Lady Megan was on the point of joining Labour.<sup>69</sup> In November the radical group of M.P.s which she led staged a revolt inside the Liberal Party, threatening to join Labour immediately, and causing Davies seriously to consider resigning.<sup>70</sup> 'Don't speak or even think of laying down the leadership. This is the moment to stand fast and fight', urged Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, desperately anxious

<sup>62</sup> H.L.R.O., Samuel papers A/155 (XIII) 101: Roberts to Samuel, 28 February 1950.

<sup>63</sup> N.L.W., Emrys Roberts papers, file 31: Sinclair to Roberts, 8 March 1950.

<sup>64</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers J3/14: Davies to Sinclair, 22 March 1950 (copy).

<sup>65</sup> Roberts, 'Strange Death . . .', p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> *The Times*, 3 May 1950.

<sup>67</sup> *Liberal News*, 26 May 1950.

<sup>68</sup> See Morgan, *Labour in Power*, pp. 292-93.

<sup>69</sup> *The Observer*, 4 June 1950.

<sup>70</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers J3/45: Davies to Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, 15 November 1950 (copy): 'The truth of the matter as it seems to me is this. They are not concerned really about the Party or the country. They are concerned about themselves only and think that their best chance lies through help from the Socialists.'



to avoid Lady Megan as leader. 'Neither Megan nor Emrys Roberts have the slightest desire to leave the Party. They know *how* small a part they would play in the Labour Party.'<sup>71</sup> Davies stood firm, and the rebels backed down, but their threat was the most harrowing manifestation yet of the fundamental dilemma facing the Liberals.<sup>72</sup> As Cledwyn Hughes, the Labour aspirant for Anglesey, told a Newborough audience in December, 'Lady Megan and Mr. Emrys Roberts have shown in deed and in thought that they are very close to the Labour Party'.<sup>73</sup>

It became apparent during 1951 that another general election would not be far distant. A conference of Welsh Liberals at Shrewsbury in July resolved to make a determined effort to 'attract the more moderate and enlightened elements of the Labour movement into a fusion with the Liberals in a new radical progressive party'.<sup>74</sup> It was also decided that the Liberals should 'seek to exploit the present division of opinion in the Welsh Labour Party over the Parliament of Wales campaign' by failing to put up Liberal candidates against sitting Labour members who had openly supported the campaign (such as S. O. Davies, Goronwy Roberts and Tudor Watkins) in the hope that Labour candidates would reciprocate in Anglesey and Merioneth.<sup>75</sup> In October what Harold Macmillan has described as a 'frustrating and frustrated Parliament'<sup>76</sup> came to an end when Attlee was again compelled to go to the country. The Liberals mustered no more than 109 candidates and could aspire towards being at best only a 'bridgehead' (in Philip Fothergill's language) in British politics.<sup>77</sup> Only six Liberal M.P.s were returned, including three—Bowen, Davies and Hopkin Morris—in Wales. All three had been elected without a Conservative opponent. The defeat of Lady Megan in Anglesey by Cledwyn Hughes—viewed as 'a swing to the right' by one prominent Anglesey Conservative<sup>78</sup>—and of Emrys Roberts in Merioneth by T. W. Jones heralded the death-knell of Welsh radical Liberalism. For the first time in sixty-one years, Wales was not represented at Westminster by a Lloyd George. 'There is no doubt', wrote Lady Megan to Lord Samuel, 'that a substantial number of Liberals voted

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. J3/46: Lady Violet Bonham-Carter to Davies, 18 November 1950.

<sup>72</sup> See the *Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 1950: 'A large party can afford to digest a few dissentients. But a small party which splits threatens to become the mere splinter of a splinter.' (Lady Violet Bonham-Carter)

<sup>73</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13 December 1950.

<sup>74</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers C2/5: Welsh Liberal Conference, Shrewsbury, 28 July 1951: Statement of Principles.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. See J. Graham Jones, 'The Parliament for Wales Campaign, 1950-56', ante, XVI (1992-93).

<sup>76</sup> Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune* (London, 1969), p. 352.

<sup>77</sup> Douglas, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

Tory. The truth is that I am too left for the modern Liberal taste.'<sup>79</sup> Viewing the outcome of the election as 'the twilight of Liberalism in Wales', Gwilym Roberts asked, 'What is going to be Lady Megan's political future? Will she stick to the Liberal label or join Labour?'<sup>80</sup> A year later she declined an invitation to stand again as the Liberal in Anglesey, claiming that she had 'latterly been disturbed by the pronounced tendency of the official Liberal Party to drift towards the Right'.<sup>81</sup>

Jones's victory in Merioneth had been facilitated by the decision of the *Plaid Cymru* candidate, Gwynfor Evans, to withdraw, ostensibly because Roberts was a supporter of the Parliament for Wales campaign, but in reality as a tactical manoeuvre to hasten the demise of the Liberal Party in Wales. 'I cannot understand the attitude and behaviour of *Plaid Cymru*', sympathised Idris Foster, '... It seems to me that it was the *Blaid*'s members who put the Labour candidate in his seat.'<sup>82</sup> 'I thought that with no nationalist standing you were safe', wrote Jo Grimond, 'It seems to have been a most cruel stroke that Labour should have gained their votes.'<sup>83</sup>

The new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, anxious to broaden the base of his government, offered Clement Davies ministerial office, probably the ministry of Education, but the Liberal leader, having consulted his colleagues, declined the offer, perhaps with some reluctance.<sup>84</sup> In so doing he preserved the integrity of the Liberals as an independent political party. Even so, the party which Davies kept intact in 1951 had changed beyond all recognition from the movement to which he had dedicated his life in his youth when the old Welsh radicalism, so manifestly in decline in the Liberal Party of the 'fifties, had held sway. Professional people on the political left, the erstwhile mainstay of the Liberals, were now gravitating towards the Labour Party which had decisively, even contemptuously, rejected the old cloth-cap image. The former miners and miners' agents within its ranks had been succeeded by an array of highly educated professionals, especially school teachers, college lecturers and barristers.<sup>85</sup> The three Liberal M.P.s from Wales who survived tended to be on the right of the party (often relieved of

<sup>79</sup> H.L.R.O., Samuel papers A/155 (XIII) 161: Megan Lloyd-George to Samuel, 9 November 1951.

<sup>80</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 October 1951.

<sup>81</sup> Gregynog Hall, Newtown, Liberal Party of Wales MSS., Lady Megan Lloyd-George to W. Shubert Jones, 5 November 1952.

<sup>82</sup> N.L.W., Emrys Roberts papers, file 31: Idris Foster to Emrys Roberts, 28 October 1951 (translation).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, Jo Grimond to Emrys Roberts, 7 November 1951.

<sup>84</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 October 1951.

<sup>85</sup> See J. Graham Jones, 'Glamorgan Politics, 1918-85', in Prys Morgan (ed.), *Glamorgan County History*, VI (Cardiff, 1988), 71-87.

Conservative opposition in their constituencies), and a primarily conservative influence on party counsels.

Churchill's approach to Davies in the autumn of 1951 was, it is generally agreed, a reflection of heartfelt genuine goodwill towards the ailing Liberals, a conclusion borne out by a number of olive branches from the Tories during the 'fifties. Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Asquith's daughter and a personal friend of Winston Churchill, was offered one of the Conservative twenty-minute election broadcast slots by him in 1950, and in 1951 she faced no Conservative opponent in her audacious bid to wrest the highly marginal Colne Valley division of Yorkshire from Labour hands. She herself was a consistent advocate of anti-Socialist election 'pacts' in constituencies where Labour M.P.s had been returned on a minority vote. Such electoral agreements were indeed made at Huddersfield West in 1950, 1951, 1955 and 1959, where Donald Wade's continued re-election could be attributed mainly to the absence of a Tory contender, and at Bolton West in 1951, 1955 and 1959, where Arthur Holt narrowly held on against the powerful challenge of a sole Labour opponent. Both seats in fact fell to Labour in 1964 when Conservative candidates stood. Wales was not the scene of any such formal 'pact' in the 'fifties, but Clement Davies's hold on Montgomeryshire was made more secure by the absence of Conservative opposition in 1951 and 1955; his majority was to fall sharply in a three-cornered contest in 1959. Roderic Bowen, too, was relieved of Tory opposition in Cardiganshire on three occasions in the 'fifties; a keenly fought four-cornered contest was to be the occasion of his eventual defeat by Labour in 1966. No Conservative stood in Carmarthen in four parliamentary contests in the 'fifties, undoubtedly the major factor accounting for Rhys Hopkin Morris's continued re-election in this most marginal, individualistic and unpredictable of constituencies.

Devolution continued to occupy the attention of the Liberal Party to some extent; both Clement Davies and Lady Megan Lloyd George had consistently supported devolutionary proposals in the thirties and forties. Davies's first speech to the 1951 Parliament was devoted to regional devolution and electoral reform,<sup>86</sup> an appeal which fell on deaf ears as Churchill designated the Home Secretary as minister of Welsh Affairs, the new government's sole concession to Welsh national sentiment.<sup>87</sup> The defeats of Emrys Roberts and Lady Megan in October 1951 sharply reduced the involvement of the Liberals in the Parliament for Wales campaign, at whose launch they had played a

<sup>86</sup> *Parl. Deb.*, 5th series, Vol. 493, cols. 353-56.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 75.



prominent role.<sup>88</sup> Roberts enthusiastically supported the idea of a Welsh Covenant to be organized by *Undeb Cymru Fydd*,<sup>89</sup> and Lady Megan appealed for 'a solid national front' made up of 'all Welshmen and women, of all parties and of no party'.<sup>90</sup> The campaign, she argued, would 'develop by its own impetus into the most thorough-going crusade since the days of the Church dis-establishment cry', adopting as its watchwords 'education, persuasion and penetration'.<sup>91</sup> This fervour was not shared by the three Liberal M.P.s from Wales who survived the general election of 1951. Although Clement Davies was nominally a supporter of the campaign, he was compelled to devote most of his flagging energies to ensuring the survival of the party nationally and thus proved reluctant to address campaign meetings.<sup>92</sup> Hopkin Morris was uncharacteristically hostile to the movement from the outset, and Roderic Bowen distanced himself from its activities, later claiming that his halfheartedness was 'because there were too many political viewpoints represented'.<sup>93</sup> Liberal support for the campaign was indeed 'anaemic' in the extreme,<sup>94</sup> as reflected in a paucity of Liberal party workers on the ground and by a feeling amongst older Liberals that they had been 'dragged' into the movement by the enthusiasm of younger elements within the party.

In 1955 the six surviving Liberal M.P.s, including the three in Wales, retained their seats—no mean achievement. The party was heartened somewhat by an array of young candidates of high calibre who had agreed to stand; these included Glyn Tegai Hughes, a lecturer at Manchester University, who waged a lively campaign in Denbigh and polled 13,671 votes. Clement Davies had been seriously ill before the election and was unable to campaign extensively even in Montgomeryshire. In September 1956 he announced his resignation as party leader.<sup>95</sup> The death of Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris in November led to a precarious by-election in the Carmarthen division in the following February, when the Liberals lost the seat to none other than Lady Megan Lloyd George, a convert to Labour since April 1955, by more than 3,000 votes. Only five Liberal M.P.s remained at

<sup>88</sup> See Butt Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>89</sup> Gregynog Hall, Newtown, Liberal Party of Wales MSS., Emrys Roberts to Hywel Rhys, 8 January 1950.

<sup>90</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 17 January 1950.

<sup>91</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 20 September 1950.

<sup>92</sup> N.L.W., Elwyn Roberts papers, file 31: minute book of the Bangor committee of the Parliament for Wales campaign, 18 February 1952.

<sup>93</sup> Butt Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>94</sup> *Welsh Nation*, May 1956.

<sup>95</sup> *Bournemouth Echo*, 29 September 1956.



Westminster, the party's organization at local level was stagnant, financial resources were hopelessly inadequate, there were only thirty salaried agents throughout Britain, and there remained a desperate need for the establishment of a research department to devise radical and progressive new policies.<sup>96</sup> In 1959 again six Liberals were returned, including Bowen and Davies in Wales, though the majority of the latter, who faced a Conservative opponent for the first time since 1950, shrank to an ominous 2,970, the lowest since his initial return in 1929. There were frequent suggestions that the party should reach an electoral agreement with *Plaid Cymru*.<sup>97</sup>

In the wake of the election, Liberals were heartened by the decision of Lord Ogmores, a former minister in Attlee's government, to leave Labour and join their ranks. Welcoming him into 'a very friendly band who find it easy to get on together',<sup>98</sup> Lord Rea warned Ogmores, 'Our present personnel is totally inexperienced. . . . You may find a great amateurishness throughout our organization which has such meagre funds compared with the two big parties.'<sup>99</sup> On a national level, Liberal fortunes soon appeared to be experiencing a marked upward turn. The Labour Party was split on a wide range of issues, Liberal membership figures improved, by-election results were creditable, and the party leadership under Jo Grimond seemed popular, highly respected and attractive. These factors were much less in evidence in Wales, although the party scored moderate successes in the 1961 local council elections in areas such as Cardiff, Newport, Neath and Llanelli. In a by-election in Ebbw Vale in November 1960 caused by the death of Aneurin Bevan, a Liberal candidate, Patrick Lort-Phillips, stood in the division for the first time since the *We Can Conquer Unemployment* election of 1929, and almost saved his deposit with 3,449 votes. Lort-Phillips, at the time actively engaged in attempting to create a fresh radical image for the Liberal Party in Wales, was not an admirer of Grimond's style of leadership. As he wrote to his leader in the following April:

The Party has ceased to exist as an effective political force, and its officers and Executive have become meaningless shadows. The Party is dead. . . . No previous Leader of the Party in all its history has ever treated, or tried to treat, the Party with the contempt and indifference which you do. . . . All power, all initiative is in your hands. There is no-one, no body, no organization to say you nay, or utter a squeak of protest. We have a lot to thank you for. You have brought more dynamism to the leadership of the Party than we have had for a

<sup>96</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers C1/107: W. H. Grey to Lord Byers, 10 March 1958 (copy).

<sup>97</sup> *Liberal News*, 23 July 1959.

<sup>98</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmores papers, file 1, Lord Rea to Lord Ogmores, 18 October 1959.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

long time: and I personally am very grateful to you for that. But you must realize what you have done. You have taken all the strings into your own hands, and the whole success or failure of Liberalism now rests on your shoulders alone.<sup>100</sup>

In the same year, Lort-Phillips published a booklet, *The Future of Wales*, which sharply attacked the Council of Wales and Monmouthshire as 'a mockery': 'it has no right, morally or legally, to speak for Wales'.<sup>101</sup> He argued powerfully for the creation of a democratically elected Council of 100 members, chosen by the local government franchise, a Council which, working in close collaboration with the county and county borough councils, would assume a wide range of responsibilities.<sup>102</sup> The document came down in favour of the appointment of a secretary of state for Wales<sup>103</sup> (already agreed Labour Party policy), and urged the summoning of a Welsh National Convention to draft the new Council's constitution,<sup>104</sup> and the preparation of a Welsh Covenant of at least one million signatures as a 'formal and permanent record' of the case for the Council.<sup>105</sup> Lort-Phillips's work reflected the new emphasis on Welsh nationhood and the need for a Welsh assembly that was so apparent in Liberal circles in Wales in the early 'sixties, and advocated in particular by the new blood in the party, notably by Alun Talfan Davies and E. T. Nevin.<sup>106</sup> 'I hope it gets the publicity it deserves', wrote G. W. Madoc Jones, secretary of the Liberal Party of Wales, 'and hits both the headlines and the imagination of our fellow-countrymen as practical politics.'<sup>107</sup> Fully sensitive to a powerful *Plaid Cymru* challenge, Madoc Jones saw the early 'sixties as a possible turning-point in the fortunes of the Liberal Party in Wales, 'a good moment for re-thinking'.<sup>108</sup> He believed Welsh public opinion should be 'educated . . . in the direction of a Northern Ireland type of Parliament . . . via a Secretary of State for Wales and a Welsh Office'.<sup>109</sup> Such discussions in Wales were stimulated by the appearance in July of the Keith-Lucas Report on local government, which was in turn the Liberal Party's response to the drastic proposals of the Local Government Commission for Wales published in May.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Patrick Lort-Phillips to Jo Grimond, 23 April 1961 (copy).

<sup>101</sup> Patrick Lort-Phillips, *The Future of Wales* (Carmarthen, 1961), p. 8.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. E. T. Nevin, *Wales in the 60s* (London, 1962).

<sup>107</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers C2/9: G. W. Madoc Jones to Clement Davies, 13 August 1961.

<sup>108</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 1: G. W. Madoc Jones to Lord Ogmore, 15 June 1961.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> N.L.W., Clement Davies papers C2/14.

Liberal spirits were raised throughout Britain early in 1962 by the staggering success of Eric Lubbock in the Orpington by-election in March,<sup>111</sup> when a Conservative majority of almost 15,000 in 1959 became a Liberal majority of nearly 8,000. Sadly, only nine days after the Orpington sensation, Clement Davies died at a London clinic.<sup>112</sup> In the by-election which ensued in Montgomeryshire in May, Emlyn Hooson, a Welsh-speaking barrister educated at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, scored another notable Liberal success, raising the Liberal share of the vote by more than 9 per cent and polling more than half the votes cast in a keenly fought four-cornered contest. In the same month, Liberals were heartened still further by encouraging results in local government elections.<sup>113</sup> But these successes bred their own problems. The appointment in 1962 of a chief organizer for Wales, a new appointment, and sharply increased Liberal activity in south Wales (to a large extent abandoned since the 'twenties), led to severe financial difficulties for the party.<sup>114</sup> Each association was required to make an annual quota payment of £100 to the party's central organization,<sup>115</sup> but many proved curiously reluctant to part with their cash. In September Madoc Jones justifiably described the response of the Welsh associations as 'a disgrace to us all. . . . National pride demands that we play our part in the Liberal Revival.'<sup>116</sup> Yet the Welsh associations continued to go their own way, largely unresponsive to prompting from the party's organization. The death early in 1963 of D. L. Mort, the Labour member for Swansea East, a highly industrialized, working-class division, saw yet another by-election in March when the Liberal candidate, Richard Owen, polled 4,895 votes, 15.8 per cent of those cast, a highly creditable performance in a constituency which had seen no Liberal candidate since 1931.<sup>117</sup> Owen, although well pleased with the outcome, was unrestrained in his criticism of the Liberal Party in Wales: 'The result could have been so very much better if only we had received the help we had been promised from so many parts of Wales. Headquarters were excellent in their assistance in so many ways. . . . I shall go along to Pantyfedwen this Easter for one hour

<sup>111</sup> See Donald Newby, *The Orpington Story* (London, 1962).

<sup>112</sup> *The Times*, 24 March 1962.

<sup>113</sup> *Liberal News*, 19 May 1962.

<sup>114</sup> N.L.W., Cardiganshire Liberal Association records, file 94, circular letter from O. Glyn Williams, treasurer of the South Wales Liberal Federation, 2 October 1962.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, memorandum by G. W. Madoc Jones on 'The Liberal Party of Wales—quota scheme'.

<sup>117</sup> A National Liberal had contested the seat in 1945.

only—to tell the Liberal Party of Wales what I think of them. I hope my fight will spur them into more action and fewer words.’<sup>118</sup>

The Swansea East by-election campaign had coincided with the initiation of a ‘Take Wales ahead with the Liberals’ campaign, launched on 1 March by Jo Grimond and Emlyn Hooson in south Wales and simultaneously by Roderic Bowen and Jeremy Thorpe in the north.<sup>119</sup> Appealing for funds, Hooson claimed to be heartened by his party’s performance in local elections, and asserted, ‘The time is now ripe for a demonstration of Liberal strength and enthusiasm in Wales’.<sup>120</sup> Funds were indeed sorely needed, for in south Wales the financial position had become ‘quite intolerable’. An outstanding debt of £300 proved difficult to clear, and the work of the organizer was hindered by financial difficulties. ‘It is virtually impossible for him to visit distant Constituencies and give them the attention they require because of lack of funds.’<sup>121</sup> Clearly, the Liberal position in south Wales remained precarious as the party prepared for the general election which would come in 1964. In the north, on the contrary, in spite of difficulties in the Caernarvon and Conway constituencies, party organization remained buoyant in Anglesey, Merioneth, Denbigh, East and West Flintshire.<sup>122</sup> Montgomery was generally regarded as a safe seat, although the secretary of the North Wales Liberal Federation was critical of the time Emlyn Hooson devoted to his practice as a barrister: ‘I am inclined to think he ought to spend more time on his job as a Member of Parliament or else we shall have another Roderic Bowen, but one who does not spend much time in his constituency’.<sup>123</sup> In the summer the Welsh League of Young Liberals was divided into two federations, covering north and south Wales, but the latter ‘collapsed almost immediately’.<sup>124</sup> Even Cardiganshire, an area with a strong Liberal tradition, had no Young Liberal branch.<sup>125</sup> Ultimately, there was no Liberal recovery in Wales in 1964; the party mustered only twelve candidates, who polled 7.3 per cent of the vote, and Bowen and Hooson were

<sup>118</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 3, Richard Owen to Lord Ogmore, 9 April 1963.

<sup>119</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 42, circular letter from Emlyn Hooson, 11 February 1963—‘Take Wales Ahead with the Liberals’. I am most grateful to Lord Hooson for permission to consult these papers.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> N.L.W., Cardiganshire Liberal Association records, file 94, circular letter, 24 January 1963, from Emlyn Hooson and Dai Rees to all associations of the South Wales Federation of the Liberal Party of Wales.

<sup>122</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 3: Margaret J. Lawson, secretary of the North Wales Liberal Federation, to Lord Ogmore, 3 August 1964.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> N.L.W., Cardiganshire Liberal Association records, file 94, letter from Peter J. Ellis Jones, acting chairman of the South Wales Federation of Young Liberals, to E. Jones, 8 August 1964.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, E. Jones to Peter J. Ellis Jones, 12 August 1964.



returned with sharply reduced majorities, the former's only 2,219. The party's commitment to devolution amounted to no more than support for an elected Council for Wales,<sup>126</sup> a marked retreat from advocacy of a Welsh Parliament in 1959. 'There is obviously a good deal of work to be done in Wales generally on organization', wrote Emlyn Hooson, 'but I think we may do better when we are facing a Labour rather than a Conservative Government.'<sup>127</sup>

Hooson, by now firmly established and highly respected as the leader of the Liberal Party in Wales, was doggedly determined that his party should reach no formal agreement with the Labour government, which was in difficulties because of its small parliamentary majority. In this he was clearly at odds with Jo Grimond, who had been actively advocating a strategy of radical re-alignment in the shape of some kind of Lib-Lab consensus, a strategy shipwrecked by the Labour victory in October 1964. 'I have always doubted Jo's political acumen when it came to the question of using the Liberal Party as the basis of the formation of a new party', he wrote a few years later. 'I violently objected to Jo's idea of a new party of the left and with his tentative approaches to Labour at the 1964 Election.'<sup>128</sup> When Grimond set out in March 1965 his proposals for a working arrangement with the Labour government, Hooson was unrestrained in his criticism. In June the *Guardian's* headline read, 'Coalition offer to Labour by Mr. Grimond',<sup>129</sup> a claim which over-stepped the mark and was firmly repudiated by the Liberal leader.<sup>130</sup> Yet Grimond intimated that 'a serious agreement on long-term policies' might be possible.<sup>131</sup> Widespread alarm in Liberal ranks was reflected in Hooson's statement to the party's executive: 'There is only one course open to the Liberal Party; that is to soldier on in complete independence of any arrangement with Conservatives or Labour and press for policies in which we believe'.<sup>132</sup> He saw a distinct future for the Liberals as 'a radical, non-Socialist party in Britain'.<sup>133</sup> The party's difficulties were compounded in the autumn when Roderic Bowen agreed to accept one of the two deputy speakerships, giving the impression that the Liberals were propping up a Labour government on the verge of defeat. The

<sup>126</sup> *Liberal Partnership in Wales* (Maesteg, 1964).

<sup>127</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmores papers, file 3: Emlyn Hooson to Lord Ogmores, 22 October 1964.

<sup>128</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 43: Emlyn Hooson to Roger Taylor, 14 February 1968 (copy).

<sup>129</sup> See Douglas, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>130</sup> *Guardian*, 25 June 1965.

<sup>131</sup> Douglas, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>132</sup> D. E. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London, 1967), p. 79.

<sup>133</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 42, memorandum on 'Pacts and Alliances'.

Liberals thus lost the opportunity of holding the balance of power in the Commons, and Conservative hopes of an early election were dashed.

Much of Emlyn Hooson's energies were dedicated to the preparation of a Liberal economic plan for Wales. A warm admirer of Lyndon Johnson's Appalachian Bill in the U.S.A., Hooson felt strongly that post-war planning in Britain had lacked initiative and imagination, a major weakness which explained the failure to match the productivity of France, the Scandinavian countries and the United States.<sup>134</sup> He was responsible for the formation of a Welsh radical group charged with preparing a volume entitled 'Brave New Wales', to be edited by J. Geraint Jenkins of the Welsh Folk Museum, as 'a basis for Welsh Liberal policy in the future much as Lloyd George's *Yellow Book* was intended to do the same for the Liberal Party in 1929'.<sup>135</sup> July saw the publication of a plan for mid-Wales, with suggestions for the rejuvenation of its economy and the retention of agriculture as its basic industry.<sup>136</sup> The plan revolved around three main themes—the establishment of a Rural Development Corporation to build up existing towns; a radical overhaul of rural transport facilities, including the construction of trunk roads linking north and south Wales, and Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury; and the expansion of Aberystwyth under the New Towns Act to a population of at least 60,000.<sup>137</sup>

When the election finally came in March 1966, the Liberals increased their representation from nine to twelve, but two seats were forfeited: one was Caithness and Sutherland, the other Cardiganshire, where Roderic Bowen was defeated after twenty-one years. Cardiff South-East and Ogmore were the only divisions in the south in which a Liberal stood. 'Money is, of course, the difficult thing', came the report from Ogmore, 'and we shall fight on a budget that will pare away everything but absolute essentials. We have been caught, financially, on the wrong foot.'<sup>138</sup> The 1966 election saw Labour strength at its zenith, the party capturing thirty-two of the thirty-six Welsh seats, its victory in Cardiganshire seemingly confirming its hegemony over the primarily rural divisions of the western seaboard. Nationally, the new Labour government had an overall majority of ninety-seven. 'The election result has definitely given Lib-Labory the axe once and for all', rejoiced

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Emlyn Hooson to Dr. Glyn Tegai Hughes, 24 March 1965 (copy).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Emlyn Hooson to Lawrence W. Robson, 27 May 1965 (copy).

<sup>136</sup> H. E. Hooson and G. Jenkins, *The Heartland: a Plan for Mid-Wales* (London, 1965).

<sup>137</sup> There is material on the formulation of the plan in the Lord Hooson papers, box 42.

<sup>138</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 3, John Gibbs, honorary secretary of the South Wales Federation of the Liberal Party of Wales, to Lord Ogmore, 3 March 1966.

Emlyn Hooson.<sup>139</sup> Hooson and the other party leaders in Wales were by this time very conscious of a powerful *Plaid Cymru* challenge, which was reflected in the increasing attention given by the media to the nationalist party. In the 1959 general election seven of the eight Liberal candidates had faced opposition from *Plaid Cymru*, which had put up no fewer than twenty candidates. Alarmed by the dynamic nationalist challenge, seen as a real threat to the Liberals, Madoc Jones spoke out:

I believe we have reached a point where we must recognize the Nationalist challenge. We dare not try to ignore it. And I feel sure that a positive and constructive remedy for the situation would be for the Liberal Party of Wales to declare itself an autonomous and quite independent organization—similar to the Scottish Liberal Party which has no affiliation—financially—with the Liberal Party.<sup>140</sup>

The heartlands of rural Wales were beginning to witness what developed into a formidable *Plaid Cymru* onslaught. The party had, by the early 'sixties, formulated coherent social and economic policies which complemented its linguistic and cultural stand, and, as a result, it was building up a dedicated hard core of supporters throughout the Welsh-speaking constituencies on the western seaboard—Anglesey, Caernarvon, Merioneth, Cardigan and Carmarthen—in each of which it was able to attract a creditable share of the vote. The *Blaid's* advance culminated in a dramatic triumph in the Carmarthen by-election of July 1966 for the movement's president, Gwynfor Evans, who won the seat with a majority of almost 2,500 votes, comfortably defeating the Labour candidate, Gwilym Prys Davies (himself a keen nationalist sympathiser), and forcing the Liberal aspirant into an ignominious third place.

The Liberal response to the nationalist challenge was twofold. Firstly, a Welsh Liberal Party came into being on 10 September 1966. The idea had been approved in principle by the A.G.M. of the North Wales Liberal Federation on 14 May.<sup>141</sup> 'Liberalism in Wales is in urgent need of drastic reform', wrote Madoc Jones, 'both as to its organization 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>142</sup> The proposal was far less enthusiastically received in south Wales. Jennie Gibbs, the Liberal

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Emlyn Hooson to Lord Ogmore, 15 April 1966.

<sup>140</sup> G. W. Madoc Jones, 'The Future of the Liberal Party in Wales' (unpublished memorandum).

<sup>141</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 42, circular letter from G. W. Madoc Jones to all secretaries of constituency associations and associated bodies, 22 May 1966.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

candidate for Ogmore in 1966, who was to stand in the division again on two occasions in 1974, wrote, 'The Division is firmly against any independent Welsh party and there is great unease at the suggestion in industrial S. Wales, Cardiff is hedging and Emlyn [Hooson] is using every trick in the trade to get it passed in Sept.'<sup>143</sup> Roderic Bowen, too, disapproved of the proposal,<sup>144</sup> and some of the south Wales divisions attempted to mobilise opposition to the plans,<sup>145</sup> but in vain. Lord Ogmore later became the president of the new party,<sup>146</sup> which was to be based on the Scottish Liberal model, enjoying federated links with the party's national organization—'a logical step' in Jo Grimond's opinion.<sup>147</sup> The change was agreed unanimously by the 200 delegates at the September conference.<sup>148</sup> It gave a powerful fillip to the concept that Welsh Liberals were a distinct force within the British Liberal Party.

It is clear that the formation of the Welsh Liberal Party did enable the movement to attract a number of loyal Welshmen who warmly embraced the opportunity for party policies to comprise a consistent Welsh dimension. Plans were made for the adoption of Liberal candidates throughout Wales.<sup>149</sup> 'I am delighted that we are having a new breed of candidate coming forward', wrote Martin Thomas, the candidate for West Flintshire, in November 1967, '... I have no doubt that the bandwagon is beginning to move.'<sup>150</sup> Spirits rose and optimism increased in Liberal circles in south Wales; as the chairman of the new party wrote to Lord Ogmore in October:

All are agreed that there has *never* been such a splendid spirit prevailing in Liberal meetings. You have no idea the sort of meetings we used to have—not just petty bickering—tho' there was plenty of that, but, often we verged on brawling—and the City of Cardiff Liberal meetings were very often almost stand-up fights.

We have much to be grateful for to you. In the past we have lacked leadership, and only had the weirdies at the helm, and people of standing—and standards—just refused to come to meetings, and things got progressively worse, because the odd-balls got more and more power, and just didn't worry how few people attended meetings, as long as they got their way.

<sup>143</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 3: Jennie Gibbs to Lord Ogmore, 27 July 1966.

<sup>144</sup> Roberts, 'Strange Death ...', p. 90.

<sup>145</sup> *Western Mail*, 9 and 13 June 1966.

<sup>146</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Mary Murphy to Lord Ogmore, 6 June 1967.

<sup>147</sup> *The Times*, 12 September 1966.

<sup>148</sup> *Western Mail*, 12 September 1966.

<sup>149</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Emlyn Hooson to Lord Ogmore, 11 October 1967.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, Martin Thomas to Lord Ogmore, 3 November 1967.



I am greatly heartened and optimistic about the Liberal cause after the couple of meetings we've had with you in the South.<sup>151</sup>

At the party's second annual conference at Llandrindod Wells in June 1968, Emlyn Hooson claimed that 'all internal criticism' of the decision to establish an autonomous Welsh Liberal Party had been 'stilled'.<sup>152</sup> The party, he went on, had become 'the thinking party in Wales . . . the think tank of Welsh politics. . . . Liberalism . . . is more thrustful, it is attracting more people. . . . We must avoid the deadening hand of consensus politics if we are to have thrust and determination.'<sup>153</sup> Later in the same month, it was announced that Emlyn Thomas of Aberystwyth, at the time general secretary of the Farmers' Union of Wales, had been appointed to the newly created post of general secretary of the Welsh Liberal Party.<sup>154</sup>

The second Liberal response to the nationalist upsurge was the introduction of a succession of Home Rule bills in Parliament. Russell Johnston, Liberal M.P. for Inverness, introduced a Scottish Self-Government Bill in November 1966, by which time a Government of Wales campaign was already underway.<sup>155</sup> Welsh Liberals were heartened by the outcome of a National Opinion Poll survey published in January which revealed *Plaid Cymru* support to be running at 4 per cent and the Liberals enjoying a 12 per cent following in Wales.<sup>156</sup> A *Western Mail* poll suggested that 60 per cent of the Welsh electorate supported a domestic parliament for Wales.<sup>157</sup> On St David's Day 1967, Emlyn Hooson introduced a Government of Wales Bill in the Commons which proposed a domestic parliament for Wales, composed of eighty-eight members, to assume responsibility for a wide range of governmental responsibilities including industry, trade, agriculture, education, health and transport. Defence, Commonwealth and foreign affairs, and the administration of general law were to remain the preserve of the Westminster parliament, to which Wales would continue to send its thirty-six representatives. Predictably, the measure made no progress. In April Hooson and Gwynfor Evans participated in a heated debate on B.B.C. television on their parties' policies for Wales.<sup>158</sup> January 1968 saw the introduction of a Government of Wales Bill into the House of Lords by Lord

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., Mary Murphy to Lord Ogmore, 25 October 1967.

<sup>152</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 42, 'The Assize of Youth' (press release).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., box 43, press announcement by the Welsh Liberal Party, 12 June 1968.

<sup>155</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Martin Thomas to Lord Ogmore, 6 January 1967.

<sup>156</sup> *Sunday Times*, 6 January 1967.

<sup>157</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Martin Thomas to Lord Ogmore, 6 January 1967.

<sup>158</sup> See *ibid.*, Emlyn Hooson to Lord Ogmore, 13 April 1967.

Ogmore, but it won the support of only seventeen peers, fifteen of them Liberals, while eighty-six opposed the measure.<sup>159</sup> 'I think your efforts have succeeded in our object of distinguishing our campaign from that of the Nationalist party', wrote Martin Thomas to Lord Ogmore.<sup>160</sup> In March a Parliament of Wales Committee was set up to make arrangements for the presentation of a petition to the Queen requesting a single chamber Welsh parliament, a campaign rather similar to the Parliament for Wales agitation of the early fifties.<sup>161</sup> Elaborate plans were made for the collection of one million signatures at strategic points throughout Wales: 'It is by these means that the extremes of nationalism are arrested and the patriotic fervour of ethnic groups . . . are canalised into positive action.'<sup>162</sup>

Meanwhile, vigorous efforts continued to select parliamentary candidates and build up the party's organization. In the face of considerable pressure to reach some kind of agreement with *Plaid Cymru*, Emlyn Hooson doggedly distanced himself from the nationalist party, writing of Jo Grimond in February 1968, 'I think he is wrong to make cooing noises in the direction of the Nationalists now'.<sup>163</sup> Lord Ogmore conveyed to Hooson the suggestion which came from some sections of the party that an electoral pact with *Plaid Cymru* would bear fruit: ' . . . we should do an under cover deal with them & try & avoid fighting each other at the next General Election'.<sup>164</sup> 'We can only negotiate from strength', he added, 'i.e. at least 25 prospective candidates as soon as possible.'<sup>165</sup> 'I have been building up our strength', replied Hooson, 'and I entirely agree with you that if there are to be any negotiations, it must be negotiation from strength.'<sup>166</sup> By this time, sixteen Liberal candidates had been selected in Wales<sup>167</sup>—only nine had stood in 1966—and a buoyant sense of optimism spread through Liberal ranks. Constituency associations, however, were loath to affiliate to the party's national organization,<sup>168</sup> and detailed organization left much to be desired. When Lord Byers, an elder statesman of the party, undertook a speaking tour of Wales in February, he was appalled by the chaotic

<sup>159</sup> *House of Lords Debates*, Vol. 258, cols. 702-64 (30 January 1968).

<sup>160</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Martin Thomas to Lord Ogmore, 14 February 1968.

<sup>161</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 43, Parliament of Wales Committee circular, March 1968.

<sup>162</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 9; *ibid.*, file 4, Elfyn Lloyd Morris, secretary of the Policy Directorate of the Welsh Liberal Party, to Lord Ogmore, 7 March 1968.

<sup>163</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 43: Emlyn Hooson to Roger Taylor, 14 February 1968 (copy).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, Lord Ogmore to Emlyn Hooson, 27 March 1968.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Emlyn Hooson to Lord Ogmore, 28 March 1968.

<sup>167</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 43, Emlyn Hooson to F. G. Henderson, 14 February 1968 (copy).

<sup>168</sup> N.L.W. Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Rhys Gerran Lloyd to Lord Ogmore, 2 July 1968.

preparations: 'It will be a long time before I accept another invitation to speak in Wales. . . . I think this was just about the last straw. . . . It really is quite shocking that the limited manpower in the Party should be wasted in this way.'<sup>169</sup> Further problems arose over the continued use of the name 'Liberal', which, it was widely felt in the south, hampered the party's revival because of 'the rather doleful image it [was] said to present of old political causes of the past and irrelevance to the present'.<sup>170</sup> It was suggested that 'the Welsh Radical Party' might serve as a more appealing and vote-winning nomenclature. But no change took place; Emlyn Hooson was well aware that the party reaped 'a considerable amount of strength' from the continued use of the name 'Liberal' 'in such areas as Mid-Wales'.<sup>171</sup>

When a by-election took place in Rhondda West in March 1967 on the death of Iorrie Thomas, the *Plaid Cymru* candidate, Vic Davies, caused a sensation, coming within 2,300 votes of toppling the Labour victor. The Liberals failed to put up a candidate. A further by-election in Caerphilly in July 1968 saw a Liberal candidate, Peter Sadler, stand in the division, again for the first time since 1929. Following his adoption, Sadler asserted, 'I am out to win the votes of the radical left. . . . Whichever group emerges successful in this by-election may well become the leader of the radical left throughout Wales.'<sup>172</sup> When questioned on the possibility of a 'pact' with *Plaid Cymru*, he responded, 'There is no point in a pact unless our basic ideals are the same. . . . The few differences between us are fairly basic ones on which it is not possible to compromise.'<sup>173</sup> At a press conference two days before the poll, he claimed, unwisely, 'I think we can be a good third'.<sup>174</sup> In the event, while the Labour candidate was run close by Dr. Phil Williams, the *Plaid Cymru* contender, Sadler polled no more than 1,257 votes, 3.6 per cent of the total. As the party's agent noted in his report on the campaign, 'This was frankly a shambles. . . . Nearly every basic mistake that could be made was made.'<sup>175</sup> He pointed out 'the danger that many people who are really Liberals will be inveigled into the Nationalist camp on the assumption that they and we are after the same thing'. He felt confident that there was 'no basic dislike or hostility' to the Liberals in south Wales. 'It is simply that the Liberals by abdicating in favour of Labour have lost

<sup>169</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 43, Lord Byers to Emlyn Hooson, 6 March 1968.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., Lord Ogmore to Hooson, 27 March 1968.

<sup>171</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Emlyn Hooson to Lord Ogmore, 28 March 1968.

<sup>172</sup> *Caerphilly Advertiser*, 24 May 1968.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> *Western Mail*, 17 July 1968.

<sup>175</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 43, file on the Caerphilly by-election, report by Edward Wheeler.

touch.'<sup>176</sup> A week after the poll, Sadler himself wrote, 'The dirtiness of the whole affair has changed me from a tolerant politician into a person dedicated to fight the *Blaid* as long as I live.'<sup>177</sup>

Problems, financial and organizational, persisted. The party's Aberystwyth headquarters cost £350 a year to run, while the party's decision to abolish affiliation fees created severe difficulties.<sup>178</sup> The movement remained committed to the establishment of a domestic parliament for Wales and was strongly opposed to the proposed creation of large counties in Wales as part of local government reform.<sup>179</sup> The need for a measure of party reorganization remained acute; during 1969 Emlyn Thomas, the general secretary, visited local associations in an attempt to persuade them 'to weld themselves into one strong party each contributing to the success of the other. Isolationism on the part of Associations in the past had been the root cause of the sorry state of the Liberal Party today.'<sup>180</sup> The Liberals went into the 1970 general election still committed to a domestic parliament for Wales.<sup>181</sup> Nationally, 1970 was a disaster with only six Liberal M.P.s (including Emlyn Hooson) returned.<sup>182</sup> In Wales the party's performance was unimpressive, although the Liberal attempting to re-capture Cardiganshire came within 1,200 votes of victory. *Plaid Cymru*, though it sacrificed Carmarthen to Labour, still seemed to be capturing the headlines.

When Merthyr Tydfil was the scene of yet another by-election in April 1972 (occasioned by the death of S. O. Davies), and indeed the scene of yet another *Plaid Cymru* triumph, the Liberal candidate polled a pathetic 765 votes. The Liberal organizer was confronted by an impression of 'enthusiastic chaos', his campaign hampered by 'a shoe string budget', and his efforts undermined by hostile coverage in the south Wales press which 'seriously damaged the Liberal campaign'.<sup>183</sup> His report concluded, 'Never in the history of British politics has any party aroused more enthusiasm and fervour, spent more money, or called in more workers than did the

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 4: Peter Sadler to Ogmore, 24 July 1968.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., Rhys Gerran Lloyd to Lord Ogmore, 12 February 1969.

<sup>179</sup> *Resolutions before the Third Annual Conference of the Welsh Liberal Party at the Royal Pier Pavilion, Aberystwyth, April 1969.*

<sup>180</sup> N.L.W., Welsh Liberal Party archives, file A1, minutes of the proceedings of the Council of the Welsh Liberal Party, Llanidloes, 23 November 1969.

<sup>181</sup> N.L.W., Lord Ogmore papers, file 5, speakers' notes, 2 May 1970—'Wales: Liberal proposals'.

<sup>182</sup> See Cook, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-51.

<sup>183</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 42, report of Kenner Elias Jones on the Merthyr Tydfil by-election, 13 April 1972.



Nationalists at Merthyr'.<sup>184</sup> Welsh Liberalism was still dominated by Emlyn Hooson, who looked optimistically for the 'second coming' of his party.<sup>185</sup> He felt confident that 'the old and wrecking division' between north and south had been 'adequately broken', but believed 'grass roots inspiration' was lacking, the party having become 'too remote from the day to day problems which worry people in the constituencies'.<sup>186</sup> The party targeted Cardiganshire, Merioneth and Denbigh as likely gains in the next general election.<sup>187</sup> Again there was talk of the possibility of co-operation with *Plaid Cymru*,<sup>188</sup> while nationally speculation centred on a re-alignment of British politics around a 'Centre Party'. The dramatic Liberal revival in the general election of February 1974 (although only fourteen seats were won throughout Britain) certainly had repercussions in Wales: thirty-one candidates (compared with nineteen in 1970), the re-capture of Cardiganshire by Geraint Howells, a majority of 4,651 for Emlyn Hooson in Montgomeryshire, a percentage vote which had increased 2.5 times, and a total poll 60 per cent higher than that of *Plaid Cymru* which had contested all the Welsh seats. Ten Liberal candidates had polled more than 10,000 votes, while Dr. David Williams's poll of 15,243 in Denbighshire, coming within 6,000 votes of toppling Geraint Morgan, was the highest Liberal vote in Wales. Only in the three seats in north-west Wales—Anglesey, Caernarvon and Merioneth—was the Liberal performance disappointing. In their October manifesto, the Liberals offered 'a fully proportional system using the single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies' and 'a substantial devolution of power from Westminster' to parliaments in Scotland and Wales where, they claimed, 'alienation and cynicism with conventional policies' abounded.<sup>189</sup> The Liberal vote fell back a little in October, but the party's performance was still creditable; it had contested all thirty-six seats and captured about 16 per cent of the vote, well ahead of *Plaid Cymru*'s static 10.8 per cent share.

Devolution had a prominent place in Welsh political life from the publication of the Kilbrandon Report in October 1973 until the fateful referendum of 1 March 1979. During this period, Liberals in Wales, as elsewhere, were presented with a golden opportunity to work alongside politicians in the other parties. March 1977 saw the conclusion of the oft

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> See Roberts, 'Strange Death', pp. 91-92.

<sup>186</sup> N.L.W., Lord Hooson papers, box 42, memorandum by Emlyn Hooson, 'Proposals for Reorganization of Welsh Liberal Party' [1972].

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., memorandum by Rhys Gerran Lloyd, president of the W.L.P., 13 June 1972.

<sup>188</sup> See Butt Philip, op. cit., pp. 331-32.

<sup>189</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 18 September 1974.

discussed Lib-Lab pact between the Labour prime minister, James Callaghan, and the Liberal leader, David Steel. Emlyn Hooson was a most fervent advocate of such an association, an enthusiasm not shared by many Welsh Liberal Party activists and certainly frowned upon by a considerable element in Montgomeryshire, where his supporters included a substantial conservative component sharply critical of the Liberals' decision to keep in office a Labour government on the brink of defeat. It is significant that in the March referendum, Powys recorded the highest 'no' vote of all the Welsh counties. Although both Hooson and Howells played prominent parts in the devolution campaign, their party reaped little popular support from its advocacy of a Welsh assembly. Indeed, when a general election was held two months after the referendum, the Liberal share of the vote slumped badly, and in Montgomeryshire the unthinkable actually happened: Emlyn Hooson was defeated after a Liberal tenure of the seat for ninety-nine years. A distinct chapter in Welsh political history had come to an end.

The decline of the Liberal party proceeded apace in Wales after the Second World War as the constituencies which had previously remained loyal fell, one by one, into Labour hands. The indices of vigour and resilience which it had displayed on the Celtic fringes suddenly collapsed, and when some revival in Liberal fortunes occurred in the late fifties and early sixties in parts of England, it had little effect on the party's standing in Wales. Jo Grimond wrote in his memoirs: 'Another suggestion Liberals pursued in and out of season was home rule for Scotland and Wales. . . . We made some headway in Scotland and Wales by being the party which had a particular interest in their affairs.'<sup>190</sup> And yet his party failed to don successfully the mantle of the radical-nationalist alternative to Labour in Wales. After the defeats of Emrys Roberts and Lady Megan Lloyd-George in 1951—and the latter's long flirtation with Labour, culminating in her joining the party in 1955 and capturing Carmarthen two years later—Welsh Liberals increasingly appeared a relatively conservative party, thus driving radical thinkers disillusioned with Labour into the arms of *Plaid Cymru*. The gradual fall in the number of Liberal seats in Wales—from seven in 1945 to just one by the late 'sixties—was underlined by an even more dramatic collapse in the Liberal position in local government, where those Liberals who survived sat as Independents. Indeed, the eclipse of the Liberals had been even more marked in municipal government than at parliamentary level. Even before the war, only a few borough councils throughout Britain had a Liberal member.

<sup>190</sup> Grimond, *op. cit.*, p. 208; see also *ibid.*, p. 211.

From 1945 sweeping Labour gains removed the last Liberal councillors, often in total humiliation, in an array of centres. Those 'Liberals' who survived did so either by amalgamation with the Conservatives, as at Bristol or Sheffield, or by standing as nominal 'non-party' independents, as in Wales. Even when there was some revival of the Liberal position in local government, as occurred in May 1962 and, to a lesser extent, a year later, Wales was not the scene of any marked recovery. In a sense, the decision to set up the Welsh Liberal Party in 1966-67 and to take an independent line on a wide range of issues was a reflection of 'the isolation of weakness'.<sup>191</sup> The party emerged as increasingly the political home of the elderly, ever more detached from the mainstream of Welsh political life, many of its younger radicals defecting to Labour, the Welsh patriots embracing *Plaid Cymru*, and some former Liberals finding a congenial home in the Conservative Party. The Liberal appeal and commitment to traditional values and memories were no longer sufficient to win the party mass electoral support in Wales.

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<sup>191</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980* (Oxford and Cardiff, 1981), p. 342.