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THE CARDIGANSHIRE ELECTION OF 1959

During the 1950s Cardiganshire was widely regarded as the safest Liberal seat in the whole of Britain. Indeed, the Liberals had first captured the seat in the epoch-making election of 1868, and from 1880 onwards the party had enjoyed a seemingly impregnable ascendancy, its rule apparently invigorated and reinforced by the deep political schisms of the 1920s. In the general election of 1945 Captain E. Roderic Bowen, who succeeded to the 'sacred trust' of the Cardiganshire Liberal inheritance,¹ was one of only twelve Liberal members returned in the whole of Britain, seven of whom represented Welsh constituencies. Bowen, described at Westminster as 'a plump Welshman with a polished manner',² was often depicted as a political lightweight, but he soon earned respect as a competent platform speaker who made a number of impressive and memorable speeches in the House of Commons.³ He adhered closely to the official party line, displaying little independence of outlook, and in 1948-9 he led the local Liberal Association to resist decisively overtures from Sir Arthur Harford of Falcondale, chairman of the Cardiganshire Tories, that the two parties might field a joint candidate in the next general election.⁴ Bowen was generally popular and respected throughout the county, especially among the farming community, and he easily secured re-election to Parliament in a vigorous three-cornered contest in 1950 and against a sole Labour opponent in 1951 and 1955. Although the early 1950s proved fraught with financial and organizational difficulties for the Cardiganshire Liberal Association, and although the Member's health was far from robust, in May 1955 he was returned to Westminster with a majority of 8,817 votes.

Roderic Bowen was one of only six Liberal Members re-elected in 1955, three of whom came from Wales. His two Welsh colleagues were Clement Davies, MP for Montgomeryshire since 1929 and the party leader since 1945, and Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, Carmarthenshire's MP from 1945 and the former Liberal Member for Cardiganshire from 1923 to 1932. Nationally the party was at the nadir of its fortunes, its future seeming bleak indeed. In September 1956 Clement Davies, by then seventy-

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two years of age, resigned as party leader, and was succeeded by Jo Grimond (Orkney and Shetland), a much younger man who propounded a vision of the Liberals as a dynamic radical centre party capable of winning over disillusioned former Gaitskellite Labour supporters. Decisively fresh, appealing to all classes and strands of the community, almost non-political in appeal, it offered a powerful base from which to challenge Macmillan's Conservative Party.⁵ The change of leadership and new emphasis coincided with a number of impressive by-election performances in England, above all at Torrington in March 1958 when Mark Bonham-Carter (appropriately Asquith's grandson) dramatically won the seat from the Tories, the first Liberal by-election gain since 1929.⁶ Although the Liberals had only six members at Westminster, it did seem as if the party had turned the corner: its financial position improved steadily, a number of previously moribund constituency associations sprang to life, and substantial votes were chalked up in almost every by-election. A modest national revival was indeed under way, in sharp contrast to the torpor and despair experienced by the party in the late forties and early fifties.

Unfortunately for the Liberals, the same sense of throbbing vitality did not surface in Wales. Although there was no reason to doubt the continued re-election of Roderic Bowen and Clement Davies, the death in November 1956 of Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris led to a most precarious by-election in Carmarthenshire where, ironically, the Labour victor proved to be Lady Megan Lloyd-George, the former Liberal MP for Anglesey, 1929-51, and a convert to the Labour ranks only since April 1955. Some commentators saw in her victory the symbolic sounding of the death knell of Liberal Wales.

Nor was Bowen as securely entrenched in his Cardiganshire citadel as a superficial view would suggest. Dissatisfaction abounded because he was regularly engaged in large-scale legal work, allegedly to the neglect of his parliamentary duties. During the May 1955 general election campaign D. J. Jones, president of the Cardiganshire Labour Party, had vehemently accused him of belonging to a tradition of 'playboy M.P.s': 'No man can pursue a private career and do justice to his constituents at the same time. No man can be in

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Cardiff and Westminster at the same time'.⁷ Local tensions mounted when the Member failed to participate in a Commons debate on the Rating and Valuation Bill in February 1957. Councillor Elfed Williams, a member of the Aberystwyth Town Council, proclaimed: 'The Member for Cardiganshire was not there, and Cardiganshire's views were not represented.'⁸ Dissatisfaction with Bowen's performance as a constituency member, combined with news of his ill-health, led to widespread rumours that he was about to resign from Parliament. 'It's all twaddle and nonsense', responded Bowen, 'it's a hardy annual put up by the Labour boys when things are quiet.'⁹

It was indeed apparent, as the Tory government elected in May 1955 ran its course, that Bowen had no intention of standing down. 'Get more women and young people!' was the message to the Cardiganshire Liberal Association in November 1957 by the constituency organizer J. Parry Williams, as he urged the formation of more women's branches and young Liberal groups.¹⁰ 'There is no reason for complacency', warned party president D. Lloyd Jenkins of Tregaron, as he attributed the recent defeat in the Carmarthen by-election to the fact that the local party organization 'was not up to the highest standard'.¹¹ Referring to the county's deeply entrenched Liberal tradition, he proclaimed: 'We can rejoice, not in its survival, but in its revival',¹² while Roderic Bowen depicted the party as 'in a state of high hopes and spacious optimism'.¹³ Warming to his theme, he went on:

We are fast losing the nonconformist conscience and not replacing it by anything. The resulting vacuum will have far-reaching social, moral and political effects. But it is heartening that the Liberal revival springs chiefly from young people and there is a great rebirth of interest in Liberalism at the universities.¹⁴

The following April Jo Grimond, visiting Aberystwyth to address a Cardiganshire Liberal Association rally, urged the party to steer clear of any agreement with local Tories: 'It would be disastrous for this country if all non-Socialists made a cynical pact to keep the Labour Party out of office. The time has come

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for electoral reform so that organized Liberalism can get proper representation in Parliament'.¹⁵ As 1958 drew to a close it became apparent that Harold Macmillan, the new Conservative Prime Minister in succession to Anthony Eden, was likely to seek a new vote of confidence from the electorate. In January Roderic Bowen asserted his belief in the likelihood of an autumn poll, declaring his confidence that his party 'was in finer fettle now than at any time since he had come into public life'.¹⁶ Two months later he urged his local association to prepare itself for the impending fray: 'We have got to be election minded and prepare ourselves for the campaign. Nothing is worse in any sphere than to be over-confident, but I believe it only right to say that my impression is that the Liberals of Cardiganshire are in very good heart indeed.'¹⁷ He encouraged them to 'one supreme effort when the election is upon us', warning them against 'over-confidence'.¹⁸

A similar sense of well-being and self-confidence exuded from the local Labour camp. Although the roots of the Labour Party in Cardiganshire extended back to the 1890s, the party had never succeeded in putting up a candidate in a parliamentary election until the 'doctor's mandate' election of October 1931.¹⁹ Even so, in 1935 the party polled more than 10,000 votes, a feat repeated in 1945. In subsequent general elections Labour support remained remarkably constant in the constituency, leading to renewed optimism within the local party. For the 1959 general election the local Labour Party chose as its candidate Mrs Loti Rees Hughes of Llanelli, a teacher of many years experience, whose husband Alderman W. Douglas Hughes was the political agent to James Griffiths, Labour MP for Llanelli since 1936. Mrs Hughes was herself a long-serving member of the Carmarthenshire County Council and a Sunday School teacher.²⁰ Shortly after her selection as candidate, she declared that 'she was devoting all her time to fight and win Cardiganshire for Labour'.²¹ She spent the summer of 1958 at New Quay, undertaking an extensive 'door to door' canvass.²² Ten prominent Labour MPs agreed to visit the constituency during the following autumn and winter to support her campaign.²³ In November Councillor Geraint Howells of Ponterwyd agreed to act as Mrs Hughes's agent,²⁴ but within a month withdrew his offer because

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of his extensive 'business commitments'.²⁵ The local Labour party sought the advice of W. Douglas Hughes on the conduct of the campaign and was advised that an election fund of £1,500 was essential.²⁶ In February Ron Bundock was appointed temporary, full-time agent at a weekly salary of £10, his appointment to extend from 23 February until the next general election.²⁷ 'We have in Mrs Hughes', proclaimed D.J. Davies, president of the county's Divisional Labour Party, to the annual general meeting a few weeks later, 'a person who has promised, if elected, to act as a full time M.P.'²⁸ 'We in the Labour Party in Cardiganshire', he went on, 'should press home the fact of Mr. Roderic Bowen's continued non-attendance at the House of Commons.'²⁹ Although Bowen's majority exceeded 8,800 in May 1955, it is evident that the Labour Party nationally viewed Cardiganshire as a highly marginal constituency meriting special consideration and a worthy recipient of increased resources.³⁰ The division was the recipient of an annual sum of £50 under a 'scheme of assistance to marginal constituencies' operated by Cliff Prothero, secretary to the Welsh Regional Council of Labour, the sum to be used to facilitate the travel of officers and candidates throughout the constituency.³¹ In a spirited speech to the local Labour Party, Mrs. Hughes outlined the themes she was to make very much her own as the campaign progressed:

How grand it has been to meet your old folk, and what a high percentage of old people are living in the county. How meagre is their pension to meet the soaring cost of living, and what a betrayal of the old there has been in Tory Budgets over recent years. I have been privileged to meet your young people, a very few who remain in the absence of industry and the consequent lack of employment. The young school leavers, 15 years of age and over, are despairing of the future, there is simply no prospect for them. What a great exodus this will mean from a county already suffering so much from depopulation.³²

Yet the local Labour party clearly faced an uphill task. In many parts of Cardiganshire, most notably the rural villages,

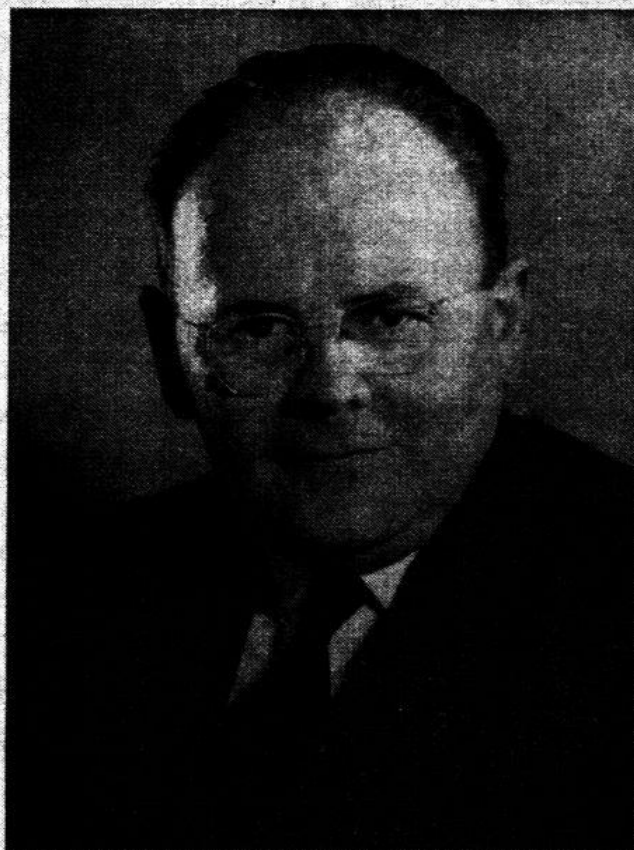
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there was scant interest in Labour politics, and instinctive, unquestioned adherence to the Liberal Party was accepted as a fact of life. At the end of June Ron Bundock wrote to Douglas Hughes of the situation at Llanwnnen, a small village a few miles from Lampeter:

From my own experience in this area it seems evident that we have wasted a lot of time and money in addressing meetings where the attendance has been under six. I think a far better effort in these areas would be to use the loudspeaker during the day time. We would get at far more people and it would reduce the strain on Mrs Hughes. There are also a number of places where the meeting has been held at the school almost a mile from the village - Rhydlewis and Gorsgoch are examples. I am compiling a list of alternative venues. It is amazing how few records we have of this type of thing and I feel it is bound to show dividends when the election comes.³³

A few weeks later Harold Macmillan announced his decision to go to the country on 8 October. Many considered that the outgoing Conservative administration had chosen a highly advantageous moment to secure the renewed confidence of an electorate which still basked in 'the afterglow of the pleasures of one of the most glorious summers since the early twenties' and thus was totally detached from 'the mundane realities of life'.³⁴ Throughout Britain optimism surged through the ranks of Jo Grimond's revitalized Liberal Party, a heartfelt sense of well-being potently confirmed by a commendable poll in the Southend West by-election in the previous January. Since the last general election, the party had fielded impressive runners-up in six by-elections, refuting consistently their previous strongly entrenched image of 'the party of also-rans and lost deposits', and making an audacious bid to secure the support of 'the Radical, non-Socialist elements' uncomfortably lodging in Gaitskill's Labour Party.³⁵ National interest focussed increasingly on the small group of marginal constituencies in rural Wales, among them the two Liberal citadels of Cardiganshire and Montgomeryshire where, it was claimed, 'the ideals of Liberalism,

General Election, 1959 - Cardiganshire Constituency



Roderic Bowen, Q.C., M.A., LL.B.

VOTE ^F_O_R BOWEN
The Liberal Candidate

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**The CANDIDATE who has given faithful service to  
his COUNTY and his COUNTRY**

An election poster on behalf of Mr Roderic Bowen in 1959  
(by courtesy of the National Library of Wales)

as opposed to the extremist elements of the two main parties, still burn brightly'.<sup>36</sup> At the outset it was admitted even by the highly partisan local Liberal press that Cardiganshire's Liberal hegemony faced 'fiery opposition from the more determined than ever Labour opposition'.<sup>37</sup> 'Gone for ever are the leisurely



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days of almost unchallenged superiority', lamented the *Welsh Gazette*, 'when we could muddle through happily if haphazardly.'<sup>38</sup> It took comfort, however, in the 'evidence of a lively public concern, a most encouraging feature'.<sup>39</sup>

The political correspondent of the *Western Mail*, in his review of the constituency, likewise reported 'the thirst for political knowledge and information' reflected in substantial attendance at election meetings 'even in the most outlandish parts of this scattered community'.<sup>40</sup> Even so, the correspondent noted the marked absence of the 'cut and thrust or the tremendous fire and controversy which raged through chapel, town and village' during the twenties and thirties when the deep-rooted rifts in local Liberal ranks had 'resulted almost in a minor civil war'.<sup>41</sup>

Roderic Bowen came before the Cardiganshire electorate as 'a custodian of the great Liberal traditions of the County'.<sup>42</sup> He had achieved some renown nationally through serving as chairman of the Welsh parliamentary party during the previous session, and zealously adopted the slogan, '*Dyn y Bobl - Dyna Bowen*'.<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of the fray, the party headquarters at North Parade, Aberystwyth, proclaimed equally zealously: 'Our organization has never been better prepared for an election'. Bowen and Eben Jones, the county's Liberal organizer, claimed, on completing a tour of the entire county, that they had encountered 'unqualified enthusiasm in all quarters'.<sup>44</sup> Pointing to his fourteen years as Cardiganshire's MP, Bowen went on:

During that period the Labour Party have had four different candidates in the field. All indications are that the county appears to be more determined than ever to endorse its belief in a Liberal Society, and to be no more inclined to embrace Socialism and all it stands for than they have been in the past.<sup>45</sup>

He undertook a personal canvass throughout the county and addressed no fewer than 110 public meetings during the campaign.<sup>46</sup> 'What counts in an election is not enthusiasm', he told his adoption meeting at Aberaeron on 19 September, 'but enthusiasm translated into positive action'.<sup>47</sup> On the same

occasion, W.R. Jones of Cardigan, president of the Cardiganshire Liberal Association, asserted: 'Mr. Roderic Bowen has a Radical faith and a Liberal attitude. In him we have a staunch and ready defender of the old radical faith.'<sup>48</sup> Indeed, throughout the campaign the need to adhere to 'the old radical faith' as a bulwark against the excesses of 'the Socialist menace' (a line of argument so reminiscent of Liberal election campaigns in the 1920s) featured prominently on Liberal platforms. 'The appeal made by the Socialists to class hatred, industrial bitterness and strife is foreign to us', asserted Bowen, 'these things have no place in our community life.'<sup>49</sup> Dismissing as an irrelevant distraction the Plaid Cymru candidature, he declared: 'The choice here is whether the people of Cardiganshire want society developed along Liberal lines or more and more public ownership, controls and regimentation.'<sup>50</sup>

Indeed it soon became apparent that Bowen gave pride of place in his speeches not to elucidating Liberal policies, but to vitriolic attacks upon the Labour Party. In his speech at his adoption meeting he contrasted Keir Hardie's 'Labour Party' which 'had worked for the under-dog' with the 'Socialist Party' of the 1950s which had completely 'lost its idealism' in its unhealthy and obsessive 'scramble for power'.<sup>51</sup>

Much of Bowen's energy was channelled into a spirited defence of his parliamentary record. Research by the Labour Party into his voting record during the 1958-9 parliamentary session revealed that he had failed to vote on seventy-one occasions, had supported the Government seventy-two times and had joined forces with the Labour opposition on thirty-four occasions.<sup>52</sup> 'Vote for Loti Rees Hughes who will give her Full Time as your M.P.', read Labour election posters.<sup>53</sup> Bowen retaliated vigorously, sharply dismissing the Labour claims as 'a lot of electioneering nonsense. ... *Hansard* proves clearly that in relation to questions, speeches and services on important committees that I and my colleagues have a far better record of service than any of the other two parties.'<sup>54</sup>

He was evidently aware that Mrs. Loti Rees Hughes was a formidable opponent and an accomplished political antagonist, vastly experienced in the affairs of local government. In Cardiganshire she soon attracted widespread personal support

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as 'a woman of tremendous gusto and energy',<sup>55</sup> 'a live-wire candidate',<sup>56</sup> who addressed seventy public meetings during the campaign, visited an array of local marts and bazaars and undertook an extensive personal canvass on a scale previously unknown in Cardiganshire. 'I have already made door-to-door calls in fifty-five villages' was her proud boast at the end of September.<sup>57</sup> 'Certainly defeat at the polls will not be attributable to her personal endeavours in nursing the constituency', observed the political correspondent of the *Western Mail*,<sup>58</sup> while his colleague in the employ of the *Liverpool Daily Post* could justifiably report 'more enthusiasm, more voluntary workers, more speakers and far more publicity than they have had at any previous election'.<sup>59</sup> Mrs Hughes's speeches were unfailingly pungent and vivacious. She told an audience at Pontrhydfendigaid at the end of September:

And what a time we have had for eight long years. Macmillan and his 'Crazy Gang' have never had it so good. Housewives have never had it so bad. Farmers are feeling the pinch since Tom Williams's Agricultural Act has been swept away bit by bit. Wake up and play your part on October 8 in helping to restore sanity.<sup>60</sup>

Labour prospects seemed bright indeed. The party had evidently made remarkable progress in the county since the Second World War. In June 1945 the editor of the *Cambrian News* had written: 'In a county with radical and progressive traditions it is difficult to understand why the Labour Party with its rigid and inflexible policy of socialism should ever expect to win the constituency.'<sup>61</sup> Yet the party's substantial poll in each general election in the meantime - more than 9,000 votes on four occasions - meant that no political commentator could write in similar vein in 1959. Now the comments of the *Cambrian News* were much more guarded: 'this time', wrote its editor, 'the Liberal Camp is a little "uneasy" that their usual big majority may slump through complacency and over-confidence.'<sup>62</sup> Ron Bundock's brave words were frequently echoed in the Labour camp: 'This time we are really confident of success. We have carried out door-to-door canvassing in 63 villages in the county and we believe we have the old folk behind us, especially



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on our proposed pensions plan',<sup>63</sup> while the party's local treasurer, Councillor E. W. Roberts, claimed, 'The machinery is well-oiled and ready to click. The Party is better organized now than it has ever been'.<sup>64</sup> Public declarations reflected private optimism. At the end of September Bundock wrote confidently to Douglas Hughes:

Personally I feel that the campaign is going extremely well and the meetings are being very well attended. We are averaging 35 - 40 each time which is something that a national speaker would be glad of - especially when one considers that these are only villages. And it is really Mrs. Hughes they want to see. We had great success last night. We even stopped the fair at Pontrhydfendigaid. It was wonderful!

I think our motto should be "Carry on as now" and we are going to shock Cardiganshire, the country and Transport House. I am extremely *confident* and the reports coming in each day are encouraging. The feeling in the county is different to any I have known in previous elections.<sup>65</sup>

At Tregaron Mrs. Hughes insisted that Bowen's re-election would be 'a great tragedy for the old, the young and the children in school'. 'The Liberals', she insisted, 'are in Parliament by the consent of the Tories.'<sup>66</sup> A Labour Member, on the contrary, would 'put Cardiganshire on the map for once'.<sup>67</sup> In her election address she gave pride of place to the need for improved pensions for the elderly (a theme certain to strike a chord amongst an electorate which comprised a higher proportion of pensioners than any other county in Britain) and for enhanced occupational opportunities for the young outside the basic industry of agriculture, which would stem the dramatic tide of rural depopulation. At her adoption meeting she was at her most eloquent and persuasive:

The aged population ... are crying out for help. I have listened to their heart-rending stories of hardship and privation; they are disappointed that beer has come

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Mrs. LOTI REES HUGHES, DEIAN, Aid. DOUGLAS HUGHES, J.P.

**Who Shall Go for US to THE SUMMIT ?  
We Cannot Again Trust Macmillan, of Suez, Cyprus, Malta,  
Nyasaland, Hola, reputation.  
Why Not Send Gaitskell ? The Man with a Plan !**

**POLLING DAY—THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8th, 1959  
7 a.m. to 9 p.m.**

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Mrs. Loti Rees Hughes, Mr W. Douglas Hughes and son Deian.  
(by courtesy of the National Library of Wales)

before bread with the Conservatives, and their Nonconformist blood has boiled. There are over one million O.A.P.s in receipt of National Assistance in the country. Many are living below the poverty line because they are too proud to obtain National Assistance.<sup>68</sup>

Her powerful rhetoric was matched by the impassioned plea of D. J. Davies, president of the Cardiganshire Labour Party:

The 8th of October should mark the end of an era when Cardiganshire was represented in Parliament by men who were more interested in their careers and spent their spare time in Parliament. Let us see how

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Cardiganshire has fared under them. We find that the county has gone back in the world so far that there are people who honestly doubt how long Cardiganshire can remain an independent county.<sup>69</sup>

The party's efforts were supported by large numbers of volunteers from south Wales, notably Llanelli, who poured into Cardiganshire during the campaign and on the day of the poll.<sup>70</sup> On polling day a fleet of cars left Llanelli for Cardiganshire to transport voters to the polling stations, their expenses paid by the Labour Party's Welsh Regional Office.<sup>71</sup> Such conduct gave rise to much local criticism, with Roderic Bowen, predictably, leading the attack on the 'invasion of people from the industrial areas of South Wales'.<sup>72</sup>

One factor, however, militated strongly against Mrs. Hughes's prospect of victory - the absence of a Tory contender for the third general election in succession. A Conservative nomination had been 'extremely doubtful' from the outset,<sup>73</sup> and at the height of the campaign an Aberystwyth Labour councillor commented: 'Plaid Cymru are to be admired for bringing out a candidate, why not the Conservatives? One can only assume that they must be well satisfied with the support the Conservative Party gets from our M.P. for Cardiganshire.'<sup>74</sup> In fact, no Tory aspirant stood in the county between 1950 and 1964, a situation similar to the state of affairs in Liberal-held Montgomeryshire and Carmarthen in the 'fifties, although it is clear that in no instance in Wales did a formal election 'pact' exist between the two parties such as was formed in a number of marginal English seats like Bolton West and Huddersfield West, the primary reason for the continued re-election of Liberal M.P.s Arthur Holt and Donald Wade.<sup>75</sup>

Yet the Cardiganshire election of 1959 (unlike 1951 and 1955) did prove to be a three-cornered contest, for Plaid Cymru put up a candidate in the county for the first time ever. Indeed the nationalist party, which had nominated only four candidates in the whole of Wales in 1951 and only eleven in 1955, had nineteen candidates in place by July 1959<sup>76</sup> and twenty by September.<sup>77</sup> Every seat in Gwynedd and Dyfed had a Plaid Cymru candidate. The party's standing and morale had received



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a considerable fillip at the summer's National Eisteddfod when Huw T. Edwards, who had served as the chairman of the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire and had previously been a North Wales Labour activist, suddenly announced his intention to join Plaid Cymru.<sup>78</sup> J. E. Jones, the party's general secretary, boldly asserted its three-fold strategy: to double its national vote, elect an M.P. to Westminster (party president Gwynfor Evans, who was standing in Merioneth, was considered the most likely victor), and demand government attention for Wales.<sup>79</sup>

The party's pioneering aspirant in Cardiganshire was Dr. Gareth Wyn Evans, a thirty-eight year old lecturer in mathematics at University College, Swansea, and a native of the county. His father, Fred Evans, had served as a schoolmaster at Penllwyn, near Tal-y-bont.<sup>80</sup> 'I think we can put up a good show', asserted the party's membership secretary, W.J. Hughes of Llandre, 'I think a large number of young people will vote our way.'<sup>81</sup> Gareth Evans, conscious of the uphill task facing him, underlined the moderation of his party's policies: 'We want no separation from England in the sense of isolation. We want to build no new Offa's Dyke. All we ask for is the freedom to handle our affairs effectively.'<sup>82</sup> Evans was said to consider his candidature 'a missionary campaign',<sup>83</sup> one of the party's officials admitting: 'We of the *Blaid* accept as fact now that when our candidates stand for the first time it means a lost deposit.'<sup>84</sup>

Yet, as is often the case, the advent of the Plaid Cymru candidate ensured that Welsh affairs achieved a more prominent place in the election campaign than would otherwise have occurred. Roderic Bowen had doggedly distanced himself from the activities of the tenacious Parliament-for-Wales campaign of the early 'fifties, later attributing his reluctance to participate actively to the fact that 'there were too many political viewpoints represented'.<sup>85</sup> His attitude towards devolution was at best ambivalent and inconsistent. Whereas the party manifesto in 1959 voiced support for the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales (also Labour Party policy by 1959) as an interim measure pending the establishment of a Welsh Parliament, Bowen studiously avoided the subject in his campaign speeches. As D. Gwenallt Jones told a Plaid Cymru election meeting:

They are only a handful of Liberals, so surely they should agree on such an important issue. A Parliament for Wales is our chief object, and the Labour Party, too, pronounced itself in favour of it back in the days of Keir Hardie. Then they changed their view and became antagonistic to the idea. Now they have changed again and say they are in favour of a Secretary of State for Wales. Why have they changed? Because the Welsh Nationalist party is putting so many candidates in the field and they want to hand out a sop.<sup>86</sup>

Evans's comment on his candidature was eminently sensible: 'It is essential, if Welsh issues are to be taken seriously, that there should be a political threat to the other parties. They cannot be allowed to have it all their own way.'<sup>87</sup>

It may well be that the decision to publish a separate Welsh Liberal manifesto *New Deal for Wales* was the result of the record number of Plaid Cymru candidates. This eight-page publication stressed the problems of decay in rural areas and outlined a number of policy initiatives, among them the appointment of a Welsh Secretary of State, a drastic improvement in the road system ('Wales has suffered badly from her lack of good motorways') and the need to harbour the natural resources of Wales ('a Welsh Water Board should be set up'). The scope of the document was wide-ranging, encompassing Welsh agriculture, unemployment, ports, mines and quarries, education and cultural development. The manifesto depicted Liberal policies for Wales in 1959 as a fitting continuation of past achievements: '... the Liberal record of achievement for Wales far surpasses that of any other party. Nearly everything that Wales has won in the past in the political sphere has come to it under a Liberal administration or by the efforts of individual Liberals.'<sup>88</sup> This emphasis represented a striking change of heart; when the party's annual conference at Torquay had confirmed the policy commitment to supporting a Welsh Office and Secretary of State, David Rosser wrote with justification that this was no more than 'a lifeless, mechanical re-affirmation ... rushed through as a formality', the delegates at the assembly in reality showing marked 'frigidity' towards Welsh issues.<sup>89</sup>

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Roderic Bowen, too, displayed the same 'frigidity' towards Welsh affairs, simply attacking Plaid Cymru in his eve-of-poll message:

Cardiganshire is as truly Welsh as any area in the Principality. She does not, however, believe that economic separation, burning aerodromes, or withholding income tax are the most effective ways of preserving that which is best in our national life. A much more enlightened and mature approach is required.<sup>90</sup>

Mrs. Loti Rees Hughes adopted a much more positive patriotic note. At her adoption meeting, she proclaimed, 'The time has come when Wales should have a large measure of autonomy', adding that she herself had always displayed a 'keen interest in Welsh culture and the preservation of the Welsh language'. She reminded her audience that it was George Tomlinson, Minister of Education in a Labour government, who had allowed Welsh local authorities to establish Welsh-medium schools in Wales.<sup>91</sup> Her message was repeated by James Griffiths who, in a powerful speech at the King's Hall, Aberystwyth, stressed his party's commitment to a Welsh Secretary of State with a seat in the Cabinet, thus giving Wales a Minister in the Commons and the Councils of State, the transfer to a Welsh Office of the administration of Welsh departments of education, health and housing and local government, and the setting up of a Welsh Grand Committee in Parliament.<sup>92</sup>

'It seems...that there are still enough Liberals of the old school to see Mr. Bowen back to Westminster this time' was the sage verdict of the political correspondent of the *Western Mail*.<sup>93</sup> His prophecy proved sound, for, in the event, Bowen was indeed re-elected comfortably:

|                  |             |        |       |
|------------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| E. Roderic Bowen | Liberal     | 17,868 | 59.0% |
| Loti Rees Hughes | Labour      | 8,559  | 28.2% |
| Gareth Wyn Evans | Plaid Cymru | 3,880  | 12.8% |
| Majority         |             | 9,309  | 30.8% |



Indeed, Bowen's poll was especially impressive in a three-cornered contest. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* had predicted that the Liberal majority would increase while the party's vote would fall.<sup>94</sup> Roderic Bowen was clearly the beneficiary of tactically-cast Tory votes, although the Member himself claimed that his re-election was eloquent testimony to 'the soundness of Liberal traditions in Cardiganshire'.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the majority of Clement Davies (the only other Liberal MP in Wales) in Montgomeryshire shrank to an ominous 2,970, the lowest since his initial return in 1929, giving rise to much alarm in some sections of the party.<sup>96</sup> Bowen, too, rejoiced in the fact that Mrs. Hughes's poll was 'the lowest vote the Socialists had had since 1932'.<sup>97</sup> D.J. Davies could not dissent, but argued that the Labour vote was 'the true hard core of Labour in the county'.<sup>98</sup> Douglas Hughes considered the outcome disappointing, and urged the Cardiganshire D.L.P. to contest every seat in the county in the 1961 local government elections, and to make a special effort to secure the support of the youth.<sup>99</sup>

Dr. Gareth Evans rejoiced in the saving of his deposit - by some eighty votes: 'I believe this is the only election where Plaid Cymru has fought for the first time without losing its deposit. It shows an awakening of Nationalist feeling in Wales.'<sup>100</sup> But overall the twenty Plaid Cymru candidates polled no more than an average 10.34 per cent of the votes cast, a bitter disappointment for them.<sup>101</sup> It was estimated that Evans had deprived Labour of some 1,500 votes and the Liberals of about 1,000.<sup>102</sup> 'The trend has been to recruit *Blaid* converts from the Labour ranks', noted one observer.<sup>103</sup> Although Liberal support in Cardiganshire had fallen by 6.2 per cent because of the Plaid Cymru candidature, the party had avoided the experience of Montgomeryshire and Carmarthen where Conservative 'intervention' had caused the Liberal vote to plummet by 26.1 and 15.2 per cent respectively.<sup>104</sup> A similar fate was not to befall Cardiganshire until the general election of October 1964 when the advent of a Tory contender for the first time since 1950 gave rise to a closely fought four-cornered contest and a resultant sharp fall in Bowen's majority to 2,219. Only then did the constituency appear marginal and the Liberal hegemony seem in jeopardy. Five years earlier, in October 1959, Cardiganshire remained one of a small number of

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divisions almost certain to return to Parliament its sitting Liberal M.P., perhaps indeed 'the safest seat held by a Liberal member'.<sup>105</sup>

*Aberystwyth*

J. GRAHAM JONES

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### NOTES

- 1 *Cambrian News*, 22 June 1945.
- 2 *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1950.
- 3 See David M. Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales', in John Osmond (ed.), *The National Question again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandysul, 1985), p. 78.
- 4 See the correspondence in NLW, Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records, file 24.
- 5 Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-7.
- 6 See Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party, 1895-1970* (London, 1971), pp. 268-70.
- 7 *Cambrian News*, 29 April 1955.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 15 February 1957.
- 9 NLW, Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records, file 135, unlabelled press cutting.
- 10 *Welsh Gazette*, 14 November 1957.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Western Mail*, 11 November 1957.
- 15 *Cambrian News*, 2 May 1958.
- 16 *Welsh Gazette*, 22 January 1959.
- 17 NLW, Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records (1992 deposit), minute book, 1949-64, entry for 13 March 1959.
- 18 *Welsh Gazette*, 29 July 1959.
- 19 See Howard C. Jones, 'The Labour Party in Cardiganshire', *ante*, IX, no. 2 (1981), 150-61.
- 20 See Loti Rees Hughes, *Election Address*, October 1959.
- 21 NLW, Deian R. Hopkin Papers 136, Cardiganshire Labour Party minute book, 1958-65, minutes of executive committee, 8 March 1958.
- 22 *Ibid.*, file 135, circular letter from Councillor Elfed Williams, secretary and agent of the Cardiganshire Constituency Labour Party, 11 June 1958.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, 136, executive committee minutes, 18 November 1958.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 18 December 1958.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 4 February 1959.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, A.G.M. minutes, 28 February 1959.
- 29 *Ibid.*



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- 30 *Ibid.*, file 135, letter from A. L. Williams, Labour Party national agent, 5 February 1959.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Welsh Gazette*, 5 March 1959.
- 33 NLW, Deian R. Hopkin Papers 135, R. J. Bundock to W. Douglas Hughes, 30 June 1959. Cf. NLW, Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records, file 77, Maldwyn Hughes, treasurer of the Cards. Lib. Assoc. to Eben Jones, 24 September 1959, 'I hope that you can fit in Llanwnnen for Mr. Bowen to speak at, as there is quite a Labour nest there & they have been taunting the local Liberals that he is not coming.'
- 34 *Cambrian News*, 25 September 1959.
- 35 NLW, Ben G. Jones Papers 24 (scrapbook of press cuttings), p. 5.
- 36 *Cambrian News*, 9 October 1959.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 25 September 1959.
- 38 *Welsh Gazette*, 24 September 1959.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 E. Roderic Bowen, *Election Address*, October 1959.
- 43 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 44 *Cambrian News*, 18 September 1959.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 47 *Cambrian News*, 25 September 1959.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Welsh Gazette*, 8 October 1959.
- 50 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 51 *Cambrian News*, 25 September 1959.
- 52 NLW, Deian R. Hopkin Papers 135, John Milwood, Labour Party Research Department, to James Griffiths, 20 August 1959.
- 53 *Cambrian News*, 2 October 1959.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 9 October 1959.
- 55 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 56 *Cambrian News*, 2 October 1959.
- 57 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5 October 1959.
- 60 *Welsh Gazette*, 1 October 1959.
- 61 *Cambrian News*, 1 June 1945.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 25 September 1959.

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- 63 *Ibid.*, 2 October 1959.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 11 September 1959.
- 65 NLW, Deian R. Hopkin Papers 135, R. J. Bundock to W. Douglas Hughes, 26 September 1959.
- 66 *Welsh Gazette*, 1 October 1959.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 *Cambrian News*, 25 September 1959.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 NLW, Deian R. Hopkin Papers 137, Cliff Prothero to W. Douglas Hughes, 21 October 1959, and Hughes to Prothero, 2 November 1959 (copy).
- 71 *Ibid.*
- 72 *Cambrian News*, 9 October 1959.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 11 September 1959; *Welsh Gazette*, 17 September 1959.
- 74 *Cambrian News*, 25 September 1959.
- 75 See Roberts, *op. cit.*, 81-3.
- 76 *Welsh Nation*, August 1959.
- 77 *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 10 September 1959.
- 78 See Alan Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics, 1945-1970* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 78.
- 79 *Cambrian News*, 18 September 1959.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 11 September 1959.
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 *Welsh Gazette*, 24 September 1959.
- 83 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 Butt Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 259.
- 86 *Welsh Gazette*, 1 October 1959.
- 87 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 88 *New Deal for Wales* (1959).
- 89 NLW, Ben G. Jones Papers 23 (scrapbook of press cuttings), p. 5.
- 90 NLW, Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records 135, unlabelled press cutting.
- 91 *Cambrian News*, 25 September 1959.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 2 October 1959.
- 93 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- 94 *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 8 October 1959.
- 95 *Welsh Gazette*, 15 October 1959.
- 96 See the comments in the *Liberal News*, 23 July 1959.
- 97 *Cambrian News*, 16 October 1959.
- 98 *Ibid.*
- 99 NLW, Deian R. Hopkin Papers 136, Cardiganshire Labour

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Party minute book, 1958-65, minutes of executive committee, 31 October 1959.

100 *Cambrian News*, 16 October 1959.

101 Butt Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

102 Jones, *loc. cit.*, p. 159.

103 *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.

104 See D. E. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British Election of 1959* (London, 1960), p. 233.

105 NLW, Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records 56, J. Ellis Williams, Hon. Secretary of the South Wales Liberal Federation, to Eben Jones, 11 February 1959.