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# DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN GLAMORGAN, 1884-1914

by

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THE modern history of Glamorgan is the outcome of two fundamental influences—industrialism and democracy. Between them, they created the strange, distinctive society of the coalfield, cosmopolitan, yet essentially Welsh, that Sir Alfred Zimmern labelled “American Wales”.<sup>1</sup> They served to colour, and to mould, the oblique relationship that Glamorgan enjoyed with the emerging national self-consciousness of Wales, the alternating waves of attraction and repulsion that helped to leave the Welsh national movement unfulfilled, incomplete.

The Parliamentary session of 1884 symbolizes the connection between these two forces, when two pieces of legislation were passed which were to transform the economic and political development of Glamorgan. The first was the private act to sanction the construction of Barry Docks. The second was Gladstone’s Reform Act. Barry Docks, the crowning triumph of David Davies of Llandinam, made possible a vast extension on a world scale of the export of sale-coal from the Welsh valleys. The Reform Act, with its attendant measure for the redistribution of seats, transferred political power to the working-class majority. These two measures disclose the emergence of the Glamorgan of modern times, technical revolution accompanied by social transformation, commercial expansion overseas and class conflict at home.

While the economic implications of these factors have received due attention, their impact on the political structure of

<sup>1</sup> Sir A. Zimmern, *My Impressions of Wales* (London, 1927), p. 37.

Glamorgan has yet to be investigated. Yet the political consequences were extensive and profound. Between the Reform Acts of 1884 and 1918, Glamorgan spanned the gulf between the politics of connection and the politics of caucus. Political representation reflected an accelerated social change. In 1884, the county members were the Lord-Lieutenant, C. R. M. Talbot, an octogenarian landowner who had sat for the constituency since 1830, and Sir Hussey Vivian, a Swansea industrialist, whose tenure dated from 1857. The Gladstone coalition was thus typified—the Whig landowner and the “radical” capitalist. But by 1918 the county was rapidly becoming a stronghold of Socialism, and was widely acclaiming the revolution in Russia. Even in the “Hang the Kaiser” election of 1918, Glamorgan constituencies returned five Labour members: in the more tranquil atmosphere of 1922, the total rose to eleven. These great changes reflect the character and limitation of radical nationalism in Wales—the relation between political denominationalism and class loyalty, the impact of Welsh sentiment upon an increasingly anglicized society, the tensions between an area of intense economic concentration and a sparsely developed hinterland. Not only does modern Glamorgan provide a case-study of great complexity and interest, but the coming of democracy in the county serves as a microcosm for Wales as a whole.

Disraeli's Representation of the People Act of 1867 had seemed, at first sight, to provide the political liberation of the Welsh people. Henry Richard, returned triumphantly for Merthyr Tydfil, in 1868, reminded his countrymen of the old tag, *Trech gwlad nag arglwydd*.<sup>1</sup> Feudalism in Wales was dead: the nonconformist masses were emerging into the light. But subsequent events were to modify this optimistic judgement. The Act of 1867 affected the franchise and representation, as far as Glamorgan was concerned, to only a limited extent.

In the county, where the reduction of the occupancy qualification to one of £12 rating had been the major change in

<sup>1</sup> Henry Richard, *Letters on the Social and Political Condition of Wales* (London, 1867), p. 106.

the franchise, the electorate was still a narrow one. By 1880, only 12,785 voters were registered, out of a population of 162,241. The traditional control of leading families was scarcely impaired, and Talbot and Vivian maintained the partnership of land and industry that had lasted since 1832.

In the boroughs, however, a more profound change had taken place. The electorates of both Cardiff District and Swansea District had been greatly expanded under household suffrage, while that of Merthyr Tydfil, to which the Act of 1867 gave a second member, had swollen beyond recognition to 14,577, a tenfold increase.<sup>1</sup> It was thus in the boroughs of Glamorgan that experiments in political organization began first to flourish: it is not without significance that it was L. Ll. Dillwyn, radical member for Swansea, who played an important part in the tactical discussions among the radical members during the passage of Disraeli's Act. In Swansea and Cardiff, active Liberal Associations emerged, though with limited effect on the dominant elements in local Liberalism. When Col. J. F. Crichton-Stuart retired from representing Cardiff District in 1880, a small committee of middle-class Liberals, Lewis Williams of the School Board, William Sanders and John Batchelor ("Friend of Freedom"), secured the nomination and return of the eminent naval authority, E. J. Reed.<sup>2</sup> Merthyr Tydfil, with its vigorous nonconformist committee and its ideological links with the Chartist past, maintained the powerful radical organization which had served to return Henry Richard in the great election of 1868. Traditional paternalism was still powerful enough to return the local ironmaster, Richard Fothergill, even against Thomas Halliday of the Amalgamated Association of Miners in 1874. But when Fothergill's social position collapsed as a result of financial disaster, he was succeeded by C. H. James, the solicitor who presided over the local nonconformist caucus. Even so,

<sup>1</sup> The electoral changes brought about by the Act of 1867 have been very clearly analysed by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, "Franchise Reform and Glamorgan Politics" *Morgannwg*, II (1958), pp. 60-1.

<sup>2</sup> W. Sanders to Alfred Thomas, 1 July 1899 (Pontypridd Papers, Cardiff Central Library).



the impact of the Act of 1867 remained limited. The election of 1868 had above all created a new martyrology, the evicted tenant farmers of the countryside. It had not heralded the dawn of democracy in Glamorgan, or indeed in Wales as a whole.

For the great mass of working-class voters resided in the county constituency, and it was they who were enfranchised in 1884. In addition, the accompanying measure of redistribution, the price demanded by the House of Lords for their acquiescence, divided the county into five segments, the Western (or Gower), Middle, East, Rhondda and South divisions, with a combined electorate of 43,449. Swansea Town was created as a separate constituency, distinct from Swansea District. Cardiff (which included Cowbridge and Llantrisant as contributory boroughs) and Merthyr Tydfil retained their old representation. Glamorgan was favoured by the redistribution, as was Wales generally. While England received approximately one member per 54,000 of the population, for Wales the figures were one per 45,342. Thus the preponderance on which the Conservative Party insisted to uphold the representation of the rural areas of England, worked in favour of the industrial democracy of South Wales. A large number of distinctively working-class single-member seats, elected on a basis of simple majority voting, was created. On the other hand, the system worked no less to the disadvantage of large urban communities. Cardiff, with 85,000 inhabitants, returned one member alone, the same as Montgomery District, a network of scattered villages with a population of only 19,925. Cardiff became the largest single-member constituency in the kingdom.

In the House of Commons, a paradoxical situation had developed during debates on the Redistribution Bill. Gladstone, the venerated hero of Wales, was obliged to defend the excessive representation of Wales by denying the need for separate treatment. "The distinction between England and Wales, except in a recital in an Act of Parliament for the purpose of indicating their unity, is totally unknown to our constitution."<sup>1</sup> He forgot

<sup>1</sup> H. of C., 1 December 1884, Gladstone's speech (*Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, ccxciv, p. 378).

his own government's Welsh Sunday Closing Act of 1881 which had created this distinction! Conversely, Conservatives were compelled to put forward a strange form of Welsh separatism, demanding different treatment for Wales, in order to justify the reduction of her members from 34 to 25. They well knew the religious and political complexion of the Welsh constituencies. But they protested in vain.

The influence of franchise reform on the politics of Glamorgan was soon apparent. At the general election of 1885, dominated as it was by Joseph Chamberlain's "Unauthorized Programme", all ten Glamorgan members returned were Liberals. It was this election, rather than that of 1868, which marked the ascendancy of the nonconformist middle-class, with its awareness of religious injustice helping to consolidate it as a class and to unify it as a national force.

The new members of Parliament can be divided into two rough, yet distinct categories, the majority of the county and borough members forming one group, the members for the great urban centres of Cardiff and Swansea Town making up the other.

In the first group we see the emergence of a new type of member, more vigorous and more militantly aware of his Welsh background. The county constituencies proved immutably radical. Gower was dominated by the miners and tinplaters of the Swansea valley. The force of paternalism was strong enough to return F. A. Yeo, a local colliery owner, in 1885, but on his death in 1888 the tinplaters successfully nominated David Randell, a Methodist solicitor who had specialized in trade union litigation. Randell comfortably defeated the influential Conservative landowner, John Talbot Dillwyn-Llewellyn of Penllergaer. Randell's success led to later claims that Gower was an acknowledged "Labour" seat, successfully put to the test by the Miners' Federation in 1906. Mid-Glamorgan was a predominantly mining division, including as it did the Llynfi, Ogmore and Garw valleys. Its first member was C. R. M. Talbot, who died, full of years and honour, in 1890. His successor was Samuel T. Evans, the grocer's son of Skewen,

initially a militant nonconformist and Welsh Home Ruler, later much sobered by the cares of office and the Presidency of the Court of Admiralty.<sup>1</sup> The Rhondda electorate was entirely a mining one also. In 1885, it returned William Abraham ("Mabon"), miners' agent and vice-President of the Sliding Scale Committee, by a comfortable majority over the Liberal coal-owner, F. L. Davis. Mabon remained in Parliament for over thirty years to preach his gospel of industrial co-operation.<sup>2</sup> Another largely mining seat was East Glamorgan, represented from 1885 to 1910 by Alfred Thomas, erstwhile Mayor of Cardiff and President of the Welsh Baptist Union. He was to chair the Welsh "Party" in the Commons from 1897 before being created Lord Pontypridd. Thomas, an amiable and benevolent man—"that worthy pantaloon", one of his colleagues described him<sup>3</sup>—was a reluctant revolutionary, the butt of his colleagues.<sup>4</sup> He based his politics quite simply on his nonconformity. But his majority was beyond challenge. The one doubtful Liberal seat was South Glamorgan. The influence of Bute and Dunraven was powerful on the Unionist side. The mining areas of the lower Rhondda and the cosmopolitan town of Barry were juxtaposed against the conservatism of the Vale, the residential calm of Penarth and the clericalism of Llandaff. Arthur Williams, a lawyer, managed to retain the seat for Gladstone and Home Rule until 1895, when Major Wyndham-Quin, a local landlord, who later distinguished himself in the Boer War, captured the division for the Unionists.

Two of the borough constituencies also conformed to this general pattern. Merthyr Tydfil remained an immensely secure Liberal stronghold. The two old members were replaced, on death and retirement, in 1888 by two powerful nonconformist capitalists, both of whom placed Welsh affairs prominently on

<sup>1</sup> Solicitor General, 1908-10; President of Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Divisions, 1910-18; ob. 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eric Wyn Evans, *Mabon* (Cardiff, 1959).

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Humphreys-Owen to Stuart Rendel, 23 March 1901 (Rendel Papers, No. 689a, N.L.W.).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Vyrnwy Morgan, *Life of Viscount Rhondda* (London, 1918), p. 195.

their programmes. They were D. A. Thomas, a wealthy coal proprietor, already building up his Cambrian Combine, and Pritchard Morgan, an adventurous gold speculator, known locally as *Yr aelod dros China*, whose travels had taken him as far afield as Australia and Korea. For years these two were unassailable, and in 1892 were returned by the astonishing margin of over 11,000. But Merthyr was more problematic than might appear. There was tension between the miners and the ironworkers of Dowlais, while between Merthyr and turbulent Aberdare an uneasy truce prevailed. The return of Pritchard Morgan in 1888 had been a defeat for the *Cymru Fydd* element, of which Tom Ellis was the spokesman.<sup>1</sup> It broke up the Merthyr Liberal Association which remained non-existent until an artificial recrudescence in 1909. D. A. Thomas maintained his political ascendancy on personal grounds, and employed two personal election agents.<sup>2</sup> He and Pritchard Morgan shared a hearty loathing for one another, and this proved a major factor in Morgan's defeat by Keir Hardie in 1900. As Thomas strengthened his control over the coalfield, his position at Merthyr passed beyond challenge, even democratic challenge. In the three-cornered contest of 1906, he polled 77 per cent of the votes cast.<sup>3</sup> Yet, to what end? As wealth accumulated, politics decayed. Thomas' restless brilliance was bridled by the ties of party. He vented his frustration in bitter attacks on *Cymru Fydd* and on his Welsh colleagues: they were "a fraud and a failure", "tame cats and needy axe-grinders".<sup>4</sup> Stuart Rendel regarded Thomas as "a Tory in Disguise".<sup>5</sup> Not until Lloyd George's wartime coalition did Thomas' talents find a satisfying outlet in political life.

Swansea District (which included the contributory boroughs of Neath, Kenfig and Aberavon), was as secure as Merthyr for

<sup>1</sup> T. I. Ellis, *Cofiant Thomas Edward Ellis*, cyf. II (Liverpool, 1948), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Merthyr Express*, 23 October 1909.

<sup>3</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 27 January 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Merthyr Express*, 16 January 1909.

<sup>5</sup> Rendel to Humphreys-Owen, 10 December 1895 (Glansevern MSS., No. 672, N.L.W.).



Liberalism. Its dispersed tin and steel works made it susceptible to the sway of the Liberal employer. Sir Hussey Vivian represented it with distinction until 1893, when he was succeeded by the Morriston tinplate owner, William Williams. Finally, in 1895, after a bitter contest for the nomination with Llewellyn Williams, D. Brynmor Jones, Queen's Counsel and son of a famous Congregationalist minister, was returned.<sup>1</sup> Jones, a characteristic product of radical nonconformity, also had a disappointing political career, soured by his failure to secure a judgeship.

All these constituencies, save for South Glamorgan, were overwhelmingly working-class in character and safe for Liberalism, until and unless the proletariat decided to set up an organization of its own. Geography and economic dispersal seemed to militate against this. Men felt more loyalty to their valley than to their class. These constituencies, in representation as well as in organization, became centres for experiment, returning members of a distinctively Welsh background, often of humble origins. In all their diversity, Randell, S. T. Evans, Mabon, D. A. Thomas, Brynmor Jones articulately challenged the hallowed illusion that "there was no such place as Wales".

Swansea Town and Cardiff District, however, form a quite distinct category, with an electorate more complex, more cosmopolitan and more extensive, in which factors such as the cost of registration made wealth rather than Welshness the major qualification for a potential Liberal candidate.

Swansea was a town in process of rapid change. Llewellyn Williams, the youthful editor of the *South Wales Daily Post*, was depressed in 1893 by "the howling wilderness of Swansea Philistinism". "I was awfully surprised on coming down here," he went on, "to find how anti-Welsh the Liberals of the place are",<sup>2</sup> and indeed his efforts to run the *Post* on nationalist lines

<sup>1</sup> He was a brother of J. Viriamu Jones, first Principal of the University College of Cardiff, and of Leif Jones, Liberal M.P. for various constituencies, 1905-31, and later Lord Rhayader.

<sup>2</sup> Llewellyn Williams to Edward Thomas, 6 April 1893 (Cochfarf Papers, Cardiff Central Library).

proved no more successful than his earlier venture with the *Barry Star*. But the Swansea Liberal Association, presided over by such powerful industrialists as Cory Yeo and Morgan Tutton, was able to secure the safe return of the Liberal candidate at every election down to 1922, save for that of 1895. Dillwyn, the veteran Liberatorist, was succeeded on his death in 1892 by R. D. Burnie, another local industrialist of less influence and polish, whose radical views on social questions were suspect to his colleagues. He was a casualty in the Liberal rout of 1895, and his opposition to the South African War later prevented his re-adoption.<sup>1</sup> In 1900, Swansea reverted to type by returning Sir George Newnes, the newspaper magnate, whose personal largesse far outweighed his political acumen. In January, 1910, he was followed by Sir Alfred Mond, of the massive Brunner-Mond combine. Conservatives, weary of age-long attacks on the "alien Church", gratefully seized on the opportunity to pillory the Viennese Jew who represented the Dissenters of Swansea.<sup>2</sup> "Vales for the Velsh" screamed from every hoarding. But a Liberal capitalist who directly employed so large a bulk of the Swansea population seemed beyond challenge.

Generally, until the advent of Labour in municipal elections after 1900, Swansea was secure for Liberalism. The electorate had a solid nucleus of miners, dockers and tinplaters. The Irish in the Greenhill district invariably supported the Liberal, while local ministers such as the celebrated Dr. "Gomer" Lewis of Capel Gomer, Orchard Street, were valuable vote-getters in the "Mecca of Nonconformity".

Finally, there was Cardiff, always an individual and distinctive case, owing to its size and complexity. Registration was a hazardous process in a large urban constituency, while high election costs added to the difficulty of selecting a candidate. Unionists and Liberals generally favoured candidates active in the business world. The Liberal member from 1880 to 1895 and again from 1900 to 1905 was characteristically eclectic. Sir

<sup>1</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 3 July 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A.S.T. Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories* (London, 1925), p. 59.

Edward Reed, formerly Chief Constructor of the Navy, and author of several authoritative manuals on the subject, regarded his major function to be the apologist for "the great commercial and cosmopolitan town of Cardiff".<sup>1</sup> He reminded the electors that he had been instrumental in obtaining commercial orders for them to the value of £2,000,000.<sup>2</sup> He refused minor office in Gladstone's last ministry on the grounds that it was too insignificant for the member of so eminent a constituency.<sup>3</sup> Reed was widely disliked by his fellow-members, and his views were flexible in the extreme. Yet he triumphed time after time. His enthusiasm for Welsh disestablishment gradually waned, yet he obtained a solid nonconformist vote. He vacillated over Irish Home Rule, and finally came out in opposition, yet the Irish of Adamsdown voted for him to a man. He bitterly attacked the Amalgamated Society of Engineers' strike in 1897, yet the Cardiff Trades Council declared in his favour. His skilful vacillations served him well in conciliating the diverse elements of the town, until in 1904 a final "wobble" towards Tariff Reform took him into the Unionist camp.

He was succeeded by a Liberal of similar stamp, the Honourable Ivor Guest, heir to Lord Wimborne and to the patrimony of Guest, Keen and Nettlefold, who crossed the floor at the same time as Reed, but in the reverse direction. D. A. Thomas bitterly attacked the adoption of so dubious a Liberal as Guest, with much justification, but in vain.<sup>4</sup> The predominance of business and commercial interests continued to play a crucial role. D. A. Thomas sat briefly for the constituency in 1910. In December, 1910, when the Liberals were finally defeated in Cardiff, Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart, heir to Lord Bute, narrowly ousted the Liberal, Sir Clarendon Hyde, another powerful industrialist. In 1918, all three Cardiff members returned in the "Coupon Election", J. C. Gould, J. H. Cory and

<sup>1</sup> Letter in *South Wales Daily News*, 17 March 1891.

<sup>2</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 19 September 1903.

<sup>3</sup> Reed to Gladstone, 16 August 1892 (B.Mus., Add. MSS., 44515, f. 176).

<sup>4</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 30 April 1904.

Sir William Seager (Liberal), represented shipping interests.<sup>1</sup> Cardiff was no constituency for the poor man, and the affairs of Wales carried little significance here. There appears to have been a move to secure the nomination for Lloyd George in 1910,<sup>2</sup> but the effort was half-hearted. Llewellyn Williams had lamented in 1892 that "Cardiff is lost to Welsh nationalism".<sup>3</sup>

The key to Cardiff politics lay in organization. After the Liberal defeat in 1895, when J. M. Maclean, a proprietor of the *Western Mail*, ousted Reed, the Liberals appointed a full-time agent in H. G. C. Allgood, and in subsequent years the Liberal position improved considerably.<sup>4</sup> Registration increased, subscribing members of the Liberal Association rose from a nadir of 500, and the Liberal "Progressives" maintained a narrow majority on the Borough Council from 1897 to 1904. In the 1900 election, Reed, a fervant Imperialist, managed to enlist the support of C. J. Cory and the Protestant League, on the one hand, and Father Hayde and the United Irish League, on the other, and won the day by 801 votes. In 1906, the Honourable Ivor Guest triumphed with over 3,000 votes to spare.

The Cardiff Liberal Association was a bewildering miscellany. It included Welsh patriots such as Edward Thomas ("Cochfarf") and Principal William Edwards, nonconformist business men such as Robert Bird and Sydney Robinson, industrial magnates such as D. A. Thomas (its president for many years) and C. J. Cory, Irish nationalists such as Dr. Buist and Dr. Mullins, and even Trades Council nominees such as John Chappell and W. S. Crossman. The Labour vote, although comprising over 10,000 trade unionists by 1900,<sup>5</sup> was too heterogeneous to be effectively deployed. On the other hand, the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce

<sup>1</sup> Cf. an interesting article by Sir Reuben Pugsley, *Western Mail*, 29 January 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Speech by Lloyd George, 9 December 1909 (*The Times*, 10 December 1909).

<sup>3</sup> Llewellyn Williams to T. E. Ellis, 19 February 1892 (Ellis Papers, N.L.W.).

<sup>4</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 13 January 1897 and cf. H. G. C. Allgood, *Statistics bearing upon Welsh Liberal Organization* (draft in Swansea Public Library).

<sup>5</sup> *Labour Pioneer*, June 1900.



had a strong Liberal leaven, D. A. Thomas being its president for a time. The shipping interests strongly opposed discriminatory tariffs and effectively criticized Hicks-Beach's coal duty of 1901. As long as the traditional pattern of interest could be maintained, the Cardiff Liberal coalition could preserve its existence.

This was the pattern of representation brought about by the Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1884-5. This picture of Liberal domination was reproduced at the local level also, in elections for municipal councils, for School Boards and for Poor Law Boards of Guardians. The first county council elections in Glamorgan in 1889 led to the return of 45 Liberals as against 21 Unionists, and later years produced little divergence. The "Revolt" against the Balfour Education Act of 1902 saw Glamorgan as active as the rural counties in opposition to the "Coercion of Wales".

Two formative factors stand out in the shaping of opinion and organization which produced this pattern. The first was the overwhelming preponderance of nonconformity. The Royal Commission on the Welsh Churches in 1910, although its authority on statistical matters is far from being unimpeachable, declared that there were 202,648 members of nonconformist chapels, as against 61,064 churchmen, out of a population of 859,981.<sup>1</sup> This predominance, greatly stimulated by the religious revival of 1904-5, was uniform, most emphatic in the inland valleys, but notable even in the anglicized metropolis of Cardiff, where 18,281 nonconformists were registered against 9,354 churchmen.<sup>2</sup> Nonconformist-controlled School Boards made rapid progress. What did this mean in political terms? It provided Liberalism with a creed and a machinery. The class grievances of nonconformists, deriving their economics from Manchester and their political philosophy from Geneva, superseded the class war in industry. More, the nonconformist

<sup>1</sup> *Royal Commission on the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales* (Parl. Papers, 1910, XIV, I), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* (Parl. Papers, 1910, XVIII), pp. 258-267.

struggle for social equality became the Welsh campaign for national equality, with disestablishment and publicly-controlled education as its major objectives, and Tory magistrates as the ostensible opposition.<sup>1</sup> Again, the organizational flair and popular influence of local ministers formed the spearhead of the Liberal machine. As long as life could be breathed into the grievances of nonconformity, Liberalism in Glamorgan could preserve a façade of unity. But as political nonconformity slowly lost its impetus in the years after 1900, in face of the varied challenges of industrial growth and the English language, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, the disparate elements in Glamorgan Liberalism began to melt away.

The second major factor in shaping the character of the political picture in Glamorgan was the largely working-class nature of almost all its constituencies. The population of the county leapt prodigiously, from a mere 397,859 in 1871 to 1,120,910 in 1911, with a massive rate of immigration. The labour force in the mining industry rose to over 225,000 by 1912. Yet the identification of interest of working men with middle class Liberals was maintained with little difficulty until the turn of the century. Nonconformity unified more than economics divided. After the dispute over the Rhondda seat in 1885, the local caucus was reconstituted under the name of the Labour and Liberal Association, while Mabon's moderate views on industrial affairs were generally acceptable. A similar body was created in East Glamorgan to further the candidature of Alfred Thomas. The element of paternalism was still powerful, particularly in the tinsplate industry. Until 1898, mining trade unionism was still ill-organized. The village, rather than the pithead lodge, was the distinctive organizational unit, though in many cases the two were admittedly indistinguishable. The "new unionism" was slow to penetrate South Wales, and the dominance of the Liberal Party remained without challenge.

<sup>1</sup> Although the proportion of nonconformists on the bench in Glamorgan was stated to be higher than in any other Welsh county ("Adfyfr" [T. J. Hughes], *The Welsh Magistracy*, Cardiff, 1887).

These two general characteristics, the predominance of nonconformity and the strength of the working-class vote, had a marked effect on political organization. In particular, it led to local machinery becoming more and more superficial. This was never true of Cardiff, or, to a lesser extent, of Swansea, where the local Associations met regularly and arranged an intense schedule of registration. But, in Merthyr, as we have seen, the local body crumbled. D. A. Thomas reproved the secretary of the Brecon-Road Liberal Association for designating his body the "Merthyr Liberal Association".<sup>1</sup> The main formal recognition of Liberalism was the survival of Liberal clubs at Merthyr and Aberdare, whose major purpose seems to have been refreshment—not that that was without its electioneering importance! In 1900, Keir Hardie found a largely disorganized opposition. The severe fight he was given by a last-minute Liberal candidate, Henry Radcliffe, in 1906 makes it at least problematic whether he would have succeeded against less rudimentary organization. Not until 1909 was a unified machinery restored, with D. M. Richards as Registration Agent.<sup>2</sup> The Associations in the East, Middle and Rhondda divisions met annually to "report progress" and little else.

In the Gower division, obsolescence was far advanced, and this had a significant effect on relations between Labour and Liberals. The "Gower Liberal Association" that nominated J. Aeron Thomas, a local capitalist, in 1900 was an *ad hoc* assembly that had apparently not met since the election of 1895. John Hodge of the Steel Smelters, fighting on the programme of "Labour first, politics second", came out in opposition. After five years more of hibernation, a body of "delegates" assembled in August, 1905, "to take steps to revive the old Liberal Association". It was discovered that the president of the Association had retired from public life, while both chairman and treasurer were, apparently, dead! Nevertheless, it was this body that

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Thomas to T. J. Rice, 11 November 1902 (Glamorgan Record Office MSS., D/D Xes, 6).

<sup>2</sup> *Merthyr Express*, 23 October 1909.

succeeded in nominating a Liberal candidate, after much local rivalry. On this occasion, the miners' candidate, John Williams, was successful and the Liberal control of Gower was at an end, as a final contest with Labour in December, 1910, confirmed.<sup>1</sup>

South Glamorgan was another constituency in which organizational problems led to conflict with Labour, although here Herbert Gladstone amicably resolved the dispute in 1903. The Liberal Association in South Glamorgan was essentially an offspring of the Cardiff Association, and indeed held its rare meetings in the offices of the Cardiff body. The leading figures in South Glamorgan Liberal circles were Alderman T. J. Hughes and shipping magnates such as T. W. David and Henry Radcliffe. In December, 1908, David reconstituted the body, "as it had been in a state of suspended animation for years".<sup>2</sup> To do was so a sign of weakness. Thus South Glamorgan showed the same tendency to obsolescence in machinery as elsewhere, although the major factor here was probably the tension between the Rhondda miners and the mercantile interests of Barry and Cardiff.

Another important element in the formation and mobilization of public opinion was the local Press, although its political role was less decisive than that of the Welsh denominational journals of Thomas Gee, E. W. Evans and Beriah Gwynfe Evans. Certainly the local Press was a major factor in developing the nascent labour movement: *Llais Llafur* of Ystalyfera, for instance, was very influential in the Swansea valley. The valley newspapers, such as the *Rhondda Leader*, the *Merthyr Express* and *Tarian y Gweithiwr* (of Aberdare), had a mainly local coverage. The impression is that their influence was limited: for example, the long vendetta of the *Express* against Keir Hardie seems to have been a complete failure. The two Swansea dailies, the *South Wales Daily Post* (Unionist) and the *Cambria Daily Leader* (Liberal) were of wider appeal. Thus in 1901 David Davies,

<sup>1</sup> The politics of Gower are analysed in some detail in an article of mine, "The Gower Election of 1906", *Gower* (1959).

<sup>2</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 16 December 1908.



editor of the *Daily Post*, was triumphantly returned for working-class Landore as a "municipal reformer", and eventually was to become Mayor of Swansea in 1917. The *Leader* was at times under fire for its critical attitude to the local Liberal hierarchy. Finally, there were the two Cardiff dailies, a curious pair. The *South Wales Daily News*, the leading organ of Welsh Liberalism, was much criticized for its unsympathetic attitude towards Welsh affairs and for the unadventurous approach of its Scottish editors, the Duncans. On the other hand, the *Western Mail*, avowedly Church and Tory, ardently promoted the claims of Wales for national equality. "Cochfarf" and William Brace graced its columns, and it gave full coverage to the religious, cultural and sporting life of Wales. It pressed for Lloyd George's inclusion in Campbell-Bannerman's Cabinet of 1905.<sup>1</sup> A Liberal writer described the *Mail* as "the strongest nationalising agency we have in the country".<sup>2</sup> The fortunes of the two Cardiff dailies indicate clearly the nature of Glamorgan politics, and the limitations of the Welsh national movement. Radicalism degenerated into pomp and circumstance. Nationalism was transmuted into nationality.

The period which saw these social and political forces operating in Glamorgan saw also the rise, culmination and slow decline of the movement for political nationalism in Wales, whose early origins may be traced in the clamour of 1868. These were the years of the dominant image of Gladstone, of Lloyd George's rebellion of 1894, of *Cymru Fydd*, of the Education revolt and of the Liberal election triumph of 1906. Gladstone had to be aware of the Welsh sentiment of Glamorgan in the appointment of a new bishop of Llandaff in 1882.<sup>3</sup> These basic themes lie outside the scope of this article. What is of real interest in these years is the growth of a specifically Glamorgan attitude in national politics, an assertion that the wealthiest and

<sup>1</sup> *Western Mail*, 5 December 1905.

<sup>2</sup> J. O. Jones, "The National Awakening in Wales: IV In its relation to the Press" (*Young Wales*, December 1895).

<sup>3</sup> Gladstone to the Bishop of Durham, 28 December 1882 (B. Mus., Add. MSS., 44478, f. 271).

most populous county in Wales might have special claims, divergent from those of Wales as a nation, that, in fact, the concept of Welsh nationhood required re-appraisal, if not revision.

An early indication of this was seen in the formation of a separate South Wales Liberal Federation at the end of 1886. It came out more emphatically in the tithe controversy, when D. A. Thomas, among others, insisted that tithe should be re-allocated on a population basis by a national council, not devoted simply to the county where it originated.<sup>1</sup> Conflict came into the open at Llandrindod Wells in 1891, during the discussions on Alfred Thomas's proposed Welsh National Institutions Bill. Here the Glamorgan delegates, led by Blandy Jenkins, first threatened to secede, then demanded that the suggested National Council should contain one member per 40,000 of the population of the larger counties.<sup>2</sup> However with South Wales Liberals declaring vehemently for disestablishment and Irish Home Rule in 1892, national unity seemed to be maintained.

But *Cymru Fydd* brought a fatal disruption. The South Wales Liberal Federation, headed by D. A. Thomas, became increasingly suspicious of an organization dominated by the rural hinterland in general, and by Lloyd George in particular. Antagonism built up in 1895, and ultimate disaster was foreshadowed when it was agreed to establish four regional councils, of which Glamorgan and Monmouth would constitute one. At the notorious Newport convention in January, 1896, only seven out of twenty South Wales constituencies were represented, and only two (Llanelly and Rhondda) had been given instructions.<sup>3</sup> Here, Robert Bird, a respected and moderate Cardiff politician, took up the cudgels on behalf of the cosmopolitan South, with fatal effect. The "Newport Englishmen" carried the day and the national movement collapsed.

<sup>1</sup> H. of C., 6 May 1895, speech by D. A. Thomas (*Parl. Deb.*, 4th series, xxxii, p. 565).

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Lewis to T. E. Ellis, 9 March 1892 (Ellis Papers, N.L.W.).

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd George to J. H. Lewis, 16 January 1896 (Penucha MSS.). The phrase "Newport Englishmen" is taken from this letter.

*Cymru Fydd* was dead, but its memory lingered to poison further efforts to unify liberalism and nationalism in Wales. In 1898, a new attempt was made with a Welsh "National Liberal Council", proposed by Lloyd George. The Cardiff Liberal Association strongly attacked the proposal to give each constituency equal weight on the Council, and to leave a 34-32 majority of non-elected members, so reminiscent of the "wire-pulling" of *Cymru Fydd*. D. A. Thomas revived his plan for four regional councils. At the inaugural meeting at Cardiff, a façade of unity was preserved: it was agreed that constituency associations would nominate one delegate per 3,000 electors—but at the expense of removing all the teeth from the proposed body.<sup>1</sup> It was now no more than a body for co-ordinating propaganda, the mouthpiece of Liberalism in Wales. In the first twelve months of its existence, its sole achievement was the appointment of a secretary. Cardiff remained incurably suspicious. In 1899, it succeeded in striking out a provision for the representation of non-elective bodies, such as the London *Cymru Fydd* (name of ill omen!). Lloyd George harangued "Cochfarf" to little effect.<sup>2</sup> The Cardiff Liberal Association maintained an attitude of stubborn reluctance towards any reform in the constitution of the body for years to come, and the National Council failed to develop any initiative of its own. Not until 1908 did it take an independent part in election organization.<sup>3</sup>

This divergence came out repeatedly whenever a representative body was visualized for Wales as a whole. It was the major element in thwarting efforts to set up a separate Welsh Education Council after 1906. Glamorgan local authorities repeatedly criticized the composition of the proposed taxing bodies. This same factor made E. T. John's role an unhappy one when he tried to revive the Welsh Home Rule movement after 1910. After the Great War, the political complexion of "the Bolsheviks

<sup>1</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 5 February 1898. The *Cambria Daily Leader*, *loc. cit.*, gives a somewhat different account.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd George to Edward Thomas, 15 July 1899, "Private", (Cochfarf Papers).

<sup>3</sup> In the Pembrokeshire by-election of July 1908.

of the South" made the gulf unbridgeable.<sup>1</sup> Did all this reflect parochial fractiousness or democratic zeal on the part of the most populous county? More than anything else, it showed that two societies and two cultures had grown up in Wales.

In the early years of the present century, this apparently immutable pattern of representation and opinion began to break down. Democracy in Glamorgan began to take on a new, and to the older generation of Liberals, a more sinister meaning. The rise of Labour in political life marks out a totally new phase, in which the enfranchised proletariat began to demand more direct representation. It was not a cataclysmic process, as more sociological interpretations of the growth of the Labour Party appear to imply. It was a development that arose out of the older patterns of thought and organization, gradually and partially.

The major milestones are clear. The long and bitter coal stoppage of 1898 was one: it shook the mining unions into the unity of the South Wales Miners Federation, and saw the growth of over thirty I.L.P. branches in the Glamorgan valleys.<sup>2</sup> The formation of the Labour Representation Committee in February, 1900, was another, with Keir Hardie's remarkable victory at Merthyr Tydfil as its first achievement. The formation of a miners' Parliamentary Fund in 1901 was a third, followed shortly by the termination of the hated Sliding Scale, which tied wages to the fluctuations of the price level. Throughout the valleys of Glamorgan we can see the class consciousness of working men assuming political form. But it is a story that requires detailed, almost fragmentary, presentation against the background of local pressures and animosities in each constituency.

Tensions built up slowly. Against the intransigent prejudices of local Liberal Associations must be measured the ill-organized machinery of the Labour movement that continued until the new constitution of 1918. The indignation aroused by

<sup>1</sup> D. R. Grenfell to E. T. John, 18 December 1923 (E. T. John Papers, N.L.W.) (in Welsh).

<sup>2</sup> *I.L.P. News*, September 1898. Cf. article by Keir Hardie in *Labour Pioneer*, September 1902.



the Taff Vale decision against the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was profound: it seemed to herald an employers' counter-offensive on the ominous transatlantic pattern. But the unions were slow to turn their wrath into practical organization. The body which selected John Williams as "Labour" candidate for Gower in 1903 had credentials almost as dubious as those of its Liberal opponents.<sup>1</sup> Much uncertainty also attended the nomination of William Brace by the "South Glamorgan Labour Representation League" at Barry in August, 1903, a body dominated by the local branch of the A.S.R.S.<sup>2</sup> Brace reluctantly announced his intention to stand "under the name of Labour", even though the mining areas comprised less than a fifth of the electorate. Under pressure from Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal Chief Whip, the South Glamorgan Liberal Five Hundred was compelled to accept Brace: after all, his Liberal credentials as vice-President of the Welsh National Liberal Council were unimpeachable.<sup>3</sup> But perhaps an equally potent factor in persuading the Liberal Five Hundred to accept him was the failure to find any suitable alternative. In 1906, Brace triumphed by the record margin of over 4,000 votes, and joined Mabon and John Williams as a triad of mining representatives for Glamorgan.

The growth of class tension after 1906 rapidly accelerated the development of labour as an active political force. Again Cardiff and Swansea Town remain exceptions: the heterogeneous nature of their labour force militated against unity. In January, 1910, the poor showing of Ben Tillett, the Dockers' nominee, at the general election in Swansea contrasted vividly with the success of Labour candidates in municipal elections in the borough.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, however, the more homogeneous the electorate, the more effective its organized activity. In 1905, Watts Morgan had informed the Rhondda miners that a S.W.M.F.

<sup>1</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 4 October 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August 1903.

<sup>3</sup> H. Pelling and F. Bealey, *Labour and Politics, 1900-1906* (London, 1958), pp. 228-9.

<sup>4</sup> Stan Awbery, *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea* (Swansea, 1949), p. 31 ff.

nominee "could call himself what he liked—Liberal, Conservative, Democrat or Socialist, and was only pledged to the Labour programme of the Federation".<sup>1</sup> But events were rapidly making this political eclecticism outmoded. Although the miners as a whole voted against affiliation to the Labour Party in 1906, South Wales voted strongly in favour, by 41,843 votes to 31,527.<sup>2</sup> The annual conference of the S.W.M.F. that year saw Mabon and Brace subjected to unprecedented criticism for their adherence to Liberalism.<sup>3</sup> The Federation laid claim to every Glamorgan seat when the sitting member retired. In 1908 South Wales miners again voted heavily for affiliation to the Labour Party, and on this occasion the Miners' Federation of Great Britain generally supported them. In 1910, two more constituencies saw a gulf developing between Labour and Liberalism. In Mid-Glamorgan, the local Liberal caucus rejected an appeal by the Master of Elibank to allow Vernon Hartshorn, the miners' candidate, to succeed S. T. Evans.<sup>4</sup> In both the by-election in March and the general election in December, the Liberal candidate was returned, in the name of nonconformity and Welsh nationalism. But the narrowness of the Liberal margin served to make these the most bitter elections that the constituency had ever known. In East Glamorgan also, a Labour candidate opposed a Liberal in December, 1910, in the person of C. B. Stanton, later a bellicose supporter of the Lloyd George coalition, but now at his zenith as a revolutionary fire-brand. He also was unsuccessful.

More significant than these episodes, however, is a growing impatience with the political process as a whole. This was fermented by the savage events that disfigured the Cambrian strike of 1910-11, nominally caused by the dispute over wage rates in "abnormal places", but more fundamentally by the deep apprehension among the mining community at the sinister growth of the oligipoly of the Cambrian Combine. Industrial

<sup>1</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 5 January 1905.

<sup>2</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 5 October 1906.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 March 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 March 1910.

co-operation was dead. As Stanton told the miners of Aberdare, "They were going in for an industrial union, and were going to use it for political purposes in a way which had never been done before".<sup>1</sup> 1911 saw the eclipse of Mabon and Brace in the counsels of the S.W.M.F. Noah Ablett's *Miners' Next Step* meditated the total overthrow of the capitalist structure. By 1914 the coalfield was seething with tension, and many more years of suffering, poverty and class conflict lay ahead before the primacy of the constitutional method was accepted by Labour in Glamorgan.

Even so, in the years up to 1914 the working class of Glamorgan was slow to accept the political power provided for it by the Act of 1884. The eclipse of Liberalism was still far from obvious. A number of technical reasons may be advanced—the restrictions on the franchise through such provisions as the disqualification on receipt of Poor Relief, the high cost of registration and of the maintenance of members. But these are only partial explanations. The basic cause was the unity of outlook that prevailed between the professional and mercantile Liberals who ruled Glamorgan political life and the working-class mind. They shared the same animosities—the bishop and the squire, the alien Church and the dear loaf, the Chinese slave and the unearned increment. Only gradually did this pattern break up, and then usually due to unnecessary local intransigence. The chapels of Glamorgan lost ground before the more adventurous minds of the new immigrants, Industrial questions took the place of the older social animosities, still receiving retrospective inspiration from the martyrs of 1868. Financial pressures were breaking up the estates of the old Tory squire. The new tyranny seemed to stem from the coalowners of Tony-pandy, many of whom were Liberals and nonconformists. Attention turned away from those 300,000 Glamorgan people who attended places of worship to the 600,000 who did not.

Yet, as the old Liberal system became static and artificial, its mystique remained. The evangelicalism of Keir Hardie proved

<sup>1</sup> *Merthyr Express*, 17 September 1909.

more effective at the polls than the crude materialism of C. B. Stanton. *Marchog Iesu yn llwyddianus*, the battle-hymn of the 1904 revival, found more favour than "The Red Flag". A few nonconformist ministers, the Rev. T. Nicholas of Glais, the Rev. J. Nicholas of Tonypany, Dr. "Gomer" Lewis of Swansea prominent among them, tried to unite *Y Ddraig Goch a'r Fanner Goch*.<sup>1</sup> "Who was their Saviour but a Labour man?"<sup>2</sup> Until 1914, this traditional appeal could exert supreme influence. Only after 1914, with the social upheavals of the war years, was the dominance of Liberal nonconformists, Liberal Associations and Liberal newspapers effectively shaken. Only then did new currents of thought turn the minds of men away from the local issues of the Glamorgan valleys, and on to the international aspirations of the working class as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> *Y Geninen*, Ionawr 1912. An interesting discussion by the Calvinist Methodist Assembly on "Cristionogaeth a Chymdeithas" (Christianity and Society) is printed in *Y Goleuad*, 2 Medi 1908. In this discussion, the famous preacher and theologian, Rev. J. Cynddylan Jones, electrified his audience by stating that he had been voting Labour for many years.

<sup>2</sup> From a speech by Dr. Gomer Lewis at Gorseinon (*South Wales Daily News* 22 January 1906).