

# AUSTERITY, AFFLUENCE AND DISCONTENT, 1951–1979

## *Part 3: “I am true to my land” - political and economic issues in Wales in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>1</sup>*



**Source 1:** Gwynfor Evans, leader of Plaid Cymru, protesting at the opening of the Tryweryn reservoir <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad" better in English or in Welsh?

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/tryweryn-fifty-years-sense-injustice-10300573>

## Tryweryn – the drowning of a Welsh village<sup>3</sup>

Capel Celyn was a small rural community in the Afon Tryweryn valley near Bala in north Wales made up of several houses and farms, a post office, a school and a Methodist chapel with its own cemetery<sup>4</sup>. 67 people lived there. It was one of the last Welsh-only speaking communities in the area. In 1956 Liverpool City Council asked Parliament to pass a law to allow them to build a reservoir in the valley to provide water for the city. To do this Capel Celyn would have to be flooded. Because they asked Parliament for permission it meant that local authorities in Wales would not be asked for their permission. It also meant that Liverpool were taking the water from Wales without paying for it, and could even sell it on without Wales receiving any money for it.

In March 1956 the Capel Celyn Defence Committee was formed. Its members included well-known local politicians like Megan Lloyd George, Ifan ab Owen Edwards and Lord Ogmores. Plaid Cymru's leader Gwynfor Evans was also involved. Letters and petitions were soon being sent to the Liverpool Water Corporation<sup>5</sup>. In November 1956 The residents of Capel Celyn and their supporters marched through Liverpool to the town hall to ask the city council to reconsider. Their banners had slogans like "Your homes are safe – why destroy ours" and "Please Liverpool, be a great city not a big bully"<sup>6</sup>.

Elwyn Edwards was a 13 year old schoolboy in 1956 when he went on the protest march to Liverpool. "Two bus-loads of us went from Capel Celyn and the police met us near the tunnel in Liverpool and led us to the start point. Carrying placards we walked through the streets. Some people were friendly but others were abusive. Many didn't know why we were there as the local papers were not carrying the story of our fight to stop the valley being drowned."<sup>7</sup>

Initially the council refused to allow Gwynfor Evans to speak. Liverpool city council offered to compensate the people of Capel Celyn Councillor Dafydd Roberts, chair of the Defence Committee said: "You can talk of compensation, it is not compensation we call for, but to keep our homes." A few weeks later Gwynfor Evans was invited back and did make an impassioned plea to Liverpool's councillors. It made no difference – the council voted 95 to 1 to support the plan<sup>8</sup>. On 19th October 2005 Liverpool city council issued an official apology for this decision.

"Everyone deplores the fact that in the interests of progress, some people must suffer," Liverpool MP Bessie Braddock told the Commons at the time. "But that is progress."<sup>9</sup> 35 out of 36 Welsh MPs voted against the Tryweryn bill, the other Welsh MP abstaining [not voting for or against] but in July 1957 it was passed by Parliament by 166 to 117 votes.

<sup>3</sup> BBC iWonder timeline with photographs and video clips of the drowning of Tryweryn can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zt4hycw> as well as the Peoples Collection Wales photographs of campaign to save Tryweryn <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/collections/376985> Peoples Collection Wales photographs "Leaving Capel Celyn" at <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/collections/376981> and the National Library of Wales page of Tryweryn with documents and images and there is a bilingual photo archive of building Tryweryn can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cymrufyw/34518186> and Peoples Collection Wales on Tryweryn (images and audio) at <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/content/tryweryn> as well as BBC News website Tryweryn: Locals on the Welsh village 'drowned' by a reservoir video clips <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34597653>

<sup>4</sup> A rare glimpse of life in Capel Celyn before flooding can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvBxJEeU1GI> as well as a British Pathe clip from 1957 "Sentence on a Valley" can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2PGQhK4uYU>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/tryweryn-shock-plans-flood-snowdonia-10240443>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/tryweryn-shock-plans-flood-snowdonia-10240443>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/tryweryn-villagers-marched-liverpool-voice-10248505>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/tryweryn-villagers-marched-liverpool-voice-10248505>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/tryweryn-liverpool-councils-belated-apology-10286902>



**Source 2:** A protest against the Tryweryn reservoir in Liverpool in 1956<sup>10</sup>

The Ministry for Welsh Affairs had 680 letters of complaint. One letter from Swansea said “We in Wales are fighting to the last ditch to defend our language and our culture. We dread to think that a power like Liverpool Corporation has the freedom to walk into our country and steal our water and our land in this tyrannical way.” However, one man who had lived in the valley wrote a letter to the government in support of the flooding. He had lived in valley for 50 years and saw its decline - how there used to be 50 children in the school now there were only 9; how the Capel Celyn Defence Committee was made up of outsiders and Plaid members who did not know the terrible conditions locals were living in; how people felt pressured to show support for nationalists even though could see advantages to moving to better housing. By 1957 most residents were happy to receive compensation and relocation and only being moved four miles away.<sup>11</sup>

No Welsh MP supported it, no Welsh council agreed to it but the decision was taken anyway. To many people it seemed like Wales was completely powerless to have any say in its own future. Support for Plaid Cymru increased and they increased the number of seats they were able to challenge in the 1959 election<sup>12</sup>.

Some people were more extreme in their protests. On September 22 1962, David Pritchard and David Walters damaged equipment at the site. They were arrested and fined £50 each. On February 10, 1963, Aberystwyth student Emyr Llywelyn Jones, a member of Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (MAC – Movement for the Defence of Wales), placed a 5lb bomb at the base of an electrical transformer at the construction site. He was sent to prison for 12 months. Owain Williams and John Alert Jones blew up a pylon at Gellilydan in response to the sentence. The explosion caused serious damage. They were jailed for 12 months<sup>13</sup>.

Twelve houses and farms ended up under the new lake, Llyn Celyn, created by the dam<sup>14</sup>. 48 people of the 67 who lived in the valley lost their homes. 3.2 km<sup>2</sup> of land were submerged. 8 bodies were moved from the chapel cemetery to a new one<sup>15</sup>. The total cost was “20 million.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/tryweryn-fifty-years-sense-injustice-10300573>

<sup>11</sup> From page 212 of *Wales Since 1939* by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670

<sup>12</sup> BBC News article Tryweryn: How reservoir of anger ‘fuelled nationalist cause’ at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-34533405> and Gwynfor Evans 1959 book “We Learn From Tryweryn” can be downloaded from <http://www.hanesplaidcymru.org/download/llyfrynnau/1959%20Learn%20from%20Tryweryn.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/flooding-tryweryn-valley-done-liverpool-10284326>

<sup>14</sup> 40 minute film from 1965 “Tryweryn, Story of a Valley” can be seen at <http://player.bfi.org.uk/film/watch-tryweryn-the-story-of-a-valley-1965/> and BBC clip “The Drowning of Tryweryn” from 1965 can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01284gb>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/guide/ch22\\_a\\_new\\_nation.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/guide/ch22_a_new_nation.shtml)

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The official opening ceremony of Tryweryn on 28th October 1965 was a farce. There were 400 guests and 500 protesters. There was lots of booing and shouting. Someone tried to burn the Union Jack. Stones were thrown at the platform. Speeches had to be cut short as the microphone lead was cut<sup>16</sup>. It was also the first public appearance of the **paramilitary** [like an army] Free Wales Army with their uniforms and Welsh flags<sup>17</sup>.

A new road had to be built from Bala to Ffestiniog to avoid the valley. A sign on the A487 near Llanrhystud, Ceredigion still reads “Cofiwch Dryweryn” (Remember Tryweryn)<sup>18</sup><sup>19</sup>.

“These English you’re just going out to meet have taken our coal, our water, our steel; they buy our houses and live in them a fortnight a year. Down the centuries these English have exploited and pillaged us – and we’re playing them this afternoon, boys.” Wales Coach Phil Bennett’s call to arms before the England-Wales 1977 rugby match.<sup>20</sup>

### Tragedy at Aberfan<sup>21</sup>

On October 21st, the Friday before half term, disaster struck the mining village of Aberfan. A waste tip from the nearby Merthyr Vale colliery slid down the hillside. Covering part of Pantglas primary school and damaging several farms and villages. 2,000 people were involved in the rescue effort<sup>22</sup> digging through the rubble to find survivors, but no one was brought out of the rubble alive after 11 a.m. that morning. 144 people died, 116 of them were children aged between 7 and 10. It was devastating for such a small close-knit community.<sup>23</sup>



**Source 3:** Rescuers digging through the mud in Aberfan to find survivors <sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> From page 233 of *Wales Since 1939* by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670

<sup>17</sup> ITV Wales clip on Tryweryn and the Free Wales Army <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxEiJekU2pg>

<sup>18</sup> Tryweryn: Personal stories 50 years after drowning at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-34528336> and Tryweryn 50 years on programme clips <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06jsxbk> and the 1998 Manic Street Preachers song “Ready for Drowning” inspired by Tryweryn can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a33J4ADNfoo>

<sup>19</sup> From page 15 *Wales 1900 to the present day* by Harri Jones and Colin Hughes published by CAA in 2014 ISBN 9781845215279

<sup>20</sup> From page 512 of *Seasons in the Sun* by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160

<sup>21</sup> Clip from “Wales in the Seventies” about remembering Aberfan <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00hb3fw> and Aberfan: 50 years since a tragedy that shook the world ITV page with video clips and photographs <http://www.itv.com/news/wales/2016-10-21/aberfan-50-years-since-a-tragedy-that-shook-the-world/> and <http://www.itv.com/news/2016-10-21/happy-childhoods-ended-in-devastation-of-aberfan-tragedy/> and the recent newspaper commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan tragedy <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/wales-set-fall-silent-nation-12057055> and <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/aberfan-50-years-on-nation-12057394> and <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/how-aberfan-marked-50-years-12062773> and <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/aberfan-today-community-forging-new-12018850> the Guardian article on how Aberfan should be remembered <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/oct/09/aberfan-50-years-owen-sheers-the-green-hollow-film-poem> as well as the Channel 4 report on 50th anniversary of Aberfan at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVtYZdzjmMQ> and Carwyn Jones speaks as Aberfan is remembered in the Senedd <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-37702692> and <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/aberfan-was-a-man-made-disaster-50-years-on-we-must-remember-thi/>

<sup>22</sup> 1966 British Pathe reports on the rescue operation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nr-6uxM7y8> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LzJLww3DvM>

<sup>23</sup> BBC documentaries “Aberfan the untold story” can be seen at <https://youtu.be/TGwJsDbmv9M> and “Surviving Aberfan” can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeBVuofaSY4> and the BBC website page on Aberfan including photographs and testimony is at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/150d11df-c541-44a9-9332-560a19828c47>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/michael-sheen-gives-moving-recital-12018594>



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One of the survivors from Pantglas Primary School said “I was there for about an hour and a half until the fire brigade found me. I heard cries and screams, but I couldn’t move. The desk was jammed into my stomach and my leg was under the radiator. The little girl next to me was dead and her head was on my shoulder.”<sup>25</sup>

50,000 letters of condolence were sent to Aberfan. The funerals of the victims were broadcast on the BBC<sup>26</sup>. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited eight days after the disaster<sup>27</sup>. There were resolutions of support from the Houses of Commons and Lords. Secretary of State for Wales Cledwyn Hughes immediately ordered an inquiry into what had happened. It was chaired by Sir Herbert Edmund Davies, a barrister who was familiar with mining law. The inquiry sat for 2 months, heard 136 witnesses, looked at 300 pieces of evidence, and read 2.5 million words of testimony<sup>28</sup>.

The inquiry report was published on 3rd August 1967 . It said, “...the Aberfan disaster is a terrifying tale of bungling ineptitude by many men charged with tasks for which they were totally unfitted, of failure to heed clear warnings, and of a total lack of direction from above. Not villains but decent men, led astray by foolishness or by ignorance or by both in combination, are responsible for what happened at Aberfan... Blame for the disaster rests upon the National Coal Board. This is shared, though in varying degrees, among the NCB [National Coal Board] headquarters, the South Western Divisional Board, and certain individuals... The legal liability of the NCB to pay compensation of the personal injuries, fatal or otherwise, and damage to property, is incontestable and uncontested”<sup>29</sup>.

The inquiry was appalled by the behaviour of the NCB, both before and after the disaster. Lord Robens, chairman of the NCB, insisted through most of the proceedings that the NCB had not known anything was wrong with the tip at Aberfan. He eventually appeared at the end of the inquiry gave evidence and admitted the NCB was at fault. It turned out that the NCB had not done a survey of the site for the Aberfan tip. The local spring that ran through the area was on all maps from the time<sup>30</sup>. The local authority had repeatedly complained to the NCB about coal waste being washed down to the primary school but the NCB had said it was safe<sup>31</sup>. Robens offered his resignation but the Labour government rejected it as they needed him to help try and stop the decline of the coal industry.

A disaster fund was set up to raise money for Aberfan and raised £1.75 million (£25million in modern money) but there were arguments between the community and the local authority about how the money would be spent. The local council had also upset the grieving families by sending out duplicated letters of condolence, then sent their children to the Merthyr Vale primary school beneath another coal mining waste tip and in full sight of the cemetery which contained the graves of their friends<sup>32</sup>.

The people of Aberfan wanted the remaining waste tips removed because they were a reminder and disaster. The NCB said would it would cost too much. In August 1968 the government forced the disaster fund to pay £150,000 to have them removed even though should never have been placed there by NCBs own rules. The disaster fund also ended up paying for rebuilding of village chapel that had been used as a temporary mortuary. People could no longer bear to worship in the old building but the NCB refused to pay for it<sup>33</sup>. Mining communities were reluctant to criticise the

<sup>25</sup> From page 308 of The Story of Wales by Jon Gower published by BBC in 2012 ISBN 9781849903738

<sup>26</sup> Gwyn Thomas' eulogy broadcast by the BBC on the day of the funeral <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-37717604> or at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7z7pBV15yk>

<sup>27</sup> ITV News report on the Queen and Aberfan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aObxL02DnHs>

<sup>28</sup> From page 308 of The Story of Wales by Jon Gower published by BBC in 2012 ISBN 9781849903738

<sup>29</sup> From page 308 of The Story of Wales by Jon Gower published by BBC in 2012 ISBN 9781849903738

<sup>30</sup> HWB Aberfan resource including maps, a powerpoint of photographs and activities can be found at <http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/resources/resource/8ea08714-3f92-4ce4-b5c9-3d7bd8e17503>

<sup>31</sup> From page 308 of The Story of Wales by Jon Gower published by BBC in 2012 ISBN 9781849903738

<sup>32+33</sup> From page 245 of Wales Since 1939 by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670

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NCB as they were worried that theirs might be the next coal mine to be closed<sup>34</sup>.

The disaster at Aberfan prompted a number of campaigns to remove or level coal waste tips from other mining communities which resulted in the landscaping of many coal mining areas that can still be seen today<sup>35</sup>.

### Wales and the Royal Family

#### Map 1: The United Kingdom



Speaking to members of both Houses of Parliament during the celebrations for her Silver Jubilee on 4 May 1977, Queen Elizabeth II said, 'I cannot forget that I was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Perhaps this Jubilee is a time to remind ourselves of the benefits which union has conferred, at home and in our international dealings on the inhabitants of all parts of this United Kingdom'.<sup>36</sup>

The Royal Family played a role in recognising the identity of Wales as a nation. Wales had never been a kingdom in its own right so it was not included in the Union Jack. The Stuarts had replaced

<sup>34</sup> Story about how the NCB let down the people of Aberfan can be read at <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/how-people-aberfan-were-repeatedly-12025941> and <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/terrifying-tale-ineptitude-aberfan-disaster-12025544>

<sup>35</sup> From page 308 of The Story of Wales by Jon Gower published by BBC in 2012 ISBN 9781849903738

<sup>36</sup> Richard Weight, Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000 (London, 2013), page 548. There was some controversy as she was Queen Elizabeth II of England, Ireland and Wales but not Scotland which had its own monarchy when Elizabeth I was queen; you can hear the Queen saying this at <http://goo.gl/r6H6Qr>

the Tudor dragon in the royal flag with a unicorn which represented the Scottish monarchy. After a lot of debate and rejection of several flags suggested by English designers, the Queen officially recognised Henry Tudor's flag, white and green with the red dragon, as the Welsh flag in 1960. It quickly sprang up on buildings around Wales. There continued to be a lot of warmth towards the Royal Family in Wales. The Queen was well received in her tours of Wales following her coronation in 1953, and to celebrate her Silver Jubilee in 1977.

## FOCUS : the investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales in 1969<sup>37</sup>

The Queen's decision to officially **invest** her eldest son Charles as Prince of Wales at Caernarfon castle in 1969 was very controversial in Wales.<sup>38</sup> The title 'Prince of Wales' had been granted to the heir to the English throne since 1301 by King Edward I as a symbol of English control of Wales, but the title had never really been formally used. Working with Prime Minister Harold Wilson, the Queen had decided that giving Prince Charles this title would strengthen support for the United Kingdom and reduce the appeal of nationalism.

There were a number of objections when it was announced that Prince Charles would be crowned Prince of Wales. There were sit-ins, hunger strikes and protest marches. There were complaints about English imperialism imposing itself on Wales, about the waste of public money. Plaid Cymru was put in a difficult position and said nothing about the investiture because they did not want to alienate their young members by supporting it they did not want to lose their older supporters by opposing it<sup>39</sup>.

Charles went to study Welsh at Aberystwyth University for a term before the investiture. His tutor was a supporter of Plaid Cymru. Prime Minister **Harold Wilson** was worried that he would be vulnerable to attack but MI5 said he was not in any danger. The few Welsh students who protested as he walked through the streets to his classes each day were drowned out by his supporters. Charles was so sympathetic to the Welsh view that his advisers became worried that he was too sympathetic to the nationalist cause.

To avoid causing trouble at the ceremony the authorities had arrested the leaders of the paramilitary group Free Wales Army. They were put on trial on the day of the investiture but their exaggerated claims about their achievements and the extent of their support just resulted in three of them being sent to prison and three being given suspended sentences.

There were a lot of hoax calls about bombs. Movement for the Defence of Wales (MAC) were planning four explosions, not to kill Charles but to cause disruption. Two members of MAC were killed in Abergele the day before the investiture when their gelignite exploded<sup>40</sup>. A bomb went off outside garden of the Chief Constable of Gwynedd without causing any injuries. Four days later a 10 year old boy lost a foot after tripping on explosives outside an ironmongers yard Charles had passed on his way to the castle. Another bomb at Llandudno pier failed to go off. In November 1969 John Jenkins and Frederick Alders were arrested and sent to prison for causing explosions and the MAC bombing campaign came to an end.

<sup>37</sup> BBC interactive timeline of the 1969 investiture can be accessed at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/timeline/investiture.shtml> and articles containing photographs of the investiture can be found at <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/queen-gives-blessing-welsh-crown-9259507> and <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/welsh-history-month-many-supported-7830492>

<sup>38</sup> See colour footage of the investiture at <http://goo.gl/zsvXBz>

<sup>39</sup> From page 195 of A History of Modern Wales by Philip Jenkins published by Longman in 1992 ISBN 9780582489257

<sup>40</sup> Article about the controversy of a march to commemorate the two men killed while taking a bomb to the investiture can be read at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/8120839.stm>



**Source:** the investiture of Prince Charles as the Prince of Wales in Caernarfon Castle 1969<sup>41</sup>

The investiture went ahead on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1969. In his speech, delivered in Welsh, Charles recognised that the people of Wales were determined to protect their heritage and to remain a proud and distinct nation. 90,000 watched the procession in Caernarfon, a lot less than 250,000 that had been expected. The investiture ceremony was also televised and broadcast around the world – it was an international celebration of Welsh culture in a way that had not happened before. 500 million people watched the ceremony around the world, 19 million of them in the UK<sup>42</sup>. The ceremony cost £200,000 of public money but had produced a big boost to the local economy in tourism.

After all of the threats of disruption the special magistrates court only had to deal with a few incidents - two cases of indecent exposure, two for carrying offensive weapons, three for a breach of the peace (two of which for flicking “V” signs at the Queen resulting in the crowd turning on them and one for throwing a banana skin under the Household Cavalry).

Opinion polls suggested that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Welsh people supported the event<sup>43</sup>, although a higher proportion of younger people were hostile towards it.. On the 1st July the South Wales Argus reported, “the inbuilt tension cannot disguise the fact that for the vast majority of the people of Wales the investiture is a joyful and memorable occasion. For the ordinary man and woman in the street the abstract political arguments are less imposing than the reality of a colourful ceremony involving a young prince and his family who, in the past week or two, have become more intimately alive and real thanks to film, photographs and interviews in the Press”.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/incoming/gallery/prince-charless-investiture-caernarfon-1969-7353393>

<sup>42</sup> From page 235 of *The People of Wales* edited by Gareth Elwyn Jones and Dai Smith published by Gomer in 2000 ISBN 9781859027431

<sup>43</sup> From page 288 *The Story of Wales* by Jon Gower published by BBC in 2012 ISBN 9781849903738

<sup>44</sup> From page 235 of *Wales Since 1939* by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670



## Developments in Welsh politics



**Source 4:** Photograph of the plaque at the entrance to the Wales Office, Westminster, London, April 2014

Wales had been legally united with England in 1536 but unlike Scotland and Northern Ireland it had never had its own parliament, laws, or education system. The distinct Welsh-speaking culture in many parts of Wales became formally recognised towards the end of the nineteenth century. The 1880 education system acknowledged the Welsh language and cultural heritage and in 1893 colleges at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff joined together to form the University of Wales.

The Second World War brought some official recognition of the importance of a distinct Welsh identity. In response to complaints from Welsh listeners, the Ministry of Information told the BBC to stop using 'England' in their radio broadcasts when they meant the 'United Kingdom', because all regions of the UK were contributing to the war effort.<sup>45</sup> The BBC also began to broadcast the news in Welsh, although this frequency was soon given over to the Forces Network. It did not establish a full-time Welsh language station until Radio Cymru in 1977.

Letters and petitions were written to Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1943 from local authorities, unions and church leaders asking for a Welsh Office in Westminster. This led to:

- a Council of Wales being established by the Labour government in 1949 to look at the effect of government policies on Wales
- a Minister for Welsh Affairs being appointed by the Conservative government in 1951, although this was kept part of the role of Home Secretary until 1957 when it was passed on to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government
- Cardiff, which had been a city since 1907, was chosen as the official capital city of Wales in 1955; Caernarfon and Aberystwyth were also considered
- Under pressure to counter the rising nationalist threat in Wales Labour created the Welsh

<sup>45</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2013), page 53.

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Office in 1964; it was run by the Secretary of State for Wales<sup>46</sup> who had a seat on the Cabinet; it had power over local government, housing and roads; the Conservatives in the early 1970s added primary and secondary education, industry and employment, then Labour added agriculture, fisheries, higher education and assistance to urban areas to this list; by 1979 the Welsh Office<sup>47</sup> had an annual budget of £1.5 billion but it could only adapt directives from Westminster for Wales; its offices at Cathays Park in Cardiff opened in 1979

- The 1967 Welsh Language Act which gave the language equal status to English and said that it should not be assumed that all laws that only named England would automatically apply to Wales as they had done since 1536.
- Increased recognition of Wales as a distinct political entity also led to the Welsh Liberal Party being established in 1966, Conservatives of Wales first separate party conference 1972, and in 1975 the Welsh Regional Council of Labour became The Labour Party – Wales
- There was a re-organisation of local government in Wales and the rest of the UK in April 1974; Wales went from 4 county boroughs and 13 counties, with populations ranging from 750,000 in Glamorgan to 18,250 in Radnorshire, to 8 counties with populations varying from 531,800 in Mid-Glamorgan to 99,200 in Powys; it made Monmouthshire officially part of Wales for the first time<sup>48</sup>; old county councils disappeared to be replaced by new bigger local or regional authorities – Gwynedd, Clywd, Powys, Dyfed, Gwent were adapted from historic names from Medieval Wales, along with East, Mid and South Glamorgan; there were some serious practical difficulties - the councillor for Borth in the north end of old Cardiganshire had a round trip of 100 miles to council meetings in Carmarthen; people continued to identify with older district councils and county councils rather than new authorities.<sup>49</sup>



Welsh counties before 1974<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> BBC News website celebrating 50 years of Cardiff as the capital of Wales at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-35126210>

<sup>47</sup> Clip from "Wales in the Seventies" about Welsh Office <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00kx6hc>

<sup>48</sup> From page 638 of A History of Wales by John Davies published by Penguin in 2007 ISBN 9780140284651

<sup>49</sup> From page 401 of Wales 1880 to 1980 by Kenneth O Morgan published by Oxford in 1982 ISBN 978780198217602

<sup>50</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic\\_counties\\_of\\_Wales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_counties_of_Wales)



Welsh counties 1974 to 1996<sup>51</sup>

Labour was the dominant political party in Wales, even when it was not the party of government for the UK. Decisions about Wales continued to be made at Parliament in Westminster. 36 out of 650 MPs represented constituencies in Wales. Economic growth meant that there was little support for Plaid Cymru which had nine candidates in the 1959 general election. They all failed to win at least 5% of the vote.<sup>52</sup> In 1959 a campaign for a Welsh Parliament handed in a petition with 250,000 signatures. It achieved little as the agreement between its many supporters broke down after the petition was handed in.

<sup>51</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preserved\\_counties\\_of\\_Wales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preserved_counties_of_Wales)

<sup>52</sup> Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), page 524.

## The rise of Plaid Cymru

**Table 1: Plaid Cymru general election results 1959–1979<sup>53</sup>**

General Election	Candidates	Seats Won	Votes Won
1959	20	0	77,571
1964	23	0	69,507
1966	20	0	61,071
1970	36	0	175,016
1974	36	2	171,374
1974	36	3	166,321
1979	36	2	132,544

Language, religion and culture were very important to the people of Wales at the start of the twentieth century. As communications with the rest of the UK improved through the twentieth century these things became less important to some Welsh people. To strengthen Welsh language and culture a Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, was formed in 1925. Initially Plaid Cymru's support came from the middle classes, from teachers, chapel ministers and professionals and by 1939 there were only 2,000 members.<sup>54</sup> Most people were more interested in supporting the proposed reforms of the Labour Party which wanted to keep Wales and Scotland in the UK. Most people in Wales lived in industrial areas and voted for the Labour Party which is why Plaid Cymru won so few votes in general elections. Many of these areas were not Welsh-speaking and had little interest in the ideals of the party. By the 1950s Plaid Cymru started to broaden its aims and take on political as well as cultural issues.

A shift in voting away from Labour was seen right across the UK, although the nationalists benefitted in Wales, and in Scotland. Plaid Cymru got 175,000 votes in the 1970 general election,<sup>55</sup> and won several seats in Parliament. Between 1959 and 1974 Plaid Cymru's share of the vote increased from 0.2% to 20%.<sup>56</sup>

It was not just that voters were turning away from the Labour Party. There were other reasons why support for Plaid Cymru increased in the 1960s:

- Welsh industry was uncompetitive and in need of modernising and unemployment doubled in 1958 alone. There were 164 coal mines in 1960 but only 52 remained open in 1970 and more mines continued to be closed.<sup>57</sup> Plaid Cymru came very close to winning by-elections in Rhondda West and Caerphilly in the 1960s, as the Labour government's programme of mine closures was leading to rising local unemployment in 1967–68. In 1967 a miner who had just been made redundant [lost his job] said, "I'll never vote for Labour again. What would I be voting for? A dead valley." In the same year a Rhondda pensioner explained why they switched their vote to Plaid Cymru: "It was a hard thing to do, but I feel that Labour closed down our pits, put men out of work without providing alternative jobs." There was also rising support for Plaid as a political protest. During the 1974 election a Caerphilly housewife said, "I've always voted Labour but I'm fed up with the big parties. Maybe I'll vote Plaid Cymru – it may help to change things and the country needs a change."<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Information from Andrew Boxer with Keith Lockton and Elizabeth Sparey, *The End of Consensus: Britain 1945–90* (Essex, 2009), page 126, and the Wikipedia page of Plaid Cymru <http://goo.gl/94e6Fe>

<sup>54</sup> Josh Brooman, *Britain in the 20th Century: People in Change* (Longman, 1994), page 144.

<sup>55</sup> Josh Brooman, *Britain in the 20th Century: People in Change* (Longman, 1994), page 145.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2013), page 408.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2013), page 403.

<sup>58</sup> From page 268 of *Wales Since 1939* by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670



## 13 Austerity, Affluence and Discontent, 1951-1979: Part 3

- Several English city councils bought up land in Welsh valleys to put a dam across them and turn them into reservoirs to provide water. One of the most controversial of these was Liverpool's plan to turn the Tryweryn valley in north-west Wales into a reservoir, which would drown a village. In 1957 Parliament voted to give Tryweryn valley to Liverpool – Plaid Cymru's leader, Gwynfor Evans, organised protests against this – they failed, but Plaid Cymru gained a lot of publicity and support<sup>59</sup>. As Henry Brooke, the minister responsible for Wales wrote to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in November 1957, 'It is imperative to avoid creating... the feeling that Wales is merely being used by the English for their own convenience, and not treated as a nation of its own'.<sup>60</sup>
- Plaid Cymru founder Saunders Lewis made an impassioned radio speech, 'Tynged yr Iaith' (The Fate of the Language) in 1962 to protect Welsh language and culture from the English dominated government in London. The speech was in response to the 1961 census, which showed a decrease in the percentage of Welsh speakers in Wales from 36% in 1931 to 26% in 1961.<sup>61</sup> This led to the formation of the Welsh Language Society (Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg) and a campaign of civil disobedience, writing Welsh names on English road signs, damaging television masts and disrupting studios which broadcast English language rather than Welsh language programmes.

### FOCUS : the 1966 Carmarthen by-election

#### 1966 general election result for Carmarthen<sup>62</sup>

Party	Candidates	Votes	%
Labour	Megan Lloyd George	21,221	46.17
Liberal	D.H. Davies	11,988	26.08
Plaid Cymru	Gwynfor Evans	7,416	16.13
Conservative	Simon Day	5,338	11.61
Labour Majority: 9,233			

#### 1966 by-election result for Carmarthen<sup>63</sup>

Party	Candidates	Votes	%
Plaid Cymru	Gwynfor Evans	16,179	38.98
Labour	Gwilym Prys-Davies	13,743	33.11
Liberal	Hywel Williams	8,650	20.84
Conservative	Simon Day	2,934	7.09
Plaid Cymru Majority: 2,436			

<sup>59</sup> A facsimile of the Gwynfor Evans 1964 pamphlet on the need for Wales only planning can be downloaded from <http://www.hanesplaidcymru.org/download/llyfrynnau/1964%20Wales%20the%20Next%20Step.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2013), page 278

<sup>61</sup> The statistics are from <http://goo.gl/y1q5Hb>

<sup>62</sup> From page 16 *Wales 1900 to the present day* by Harri Jones and Colin Hughes published by CAA in 2014 ISBN 9781845215279

<sup>63</sup> From page 16 *Wales 1900 to the present day* by Harri Jones and Colin Hughes published by CAA in 2014 ISBN 9781845215279

## 14 Austerity, Affluence and Discontent, 1951-1979: Part 3

The political breakthrough finally came when Plaid Cymru leader Gwynfor Evans won a by-election at Carmarthen in July 1966 which was set up very quickly after the Labour candidate who had won in the 1966 general election died after only two months. There were a number of reasons for this – anger at strikes and pit closures, distrust over a national economic crisis, the lack of a credible Labour candidate, as well as concerns about the impact of Select Employment Tax on rural businesses and Labour-run county council's policies towards rural schools<sup>64</sup>. Plaid were a non-Conservative alternative to the struggling Labour Party. In his victory speech Evans said, "Great steps were taken towards restoring the dignity and self-respect of an old nation that had forgotten to stand on her own two feet... Things will never be the same in Wales."<sup>65</sup> He was disappointed as he was not allowed to take his oath as an MP in Welsh<sup>66</sup>.

Over the next few years Plaid Cymru also came very close to winning in the Labour-supporting areas of Rhondda with a 30% swing in the vote from Labour to Plaid, and Caerphilly with a 40% swing in the vote from Labour to Plaid. The 1970 election was the first time Plaid contested all of the seats in Wales and got over 175,000 votes<sup>67</sup>. The party had now become a very serious threat to Labour not just in rural Welsh-speaking areas but now in the industrialised south Wales as well.

There were some set-backs. In 1970 Gwynfor Evans lost his seat in the general election. Some Labour MPs expressed prejudice against the nationalists - Leo Abse Labour MP for Pontypool said Plaid Cymru represented "irrational, insatiable... vulgar and aggressive nationalism", the "Mumbo jumbo of primitive nationalism"; young Labour MP Neil Kinnock saw them as a distraction from the real issues, as "mournful Druid fanatics"<sup>68</sup>.

However in the general election of February 1974 Plaid Cymru won two seats - Dafydd Wigley in Caernarfon and Dafydd Elis-Thomas in Meirionnydd – and in October 1974 they added Gwynfor Evans in Carmarthen again. In the 1976 local elections Plaid Cymru began to make some headway as well, gaining control of Merthyr Tydfil Council and Rhymney District in Gwent.<sup>69</sup>

In some ways Plaid Cymru had benefitted from the decline of the Liberal Party who were down to 2 Welsh MPs and 5% of the vote by the end of the 1950s. The rise of Plaid Cymru in 1970s also coincided with increasing support for both the Liberals and the Conservatives in Wales and for the first time since the Second World War Labour could count on less than half of votes from Wales in general elections. This resulted in the Labour government from 1974 becoming increasingly dependent on support from Welsh and Scottish nationalists to get laws passed through Parliament. Labour continued to act to keep the support of Welsh nationalists. For example the 1st November 1978 Queen's Speech gave more money for the Welsh Development Agency, the promise of Welsh language TV channel by 1982 and compensation for victims of silicosis [lung disease that affects miners]<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> From page 386 in *Wales 1880 to 1980* by Kenneth O Morgan published by Oxford in 1982 ISBN 978780198217602

<sup>65</sup> An audio recording of Gwynfor Evans talking about how the by election can inspire Wales can be heard at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ms6JFJqpU0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ms6JFJqpU0) ; the seat was won back by Labour in the 1970 election but lost again to Plaid Cymru in 1974 which can be seen in old footage at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9uLstkeYrs>

<sup>66</sup> A photograph of Gwynfor Evans arriving at Parliament can be seen at <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/heritage/welsh-history-and-its-sources/content-section-7.8#>

<sup>67</sup> From page 16 *Wales 1900 to the present day* by Harri Jones and Colin Hughes published by CAA in 2014 ISBN 9781845215279

<sup>68</sup> From page 512 of *Seasons in the Sun* by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160

<sup>69</sup> From page 401 of *Wales 1880 to 1980* by Kenneth O Morgan published by Oxford in 1982 ISBN 978780198217602

<sup>70</sup> From page 401 in *Wales 1880 to 1980* by Kenneth O Morgan published by Oxford in 1982 ISBN 978780198217602

### FOCUS : the devolution referendum of 1979

The Labour Party had publicly supported **devolution** of power from Westminster to Scotland and Wales since 1966. This was because they were concerned about rising support for nationalist parties. The Royal Commission on the Constitution, also known as the Kilbrandon Commission after its chairman, began work on proposals in 1968 and submitted its final report in October 1973. All 13 commissioners agreed that devolution of power to the regions was needed but they disagreed on what powers should be given to Wales –

- 2 out of the 13 commissioners thought that the Welsh Office should have more power
- 11 out of 13 commissioners thought that Wales should have an elected Assembly
- 6 out of the 13 commissioners, including both of the Welsh commissioners, wanted the Welsh Assembly to have legislative [law-making] powers <sup>71</sup>

After the general elections of 1974 the new Labour government offered Wales an elected executive 80 member Assembly to run the administration of Wales with an annual budget of £1.5 billion, which was not as much power as was proposed for Scotland where devolved government would be allowed to make some laws as well. This Assembly would be based in the old Coal Exchange in Cardiff. Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's Cabinet warned him in January 1975 that nationalists in Wales and Scotland were threatening Labour's future, and that devolution put them on "a slippery slope to the break-up of the UK", although Wilson saw devolution as the way to "weaken the forces of separatism."<sup>72</sup>

It was not a straight forward process to get the law to make this happen through Parliament as there was a lot of resistance from the Conservatives, as well as from some Labour MPs. The Labour government showed very little support for the idea despite the Prime Minister James Callaghan being MP for Cardiff South, the Minister for Employment Michael Foot being MP for Ebbw Vale and Secretary of State for Wales John Morris being MP for Aberavon. Some MPs argued it went too far and was playing to the nationalists, some said it did not go far enough. Others pointed out problems with highlighting issues with the Wales Act itself - the vague powers of the Secretary of State, as well as the lack of machinery for dealing with disagreements between Assemblies and Westminster. The Conservatives were just as divided as Labour. Former leader Edward Heath was a strong supporter of devolution but the new leader Mrs Thatcher was hostile to it.<sup>73</sup> It took a long time for the devolution laws to be passed because: <sup>74</sup>

- an amendment [change] was made that the law would not be enforced unless people supported it in a **referendum**
- the struggling Labour government made a **pact** [deal] to work with the Liberals in Parliament in 1977; the Liberals insisted on devolution for Wales and Scotland
- to overcome opposition the devolution law was split into two separate laws, one for Scotland and one for Wales
- a Scottish Labour MP called Tam Dalyell highlighted a major concern with the proposed changes which he called "the Midlothian question" – was it right that his constituents in Scotland could vote on issues that affected England, but MPs from England would not be able to vote on issues that affected Scotland
- another amendment said that only 40% of **the electorate** [the people who were allowed to vote] rather than 50% of the people who actually voted was needed for the laws to be put into effect

<sup>71</sup> From page 648 of A History of Wales by John Davies published by Penguin in 2007 ISBN 9780140284651

<sup>72</sup> From page 521 of Seasons in the Sun by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160

<sup>73</sup> From page 395 of Wales 1880 to 1980 by Kenneth O Morgan published by Oxford in 1982 ISBN 978780198217602

<sup>74</sup> From page 648 of A History of Wales by John Davies published by Penguin in 2007 ISBN 9780140284651

1960s opinion polls suggested that 60% electorate in Wales would like Welsh Assembly. The Royal Commission for the Constitution found that 64% of Welsh people thought Wales run more efficiently if had a say, 30% thought it would be worse. But there was never more than 10% support for Welsh independence. An opinion poll in May 1978 poll showed 41% of the Welsh electorate favoured the idea of an Assembly but the referendum was delayed from the end of summer 1978 to St. David’s Day 1979. Unfortunate the political turmoil of the Winter of Discontent happened in between.

The “Wales for the Assembly” campaign got off to a bad start as the leader of an important Welsh **trade union** refused to share a platform with Gwynfor Evans. Plaid Cymru had to take over all of the work of the YES campaign, whereas the NO campaign had the Welsh Conservatives, many Welsh Labour MPs, trade unions, most South Wales councils and funding from the anti-devolution Federation of Small Businesses<sup>75</sup>. Gwynfor Evans predicted “When a referendum comes we shall lose disastrously.”<sup>76</sup>

In rural areas opposition to devolution was co-ordinated by the Conservative Party, but also 6 Welsh Labour MPs - Leo Abse (Pontypool), Neil Kinnock (Bedwellty), Donald Anderson (Swansea East), Fred Evans (Caerphilly), Ioan Evans (Aberdare), Ifor Davies (Gower) - who were worried that it would divert efforts to improve the lives of working class people across the UK and that devolved assemblies would mean too much government for Wales and Scotland as an assembly was proposed for England<sup>77</sup>. There were also concerns about tensions between Welsh and non-Welsh speakers. Some English MPs were also opposed to it as they were worried devolution would divert funds away from their areas.

There was also opposition to devolution on the grounds of cost. Labour MP Neil Kinnock said in 1976 that the £12 million annual running costs of the proposed Welsh Assembly would pay for 4 hospitals, 10 comprehensive schools, 10 miles of motorway or 2 Welsh language TV channels. Another Labour MP Leo Abse talked of the “packed gravy train” of newly paid administrators. Both of them played on how it would result in an elite of Welsh speakers. Plaid Cymru had decided to support devolution but Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg had decided to oppose it as there was no Welsh language provision for the proposed Assembly.

Saunders Lewis, one of the founders of Plaid Cymru, in a letter to the Western Mail published a few days before the referendum warned that if NO won the referendum “There will follow a general election. There may be a change of government. The first task of the Westminster Parliament will be to reduce and master inflation. In Wales there are coalmines that work at a loss; there are steelworks that are judged to be superfluous; there are valleys convenient for submersion. And there will be no Welsh defence”.<sup>78</sup>

1979 referendum result for Wales<sup>79</sup>

	% of electorate
Voted “Yes”	11.9
Voted “No”	46.9
Did not vote	41.2

<sup>75</sup> From page 767 Seasons in the Sun by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160  
<sup>76</sup> From page 521 of Seasons in the Sun by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160  
<sup>77</sup> From page 648 of A History of Wales by John Davies published by Penguin in 2007 ISBN 9780140284651  
<sup>78</sup> From page 652 of A History of Wales by John Davies published by Penguin in 2007 ISBN 9780140284651  
<sup>79</sup> From page 26 of Wales 1900 to the present day by Harri Jones and Colin Hughes published by CAA in 2014 ISBN 9781845215279



## 17 Austerity, Affluence and Discontent, 1951-1979: Part 3

Yes	243,048 votes
No	956,330 votes
Rejected ballot papers	3,309
Electorate	2,038,049
Turnout	58.8%

Less than 20% of those who voted in the referendum in Wales voted "Yes" and there were some regional variations – 1 in 2 people in Gwynedd voted "No" while 9 out of 10 people in Clywd voted "No"<sup>80</sup>. Gwynfor Evans was so sure of the result that he conceded defeat before and votes had been counted.

### Reasons why the 1979 devolution referendum failed<sup>81</sup>

- There were fears that the UK government would lose interest in helping the Welsh economy to survive and grow in difficult times
- Many people were worried about the extra cost of additional layers of local government
- Opponents exploited people's fears of corruption, cronyism and Welsh language elitism as well as the north/south Wales divide
- There was no all-Wales daily newspaper to give "Yes" views as opposed to the pro-union UK daily papers [see "How the media reported the devolution campaign" below]
- The unpopularity of the Labour government after the disruption and misery of the Winter Of Discontent; some people saw this referendum vote as a protest vote against Labour
- There was a lot of indifference to the debate as many thought devolution would make no difference
- It was also portrayed as a step on the 'slippery slope' towards full independence

How the media reported the devolution campaign<sup>82</sup> -

- The Western Mail was a moderate supporter of devolution, seeing the issue being about democracy and accountability not language or separation
- The South Wales Echo played the fear card as in fearing being shut out from the Union
- The Daily Post played on North-South tensions
- London based papers like Sun and Mirror most widely read hardly mentioned it at all
- BBC and ITV did not broadcast devolution programming on English transmitters losing 35% of the Welsh TV audience

UK tabloids like the Sun and the Mirror with a ¼ million copies sold each day had very little Welsh coverage while the Western Mail (Cardiff) and the Daily Post (north Wales from Liverpool) only sold 30,000 copies a week.<sup>83</sup>

- The referendum vote in Wales was a disaster for the supporters of devolution. There were a number of serious consequences
- It helped bring down the Labour government as Scottish nationalists with slim majority of votes (but not 40% of electorate) could not get the government to move ahead with

<sup>80</sup> From page 767 Seasons in the Sun by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160

<sup>81</sup> From A History of Wales 1906-200 by D. Gareth Evans published by University of Wales in 2000 ISBN 9780708315941

<sup>82</sup> From page 295 of Wales Since 1939 by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670

<sup>83</sup> From page 231 of The People of Wales edited by Gareth Elwyn Jones and Dai Smith published by Gomer in 2000 ISBN 9781859027431

## 18 Austerity, Affluence and Discontent, 1951-1979: Part 3

devolution; first the Scottish Nationalist Party and then the Conservatives proposed motions of no confidence in the government which were passed by 311 to 310 votes on 28th March 1979 even though all three Plaid MPs had given Labour their votes

- Plaid Cymru in its manifesto “A Future For Wales” played down the self-government issue
- In 1979 local elections Plaid lost Merthyr back to Labour in the 1979 local elections and Gwynfor Evans lost Carmarthen seat in the 1979 general election
- In the 1979 general election the Conservatives won 35% of the vote in Wales and Mrs Thatcher’s Conservatives were elected to form a government<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> From page 405 of *Wales 1880 to 1980* by Kenneth O Morgan published by Oxford in 1982 ISBN 978780198217602

Economic Difficulties

The UK had been in a very strong economic position at the beginning of the 1950s, but by the 1970s the UK was struggling to keep up with other countries around the world. There were two main problems that hit the UK economy at the same time and made the 1970s a difficult decade for many people to live through.

Table 3: UK’s share of world trade 1950–1970

UK’s share of world trade	1950	1960	1970
	25.5%	16.5%	10.8%

PROBLEM 1: The UK’s share of world trade quickly declined because:

- Most UK companies had expected to go on making their money from the British Empire and **the Commonwealth**. They were badly affected by the rapid process of **decolonisation** that began in the 1950s – markets that UK industries relied on began to develop their own industries and started trading with their neighbours rather than the UK.
- West Germany in Europe and Japan in the Far East were increasing their industrial production and share of world trade. Membership of the EEC had given a big boost to West German, French and Italian industry from the beginning as it was then much cheaper to trade with each other.
- The UK was making products that were less in demand like steam locomotives, or not keeping up with new developments like the shipyards which did not switch to making larger container ships and super-tankers.
- There were higher production costs in the UK because industries were not modernising and becoming more efficient which meant that goods from other countries were cheaper to buy even in the UK.
- Few UK companies were able to quickly adapt to these changing circumstances so by the 1970s even a world-famous UK company like Rolls Royce needed government help to survive.



**Table 4: Rates of economic growth between 1950 and 1973<sup>85</sup>**

Country	Rate of economic growth 1950–1973
UK	3.1%
USA	2.7%
Germany	6.0%
France	5.1%
Japan	7.7%

**PROBLEM 2:** UK **productivity** began to fall behind other countries. Between the 1950s and the 1970s the UK went from being one of the most productive countries in the world, to being one of the least productive countries in Europe. Even though the value of the British economy grew by an average of 2% each year between 1950 and 1970 other countries, such as West Germany, France and Japan, were growing at more than twice that rate. This could also vary a great deal – in 1973 the value of the UK economy grew by 5.3% but one year later it had shrunk by 2.5%.<sup>86</sup> By 1977 UK productivity was half that of West Germany and Denmark, and only Italy and the Republic of Ireland were lower in Europe.<sup>87</sup> There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- high government spending on defence and welfare rather than modernising industry
- old-fashioned working methods, machinery and facilities
- workers kept in jobs that were not really needed to avoid rising unemployment and to please trade unions, e.g. a 1953 report comparing the UK steel industry to the USA suggested that there were two or three times as many workers employed in steel in the UK than were needed, and that they could make more if workers were flexible about which jobs they would do, which UK unions would not allow.<sup>88</sup>

**PROBLEM 3:** Inflation was making prices rise faster than wages because the UK was importing more and producing less. People saw the spending power they had enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s starting to disappear. Between 1975 and 1976 average earnings fell by 18%.<sup>89</sup> At the same time the number of people who were unemployed passed one million and rising interest rates made it more difficult to borrow money. Many workers tried to get their bosses to increase their pay to help solve their problems. This brought many workers into conflict with the government which was trying to keep wages down to help lower inflation.

<sup>85</sup> Figures taken from the Warwick University article by Stephen Broadberry, 'Britain's Twentieth Century Performance in International Perspective' found at <http://goo.gl/zDahQS>

<sup>86</sup> Nicholas Comfort, *The Slow Death of British Industry: A Sixty-Year Suicide 1952–2012* (Biteback Publishing, 2013), page 240.

<sup>87</sup> Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), page 504.

<sup>88</sup> Nicholas Comfort, *The Slow Death of British Industry: A Sixty-Year Suicide 1952–2012* (Biteback Publishing, 2013), page 45.

<sup>89</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun* (London, 2012), page 367.



### Industrial Unrest<sup>90</sup>

Six million working days were lost to strikes in the first six months of 1970<sup>91</sup> including a work-to-rule by power station workers that had resulted in a number of power cuts. The 1971 Industrial Relations Act was brought in by the newly elected Conservative government to control the trade unions<sup>92</sup> who represented workers. It tried to make sure that unions only went on strike after attempts to discuss problems had been made. It did not work. Many trade union members opposed this, and many **shop stewards**<sup>93</sup> ignored their union leaders when they insisted members should follow the new rules. When the government did try to use the Act to prevent a dock strike, and a rail strike in 1972 the unions ignored them completely.

The general public supported some strikes for higher wages as rising inflation meant that prices were rapidly rising in the early 1970s – prices rose 8.6% between 1970 and 1973, and were rising by 29% by 1975.<sup>94</sup> Prices were rising because:

- the falling value of the American dollar had damaged the value of the pound, making UK imports to the USA very expensive
- the price of oil quadrupled in 1973 after OPEC, the group of Middle Eastern countries who produced most of the world's oil, restricted supplies in protest at the USA and the UK's support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War
- the rising number of strikes by different groups of workers were usually ended by awarding pay increases.

<sup>90</sup> BBC website on 1970s strikes and blackouts can be read at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6729683.stm> and Office of National Statistics survey of the history of strikes in the UK <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/the-history-of-strikes-in-britain/>

<sup>91</sup> Yesterday's Britain: The illustrated story of how we lived, worked and played in this century (Reader's Digest, 98), page 301.

<sup>92</sup> The Strawbs song 'Part of the Union' from 1972 mentions a number of ways in which trade unions acted during this period of time; see a Top of the Pops performance of the song at <http://goo.gl/NtvGO9> and Billy Bragg's 'There is Power in a Union' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFgT7eQRjel>

<sup>93</sup> This behaviour by shop stewards was satirised in the 1959 film I'm Alright Jack as may be seen at <https://goo.gl/eGm4Bh> and in the 1971 film Carry On At Your Convenience as may be seen in the clip at <http://goo.gl/YrcYR8>

<sup>94</sup> Liz Patheram, Challenging History: Britain in the 20th Century (Nelson Thomas, 2001), page 321.

### FOCUS: The Miners' Strike 1972<sup>95</sup>

This strike was about pay. Coal miners were very poorly paid for doing this dangerous job<sup>96</sup>. The coal industry had been nationalised in the 1940s, so it was run by the National Coal Board, on behalf of the government. The miners put in a pay claim for a 47% pay rise – their employers had offered them 8%. Some 280,000 miners went on strike. It caused a national power crisis and the government quickly gave the miners a large pay increase.

The miners won because the Yorkshire miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, organised thousands of '**flying pickets**' to block the movement of coal to power stations<sup>97</sup> and persuaded miners to continue to support the strike. Despite a number of violent confrontations involving miners the public continued to support them. The government was also very poorly organised and had not stockpiled coal at power stations to meet increased winter demand.

This strike led to creation of TUC [Trades Union Congress] Wales. The pay settlement that ended the 1972 strikes was quickly undermined by inflation so November 1973 93% of miners from South Wales supported another strike<sup>98</sup>. The Times newspaper reported on the situation in the mining industry on 10th January 1974 A Rhondda miner said in an interview that if Prime Minister Heath ever came to visit the colliery "we would go down the pit and walk two miles to the coalface, crouching down because of the low roof. His eyes would sting with dust and he would think his brain was coming loose with the noise of the drills. He would see us eat sandwiches with filthy hands and hear about roof falls and he would get tired just watching us dig coal for seven hours in all that din and muck. Then I would say 'would you do it – the stinkiest job in Britain – for 31 quid a week takehome [pay]?'"<sup>99</sup>

Union opposition to government attempts to limit their activities, as well as to control pay and prices, caused a national crisis in the winter of 1973. Starting in November 1973, first the miners, then electricity power engineers, then train drivers all began **overtime** bans. As a result it became increasingly difficult to maintain the normal electricity supply and some areas suffered from power blackouts. Attempts to try and get the unions back to normal working conditions failed.

With oil supplies restricted by OPEC and power stations running short of coal, Prime Minister Heath had no choice but to declare a State of Emergency. Heath imposed a Three-Day Week<sup>100</sup> on the UK from 31 December 1973. This meant that electricity would only be provided to businesses

<sup>95</sup> Clip from "Wales in the Seventies" about Wales and 1970s miners strikes

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02ddz66>. Welsh miners in the 1970s information can be found at <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/welsh-history-month-how-miners-1838816> and [http://www.agor.org.uk/cwm/themes/events/1972\\_1974\\_strikes.asp](http://www.agor.org.uk/cwm/themes/events/1972_1974_strikes.asp) with photos found at <http://www.reportdigital.co.uk/gallery/1970s/1900/1920/1048/miners-strike-1972.html>

<sup>96</sup> Max Boyce's song about the difficulties facing miners called "Duw, it's hard" can be heard recorded in 1974 at <https://youtu.be/7itxshX1i4o>

<sup>97</sup> See the BBC report on the picketing of Sattley Coke Depot at <http://goo.gl/iRadXQ>

<sup>98</sup> From page 647 of A History of Wales by John Davies published by Penguin in 2007 ISBN 9780140284651

<sup>99</sup> From page 252 of Wales Since 1939 by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670

<sup>100</sup> See Edward Heath announcing these measures at <http://goo.gl/Y9Vg9O> and see a sequence of photographs showing the effects of this at <http://goo.gl/uV11jX>

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for three specific days each week, which limited how long they could be open, and how much workers would be able to earn. Any businesses which broke these rules would be fined and their owners could face imprisonment. Restrictions did not apply to shops that sold food. Ironically UK businesses produced as much on a three-day week as they had on a five-day week.

Other measures were introduced as well. There were power cuts to people's houses, with different regions facing cuts at different times of the day on a rolling programme. Television broadcasts were ordered to end at 10.30 at night, although late night radio programmes registered large increases in their audiences. Floodlights were not allowed to be used at sporting events and street lights were turned off. To reduce fuel use a 50 miles an hour speed limit was introduced, which actually led to a reduction in the number of road accidents. Petrol stations began to run out of fuel and long queues formed at places that still had fuel as it was shared out amongst as many people as possible. People were arrested for jumping petrol station queues or draining petrol from parked cars.

The unions still refused to co-operate and the miners called a full strike in February 1974. Heath called an immediate general election<sup>101</sup> on the issue of 'Who governs Britain?' in the hope of being able to show that he had more public support than the unions. He did not get the decisive result he wanted. He was forced to resign as the Conservatives won more votes but fewer seats than Labour. There was another election in October 1974 which gave Labour a very small majority and Heath was soon replaced by Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservatives.

The situation was calmed when the new Labour government settled the pay disputes – the miners got a 29% increase. Labour made a 'social contract' with the unions and got rid of the 1972 law-restricting union activity, in return for a promise of pay claims for increases of 5% or less. As Labour leader Harold Wilson retired in 1975 he was replaced by James Callaghan. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Dennis Healey, was given the job of trying to improve the economic situation in order to take away the need for strikes about pay. He tried to control inflation by reducing government spending and increasing taxes. This did reduce inflation, but did not increase public confidence in the government. Labour lost two by-elections and lost its majority in the House of Commons. In March 1977 Callaghan did a deal with the Liberal leader David Steel to get the support of the thirteen Liberal MPs, and also got support from Scottish and Welsh nationalist MPs by offering them a vote on devolution.

The situation began to improve. The world-wide economic recession was over, government finances were improving and trade unions were sticking to a 10% limit on pay rises. Unemployment was still high and rising but optimism that the situation was improving saw public support return to Labour. Callaghan decided to wait until 1979 for a general election because he believed the economy would continue to improve, and that Labour would gain further support.

The trade unions saw things differently. They thought that by accepting government pay increase limits they were betraying their members, many of whom were suffering hardships because of the government's anti-inflation policies. In the Autumn of 1978 Ford car workers went on strike and got a 15% pay increase. In December 1978 the House of Commons voted against a government plan to punish employers who broke the agreed 5% limit on pay deals. This opened up the possibility of large numbers of strikes demanding high pay rises. As prices rose higher and higher with inflation in the late 1970s, the amount of money workers were bringing home was getting less and less all

<sup>101</sup> The 1974 Conservative Election broadcast may be seen at <http://goo.gl/ziAJgq>

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of the time.

Lorry drivers went on strike demanding a 30% pay increase in January 1979, leading to petrol shortages. The National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) which represented the lowest-paid local government workers demanded a 40% pay increase which resulted in school dinners not being served, rubbish piling up in the streets and in some extreme cases bodies going unburied. They were joined by the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) in a more general strike for improved pay for public sector workers,<sup>102</sup> having seen groups like the miners and Ford car workers get big pay increases. Ambulance drivers went on strike and in cities like Cardiff they refused to respond to 999 emergency calls. In these areas, the Army was asked to provide a basic ambulance service<sup>103</sup>.

This series of strikes which affected the daily lives of nearly everyone in the UK came to be known as the Winter of Discontent<sup>104</sup>. Between November 1978 and March 1979 a total of 30 million working days were lost. It was the largest strike since the Great Strike of 1926 and there has not been one of similar size since.<sup>105</sup> On 22 January 1979, 1.5 million public sector workers refused to work – the most number of strikers in a day during that winter and the most number of workers on strike all at once since the General Strike in 1926.<sup>106</sup> There was no pattern and no planning to these strikes and most of them were unofficial. The government wanted 5% pay deals, prices were rising at 10% but workers were asking for rises that were much higher than that – some were trying to make up for years and years of watching inflation wipe the value out of their pay, others because they just wanted to be paid more. 328,000 Welsh workers were involved in strikes but surveys in Wales showed consistently that two thirds of people surveyed thought unions had too much power<sup>107</sup>.



**Source 5:** Uncollected rubbish piling up in the street as bin men strike during the 'Winter of Discontent'

These strikes sometimes had unforeseen consequences. For example, lorry drivers went on strike with a 22% pay claim and pickets stopped the delivery of materials to make the antibiotic penicillin and the supply of blood for transfusions. The Minister for Transport, Bill Rodgers, found

<sup>102</sup> For further information, see <http://goo.gl/nJp8HG>

<sup>103</sup> From [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter\\_of\\_Discontent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_of_Discontent)

<sup>104</sup> Winter of Discontent audio/visual slideshow at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7598647.stm> and a BBC Radio 4 short Eye-witness report on Winter of Discontent can be downloaded from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00lrk9c>

<sup>105+106</sup> Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London, 2009), page 465.

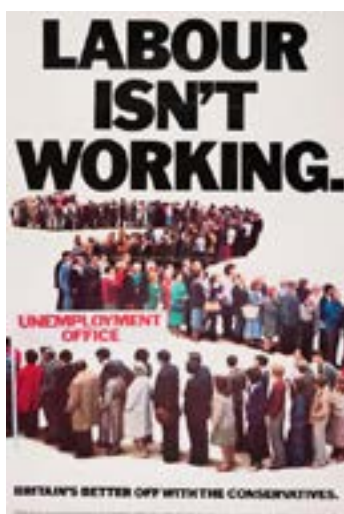
<sup>107</sup> From page 252 of *Wales Since 1939* by Martin Johnes published by Oxford in 2012 ISBN 9780719086670



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that the medicines needed to help his mother who was dying from cancer could not get to the hospital.<sup>108</sup> At one point there was only one petrol station open in Liverpool, and petrol prices at stations around the UK that did stay open rose quickly from 75p a gallon to more than £3.<sup>109</sup> This strike affected lives of the British people in other ways as well, as chlorine was not transported to water purification plants to make drinking water cleaners, and propane gas was not transported for the railways to use to melt ice on the tracks during the coldest winter the UK had seen since 1963. Many people who were not on strike became frustrated with those who were. For example, a farmer fired shotgun at strikers outside flour mill in Abergavenny injuring three of them<sup>110</sup>. Although it was a very difficult time – and no one was proved to have died as a result of this union action, there were no food shortages and no violence.

Prime Minister Callaghan returned to the UK after attending an international summit in the West Indies. He seemed very out of touch with how bad the situation had become, telling journalists at the airport, 'I don't think that other people in the world would share the view that there is mounting chaos'. It led to a mocking headline in The Sun newspaper the following day – 'Crisis? What Crisis?'.<sup>111</sup> The Conservatives took advantage of this situation and ran election campaigns blaming the Labour government for lack of control of the unions and rising unemployment, which was at 1.3 million people out of work,<sup>112</sup> having risen by 60% through the 1970s.<sup>113</sup> Appearing on the television news programme Weekend World in January 1979, Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher suggested that workers in essential services should not be allowed to strike and that benefits could be reduced or taken away from striking workers. Public opinion began to turn towards the Conservatives.<sup>114</sup>



**Source 6:** A Conservative poster for the 1979 election

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (London, 2009), page 375.

<sup>109</sup> Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (Aurum, 2008), page 264.

<sup>110</sup> From page 738 of *Seasons in the Sun* by Dominic Sandbrook published by Penguin in 2013 ISBN 9780141032160

<sup>111</sup> Andrew Boxer with Keith Lockton and Elizabeth Sparey, *The End of Consensus: Britain 1945–90* (Essex, 2009), page 161; Callaghan's speech may be seen at <http://goo.gl/eTsnMG> and a photograph of The Sun headline may be seen at <http://goo.gl/TkFMF6>

<sup>112</sup> Colin Stewart, *Edexcel GCSE History – British Political History 1945–90: Consensus and Conflict* (Edexcel, 2010), page 145.

<sup>113</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun* (London, 2012), page 692.

<sup>114</sup> The Winter of Discontent was very heavily played on in the 1979 election campaign – see one of the Conservative election broadcasts from April 1979 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcrO8SWZJFc>

### Conclusion: “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony”

In March 1979 the Labour government became the first government since 1924 to lose a vote of confidence in the House of Commons. Scottish and Welsh nationalist MPs had deserted them and voted with the Conservatives. Each of the main UK political parties had leaders who had not yet faced an election – James Callaghan had taken over when Harold Wilson had retired, Margaret Thatcher had replaced Edward Heath as Conservative leader and David Steel had recently become Liberal leader.

A general election was called in which the Conservatives got 13,697,690 votes and won a clear majority in the House of Commons with 339 seats. Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher was invited by the Queen to form a government. When she arrived at Downing Street after her meeting with the Queen she made a speech outside Number 10 in which she said that her mission was to end the discontent that had made life so difficult in the UK in the 1970s.<sup>115</sup>

I would just like to remember some words of St. Francis of Assisi which I think are really just particularly apt at the moment. “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope”. And to all the British people, howsoever they voted, may I say this: now that the Election is over, may we get together and strive to serve and strengthen the country of which we’re so proud to be a part.<sup>116</sup>



**Source 7:** Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher.

<sup>115</sup> For a brief summary of life in the UK in 1979 see the article commemorating the 35th anniversary of Margaret Thatcher becoming Prime Minister at <http://goo.gl/oP7JuZ>

<sup>116</sup> See this speech at <http://goo.gl/9EKL7q> and a slightly fuller version at <http://goo.gl/2CfAS3>

### Glossary

<b>Mr Harold Wilson</b>	Labour leader
<b>The Commonwealth</b>	countries who were or who had been members of the British Empire
<b>referendum</b>	public vote on a particular issue
<b>the electorate</b>	people who are allowed to vote
<b>invest</b>	crowd
<b>Lib-Lab Pact</b>	Liberal and Labour MPs working together
<b>devolution</b>	taking powers from central government in London and giving them to regional governments
<b>paramilitaries</b>	groups acting like an army
<b>decolonisation</b>	countries in the British Empire gaining independence
<b>productivity</b>	the amount made by each person working in an industry
<b>trade unions</b>	organisations that looked after the welfare and interests of workers in a particular business
<b>shop stewards</b>	local union officials
<b>flying pickets</b>	mobile groups of striking workers
<b>overtime</b>	working more than the usual hours

### Recommended materials

Andrew Marr's History of Modern Britain: episode 3 'Paradise Lost'

Dominic Sandbrook series:

Strange Days: Cold War Britain: episode 1 'Red Dawn' and episode 2 'The Looking Glass War' (BBC)

The 70s (BBC)

Executed – The Last Days of Capital Punishment (ITV)

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