

## **Between Britishness and Welshness: The Labour Party in Wales**

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*The article deals with changes of Labour Party politics concerning Wales and Welsh national identity during the 20th century. The main goal of the analysis relates to a question why Labour Party as a main political representative of Welsh voters since 1920s did not become a main representative of Welsh national interests. Nevertheless, it was Labour Party who brought off a new institution – the Wales National Assembly in 1997. Describing economic as well as cultural and language politics of the party the ambivalent approach to devolution is elucidated. There always existed several parallel currents in the party, and their leaders very often derived their attitude to devolution from the particular political situation of the moment. They thus combined many factors, such as political priorities, electoral calculations, cultural considerations and political analysis and commitment. Nevertheless, Welshness was not a party priority. That is why the main attention is paid to those changes which were closely connected with pragmatism and reverse of Labour politics during the 1970s and especially Tony Blair's New Labour devolution programme in the 1990s.*

Given traditional labour policies and the party's strong electoral base in the area, Wales has an indisputably important place in the history of the British Labour Party. People of Welsh origin and with strongly Welsh images have also often been among its leaders. We might therefore expect that the defence of the interests of Wales and its inhabitants to be a substantial element of the party's programme, but in fact the Labour Party's attitude was never unambiguous when it came to pushing through a devolution programme for Wales. Even the members of the Welsh branch of the party failed

to take a consistent view of the matter, some of them radically changing their positions over the years (many even switched party as a result). Nonetheless, some authors<sup>[1]</sup> maintain that it was precisely the Welsh Labour Party members who managed to force the party as a whole and its leadership into an awareness of the distinctive character of Wales and to get it to take Wales into account as part of the progressive modernisation of party policy.

This was, however, the outcome of an often very circuitous journey, as is clear from the lives and political fates of the many native Welshmen who came to the fore in the Labour Party after 1945 (the most important was undoubtedly Aneurin Bevan), and gave priority to the British dimension rather than the pursuit of so-called Welsh national interests. Paradoxically those who shifted Wales to the foreground of interest of the centre of power, i.e. British politics, and did so very much as British statesman, were people who set considerable store by their ‘Welsh background’.. Such identification with Welsh interests as they felt was, indeed, expressed as a primary interest in solving the economic problems of Britain as a whole, an interest with indisputable roots in the hard times that had culminated in South Wales in the period of economic depression in the 1930s. This had been the period of the start of the careers of many Welsh Labourists who later formulated what became a widespread and accepted view in the party, i.e. that none of the economic troubles of Wales could be successfully tackled without help from the centre. Naturally this conviction led to rejection of any suggestions for the loosening of ties with Britain, i.e. any changes in the constitutional status of Wales within the United Kingdom. For these politicians devolution was an unacceptable alternative because they believed it would make economic problems intractable, not solve them, and instead they gave priority

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<sup>[1]</sup> P. Stead, ‘The Labour Party and the Claims of Wales’ in J. Osmond, *The National Question Again. Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*, Gomer Press 1985, 101.

to the concept of democratic socialism. In this respect the interests of Britain were given precedence over national, i.e. Welsh interests.

In the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, it was in fact the Labour party that took up policies resulting in the establishment of the Welsh National Assembly, (*Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru*) (as well the Scottish Autonomous Parliament).<sup>2[2]</sup> This naturally raises the question of whether the present party leadership should be regarded in this respect as the supporters of nationalist interests, or whether it was primarily taking a strategic step motivated less by the national interests of the Welsh (and Scots) than by the interest of the Labour Party in consolidating its position at the centre of power, i.e. London. The following analysis will explore the question, and offer essential contextual interpretation of the various different directions taken by the party in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Between Home Rule and Centralism**

The first significant interest in the question of Wales within the Labour Party was expressed before the First World War.<sup>3[3]</sup> R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones<sup>4[4]</sup> argue that it was motivated by the party's need to

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<sup>2[2]</sup> There is no doubt that the Scottish side of the issue cannot be left out of general analysis of the position of the Labour Party on devolution. In view of the theme of this article, however, we are forced to leave Scottish devolution issues to one side and to direct the reader's attention to the now extensive separate literature on the subject.

<sup>3[3]</sup> In 1910 David Thomas published the first and practically the only defence of socialism in Welsh – *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas*.. It did not contain any kind of specifically Welsh version of socialism, however, but was simply a propagandist publication indistinguishable from the English versions of the period. Many Fabian pamphlets were also published in Welsh at this time. In the same year Keir Hardie asked in parliament whether the government intended to create the post of a Secretary of State for Wales and a separate administration for the country.

address new voters, potential supporters, and so make a greater impact on the British political scene.

They believe that in 1911, they can already:

discern not only a consciousness of Wales as a nation but also a strong pragmatic and electorally strategic political element in Labour's attempt to construct a 'socialism in Welsh Dress', a pragmatic thread which, ....., can be discerned running through the century-long debate on the Welsh Questions.<sup>5[5]</sup>

It was not until 1918, however, that voices were raised in the Labour Party in clear support of devolution (George Barker). It was primarily a response to fears that if the mines were to be nationalised in line with the new programme of the Labour Party in 1918 (June), this might lead to a strengthening of the position of the Welsh National Party particularly among the miners in South Wales. Although agitation for Home Rule attracted the attention of some Labourists just before the end of the war, it was the Liberals who remained the main fighters for devolution. It was mainly Liberals, for example, who attended a conference on the question of Home Rule for Wales held in Llandrindod in May 1918. The introduction of the theme of Home Rule into party discussions was primarily due to the efforts of members of the South Wales Labour Federation (SWLF), but the party leaders accepted this new element on the programme without enthusiasm, and many of them expressed very sceptical

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<sup>4[4]</sup> R. Merfyn Jones – Ioan Rhys Jones, 'Labour and the Nation' in D. Tanner – Ch. Williams – D. Hopkins (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2000, 241 – 263.

<sup>5[5]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 244.

views on devolution.<sup>6[6]</sup> Only a month later the demand for Home Rule All Round (at that time understood as the federalisation of Britain) appeared in the new Labour Party Programme, but the achievement of socialism and nationalisation remained the key party orientation.

As discussions of Home Rule for Wales became more widespread in 1918, Welsh Outlook initiated a debate on the relationship between Labour and devolution. Although the magazine received plenty of reactions strongly in favour of Home Rules (both from leading representatives of the unions, and from Ramsay MacDonald), the majority of responses were sceptical. Doubts were expressed both about raising the whole question of national sentiment in the Labour Party, and on the other there were fears that devolution might exclude the non-Welsh speaking inhabitants of Wales from decision making. At the beginning of the 1920s the promising debate on the subject somewhat subsided, since the Labour Party had managed to wage a successful electoral battle with the Liberals in Wales without emphasising devolution themes.<sup>7[7]</sup> As J. Davies<sup>8[8]</sup> comments:

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<sup>6[6]</sup> For example A. Henderson was convinced that a “self-governing Wales” was a “modern utopia”. He also took a critical view of the demand for the creation of an autonomous Welsh Council of Labour. Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation. Wales 1880-1980*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, 176 – 177.

<sup>7[7]</sup> The importance of the electoral distribution of forces and the concentration of population (most in the south-east in the industrial areas) is attested by the distribution of constituencies in Wales. Before 1918 out of 34 seats there were 14 in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, 8 in the other Southern counties and 12 in the north. After 1918 out of 36 seats there were 22 in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, 5 in the other southern counties and 8 in the north. The University of Wales also acquired a seat (assigned on the basis of the register of graduates of the university – in 1918 there were 1,066).

<sup>8[8]</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales*, London: Penguin books 1994, 543.

... once Labour's prospects in Westminster began to improve, its enthusiasm cooled. To those who had been trained in the Central Labour College – an increasingly influential group within the party in the 1920s – any attempt to emphasise the separateness of Wales was considered to be a threat to the unity of the proletariat; as the experience of the English working class represented the universal.... it could be argued that the party's historical role was to consolidate the process of integrating the Welsh into British system. Thus it is frequently suggested that the year 1922, when Labour party won half of the seats in Wales, marks the end of the period in which specifically Welsh subjects were central to the political process.

It seems clear that while before 1922 the progressive growth of demands for constitutional recognition of the Welsh nation was evident even in the Labour Party, after this year nationalism became marginal for the Labour Party, and there was hardly any further progress towards that recognition. In the 1920s it was already apparent that the Labour Party was headed in the centralist, socialist direction. The constitutional influence of the original Independent Labour Party<sup>9[9]</sup> gradually disappeared from its programme, to be replaced by the centralism associated with such intellectual leaders as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Herbert Morrison, who emphasised the value of the corporative system. As a result the Labour Party entirely lost interest in Welsh self-government.

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<sup>9[9]</sup> For more on the history of the Labour Party see e.g. S. Ingle, *The British Party System*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989; D. Tanner – Ch. Williams – D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900-2000*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2000.

**Table 1: Results of Elections to the Westminster Parliament 1900-1945: Wales**

Year	Conservative Party	Labour Party	Liberal Party	Welsh seats in Westminster*
1900	6	2 <sup>o</sup>	<b>26</b>	34
1906	0	5 <sup>1</sup>	<b>29</b>	34
1910 (J)	2	5 <sup>2</sup>	<b>27</b>	34
1910 (D)	3	5 <sup>3</sup>	<b>26</b>	34
1918	6	10	<b>20</b>	36
1922	6	<b>18</b>	10	36
1923	4	<b>20</b>	12	36
1924	9	<b>16</b>	10	36
1929	1	<b>25</b>	10	36
1931	11	<b>16</b>	8	36
1935	11	<b>18</b>	6	36

Compiled from T. Combs, *The Party of Wales, Plaid Cymru: Populist Nationalism in Contemporary British Politics*, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International 1978; D. Tanner – Ch. Williams – D. Hopkins, *The Labour party in Wales 1900-2000*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2000; H. Abalain, *Le Pays de Galles. Identité, modernité*. Crozon 2000; Blanka Říchová, 'Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění', *Politologická revue*, VI (2000), 1, 6 – 25; M. Klíma, 'General Elections in the United Kingdom', *Politologický časopis* VIII (2001), 3, 271.

**Notes:**

\* The overall number of mandates necessarily includes MPs who entered parliament as representatives of parties other than those presented in the table.

<sup>0</sup> W. Abraham was returned as a 'Lib-Lab' for the Rhondda constituency, K. Hardie was returned in second place for the dual-member seat of Merthyr Boroughs.

<sup>1</sup> W. Abraham (Rhondda), W. Brace (South Glamorgan), T. Richards (West Monmouth) and J. Williams (Gower) were all returned as 'Lib-Lab'. K. Hardie was returned in second place in Merthyr Boroughs.

<sup>2</sup> K. Hardie was returned in second place in Merthyr Boroughs.

<sup>3</sup> K. Hardie was returned in second place in Merthyr Boroughs.

### **South Wales in Labour Politics**

From the 1920s the interest of the Labour party focused primarily on the needs and demands of South Wales, where the core of labour voters was to be found. It was precisely at this period, when the Labour Party was seeking for ways to strengthen South Wales and encourage its economic development, that a strong interest in intervention from the centre developed. Labourists came to the conclusion that there was no practical way of raising up the Welsh economy and developing it without support from the centre. Its own internal, i.e. Welsh, resources were insufficient or inaccessible, In this respect, as R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones emphasise, all Labourists were in practice centralists and nationalisation was the crucial demand for the party.<sup>10[10]</sup> By contrast, however, the 1930s was a period characterised by both authors as one of regionalist strategies for (south) Wales, with the aim of creating effective representation of economic interests at the centre.

During the Second World War these efforts led to Labour adoption of the demand for the creation of a Secretary of State for Wales and Welsh Office, supposed to correspond to 'arrangements already

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<sup>10[10]</sup> This dependence of Wales on the centre was obvious to practically everyone, including the conservatives. Most Welsh politicians supported the idea of investment and support from the centre regardless of party affiliation. It is essential to view devolution in this period with this reality in mind (while cultural themes were also on the agenda, they were not accorded equal importance). Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 246.

existing in Scotland<sup>11[11]</sup>.. In 1942 and 1943 the South Wales Regional Council of Labour (SWRCL) supported adoption of the demand for the creation of a Secretary of State for Wales,<sup>12[12]</sup> as did the Flintshire area (North Wales Federation of Labour Parties, NWFLP), whose representatives also asked the party to adopt a resolution on devolution (in 1944 and gain in 1945): H. T. Edwards, for example, later secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union in North Wales and chairman of the Council of Wales and Monmouthshire (CWM) from 1948 to 1958, emphasised the growing support for the Welsh nationalists in his area, which in his view was a direct result of the lack of interest in an 'essentially Welsh' theme among the other parties including Labour.<sup>13[13]</sup> He expressed fears that the Labour Party, instead of developing progressively, might be incapable of catching on to the trend and was falling behind. Despite these internal calls for change in the party's attitude to the question of Welsh interests, in the 1940s the NEC did not alter its position.<sup>14[14]</sup> The general election of 1945 seemed to prove the leadership of the party right, since the party won a convincing victory and in Wales its candidates took a total of 25 seats out of 36, with more than 80% electoral support for Labour in seven of those constituencies (although growth in support for the party was in fact more marked in England<sup>15[15]</sup>).

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<sup>11[11]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 248.

<sup>12[12]</sup> As early as the mid-30s the Labourites supported the demands of the Liberals for the establishment of this office. It was actually created in 1964, and its first occupant was James Griffiths, who in the 1940s, specifically in 1944, had expressed support for administrative devolution, but absolutely not for full independence.

<sup>13[13]</sup> He was not entirely accurate about the situation. For example the Communist Party at its first All-Welsh Congress in 1945 called for a range of Welsh national rights, including equal status for the Welsh language and a Welsh Parliament. Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 259.

<sup>14[14]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15[15]</sup> J. Davies points out that while in Birmingham, for example, electoral support for the Labour Party grew by 23%, in Wales it rose by “only” 12%. Overall the Labour Party won 393 seats at Westminster

In 1945 disputes inside the Labour Party developed between two groups of politicians: those who demanded the creation of the office of a Secretary of State for Wales (James Griffiths, the Minister of National Insurance), and the opponents of decentralisation (above all Aneurin Bevan, the new Minister of Health, a Herbert Morrison). Labour MPs put pressure on the Attlee government to move towards devolution, but were not entirely successful, since Attlee insisted that ‘a Welsh Office would be an unnecessary duplication of administration’.<sup>16[16]</sup> The dispute in the party became urgent in October 1946, when discussions were held on the government draft of a law on Wales. MPs defended the demand for creation of the new post by arguing that it would help prevent a repetition of the economic depression that had hit Wales so hard, particularly the industrial area of South Wales, in the inter-war period.<sup>17[17]</sup> Members of the Labour government and many leaders of trade unions active on Welsh territory, however, feared that devolution might ‘leave Wales in a state of permanent poverty’.<sup>18[18]</sup> Labour MPs and many representatives of Labour’s North and South Wales councils sought more direct interventions in policy-making through a Welsh minister.<sup>19[19]</sup> In the discussions another frequently

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compared to the 166 it had held before the war. The Conservative Party won only 213 compared to its earlier 397. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 612.

<sup>16[16]</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation. Wales 1880-1980*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, 377.

<sup>17[17]</sup> The Conservative MP for the Flint constituency, Nigel Birch took a similar view. Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 249.

<sup>18[18]</sup> For example the President of the Board of Trade, Sir Stafford Cripps, stressed in this context that practically nothing existed that could be called “local in character in the sense of being either financed or originated from Wales”. He was also against the creation of the post of Secretary of State for Wales, since he believed it would not be able to manage all the administration connected with the agenda. Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 250.

<sup>19[19]</sup> E.g. G. Roberts, who was re-elected as MP for Caernarfonshire, declared that he was not against central planning, but it ought to be organised in such a way it to “penetrate the perimeter”.. J. Davies states that among the Labour and Liberal MPs at Westminster there were some who supported the

voiced argument was that in view of its particular economic situation Wales actually needed much more ‘integration with the British economy’.<sup>20[20]</sup> Wales was considered from the so-called regionalist perspective as a vulnerable region that required a direct voice in government.

Although the views of the opponents of reform prevailed, the government realised that it needed to be a little more flexible in its attitude to the theme, and so embarked on a number of changes.<sup>21[21]</sup> 1947 saw the creation of a Welsh Regional Council of Labour (WRCL), which merged the earlier North Wales and South Wales Labour organisations into a single body covering the whole of Wales. According to R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones<sup>22[22]</sup> this was ‘a significant pointer to the increased profile of the Welsh dimension with Welsh Labour politics’. The same view is presented by J. Davies, who further emphasises that ‘although (the council)... was intended to be wholly under the control of the party at the centre, it was eventually to develop a degree of independence’.<sup>23[23]</sup>

Soon after, in 1948, a Council for Wales and Monmouthshire (CWM) was created following of wide-ranging internal party debate. It was a non-elected body of twenty-seven nominated members with minimal powers and no ministerial chair (the already mentioned H. T. Edwards was placed at the head of the new institution). Nonetheless, there is general agreement that this meant – at least temporarily – ‘a total rout of the pro-devolution forces’, who were outmanoeuvred by being ‘given the task of

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creation of a Secretary of State for Wales. The problem appeared in 1946, when the government received a deputation headed by D. R. Grenfell, member for Gower, and W. H. Mainwaring, member for Rhondda East, who had the support of J. Griffiths behind them. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 622.

<sup>20[20]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 250.

<sup>21[21]</sup> One of the first was the decision to publish an annual White Paper on Welsh affairs, issued from 1946 onwards; its contents were formulated on the basis of consultations with various government departments.

<sup>22[22]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 250.

<sup>23[23]</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, 622

advising the government on matters relating to Wales’,<sup>24[24]</sup> and by the fact that ‘the Council did at least acknowledge the existence of Wales, including Monmouthshire, as an administrative, economic and cultural units’.<sup>25[25]</sup> This was a reason why the creation of the CWM gained the strong support of party members (for example the Swansea Labour Party Annual Report of 1948 stated that this arrangement was more advantageous for Wales than the creation of a post of Secretary of State). The importance of the CWM became clear in the 1950s, when it repeatedly pushed the theme of devolution onto the political agenda. As memories of the pre-war economic depression faded, the economic development of Wales speeded up and economic planning became a stronger element, so gradually: ‘The council shifted the emphasis away from the narrow economic to the even narrower but in many respects more effective terrain of the efficacy of the machinery of government in Wales’.<sup>26[26]</sup> The main object of its criticism was the large number of uncoordinated government departments with Welsh offices and units.

Although the Labour Party retained power in the elections of 1950, the victory was not sufficiently convincing to secure stable conditions for government. There were therefore new elections the next year, but these lost the party even more seats in Britain as a whole. In Wales, however, Labour continued to be the victor, and emerged with 27 Welsh seats. The results that raised Labour hopes the most in this context were its victories over the Liberals in Anglesey and Meirionnydd<sup>27[27]</sup>, because

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<sup>24[24]</sup> J. Davies points out that that the WRCL’s lack of powers “caused increasing frustration to Huw T. Edwards, the secretary of the Transport and General Workers’ Union in the north and the chairman of the Council of Wales from 1948 to 1958”. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 623.

<sup>25[25]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 251.

<sup>26[26]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27[27]</sup> J. Davies emphasises that what was at stake was not just the general success of the Labour Party, but the fortunes of specific candidates: the Labourist C. Hughes, who stood for election in Anglesey, managed to identify himself with the cultural and the radical Welsh tradition. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 624.

they meant that the Labour Party had at least penetrated into rural Wales (the gains were balanced out by the loss of two seats to the Conservatives). These favourable developments in electoral geography effectively turned devolution into an uncontroversial item in the party programme, and one that could also be considered part of anti-Tory policy. It was as the latter, i.e. as a pragmatic issue, that Welsh devolution was now acceptable even for many of its former opponents (for example the later prime minister James Callaghan, who as MP for the urban constituency of Cardiff had been a vigorous opponent of the pseudo-nationalist pro-devolution movement in the party).

In view of the fact that in 1951 the Conservative Party created a post of Minister of Welsh Affairs as an adjunct of the office of Home Secretary (without a government department)<sup>28[28]</sup>, the Labour Party decided to take a more active position on the Welsh question and went into the general elections of 1955 with the professed aim, as far as devolution was concerned, of deepening and strengthening the position of this ministry. Two years later, in the framework of the Third Memorandum on Government Administration in Wales, party leaders inclined to the demand for the creation of a Secretary of State and a Welsh Office, but what is important is that devolution, in the rhetoric of the party, appeared only as a project of bureaucratic rationalisation and in no way as a nationalist gesture. Despite all efforts the party did not manage to destroy the electoral position of the Conservatives, and so it went into the general elections of 1959 with even more ambitious plans, this time unambiguously formulating a

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<sup>28[28]</sup> In 1957 the name of this office was changed to Minister of Housing and Local Government and a Minister of State was appointed to assist him. This Minister of State was Baron Brecon. 1960 saw the establishment of a Welsh Grand Committee. Further more, in 1955 Cardiff became capital of Wales and in 1963 an office, albeit with only a small number of members, was transferred here to superintend the economy. The devolutionists in the Labour Party had no hesitation in supporting these administrative changes, which were introduced by the Conservative Party. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 663.

demand for the creation of a Secretary of State and a Welsh Office.<sup>29[29]</sup> The politician who strongly influenced the internal party atmosphere and gave it a more positive orientation to devolutionary themes was James Griffiths (above all he influenced Hugh Gaitskell, who was ‘crucial in getting the manifesto pledge through the NEC’).<sup>30[30]</sup> Nonetheless, active Labour devolutionists continued to fail to push through any more ambitious party-wide devolution programme.

This failure was reflected, for example in the Parliament for Wales campaign (1950-1956), in which the Labour Party did not as a whole take the side of devolution and tended to view the entire movement as a nationalist plot. It was symptomatic that when in 1955 the Labour MP for Merthyr Tydfil, S. O. Davies, presented a private member’s bill in parliament supporting the initiative of the Parliament for Wales campaign (the author of the text was D. W. Powell, a nationalistically minded lawyer), he earned himself a slap on the wrist from the leadership. The Labour MPs reacted differently. During debate on the bill a small group of active supporters of devolution formed, who in internal party slang were christened ‘nationalists’ or fellow travellers of *Plaid Cymru* (they were strongly disciplined for their attitude by the party leadership). This group primarily consisted of MPs who represented rural or semirural constituencies of the region, and it was they who were to become the real leaders of the fight for devolution in later years.<sup>31[31]</sup> They regarded the creation of the post of

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<sup>29[29]</sup> The demands appeared in clearcut form at the conferences of the WRCL in 1954, 1957 and 1958.

<sup>30[30]</sup> R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones also emphasise that Gaitskell was also supported by the Welsh Labour MPs. Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 254.

<sup>31[31]</sup> One of the most active supporters of devolution who attracted charges of “nationalist aspirations”, was G. P. Davies, who had originally been a member of *Plaid Cymru* and a Welsh Republican and had later gone over to the Labour Party because he was convinced that it was the only party capable of genuinely benefiting Wales, even if only in the long run. Another was G. Roberts (Caernarfon) (1945), who managed to get 240,000 signatures on a petition demanding a Welsh parliament. Roberts was a member of the Gwerin group at the University College of North Wales in the 1930s, which tried to combine the ideas of socialism with Welsh government (in a speech in parliament in 1946 he called for a democratic revolution, including the establishment of national assemblies in Wales, Scotland and England; in his view this

Secretary of State as the immediate goal, but not as the end of their Welsh orientated campaigns. In their view it was just the first step towards the constitution of a Welsh Parliament. Most Labour MPs, and especially the MPs for South Wales, however, were anti-devolutionary changes in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In this period the party as a whole started actively to resist devolutionary moves (there were calls for discipline in the party ranks), even despite the fact that the Parliament for Wales campaign seemed outwardly to be quite successful. Analyses based on the period context emphasise that if at any given moment the Labour Party admitted the possibility of devolution, then this was only in the form of administrative devolution. Any other devolutionary model was regarded as dangerous, since according to majority opinion in the party, steps in such a direction might lead to the cultural isolation of Wales.

### **From the Welsh Office to the 1979 Referendum**

In 1964, after 13 years in opposition, the Labour Party won the general elections. Reaching Whitehall led the party leadership to change its views on the importance of devolution for Wales, among other issues. The new government headed by Harold Wilson decided to fulfil its electoral pledge and create a Secretary of State for Wales. Immediately after the election the prime minister let it be known that a cabinet post of secretary of state would be established, and that the appointee would have his own office in Cardiff and a small ministerial office in London. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1964 James Griffiths was appointed first occupant of the post.<sup>32[32]</sup> Nonetheless, pragmatism was to remain the keynote of these formal institutional changes.

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was the only way of coping with the nationalist challenge. Others were T. Watkins (Brecon and Radnor), C. Hughes (Anglesey) (1951) and T. W. Jones (Merioneth) (1951). Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 252.

<sup>32[32]</sup> Until 1936, when he was elected to parliament, Griffiths was the president of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF). Throughout his political career he always insisted on the unity of Wales

A large number of Labour MPs inclined to the view that the new institution could exist without the establishment of an independent ministry, i.e. a Welsh Office as the equivalent of the Scottish Office, but Griffiths refused to yield to pressure. He even threatened to resign if the government failed to take the necessary administrative steps, and insisted that the new office and Secretary of State there own separate institutional resources and clearly defined powers. After not quite two months (19<sup>th</sup> of November) the prime minister announced that housing, local government and roads would be administered by the Welsh Office.<sup>33[33]</sup>

On the other hand, the new Welsh Office had its weaknesses. It was very much orientated to the power centre in London and exclusively followed goals and fulfilled needs determined by the London government. Its powers and composition did not therefore reflect the attitude of Welsh voters to specific political parties, but only the distribution of seats in Westminster (i.e. electoral support for the parties in Britain as a whole). In fact, the preferences of Welsh voters played no role whatever in relation to the party composition and programme of the Welsh Office. Nonetheless, there are grounds for believing that the establishment of the office was an important milestone from the point of view of the Welsh national programme. It meant the de facto recognition of the territorial integrity of Wales,

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and refused to identify Wales solely with the southern industrial region. He always also pointed out the need to ensure that Labour policy in Wales appealed to the young generation, which was more strongly embedded with national sentiment. After 1945 he devoted himself in government to the creation of all-Wales structures. .

<sup>33[33]</sup> Under the conservative government (1970-1974) the powers of the Welsh Office were extended to cover education and industry, and the unemployment issue. The new labour government transferred agriculture, fisheries, higher education and assistance to urban areas, to its sphere of competence as well. Its competence also extended to the economic development of the region, because the Welsh Office had supervisory power over the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Welsh Land Authority. As J. Davies states, in 1984 the Office had more than 2,000 employees. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 665.

strengthened the concept of the territorial unity of Wales and opened the way to the establishment of other, territorially based institutions. The setting up of the Welsh Office had yet another, by no means unimportant result: it meant that all the political parties paid greater attention to strengthening their own party structures in Wales.<sup>34[34]</sup>

As far as the position of the Labour Party in Wales was concerned, prospects in the 1960s were not promising. Although the party maintained its clearly dominant status (for example in the elections of 1966 its candidates took 32 of the 36 seats), behind the success uncertainty and fears of loss of support were looming ever larger.<sup>35[35]</sup> The reason was that socialism, for a long time the main theme of the party, was gradually losing its centrality in the party programme: in the context of the previous development of the relationship between party and voters, the Labour candidates who won in the elections of 1966 had one distinct ‘weakness’. In contrast to their predecessors they were no longer able to fully identify themselves with their electorate, i.e. the working class (e.g. MPs selected thanks to the votes of the National Union of Mineworkers gradually disappeared and by 1974 there was no longer a single one at Westminster). In this context J. Davies<sup>36[36]</sup> speaks of the *embourgeoisement* of the Labour Party. Paradoxically it was a process encouraged by the major electoral successes of the party, since Labour dominated not just the parliamentary seats at Westminster but also the local

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<sup>34[34]</sup> The first to react was the Liberal Party, which in 1966 created the Welsh Liberal Party. Six years later (1972) the Conservative Party set up Conservatives of Wales, and finally in 1975 the Welsh Council of Labour was reorganised and changed into The Labour Party–Wales. (Up to the end of the Second World War separate party groups, known as the South and North West Federations of Labour Parties, had existed in Wales. In 1947 these had been merged to form the Welsh Regional Council of Labour, but in 1959 the term regional was dropped from the title.)

<sup>35[35]</sup> Blanka Říchová, ‘Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění’, *Politologická revue*, VI (2000), 1, 6 – 25.

<sup>36[36]</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, 662.

authorities in the Welsh industrial regions. In some areas the party's position was so strong that in practice it faced no opposition at all (some authors see this as a factor in the strong tendency of the party to nepotism and the increasing petrification of the party apparatus). Furthermore, the labour parliamentary benches were increasingly filling up with 'professionals', mainly solicitors and lecturers (by the 1970s their share of Labour seats had risen to  $\frac{3}{4}$ ). Nor was it of only marginal significance that after the death of the charismatic Aneurin Bevan (1960), no one of the same stature emerged in the party to replace him (not only in Wales, but in Britain as a whole).

At the same time, however, a new factor appeared that was to be in many respects decisive for the future of Labour's attitude to devolution. This was *Plaid Cymru*, or rather increasing support for the explicitly nationalist party among Welsh voters. The influence of this nationalistically orientated party was growing conspicuously even in Labour heartland constituencies like Caerphilly and Rhondda, and fuelling fears among leading members of the Labour Party (above all Griffiths), that *Plaid Cymru* might become the party of the future in Wales and so oust Labour from the strong and practically stable position that Labour had enjoyed in the region for decades.<sup>37[37]</sup> It is therefore no wonder that the possibility of pushing through creation of an elected Welsh legislative body once more became the subject of internal party discussions.

The Labourists who inclined to the view that the political system in Wales should reflect the interests and preferences of Welsh voters pressed for the Labour Party to embark on the road already taken by *Plaid Cymru*. They were convinced that, 'it was only through moving in that direction that the Labour Party could retain it hold upon the majority of the seats of Wales'.<sup>38[38]</sup> In reaction, however,

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<sup>37[37]</sup> According to J. Davies "the subject of self-government would probably have never reached the political agenda but for the successes of *Plaid Cymru*". In his view these nationalist gains forced all the political parties to shift their approach, since "the need to satisfy (or undermine) the national movements in Wales and Scotland became a matter of importance in British politics". Davies, *A History of Wales*, 667 – 670.

<sup>38[38]</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, 667.

opposition stiffened from the Welsh Labour MPs who had earlier resisted all proposals for strengthening the Welsh element in the party programme. The latter became even more sensitive to anything that might even marginally suggest movement in a direction marked out by the Welsh nationalists.

The choice made by the leadership was reflected in the appointment of George Thomas as the new state secretary for Wales in 1969; Thomas was a public proponent of the view that the strengthening of the language programme and the spread of Welsh represented a clear threat for non-Welsh-speakers.<sup>39[39]</sup> Contemporaries therefore saw his appointment as a clear signal that the Labour government had lost interest in continuing on the path towards accepting the national interests of the Welsh.

Nonetheless, in the party ranks there remained many who refused to give up the idea of achieving a closer link between Welsh voters and government institutions in Wales. One of them was E. Morgan (Cardiganshire), whose efforts led the Labour government to the decision to set up a commission on the constitution in October 1968. The commission was entrusted with the task of drawing up materials and proposals for devolution. In what was a new development, the most frequent ideas on potential changes now related to reform of the status of Wales in the context of the reorganisation of local government.<sup>40[40]</sup> The result was that despite all the problems, by the last years of the 1960s a Labour

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<sup>39[39]</sup> The investiture of Prince Charles, eldest son of the Queen, as Prince of Wales played a role here. For Thomas it was an opportunity for lambasting the nationalists.

<sup>40[40]</sup> Arguments for the necessity of reorganising local government in Wales had been appearing since the beginning of the 1960s. In 1963 G. P. Davies published a pamphlet in which he appealed for the creation of an elected assembly for Wales. J. Griffiths agreed with the demand and linked it primarily with the reorganisation of local government. According to J. Davies (*A History of Wales*, 667) the connection between the two themes had already been made earlier in the context of the view that Wales had too many counties that were too small to fulfil their tasks adequately. This opinion was supported by the Commission on Local Government in Wales in 1963. R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones point out that when C. Hughs

devolution plan was effectively ready and on the table, in the form of a proposal for an elected all-Wales assembly which would not, however, have full legislative powers or the right to interfere with the policies of the centre as they affected the tax burden on Welsh voters.<sup>41[41]</sup>

When the Labour Party returned to power in 1974, its position in Wales was the worst since end of the Second World War (it won only 47% of Welsh votes, when in previous elections its support had always exceeded 50%). Although the party was indisputably the victor in the election, its position in Westminster was in no way strong and another general election was therefore called in October of the same year, from which the party emerged with a better majority of 43 seats. By 1976, however, this majority had been eroded by by-election losses, and so in 1977 it made an agreement with the Liberal Party and also tried to come to an arrangement with the nationalists, whose position in Westminster had markedly improved in the course of the early 1970s.

In what was now a familiar pattern, weakness of its position at the centre and the resulting insecurity led Labour Party leaders to a renewed interest in the devolution programme as such. Characteristically, it was a distinctly pragmatic move, motivated not by nationalist sentiments in the leaders or rank and file but by larger British interests. It should further be noted, that in the 1970s attention to the Welsh

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became Secretary of State for Wales in 1966, he tried – albeit unsuccessfully – to include this project in a package of changes relating to local government. He was succeeded in his office by G. Thomas, who virulently opposed nationalism and further devolution. When a law on local government was finally passed in 1973 (coming into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1974), no new body that would reflect the specific character of Wales was included. The reorganisation related exclusively to the territorial dimension of government. Jones – Jones, Labour and the Nation, 2002.

<sup>41[41]</sup> Trouble started when it turned out that the Scottish Labour Party was not interested in devolution. London therefore started to put pressure on it and in the attempt to ensure Welsh Devolution tried in 1974 to push through devolution for Scotland as well, including in the Scots case even legislative devolution.

issue in the Labour Party was relatively marginal and the policies of the leadership with regard to devolution were to a greater extent reactions to the situation in Scotland.<sup>42[42]</sup>

In relation to the government bill on devolution of parliament introduced in 1976, ‘it was probably the developments in Scotland which led the government to offer to Wales a more far-reaching scheme than had been approved in 1970 by the Labour Party in Wales’.<sup>43[43]</sup> The bill offered Wales substantial administrative authority, including supervision of an annual expenditure.<sup>44[44]</sup>

Although all the Labour candidates who entered the electoral fray in 1974 agreed with the main points of the party programme, including the pledge to take devolution further by creating new institutions, many felt an increasing unease at the question of how the party actually intended to implement the pledge. The question is why the Labour Party, having obtained the assent of parliament, which according to British custom is sufficient for the implementation of the proposed steps, should have gone further and announced a referendum, a very unusual instrument for the British system and one

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<sup>42[42]</sup> Blanka Říchová, ‘Skotsko na cestě k autonomii’, *Politologická revue*, IV (1998), 2, 54 –75.

<sup>43[43]</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, 674.

<sup>44[44]</sup> The devolutionists in the Labour party found support in the report of the Royal Commission on the Constitution set up by the Conservatives (known as the Kilbrandon Report), which had been presented in 1973. Most of the members of the commission had taken the view that it would be advantageous to create a directly elected Welsh Assembly with powers primarily in the sphere of local government. A total of thirteen members agreed that the existing government organisation was unsatisfactory, but only two inclined to the idea of creating a completely new system of regional councils for Britain as a whole. Two believed that the existing powers of the Welsh and Scottish Offices were insufficient and should be increased. The remainder of the members recommended the creation of an Assembly for Wales, with 6 commissioners (two of them Welsh) recommending that the new assembly should have legislative powers. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 673 – 674.

without binding force on the government. The obvious and convincing explanation is that it was an attempt to transfer responsibility for the final decision on the implementation or rejection of devolution from politicians to the Welsh and Scottish voters (it should not be forgotten that from the point of view of the territorial distribution of seats, MPs from the English constituencies are a majority in Westminster). Furthermore, the anti-devolutionists in the Labour Party were not unaware of the fact that a referendum would in a sense rid the party of responsibility for the decision.<sup>45[45]</sup> The first proposal for a referendum was submitted to parliament in February 1977, and the second in November of the same year (the voting clearly showed that MPs did not maintain party ties and many voted mainly on the basis of their own attitudes to devolution); the Royal Assent was given on 31 July 1978.<sup>46[46]</sup>

The campaign against devolution (the No-campaign) was supported primarily by the Conservative party, but the conservatives nonetheless worked closely with a group of 6 leftist Labour MPs.<sup>47[47]</sup> The

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<sup>45[45]</sup> J. Davies states that this opinion was first voiced by Labour's Caerphilly constituency party in 1975. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 673.

<sup>46[46]</sup> All predictions about the results of the vote in parliament proved wrong and even the Liberals voted against the government. The Liberals insisted that the future members of the new bodies should be elected on the basis of proportional representation, and they also demanded reform of the tax policy of the regions. Furthermore, they were highly critical of the Labour Party's attitudes and conduct in general and indicated that they would rather have a Thatcher government than devolution. The nationalists (i.e. MPs from *Plaid Cymru* and the Scottish National Party) on the other hand, quite unexpectedly voted with the government. Blanka Řířhová, 'Proměny velšského nacionalismu', *Politologická revue*, VIII (2002), 1, 120 – 140.

<sup>47[47]</sup> Critics of the new regional assembly concentrated on three aspects: the cost of the assembly, the over-government implicit in it, the threat to the unity of Britain, and the belief that it might endanger the interests of non-Welsh speakers. Some anti-devolutionists stressed the reverse, however, claiming that "Welsh-speaking Welsh would suffer at the hands of an assembly which would inevitably be

most active of the latter were Neal Kinnock, whose views were resonant with the antidevolutionary principles of Aneurin Bevan, and Leo Abse. Like Bevan, Kinnock was convinced that the needs of Wales were bound up with centralised planning of the economy, since, as Bevan had quipped, there was no difference between ‘a Welsh sheep, a Westmorland sheep and a Scottish sheep’.

Kinnock and his party allies in 1979 saw the theme of devolution from the same angle. They were so call anti-nationalists, but only in the sense of disagreement with the nationalism of *Plaid Cymru*.. In no sense could the Labour opponents be described as rejecting Welsh national consciousness:

We are a nation, proud of our nationality. But there is little or no desire for the costs, responsibilities of nationhood as the puny voting support for the Nationalists shows. We do not need an Assembly to prove our nationality or our pride. That is a matter of hearts and minds, not bricks, committees and bureaucrats.<sup>48[48]</sup>

In the 1940s Bevan had emphasised the distinctive character of Welsh culture and language in just the same way. In his view the basic problem of Welsh national consciousness was that it linked Welsh culture to the Welsh language, which meant that it might lead to a situation in which a minority of Welsh-speaking could tyrannise over the non-Welsh-speaking majority in Wales. Although up to 1959<sup>49[49]</sup>, Bevan was open and resolute in his opposition to devolution, at the same time he insisted that,

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dominated by the representatives of the populous English-speaking areas of the south-east”. Davies, *A History of Wales*, 676.

<sup>48[48]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 257.

<sup>49[49]</sup> In this year Bevan abandoned his long held anti-devolutionary stance and switched to the view that the demand for the creation of a Secretary of State for Wales should form part of the Labour electoral programme. (Davies 1994, 663)

There is a place for Welsh culture – I subscribe to it as warmly and as sincerely as my Hon. Friend – there is a place for Welsh independence, there is a place for Welsh national self-consciousness and pride.<sup>50[50]</sup>

In the same spirit he wrote in an article reprinted in *Nation* (originally published in *Tribune*) in 1947, that,

In so far as Wales is different to England, it is the difference, and not the similarity, which requires special recognition and a special constitutional medium of expression. Wales is different... in that she has a language of her own, and an art and a culture, and an educational system and an excitement for things of the mind and spirit, which are wholly different from England and English ways.<sup>51[51]</sup>

We can see the same approach in Kinnock's attitudes. For example, in a party political radio broadcast 1992 he commented that,

I've always felt Welsh... particularly in the sense of the kind of community from which I came that gave you a confidence and an identity and I think it's important to have roots.<sup>52[52]</sup>

The opponents of devolution in the Labour party in the 1970s insisted that their anti-devolutionist stand in fact derived precisely from their national consciousness, since,

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<sup>50[50]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 260.

<sup>51[51]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 260 – 261.

<sup>52[52]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 261.

... we represent Welsh interests, and strictly because we wish to maximise the opportunities of economic, social and political support for our country that we strive to defeat the Assembly proposals on March the 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>53[53]</sup>

The second conviction that Kinnock shared with Bevan was the belief that the needs of Wales could not be met without central planning of the economy. Socialism was central to Bevan's outlook and, as R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones stress<sup>54[54]</sup>:

... he could see no way of solving either the coal problem or the agricultural problem in Wales without reference to a strategy that would tackle the problems of these industries throughout the UK.

It is therefore quite clear that as in the case of Bevan, so in the case of Kinnock and the other Labour opponents of devolution in the late 1970s, emphasis on the need to strengthen and extend the powers of the government in London was in no sense a matter of anti-Welsh attitudes (paradoxically, when Kinnock later became chairman of the Labour party, he was frequently attacked or ridiculed in the opposition press precisely for his Welshness). If we assess their attitudes in the context of the times, we cannot regard their rejection of devolution in terms of a lack of national feeling. The rejection of nationalism in the sense of devolution was no more nor less than unambiguous rejection of the views of *Plaid Cymru* and anything that might threaten the position of the Labour Party at Westminster and

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<sup>53[53]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 257 – 258.

<sup>54[54]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 259.

its economic programme designed for Britain as a whole. It might therefore be appropriate to link the anti-devolutionary attitudes of these Labourites with patriotism.<sup>55[55]</sup>

The results of the 1979 referendum in Wales meant the practical political defeat of those politicians that favoured devolution, but the impact of the failure went much deeper. The Labour Party, which had not managed to confront the problem as an internally united party defending a clear position, was forced to call new elections. In these elections it lost its precarious position in parliament and was replaced as governing party by the Conservatives.<sup>56[56]</sup>

**Table 2: The Results of Elections to the Westminster Parliament 1945-2001: Wales**

Year	Conservative Party		Labour Party		Liberal Party		<i>Plaid Cymru</i>		Welsh seats in Westminster*
	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	
1945	4	23,8	<b>25</b>	58,5	6	14,9	–	–	36
1950	4	27,4	<b>27</b>	58,1	5	12,6	–	–	36
1951	6	30,9	<b>27</b>	60,5	3	7,6	–	–	36
1955	6	29,9	<b>27</b>	57,6	3	7,3	–	–	36
1959	7	32,6	<b>27</b>	56,5	2	5,3	–	–	36

<sup>55[55]</sup> Říchová, Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění, 6 – 25.

<sup>56[56]</sup> The Conservatives in Wales celebrated an unexpected success, for they won a total of 11 seats, which was the most since 1874 (see Table 2). For this they needed a “mere” 32% of the votes. The position of the Labour Party, by contrast, was markedly weakened: it gained only 21 seats, the worst result since 1935. Říchová, Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění, 6 – 25.

1964	6	29,4	<b>28</b>	57,9	2	7,3	–	–	36
1966	3	27,9	<b>32</b>	60,6	1	6,3	0	4,3	36
1970	7	27,7	<b>27</b>	51,6	1	6,8	0	11,5	36
1974 (F)	8	25,9	<b>24</b>	46,8	2	16,0	2	10,7	36
1974 (O)	8	23,9	<b>23</b>	49,5	2	15,5	3	10,8	36
1979	11	32,2	<b>22</b>	46,9	1	10,6	2	8,1	36
1983	14	31,0	<b>20</b>	37,5	2	23,2	2	7,8	38
1987	8	29,5	<b>24</b>	45,1	3	17,9	3	7,3	38
1992	6	28,6	<b>27</b>	49,5	1	12,4	4	9,0	38
1997	0	19,6	<b>34</b>	54,7	2	12,4	4	9,9	40
2001	0	21,0	<b>34</b>	48,6	2	13,8	4	14,3	40

Compiled from T. Combs, *The Party of Wales, Plaid Cymru: Populist Nationalism in Contemporary British Politics*, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International 1978; D. Tanner – Ch. Williams – D. Hopkins (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000I*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2000; H. Abalain, *Le Pays de Galles. Identité, modernité*. Crozon 2000; Blanka Říchová, 'Proměny velšského nacionalismu', *Politologická revue*, VIII (2002), 1, 120 – 140 .

Note:

\* The overall number of mandates includes successful candidates who entered Westminster as representatives of parties other than those presented in the table.

### **From the 1979 Referendum to the 1997 Referendum**

The 1980s saw fundamental qualitative changes of view on the existing form of government in Wales.

The Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher took steps to implement a policy of reduction of state

influence in local government. On the territory of Wales a whole series of new administrative bodies, known as quangos (quasi independent non-government organisations), came into existence and were given responsibility for the provision of services in some areas (e.g. health, housing and education).<sup>57[57]</sup> Although at first it seemed that these institutions would be capable of forming an effective intermediate link between central government and the population to the benefit of both sides, they soon attracted serious criticism. The reason was the excessive and quite manifest ties of the quangos to the Conservative Party. In Wales they actually meant the creation of a structure, parallel to that which had been traditionally represented in Wales by local authorities controlled and run by the party political opponents of the Conservatives. It was therefore quite natural to see a revival of the question of how Welsh autonomy could be further developed within the framework of Britain and who would head any movement directed to achieving it.

As far as the position of the Labour Party in the 1980s was concerned, the decade saw complex internal developments. In October 1983 Michael Foot resigned as Chairman of the Labour Party and after internal elections he was replaced by the previous opponent of devolution Neil Kinnock (who thus became the fifth Welsh MP to head the party, although the first with deep roots in the South Wales coalfield). The following general elections showed that the dissatisfaction of Welsh voters with Labour continued, since the party achieved only 38% of the vote (its worst result since 1918). Nevertheless, the Labour managed to take 20 out of the 38 Welsh seats. The elections also showed that from the point of view of electoral preferences, Wales divided into three different areas:

1. British Wales – the eastern constituencies and the southern coastal areas, a region in which Conservatism was strong;
2. Welsh Wales – the southern coalfields, Labour stronghold;

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<sup>57[57]</sup> These included for example Training and Enterprise Councils, National Health Service Trusts, Urban Development Corporations, Housing Action Trusts.

3. Welsh-speaking Wales (*y Gymru Gymraeg*) – Gwynedd and most of Dyfed, a region where four parties were struggling for supremacy.

The next elections, in 1987, confirmed this division: the Labour Party increased its support in Welsh Wales and remained the strongest political party in Wales (its MPs holding the majority of Welsh seats in parliament), while the conservatives remained the dominant political force in British Wales (they even managed to take 6 more seats, but their share of support actually dropped by 1,5%). *Plaid Cymru* improved its position in Welsh-speaking Wales (it took Anglesey), but elsewhere effectively failed.<sup>58[58]</sup>

Despite continuing successes in regional elections, the Labour Party delayed its official return to devolution until 1992.<sup>59[59]</sup> The reason for its hesitant attitude was partly the indisputable no vote given by the population of Wales in the 1989 referendum, but also the fact that the leaders of the Welsh Labour Party continued to fail to agree on any clear common approach to the problem. In any case the party as a whole with struggling with more basic problems arising from its position in opposition, and from the need to react to the social and economic problems of the country; devolution as an issue could not successfully compete with the problems of growing unemployment or the Miners' Strike which started in 1985. Until its second electoral defeat, in 1987, the devolution issue was not in the forefront of Labour concerns.

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<sup>58[58]</sup> Říchová, Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění, 6 – 25; Říchová, Proměny velšského nacionalismu, 120 – 140.

<sup>59[59]</sup> The concept of devolution first appeared in a Labour Party published declaration entitled It's Time to Get Wales Working Again. R. Deacon, *New Labour and the Welsh Assembly: 'Shaping the Vision' or updating the Wales Act 1978?* in S. Hampeher-Monk, *Contemporary Political Studies*, Belfast: PSA – United Kingdom 1996, 281 – 288.

In 1987, however, a non-party initiative called The Campaign for Welsh Assembly<sup>60[60]</sup> appeared on the Welsh political scene, and Labourists once again began to pay more attention to the question of a Welsh assembly. In October they created a working group entrusted with drawing up a plan for future local government in Wales. The group presented its conclusions to the party leadership two years later, recommending the establishment of a Welsh assembly, but the party still dragged its feet and did not officially adopt the plan until the early 1990s (1992). In July 1994 the Labour Party embarked on the stage of major consultations and created a special commission entrusted with gathering the widest possible range of opinions from the inhabitants of Wales on the subject of possible devolution.<sup>61[61]</sup> The results of the commission's research were published in May 1995 in a document called *Shaping the Vision*. The document recommended that a Welsh assembly should be elected by a majority (direct not proportionate) electoral system, should take over the powers of the Welsh Office and the Welsh quangoes, and should be funded from Westminster (in all these respects the commissions proposals were the same as the proposals submitted to the 1979 referendum).<sup>62[62]</sup>

The much bigger problem for the Labour Party was making a clear decision on whether or not to support the holding of a new referendum. Some in the party leadership feared that the situation might be a repeat of 1979. Finally the view prevailed that the referendum would not be essential for implementing the plan, because if voters were interested in the autonomous assembly, in the general

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<sup>60[60]</sup> This initiative was led by Labour councillor Jon-Owen Jones, who later became the party MP for Cardiff Central.

<sup>61[61]</sup> The commission worked for a full five months throughout the territory of Wales. Although its work attracted criticism, it nonetheless gathered sufficient material, which was then used for internal party discussions on the issue. The strategy of the Labour Party was to start by creating a clear and acceptable platform for the party, and then use it to offer a united front to the public. R. Deacon argues that the main aim of the party was to prevent the emergence of a Welsh equivalent of the Scottish Legislative Council. Deacon, *New Labour and the Welsh Assembly*, 283.

<sup>62[62]</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, Oxford: University Press 1999 and 2001.

election they would vote for the Labour Party which had incorporated this item in its programme. If they were against the assembly, they would vote Conservative.<sup>63[63]</sup>

The second basic question to which the Labour leadership had to find an answer was how to secure internal party unity if the party included the devolution plan in its election manifesto. There were grounds for the fear that if the party failed to find a clear internal consensus, it would be faced once again by an ideological split, the consequent failure of the devolution plan and perhaps even yet another defeat in a general election. To reach internal agreement, the supporters of devolution had to reduce their demands and accept that the Welsh assembly would be a weaker and less conspicuous than its Scottish equivalent. On the other hand, the most militant Labour supporters of the concept of devolution<sup>64[64]</sup> could comfort themselves that this decision was just the first step to ‘real political devolution’..

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<sup>63[63]</sup> The same attitude was taken by leaders of the Welsh nationalists, who at their conference in the autumn of 1995 voted against the holding of a referendum on a Welsh Autonomous Assembly. The Chairman of *Plaid Cymru* D. Wigley in June of the same year also inclined to the view that if such a referendum was to take place at all, it would only make sense to hold it before the general elections. Řichová, *Proměny velšského nacionalismu*, 120 – 140.

<sup>64[64]</sup> These Labourists formed their own pressure group within the Labour Party, known as Wales Labour Action. It was headed by Gareth Hughes. They proposed that the Welsh assembly should take practically the same form as the Scottish parliament. Together with the movement Campaign for a Welsh Assembly, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and *Plaid Cymru*, what they most criticised was that fact that the proposal for the autonomous Welsh assembly did not contain powers to raise taxes and did not provide future members with the right to debate and pass laws in the first instance. Similarly they agreed that election of members to the Welsh assembly should be based on a proportional representation system. In an attempt to stress that the original interest in increasing economic powers in a future autonomous Welsh assemble no longer met the main interests of Welsh people, the non-party organisation Campaign for a Welsh Assembly had changed its name in 1993 to The Parliament for Wales Campaign. The term parliament was designed to show that supporters of Welsh devolution had shifted the centre of gravity of their struggle towards political equality, and was supposed to attract greater interest from the population and at the same time demonstrate that the campaign was not trailing in the wake of Labour’s moderate demands. At a conference organised by the leaders of the campaign in April 1994 there were calls for the expansion of the legislative

The installation of a new Labour government under the leadership of Tony Blair (1997) opened the era that led to the final creation of an autonomous Welsh National Assembly. The law declaring a referendum was practically the first law that the new labour government adopted. Although there had been quiet speculation and in some quarters anticipation that Labour might take a step of this kind, Blair's decision to open consultations on the creation of autonomous regional legislative institutions, i.e. a Welsh National Assembly and a Scottish Autonomous Parliament, came as quite a surprise to many members of the party.<sup>65[65]</sup> The general view seems to have been in contrast to the Labour Party's attitude to the referendum of 1979, when the party was essentially using it as an instrument in its struggle to retain its own political position in the country, the decision to repeat the step in 1997 was more a matter of tackling the issue on its own merits, i.e. that Blair was genuinely trying to take a positive approach to devolution and the constitutional changes that were called for.<sup>66[66]</sup> Nonetheless,

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powers of a future Welsh parliament – the right to propose laws, to share in determining the tax level – and also a call for future members of a Welsh parliament to be elected on the model of the STV – single transferable vote. It was quite clear that the Welsh supporters of devolution had drawn strong inspiration from Scotland, but they did not manage to secure substantial official support from any of the political parties, even though many leading figures in Welsh politics were in the campaign ranks. Furthermore, the spokesmen of the campaign continually had to face the marked hostility of Labourists and the leaders of *Plaid Cymru*.. By the mid-1990s it was abundantly clear that in practice the strengthening of the position of the Labourists and the adoption of some of the views that they were seeking to implement was the only effective way forward for the campaign for a Welsh Parliament. Říchová, Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění, 6 – 25; Říchová, Proměny velšského nacionalismu, 120 – 140.

<sup>65[65]</sup> In 1996 the Labourists did not yet consider a referendum to be essential. Neither R. Davies as the shadow Labour Secretary of State for Wales, nor G. Robertson as the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland saw the necessity for referenda. In the end, however, the party included the referenda in its pre-election programme, and in this way actually delayed real debate on the problem of devolution until after the elections.

<sup>66[66]</sup> Since taking over leadership of the party, Blair had been closely identified with the concept of the modernisation and reform of the political system of the country. Reform of the constitution was regarded as an integral part of such reform, as

some analysts (e.g. L. McAllister) did not hesitate to characterise the calling of the referendum as an expression of Blair's personal tactics, and his attempt to take a firm line both with opponents in his own party and against the opposition.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1997, i.e. not quite three months after the formation of the new government, the government bill for the creation of a Welsh National Assembly was published under the title *A Voice for Wales*.<sup>67[67]</sup> The formulation of the bill, however, satisfied almost nobody. The opponents of devolution took a clearcut view, since as far as they were concerned they found nothing in the text of the bill to justify the setting up of an autonomous Welsh assembly. They branded the text poorly prepared and ill-conceived, and also pointed out that it had not been based on sufficiently thorough consultations. In these circumstances, they claimed, a referendum was pointless, since it asked voters to decide on something that was not precisely defined and had no clear concrete form and content. The document also, however, attracted serious critics from the ranks of the supporters of devolution, who pointed out that the proposed form of the autonomous Welsh Assembly gave its future members

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one of the chief and fundamental features of the required and expected process of the political transformation of Great Britain under the leadership of the party.

<sup>67[67]</sup> The text, in both languages, contained the unambiguous decision that the future Welsh National Assembly would take over responsibility only for questions that had previously fallen within the competence of the secretary of state for Wales. The future Welsh assembly would also take over the entire budget of the Welsh Office, i.e. 700 milliard pounds (the proposal regulated in detail where, and in what proportions the funds would be transferred). There was also substantial attention to the creation of new institutions designed to share in the future economic development of Wales (it envisaged the setting up of special authorities for the development of industry and agriculture, and a new organisation to supervise the development of local government).

absolutely no genuine legislative; in their opinion such an assembly offered merely ‘responsibility without power’.<sup>68[68]</sup>

Despite all inner tensions, the Labour Party was the decisive force in the Yes for Wales campaign organised to support the plan for a Welsh Autonomous Assembly. Labour had very obviously learnt from the shortcomings of the 1979 campaign and gambled on a significant shortening of the referendum campaign period, fearing that a longer discussion period would provide more space for opponents of devolution and make splits between its supporters more visible. The less time for exchange of views, of course, the fewer the questions that would arise and the less the need to find satisfactory answers. Furthermore, the referendum date in Wales was shifted back to a week after the referendum in Scotland (in 1979 the two had taken place on the same day), with the aim of increasing yes votes, since it was anticipated that the Scottish voters would support the proposal and there might therefore be a kind of domino effect.

The party leadership also realised the need to strengthen the campaign by creating a single umbrella ‘organisation’ that would combine party with non-party interests supporting the idea of an assembly and that would run the whole campaign.<sup>69[69]</sup> The greatest achievement of the campaign run by a staff of supporters of a Welsh Assembly was the fact that despite all the difficulties it managed to bring together the leaders of all the political parties actively interested in the creation of the assembly. The keynote of the campaign was a broad pragmatic consensus, not insistence that this particular form of

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<sup>68[68]</sup> Opposition to the bill came on the one hand from members of *Plaid Cymru*, and on the other from the Liberal Democrats. It was also shared by some members of the Labour Party (members of Welsh Labour Action, a group that brought together some Labour MPs and Labour constituency activists, were particularly active opponents of a referendum).

<sup>69[69]</sup> The beginnings of this non-party organisation are usually dated to December 1996 when the supporters of a referendum first officially came together, but in practice it did not start operating until February 1997 when it gained a pledge of 25,000 pounds support from the Joseph Rowntree Trust. This funding allowed it to start paying regular employees and an organisational staff based in Cardiff.

achieving the desired goal was necessarily the best and most appropriate.<sup>70[70]</sup> This fact was highly appreciated by the Labour State Secretary for Wales, who claimed that it was an ‘historic performance of all the three progressive parties in Wales’ (Labourists, Liberals and Nationalists).

The campaign against the setting up of a Welsh Assembly (Just Say No) was not launched until the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, only a few weeks before the referendum itself.<sup>71[71]</sup> Naturally the strongest opponents of a referendum and active supporters of the Just Say No campaign were the Welsh Conservatives.<sup>72[72]</sup> The campaign was quite unexpectedly joined, however, by a number of Labour MPs from Wales headed by Llew Smith, member for Blaenau Gwent, one of the ‘Old Labour’ wing of the party and a long-time opponent of devolution. He was supported by another five members of the party who expressed their doubts about a future Welsh Assembly.<sup>73[73]</sup> Ron Davies<sup>74[74]</sup> as leader of the Welsh Office on the one

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<sup>70[70]</sup> The official labour flyer for the Yes-campaign stressed above all the economic arguments, and insisted that the future Welsh assembly would not cost more than the current arrangement of powers between London and Cardiff. The Labourists also repeatedly stressed that the autonomous Welsh assembly was not the beginning of the disintegration of the whole state, but would on the contrary strengthen the unity of country as a whole.

<sup>71[71]</sup> The funding for the campaign was secured by the son of the banker Sir J. Hodge, R. Hodge.

<sup>72[72]</sup> The official leader of the campaign was the former speaker of the House of Commons and later Viscount Tony Pandy who was an uncompromising opponent of any kind of devolution. L. McAllister, (1999), *The Road to Cardiff Bay: The Process of Establishing the National Assembly for Wales. Parliamentary Affairs*, 52 (1999), 4, 634 – 648.

<sup>73[73]</sup> In addition to the Labour MPs active in the ranks of the campaign against the creation of a Welsh assembly, there were also two members of the Labour Party from the Rhondda Valleys (B. Bowen and C. Pugh), who declared themselves to be spokesmen for the ordinary Labour voters, and T. Williams, a former member of *Plaid Cymru* who had gone over to the Labour Party.

<sup>74[74]</sup> In 1979 Ron Davies, as MP for Caerphilly, had been an opponent of devolution. In 1997 he was a prime advocate of devolution in the Labour government and tried to manoeuvre in the campaign in such a way as to get support for the government proposal for the new assembly even from nationalistically minded voters.. Although he insisted on the primary importance of devolution for

hand tried to use the whips in Westminster to censor all the statements made by these Labour rebels but to the public, i.e. outside parliament, he always stressed that their appearances could in no way endanger the Labour decision to hold a referendum or change the attitude of Labour MPs in supporting the future Welsh Assembly. The Labour leadership tried to stop the internal disputes getting out into the public domain and so potentially undermining the image of party unity on the issue. Insofar as the public got to hear the views of the Labour opponents of devolution, these were written off from the official point of view as merely the ‘excesses of a few insignificant individuals’.

The main arguments used by the opponents of the referendum were, however, quite contradictory enough in themselves. On the one hand the campaign presented fears of the possible violation of the integrity of the United Kingdom (there were even references to Yugoslavia), but on the other, many opponents of the Labour bill pointed out that the future assembly would have insufficient real power, and that instead of governing it would be just a ‘Welsh debating society’.. The rise in the costs of government was also an integral part of the arguments against the establishment of a Welsh assembly. But reactions to these apparently contradictory attitudes among the voters were minimal. According to L. McAllister<sup>75[75]</sup> this said more about the weakness of the pro-devolution campaign than about the weakness of its opponents.

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democratisation, “he also came to symbolise the ever-present, practical side to Labour in Wales, learning the Welsh language and emphasising the distinctiveness of Wales not only culturally but also politically and socially”.. Earlier, in 1994 he had said at the British Labour Party Conference, that “Like the Scots we are a nation. We have our own country. We have our own language, our own history, traditions, ethics, values and pride... We now in Wales demand the right to decide through our own democratic institutions the procedures and the structures and the priorities of our own civic life.” Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 260.

<sup>75[75]</sup> L. McAllister, ‘The Welsh Devolution Referendum: Definitely, Maybe?’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 51 (1998), 2, 159.

The actual referendum took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 1997. Even shortly before the polling stations closed, the forecasts were still suggesting that there would definitely not be a majority in favour of the creation of the Welsh assembly. Even the BBC declared that the Labour proposal would be rejected by a narrow majority in the referendum. The final results from Carmarthenshire in South-West Wales showed, however, that the Yes-campaign had succeeded against all expectations and that like the Scottish voters the inhabitants of Wales favoured the creation of an autonomous assembly. The victory was, however, very narrow – a mere 50,3% of votes cast, but even so, most commentators considered that there had been an ‘important and marked’ shift in the attitudes of the population in Wales. Indeed, there had been a practically thirty-percent rise in the number of supporters of an autonomous assembly as compared with 1979 (a very conspicuous change compared to the situation in Scotland as well).<sup>76[76]</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Labour was a party that clearly represented the interests of the British periphery (i.e. Wales and Scotland) and expressed highly decentralist ideas (for example the Scottish Labour Party had been founded by supporters of the radical Home Rule programme in 1888, and this programme was still part of the party programme in 1916-1923, and in 1924 the party even contributed to the reformulation of this plan<sup>77[77]</sup>). Given that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Labour

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<sup>76[76]</sup> Certain regions in particular recorded a huge rise in support for devolution: for example in South and South-East Wales, in the Glamorgan area, support for the creation of an autonomous assembly rose from 12% in 1979 to more than 55% in 1997. There were, however, even more striking differences in the distribution of opinion within individual constituencies: for example in Bridgend in South Wales the internal fragmentation of the region was remarkable – in the north 95% of voters supported the new assembly, while in the south 70% were against it.

<sup>77[77]</sup> Labour became the strongest political force in Scotland in 1922, which led many socialists from its ranks to consider the possibility of trying to push through bigger changes in Scotland. In 1915 the

Party was the dominant party in Wales (the Labour Party came across as a very active and sufficiently radical party, and so by the 1920s had managed to appeal to most Welsh voters – in the elections of 1922 it won a majority of the Welsh seats), the history of Welsh devolution is in practice the history of an internal party debate.

From the last years of the Second World War the party gave unambiguous priority to centralisation and the opinion prevailed that only a strong and vigorous British government could provide what the periphery needed. Thus while the Liberals favoured the principle of the dispersion of power in the interests of the periphery, Labour on the other hand emphasised nationalisation and a planned economy as a way of improving its situation. As a result of this marked shift of view, the party lost the support of many people who took a more regional perspective and believed that the party should have continued to uphold the principle of a transfer of more power to the periphery.

For the Labour Party, post-war fears of the possible effects of devolution were associated first and foremost with fears that it would endanger the party's economic programme and the ideological premises on which that programme was based, but also on awareness of the fact that one result of devolution would very probably be the weakening of the party's position at the centre of political power, i.e. in the Westminster parliament. This was because the party had much more to lose from the weakening of its representation in Scotland and Wales than the conservatives, whose electoral support in these regions was less solid and who compensated with their strong position in the English constituencies.<sup>78[78]</sup>

On the other hand, however, the Labour Party could not afford entirely to give up the theme of devolution, because that would lose it the votes of those who placed greater emphasis on the concept of

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Labour Party's Scottish Council was created as a specific regional element in the Labour Party; in 1977 its influence in the party was extended in connection with the planned devolution.

<sup>78[78]</sup> Říchová, Labour Party a koncept Velšského národního shromáždění, 6 – 25.

the national interests of the Welsh (or the Scots). These votes would go over to the explicitly nationalist parties in both regions, and that was indeed what happened in the course of the later 1960s. The actual content of devolution – what should it involve? – presented difficulties in itself. Frequently there was talk of the English regions as well, but in this period none of them showed any signs of wanting their own special powers. It is likewise the case that Labourists were much more favourable to the idea of devolution in Wales than in Scotland, since without the support of the Welsh MPs the party was not in position to put a government together (this was particularly clear in 1964-1974). Yet all efforts to push through devolution proposals in the centre of power, i.e. in the Westminster parliament, always involved conflicts with the Labour MPs for South-East Wales. On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that devolutionary policy helped the party to take an active stand against the influence of the conservatives in the regions and moreover, from the later 1960s it was also possible for Labour to link these proposals with reform of local government and of the position of quangos. According to V. Bogdanor<sup>79[79]</sup>, however, the chance of pushing through devolution in linkage with local government reform was lost in the 1960s, when the government took steps to reorganise local government without any devolutionary implications.

In these complex and very unclear circumstances it seemed only sensible to play for time, i.e. not to neglect the theme, but not to arrive at any clear conclusion until such time as it would be absolutely clear what devolution would mean for the party itself (i.e. whether it would strengthen or weaken Labour). For this reason political interpretation of the Labour attitude in the late 1960s and early 1970s has tended to endorse the view that the party laid the emphasis on the activity of the Kilbrandon Royal Commission for purely strategic, temporising reasons.<sup>80[80]</sup> Despite this, in terms of basic outlook, the party leaders and rank-and-file members clearly preferred a strong central government (in the inter-war

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<sup>79[79]</sup> Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, 162 – 163.

<sup>80[80]</sup> Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, 178 – 179.

period the trade union leaders had also come round to this view, with an eye to negotiations on pay etc.).

The theme of devolution appeared once again and with new vigour in internal discussions in the Labour Party in the mid-1980s, when the pragmatic approach now entirely prevailed over previous distaste for devolution. Devolution was now seen as a potential barrier against Thatcherism and a potential power base for Labourism in the United Kingdom as a whole. The theme returned in the party's election manifesto in 1992, with many features that can in fact already be found in the conceptions of the 1950s, i.e. it was formulated as a general problem of democratic government and a means of suppressing undemocratic elements in the British political system (above all the position and influence of quangos). The same kind of concept appeared in the campaign that accompanied the referendum held by Tony Blair's new Labour government in 1997; at this point too, arguments for the creation of a Welsh National Assembly stressed democracy and efficiency, not national identity. The results of the second devolution referendum in 1997 show that on this occasion ordinary people, too, cast their votes without marked attention to the issue of national identity. According to R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones<sup>81[81]</sup> the Labour Party therefore succeeded in its long-term struggle to interpret devolution as a matter of democratising, pragmatic politics. It would not be correct to say, however, that this attitude involved the elimination of emotionalism, the weakening of Labour Welsh patriotism (as opposed to nationalism) or the complete absence of appeals to culture in the defence of the shift of powers to the newly created legislative body. R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones<sup>82[82]</sup> insist that 'during the twentieth century Labour and the national question have been inseparable'. Although for many years the Labour Party presented itself as a centralised, i.e. British party, it was in fact the Labour Party, that 'had delivered a degree of democratic autonomy to Wales for the first time in the nation's history'.

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<sup>81[81]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 260.

<sup>82[82]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 261.

Furthermore, 'it was achieved, moreover, despite the indifference of much of the Welsh electorate and the active hostility of a large minority, as was demonstrated in the referendum result'.<sup>83[83]</sup>

If we review what has been said on the metamorphoses of the attitudes of the Labour Party and its leaders to devolution, which ultimately led to the creation of the Welsh National Assembly, there seems good reason to agree with those authors who have stressed internal differences in the approach to the problem (see R. M. Jones and I. R. Jones). There always existed several parallel currents in the party, and their leaders very often derived their attitude to devolution from the particular political situation of the moment. They thus combined many factors, such as political priorities, electoral calculations, cultural considerations and political analysis and commitment. We cannot therefore regard the devolution process linked to the Welsh political scene as a conscious Labour attempt to fulfil a concrete goal, i.e. the creation of a specific political institution. If we nonetheless wanted to identify a certain concrete common feature that appears repeatedly in the behaviour of the Labour Party, then it is without doubt the pragmatic character of attitude to the theme in question, even though Labourists repeatedly, albeit with varying intensity, appealed to the cultural tradition and distinctiveness of 'Welsh life'.

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<sup>83[83]</sup> Jones – Jones, *Labour and the Nation*, 241.