The Welsh Labour Party and Devolution, 1966-1999: Disunity in Diversity

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Résumé *: The Labour Party in Wales played a determining but contradictory role in the long and complex process which led from the creation of the Welsh Office in 1964 to the transfer of executive powers to the National Assembly for Wales on July 1st 1999. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, elements within the Welsh Council of Labour pressed hard for legislative devolution for Wales but the campaign orchestrated by some South Wales Labour MPs , the Gang of Six, made a decisive contribution to the failure of the 1979 referenda on devolution in both Wales and Scotland. Similarly, in the 1990s, even if Labour finally delivered executive devolution, the divisions within the party led it to try and make the devolution debate in Wales an internal party affair. This nearly resulted in a second defeat in the September 1997 referendum. My paper will start by briefly sketching out this contradictory role and its impact at some of the key stages of the devolution process. It will then analyse the reasons for the existence of different positions on devolution within Welsh Labour and the factors which changed the internal balance of forces over time.*

Introduction

All big national political parties in the major western democracies are complex structures. This is particularly true of the British Labour Party because of its large number of affiliated organisations. In most circumstances, this does not prevent the formulation of valid generalisations about the party's general positions and political role, for the very adversarial, two-party style of much of British politics tends to make it a tightly leadership-led organisation with policy orientations firmly enforced throughout the party. Devolution, however, was an exception. It was a question which opened up very deep ideological divisions within Labour and produced some of the worst infighting of the post-war period: the 1976 Scotland and Wales Bill was the only major piece of legislation that a Labour Government was forced to abandon in mid-parliamentary procedure because of a rebellion within its own ranks during the second-half of the century.

In these circumstances it is necessary to have a clear vision of the complexity of the party's positions and of the contradictory roles that different parts of the party played. This article aims to achieve that in relation to the Welsh Labour Party. The subject is important in several respects. Wales being one of the two parts of Britain principally concerned by the public debate on territorial governance, the attitude of Labour members in Wales was of particular

significance. Labour's dominance of political life in Wales also meant that they would deeply influence majority attitudes of the whole Welsh population to devolution and it gave them the critical mass necessary to have an impact on the party's national positions through their representatives in London. Understanding the Welsh Labour Party's contradictions will thus shed light on the tortuous route taken by Wales towards devolution and the policy difficulties encountered at a British level. We will start by describing what happened and then proceed to give an explanation.

I. The Welsh Labour Party and Devolution: Two Cycles of Debate and Campaigning

To give a coherent account of what happened between 1966 and 1997, it is necessary to distinguish four different institutional levels within the Welsh Labour Party. The most basic building block of the party was formed by the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), essentially made up of delegates from local Labour Party branches and also from branches of local affiliated trade-unions. They, along with the regional structures of affiliated trade-unions, were brought together in what, seen from a London point of view, was the regional structure of the Labour Party. This held an annual conference and was managed by an executive committee. Thirdly there was what could be termed the Labour Party local government lobby, made up of the Labour councillors, the local authorities they ran and the Labour sections of the various associations which linked the different levels of local authority together, such as the Association of County Councils or since 1996 the Welsh Local Government Association. Finally, all the Labour MPs representing Welsh constituencies made up the Welsh Parliamentary Labour Party (WPLP). We will use the expression the Welsh Labour Party to refer to all of these levels collectively.

This simple enumeration demonstrates that there was certainly institutional room for the expression of divergent opinions. The successive names of the all-Wales regional structure in turn already provide us with a brief introduction to our subject. It was created for the first time in 1947, as the Welsh Regional Council of Labour (WRCL). In 1960 the word regional was deliberately dropped, so it became the Welsh Council of Labour (WCL). In 1975 there was a complete change of name, which became the Labour Party in Wales (LPW), referred to first as the Labour Party, Wales and then as the Wales Labour Party. Finally, in March 2000 it was rebranded as Welsh Labour, a term that now figures in both English and Welsh ("Llafur Cymru") as part of the party's logo on its website.

Such linguistic subtleties were commonplace in this period, as the name of the institution finally created, the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW), confirms. They expressed differing attitudes to the Welsh National Question. The 1960 change in name followed the voting of two conference motions which asserted that the party "fully aware that Wales is a nation should now take steps to delete the

word 'Regional' from its constitution and Rules". The Labour Party in Wales, by contrast, was chosen because it was felt to emphasise the party's primary commitment to the British Labour Party and a secondary commitment to Wales. The term Welsh Labour was only finally adopted after the party's disappointing results at the first NAfW elections. These shifts in the party's positioning can best be studied by dividing the period under study into the two cycles of debate about devolution that took place before and after 1979.[1]

In the wake of the creation of the Welsh Office in 1964 and a change in secretary or full-time organiser, the Welsh Council of Labour (WCL) adopted some positions on territorial politics that were very advanced, at least from a Labour point of view. The debate at the time was mainly being carried out in terms of the reform of local government. In the spring of 1965, fifteen months before the Carmarthen by election, the WCL executive committee under the leadership of Emrys Jones came out in favour of creating a directly elected council for the whole of Wales, as a third tier of local government. Its role would be to exercise those local government functions which could be best carried out on a larger scale, those "where cooperation, coordination and amalgamation of financial strength" were needed. The idea was pushed in London by the new Secretary of State for Wales, Cledwyn Hughes, but diluted by firm opposition within the Cabinet: the proposal got turned into a purely consultative, appointed council.[2]

That line of enquiry, which linked the creation of an all-Wales elected assembly to the transfer of powers from local government, was closed off by the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on the Constitution announced on October 30th 1968. The latter tied any idea of regionalisation to a change purely in "the present functions of the central legislature and government in relation to the several countries, nations and regions of the United Kingdom".[3] Regionalisation, therefore, became a question of what we now call devolution: the transfer to a subordinate elected body on a geographical basis of functions at present exercised by Parliament.

This did not deter the WCL and Emrys Jones. In February 1969, even before the Royal Commission was constituted, a WCL research group was set up to prepare the basis for a submission to the Royal Commission. It produced a confidential report in August 1969, entitled *Reform of the Machinery of Government,* which was a radical document. It proposed full-blown legislative devolution for Wales associated with considerable taxation powers corresponding to between 45% and 60% of the proposed assembly's spending needs. This went well beyond what was deemed to be acceptable in London, where the leadership of the British Labour Party was also confronted, at this stage, by the total opposition of the Scottish Labour Party to any form of devolution. Intense pressure was exercised within the party and Emrys Jones had to settle for a compromise. He held out on the principle

[1] McALLISTER, Ian, "The Labour Party in Wales: The Dynamics of One-Partyism", *Llafur* 3, no. 2, 1981, p. 83.
[2] EVANS, John G., *Devolution in Wales: Claims and Reponses, 1937-1979*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2006, pp. 102-112.
[3] Royal Commission on the Constitution, *Volume I: Report*, London, HMSO, 1973, Cmnd. 5460, p. iii.

of a directly elected assembly but had to replace legislative devolution by executive devolution and to abandon any pretensions to fiscal autonomy.[4]

The WCL went on to play its cards rather badly in 1974. During that decisive year, British Labour Party policy on devolution took on some of its key features, which were still visible, twenty-five years later, in the 1999 settlement. The WCL could no doubt have made a second attempt to get a policy of legislative devolution for Wales accepted by the British leadership of the party but, for reasons of party unity, it decided against raising the issue. Consequently it, and Wales as a whole, became lumbered with its publicly accepted compromise of 1970. Thereafter, it had to put on a brave face, at times belittling the importance of the distinction between executive and legislative devolution, at others disguising the setback by a call for moderate devolution all round, England included. This, however, did not stop the annual LPW conference of 1978 adopting an ambitious policy statement called *Political and Industrial Democracy in Britain* which placed devolution on a continuum of a developing democracy going from the political to the industrial. In addition, the executive committee tried to maintain a pro-devolution party discipline in the run up to the referendum reminding leading party figures that "Party policy is decided at Conference, and not separately by constituency Labour Parties». Finally when the referendum disaster happened, the executive expressed its deep disappointment and sketched out its vision of the future in prophetic terms: "Unless Labour carries out radical and effective proposals to create real democratic control of our public services and industries, the Tory party will destroy all we have built up over generations." [5]

Thus, in the period 1966 to 1979 there were principled devolutionists in control of a significant part of the Labour Party machine in Wales, their commitment went well beyond the reluctant acceptance of political necessity and, even if they were outmanoeuvred by the British leadership of the Labour party on the question of legislative devolution, they never gave up defending the principle of the devolution of power to a democratically elected all-Wales assembly.

But, of course, that was only one half of the story. Other things were going on in other parts of the party. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, there had always been voices within the party which expressed opposition to any form of recognition of Wales as an entity by formal political territorial structures. The most recent episode before our period began had consisted in a very last-minute letter in October 1964 from certain Welsh MPs beseeching the new Prime Minister Harold Wilson not to transfer any ministerial functions to the new office of Secretary of State for Wales. The letter writers were at work again in the month leading up to the publication in July 1967 of the White Paper *Local Government in Wales*.

[4] JONES, J. Barry, KEATING, Michael, "The British Labour Party: Centralisation and Devolution", *In* MADGWICK, Peter, ROSE, Richard (eds), *The Territorial Dimension in United Kingdom Politics*, London, Macmillan, 1982, pp. 182-189. OSMOND, John, *Creative Conflict: The Politics of Welsh Devolution*, Llandysul and London, Gomer Press and Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 142-144 and 180-184.
[5] TANNER, Duncan, "Facing the New Challenge : Labour and Politics, 1970-2000", *In* TANNER, Duncan, WILLIAMS, Chris, HOPKIN, Deian (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900-2000*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000, pp. 279-280.

Nineteen Welsh Labour MPs warned against the creation of an elected council. By December 1969, when the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party met with the Welsh PLP to talk about the Royal Commission, majority opinion within the latter was that only a national council with powers strictly limited to the democratic supervision of nominated bodies might be acceptable.[6]

Opposition radicalised when the British party leadership, for its own reasons of political expediency, began formally to adopt legislative devolution for Scotland and executive devolution for Wales as party policy. Agitation in favour of the need for a referendum to validate any legislation began at the annual conference of the WCL in May 1974, despite it being against official WCL policy and a big departure from normal British constitutional conventions.[7] It was rapidly coordinated and amplified by the Caerphilly Constituency Labour Party. The idea was relayed at the Parliamentary level by two South Wales MPs: first Fred Evans, MP for Caerphilly who put down an early day motion in November 1976 and then by Leo Abse, MP for Pontypool, who tabled an amendment to the Scotland and Wales Bill. The latter had obtained 151 signatures by December 16th and was used to threaten the Cabinet with a major Labour rebellion on the second reading. The government conceded the point announcing that it would itself put forward an amendment at the Committee Stage.

The 'Gang of Six', an informal grouping of six South Wales Labour MPs, had begun to coalesce in the course of the campaign to obtain a referendum and went on to play a decisive role. Firstly, they played a part in the wrecking operation carried out within Parliament that led among many other things to the adoption of the Cunningham Amendment. Then they took a very active part in the extra-parliamentary Labour No Assembly Campaign. There they linked up with the local government lobby and their joint action was devastatingly effective: they managed to help to destroy the normal reflex of Labour supporters in Wales, which was, of course, to support official Labour policy. During the 1979 Welsh Election Survey, people were asked how they had voted during the referendum: 39% of Labour supporters declared that they had abstained and of the 61% who had voted nearly three-quarters (73%) declared they had voted against.[8]

So by 1979 the Welsh Labour Party was bitterly divided on devolution. The division was very public, with the official Labour Party Wales TUC Campaign exchanging blows with the unofficial Labour No Assembly Campaign. The final outcome was that a part of the Welsh Labour Party made a major contribution to

[6] EVANS, J.G., *op.cit.*, pp. 122-128.
[7] The convention in question is that all the explicit manifesto commitments of the majority party are considered to have popular consent. The promise of an elected council 'with functions, power and finance to enable it to be an effective democratic force in the life of Wales' figured clearly in the February 1974 Welsh Manifesto, *Labour's Policies for a Brighter Future for Wales*, although there was no mention of devolution in the national manifesto. The commitment to devolution for both Scotland and Wales was very clear in the October 1974 British manifesto.
[8] WYN JONES, Richard, TRYSTAN, Dafydd, TAYLOR, Bridget, "Voting Patterns in the Referendum", *In* JONES, J. Barry, BALSOM, Denis (eds), *The Road to the National Assembly for Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000, p. 169. The Gang of six was made up of Neil Kinnock (Bedwelty), Leo Abse (Pontypool), Fred Evans (Caerphilly), Donald Anderson (Swansea East), Ifor Davies (Gower)and Ioan Evans (Aberdare).

bringing about the failure of a policy that had been the LPW's official orientation for at least ten years. That, along with the sheer scale of the rejection of devolution by the electorate who voted four to one against, will help us to understand what happened after 1979.

Unlike in Scotland, the events of March 1979 produced a complete break in the public and official association of the Labour Party in Wales with devolution. As the 1979 British Labour Party manifesto bluntly stated: "following the result of the referendum in Wales, it is clear that the majority there does not want an assembly, and we accept their decision". The crisis was in fact much wider, affecting all pro-devolution forces: in 1985 John Osmond underlined that after the referendum "all previous assumptions about Welsh politics and indeed, Welsh identity itself, seemed fatally undermined". [9] Wales remained absent from the 1983 British Labour Party manifesto and was promised simply a new Wales Economic Planning Council and a separate Arts Council for Wales in that of 1987.

Even before the 1987 general election, however, devolution was once again being talked about in a structured way, including in Welsh Labour circles. This started at the local government level. In a series of meetings in early 1987 the Association of County Councils agreed upon a broad approach which included a reform of local government to replace the counties and districts by a system of unitary all-purpose authorities and, in the medium term, the creation of an all-Wales elected authority. This new policy orientation was accompanied by several prominent leaders of South Wales counties, such as Lloyd Turnbull (Gwent) and John Allison (West Glamorgan) announcing publicly that they had changed their position on devolution.[10]

The position of the county councils, coupled with the jolt given by the 1987 election, when, according to a much quoted graffiti "We (i.e. Wales) voted Labour, we got Thatcher!" led the executive of the Labour Party in Wales and its new general secretary, Anita Gale, to reopen the devolution dossier but in the rather minimalist perspective suggested by the councils. Consultations were held with the CLPs and the trade unions over a two-year period and in 1990 the annual conference validated a document entitled *A Statement on the Future of Local and Regional Government*. The proposals included the creation of "an elected government for Wales to deal with the functions of the Welsh Office and its nominated bodies" although it was added that "the pace of reform in Wales should parallel progress towards regional government in England".[11] Despite the proviso, this led to the reintroduction of devolution into Labour's programme for the 1992 election. The British manifesto, *It's time to get Britain working again,* stated: "We will establish, in the lifetime of a full Parliament, an elected Welsh Assembly in

[9] OSMOND, John, "Preface", in OSMOND, John (ed), *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*, Llandysul, Gomer Press, 1985, p.x.

[10] OSMOND, John, "Dreaded Devolution …. Back on the Agenda", *Planet*, no. 65 Oct-Nov, 1987, p.116.

[11] MORGAN, Kevin, MUNGHAM, Geoff, *Redesigning Democracy: The Making of the Welsh Assembly*, Bridgend, Seren, 2000, pp. 86-87.

Cardiff with powers and functions which reflect the existing administrative structure".

The "we will", however, was not to be: Labour lost its fourth general election in a row. For a number of reasons, this made it almost more urgent for the Labour Party in Wales to flesh out its thinking on devolution. Firstly, the election result had underlined the widening political divergence between Wales and England. Secondly, there would be no Labour government in London to do the work in its place. Thirdly, as a result of the defeat, Labour soon acquired a new leader, John Smith, who believed that devolution was serious "unfinished business" and who asked his new Shadow Secretary of State for Wales Ron Davies "to develop the same policies for Wales as we have for our planned Scottish Parliament".[12] And finally in Wales there was increasing pressure for the Labour Party to join a broader coalition of opposition to the Conservative approach to constitutional questions.

The Campaign for a Welsh Assembly had been reactivated in the wake of the previous general election defeat. Members of the Labour Party, such as Jon Owen Jones, had played an influential role within it from the start but in an individual capacity. Constituency Labour Parties and local authorities also, however, began to affiliate. In the spring of 1992 the campaign placed a pre-election advertisement in the *Western Mail* calling for an all-party conference on devolution after the election. This demand was reiterated two days after the election in the same newspaper by a Labour MP, Peter Hain. Ten days later, at its annual conference, the Welsh TUC passed an emergency resolution calling for the establishment of a "Welsh Constitutional Convention". [13]

The Labour Party in Wales was clearly at a turning point: either it had to take the Scottish road that it was being invited to follow or to find another way of dealing with the problem. In August 1992, it chose the latter adopting the most conservative method possible, namely a purely internal Constitutional Policy Commission. Its terms of reference were "to re-examine policy in relation to the creation of a directly elected Welsh Assembly" and under the chairmanship of Ken Hopkins, the Secretary of the Rhondda Constituency Labour Party, its work was to last off and on for four and a half years. The annual meeting of the Wales Labour Party adopted *Representing Wales*, which contained the final details of the devolution project that was to become the 1998 Government of Wales Act, in March 1997.

The decision to conduct the devolution debate as an internal Labour Party debate had very wide repercussions upon the devolution process. Most fundamentally, it did allow the Shadow Secretary of State Ron Davies to push through a devolution package that was better than that of the 1970s. The last improvement to be adopted was the introduction of a dose of proportional

[12] Ibid., p. 99.
[13] OSMOND, John, "Movements for a Democratic Wales", *In* OSMOND, John (ed), *Welsh Europeans*, Bridgend, Seren, 1995, pp. 167-170. ANDREWS, Leighton, *Wales Says Yes: The Inside Story of the Yes for Wales Referendum Campaign* ,Bridgend, Seren, 1999, pp. 52-58.

representation via the additional-member system. It was the key element necessary to make the package acceptable to the other pro-devolution forces.

That basic act of delivering was achieved, however, at a high price for devolution to Wales. Firstly, Davies did not obtain what his brief use of the words Senedd and Parliament indicated that he would have ideally liked: primary legislative power and a move away from the corporate-body status of the assembly. The project remained one of executive devolution with all the problems which that involved. Secondly, party unity was not achieved. In 1997 there were four publicly expressed No votes by Labour MPs. Thirdly, the long period of internal one-party discussion meant that the Welsh Labour Party had not developed any working relations with the other pro-devolution parties in Wales. Many activists from other parties were wary of Labour after the events of 1979. The Welsh Liberal Democrats only decided to join the Labour inspired, umbrella 'Yes for Wales Campaign' in mid-June 1997. Plaid Cymru did so in late July, less than two months before the referendum. Fourthly and above all, the arguments for devolution had not been carried into Welsh society and no deep public consensus had been built in favour of a Welsh Assembly, despite the best efforts of the Parliament for Wales Campaign. As Leighton Andrews, one of the initiators of the Yes for Wales Campaign, later wrote: "building a consensus for constitutional reforms requires significant cultural change that takes years rather than months". The Yes for Wales Campaign had two months in which to try and do what the Scottish Constitutional Convention had taken nearly nine years to achieve. It was an impossible mission.[14]

The referendum vote revealed "a divided population: half of the electorate either apathetic, or confused or both, and not registering any preference; the other half almost equally divided between opponents and supporters of the government's devolution proposals".[15] Had the turnout been higher, the referendum would have been lost as potential No voters outnumbered potential Yes voters by almost two to one among abstentionists. As for Labour supporters, 42% abstained, the highest rate of any party, 24% voted No and only 34% voted Yes. The only consolation was that this time, among those who actually voted, there was a three to two vote in favour of devolution whereas in 1979 there had been a five to two vote against.

II. Welsh Labour's Contradictory Role in the Devolution Process: An Interpretation

To understand these two sequences of events, we need to adopt two types of approach: firstly to consider the nature of the Welsh Labour Party as a political party and secondly to analyse the different positions within the party on the Welsh National Question and the reasons for their ebb and flow.

[14] ANDREWS, Leighton, *op.cit.*, p. 188.
[15] WYN JONES, R., TRYSTAN, D., TAYLOR, B., *op.cit.*, pp. 161-162.

The Welsh Labour Party in our period of study was a good example of what political scientists have called one-partyism, that is to say of the attitudes and political practices which result from a prolonged period of electoral dominance. Indeed, apart from the election of the odd Labour dissident, the party had won all the mining constituencies of South Wales at every general election since 1922 and had a similar level of dominance within local government in the same area. Three elements of the ensuing one-partyism had an impact on devolution. Firstly, there was the state of the party organisation: consistent electoral success had led to the development of oligarchy. Insufficient new members were recruited, the political interest of existing members was not sustained and local organisation (the CLPs) became the preserve of a few. Paradoxically the party was often weakest in terms of active individual members there where it was strongest in electoral terms. Then there was the conception of politics that had come to prevail, which was linked to this oligarchical situation. Politics became reduced to the art of dominating the party machine and policy making and strategy building were the work of small relatively confidential groups. For example no minutes of the meetings of the LPW executive were circulated to the rest of the organisation. Finally, there was the attitude to other political parties and social movements. The Welsh Labour Party was used to ruling the roost and believed that it did not need to build alliances with non-party organisations.[16]

These characteristics of the Welsh Labour Party's one-party culture allow us to understand three aspects of the story we told above. To start with they help to explain the divergence between the official LPW position in 1979 and the voting of Labour supporters in the referendum. One-partyism meant that the pro-devolutionists' control of the WCL/LPW in the period 1965-1979 was a piece of rather formal machine politics. Those in charge, people like Emrys Jones, showed considerable energy, initiative and imagination in developing policy, which was new within the WCL. Yet little attention was paid to involving members in the debate and educating them as to the reasons for the party's official position, let alone to taking the argument to the wider Labour-voting electorate. As a result, from the moment that there was sufficiently strong opposition from within a different powerbase in the party to upset the normal party-loyalty vote, the semblance of political power was revealed for what it was, rather an empty shell.

Secondly one-partyism helps to explain the rather lacklustre performance of the Labour Party in the two referendum campaigns. Even had it been united, the Party was not really equipped to fight a referendum campaign in terms either of its normal mental reflexes or of its numbers of real activists and militants. The Labour Party was too used to taking the electorate for granted, whence the many stories of the more activist Plaid Cymru delivering Labour Party referendum materials. Thirdly, it helps to understand Labour's decision to refuse a Welsh Constitutional Convention and therefore everything which ensued from that. A Convention would have been totally contrary to one-party culture. It would have involved talking to

[16] McALLISTER, Ian, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-83.

other organisations and thereby giving them a credibility that Labour reserved to itself. It would have exposed the leadership of the party to an organisational structure that it did not control automatically and in which its formal authority over its own members might have been short-circuited. And it would have implied a medium-term effort to dialogue with public opinion. One-partyism was still sufficiently strong to make the LPW executive's decision a foregone conclusion.

There were, however, two other reasons for that decision. Firstly it was in part motivated by the leadership's fear that the very public divisions of the 1970s would be reproduced all over again in the context of a public debate. It also reflected the fact that those in control of the party machine at the time were themselves not enthusiastic devolutionists, although it must be said that there were also pro-devolutionists who believed in the internal approach because they felt that it was the only way to deliver a united Labour Party and that only a united Labour Party would be able to deliver devolution.

These additional reasons bring us to our second explanatory theme: differences within the Labour Party on the Welsh National Question. Several recent books and articles have identified two ideological traditions within the Welsh Labour Party that have been conveniently labelled the Red Dragon and the Red Flag traditions.[17] The former believed that Wales needed greater institutional recognition within Britain as a nation on the basis of equality with England and the taking into account of its cultural aspirations. This tradition derived from the nineteenth century radical critique of the "rotten" British constitution ("Old Corruption") and also drew inspiration from the Liberal struggles of the 1890s. As late as 1920 the leader of the Labour Party, Ramsay Macdonald, was still explaining that Britishness was a form of artificial homogeneity that was both the product of capitalism ("with its fatal allurements of materialist gains and organisation for materialist efficiency") and the source of "those appetites of possession and authority known as Imperialism". [18]

In the 1920s, however, the Red Flag tradition emerged. It was based on the idea that the organising principle of politics should be class and not community. This implied a primary loyalty to the British working class and beyond it to the idea of working class internationalism. It went hand in hand with the idea that the Labour Party itself should have a modern, centralised and non-federal structure capable of taking over the centralised political and economic structures of twentieth-century Britain to assert the interests of the British working class. This point of view became predominant throughout the Labour movement in the interwar period. The deep structural crises experienced by several of Britain's staple industries and the regional disparities they induced underlined the need for interregional class solidarity and a British Labour government to transform that into

[17] MORGAN, Kenneth O., *The Red Dragon and the Red Flag*, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 1989. MORGAN, K., MUNGHAM, G., *op.cit*.
[18] TANNER, Duncan, "How Devolution Died : The British Labour Party's Constitutional Agenda, 1900-45", *In* TANNER, Duncan (ed), *Debating Nationhood and Governance in Britain, 1885-1939: Perspectives from the 'Four Nations'*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006, pp.243-244.

effective policies. The crisis was particularly deep in Wales (the historian Gwyn Williams often referred to it as the Welsh equivalent of the Irish Great Famine) and the ideological mutation was all the more strong. It was cemented by the relative success of the Attlee government's effort to restore prosperity to Wales using centrally organised regional planning.

To understand the Welsh Labour Party's relationship to devolution we clearly need to understand how the balance of forces between these two traditions evolved in the period under study and the reasons for this. Three questions in particular come to the fore. Firstly, why from 1965 to 1979 were the WCL and the WPL controlled by people who to varying degrees were closer to the Red Dragon tradition than to the supposedly dominant. Red Flag one, a phenomenon which was very different from the situation in Scotland? Two reasons specific to the Welsh Labour Party help to explain the development of what we might call the Emrys Jones orientation. The first was the great influence of the person who had become the Grand Old Man of Welsh Labour, and Wales's First (Charter) Secretary of State, James Griffiths. By 1965 he was already 75 years old and as such a living link with that first tradition, which had shaped the texture of his early labour movement experience. Although he accepted the necessity for a British approach to economic policy he never believed that it was incompatible with greater institutional recognition for Wales. He had recently fought for and won a commitment to creating a Welsh Office on the grounds of what he called in his memoirs "fuller recognition of our nationhood" or "national sentiment". In 1965 he launched serious reflection on the creation of an elected all-Wales council, to which the WCL responded positively. He put the following gloss on his action:

> To all those who, like myself, desire to maintain the identity of Wales, the reform of local government presents both a challenge and an opportunity. If we have the courage to act, and the wisdom to look beyond our parish, we can now create a new organ of government which will improve the well-being of our people and which will be at the same time an embodiment of our nationhood. [19]

The second reason was the degree to which by the mid-sixties Labour had become objectively the party of Wales. This process reached its climax in 1966 when Labour won 60% of the vote and thirty-two out of thirty-six seats including the nine most agricultural and Welsh speaking constituencies: only Barry, Denbigh, West Flintshire (Conservative) and Montgomery (Liberal) resisted against the red tidal wave. This had a whole series of consequences. It underlined the Welsh party's role as a party of territorial defence. This implied winning recognition from central government for the specific socio-economic problems of Wales and also obtaining the structures of government with which to deal with them. It also brought into the Welsh PLP more Welsh speakers and therefore more MPs who were sensitive to that dimension of the Welsh National Question. It even attracted from outside the party keen Welsh patriots who were anxious to reinforce the "Red Dragon" tendency within Labour, most notably a former vice-president of Plaid Cymru, Elystan Morgan.

[19] GRIFFITHS, James, *Pages from Memory*, London, Dent, 1969, p. 176.

Otherwise when trying to account for the rise of the pro-devolutionists one must also keep in mind certain factors that affected the whole of Welsh society, the Labour Party included: the recovery of a certain degree of socio-economic self-confidence, the institutional logic set in motion by the creation of the Welsh Office and a more assertive phase in Welsh culture. Thereafter, the pro-devolutionist camp was helped by one principal development: the creation of the Wales TUC at the initiative of the TGWU, the South Wales Area of the NUM and the trade councils of Wales and against the wishes of the British TUC. At its founding conference in February 1973 and again at its first annual conference in April 1974, the Wales TUC unanimously adopted a motion in favour of an elected legislative assembly for Wales able to deal "with the many industrial, economic and social problems confronting the Principality of Wales". This reflected a certain disappointment with the results of the central planning of the 1960s and a new confidence in less remote and more accessible democratic institutions. It may also have been a witness to the influence of the Communist Party within Welsh trade-unionism and in particular the NUM. The Communist party had come out clearly in favour of self-determination in 1964 and the first chairman of the Wales TUC was Dai Francis, the leader of the South Wales miners and himself a communist.[20] The Wales TUC fought hard to try to bring the WPL back to open support for legislative devolution and to impose respect for Labour's 1974 manifesto, which meant no referendum. Although it lost both battles, it played a fundamental role in helping the LPW to keep executive devolution on the agenda throughout the 1970s.

But by the end of the 1970s the executive of the LPW and the Red Flag tradition had lost control of the situation and the second key question is therefore why that loss of control took place. Many of the reasons for it were not the LPW's direct responsibility: weak and instrumental leadership in London produced counter-productive concessions, flawed legislation and a breakdown in party discipline within the PLP. The rise of Plaid Cymru in the short and medium term made life more difficult for pro-devolutionists within the Welsh Labour Party in several different ways. It contributed to the Labour Party losing its representative status as the party of Wales and in the process eliminated some of the Labour MPs who had been historically most favourable to devolution, for example Goronwy Roberts, M.P. for Caernarvonshire. By October 1974 the party was back down to 23 seats and the centre of the WPLP had very much swung back to the valleys. It also gave much greater purchase to the 'Red Flag' argument that devolution was simply an act of appeasement towards nationalism rather than a path to building a more democratic form of socialism. That argument would be taken one stage further in the referendum campaign when the Labour No camp presented devolution as the

[20] The economic development argument also filtered through to the LPW although with a Britain all-round dimension to it: "When the evidence of the Welsh Council to the Commission on the Constitution was being prepared four years ago, there was still a strong belief in the necessity for strong central government direction if regional problems, particularly economic ones, wee to be successfully solved. Today, this can only be effectively done if the wishes of the people in each part of Britain are directly heeded through democratically elected bodies and their support for the necessary policies mobilised Labour Party in Wales." *The Attitudes of the Labour Party in Wales Towards the Machinery of Government*, Cardiff, Labour Party, 1973, cited in JONES, J. Barry, KEATING, Michael, "The British Labour Party : Centralisation and Devolution", *op.cit.*, p. 194.

road to power of a Western Wales Welsh-speaking middle-class elite. Thirdly, the clash between the timetables of local government reform and devolution pushed the Labour local government lobby into the No camp. And finally the Winter of Discontent finished off the credibility of the Labour Government that formally at least was sponsoring the legislation.

But despite all those mitigating circumstances it must also be said that the referendum campaign revealed that the LPW had not done the long-term mass political work necessary to transform its many conference motions into a coherent set of attitudes among Welsh Labour voters. We touch here upon the problem of the political implications of a Welsh, and in particular a South Walian, working-class identity, the numerically predominant type of Welshness at the time. The 1979 Welsh Election Survey found 63% of Welsh identifiers in industrial South Wales, the area that Denis Balsom called Welsh Wales. At the end of the 1970s they still clearly conceived of themselves as being members of a relatively advanced section of the British working class that distinguished itself by its unusual degree of support for the Labour Party and its very strong trade-union traditions. That was the conception of self upon which the No camp successfully played and with which the arguments of the Yes camp failed to connect because it contained no rationale for all-Wales political structures. The Red Flag tradition, as we have already noted, was the victim of its own one-partyism.[21]

The result of the 1979 referendum left the Red Dragon tendency within the Welsh Labour Party in a dire situation. The last question we have to answer then is how and why it recovered. We have already stressed the limits to that recovery: that is to say the pro-devolutionists' failure to throw off , and to get the whole of the Welsh Labour Party to throw off, the habits of one-partyism, which does much to explain the closeness of the result in 1997. Nonetheless something had changed: a Yes-vote of merely 50.3% was uncomfortably close but it represented an enormous change from the 20.3% of 1979 and behind that change lay principally a change in the vote of Labour supporters: 61% in favour as against only 28% eighteen years previously. The principal explanatory factor of this turn around is the impact of Thatcherism, the great midwife of devolution.

To measure that impact upon Welsh Labour Party, we can start by looking at two of the power bases of the No Camp in 1979, the local government lobby and the parliamentary party. As regards the former, we have seen that it was the first to reintroduce devolution into the debate. Thatcherism was indeed experienced by Labour-controlled local government as a direct attack because of the draconian limits placed upon its financial autonomy and the transfer away from it of some of its key functions such as housing. Local government leaders were some of the first public figures in the No Camp to announce a personal change of position: devolution would have prevented "the repressive attitude of central government towards local councils". The WPLP for its part found itself at the cutting edge of

[21] BALSOM, Denis, "The Three-Wales Model", in OSMOND, John, *The National Question Again : Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*, Llandysul, Gomer, 1985, pp. 1-17.

the general contradiction that we might call "We voted Labour, we got Thatcher!". In Parliament it formed the majority delegation from Wales, by far, and yet it was drowned out by an enormous Conservative English majority. In 1987, for example, the Conservatives held 70% of the 511 English seats (356), which gave them an absolute majority without taking either Wales or Scotland into account. The implications of this gradually sank in.

The most interesting case is that of Ron Davies, who was elected as MP for Caerphilly in 1983. In 1979 he had kept his head down and voted no. The experience of a third successive defeat for the Labour Party in 1987, despite considerable electoral progress in Wales, made him think about the problem of democracy, "the question of Welsh representation". This point was rammed home by the steadily shrinking number of Conservative MPs and the arbitrary changes in parliamentary procedure that the government therefore had to introduce in the 1990s to get through its Welsh legislation. Ron Davies went on to make a major personal contribution to the recovery of the 'Red Dragon' tradition within the Welsh Labour Party and to the popularity of devolution within Wales more generally. It was threefold. Firstly he had the unearned but nonetheless very important merit of being a native of the most densely populated area of Wales: as John Davies points out, by contrast, the principal Labour advocates of devolution in the 1970s had all had their roots in West Wales. Secondly he deepened the economic development case for devolution. As he said in a speech in Treorchi in 1992: "For a modern economy we need a modern democracy and this should be based on an elected Welsh Parliament and strengthened local councils. A more democratic and responsive Wales is not only right for democracy, it is also needed for the sake of industry, jobs and regeneration". This was to become one of the principal messages of the 1997 White Paper *A Voice for Wales*. Thirdly, although he remained rather one-partyish in his internal Labour party style, he realised the importance of giving other parties their place in the assembly and of adopting a more collaborative style towards them. This he did quite effectively in the short referendum campaign.[22]

But when trying to assess the impact of Thatcherism, in the last analysis one is always brought back to the general collision that Thatcherism produced between the socio-economic effects of government policies and the values of Labour supporters. Among the former there were, for example, two recessions, mass unemployment, the brutal restructuring of the steel industry, the virtual closure of the coal industry after a year-long strike that brought rural and industrial Wales together in the same movement of solidarity, much higher rates of male inactivity, the development of part time work and still in 1997, five years after the beginnings of economic recovery in 1992, a deficit of employment in relation to the situation in 1979.

[22] DAVIES, John, *A History of Wales*, 2nd ed., London, Penguin, 2007, pp. 670-673. OSMOND, John, "Going Native", in OSMOND, John (ed), *Welsh Europeans*, Bridgend, Seren, 1995, pp. 79-91.

These effects had a real impact on the political content of the Welsh working class identity, much more so than the motions passed by the LPW. Thatcherism had dislocated the British working class. Certain sections of its English component seemed to have given up the fight. The values of the post-war British consensus, which was essentially a social democratic consensus, had been torn up by English parliamentary majorities : full employment, a welfare state and public services to be proud of, limits to income inequalities and regional inequalities, all those were things of the past and could no longer be meaningfully described as British. Slowly, perhaps reluctantly, but surely, more and more Labour supporters in Wales began to feel that in that case they should at least try to ensure that those values remained a part of Welsh society. If they could no longer be British values, then they should become Welsh values and the cultural resources and traditions of Wales should be used to try to put them into practice. To achieve that, an all-Wales political structure was clearly necessary. Nearly two-thirds of people identifying themselves as 'Welsh not British' or 'More Welsh than British' voted yes at the referendum and nearly 60% of that category were supporters of the Labour Party.[23]

That redefinition of the political content of a certain type of Welshness was the deep process that was at work which allowed the referendum to be won. The process should not be exaggerated or romanticized. Half of Welsh people did not even vote in September 1997 and the turn-out at the first two assembly elections was low: 45.9% in 1999 and 38.2% in 2003. But the thinking of enough Labour supporters had moved on, perhaps further than that of certain parts of the Labour machine.

Conclusion

Two interpretative variables have been identified that help to make sense of the chequered relations between the Welsh Labour Party and devolution over the period between 1966 and 1997, namely the degree of Welsh Labour one-partyism and the changing internal balance of forces between the Red Dragon and the Red Flag traditions. Their usefulness is confirmed by their ability to explain the key events surrounding the Welsh Labour Party since the referendum. Alun Michael was elected as Leader of the future National Assembly Labour Group in February 1999. His election demonstrated two things. Firstly, the form of the devolution debate within Welsh Labour had not prepared the party for a cultural mutation away from one-partyism towards a more inclusive and open political style. Michael's election was in fact stitched up in the best traditions of Labour machine politics: electoral rules were adopted that determined the result of the election in advance. Secondly, the battle between the two traditions was still going on: Alun

[23] WYN JONES, Richard, TRYSTAN, Dafydd, "The 1997 Welsh Referendum Vote", *In* TAYLOR, Bridget, THOMSON, Katharina (eds), *Scotland and Wales : Nations Again ?*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1999, pp.75 and 84. Such identifiers were of course proportionately much more numerous within Plaid Cymru but, as Labour had at least five times as many supporters, it remained the principal party for Welsh identifiers in absolute terms.

Michael was very much a candidate backed by London to ensure a minimalist use of the new powers given to the National Assembly. His unfortunate competitor, at least the first time round, Rhodri Morgan, was clearly associated with a Red Dragon approach. Labour's style of politics was soon afterwards heavily sanctioned at the first elections to the National Assembly, the so called "gentle electoral earthquake": Labour's vote slumped to 37.6% in the constituency vote (a result comparable to that of 1983, the worst since the war), it failed to win an absolute majority of seats (twenty-eight out of sixty) and most memorably it lost three of its heartland constituency seats (Rhondda, Islwyn and Llanelli). Similarly, the One Wales Labour-Plaid Cymru coalition which has existed since July 2007 reflects a big shift away from certain aspects of one-partyism and also the emergence of a clear 'Red Dragon' majority within the National Assembly Labour Group. The question we may ask, looking back over the history of the past forty years, is whether these two shifts are definitive or purely tactical. [24]

[24]TRYSTAN, Dafydd, WYN JONES, Richard, "A Quiet Electoral Earthquake", *Agenda*, Summer 1999, pp. 26-28. OSMOND, John, *Crossing the Rubicon : Coalition Politics Welsh Style*, Cardiff, Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2007.