

WALES AND SOCIALISM

Political Culture and National Identity

c. 1880-1914

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By

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Summary

This thesis examines the spread of socialist ideas and the growth of the socialist movement in Wales in the period 1880-1914. It pays particular attention to the way in which socialists related to Welsh national identity, and analyses the processes through which the universalist ideals of socialism were related to the particular and local conditions of Wales. It examines the interplay between Wales and the wider world that occurred through the medium of the socialist movement, and balances this against the internal dynamic and organic growth of socialism within Wales itself. Having surveyed and commented upon existing British and Welsh labour historiography, the thesis opens with a discussion of the first 'modern' socialists to undertake propaganda in Wales in the 1880s. It then examines the way in which socialist societies began to put down roots in the 1890s, through case studies of the Fabian Society in Cardiff and the Social Democratic Federation in south Wales. The central part of the thesis is concerned with the rise of the most important of the socialist organisations, the Independent Labour Party. Attention is given to the way in which the ILP used the south Wales coal strike of 1898 to gain its ascendancy in Welsh socialist politics, and the nature of the political culture that was created by the party in south Wales. The remainder of the thesis discusses the nature of socialist growth beyond south Wales, and pays particular attention to indigenous Welsh forms of socialism. The thesis concludes with an examination of the rapid growth of the socialist movement in Wales after 1906, and the consequent debate that occurred about the relationship of socialism, Welsh nationalism and the Welsh language.

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Introduction

This thesis is an analysis of the elision of two concepts, Welshness and socialism, in the period before the Great War. Both terms defy easy definition, and when considered together they present the historian with something of a Gordian Knot, at the heart of which is a set of problems both universal and specific in nature. On one level these concern the relationship between the ideologies of socialism and nationalism. These two forces, which evolved to maturity in the second half of the nineteenth century, between them influenced the shape of much of the twentieth century world. Their often turbulent relationship was, however, played out in a multiplicity of settings, each varying according to prevailing socio-economic, cultural and linguistic circumstances. In their mission to inaugurate a universal ‘Co-operative Commonwealth’ socialists had to face numerous particularisms; they needed to map the general principles of their creed onto the local conditions of their immediate environment. Some took part in this process almost unconsciously, whereas for others it involved a conscious and theoretical effort. Either way, the tension between the local and the global being a salient theme of modern life, their efforts are worthy of historical examination. Indeed, there is no shortage of secondary literature concerned with the general problem of socialism’s relationship with nationalism,¹ although that is only part of the problem examined here. Behind the ideological relationship between socialism and nationalism was a web of less ideologically specific and more everyday circumstances, characteristics and ideas. These too have been subject to historical examination. Within a British context this has often been abbreviated to a consideration of what E.P. Thompson memorably called ‘the peculiarities of the English’.² This thesis is concerned with a problem that has been less frequently explored by labour and socialist historians, namely ‘the peculiarities of the Welsh’.

¹ Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post Communist View from Marx and Engels*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1995); Stefan Berger and Angel Smith, *Nationalism, Labour and Ethnicity 1870-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York (1999); Ian Cummins, *Marx Engels and National Movements*, Croom Helm, London (1980); Horace B. Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labour Theories of Nationalism to 1917*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London (1967); Michael Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania (1998); Michael Löwy, *Fatherland or Mother Earth: Essays on the National Question*, Pluto Press, London and Sterling, Virginia (1998); John Schwartzmantel, *Socialism and the Idea of the Nation*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead (1991).

² E.P. Thompson, ‘The Peculiarities of the English’, in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register*, 2 (1965), pp. 311-361.

Specifically, it discusses the ways in which late nineteenth and early twentieth century socialists related to those ‘peculiarities’, and the way in which Welsh ‘peculiarities’ responded to and influenced the development of socialism.

A survey of British labour and socialist historiography is not initially very helpful in progressing such an enquiry. The field is both vast and labyrinthine and was traditionally, until at least the 1960s, concerned primarily with narrating the ascendancy of labour – celebrating and detailing ‘Labour’s Forward March’. This narrative was overwhelmingly British in character, culminating in the profoundly pan-British achievement of the Attlee Governments in the creation of the ‘New Jerusalem’ after 1945, and Wales - at any rate that part of it beyond the southern coalfield – was marginal to its concerns. Thus Henry Pelling, in *The Origins of the Labour Party*, reminds us that there was not a single Welsh representative at the foundation conference of the Independent Labour Party at Bradford in 1893. Wales metaphorically - and in the case of Sam Hobson, the unfortunate intended representative from Cardiff, literally - missed the train.³ One representative example will suffice to illustrate the apparent invisibility of Wales within this historiographical tradition. It would almost be possible to read G.D.H. Cole’s multi volume *History of Socialist Thought* without realising that Wales existed at all. Wales does not merit a mention in the index of any of the volumes, and the only brief references to the country are to the Taff Vale dispute, Keir Hardie’s representation of Merthyr Boroughs in Parliament and the *Miners’ Next Step*. In the first two instances it is not even specified that the events took place in Wales, and it would be quite possible for a reader with no knowledge of the British Isles to assume that Taff Vale or Merthyr were in England. Indeed Cole could write about the trade union events of 1889 having ‘an immensely stimulating effect on working class opinion all over the country’, without feeling the need to specify which country he was referring to.⁴ Indeed, one suspects that to the majority of traditional British labour and socialist historians, most of Wales was, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, ‘little more than a mountainous agricultural annexe’ whose culture ‘went its own way’ and consisted of ‘largely

³ Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, Macmillan, London (1954), p. 116; Sam Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist*, Longmans, Green & Co, London (1938), p. 35.

⁴ G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, Macmillan, London & New York (1956), vol. III, pt. 1, p. 149.

invented national rituals of pseudo Druidism'.⁵ Even within the confines of a narrative detailing the rise of labour from a British perspective this is hardly satisfactory, given the very considerable contribution made to the labour movement and the post 1945 settlement by organisations and individuals from Wales, some of the most prominent of whom explicitly felt themselves to be implementing ideas that had originated in their home country.⁶

If traditional British labour historiography marginalised Wales, the revisionist works that appeared in subsequent decades did little to set the record straight. From the 1960s onwards, as 'Labour's Forward March' began to falter, historians began to re-examine the past of the socialist and labour movement in Britain in more creative ways.⁷ They began to ask questions about the efficacy of the parliamentary road to socialism and the role of the Labour Party.⁸ They examined the relationship between the Marxist tradition and native British intellectual traditions,⁹ and the way in which socialists sought to turn their idealist notions into political realities.¹⁰ They considered the cultural and psychological dimensions of the socialist movement,¹¹ and began to re-write the history of elements of the labour movement that had been eclipsed by the later dominance of the Labour Party.¹² On the whole, though, they did not unpick the cultural pluralism of socialism within the British Isles, and, valuable though it is, much of this work continued to conflate notions of Britishness with Englishness. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate some of the interesting questions which were

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (1968), 1983 reprint, pp. 294-300.

⁶ 'The Welsh presence in the post-war Attlee ascendancy was active and articulate at all levels.' K.O. Morgan, 'Power and Glory: War and Reconstruction, 1939-1951', in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams & Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2000), pp. 166-188, p. 176. The two outstanding examples, of course, are James Griffiths and Aneurin Bevan. Bevan famously saw himself as a 'projectile discharged from the Welsh valleys', Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan, Vol. II, 1945-1960*, Paladin, London (1975), p. 239.

⁷ The roots of this counter-historiography may in fact be detected as early as the 1920s in Joseph Clayton's *Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain*, Faber & Gywer, London (1926). This text exhibits the same conflation of Britishness and Englishness as the mainstream historiography.

⁸ Ralph Milliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour*, Allen & Unwin, London (1962); David Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1975).

⁹ Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London (1973).

¹⁰ Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass (1979).

¹¹ Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal*, 4, 1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 5-56; Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1990).

¹² David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1983).

raised, but not pushed to their logical conclusions, by these historians. Stanley Pierson, in *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, raises interesting questions about what happens when Marxism is absorbed into specific national cultures. He sees the development of the socialist movement in late-nineteenth century Britain as the result of ‘an encounter between Marxist ideas and native intellectual traditions’. ‘Marxist ideas entered late Victorian Britain’, he argues ‘and imparted new inspiration to indigenous currents of social thought, in the process transforming themselves’.¹³ Pierson’s work though is concerned more with England than Britain, and what he doesn’t ask is what happened when Marxist ideas met the different native intellectual traditions of Wales. Similarly, Chris Waters makes a compelling case in *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture* that British Socialists failed to engage sufficiently with popular culture in Britain in the period before the Great War, and instead fell back upon elitist, inward looking cultural forms that were ultimately self-defeating. His study adds an important dimension to our understanding of the early years of modern British socialism. Again, though, the concern of this work is exclusively with Anglophone culture, and the different conditions prevailing in Wales are left unexplored. It is of course reasonable that historians to whom much of the life of Wales is encrypted in a seemingly impenetrable language should not seek to interpret that from which they are linguistically excluded. What is less reasonable is the assumption that an analysis of the Welsh experience may be effortlessly collapsed into an analysis of the wider British experience, and looked at from a Welsh perspective work like Pierson’s and Waters’ raises some intriguing questions.

Some of these have been addressed by the remarkable growth in Welsh historiography that has taken place since the 1970s. Much of this work might accurately be termed labour history, and has been written in the best traditions of ‘history from below’. It traces the development of a working class movement from its baptism of fire at Merthyr in 1831, through the struggles of the Chartists to the era of the Lib-Labs, and on to the development of the great trade union organisations of the twentieth century and the ultimate ascendancy of the Labour Party in Wales.¹⁴ Some

¹³ Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, p.

¹⁴ Gwyn A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising*, Croom Helm, London (1978); David J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Insurrection of 1839*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1985); Ivor Wilkes, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839: Class Struggle As Armed Struggle*, Croom Helm, London & Sidney (1984); Ryland Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!: A Study of Reform Agitation in Wales 1840-1886*,

of it, moreover, deals directly with the period under discussion in this thesis. Indeed, despite what has been widely perceived as the relative tardiness of Wales in the growth of socialism that began in Britain in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, there is a significant body of work focusing directly on the Welsh socialist movement before the Great War. Much of this contributes to our understanding by taking a regional approach, as pioneered by Cyril Parry in his work on the socialist movement in Gwynedd.¹⁵ Since Parry's work, a number of other historians have used similar approaches to build up a narrative of the development of the labour and socialist movement in other parts of Wales, particularly, and for obvious reasons, in the industrialised south. In particular, the work of Deian Hopkin,¹⁶ Chris Williams,¹⁷ Peter Stead,¹⁸ Jon Parry,¹⁹ and David Cleaver²⁰ has expanded our knowledge considerably. In addition to these regional or local studies we also have a number of contributions which have begun to untangle the wider ideological, political and cultural complexities of the movement, particularly in its relation to Welsh society and culture.²¹ There have also been a number of biographical studies that have

University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1991); David Smith (ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales 1780-1980*, Pluto, London (1980); Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Explorations & Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*, Gomer, Llandysul (1981); Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams & Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2000).

¹⁵ C. Parry, *Socialism in Gwynedd 1900-1920*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales (1967); C. Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics: A Study of Liberal and Labour Politics in Gwynedd 1900-1920*, (*University of Hull Occasional Papers in Economic and Social History No. 2*), Hull (1970); C. Parry, 'Fabianism and Gwynedd Politics 1890-1918', *Transactions of Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 29 (1968), pp. 121-136; C. Parry, 'The Independent Labour Party and Gwynedd Politics 1900-1920', *Welsh History Review*, 4, 1 (1968), pp. 47-66; C. Parry, 'Gwynedd Politics, 1900-1920: The Rise of a Labour Party', *Welsh History Review*, 6, 3 (1973), pp. 313-328.

¹⁶ Deian Hopkin, 'The Rise of Labour: Llanelli, 1890-1922', in Geraint H. Jenkins & J. Beverley Smith (eds.), *Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922: Essays in Honour of Ieuan Gwynedd Jones*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1988), pp. 161-182.

¹⁷ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1885-1951*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1996).

¹⁸ Peter Stead, 'Working Class Leadership in South Wales, 1900-1920', *Welsh History Review*, 6, 3 (1973), pp. 329-353; Peter Stead, 'Establishing a Heartland – The Labour Party in Wales', in K.D. Brown (ed.), *The First Labour Party 1906-1914*, Croom Helm, London (1985).

¹⁹ Jon Parry, 'Labour Leaders and Local Politics, 1888-1902: The Example of Aberdare', *Welsh History Review*, 14, 3 (1989), pp. 399-416; Jon Parry, 'Trade Unionists and Early Socialism in South Wales, 1890-1908', *Llafur*, 4, 3 (1986), pp. 43-54.

²⁰ David Cleaver, 'Labour and Liberals in the Gower Constituency, 1885-1910', *Welsh History Review*, 12, 3 (1985), pp. 388-410; David Cleaver, 'The General Election Contest in the Swansea Town Constituency, January 1910 – The Socialist Challenge', *Llafur*, 5, 3 (1990), pp. 28-33.

²¹ Deian Hopkin, 'Y Werin a'i Theyrnas: Ymateb Sosialaeth i Genedlaetholdeb, 1880-1920', *Cof Cenedl*, VI (1991), pp. 162-192; Deian Hopkin, 'Llafur a'r Diwylliant Cymreig 1900-1940', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (New Series)*, 7, 2001, pp. 128-148; Dylan Morris, 'Sosialaeth i'r Cymry – Trafodaeth yr ILP', *Llafur*, 4, 2 (1985), pp. 51-63; Christopher B. Turner, 'Conflicts of Faith? Religion and Labour in Wales 1890-1914', in Deian Hopkin & Gregory Kealey (eds.), *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales & Canada 1850-1930*, Llafur /

provided an insight into the motivation and influences upon important individuals active within the movement.²² Our knowledge is very far from complete, but the work of the scholars mentioned here, and others cited later in the text, has been invaluable in providing a Welsh historiographic dimension to the emergence and rise of modern socialism in Britain.

Without being directly critical of this body of work some important observations might be made about the flowering of Welsh labour historiography that it represents. Firstly, that it is exactly that – a *Welsh* labour historiography. In other words, it is very much a separate and parallel development to English or even British labour historiography and as yet there has as yet been no sustained attempt to relate analytically the history of the socialist movement in Wales to its British counterpart. There has not been an attempt, in other words, to evaluate what was specifically Welsh about the Welsh socialist movement in this period, to examine the relative weight of Welsh against heterogenous influences in its development, or to consider the extent and nature of interplay between the movement in Wales and that outside. This is not really surprising. Peter Stead once commented that there ‘can be no more difficult task than that of analysing the importance of specifically Welsh influences and aspirations in the history of the Labour Party in Wales’²³ - except, it might be added, analysing the importance of specifically Welsh influences in the history of socialist ideology and practice more generally. This task, then, provides one agenda

Canadian Committee on Labour History (1989), pp. 67-85; Robert Pope, *Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales, 1906-1939*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1998); R. Pope, ‘Facing the Dawn: Socialists, Nonconformists and Llais Llafur, 1906-1914’, *Llafur*, 7, 3&4 (1998-9), pp. 77-88; R. Pope, ‘Pilgrims Through a Barren Land’: Nonconformists and Socialists in Wales 1906-1914’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymrodorion (New Series)*, 7 (2001), pp. 149-163.

²² Works relating to figures of significance in the period under discussion in this thesis include, P. Jones Evans, ‘Evan Pan Jones – Land Reformer’, *Welsh History Review*, 4, 2 (1968), pp. 143-159; Peter Stead, ‘Vernon Hartshorn: Miners’ Agent and Cabinet Minister’, *Glamorgan Historian*, Vol. 6 (1969), pp. 83-94; J. Beverley Smith, ‘John Gwili Jenkins, 1872-1936’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1974-5), pp. 191-214; S.E. Treharne, *Astudiaeth o Fywyd a Phrydyddiaeth R.J. Derfel*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Wales (1974); S. Howys Williams, *Bywyd a Gwaith Thomas Evan Nicholas, 1879-1971*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Wales (1986); D.W. Howell, *Nicholas of Glais: The People’s Champion*, Clydach (1991); E. Cass, ‘Robert Jones Derfel: A Welsh Poet in the Cotton Factory Times’, *Llafur*, 7, 1 (1996), pp. 53-67; Angharad Tomos, *Hiraeth am Yfory: David Thomas a Mudiad Llafur Gogledd Cymru*, Gomer, Llandysul (2002); E. Price, ‘“Yr Unig Un Erioed”: R.T. Jones, Chwarelwr Llechi ac Aelod Seneddol’, *Cof Cenedl*, XXI (2006), pp. 129-158; Ifor Rees, ‘Thomas Evan Nicholas, 1879-1971’, *National Library of Wales Journal*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1 (2010); A.M. Roberts, ‘R.J. Derfel, 1824-1905’, *Y Traethodydd*, CLXV, 688 (January 2009), pp. 34-54.

²³ Peter Stead, ‘The Labour Party and the Claims of Wales’, in John Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*, Gomer, Llandysul (1985), pp. 99-122, p. 99.

for this thesis. Another agenda is suggested by a second observation, that as yet, and despite some very useful work which identifies some overall themes and periods of development,²⁴ Welsh socialist historiography remains rather fragmented. While we have enough local and regional studies to begin to build up a detailed picture of the movement from the bottom up, we do not yet have a single full-length study which attempts to comprehend that movement as a whole – reviewing and bringing together the existing secondary literature in the light of primary research from across Wales and the socialist movement more generally, while also attempting to fill some of the gaps between the existing studies. That this task is urgent may be inferred from a final observation on the Welsh historiography, namely that its volume has been considerably reduced during the past decade. This is a matter for concern, given the contemporary political context of devolution, in which it might be thought that an interest in defining what was specifically Welsh about one of the most important political ideologies in modern Welsh history would be germane.

So, the aim of this thesis is to provide both a narrative and an over-arching analysis of the socialist movement in Wales from the emergence of modern socialism in Britain in the early 1880s to the outbreak of the Great War. In particular it will seek to examine that movement in terms of an interplay between its specifically Welsh influences and the more universal influences imported from its wider British, and indeed worldwide, context. In undertaking this task account must be taken of the prevailing trends in labour and socialist history, a discipline which – in the view of many of its leading proponents - suffered a crisis sometime in the 1980s, from which it arguably has not yet emerged. Indeed, the consequences of this supposed crisis provide a rationale for the approach of the current study, in that one positive outcome of an otherwise much lamented collapse of the certainties that once guided labour and socialist historians has been the widespread recognition that the discipline needs to become, in the words of Malcolm Chase, more ‘inclusive, more international and more aware of diversities’.²⁵ James D. Young noted in the early 1990s that in historiographic terms British socialism was too often equated simply with English socialism ‘and at the heart of British thought and behaviour was the tacit assumption

²⁴ Deian Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour in Wales, 1890-1914’, *Llafur*, 6, 3 (1994), pp.120-141.

²⁵ *Labour History Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Winter 1995), p. 47.

of English socialists' hegemony over the British radical and socialist movements'.²⁶ Even before Young's comment some efforts were being made to restore to socialist historiography a sense of the diversity of socialist traditions from differing national perspectives within the British Isles.²⁷ 'Celtic fringe' figures from within the Marxist tradition, such as James Connolly, John Maclean and Hugh MacDiarmid have also maintained a presence and a following.²⁸ Nevertheless, if socialists from Scotland and Ireland have been produced as an antidote to the failure of socialism and its historians to embrace the diversity of national cultures within the British Isles, Welsh socialists have not featured prominently alongside them. Indeed, Wales has been noticeable by its absence in efforts to apply the precepts of 'four nations history' to socialist historiography.

Such a task is, perhaps, not so straightforward as it once would have been. Socialist historians have not just the accommodation of diversity suggested above to comprehend, but also the impact of the related collapse of class-based, teleologically driven analytical frameworks that occurred in the 1980s, and their partial replacement by new radically revisionist post-structuralist approaches.²⁹ This has made the reading and writing of labour history more confusing, but also more pregnant with possibility. So far, despite the gentle chiding of Andy Croll in an article published in *Llafur* over a decade ago,³⁰ Welsh labour historians have been relatively reluctant to vanish down the post-structuralist rabbit hole. This might be considered a manifestation of wisdom and Welsh labour history's non-involvement in the crisis of its mother discipline has certainly been in some ways beneficial. Nevertheless, as Croll suggests, there are

²⁶ James D. Young, 'A Very English Socialism and the Celtic Fringe 1880-1991', *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993), pp. 136-152.

²⁷ David Howell, *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & Chicago University Press, Chicago (1986).

²⁸ Austen Morgan, *James Connolly: A Political Biography*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1988); Claire Fitzpatrick, 'Nationalising the Ideal: Labour and Nationalism in Ireland, 1909-1923', in Eugenio Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identity in the British Isles 1865-1931*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1996), pp. 276-304; Nan Milton, *John Maclean*, Pluto Press, London (1973); Scott Lyall, *Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry and Politics of Place: Imagining a Scottish Republic*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh (2006).

²⁹ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1983); Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England*, Harvester, Brighton (1980); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1991).

³⁰ Andy Croll, 'People's Remembrancers in a Post-Modern Age': Contemplating the Non-Crisis of Welsh Labour History', *Llafur*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (2000), pp. 3-17.

certain elements of post-structuralist discourse that might illuminate Welsh labour history, and, indeed, which might be themselves advanced by a consideration of the Welsh experience. The so-called ‘linguistic turn’ is an obvious case in point. It is remarkable that the linguistic theorists that turned British labour history inside out did not explicitly confront the structuring power of language in the bilingual parts of Britain, which surely must provide some of the most convincing evidence available for the power of language as a tool in the construction of social, cultural and political realities. Thus, without consciously, or even willingly, embracing post-structuralist theory, the power and role of language in determining social, cultural and political developments is a recurrent theme in this work – as indeed it was in the lives of many of the socialists who form its subject matter.

One final historiographic consideration, which returns to the points raised in the opening paragraph and completes the agenda for this thesis, is a recognition of the increasing importance of a sense of place in historical studies. As the post structuralist dust has settled, political historians have sought to examine the interaction – or the construction of discourse - between ‘high’ (or ‘formal’) and ‘low’ (or ‘informal’) politics, and by necessity this has involved a close consideration of the local and the particularities of place.³¹ In one sense there is nothing new about this. The pursuit of ‘local history’ was, of course, an essential component of the methodology of ‘history from below’, which revolutionised the study of labour history in the 1960s,³² and labour historians, in their studies of the roots of modern socialism in Britain, have year on year been adding to our knowledge of what has turned out to be a highly complex patchwork of different conditions and experiences.³³ There have also been some major works of synthesis, dealing directly with the period under discussion in

³¹ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1998); David Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1993) foreshadows the approach of Lawrence’s much vaunted text in many respects. Also see, Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1987); Mike Savage, ‘Understanding Political Alignments in Contemporary Britain: Do Localities Matter?’, *Political Geography Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 1987), pp. 53-76; Stefan Berger, ‘The Decline of Liberalism and the Rise of Labour – The Regional Approach’, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 12, Pt. 1 (1993), pp. 84-92; *Parliamentary History Special Issue: Parliament and Locality 1660-1939* (1998).

³² Of particular relevance here is E.P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’, in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History in Memory of G.D.H. Cole*, Macmillan, London (1967), pp. 276-316.

³³ The work of historians such as Keith Laybourn, for example. For further citations see chapter 3.

this thesis, to integrate this extensive local historiography into a national picture.³⁴ Existing approaches to such a synthesis – in other words, to the linking of the local and the national, the ‘low’ and the ‘high’, and the ‘informal’ and the ‘formal’ – are, however, either problematic or partial. They either focus on a ‘British’ experience, which is becoming increasingly unrecognisable as post-devolution historiography seeks to take account of the national diversities within it, or, they restrict themselves to a discussion of England, taking on board, doubtless, E.P. Thompson’s wise half-century old words about neglecting the experience of those outside England not out of chauvinism but respect.³⁵ What we do not yet have is an account of the development of modern socialism, in its critical early period, in Wales, which takes account of the ways in which its ideology and politics were mediated between the national(s) (that is both the British and the Welsh simultaneously) and the local, through the activities of individuals, through the language(s) that they used and through the organisations they sought to establish. That is what this thesis seeks to provide.

In attempting this task a range of different sources have been used, about which it is worth making some general and preliminary points. The first point is that they are woefully incomplete. The nature of socialist activists and activism at a local level did not lend itself to the tidy collection and preservation of manuscripts. This is particularly true of the early part of the period, before the establishment of more enduring political structures created some sort of framework for the preservation of the movement’s documents. Two points need to be noted here. Firstly this situation is, thankfully, not universal. Some individuals, the North Walian ILP activist David Thomas being the prime example, systematically kept more or less everything that ended up in their possession, and in the rare cases that such collections were made and have survived – in Thomas’s case the papers are preserved between Bangor University Archive and the National Library of Wales – we have a superb insight into the everyday life of the socialist movement and some of the dilemmas that faced its activists.³⁶ Other collections relating to political organisations like the ILP, such as

³⁴ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1983); Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1990).

³⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 13.

³⁶ The David Thomas Papers at the National Library of Wales are uncatalogued. Among the extensive collection of manuscripts at Bangor University Archive the following are of particular interest: Bangor MS19158-19168, 19180-19263, 19301-19322.

the correspondence of Francis Johnson, its secretary throughout this period and beyond, provide similar insights.³⁷ When considered alongside some of the more obviously accidental and random survivals, such as the minute book kept in faint pencil by the secretary of the Dowlais branch of the ILP at the beginning of the twentieth century which miraculously survives in the Coalfield Collection at Swansea University Archive,³⁸ these sources enable the reconstruction – partial and tentative, it is true – of the political culture that created them. The information that they provide may also be supplemented by reference to the limited number of reminiscences, some published, but others available only in manuscript form, that were written by early members of the movement.³⁹ All of these sources may be read on several levels. The memoirs in particular tend to generate a sense of mythic heroicism that is arguably as misleading in terms of interpreting the political reality of the period as it is enlightening in terms of providing an insight into the mindset of the movement's activists. All of these sources leave many questions unanswered and their partial nature suggests that in many areas of Wales, certainly in the early part of the period, there was an apparent absence of socialist activity. The second point that needs to be made, though, is that absence of evidence does not amount to evidence of absence.

It is quite clear from a reading of the contemporary newspaper press that significant socialist activity took place for which there is no surviving manuscript evidence. Consequently the press has been an immensely valuable source in the writing of this thesis. Its use, however, presents problems relating to both the volume of newspaper sources and the nature of the evidence presented within them. For the purposes of this work the press may be divided into three basic types: the UK-based socialist and labour press, the Welsh socialist and labour press and the 'mainstream' non-socialist press. Each presents its own particular problems, and various strategies have been deployed in the use of the different types of newspaper sources. Firstly, the UK-based socialist and labour press provides, when considering the period as a whole, the most complete available source for a study of the socialist movement in Wales.⁴⁰ All of the major British socialist newspapers have been systematically searched for references to

³⁷ The Francis Johnson Correspondence and other material of interest in the ILP Archive is available on Harvester Microfilm at the National Library of Wales.

³⁸ SWCC: MNA/PP/69/1, Swansea University Archive.

³⁹ E.g. Griff Jones: Script of Swansea Socialist Party and Labour Party, D/D AW H14/4, Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff. Other autobiographical sources and reminiscences are cited in the text.

⁴⁰ E.g. *Commonweal*, *Justice*, *Labour Leader*, *Labour Prophet*, *Clarion*.

activity in Wales, and the extent to which the thesis relies upon these sources will be obvious. There are nevertheless quite serious problems in taking their accounts at face value. Very often the information they provide is incomplete or even demonstrably incorrect. When reports from Wales appear their contents are often wildly over-optimistic and exaggerated, produced as they were by activists seeking to present a positive image of the movement. In other instances, though, the opposite is true, and news from the movement in Wales simply did not find its way into the mainstream socialist press, which was managed and published in centres remote from Wales.

To some extent the socialist press published within Wales, often either bilingually or in the Welsh language, provides a corrective to this problem and gives a closer representation of specifically Welsh developments.⁴¹ This too has been systematically examined. The problem here, though, is that with the exception of Ebenezer Rees's *Llais Llafur*, published at Ystalyfera from 1898, the Welsh socialist press didn't really take off until the last few years of the period under examination. This fact in itself says something about the stability and viability of local socialist activity, but again, the absence of a local socialist press does not necessarily imply an absence of local socialist activity of other sorts. Evidence of this – often surprising in its abundance – may be found in the mainstream Welsh press. This, however, presents its own problems of interpretation, ranging from the alarmist and overblown reports of socialist sedition carried by the ultra-conservative, Penrhynite *North Wales Chronicle* to the strategy of the faithfully Liberal *Tarian y Gweithiwr* which often expressed its disdain of the appearance of socialists like Keir Hardie on the south Wales scene simply by ignoring them. There is a need to chart a careful course through such variable coverage, but notwithstanding these problems the Welsh press provides a valuable supplement to the evidence presented in the socialist papers. The main problem in its use, however, is the sheer volume of material that needs to be searched. Even though this has been made easier in some cases by recent digitisation projects, comprehensive coverage of this source has been impossible within the given time limits, and various sampling techniques have been deployed in an attempt to gain the best representation possible. This means that the conclusions drawn may well be subject to revision in the light of further research.

⁴¹ E.g. *Llais Llafur*, *Pioneer* (Merthyr), *Rhondda Socialist*, *Dinesydd Cymreig*.

Some limitation of ambition and scope has also been necessary, given the relatively broad period under consideration. This thesis does not, for example, address the role of women in the socialist movement. This is not because they were not involved (their involvement was certainly limited in the earlier part of the period, although it increased significantly towards the end), but it is simply because the task of writing the history of women and socialism in pre-Great War Wales would require a thesis by itself. The history of socialist women in Wales, in other words, needs itself to be written before it can be written into other narratives – and this remains an outstanding and urgent task for Welsh labour historians. Likewise, the thesis does not purport to provide a comprehensive history of any of the socialist or labourist groups within Wales, and it certainly does not claim to provide a history of trade unionism or the growth of the Labour Party. Rather, it is specifically focused upon the concept of socialism, and although the nature of the broader labour movement significantly influenced the work of socialists in Wales, it is no more than touched upon in the following discussions. Significant gaps remain in our knowledge of the history of all the socialist groups active in Wales before the Great War, and full, separate histories of the ILP, the SDF and the Fabian Society in Wales remain to be written. It is hoped, however, that bringing together aspects of their history, and providing an analysis of the ways in which they related to Wales and Welshness, will be a worthwhile contribution to both Welsh and British labour historiography.

In undertaking this task more attention has been paid to the pre-1906 period than to the period between 1906 and the Great War. This is because the existing historiography has tended to pay less attention to the earlier part of the period, and has operated on the assumption that socialist activity in Wales was minimal before 1906. It is hoped that at least some revision of this idea will be encouraged by this thesis, although it is recognised that the period after 1906 did see a considerable increase in the volume and intensity of socialist activity in Wales, as well as an intensified discussion of the ‘national question’ among socialists. For this reason a temptation to bring the narrative to a close in 1906 has been resisted, although the coverage of the post-1906 period is, for reasons of space, more limited than that of the earlier period. The following text combines a thematic and chronological approach to Welsh socialist history. Chapter one examines the immediate context, the activities and the

reception of the first ‘modern’ socialists to attempt propaganda in Wales in the 1880s. Chapter two discusses the ways in which socialists began to put down roots in Wales during the 1890s. In particular it focuses upon the activities of the Fabian Society in Cardiff, and the SDF in other southern, mainly coastal, towns. Chapter three maintains the focus on south Wales, and examines the way in which socialist ideas spread into the coalfield and the way in which the ILP began to become the dominant socialist group in Wales. Particular attention is paid to the 1898 coal strike and the role of Keir Hardie in the period before 1906. Chapter four shifts the geographical focus, and examines the spread of socialist ideas in the rest of Wales from the 1880s to 1906. It discusses the ways in which socialists related to rural Wales, and the way in which the Penrhyn Quarry dispute of 1900-1903 influenced the development of socialism in north Wales. It also examines the ways in which what might be considered ‘indigenous’ Welsh ideologies were arguably moving independently in the direction of socialism. Chapter 5 moves the thesis towards a conclusion by examining the period from 1906 to the Great War. It makes some general observations about the growth of socialism in Wales in this period, before examining the attempt made by some socialists in this period to relate socialism more firmly to Welsh national identity, and concludes with a consideration of some of the problems inherent in the creation and distribution of socialist propaganda through the medium of the Welsh language.

Chapter 1

PIONEERS

Cyril Parry, the pioneering historian of socialism in Gwynedd, asserted over 40 years ago that ‘there was no indigenous Welsh socialism’,¹ and his somewhat stark statement still awaits full interrogation. In structural terms it is certainly true that modern socialism developed relatively late in Wales. Although provincial centres in England and Scotland witnessed the establishment of socialist societies in the early 1880s, it was not until the 1890s that similar societies were established in Wales on anything like a sustainable basis. It is also true that some of the most prominent socialists in Wales in this period were incomers. In terms of independent labour representation – the form of politics that was most often forced and pioneered by socialists – Wales was also a relatively late developer. Keir Hardie famously raised the standard of independent labour politics at Mid-Lanark in April 1888, and the formation of Britain’s first independent labour party followed in Scotland a few months later.² It is recognised, moreover, that in the early 1890s, ‘when the two party political structure began to crack, and a third party with a distinctively socialist character emerged ... [it was] amongst the mills, brickyards and gasworks of the West Riding’.³ Wales, by contrast, appears marginal to the early development of socialist and independent labour politics in Britain. While independent labour parliamentary candidates were returned in other parts of Britain as early as 1892, it was not until 1900 that a similar breakthrough was made in Wales. On the strength of this evidence, it might indeed appear that Wales was pulled along by seminal developments that took place elsewhere in the British Isles, and that socialism was not an indigenous Welsh creature.

Indeed, Welsh historiography supports the view that in its early years socialism ‘seemed an alien growth’ in Wales.⁴ Existing studies of the impact of socialism upon late nineteenth century Wales focus upon its structural growth, tending to see it in the

¹ Cyril Parry, ‘Socialism in Gwynedd 1900-1920’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales, Bangor (1967), p. 183.

² James G. Kellas, ‘The Mid Lanark By Election, 1888 and the Scottish Labour Party, 1888-1894’, *Parliamentary Affairs* (Summer 1965), pp. 318-329.

³ E.P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’, in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History in Memory of G.D.H. Cole*, Macmillan, London (1967), pp. 276-316, p. 277.

⁴ K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1963), p. 212.

context of the later emergence of the Labour Party, as, in other words, ‘Labour’s roots in Wales’.⁵ Viewed in this way the weakness of early Welsh socialism is indeed striking. In the words of Deian Hopkin, Wales was ‘[f]rankly, nowhere’ in the events of the ‘socialist revival’ of the 1880s, and remained a ‘socialist desert’ into the late 1890s.⁶ Regional studies add weight to these conclusions. Chris Williams, for example, demonstrates in his study of the Rhondda that socialism was ‘marginal’ in the politics of the two valleys up to 1898.⁷ In Llanelli, as doubtless elsewhere in Wales, participation in socialist politics in the 1890s was ‘an act of high individualism, at once risky and *outrê*’.⁸ In the anthracite district of the south Wales coalfield socialist and labour activity before 1900 was ‘minimal’,⁹ and the workers of Swansea ‘were singularly untouched by the socialist revival’.¹⁰ At the other end of the country in Gwynedd ‘the concept of socialism as a distinct political faith remained ill defined ... few appreciated its meaning and fewer still were aware of its implications’ until well into the 1900s.¹¹ In the large geographical space between, early socialism is generally agreed to be so much of a non-event that it is not even mentioned. According to the established historiography, socialism in Wales did not begin to make inroads into the social and political bedrock of nonconformist Liberalism until some time in the second half of the first decade of the twentieth century. As Ryland Wallace states, ‘[i]n general, geographical remoteness and linguistic and cultural differences ... kept the Principality almost immune from the doctrines of the Socialist societies of England’.¹²

⁵ Deian Hopkin, ‘Labour’s Roots in Wales, 1880-1900’, in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2000), pp. 40-60; Deian Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour in Wales, 1890-1914’, *Llafur*, 6, 3 (1994), pp. 120-141; J. Parry, ‘Trade Unionists and Early Socialism in South Wales, 1890-1908’, *Llafur*, 4, 3 (1986), pp. 43-54.

⁶ Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour in Wales’, p. 123; Hopkin, ‘Labour’s Roots in Wales’, p. 55.

⁷ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1996), p. 59.

⁸ Deian Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour: Llanelli, 1890-1922’, in Geraint H. Jenkins and J. Beverly Smith (eds.), *Politics and Society in Wales 1840-1922: Essays in Honour of Ieuan Gwynedd Jones*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1988), pp. 161-182, p. 163.

⁹ Ioan Matthews, ‘The World of the Anthracite Miner’, Unpublished PhD, Cardiff (1995), p. 208.

¹⁰ Thomas John McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea 1887-1918’, Unpublished PhD, Swansea (1986), p. 87.

¹¹ Cyril Parry, ‘The Independent Labour Party and Gwynedd Politics, 1900-1920’, *Welsh History Review*, 4, 1 (1968), pp. 47-66, p. 49.

¹² Ryland Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!: A Study of Reform Agitations in Wales, 1840-1886*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1991), p. 221.

While the substance of these statements is doubtless correct, it must be conceded that the tardiness of Wales in the socialist growth of the 1880s and 1890s does present an historical problem. When socialism and independent labour representation did develop in Wales it did so with remarkable rapidity. More than this, within a short space of time the Welsh socialist and labour movement became an integral and deeply influential part of the wider British movement. By 1903 Keir Hardie could state that ‘[f]or some reason or other, Wales had become the cockpit in which the great questions affecting labour were being fought out’.¹³ He wasn’t wrong. The previous five years had witnessed a series of events of major significance in the history of British labour and socialism, all taking place in south Wales within barely a dozen square miles of each other. These included the formation of the South Wales Miners Federation, Hardie’s own return to Parliament at Merthyr Boroughs and the portentous Taff Vale rail dispute. In the course of the next decade not only was there a dramatic proliferation of ILP branches in Wales, but the name of south Wales in particular was to become synonymous with left wing militancy, epitomised by the Cambrian Combine dispute and the *Miners’ Next Step*. During the decade after that, moreover, the region was to become one of the engine houses of the British socialist and labour movement.¹⁴ This apparent dichotomy between an early absence of socialist activity in Wales and the country’s subsequent centrality to labour history invites questions about the apparent failure of Wales to take part in the early growth of British socialism. At the very least the sudden animation of socialism in Wales in the early 1900s might suggest that something more was going on beneath the surface of Welsh society in the final decades of the nineteenth century than the existing historiography admits.

The purpose of the present argument is not to challenge that historiography on the structural weakness of late Victorian Welsh socialism, which it concedes as undeniable. Rather, it seeks to re-examine the period from another perspective.

¹³ Unidentified news cutting, D.A. Thomas Papers, C2, National Library of Wales. Hardie was speaking at the Rocking Stone on Pontypridd Common.

¹⁴ For some index of the subsequent importance of south Wales within the British labour movement see Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community & Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield 1898-1947*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1998), p. 49, which points out that from the general election of 1918 to the outbreak of the Second World War, in 118 potential contests at general and by-elections in the south Wales coalfield Labour candidates were victorious in 83, and unopposed in a further 29, making a total success rate of 112 out of 118, or 95%.

Instead of viewing the development of socialism from the 1880s until the early 1900s as part of that collection of events which is often assumed to amount to ‘the origins of the Labour Party’, in which the creation of formal organisational structures is an all-important measure of progress, it aims to examine the spread of socialism in Wales in terms of an interplay between Wales and the wider world. In this light, structural growth is less important than the spread of ideas. Such ideational development is, of course, more difficult to assess. It takes place, for the most part, beneath the level of the historical record, much of it in the private rather than the public sphere, and it is unquantifiable. It is also extremely complex. In the case of socialism new ideas were undoubtedly introduced to Wales by propagandists who arrived from beyond its borders, but the flow of these ideas was not uni-directional. Frequently it was diverted and complicated by contact with Welsh culture and society. Sometimes it borrowed from and fused with existing traditions of Welsh radicalism, and sometimes it eddied and fed ideas and influences back into the mainstream of British socialism. It flowed unevenly across Wales as a whole, influencing different regions in different ways and at different speeds. Undeniably, though, the permeation of socialist ideas into Wales in the 1880s marked the beginning of a process that was to have a major long term impact upon both Wales and Britain.

Beginnings and ends of historical processes and movements must, of course, be approached with circumspection. Indeed, the tendency to see what used to be called the ‘Socialist Revival’ of the 1880s as an historical watershed has long been under question,¹⁵ and the elements of it that comprised the interplay under discussion here might be seen as part of a greater meta-narrative concerning the place of Wales in the world. Certainly, radicals had been exchanging ideas and influences across the Welsh border for hundreds of years. The French Revolution initiated what might be considered the modern phase of this dialogue,¹⁶ and in its wake radical influences began to permeate Welsh society. Sometimes these came in the form of individual

¹⁵ E. Biagini and A. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics, 1850-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, (1991); Jon Lawrence, ‘Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (April 1992), pp. 163-186; Mark Bevir, ‘The British Social Democratic Federation 1880-1885: From O’Brienism to Marxism’, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XXXVII (1992), pp. 207-229.

¹⁶ David Davies, *The Influence of the French Revolution on Welsh Life and Literature*, Morgan Evans & Son, Carmarthen (1926). Our knowledge of this period will certainly be considerably expanded by the results of the major research project on Wales and the French Revolution currently underway at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies.

activists from England, among whom was John Thelwell, one of the heroes of E.P. Thompson's great narrative, *The Making of the English Working Class*.¹⁷ Escaping the intensity of London in the late 1790s, he tried to find his way back to the land - thus engaging in another of the great radical traditions of the British Isles, and one that has direct bearing upon the arguments in this thesis - at a smallholding near Llyswen in Breconshire. During what turned out to be a brief and near disastrous stay there he made contact with Welsh radicals, including Iolo Morganwg, before ultimately abandoning his new life, having failed to make his farm work in the rain.¹⁸ A failure at farming though he was, Thelwell might be seen as a forebear of the socialists who came at the end of the next century to spread their beliefs under the same Welsh rain.

His experience was linked to theirs not just by the continuity of the weather, but by an ongoing interplay that embraced the intervening generations. A prominent example of human and ideological traffic in the other direction, from the generation following Thelwell, is, of course, Robert Owen of Newtown. Often considered as the 'Father of British Socialism', Owen was considered by some, in the words of another Welsh export, Tom Ellis, to be taking the message of Wales to the world. If he was, the Owenite communitarians who came from England to settle in Meirionnydd and Carmarthenshire in the 1840s and 1850s were bringing it back again.¹⁹ Their ideological cousins in the Chartist movement were also furthering the same radical cross-border dialogue. It was, after all, the prosecution of a Londoner, Henry Vincent, in south Wales that acted as the catalyst for the Newport Rising in 1839.²⁰ Another Chartist, Thomas Powell, provides a better example of the geographical complexity of this radical interplay. He moved from Newtown to Shrewsbury and then to London before returning to Montgomeryshire in the 1830s where he was prosecuted for his role in the disturbances at Llanidloes in 1839. Throughout his life's journey he

¹⁷ E.P. Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class*, esp. pp. 172-176.

¹⁸ Penelope J. Corfield, 'Rhetoric, Radical Politics and Rainfall: John Thelwell in Breconshire, 1797-1800', *Brycheiniog*, Vol 40 (2008), pp. 17-39.

¹⁹ For a discussion of Owen and Owenism in relation to Wales see below pp. 202-205.

²⁰ David Williams, 'Chartism in Wales', in Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies*, Macmillan, London (1959), pp. 220-248.

doubtless imparted and absorbed ideas and influences in various forms and at varying levels of intensity along the way.²¹

One final example from the next generation will suffice to make the link with the socialists of the 1880s. John Ruskin was a formative influence upon most of them, and although his work might be considered quintessentially English in nature, he was no stranger to Wales. Indeed, in many senses Wales provided a perfect setting for the implementation of the pastoral ideal set out in works such as *Fors Clavigera*. In 1871, as part of this agenda, he established the Guild of St. George, the ultimate aim of which was variously described as ‘the salvation of England’ or ‘the health, wealth and long life of the British nation’, and to this end, the Guild received the gift of a row of cottages in Barmouth, to be run as a type of social housing. When in 1876, Ruskin went to Barmouth to visit the cottages, he found that one of the established tenants was a Frenchman, by the name of Monsiuer Guyard a ‘reformer, experimenter and philanthropist’ who had left France during the Franco-Prussian War. The two men got on well, and shared a belief in ‘the practical conviction that in flying from cities and luxurious lives, and in leading laborious days combined with the education of heart and mind, the perfect way was to be found’. Their liaison, in the steeply sloped settlement of old Barmouth, moreover, provides a fine illustration of the diverse and cosmopolitan nature of the interplay that embraced even some of the most apparently rural and isolated parts of Wales in the nineteenth century.²²

This process of interplay was, of course, by no means limited to secular radicalism. Indeed, its main theatres were the closely related activities of religion and education. Wales was subject to waves of heterogenous religious and educational influences during the nineteenth century, which were mediated and shaped by a class of more or less cosmopolitan Welsh opinion formers, epitomised by individuals such as Kilsby Jones, William Williams, Hugh Owen and Henry Richard.²³ By the late nineteenth

²¹ For Powell see Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York (2007), pp. 87-94. After his involvement at Llanidloes Powell returned to London and then emigrated to the West Indies, thus continuing the process.

²² Blanche Atkinson, *Ruskin's Social Experiment at Barmouth*, James Clarke & Co., London (1900).

²³ Vyrnwy Morgan, *Kilsby Jones*, Hughes and Son, Wrexham (n.d.); Daniel Evans, *The Life and Work of William Williams*, Gomerian Press, Llandysul (n.d.); Of Henry Richard, it was written on his death in 1888 that ‘he fulfilled for Wales a double political function: he not only stood in the breach between Wales and England to explain as a Welshman the mind and wishes of the Principality to the English

century these influences had been fused to create a distinct and powerful sense of Welsh identity. The ability of Wales to absorb such apparently foreign influences and make them its own was not lost on some Welsh socialists who saw their own creed as another religion and sought to mould it to the same ends. ‘Just as Christianity came here from Palestine’, one of them observed, ‘and Protestantism from Germany, and Nonconformity from England, and Calvinism from Geneva, and were welcomed here, each in its turn – so also will it be with Socialism’.²⁴ On the other side of the equation, Welsh patriots and nationalists were also aware of the ambiguities that lay not far beneath the surface of their own identity, and towards the end of the nineteenth century they were increasingly making a case on behalf of Welsh ‘particularism’, that ‘the sentiment that cherishes and strives to maintain all the particular institutions that belong to Wales as a nation apart from England’ should be developed.²⁵ ‘The most unlovely feature of modern civilization is the tendency to destroy distinction. Originality is dying out, and we are in danger of settling down on a dead level of universal mediocrity’,²⁶ argued one such patriot (from beyond the Welsh border), and socialism might have been counted among the influences he had in mind. These debates were barely underway when the first socialists began their propaganda in Wales,²⁷ but they remained unresolved throughout the period under discussion in this thesis.²⁸ Considered as a whole, they form an essential context in which to understand the activities of early socialists in Wales, who, when they began to propagate their ideas in the 1880s, were initiating yet another phase in a long historical process of ideological interplay between Wales and the wider world.

people, he was also the political spokesman from England to Wales’, *Cymru Fydd*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (September 1888), p. 505.

²⁴ David Thomas, ‘Wales and the Politics of the Future’, Undated Unpublished Manuscript, David Thomas Papers, National Library of Wales, Box 3.

²⁵ Robert Owen, ‘A Plea for Welsh Particularism II: Anglicising Dangers’, *Young Wales*, Vol. 5, No. 51 (March 1899) pp. 52-54, p. 53.

²⁶ Harry Jones, ‘Another Plea for Welsh Particularism’, *Young Wales*, Vol. 5, No. 52 (April 1899), pp. 88-90, p. 88.

²⁷ For early contributions dealing specifically with aspects of the interplay under discussion here see, William Jones, ‘Y Deffroad Cenedlaethol’, *Cymru Fydd*, Vol. 1, No. 12 (December 1888), pp. 405-412; S.T. Jones, ‘Cymry Cymreig’, *Cymru Fydd*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (April 1889); Soffos Ap, ‘Arwyddion Deffroad’, *Cymru Fydd*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February 1890), pp. 107-110).

²⁸ Essentially the same debate that was conducted in *Cymru Fydd* and *Young Wales* in the 1880s and 1890s was rehearsed in *The Welsh Outlook* in the period after the Great War. Contributors complained that Welsh ‘ideas are all heavily stamped “Made in England” or some other foreign country, and it is full time that we should attempt to develop the intellectual industry at home’ (A Welsh Nationalist, ‘Dangers of the Political Situation’, *The Welsh Outlook*, Vol. 5 (1918), pp. 244-6, p. 246), or that Wales was, in intellectual terms a ‘nation of copyists’ (Rev. Gwilym Davies, ‘A Welsh Social Diary’, *The Welsh Outlook*, Vol. 7 (1920), p. 44-5). An important element of the debate, of course, was the role of language in defining national ideas. This will be dealt with fully in chapter 5.

If the context into which socialists entered was not without its fluidities, neither, of course, was the socialists' own ideology, which was suffused with what R.H. Tawney later called 'radiant ambiguities'.²⁹ Already by the early 1880s there were several different varieties of ideology that were broadly grouped under the term socialism. These included the 'utopian' ideas of Proudhon, St. Simon and Robert Owen, the Christian socialism of Kingsley and Maurice, and the more recent 'scientific socialism' of Marx and Engels. The diversity of socialist belief was to become even more marked as socialism grew in popularity in the 1890s, but even in the 1880s the problematic nature of defining socialism was not lost on Welsh observers. One of them summarised his views in 1889: 'The difficulty one always has to encounter with modern Socialists is to attempt to get an approximate definition of their theory'. Their ideology, he continued, was imbued with 'vague teachings and fearful uncertainties', and,

if there is one thing certain at all about modern democratic Socialists it is this, that when they assemble together, the divergent views which they entertain, both as to the methods and meaning of their propaganda, are so extraordinary, that it places any material progress out of the question.³⁰

Such statements were to some extent justified by the schismatic tendencies of the largely London based British socialist leadership of the 1880s, which had already resulted in the establishment of three main socialist societies by the middle of the decade. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) was originally founded in 1881 as the Democratic Federation, and had adopted a Marxian socialist programme by 1883, which was reflected by the addition of the prefix 'Social' to the organisation's title in 1884. The Socialist League, another Marxist group, broke away from the SDF at the end of 1884, after a series of strategic disagreements and personal wranglings, to embark upon a short career in more purist and uncompromising socialist politics. The Fabian Society, on the other hand, which was also founded in 1884, espoused a more gradualist and flexible political agenda and a more heterodox, less strictly Marxist,

²⁹ R.H. Tawney, *The Attack and Other Papers*, Allen and Unwin, London (1953), p. 60.

³⁰ Ivor Bowen, 'Welsh Radicalism and German Socialism', *Cymru Fydd*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1889), pp. 57–63, pp. 57 & 58.

socio-economic analysis. All three of these organisations attempted to influence Wales to some degree during the 1880s and 1890s, but it was the Marxists of the SDF and the Socialist League that were in the vanguard.

The views of the Marxian socialists regarding nationalism, small nations and (so far as they existed at all) Wales, were however rather unhelpful as far as conducting a specifically Welsh propaganda campaign was concerned. One of their key foundation texts, after all, famously asserted that ‘the working men have no country’,³¹ and it is likely that many of the leading socialists of the 1880s would have agreed with Engels that the Welsh, like the Highland Gaels, were mere ‘remnants of peoples long gone’ upon whose behalf any claim to a separate political existence would have been ‘absurd’.³² The SDF leader, H.M. Hyndman, in his tellingly named *England for All*, favoured decentralisation in general terms, but explicitly dismissed legislative devolution to Wales on the grounds that there was no demand for it.³³ There were socialist leaders who may have provided an exception to this generally dismissive view of Welsh nationality. William Morris, of Welsh descent himself, presented a vision of a multilingual society in which Welsh was spoken and sung alongside other languages in his socialist utopia of 1891, *News From Nowhere*.³⁴ He was, however, as far as can be ascertained, exceptional in this. More representative of early British Marxist views of Wales was an article published in the SDF’s *Justice* in 1886, which derided the childish and ‘petty race prejudice which makes Welshmen hate Englishmen simply because they are Englishmen, and speak Welsh simply because it is Welsh’, and lamented the growth of nationalist feeling in Wales, opining that ‘at the time when the economical situation absolutely requires that the social problem should be regarded from an international standpoint, this recrudescence of national antipathies should puzzle all observers’.³⁵ Indeed, when pushed to its logical conclusion the SDF world view held Wales as a ‘spurious nationality’, which along

³¹ A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin, London (1968), p. 102. An English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* was published in *Justice*, 7 January 1887.

³² Robert Griffiths, *Marx and Engels on Wales and the Welsh*, Welsh Committee of the Communist Party, Cardiff (2006), pp. 31-2. Griffiths’ pamphlet makes a brave, but not wholly convincing attempt to demonstrate that Marx and Engels held a coherent view on Wales and the Welsh.

³³ H.M. Hyndman, *England for All*, Gilbert and Rivington, London (1881), pp. 99 & 126.

³⁴ William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, Longman’s Green & Company, London (1897) (First published 1891), pp. 32 & 114-5.

³⁵ *Justice*, 2 January 1886.

with Scotland and Ireland, would ultimately 'receive honourable interment'. 'To endeavour to resuscitate them' commented *Justice* 'is only to play into the hands of the exploiting classes whose game it is to spread dissension between the workers of one country and another'.³⁶ When considered alongside the putative propensity of the SDF for freethought and atheism, such attitudes did not augur well for successful propaganda in Wales.

It is, however, possible to over-play the limitations of the early British Marxist organisations in this respect. Some of the older historiographic representations of the SDF, for instance, as an inflexible, dogmatic sect, 'a rather weedy growth in the political garden, with few attractive features',³⁷ have long been subject to revision. What emerges is a more pragmatic organisation which grew out of and adapted to local circumstances in the regions where it was strong, notably the north west of England, and within which there was a significant gap between the official ideology of the leadership and the everyday activities of local activists.³⁸ Until now this interpretation has barely been tested as far as Wales is concerned, but before examining the Marxist's early contact with the country in the 1880s several points might be noted that suggest a slightly more promising context for the introduction of socialist ideas into the country than might otherwise be supposed. Firstly, the issue of Irish Home Rule was one with which socialists of all persuasions were familiar and towards which many were, up to a point, sympathetic - official views about 'spurious

³⁶ *Justice*, 17 September 1892.

³⁷ Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 172; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Hyndman and the SDF' in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London (1964), pp. 231-238 (1986 edition). Despite being generally sympathetic, Hobsbawm states that the SDF 'showed a lack of political realism unparalleled by any other contemporary group of socialists', and that the group was a 'sect rather than a serious political organization'. Similarly critical of the SDF for its lack of ideological flexibility and realism are: Henry Collins, 'The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation', in A. Briggs & John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (1967), pp. 47-69; Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford, 1961).

³⁸ Mark Bevir, 'H.M. Hyndman: A Re-reading and a Re-assessment', *History of Political Thought*, Vol. XIII, no. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 125-145; Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Ryburn, 1994); Jeffrey Hill, 'Social Democracy and the Labour Movement: The Social Democratic Federation in Lancashire', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, No. 8 (1982), pp. 44-55; Kenneth Hilton, 'John Spargo, The Social Democratic Federation and the 1898 South Wales Coal Strike', *Welsh History Review*, 16, 4 (1993), dd. 542-550; Graham Johnson, 'Social Democracy and Labour Politics in Britain, 1892-1911', *History*, vol. 85, issue 277 (2002), pp. 67-87; A.J. Kidd, 'The Social Democratic Federation and Popular Agitation amongst the Unemployed of Edwardian Manchester', *International Review of Social History*, 37 (1992); James Owen, 'Dissident Missionaries?: Re-Narrating the Political Strategy of the Social Democratic Federation, 1884-1887', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (August 2008), pp. 187-207.

nationalities' notwithstanding.³⁹ This sympathy was by no means automatically transferred to the Welsh situation, but the prominence of Ireland as a political issue in the 1880s did at least ensure that most early socialists had some awareness of the predicament of the 'Celtic fringe' of the British Isles in more general terms.

A more significant area of ideological confluence between the Marxists and Welsh radicals was provided by an issue that was closely related to Irish Home Rule, the land. Already a highly inflammatory issue in Ireland, this was in the 1880s fast becoming a key theme in Welsh politics too - a development not entirely lost on the SDF, which occasionally included reports of the Welsh land agitation in *Justice*.⁴⁰ The ideas of the American land reformer Henry George, moreover, had been an influence upon many members of the early socialist groups, often providing them with a stepping stone towards full acceptance of socialist ideology.⁴¹ By the mid 1880s George was also extending his influence to Wales. In 1884 he visited Cardiff, where he lectured to a 'large and enthusiastic' audience, mainly of working men, at the New Public Hall on 16 January,⁴² and the following afternoon he held a 'conference' on the land question, attended by 20 gentlemen and 2 ladies, at Cardiff's Swiss Hall. During the course of the afternoon meeting George explained that the 'movement was not a local one. It was going on all over the world', and illustrated his point with reference to examples from New Zealand, Australia and America.⁴³ The

³⁹ *Justice*, 23 February 1884 commented that 'the Irish National Party is doing great service by hastening on the crisis of the social question' in Ireland. Also see Michael Davitt in *Justice*, 22 March 1884; J.L. Joynes summed up the SDF ambivalence regarding the Irish issue in *Justice*, 4 October 1884, where he states 'It is deeply to be regretted that in Ireland the question [of the class struggle] is complicated by the idea of nationality, which the oppression and interference of the English constantly tends to aggravate and foment. Socialists are nothing if not international, but we must all recognise the entire right of the Irish to settle their own difficulties, and to work out the solution of their own economical problem in their own way. It is upon the free Irish nation of the future that we confidently count for assistance and fellowship in the development of the great idea of Socialism for which we all strive.'; Also see *Justice* 27 March 1886, 17 April 1886 & 2 April 1887; *Today*, Vol. 1 May – September 1883, pp. 21-35 & pp. 270-282.

⁴⁰ *Justice*, 11 September 1886 & 18 February 1888.

⁴¹ For example, Tom Mann, who recalled in the 1920s the impact of reading Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* in 1881: 'it impressed me as by far the most valuable book I had so far read ... and never since I gave it careful attention have I had one hour of doubt but that the destiny of the human race is assured, and that the workers will, in due time, come to occupy their rightful position'. Tom Mann, *Memoirs*, Labour Publishing Company, London (1923), pp. 27-28. Also see H.H. Champion, 'Henry George and the Land Question', *Justice*, 19 January 1884. Whereas George argued for a single land tax, socialists went further and advocated full land nationalisation: 'All Socialists, without exception, are in favour of Nationalisation of the Land. It is one of the most important points in our whole programme', *Justice*, 11 October 1884.

⁴² *Justice*, 26 January 1884.

⁴³ *Western Mail*, 18 January 1884.

intellectual digestion of George's internationally-informed, trans-Atlantic influence in south Wales is confirmed by the flurry of letters and comments in the *Western Mail* during the following weeks, some of which were negative, but others, in the words of one correspondent, bore 'the tooth mark of the Socialist'.⁴⁴

More influential, perhaps was Michael Davitt's tour of Wales in 1886.⁴⁵ This controversial series of meetings was instigated and organised by Welsh radicals Michael D. Jones and Evan Pan Jones,⁴⁶ and, significantly, it was also approved of from afar by the English socialists.⁴⁷ The tour included meetings at Flint, Llandudno, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Swansea,⁴⁸ and although it was sharply divisive it must be viewed as an important landmark in the development of Welsh opinion on the land issue, as Davitt's presence in Wales not only drew important emerging radical figures such as Lloyd George and T.E. Ellis into the land debate, but also linked the issue with labour representatives from the industrial south of the country, notably the miners' leader William Abraham (Mabon).⁴⁹ More than this, though, Davitt's tour provides another example of an agitator mapping international radical issues onto a specific set of Welsh circumstances, a sense of which is illustrated by his opening remarks at Blaenau Ffestiniog:

a ddywedai ei fod wedi anerch cannoedd o gyfarfodydd yn yr Iwerddon, Lloegr, Ysgotland, a'r America, o fewn y saith mlynedd diweddaf, ond ni theimlodd erioed fwy bleser i sefyll o flaen cynulleidfa nag a deimlai wrth sefyll o flaen y gynnulleidfa hon.

Davitt went on to congratulate the Welsh for preserving their language, suggesting that the Irish could learn something from their example.⁵⁰ In the 'intense national

⁴⁴ *Western Mail*, 22 January 1884.

⁴⁵ J. Graham Jones, 'Michael Davitt, David Lloyd George and T.E. Ellis: the Welsh Experience, 1886', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (June 1997), pp. 450-482.

⁴⁶ Evan Pan Jones, *Oes Gofion: Fraslun o Hanes fy Mywyd*, H. Evans, Bala (n.d.), pp. 176-177. The plans for the tour highlighted a fault line in Welsh radicalism, Thomas Gee stood aloof.

⁴⁷ *Justice*, 9 January 1886 & 13 February 1886.

⁴⁸ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 13 February, 17 February, 20 February & 29 May 1886.

⁴⁹ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 12 May 1886; J. Graham Jones, 'Michael Davitt, Lloyd George and T.E. Ellis', p. 477.

⁵⁰ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 20 February 1886. ('he said that he had addressed hundreds of meetings in Ireland, England, Scotland and America during the last seven years, but he had never felt more pleasure to stand in front of an audience as he felt standing in front of that audience'). All translations

feeling' that Davitt witnessed at Blaenau Ffestiniog, moreover, he sensed an opportunity. Although the Welsh were 'only in the A.B.C. of the great social and political problems of the day', he asserted, 'I think they will become apt scholars'. The Welsh people were, in his view, natural republicans, 'as the teachings of Nonconformity essentially tend towards republican ideas'. The meeting at Blaenau was closed by the singing of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* which was, for Davitt, a 'most agreeable incident', and he attributed what he saw as a superior intelligence on the part of the Welsh quarrymen to the cultivation of their musical culture.⁵¹ The singing of the Welsh anthem to celebrate the visit of the Irish agitator was a fitting expression of the meeting of the culture that it represented with the ideas that Davitt brought to Wales in 1886. His visit, along with that of Henry George, may be seen as a further episode in the interplay between Wales and the wider world, drawing Irish and Atlantic influences into the mainstream of Welsh life through the vortex of land agitation. Quite literally George's and Davitt's campaigns might be seen as contributing to the grounding of late nineteenth century international radical and democratic feeling in Welsh soil. They also formed the immediate context for the entry of socialist ideas into Wales.

The first instances of this were sporadic and random in nature, the result of happenstance or individual initiative, rather than any strategic effort. Most of them probably went unrecorded, but one or two left records that are worth examining for what they tell us about early socialist attitudes to Wales. Among the first socialist visitors to the country was SDF member and Eton schoolmaster James Leigh Joynes, who visited Llandudno as a holiday-maker in 1884. Joynes was no stranger to either Celtic Britain or the land agitation just discussed, as he had toured Ireland with Henry George in 1882 – an adventure that cost him his job at Eton.⁵² He was not, however, impressed with the hybrid Welsh-holiday settlement that Llandudno had become by the 1880s, and found his natural instinct to propagandise frustrated there. He wrote to a colleague from a Llandudno guest house in the summer of 1884 in acerbic terms,

from the original Welsh are by the author. The orthography, spelling, punctuation etc. of quotations in Welsh have been retained, except in the case of a small number, where minor silent emendations clarify meaning.

⁵¹ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 21 April 1886.

⁵² J.L. Joynes, *The Adventures of a Tourist in Ireland*, Kegan Paul, London (1882).

which can only reinforce notions about the harsh and alienating tone of some members of the SDF.

This place is not one for propaganda. The scum of the rich Liverpool shopkeepers and their unspeakable wives and daughters disport themselves on the esplanade. The honest part of the population is at present employed in catering for their various tastes in the way of dead animals and black-faced minstrelsy. Besides nobody except these depraved scoundrels can speak English, and I cannot convert a Taffy without knowing Welsh. There is one blind man whom I have hopes of, as he sees more than most, but it is no use giving him *Justice* unless you have it printed for the purpose in raised type that he can feel.⁵³

Joynes was not alone among the SDF leadership in visiting Wales in the 1880s. Indeed, the next high-profile SDFer to record a visit was none other than the organisation's leader Henry Hyndman. Hyndman had first visited the country in the 1850s, and returned in 1886 to investigate an industrial dispute at the Llanberis slate quarries.⁵⁴ His observations are revealing, particularly with regard to the issue that Joynes found so obstructive, the Welsh language. Hyndman was not entirely negative about the language, and in some senses saw it as a tool that might be used advantageously in pursuit of the class struggle by Welsh workers. He observed later that it gave them a 'special advantage in strike organisation', offering 'almost all the gains with none of the drawbacks of the secret society'.⁵⁵ Hyndman's approval of this aspect of the use of Welsh was, however, tempered by a more general ambivalence, as revealed in his immediate impressions of the situation at Llanberis:

... the Welshmen are soon able to talk English when they find that the Englishman who wishes them to do so is on their side. 'Dym Sassenach,' 'No English,' is the answer to those only whom they feel pretty sure are against them. The National feeling which is rising in Wales so rapidly is really far more social than political; but they use their language among themselves and are forming secret societies from which Englishmen are excluded, because

⁵³ J.L. Joynes to [?] Fitzgerald, 10 August 1884, COLL MISC 522/2/11, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London.

⁵⁴ *Justice*, 23 January 1886.

⁵⁵ H.M. Hyndman, *Further Reminiscences*, MacMillan and Company, London (1912), p. 447.

they hope in this way to organise better... It would certainly be well to have our short literature translated into Welsh and distributed in the Principality. The people are much quicker to grasp revolutionary ideas than our own rural population, and seem to turn naturally towards Socialism, though their language may interfere somewhat with the spread of our doctrines.

This passage reveals much about early socialist attitudes to the Welsh language and culture. Hyndman does his best to identify, or even insinuate, himself with the Welsh workmen. He also articulates a view that was to become common currency in socialist circles in Wales, that the Welsh 'turn naturally towards socialism'. He cannot, however, hide his suspicion of the Welsh language and Welsh nationalism. He sees the language as something which is used willfully by the Welsh to exclude Englishmen, and as something which will 'interfere' with the natural spread of ideas. To Hyndman, socialist ideas would only spread in Wales 'in spite of the Nationalism of the people'.⁵⁶

Despite such attitudes on the part of the organisation's leadership Wales was not devoid of indigenous socialist activity in the 1880s. Indeed, the first formal socialist society to be formed within Wales was a branch of the SDF, which was established near Brynmawr, in Breconshire, in the industrial south east of the country. In 1885 a 'small body of earnest workers' organised themselves there 'after careful study of the principles of Socialism', with the intent of 'carrying on an active propaganda among their ill-paid and over-tasked fellow-workers'.⁵⁷ The workers, in a region largely dependent upon a declining iron industry where unemployment was high, were, it was reported, 'always glad to receive any of the Federation literature'.⁵⁸ The branch was, however, short-lived, and dissolved after the death of its leading light, John Price of Waen Avon, in the summer of 1885. Despite this, the work was carried on in the region by David Williams, an 'active Propagandist' from Clydach, and it was reported at the SDF's annual conference that year that 'large quantities of literature' had been 'put about' in Breconshire and Monmouthshire.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the historical record is extremely sparse with regard to this group, and we do not even know exactly where

⁵⁶ *Justice*, 23 January 1886.

⁵⁷ *Justice*, 10 January 1885.

⁵⁸ *Justice*, 7 March 1885.

⁵⁹ *Justice*, 8 August 1885.

it met, how big the branch was, or where its members came from. It is fairly safe to assume, though, that they were reading and distributing literature supplied from SDF headquarters in London, including the Federation's newspaper, *Justice*, and pamphlets by the likes of Hyndman, Morris and Joynes.

It wasn't until March 1887, however, that socialists began to organise meetings in Wales in any strategic way. In that month John Fielding of the SDF began 'breaking fresh ground' by lecturing in south Wales. On Wednesday 16 March 1887 he delivered a lecture on socialism at the Albert Hall in Swansea, which, according to *Justice*, left the local workmen 'discussing the principles of Social Democracy on the following days with much animation and interest'.⁶⁰ Significantly, the meeting was chaired by a local Liberal, C.H. Perkins, who, in his opening remarks, recorded a sense of intellectual and ideological interplay between the UK capital and its distant satellite by observing that 'Mr. Fielding had come from London to give them information they very much lacked in Swansea'.⁶¹ Fielding followed his lecture in Swansea with an open air meeting near Landore steel works, where he delivered a 'long speech which was listened to with the greatest attention throughout' by local workmen, who, after the meeting, urged him to return again to speak in Swansea.⁶² Further meetings at Cardiff were unfortunately disrupted by snowstorms and poorly attended, but a Comrade Parr of Cardiff – 'the only avowed Socialist in this town' – managed to collect 26 names for the purpose of forming a branch of the SDF there. *Justice* concluded that the success of Fielding's visit 'has proved conclusively that the people are beginning to see that their only hope is in Social Democracy. A vigorous propaganda', it surmised, 'would most certainly result in the formation of powerful branches of the SDF in all the principal towns of Wales'.⁶³ The optimism of *Justice's* coverage far exceeded the reality of the situation, and the establishment of branches did not follow in the wake of Fielding's visit. There is, nevertheless, evidence that socialist ideas were being discussed in south Wales in this period, and that Fielding's visit was not wholly without impact. The Swansea Literary and Debating Society considered socialism at a meeting held in the Unitarian Schoolroom, just days before Fielding's first lecture, at which there was a 'capital attendance'. Presided over by the

⁶⁰ *Justice*, 26 March 1887.

⁶¹ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 17 March 1887.

⁶² *Cambria Daily Leader*, 21 March 1887.

⁶³ *Justice*, 26 March 1887.

Rev. J.E. Manning, the members debated a motion put forward by the same C.H. Perkins who chaired Fielding's lecture that 'Socialism, properly carried out, affords the best remedy for the poverty and depression that so widely prevail'. The motion was defeated, but not without gaining some support.⁶⁴ A week or so later, in the wake of Fielding's lecture, socialism was the topic of debate at Swansea Liberal Club. Some of the local Liberal councillors had been present to hear Fielding at the Albert Hall, and many of them were clearly sympathetic to socialist ideas. Perkins was again active in the advocacy of the socialists, arguing that radicals and socialists were in close alliance and should mould their principles into one programme. Many of his colleagues were also sympathetic and, as one of them put it, '... failed to see any difference between an advanced Radical and a cautious Socialist'. Another argued that while socialism was too theoretical 'it was for the Radicals to give it practical form', and after a debate of two hours a motion in favour of socialism was passed.⁶⁵

These reports highlight a central theme in the fortunes of socialism in Wales, as elsewhere, namely its relationship with the advanced radical wing of Liberalism. Clearly, there was to some extent an ideological continuum that embraced both socialists and radical Liberals, of which at least some of the Swansea Liberals were a part. Care is, however, needed in evaluating this relationship. Many socialists were deeply suspicious of radicals attempting to give their theories practical form for them, and tended to see such expressions of sympathy as threatening attempts to neuter their revolutionary beliefs. Liberals, on the other hand, were often more favourably disposed towards socialism while it remained abstract and theoretical than they were when it was translated into independent political action. More critical to the fortunes of socialism though, was the extent to which Fielding's ideas found a receptive audience beyond the advanced wing of Swansea radicalism, and if the remarks of 'Paethslyllydd', the Welsh language columnist of the *Cambria Daily Leader*, are at all representative of local opinion, prospects for socialism in the area were not bright. The columnist had attended Fielding's lecture, and had interviewed him afterwards, but was unimpressed with his ideas. Accepting that more would be heard of socialism in the future, and, significantly, that it was necessary to find a Welsh term for the

⁶⁴ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 16 March 1887.

⁶⁵ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 23 March 1887.

movement, his column nevertheless dismissed socialist ideas as wholly unrealistic, and socialist agitators as false prophets:

y mae Mr. Fielding a'i gyfeillion yn myned o amgylch y wlad, gan addaw gwardigaeth, pan y bydd y bedd wedi cau arnynt hwy ac ar eu plant cyn y sylweddolir un o'u dychmygion. Gwyr Mr. Fielding hyn yn dda, ond y mae yn talu iddo ef i anog dynion yn mlaen at bethau anhygoel. Y mae munud o ystyriaeth yn ddigon i oleuo meddwl unrhyw un fod y chwyldroadau y mae y Socialists yn dweyd rhaid eu cael cyn bydd y byd yn ddedwydd, yn bethau mor fawr fel nad all neb ddisgwyl cyflawniad o honynt. Dyma un peth, yn ol Mr. Fielding ei hun, cyn y gall Socialism fod yn ddaioni digymysg, rhaid fod holl genedloedd y ddaear wedi mabwysiadau yr un gyfundrefn. Pwy ond yr ehud a ddisgwyliai weled, yn ei oes fer, y fath chwyldroad? Gobeithio nad oes neb mor ynfyd yn mhlith fy ngenedl.

Such ideas were, moreover, all the more unwelcome when presented by an incomer from England:

Cefais cyfle i ddweyd wrth Mr. Fielding fod gweithwyr Cymru, er ys blynyddau, yn barod i ddiwygiadau mawrion tra yr oedd y Saeson yn atalfa ar ein ffordd i'w cael.⁶⁶

Hostility of this type, with its nationalist undertones, was to become a familiar obstacle to socialist activists in Wales during the forthcoming decades.

Socialists were, however, not deterred, and five months later it was the turn of the rival Socialist League to try to bring 'the Cause' to Wales. On 13 August 1887 Sam

⁶⁶ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 30 March 1887 ('Mr Fielding and his friends go around the country promising salvation when the grave will be closed over them and their children before one of their fancies is realised. Mr Fielding knows this well, but it pays him to encourage men to strive for the unbelievable. A minute of consideration is enough to enlighten the thought of anyone that the revolutions that the socialists say they must have before the world becomes happy are so great that no-one can expect them to be completed. Here is one thing, according to Mr Fielding himself, before socialism can be an unmixed blessing, all of the nations of the earth must adopt the same system. Who but the simple minded can expect to see in their short lives this kind of revolution? Hopefully there is no-one so insane among my compatriots. [...] I had a chance to tell Mr. Fielding that the workers of Wales, for years, have been ready for great reforms, while the English have been standing in their way').

Mainwaring and Frank Kitz, members of the League in London, joined the throngs returning from National Eisteddfod, which had been held in London that year, and boarded a train to Cardiff. They took with them ‘an enormous sack’ and another smaller bag filled with literature, which together were ‘terrible encumbrances’ on their subsequent week-long journey. Over-nighting at Cardiff, they proceeded the next day to Pontypridd, where they held a meeting at the Rocking Stone on Pontypridd Common. ‘Our audience’, they later claimed ‘poured towards us from all points. They listened attentively to our exposition of Socialism, and cheered us to the echo’, ultimately giving a unanimous show of hands in favour of socialism. After another enthusiastic meeting at the Rocking Stone the next day Kitz and Mainwaring left Pontypridd and headed up the Rhondda to Tylorstown, where they held another meeting, and then walked to Aberdare, where they collected the names of local men interested in forming a branch of the Socialist League. From Aberdare, they went to Merthyr, where they held two enthusiastic meetings, at one of which ‘a forest of hands’ was held up in their favour. At Merthyr they also collected names for the formation of a branch of the League, and appointed agents for the sale of the League’s journal, *The Commonweal*.

Having secured Merthyr for socialism, they returned to Aberdare and ‘held a great meeting’ in the town, at Boot Square. Here too they secured agents for *Commonweal* and distributed ‘a vast amount of literature’. Satisfied that their work would be ‘crowned with lasting success’, they then returned to Pontypridd, where they held two further meetings at the Rocking Stone - one of which was an ‘immense gathering’ - and formed a branch of the Socialist League, before departing for home.⁶⁷ Kitz and Mainwaring’s hyperbolic account of their ‘Socialist Campaign in South Wales’, must, of course, be treated with caution. Unsurprisingly the *Western Mail* gave a different account of their visit. According to that paper the attendance at the first meeting in Pontypridd was ‘scanty’, and ‘those who did attend were composed of the social dregs of the place, who listened but very inattentively to the feeble attempt at

⁶⁷ *Commonweal*, 27 August 1887. The sack of literature contained, probably amongst other socialist publications, 5,000 specially printed leaflets for South Wales. See Joseph Lane’s ‘Report of the Strike Committee of the Socialist League’, *Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Socialist League, May 20 1888*, Socialist League, London (1888), pp. 8-9.

addresses made'.⁶⁸ More tellingly, perhaps, nothing more is recorded of either the branch that the two propagandists were hoping would be formed at Aberdare, or the one they claimed to have formed at Pontypridd. In May of the following year, moreover, it was lamented at the Socialist League's annual conference in London that the trip to South Wales had not increased membership of the League or the sale of *The Commonweal* at all.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the visit is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, Kitz and Mainwaring's account of it is one of the fullest descriptions we have of an early socialist propaganda visit to Wales. Carefully studied, it yields important clues about the nature of socialist interaction with Welsh culture in this period, and a consideration of the two individuals involved also sheds significant light upon the process of ideological interplay central to the present discussion.

Frank Kitz would seem to provide a fairly straightforward example of a foreign socialist bringing his doctrine to Wales from outside. Born in the east end of London in the late 1840s, Kitz was the son of a German exile, and spoke fluent German.⁷⁰ He had become involved in leftist-radical politics in London in the 1870s, and his views, which were influenced by the refugees Johan Most and Victor Dave might be more accurately described as anarchist, rather than strictly socialist. Kitz's foreign origins were, moreover, apparent to the Welsh audiences he addressed during the visit. At the first meeting held at Pontypridd's Rocking Stone Kitz was assailed by a local schoolmaster who told him that 'he had no business in Wales because of his German origin'.⁷¹ The same could not be said of Mainwaring. The son of a Welsh collier, born in Neath in 1841, Mainwaring was a native Welsh speaker.⁷² He was, according to a reminiscence written years after his death 'a Celt, with all the fire and enthusiasm of his race' and maintained that Welsh was 'the finest speaking language in the world'.⁷³

⁶⁸ *Western Mail*, 15 August 1887. Kitz and Mainwaring make reference to, and quote from, another report of their meetings, which appeared in the *Pontypridd Herald*, and which treats their campaign far more sympathetically. Unfortunately there seem to be no extant copies of this.

⁶⁹ *Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Socialist League*, p. 9.

⁷⁰ E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Pantheon, New York (1976) (First published, 1955), pp. 281 – 283. Florence Boos, *William Morris's Socialist Diary*, Journeyman Press, London and New York (1982), p. 65 asserts that Kitz was the name assumed by Francis Platt, the illegitimate son of Mary Platt and John Lewis, a watchmaker, although she does not give a source for this. For an account of the context in which Kitz was politically active in London see Hermia Olivier, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London*, Croom Helm, London (1983). Kitz's own 'Recollections and Reflections' were published in *Freedom*, January – July 1912.

⁷¹ *Commonweal*, 3 September 1887.

⁷² Ken John, 'Sam Mainwaring and the Autonomist Tradition', *Llafur*, 4, 3 (1986), pp. 55-66.

⁷³ Mat Kavanagh, in *Freedom*, 1934. Quoted in Ken John, 'Sam Mainwaring', p. 55.

He addressed meetings in Welsh on the tour of 1887.⁷⁴ He also had first hand knowledge of the region that he was attempting to propagandise, as he had worked in Aberdare as a fitter in the 1860s, before spending some time in America in the 1870s. By the 1880s Mainwaring was resident and working as an engineer in London. He had adopted Marxist views and become an active socialist, initially in the SDF, and then the Socialist League. On the anti-parliamentary side of the League, Mainwaring's views, like Kitz's, tended towards anarchism – or what would later be called anarcho-syndicalism.⁷⁵

Where exactly they were formed is a matter for speculation. Certainly, his association with William Morris and other leading London socialists would have been a considerable influence, but so too would his experiences of industrial capitalism in south Wales and America in the 1860s and 1870s. Ken John, in a doctoral study of Mainwaring, argues that his anarchistic socialism was derived from a reading of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and the American socialist Ira Steward, but also that elements of a Welsh ideological and unitarian religious inheritance were present in Mainwaring's ideological make-up. Among the most significant contributors to this inheritance was 'Publicola', the 'Welsh Communist', who published articles in David Rees's *Y Diwygiwr* in the 1830s, which, John argues, Mainwaring had read by the 1870s, when he had 'arrived at an understanding of both a processal view of history and of exploitation at the point of production'.⁷⁶ Neither was Mainwaring's 1887 visit to Wales a one-off event. He returned to live in south Wales in the 1890s, where he continued to be involved in socialist activities, before again returning to London, where he died in 1907 – in full flow on a socialist platform.⁷⁷ A consideration of Mainwaring thus makes the stereotype of early socialists in Wales as outsiders

⁷⁴ Frank Kitz, 'Recollections and Reflections', *Freedom*, June 1912: 'We might fairly claim to have been the pioneers in Wales of modern Socialism, which has now taken root in the Principality'.

⁷⁵ Mainwaring is credited with coining the term. See Ken John, 'Anti-Parliamentary Passage: South Wales and the Internationalism of Sam Mainwaring, 1841-1907', Unpublished PhD, University of Greenwich (2001), p. 109; W.M. [William Mainwaring], 'A Fighter of Forlorn Hopes', *Freedom*, January 1927: 'It is a strange commentary on the progress of ideas that South Wales, now a stronghold of Marxism, should have had the first lessons in revolutionary Socialism from two such staunch Anarchist Communists as Kitz and Mainwaring.'

⁷⁶ Ken John, *Anti-Parliamentary Passage*, p. 134.

⁷⁷ Tom Mann, *Memoirs*, p. 47. Mainwaring was Mann's foreman at one point, and Mann credits him with being 'one of the very first to understand the significance of the revolutionary movement'. It might be possible, in the light of this, to see Mainwaring's Welsh inheritance as one of the influences that propelled Mann himself towards socialism. See below pp. 80-83 for Mainwaring's subsequent socialist activities in Wales.

bringing a foreign doctrine to the country seem a little less simple than first impressions would suggest. Rather, it throws light upon what is clearly a complex process of ideological development involving the interplay of influences and ideas from a range of sources, including those indigenous to Wales.

Further observations on Kitz and Mainwaring's propagandist mission of 1887 also raise question marks about the assumptions that the tour was a mission into virgin territory. The socialists certainly had contacts in the area prior to their visit. Their report in *The Commonweal* makes reference to a pre-arranged meeting with 'friends' at Cardiff, who gave them a 'hearty Welsh welcome'.⁷⁸ These may have been members of Mainwaring's family, contacts made by him when he worked at Aberdare in the 1860s, or contacts made the previous year when he acted as a Socialist League delegate to miners in south Wales, as part of his activities with the League's Strike Committee.⁷⁹ Either way, this suggests that there was at least some type of informal network of socialist sympathisers, in addition to those already mentioned at Clydach, in south Wales prior to 1887. Their activities and ideological beliefs are unfortunately absent from the historical record, and we do not know whether they were indigenous Welsh or otherwise. Their implied existence, though, adds more weight to the contention that socialist ideas were already spreading in south Wales – albeit below the level of mainstream political discourse. Kitz and Mainwaring were certainly of the opinion that the Welsh were predisposed towards radical and socialist thought, and saw no necessary conflict between Welsh national feeling and socialism. 'The vitality of the Welsh language and the depth of national feeling is strikingly evident throughout these valleys', they wrote, the 'recrudescence of national feeling' manifesting itself in two forms: 'the commercial and the Celtic'. The commercial, as expressed by figures such as Henry Richard was a form of 'bastard nationalism' and was friendly to capitalism. On the other hand,

the Celtic feeling ... is that which causes 'grave disquiet' to the friends of 'law and order,' and which antagonises at every step the progress of Anglo-Saxon commercialism. In Wales it is opposition to tithes and mining royalties, and I

⁷⁸ *Commonweal*, 27 August 1887.

⁷⁹ For the Strike Committee see *Commonweal*, 20 November 1886; *Report of the Third Conference of the Socialist League, May 29th 1887*, Socialist League, London (1887), p. 8.

am glad to be able to add now, landlordism. In Ireland and Skye it is the land war. It has a trinity of tribunes in Davitt, Pan Jones and Macdonald. It harks back to the historical times when the Celtic tribes were free from the curse of landlordism; and whilst, of course, it would not revive the cruelties of those olden days, it yet clings to the old tongue that has no equivalents wherewith to give expression to the modern profit-grinding which has blighted the land of their fathers.⁸⁰

These comments are significant because they mark an early attempt by a native Welsh socialist (the writing is almost certainly Mainwaring's) to graft socialist feeling and ideology onto Welsh national identity. This, as we shall see, would become an important theme for successive generations of socialists in and from Wales.

The extent to which Mainwaring was successful in this task is, of course, highly questionable. Certainly, the Socialist League was not in a position to follow up its initial efforts in south Wales. By September 1887 it was issuing statements in *The Commonweal* urging that if the work done by Kitz and Mainwaring was to be of 'permanent benefit' speakers must be sent at once, but lamenting that funds for such work had run out.⁸¹ Within the next year, alas, the League was beginning to tear itself apart through internal differences, and made no further officially sponsored forays into Wales. The extent to which Kitz and Mainwaring's efforts helped to spread socialist ideas is, of course, extremely difficult to estimate. It is not unreasonable to assume, though, that at least some of the 5,000 leaflets they took with them, along with the copies of *The Commonweal* that they would have succeeded in distributing, found receptive homes. Evidence for this is extremely sparse, but one hint survives in the papers of the Welsh Mancunian socialist R.J. Derfel. J. Gwalia Lewis, a tailor and draper of Ynysybwl, wrote to Derfel in late 1888, having seen some of Derfel's writing on socialism in *Cymru Fydd*:

Yr wyf yn dyheu am wastadhau llawer iawn ar ddosbarthiadau cymdeithasol ac 'o fewn ychydig i fod' yn Socialist ... Yr wyf dros feddiannu yr oll weithfeydd cyhoeddus – Rheilffyrdd porthladdoedd, Dwfrweithiau,

⁸⁰ *Commonweal*, 3 September 1887.

⁸¹ *Commonweal*, 10 September 1887 & 17 September 1887.

nwyweithiau ac yn benaf oll Tir. Gwelais bamphletyn gan W. Morris a B. Bax ... Yr wyf wedi gweled rhai rhifynau o 'Commonweal' a 'To Day'.⁸²

Lewis ('ap Gwalia') seems to have been connected to both the Rhondda Miners' Association and the Aberdare Liberal Association. He also attended lectures organised by the Aberdare Nationalist Society, and shared with Derfel an interest in rationalism. This letter provides a tantalising piece of evidence suggesting that socialist ideas were being discussed in such circles in the wake of the League's campaign, and it is not entirely unreasonable to speculate that the copies of *Commonweal* and *Today* and the pamphlet by Morris and Bax may have come from the enormous sack that had so encumbered Kitz and Mainwaring on their journey up the Rhondda.

There were however strict limits to the influence of Kitz and Mainwaring's propaganda that are revealed in letters sent from south Wales to the Socialist League's head office in London during the summer and autumn of 1887. At the end of August John Rees of Dowlais, who had been present at the meeting in Merthyr wrote in generally sanguine terms. The message of 'the holidaymakers of your League' had, in his view, 'taken deep root in some of the listeners' hearts'. 'All the workers', he continued, 'endorse the opinion that we the toiling masses by all common sense and justice ought to be on a higher level than we now are'. There was however a reason why workers would not become actively involved in the socialist cause:

The fact of the matter to speak plain [is] men are afraid one of the other. I refer to tale-bearing and its consequences. I heartily wish better principles and better feelings could be instilled in them so that we could confide one in the other. I was sorry to find so many walking away without signing their names

⁸² NLW MS 23440D, Letters to R.J. Derfel, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. The letter quoted was written from Trecynon, Aberdare, and is undated, but is on the reverse side of notepaper from these two organisations. One of the sheets is a notice from the Aberdare Liberal Association dated 31 November 1888, thus providing more evidence suggesting the spread of socialist ideas within radical Liberal circles. ('I long for a much greater levelling of the social classes and I am close to being a socialist ... I am in favour of the public ownership of all the works – railways, ports, waterworks, gasworks, and above all else, the land. I saw a pamphlet by W. Morris and B. Bax. ... I have seen some issues of *Commonweal* and *To-day*').

that night in Merthyr ... as a matter of course, if I signed I thought I might be a marked man ...⁸³

More problems were reported in September by another correspondent, R. Gregory from Treforest, who had tried, without success, to arrange a meeting place for League activity. Significantly, he reported a local lack of the necessary oratorical talent for such a venture – or at least a lack of self confidence on the part of local would-be activists; ‘there are nobody here’, as he put it, ‘that think themselves capable of speaking on the subject’ [of socialism]. Worse still, it was even proving difficult to sell the *Commonweal*, again due to fear of the personal consequences of being identified as a socialist sympathiser:

I understand that Mr. Hughes Bookseller was going to sell them but I have been to him about it and he positively declines to have anything to do with them as he says that they would do harm to his business.⁸⁴

Any account of the spread of socialist ideas in Wales in this period must, then, be strictly tempered by recognition of the obvious limits of socialist influence. It is nevertheless safe to argue that socialism was by no means unheard of, at least in south Wales in the 1880s, and that the flow of socialist ideas, although we only have scant evidence for it, was already both reflecting and creating a cultural and ideological interplay that threw up a number of significant themes. Some of these are well illustrated by the experience of the final Marxist visitor of the 1880s to be discussed in this chapter.

The early Marxist groups focused their interest largely upon the industrial south of the country. Nevertheless, it was a member of the Socialist League, Haydn Sanders, who was responsible for the first socialist propagandist effort in north Wales to be recorded in print, when he took it upon himself to turn a holiday at Barmouth into a

⁸³ John Rees, 3 Alma Street Dowlais to Socialist League office, 28 August 1887. Item 2531, Socialist League Papers, Amsterdam. Quoted in Ken John, ‘Anti-Parliamentary Passage’, p. 204.

⁸⁴ R. Gregory, Graig yr Alma, Treforest, to Socialist League office, 26 September 1887. Item 1592, Socialist League Papers, Amsterdam. Quoted in Ken John, ‘Anti-Parliamentary Passage’, p. 205. John speculates that Gregory was Mainwaring’s brother in law. He also quotes another letter in the Socialist League correspondence from Mainwaring’s son Robert (23 October 1887) reporting similar difficulties in selling *Commonweal*.

socialist mission in late September 1887.⁸⁵ The son of a lock maker, Sanders was a native of Bloxwich in Staffordshire, and himself worked as a lock maker in Walsall. In 1887 he was in his mid twenties, and probably a fairly recent convert to socialism.⁸⁶ He was rambling in the Barmouth area, when, after visiting some local quarries, he ‘decided to hold a meeting that very evening in Barmouth, and lay before such as chanced to listen the views of a Socialist. So at half-past six [he] took up a stand on the quay at Barmouth and began the first address on Socialism ever delivered there’. Like Mainwaring in the south, Sanders perceived a natural affinity amongst the locals for socialist ideas. ‘It was soon evident’, he reported, ‘that however new the ideas of Socialism were to those present, there was much that was in accord with their natural feelings as regards the duty of one man to another; that they as much disapproved of the present system of society as I did ...’. The upshot of Sanders’ impromptu performance on Barmouth quay was a request from some of those present to hold an indoor lecture on the subject of ‘Christian Socialism’. He gladly agreed, and the minister and deacons of the local Congregational Church offered the use of their schoolroom for the lecture at no cost.

Before giving this lecture, though, Sanders delivered another piece of impromptu open-air oratory, which despite taking place in the rain, was ‘one of the most fervent meetings that ever I addressed or witnessed’. He also managed to convert a local shopkeeper and his brother to the ideals of socialism. The indoor lecture, moreover, was ‘thoroughly successful’: ‘[t]hat a complete revolution of the present system of society is absolutely necessary for the removal of existing evils was admitted by every one present’. Sanders also reported comments made by one of the audience, which are worth quoting in full:

‘Yes,’ said one, ‘if we would only be as enthusiastic and self-sacrificing for the establishment of Socialism as we are for our ordinary politics and religion, it could soon be brought about; and when brought about it would be practical application of all the best teachings believed in to-day.’ The same speaker also

⁸⁵ *Commonweal*, 22 October 1887. The earlier visits of Joynes and Hyndman were more investigative forays than active attempts to propagandise.

⁸⁶ He is recorded on the 1881 census as being born in 1861. By the 1891 census Sanders had married and moved to Rotherham in Yorkshire with his young family and was recorded as a trade union or guild secretary. It is not clear whether he came to Barmouth from Walsall or Rotherham. Whether he knew about Ruskin’s links with Barmouth and went there due to this influence is a matter for speculation.

pointed out to me that there is a great amount of Socialism carried out in the different religious bodies, and instanced the manner in which they clung together for the good of all, and the equality insisted upon.

Finally, Sanders observed that there was one great difficulty of propagandising in north Wales: while most of the inhabitants could understand spoken English, very few could understand the language in its written form.⁸⁷

It is impossible to see Sanders' visit to Barmouth as anything more than an isolated act of happenstance. Indeed, incursions by English socialist societies into north Wales before the turn of the century were extremely rare. Sanders' account of it must also be treated with the customary caution. As usual, his optimism that 'North Wales could soon be successfully organised' proved to be unfounded. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to disregard what is the only detailed account of early socialist activity in the region. Apart from its rarity value, Sanders' report is of interest for the insights it provides into the relationship between socialists and Welsh culture. Indeed, there are a number of portentous elements in it that, as we shall see, re-emerge as themes in the later history of socialism in Wales. The socialist belief that the Welsh were sympathetic by nature to socialist ideas has already been noted, and Sanders provides specific instances to support such a belief. The request to lecture on 'Christian Socialism' is also significant, and presages a long campaign to relate socialist and Christian ideas that was undertaken with a particular intensity in Wales. The fact that it was the local Congregationalist minister who 'cordially approved' of the idea of holding such a lecture in the local school room is also possibly significant. Congregationalists were arguably more sympathetic to socialist ideas than members of some of the other religious denominations, and the sect produced, in T.E. Nicholas, one of the most influential and outstanding Welsh socialists of the early twentieth century. The un-named minister who was amenable to the needs of an alien socialist was, perhaps, one of the first of his denomination to exhibit this trait with regard to modern Marxian socialism. The member of the audience who saw the activities of the chapels as inherently socialistic was also pre-empting arguments that would later be mobilised by Welsh socialists seeking to graft socialism onto their native culture.

⁸⁷ *Commonweal*, 22 October 1887.

Finally, of course, Sanders recognised the difficulties posed by the Welsh language for socialist propagandists. In so doing he was among the first of the modern socialists to identify what would become a matter of deep significance to Welsh socialists of the next generation. Indeed, Haydn Sanders' spontaneous one man socialist campaign in Barmouth in September 1887 raised most of the issues that would, within the next quarter of a century, become central to the attempt to reconcile socialism and Welsh culture.

Chapter 2

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

*Nid bywyd Cymru dawel, ac nid bywyd tawel, naturiol, gwlad, -
na thref gymedrol faint, - a gynhyrchodd Sosialiaeth, ond yn
hytrach bywyd y dinasoedd mawrion. Megir ef, fel y megir
pethau afiach eraill, lle y mae aneirif nifer o fodau dynol yn byw
bywyd annaturiol; lle mae tlodi, fel cyfoeth, yn ymdrybaeddu
mewn pethau anhygar; lle nad oes nwyfre ond caddug afiach.*¹

Such was the verdict of Edward Foulkes, a contributor from Llanberis to the nationalist *Geninen* in 1908. Part of the argument of this thesis is that the reality of the development of socialism in Wales was in fact more complex than this statement suggests. There is, nevertheless, a sense in which Foulkes was correct. When socialist organisations began to put down roots in Wales, during the early 1890s, they did so not in the slate quarries of Caernarfonshire, where H.M. Hyndman claimed to have detected secret societies ready to use the Welsh language in their pursuit of the class struggle, nor even initially in the burgeoning coal mining settlements of Glamorgan, through which Kitz and Mainwaring had hauled their enormous sack of socialist literature, but in the coastal towns and ports of south Wales. Indeed, the response to the call for the names of individuals who were interested in establishing an independent Labour Party, that was published in Joseph Burgess's *Workman's Times* in 1892, suggests several things about the nature and extent of socialism in Wales.² Firstly, that compared to the situation in the rest of Britain it was extremely weak. By the end of the year only twenty-five names had been sent from Wales - from a total of over 2,500.³ The way in which they were sent also suggests that the support they represented was structurally weak. Names came in from the industrial centres of northern England very often in large groups collected together, representing already

¹ Edward Foulkes, 'Sosialiaeth', *Y Geninen* (1908), pp. 21-25, p. 21. ('It is not the life of quiet Wales, and not the quiet natural life of the country nor the moderate sized town that generated socialism, but instead the life of the great cities. It is nurtured, as other unhealthy things are nurtured, where countless numbers of human beings live an un-natural life; where poverty, like wealth, wallows in things unlikeable; where there is no sky but an unhealthy gloom').

² *Workman's Times*, 30 April 1892.

³ *Workman's Times*, 14 May 1892 – 31 December 1892.

existing branches of socialist and independent labour organisations, whereas those from Wales appeared individually and sporadically, suggesting that sympathisers were relatively unorganised or even isolated. Despite this weakness, the data clearly suggests that socialist sympathies were strongest in urban south Wales. Of the initial twenty-five names, fifteen were from Cardiff, five from Cadoxton and Barry Dock, four from Newport and one from Llantrisant. Of course, this data is hardly scientific, its nature being dictated by the circulation patterns of the *Workman's Times* (although it is reasonable to assume that these to an extent reflected the distribution of interest in socialist and labour politics). It must also be recognised that, although often concomitant, an interest in independent labour representation and a knowledge of socialist ideology were not one and the same. Nevertheless, the *Workman's Times* lists clearly suggest the urban coastal settlements of south Wales as a starting point for an investigation of the early socialist movement in Wales.

The growth of socialism in these settlements during the 1890s represents a distinct phase in the history of socialism in Wales. During this period socialism ceased to be an ideology that was simply brought into Wales by external proselytes, and became a belief that was sustained by some level of domestic organisation and structure. Two main organisations were initially involved in this process, the Fabian Society and the SDF. This chapter will therefore examine the main theatres of influence of these two organisations. It will begin with a study of Fabian activity in Cardiff, and then discuss the role of the SDF across south Wales.

(i). Cardiff and Fabianism

Cardiff was certainly the most singular and, if size is taken as a measure, by far the most important of the communities in which socialists attempted to organise in the early stages of their movement in Wales. It was also a town with an ambiguous identity. The product of a spectacularly rapid growth from obscure origins during the nineteenth century, by 1871 Cardiff had become the largest town in Wales, and was without dispute the commercial centre of the Welsh industrial revolution - a supremacy reflected in the last decades of the nineteenth century by the adoption of its multiple soubriquets, the 'Welsh Metropolis', the 'Coal Metropolis', or the

‘Chicago of Wales’. By the late 1880s the town was rapidly developing a strong civic culture, built upon a sense of middle-class consciousness that had been developed through more than half a century of struggle with the once dominant Bute estate. By 1890, when the third Marquess of Bute was accommodated as the town’s Mayor, the struggle between Cardiff’s middle class and the Bute family had effectively been resolved, setting the scene for the entry – in true Marxist style - of a working class and socialist presence into the town’s social dynamic.⁴ The arrival of socialism in Cardiff, though, occurred within a specific geo-cultural context. Cardiff’s commercial success was built upon its unique geographical position, and resulted from its development, in stages throughout the nineteenth century, as a communications hub connecting industrial Wales with both England and the wider world. With London and its range of socialist societies only three hours away, and Bristol (where a vigorous socialist society had been established in 1885)⁵ even closer, Cardiff was a gateway through which socialist ideology could enter Wales. Kitz and Mainwaring may have been among the first socialists to use it, when they battled through the returning *eisteddfodwyr* to manhandle their sack of literature across the platforms of Central Station in 1887, but they were certainly not the last.

Indeed, by the 1890s many more individuals with socialist proclivities had disembarked at Cardiff Central, some to live in the town, and others to take part in what became during that decade increasingly frequent propaganda tours of south Wales. The town in which they arrived, moreover, hosted the greatest critical mass of concentrated cultural and intellectual activity in Wales, particularly among its growing middle class. In character, though - and directly as a result of Cardiff’s nodal position, transitory nature and diverse immigrant population – this culture was highly cosmopolitan. Cardiff may have been geographically situated in Wales, but it was ambivalent about its Welshness, which had been linguistically and culturally submerged in the Anglicising tide of its rapid urban growth. That is not to say that Welshness was absent from the town’s cultural fabric. Far from it, if Cardiff was a product of immigration this included immigration from within Wales. In 1891 12,492

⁴ Neil Evans, ‘The Welsh Victorian City: The Middle Class and Civic and National Consciousness in Cardiff, 1850-1914’, *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 12 (1984-5), pp. 350-387; Neil Evans, ‘Urbanisation, Elite Attitudes and Philanthropy: Cardiff, 1850-1914’, *International Review of Social History*, XXVII (1982), pp. 290-323.

⁵ Samson Bryher, *An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol*, Bristol Labour Weekly, Bristol (1929) (2 Vols.).

of Cardiff borough's 116,207 inhabitants (10.7%) were Welsh speakers. There were at least a dozen strong Welsh chapels, and a range of Welsh cultural institutions, most notably the Cardiff Cymrodorion Society, founded in 1885. Indeed, part of Cardiff's assertive middle class culture was the product of an aspirant Welsh middle class, epitomised by its leading figure, Edward Thomas (Cochfarf), in whose coffee tavern the Cymrodorion had been formed. A native of Betws, Maesteg, a monoglot Welsh speaker until he was 13, carpenter, coffee house owner and businessman, *eisteddfodwr*, antiquarian, Pan-Celticist, temperance advocate, Baptist and Liberal politician, Cochfarf exemplified the virtues and diversity of this Welsh middle class culture. Elected a town councillor in 1890, and ultimately to become Mayor of Cardiff (in 1902), he also represented its political accommodation.⁶ Indeed, Welshness - thanks partly to the conscious efforts of individuals like Cochfarf - was a part of Cardiff's cosmopolitanism, and this balance was to be reflected in the nature of the town's socialism, some of the representatives of which were on good terms with the man himself.

Another influence upon Cardiff's socialism in the 1890s was the occupational and social structure of the town. The economic dominance of commerce and transport had tended towards the creation of a fragmented working class.⁷ As a result, and despite the creation of the Cardiff Trades Council in 1883, the labour movement in the town was weak, and failed to develop any real momentum towards independent political action for the best part of another two decades.⁸ Consequently, Cardiff socialism tended to be dominated by the town's middle-class, a situation that was not entirely

⁶ J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Y Ddelwedd Gymreig Ddinesig yng Nghaerdydd c. 1885-1939', in Hywel Teifi Edwards (ed.), *Merthyr a Thaf*, Gomer, Llandysul (2001), pp. 325-363; Owen John Thomas, 'The Welsh Language in Cardiff c. 1800-1914', in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1998), pp. 181-201; Gwynedd Pierce, 'The Welsh Connection', in Gwyn Jones & Michael Quinn (eds.), *Fountains of Praise: University College, Cardiff 1883-1983*, University College Cardiff, Cardiff (1983), pp. 25-40; J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Edward Thomas (Cochfarf): Dinesydd, Dyngarwr a Gwladgarwr', *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru* (1987), pp. 26-45.

⁷ Martin Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff 1870-1914*, Leicester University Press, Leicester (1977), p. 181.

⁸ Martin Daunton, *Coal Metropolis*, pp. 178-214; M.J. Daunton, 'Aspects of the Social and Economic Structure of Cardiff 1870-1914', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Canterbury (1974), pp. 391-477 includes more detail; Neil Evans, 'Cardiff's Labour Tradition', *Llafur*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (1985), pp. 77-90 offers a slightly more sanguine view and takes the history of Cardiff trade unionism beyond the Great War; Thomas John McCarry, 'Labour and Society in Swansea, 1887-1918', PhD, Swansea (1986), p. 379 contrasts the situation in Swansea with 'the feeble image of the movement in Cardiff' in the early 1900s.

characteristic of the socialist movement across the rest of south Wales. Care, however, must be taken in advancing this argument too far, as by the end of the 1880s there were signs of activity among Cardiff's working class that would at least create a context for the emergence of socialism in the town. One of these was the election, with Liberal support, of John Jenkins, President of both the Shipwright's Society and the Trades Council, to the Grangetown ward of the town council in 1890, as 'the advocate of the claims of the labouring classes to secure themselves adequate representation, and to support their efforts at combination'.⁹ More challenging to existing social relations, however, was the upsurge of trade unionism among previously unorganised workers in Cardiff, and indeed across south Wales as a whole, at the turn of the decade.¹⁰ Far from indicating a level of social quiescence this marked the foundation of Cardiff as, in the words of the Webbs, 'a regular cockpit for the trades union struggles of all South Wales'.¹¹

This outbreak of 'new unionism' had several important implications of specific relevance to the themes under discussion here. Firstly, as represented by national (UK) figures such as Tom Mann, John Burns and Ben Tillett - all of whom visited Wales frequently in this period - it was in itself an influence which both created and confirmed links between Wales and the other great commercial and industrial centres of Britain, and was thus part of the greater interplay central to this thesis. As John Williams noted, the most important feature of new unions was their national (UK) affiliation, which made them 'a potent source of Anglicisation'.¹² Indeed, the supposed externality of the unions' leaders was used, rather hypocritically, as an argument against them by their opponents in Cardiff, who contrasted the 'rabid nonsense these Londoners are talking with the calm, deliberate, measured utterances' of the Welsh trade unionists, 'Welshmen born and bred', such as Mabon and the miners' agent David Morgan (Dai o'r Nant).¹³ The view that Cardiff workers were

⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 4 March 1890.

¹⁰ L.J. Williams, 'The New Unionism in Wales, 1889-92', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1963), pp. 413-429; Philip J. Leng, *The Welsh Dockers*, G.W.&A. Hesketh, Ormskirk (1981), pp. 13-32; Martin Daunton, 'The Cardiff Coal Trimmers Union, 1888-1914', *Llafur*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1978), pp. 10-23; Martin Daunton, 'Inter-Union Rivalries on the Waterfront: Cardiff, 1888-1914', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1977), pp. 350-378.

¹¹ Quoted by Martin Daunton, 'Coal to Capital: Cardiff Since 1839', in Prys Morgan (ed.), *Glamorgan County History*, Vol. 6 (1988), pp. 203-224, p. 221.

¹² L.J. Williams, 'The New Unionism in Wales', p. 428.

¹³ *Western Mail*, 12 March 1891.

being manipulated by London influences, or that the town's industrial relations were entirely heterogenous, is, in fact, an over-simplification of what was in reality a two way process, with a significant part of the initiative towards general unionism coming from within the region itself.¹⁴ In any case, the 'new' or 'general' unionism that emerged at the end of the 1880s, which tended to recruit workers wherever and of whatever type it could find, held a more tenuous relationship to place than the older craft based unions, which tended to be more deeply rooted in more static communities.¹⁵ This was a tendency of long-term significance for south Wales, notwithstanding the reverses suffered by the new unions in the 1890s. It meant that the region's trade unionists were being drawn into an organisational and psychological relationship with a greater whole that stretched both along the rail lines to London and across the Bristol Channel, and which spoke the international language of trade unionism, both metaphorically and literally.

If the relationship of the new unionism to the local was slightly abstruse, so too was its relationship to the universal, as represented by socialism. Alarmed observers may have feared the 'communistic tendency' of the unions, which threatened to 'sweep away all those relations between capital and labour, which has done so much to help on England's greatness',¹⁶ but the reality was that the union's leaders, although almost all were socialists, were aware that socialism was a secondary matter to the growth of their unions. Just as the London dockers had welcomed the involvement of their socialist leaders 'not because of their Socialism, but in spite of it',¹⁷ so too were the three thousand Cardiff dockers that had been unionised by 1891 motivated not by socialistic ideas, but by the desire to improve their living standards. This did not mean that socialism was absent from the activism associated with the new unionism in Cardiff, rather it was sublimated. Ben Tillett, in particular, succeeded in weaving a socialist message into his speeches while avoiding the explicit mention of socialism. In February 1891, for instance he explained at length to a strike meeting at the Colonial Hall why they could not expect anything from a parliament of capitalists and

¹⁴ Deian Hopkin and John Williams, 'New Light on the New Unionism in Wales, 1889-1912', *Llafur*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1986), pp. 67-79.

¹⁵ Joe England, 'Notes on a Neglected Topic: General Unionism in Wales', *Llafur*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2004), pp. 45-58, pp. 46-7.

¹⁶ *Cardiff Argus*, 7 December 1889.

¹⁷ H.H. Champion, 'The Great Dock Strike', *Universal Review*, Vol. V, No. 18 (1890), pp. 157-178, p. 163.

landlords, but without once using the word socialism.¹⁸ Likewise, at the end of July he addressed a mass meeting of striking dockers and railwaymen at Park Hall, to which he was escorted at the head of a procession with a brass band. The meeting opened with the singing of Harry Salt's explicitly socialist 'Hark the Battle Cry is Ringing' to the tune of 'Men of Harlech', and Tillett went on to 'tell the respectables – the capitalists – that they would have to look to labour organised for their security in the future', and that if they did not comply with the workers' demands 'the volcano would burst, and the wrath pent up for centuries would find a terrible outlet, and teach those who had scorned and spurned the working men ... a bitter lesson that would last for centuries'.¹⁹ Tillett may not have mentioned the word socialism, but the revolutionary implications of his provocative words were quite clear, and it was in this way that the new unionism of the turn of the decade provided a medium for the spread of socialist ideas in Cardiff.

The new unionism was, however, only one medium through which socialist ideas were spreading in late 1880s and early 1890s Cardiff. Indeed, a quite different context was offered by the cultural and intellectual activities organised by the town's middle class. This was fed to some extent by the press, which frequently reported the statements and activities of British and European socialists, enabling readers to absorb socialism passively over their breakfast tables. Increasingly though, through the late 1880s, the engagement of Cardiff's middle class with socialism became more active. It will be remembered that when the SDF's John Fielding passed through the town in March 1887 there was only one 'avowed socialist' there, a 'Comrade Parr'.²⁰ Just over a year later Parr had lost his unique status, and been joined by a 'Comrade Meade', who had also begun to present papers on socialism to those who would listen.²¹ Neither was the discussion of socialism wholly a fringe activity, and under certain circumstances it could be pursued with intellectual rigour and respectability. The new University College of South Wales offered one forum for this. In January 1888 Professor Sorley, its newly appointed Professor of Logic and Philosophy, addressed its Literary and Debating Society on socialism, with Professor Viriamu

¹⁸ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 28 February 1891.

¹⁹ *Western Mail*, 1 August 1891.

²⁰ *Justice*, 26 March 1887.

²¹ *Justice*, 23 June 1888.

Jones in the chair.²² The town's religious and political organisations offered further scope, which extended the debate on socialism to the more affluent and aspirational elements of the working class. In April 1889 the Cardiff Free Methodist Improvement Class heard a paper on 'The Higher Socialism' read by the Reverend William Bailey, of Cogan Pill, Penarth, and considered it interesting enough to publish in pamphlet form.²³ Later in the same year Reverend W. Tuckwell, the 'Radical Parson' of Stockwell, County Durham, addressed a meeting in Park Hall, organised by the Cardiff Liberal Workmen's Institute, on 'Christian Socialism'. His extensive programme included an expansion of local government, land nationalisation, industrial and economic co-operation and a readjustment of taxation, and was greeted by a unanimous motion expressing 'cordial acceptance of his teaching'.²⁴ Socialist texts were also being discussed within the town's literary circles. In 1890 a paper on Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was read by a Mr. Turner to a well attended meeting of the Literary Society at the Presbyterian Schoolroom in Windsor Place. In this instance, however, the lecturer was less positive about the collectivist values it espoused: 'He shewed that the scheme of Mr. Bellamy was pure communism; but in the past failure had been the result of such plans, and from experience, and from logic, it could not succeed'.²⁵ Despite such views, it is clear that by the turn of the decade, against the background of the new unionism, socialist ideology was becoming a familiar part of Cardiff's intellectual life. This process was certainly mediated by the town's middle class, but it by no means excluded the working class. At one socialist lecture in 1890, for example, '[a]n interesting series of questions followed, with some slight debate; and a striking feature of this phase was the clear grasp that some of the working men present had got of the proposals made – fallacious and otherwise'.²⁶

²² *Western Mail*, 20 February 1888: 'the professor admitted the reasonableness of the complaints against the present state of affairs, and said that he should agree with Marx as to the necessity for adopting Socialism if he thought that the evils could not be cured in any other way, but he believed that by judicious legislation and combination they could be alleviated, as, indeed, they had already been to a great extent'.

²³ Rev. William Bailey, *The Higher Socialism: A Paper Read at the Cardiff Free Methodist Improvement Class, April 1889*, W. Chapple, Cardiff (1889).

²⁴ *Western Mail*, 24 October 1889.

²⁵ *Cardiff Argus*, 13 December 1890.

²⁶ *Cardiff Argus*, 20 December 1890.

The leading figure in this effort to propagate socialism in late 1880s Cardiff was the ‘Comrade Parr’ referred to by John Fielding in 1887, otherwise known as Dr. Arthur Charles Edward Parr, of 189 Richmond Road. Parr was a medical doctor, born in Wimborne, Dorset, in 1863 of Irish parentage, who had lived in London in the early 1880s and obtained his medical degree from King’s College in 1885.²⁷ He probably came to Cardiff soon afterwards, and quickly became involved in the political and intellectual life of the town. Apart from his unsuccessful efforts to form an SDF branch in 1887,²⁸ Parr led an intellectually energetic existence, an examination of which sheds light on the origins of Cardiff socialism. He gave papers on socialism to various Cardiff audiences in the late 1880s. In December 1888, for example, he read a paper on the subject at the Roath Church Institute.²⁹ It was however on the advanced wing of Cardiff Liberalism that Parr primarily operated in the 1880s, and in this respect he had much in common with the advanced Swansea Liberals, represented by C.H. Perkins.³⁰ Parr was a member of the Cardiff Junior Liberal Association, to whom he lectured in July 1888 on ‘Social Problems and How to Meet Them’, advocating ‘the control by the workers of the land and capital of the country, in short, the establishment of Social Democracy’. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, ‘an animated discussion followed’.³¹ In March of the following year he was again active within the Junior Liberals, presiding over a meeting at which Henry George made his second appearance in Cardiff. Parr’s beliefs clearly went further than George’s, and he stated from the chair that ‘the Cardiff Junior Liberal Association was one of aggressive reform. That being so, they demanded the land for the people’, and taxation of land values, he argued, was ‘the first step towards that end’.³² In calling for the ‘land for the people’, Parr was tapping into a core element of Welsh radicalism, and along with

²⁷ The 1881 Census records him as a ‘student of medicine’, living with his father, a merchant, a brother and two servants, in Lambeth. He received his medical certificate in March 1885, *British Medical Journal*, 14 March 1885, p. 572.

²⁸ *Justice*, 26 March 1887.

²⁹ *Justice*, 15 December 1888.

³⁰ See above p. 31.

³¹ *Justice*, 21 July 1888. The name of the lecturer is recorded as E.C. Paw, although this was almost certainly Parr. The Cardiff Junior Liberal Association was formed in 1886, and represented a more active and progressive wing of Cardiff Liberalism than the established ‘Liberal 300’, Martin Daunton, ‘Aspects of the Social and Economic Structure of Cardiff’, p. 394. For Cardiff Liberalism more generally a useful potted history is provided in Henry Allgood, *Cardiff Liberal Association: Souvenir of the Cardiff Free Trade Bazaar, October 8, 9 & 10 1912*, Cardiff Central Library.

³² *Western Mail*, 27 March 1889.

his position on the advanced wing of radical Liberalism, it goes some way to defining the origins of socialism in Wales (as already demonstrated in chapter one).³³

So too does another sphere of Parr's activities in the 1880s, namely his involvement in the Cardiff Society for the Impartial Discussion of Political and Other Questions.³⁴ In November 1889, as Vice President, he addressed the society on 'Is It Advantageous in Business to be a Rogue?', into which he doubtless worked a socialist message.³⁵ This potentially awkward topic didn't seem to damage his popularity, as by 1890 he had become President of the society.³⁶ The 'Cardiff Impartial' hosted a number of left wing speakers in the 1880s and 90s, the most famous of whom was the exiled Russian revolutionary – and *cause célèbre* among British socialists - Sergius Stepniak,³⁷ and the debating society culture that it represented was an important nurturing ground for socialist ideas and arguments across Wales in this period and beyond. Parr's contributions to it, and his frequent interventions into other areas of the town's intellectual life, were certainly exceptional and politically in advance of most of his contemporaries, and he was doubtless seen as a rather eccentric young man by many in the town. He must nevertheless be considered as the pioneer of socialism in Cardiff. Middle class and cosmopolitan, he was in many respects typical of those drawn to socialism in many British cities the 1880s. He acted as a yeast in the social and intellectual life of Cardiff, often to be seen standing in the Hayes, addressing meetings in 'a delicious Dublin brogue, wearing a top hat, with a stethoscope sticking out of his breast-pocket, and flourishing an immaculate umbrella', and calling upon those who would listen 'to emulate our Paris comrades and storm the barricades'.³⁸

When, at the end of 1890, Parr and other socialist sympathisers combined to create a discrete socialist organisation in Cardiff, though, they did not create a barricade-storming, revolutionary cell. Instead, they turned to Fabianism. Founded in London at

³³ Parr continued to offer support to both advanced Liberalism and George's land reform ideas into the 1890s. In 1892, for instance, he was present at a meeting in support of the Liberal municipal candidate Morgan Morgan, at which he argued for the Georgeite policy of taxation of land values, *Western Mail*, 26 March 1892.

³⁴ The 'Cardiff Impartial' was founded in 1886 and met at various venues in Cardiff, including the Cymrodorion Hall. A brief history is recorded in a leaflet printed on its closure in 1906. Box 2, Cochfarf Papers, Cardiff Central Library.

³⁵ *Western Mail*, 19 November 1889.

³⁶ *Western Mail*, 10 December 1890.

³⁷ *Western Mail*, 17 November 1891.

³⁸ Sam Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 29. This description is of Parr speaking in the early 1890s.

the beginning of 1884, the Fabian Society provided an alternative to the socialism of the SDF and Socialist League. During the 1880s Fabian doctrine embraced many shades of opinion, ranging from anarchism to Marxism, although by the end of the decade it was becoming more clearly defined, a process marked by the publication in 1889 of the influential *Fabian Essays in Socialism*. In essence, what this offered was an indigenous British approach to socialism, which although by no means free of Marxian influence drew upon the work of British social and economic thinkers, such as Stanley Jevons, John Stuart Mill and David Ricardo. This ideology replaced the Marxist emphasis on surplus value with the more flexible concepts of ‘rent’ and ‘unearned increment’, and projected the transition to socialism as the outcome of a process of reasoned reform, logic and evolution, rather than class struggle.³⁹ The roots of Fabianism were firmly planted in Hampstead and in many respects the society was a direct product of London cosmopolitanism, although the idea that Fabians were not interested in the development of ‘the provinces’ is to some extent inaccurate. Indeed, the Fabian Society initiated a number of attempts to establish provincial branches early in its history,⁴⁰ and, despite its quintessential Englishness, also exhibited an interest in Wales, which even extended to the translation of some of its influential *Tracts* into Welsh.⁴¹ At the end of 1890, moreover, this interest was made manifest when they dispatched one of their most prominent speakers to the country’s principal town, to address the first public meeting of the newly formed Cardiff Fabian Socialist Society.

This meeting, held at the Cymrodorion Hall on 10 December, was presided over by Dr. Parr and featured Hubert Bland, one of the founders of the Fabian Society and a contributor to *The Fabian Essays*, who addressed a ‘very good and attentive

³⁹ Norman & Jeanne Mackenzie, *The First Fabians* Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London (1977); A.M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics* (Cambridge, 1962); Edward Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, E.P. Dutton & Co., New York (1916); Willard Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism: Men and Ideas in the Formation of Fabian Socialist Doctrines, 1881-1889*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London (1975); Mark Bevir, ‘The Marxism of George Bernard Shaw, 1883-1889’, *History of Political Thought*, 13 (1992), pp. 299-318; Mark Bevir, ‘Fabianism and the Theory of Rent’, *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 10 (1989), pp. 313-27; Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, pp. 106-139.

⁴⁰ Arguably the most important of these was the ‘Lancashire campaign’ of the early 1890s, see Edward Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, pp. 95-98. This had an indirect impact upon Wales, through the influence it had upon the Welsh community of the north-west of England, most notably on the Mancunian Welshman, Robert Jones Derfel.

⁴¹ The first of these, *Why Are The Many Poor?*, originally published in 1884, was translated and published in 1892 as *Paham Mae y Lluaws yn Dlawd*.

audience' on 'What Socialism Is'.⁴² His message was explicitly gradualist, he rejected the class war, and his intellectual touchstones were drawn from the canon of English political economy, side-stepping Marx, but including references to John Stuart Mill and Ricardo. Indeed, one commentator who attended his lecture saw Bland less as a socialist than an advanced radical.⁴³ The most explicitly socialist ideas in his lecture were, in fact, international in their origins and derived not from British sources, but from the Dutch born American, Laurence Gronlund, author of *The Co-operative Commonwealth*.⁴⁴ This mix of influences provides a good illustration of the diverse nature of the socialist ideas entering Wales at the beginning of the 1890s, and the circuitous routes through which they came. Significantly, though, Bland's ideas were communicated from within specifically English frames of reference. Making no concession to the fact that he was in Wales, his speech was wholly geared to an English audience. His arguments were supported exclusively with reference to English statistics, and his Gronlundian demonstration of the way in which the national cake was divided referred explicitly to the English national cake. Socialists, he told his audience, 'wanted to point out the monopolies to the English working men, and get them to return members to the House of Commons pledged to attack them in every direction'. The fact that this statement was received with applause suggests, moreover, that Bland's audience was not unduly uncomfortable with his frames of reference and with being perceived as representing 'the English working men'.

Indeed, a study of the activities of the Cardiff Fabian Socialist Society in the early 1890s might suggest that it was to some extent a clone of other urban British socialist

⁴² The account of the meeting is based upon *Western Mail*, 11 December 1890. Bland wrote the concluding essay to the *Fabian Essays*, entitled 'The Outlook'. Also see interview with Hubert Bland, *Western Mail*, 12 December 1890.

⁴³ 'Cheviot', in *Cardiff Argus*, 20 December & 27 December 1890. Bland's lecture prompted Cheviot to write a series of articles examining socialism in the *Argus*, 20 December 1890 to 2 February 1891.

⁴⁴ Laurence Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth in its Outlines: An Exposition of Modern Socialism*, Lee & Shepard, Boston (1884) went through numerous editions before the end of the century, and along with Gronlund's journalism, was an important influence upon British socialists. A good example of Gronlund's journalism, entitled 'The Work Before Us', which summarises his rather eclectic mix of evolutionary and revolutionary views is to be found in *Commonweal*, July 1885. The diffusion of Gronlund's views, of which the meeting at Cardiff was part, might be seen as part of a process through which European ideas were exported to America and then found their way back to Britain, in this case refracted through the mind of a talented propagandist. Gronlund explicitly stated that his object was 'to lead socialism into the main current of English thought' (*The Co-operative Commonwealth*, p. x). His ideas, however, were derivative, as Edward Aveling commented in a review of the book in *Commonweal*, September 1885, 'of originality of idea there is almost nothing; of originality of method there is much'.

societies of the period. Not only did it provide a route through which the influence of a generic British socialism could enter Wales, but the experience of Cardiff socialists was directly related to that of socialists elsewhere by their necessary involvement in a range of issues that were universal to the late nineteenth century socialist movement. Among these was the campaign for free speech. This had been a hard fought struggle in many parts of Britain, and Cardiff socialists shared in the experience when confronting a town council ban on public meetings in parks.⁴⁵ After a brief agitation, however (and despite the opposition of at least one Cardiff resident who complained about the indiscriminate use of parks by ‘huge crowds of discontented workmen, with the usual concomitants of brass bands, waving banners, and blustering leaders’), the society succeeded in persuading the council to overturn the ban.⁴⁶ With this victory under their belt, the Cardiff Fabians, had become, by the spring of 1892, an energetic element in the life of the town, and organised a lively programme, as reported by an enthusiastic correspondent to the *Workman’s Times*:

A more energetic body could not exist than the Cardiff Fabian Socialist Society. They are everywhere. On the Trades Council, on the Board of Guardians, and, so I’m told, even on the Cardiff County Council. If ever energy and enthusiasm, coupled with hard work, deserved to be rewarded with success, then our Cardiff Fabians ought to get it. To say their programme is popular would not be sufficient. It is more than popular. It is accepted by the majority of the workers, and accepted because it offers the only solution of all the social problems by which we are surrounded.⁴⁷

The core activity of this effort, at least initially, was educational, namely the organisation of lectures. As we have seen, the launch of the society was combined with a high profile public lecture from a prominent London socialist, and this was followed, a year later, by a sustained series of public lectures, each bringing to Cardiff a prominent figure from the wider socialist movement. During 1892, lecturers included Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Hugh Holmes Gore, W.S. De Mattos,

⁴⁵ *Western Mail*, 27 February 1892.

⁴⁶ *Western Mail*, 2 March 1892.

⁴⁷ *Workman’s Times*, 21 May 1892.

Katherine Conway and Sidney Webb – all based in either London or Bristol.⁴⁸ In this way, the Cardiff activists initiated the importation of the latest arguments and debates within the British socialist movement into the intellectual life of their town.

In the early 1890s one main focus of such debates was political strategy, and the Fabian lecture programme played a role in calibrating the strategy and tactics of Cardiff socialists with those of the wider British movement. Primarily, this involved the confirmation and ascendancy of the gradualist, non-violent political strategy of the Fabians at the expense of the more militant SDF. Thus Katherine Conway explained to readers of the *South Wales Daily News*, in the wake of her lecture in March 1892, that the ‘Social Democratic Federation have always prided themselves on having nothing to do with the political machinery of the country, and by so doing have failed to make use of much sincere enthusiasm. We abhor the idea of physical force in effecting the reformation for which we are working’. Rather, she argued, ‘the great need is national organisation’.⁴⁹ As another correspondent put it, ‘[f]rom ethical cloudland the local Fabians have descended to stern reality’.⁵⁰ In so doing they were reflecting a wider strategic development within British socialism that was to have profound long-term implications, culminating in the rise of the Independent Labour Party. On a local level this necessitated involvement with established political and industrial configurations, comprising the radical and trade union movements, and early 1890s Cardiff provided the first Welsh experiment to this end. The main vehicle for this initiative was the Cardiff Progressive Labour League, founded in the autumn of 1892 as a collaborative endeavour of the Trades Council and the Fabian Socialist Society. The League, whose programme declared it open to all ‘agreeing to give labour a primary position in their politics’,⁵¹ acted as a point of contact between not just the socialists and the trade unionists, but also between advocates of labour politics in Cardiff and the wider British movement. This was exemplified in the person of its first chairman, Richard Davis, a founding member, and later President,

⁴⁸ *South Wales Daily News*, 5 May 1892; Fabian Society Archive, COLL MISC 375, Reports and Cuttings of Local Fabian Societies, Volume 1, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London, contains a selection of posters for the meetings.

⁴⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 12 March 1892.

⁵⁰ *South Wales Daily News*, 5 May 1892.

⁵¹ Quoted in Martin Daunton, ‘Aspects of the Social and Economic Structure of Cardiff’, p. 413; The League’s programme was published in *South Wales Daily News*, 6 October 1892.

of the National Union of Shop Assistants, established in Birmingham in 1891, and as such a representative of the new unionism at both a local and national (UK) level.⁵²

Under Davis's chairmanship the League contested 6 seats at the 1892 municipal elections, winning one of them and amassing a total of 2,296 votes,⁵³ and throughout the early 1890s the organisation met regularly at the Central Coffee Tavern, St. Mary's Street, orchestrating a sustained agitation on a range of issues. These included provision of relief work for the unemployed,⁵⁴ opposition to the creation of labour exchanges,⁵⁵ tramway municipalisation,⁵⁶ and the eight hour day for municipal employees.⁵⁷ In this sense, the Cardiff Progressive Labour League may be seen as a model of pragmatic municipal politics of the type that was being advocated by numerous socialist contemporaries, most notably the Progressives on the London County Council, whose programme it closely and consciously mirrored. It represented, albeit briefly, a fruitful meeting point for the cosmopolitan Cardiff socialists and the town's trade unionists. Socialists, including Dr. Parr, held the chairmanship at various points in the League's existence,⁵⁸ and were also active in the presentation of motions to the League's meetings.⁵⁹ On the trade union side, craft unionists and Lib-Labs such as John Jenkins of the Shipwrights sat alongside more socialistic new unionists such as the Coal Trimmer's leader John Chappell and Richard Davis.⁶⁰ In this way the League's meetings acted as a forum in which socialist ideas could be discussed, and via which they gradually became part of the consciousness of the representatives of the Cardiff working class.

The League's existence was, however, by no means unproblematic. In the first instance, it was difficult for the socialists in the League to mark out a position which made it distinct from Cardiff Liberalism, which was beginning to include a range of

⁵² P.C. Hoffman, *They Also Serve: The Story of the Shop Worker*, Porcupine Press, London (1949), p. 2.; *Western Mail*, 3 November & 6 November 1892.

⁵³ *Western Mail*, 3 November 1892.

⁵⁴ *Western Mail*, 6 November 1892, 23 November 1892 & 6 December 1892.

⁵⁵ *Western Mail*, 27 April 1893. The League believed the exchanges would 'manufacture blacklegs'.

⁵⁶ *Western Mail*, 6 October 1893.

⁵⁷ *Western Mail*, 29 March 1894.

⁵⁸ *Western Mail*, 9 June 1893 & 29 March 1894.

⁵⁹ *Western Mail*, 27 April 1893.

⁶⁰ *South Wales Labour Times*, 11 March 1893 & 1 April 1893. Chappell stated at the 1892 Labour Day demonstrations in Cardiff that he spoke as 'a Socialist and a Trade Unionist', *South Wales Daily News*, 3 May 1892.

socialistic measures in its own municipal programme, including tramway municipalisation, improved working class housing, provision of work for the unemployed and the enforcement of a minimum wage in public works.⁶¹ More than this, the relationship between the socialists and trade unionists was sometimes strained. At least one trade unionist publicly accused ‘Dr. Parr’s little Socialist society’ of being faddists and anarchists,⁶² and there was also tension over the use of the socialists’ speaking platform in the Hayes. In 1892, for example, it was publicly alleged that a socialist had denied a trade unionist the opportunity to speak about the Cardiff Masons’ strike. Instead of allowing the unionist to use the platform, it was claimed, the socialist had pushed him aside and ‘started the windpumps on things in general’.⁶³ Such incidents were symptomatic of a general inarticulation between socialist aspirations and more practical trade union concerns, that was a common feature of the relationship between socialists and trade unionists across Britain in this period, and as a national Independent Labour Party emerged after 1893 they were pushed to their limits. The socialists, most of whom were now gravitating away from Fabianism towards the ILP, increasingly demanded that the League should be affiliated to the latter body,⁶⁴ whereas the majority of the trade unions were reluctant to break their ties to Liberalism. This ultimately resulted in the demise of the League,⁶⁵ and marked the end of a distinct period in the development of Cardiff socialism. Although ultimately a failure, the experiment of the Progressive Labour League was a sign that Cardiff was following a similar political pattern to some of the other urban centres of Britain. In this, the role of the town’s socialists in aspiring to emulate the example the London Fabians was pivotal, and the League must be viewed as a step in pulling Wales into the wider web of socialist politics.

If the Progressive Labour League catered for the temporal aspirations of the socialist and labour movement in early 1890s Cardiff, its role was matched on a spiritual level by the Cardiff Labour Church, which was inaugurated at a meeting in St. John’s Hall at the end of January 1893.⁶⁶ Like the Fabian Socialist Society, the Labour Church

⁶¹ Cardiff Liberal Association, Liberal and Progressive Programme Leaflets in Cochfarf Papers, Box 2, Cardiff Central Library.

⁶² *Western Mail*, 26 August, 6 September & 15 September 1892.

⁶³ *Western Mail*, 23 September 1892.

⁶⁴ *Labour Leader*, 5 May 1894.

⁶⁵ *Western Mail*, 7 February 1895.

⁶⁶ *Western Mail*, 30 January 1893.

must be viewed within the context of the development of a wider movement. Founded in Manchester in October 1891, by John Trevor, a former Unitarian minister from Liverpool, the Labour Church Movement was a response to the failure of existing religious organisations to accommodate labourist and socialist aspirations, and to recognise sufficiently the influence of economics upon human moral behaviour.⁶⁷ As one of its Cardiff members explained, '[t]he principle upon which the Labour Church works, is, that the two great forming agencies, religion and economics, are inextricably mingled, each reacts upon the other, and no permanent advance will ever be made without the simultaneous progression of these two forces'.⁶⁸ The movement's centre of gravity was the north of England, and it grew rapidly in the early 1890s, reaching a high point of 50 churches in 1895, but declining thereafter.⁶⁹ The establishment of Cardiff Labour Church was, therefore, an expression of a national (UK) movement in its ascendancy, which was, in geographical terms, extended to its fullest reach. As with other socialistic activities in Cardiff this involved a practical and intellectual dialogue between local socialists and representatives of the wider movement, a characteristic reflected, as had been the case with the launch of the Fabian Socialist Society, by the invitation of a prominent London socialist to launch the church, in this case H. Halliday Sparling, who spoke on 'The Modern Samson'.⁷⁰

During the spring and summer of 1893, and also through 1894, the Labour Church met regularly at St. John's Hall, as well as organising outdoor meetings at which a range of local activists spoke, Dr. Parr and Richard Davis among them.⁷¹ One of the church's central problems, however, sheds light upon an important dynamic in the growth of socialism in south Wales in this period, namely the problem of developing enough local talent to establish an autonomous local movement. The efforts of local activists alone did not raise enough interest to achieve large or regularly returning

⁶⁷ Kenneth Inglis, 'The Labour Church Movement', *International Review of Social History*, 3 (1958), pp. 445-460; Stanley Pierson, 'John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement in England, 1891-1900', *Church History*, 29 (1960), pp. 463-478; Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement, 1891-1902', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (April 1999), pp. 217-245.

⁶⁸ *South Wales Labour Times*, 4 March 1893.

⁶⁹ Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', p. 234.

⁷⁰ *Western Mail*, 30 January 1893. An Irishman from Connemara, Halliday Sparling was a former member of the Socialist League, and William Morris's son in law, who by the early 1890s had gravitated towards Fabianism, Florence Boos (ed.), *William Morris's Socialist Diary*, pp. 71-72.

⁷¹ *Labour Prophet*, May, June & July 1893 & May 1894.

audiences. ‘We shall have to get speakers from strange places to do any permanent good, as folk get used to faces, and often fancy they hear the same humdrum story’, commented E.T. Robinson, the church secretary, in the summer of 1893.⁷²

Consequently, the church organisers looked primarily to Bristol to supplement the local oratorical talent, and the city supplied them with a significant number of visiting speakers, the most prominent of whom was Enid Stacy.⁷³ The church also attracted speakers from further afield, among whom were Ben Tillett,⁷⁴ the Manchester-based Fred Brocklehurst⁷⁵ and Keir Hardie.⁷⁶ In providing this mix of speakers – local, regional (South Wales and Western England) and (British) national – the Labour Church in Cardiff may be seen as an important agent in the integration of the fledgling south Wales socialist movement into the wider British movement. Indeed, Cardiff’s orientation was quite pronounced. There is precious little evidence of interaction with socialists in its own hinterland of the south Wales valleys, which was at this point largely undeveloped from a socialist point of view. A Comrade [John] Powell of Abertillery visited and spoke in July 1894,⁷⁷ but apart from this, Cardiff looked east for socialist inspiration. This is not to say that the church did not create links between socialists and Welsh trade unionists. The miners’ leader William Brace, for example, spoke there several times during 1893 and 1894.⁷⁸ In April 1894,

⁷² *Labour Prophet*, June 1893.

⁷³ Stacy was a rising star of the socialist movement, and her involvement with Cardiff Labour Church marked the beginning of a longer relationship with the socialist movement in south Wales, which was only cut short by her untimely death in 1903. Although she was a product of the socialist movement in Britsol, in 1893 she moved to the Starnthwaite unemployed colony near Kendal. June Hannam, ‘Stacy, Enid (1868–1903)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2007 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51602>, accessed 26 July 2011]. Other speakers at Cardiff Labour Church included Enid’s younger brother Paul Stacy, and Comrades Knight, Creese and Weaver, all of whom visited on more than one occasion. *Labour Prophet*, May, October, November & December 1893 & April 1894.

⁷⁴ Tillett, of course, was born in Bristol and maintained links to the city despite being based in London from the early 1890s onwards, Jonathan Schmeer, *Ben Tillett: Portrait of a Labour Leader*, Croom Helm, London & Canberra (1982). On 13 August 1893 Tillett lectured ‘to a very large meeting’ at Cardiff Labour Church, *Labour Prophet*, October 1893. He returned again in early 1894 to speak in the Colonial Hall, *Labour Prophet*, January 1894. He also visited in February 1895, when it was rumoured that he would be seeking to stand as parliamentary candidate for Cardiff. His response was typically pugnacious: ‘Why, this was the last town he would stand for, and if he could have five minutes with the gentleman who had the impudence and mendacity to start the rumour he would give him a piece of his mind’, *Western Mail*, 11 February 1895.

⁷⁵ Brocklehurst was Organising Secretary of the Labour Church and ILP candidate for Bolton. He spoke on the land question in 1894, *Labour Prophet*, August 1894; *Western Mail*, 4 June 1894.

⁷⁶ *Western Mail*, 5 March 1894.

⁷⁷ *Labour Prophet*, August 1894.

⁷⁸ He first visited in November 1893 and returned in February 1894, when a motion was passed against the sentences imposed upon individuals involved in rioting at Pontymister. He also addressed a meeting in July 1894, speaking on the colliery disaster at Cilfynydd. *Labour Prophet*, December 1893; *Western Mail*, 26 February 1894; *Labour Prophet*, August 1894.

furthermore, the church made a collection on behalf of the striking Swansea fuel workers.⁷⁹ Like its relationship with socialist idealists, though, its relationship with the wider trade union movement did not stop at the Welsh border. In October 1893, for example, Dr. Parr initiated a collection of £7/10s for the miners of the Featherstone in Yorkshire, which had come to notoriety within the British labour movement after soldiers had opened fire on striking miners there the previous month.⁸⁰

Indeed, evidence of the interests and connections of both the Socialist Fabian Society and the Labour Church in early 1890s Cardiff would, on the face of things, suggest that, as organisations, they were aligned not with the culture of Cardiff, nor even of Wales, but with that of a culturally eclectic and footloose socialist movement. At the Fabian Socialist Society's first Socialist Watch Night Meeting, held at the Hotel Metropole on New Year's Eve 1891/2, the proceedings were not accompanied by the singing of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, but were opened with the *Marseillaise* and closed with a recitation of Shelley's *Men of England, Heirs of Glory*. Between the two songs was a resolution, which made the society's universalist affiliations clear:

That we, the Fabian Socialists of Cardiff, on the eve of the New Year, cordially send our fraternal greetings to our friends in the cause the world over. Renewing our pledge to the Socialist faith, we call upon all comrades to unite in working for the solidarity of the Human Race.⁸¹

Such a declaration would seem to dismiss emphatically any conception of a sense of Welshness on the part of the Cardiff Fabians. There is a difference however between the formal outlook of a society, and the personal affiliations of its individual members. Consequently, before accepting this interpretation of the relationship of the Cardiff Fabians to the national and local cultures of which they were part, it is necessary to look within the society and examine some of the individuals that were

⁷⁹ *Labour Prophet*, May 1894.

⁸⁰ *Labour Prophet*, November 1893; *Western Mail*, 9 October & 12 October 1893.

⁸¹ Programme of the Socialist Watch Night Meeting, Fabian Society Archive, COLL MISC 375 – Volume 1, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. Other songs included Salt's 'Hark The Battle Cry is Ringing' and 'Auld Lang Syne', *Fabian News*, February 1892.

present at that Watch Night in 1891/2.⁸² Among them, for instance, was none other than Cochfarf himself. Although not formally a Fabian, he was identified, by the *Western Mail* at least, as one of ‘the prominent leaders of the Labour Party in Cardiff’,⁸³ and was clearly on good terms with members of the Fabian Socialist Society. Although in reality one of Cardiff’s ‘ardent Liberals’,⁸⁴ he made efforts to draw the socialists into the political life of the town,⁸⁵ and also fostered, in the course of his career, links with national (UK) labour leaders, including a warm friendship with the Fabian and Labour MP Will Crooks,⁸⁶ which testify to a degree of confluence between Cochfarf’s nationalistic Liberalism and the ideology of the wider labour movement. Neither was Cochfarf, and his brand of nationalism, without admirers on the socialistic left of Cardiff politics. Evidence of this is to be found in the *South Wales Labour Times*, the organ of the Trades Council and Progressive Labour League, which in 1893 published a short story entitled ‘Looking Backwards, 1936’. Clearly influenced by Edward Bellamy’s influential collectivist text, it envisaged an independent Wales, with its own Parliament in which all property was ‘invested in the State. All for each and each for all’. In this utopia, Cochfarf held the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer.⁸⁷

The extent to which such proto-nationalist views were current among Cardiff socialists is difficult to estimate. A study of several of those present at the Watch Night, however, gives some clues as to the extent of national consciousness within the nascent Welsh socialism of this period, and also illustrates the complex relationship between that socialism and its locality. Dr. Parr, who read the resolution quoted above, has already been discussed, and might be categorised as a classic cosmopolitan. The same might also be argued for the individual who presided over the proceedings that evening, and who, by the early 1890s, had arguably overtaken Parr as the dominant character within Cardiff socialism, Sam Hobson. The son of a

⁸² *Western Mail*, 1 January 1892, reports the event and provides a list of the principal attendees.

⁸³ *Western Mail*, 24 March 1893.

⁸⁴ The words are those of Fred Maddison, Organising Secretary of the Cobden Club, Letter to Edward Thomas, 21 April 1904, Cochfarf Papers, Box 1, Cardiff Central Library.

⁸⁵ In December 1892, for example he invited them to a dinner at the Hotel Metropole, along with representatives from other political and labour organisations, at which, among others, the miners’ leader William Abraham (Mabon) spoke, *Western Mail*, 21 December 1892.

⁸⁶ Cochfarf Papers, Box 6, Cardiff Central Library contains extensive correspondence from Will Crooks, which reveals a shared commitment to the temperance cause, and a warm friendship between the Thomas and Crooks families.

⁸⁷ *South Wales Labour Times*, 8 April 1893.

Quaker minister, Hobson was born in Bessbrook, County Down, in 1870, although his family moved to England when he was a child, and he was educated at Quaker schools in Saffron Walden and Sidcot. Having failed to win a university scholarship, he arrived in Cardiff in the late 1880s, where he became an active socialist.⁸⁸ The Quaker foundations of the teenage Hobson's intellect had been developed in the direction of socialism before he arrived in Wales, under the influence of at least one teacher at Sidcot.⁸⁹ He also visited London in 1889, where he witnessed the Great Dock Strike. This was a powerful influence upon his thought: 'I came back with a vivid sense of the potential power of an industrial democracy', he later recalled.⁹⁰ It was, however, in Cardiff in early 1890 that he became fully committed to socialist activism, when he discovered the *Fabian Essays in Socialism*,⁹¹ and within a short time he became a key figure in the town's socialist movement. Not only was he a founder member of the Fabian Socialist Society, but he was also a leading light in the Cardiff Labour Church, and went on to become the most prominent representative of the ILP in Wales in the period prior to 1895. Hobson's socialism was drawn from a range of sources. The *Fabian Essays* provided one element, but this was equally balanced with a strong ethical and religious drive, which came to the fore in Hobson's speeches to the Labour Church, one of which was reprinted as a penny pamphlet.⁹² In essence, Hobson's beliefs comprised 'articles of faith in relation to labour' which had been 'grafted' upon his pre-existing religious beliefs.⁹³ This process had been influenced by experience, but perhaps more by his wide reading. This is revealed in his Labour Church address to encompass most of the staples of late-Victorian British intellectual culture, including Ruskin, Carlyle, Frederic Harrison, Matthew Arnold and Charles Bradlaugh. His ideology also had a strong international dimension, and drew in both European and American sources, including Mazzini, Emerson and Walt Whitman.⁹⁴ The result was a heady and idealistic cocktail, with an arguably limited

⁸⁸ Marc Stears, 'Hobson, Samuel George (1870–1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45909>, accessed 18 July 2009]

⁸⁹ Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 23. The teacher was Basil Megahy: 'His Socialist proclivities, although not declared, were more than suspected. In addition to many talks he guided my reading, giving me access to his library'.

⁹⁰ *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 27.

⁹¹ Which he considered 'one of the germinal books of history', *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 25.

⁹² S.G. Hobson, *Possibilities of the Labour Church: An Address to the Cardiff Labour Church on February the 19th 1893*, Chapple and Kemp, Cardiff (1893).

⁹³ Hobson, *Possibilities of the Labour Church*, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Apart from *Possibilities of the Labour Church*, evidence of Hobson's intellectual hinterland is also provided in his article 'Looking Forward', *South Wales Labour Times*, 4 March 1893.

practical content. Keir Hardie later referred to him as ‘a good fellow, but an inveterate builder of sand castles’.⁹⁵

The extent to which Hobson related his ideological enthusiasms directly to his immediate local and national context was, however, questionable. Despite his prominence within Cardiff socialism, and the fact that he almost fought a parliamentary seat there in 1895,⁹⁶ his relationship with the town was ambiguous. He was frequently absent from it, on account of his work as a travelling salesman, which took him away for up to eight months a year, sometimes for up to a month at a time.⁹⁷ More than this, he also sometimes gave the impression that he didn’t really like Cardiff very much. He opined, for example, to Thomas Jones, who was considering establishing a university settlement there in 1896, that the town was ‘intellectually dead. I know of no town in the kingdom’, he continued, ‘so utterly destitute of real vitality + idealism as Cardiff’.⁹⁸ As far as Cardiff’s wider situation went, Hobson certainly viewed it within a British, rather than a specifically Welsh, context. This comes through towards the end his speech to the Labour Church in which he departs from the abstract to state his aspirations for the town:

Coming to local matters, my earnest desire is to see this church a great moral influence on the workers, and particularly the organized workers of Cardiff. ... I want Cardiff to be the first town in the kingdom in the matter of the health, morality and general condition of its people.⁹⁹

There is no question here as to which kingdom Hobson is referring. All of the statistics and examples he uses elsewhere in his speech are drawn from England, and the statement here is the first direct mention of Cardiff. Indeed, to Hobson Cardiff could have been any town in the UK, and his presence there was both accidental and incidental to his life’s trajectory.

⁹⁵ Keir Hardie to John Penny, 13 August 1897, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1897/53.

⁹⁶ *South Wales Daily News*, 10 April, 13 April & 9 July 1895.

⁹⁷ *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 31. The 1891 Census records him as a commercial traveller, staying at the Beauchamp Hotel in Malvern.

⁹⁸ Sam Hobson to Thomas Jones, 25 February 1896, Thomas Jones C.H. Collection, X (Family and Personal) 2, National Library of Wales.

⁹⁹ Hobson, *Possibilities of the Labour Church*, p. 13.

This did not mean that he was necessarily antipathetic to either nationalism or Welsh culture. He was on good terms with Cochfarf, and wrote to him (from the paddle steamer *Pembroke* on the way to Waterford on one of his sales trips) after his election to the council in 1890. This pleased Hobson on two counts, firstly because Cochfarf was a ‘working carpenter’ and shared Hobson’s socialistic enthusiasm for ‘one or two pet schemes equally dear to both of us’, by which he meant measures of municipalisation. More than this, though, Hobson stated that he would ‘have great pleasure in informing my friends [in Ireland] of the success of a nationalist’.¹⁰⁰ He also revealed, at times, a measure of respect – awe even – for Welsh culture. This comes through, for example, in his writing in the wake of the Albion Colliery disaster at Cilfynydd in 1894. He attended the funerals of the victims, and his description is revealing. His reference to ‘the vast choirs, with their subtle sense of harmonious melody, singing their Welsh hymns so sweetly and truly that the music sinks into the soul even if we do not know the meaning of the words’,¹⁰¹ combines a reverence for, and connection to, Welsh culture, which is nevertheless combined with a sense of inevitable exclusion created by his ignorance of the Welsh language. Indeed, Hobson’s position as observer at the funerals might be taken as a more general metaphor for his situation in Wales in the early 1890s. Despite playing an important role in the development of socialism in Cardiff, and indeed of the ILP across south Wales, in this period, Hobson remained an outsider. His identity was essentially pan-British, as expressed in a tongue-in-cheek skit published in 1894, and almost certainly written by Hobson himself, which asserted that ‘[b]eing thus an Irishman and a Welshman, Mr. Hobson has qualified as an Englishman’.¹⁰² His subsequent career within the socialist movement rather underlines the footloose nature of his relationship to locality and national identity. By the mid 1890s he had left Cardiff behind, moving on to work for the national ILP. In 1894 he went to London to work with Keir Hardie on the *Labour Leader*,¹⁰³ and soon after he worked for Hugh Holmes Gore in the East Bristol parliamentary constituency in 1895.¹⁰⁴ He then

¹⁰⁰ Sam Hobson to Edward Thomas, 3 & 4 November 1890, Cochfarf Papers, Box 2, Cardiff Central Library. Hobson was sympathetic to Irish Home Rule and later wrote a book on the matter, S.G. Hobson, *Irish Home Rule*, Stephen Swift, London (1912).

¹⁰¹ *Labour Leader*, 7 July 1894.

¹⁰² *Labour Prophet*, November 1894.

¹⁰³ Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 286; Hobson’s impressions of Bristol agitation are recorded in Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1895/56.

moved north, where he was selected to contest the Rochdale parliamentary seat in 1902.¹⁰⁵ He served at a national level on the Fabian executive from 1900 to 1909,¹⁰⁶ and thereafter made a name for himself as a guild socialist in the pages of A.R. Orage's *New Age* magazine.

The prominence of individuals like Sam Hobson and A.C.E. Parr in the early 1890s Cardiff socialist movement would tend to support the assertion that socialism was a heterogenous influence within Wales. A study of some other individuals present at the Socialist Watch Night, however, rather confuses this notion. Indeed Hobson and Parr only represent one element of Cardiff socialism, and it should be noted that Hobson's socialist education was only completed after his arrival in Cardiff. His main personal inspiration in this – who was also present at the Hotel Metropole that New Year's Eve – was a Welsh-speaking Welshman, R.E. Thomas, of whom Hobson later wrote '[m]y friendship with [him] at this early stage in my life was my salvation'.¹⁰⁷ Originally from Gelligaer, Thomas was the son of a Baptist minister, and grew up in Merthyr.¹⁰⁸ Sometime in the 1880s he moved to Cardiff, where he was employed as a postal clerk,¹⁰⁹ and by 1890, in his early 20s, he had become, according to Hobson, the 'virtual leader' of the small group who were busily studying the *Fabian Essays*.¹¹⁰ A young, single, educated white collar worker, with (according to Hobson) a small private income, Thomas was, perhaps, typical Fabian material. More than this, though, his personality was the product of the fusion of socialist ideas with native Welsh sensibilities. Hobson later wrote a character sketch of him, which captures this well:

The last of an old and distinguished Welsh family, he carried his breeding lightly but palpably in speech and bearing. ... He would turn from his beloved Beethoven to Welsh mediaeval war-songs, of which he had collected a great

¹⁰⁵ John Tattersall to David Lowe, 5 July 1902, stated that 'he [Hobson] has by a little tact united all sections of Socialists' in Rochdale, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1902/73. He fought a rather controversial campaign for the Rochdale seat as a socialist candidate in 1906, but polled reasonably well, Howell, *British Workers*, pp. 227-8.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, p. 271.

¹⁰⁷ Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ He appears on the 1881 Census as a 14 year old scholar, living with his parents and two sisters at 89 Thomas Street, Merthyr.

¹⁰⁹ The 1891 Census records him living at 6 Beauchamp Street, just doors away from Sam Hobson.

¹¹⁰ Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 25. Hobson describes Thomas as 'the most gifted mind I have ever known'.

number, setting some to his own music. He reconstructed the ancient architecture of St David's and Caerphilly. I think his revolt was at bottom directed against a system that had degraded his people from brave and chivalrous warriors into coal-miners and tinsplate workers. The Welsh valleys, through which he sometimes tramped, beckoned to him to lead his people out and to smash the strange gods which they ignorantly worshipped. But he was by no means a mediaevalist. He had mastered Ricardo, Stanley Jevons and Marx.¹¹¹

Indeed, Thomas acted as a point of cultural interchange between late-nineteenth century Wales and the wider socialist movement. While playing an important role introducing the *Fabian Essays* to the Cardiff intellectual scene of the 1890s, he also contributed to the wider socialist press. Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* published a short story set on a farm in the Brecon Beacons written by him in 1895, which is of particular interest because it is an extremely rare example of the mainstream socialist press from this period dealing with rural Welsh life. The piece provides a striking insight into Thomas's own views on Welsh society. Worthy of Caradoc Evans, it contains a scathing attack on the values of contemporary Welsh nonconformity, which, in the view of its narrator, had become 'the willing tool of the lower middle class of monied men, [which] [a]s is well known ... is the body of men the most unimaginative and reactionary in the community'. It also, however, contains a defence of the genuine religious devotion exhibited by earlier generations (including, perhaps, Thomas's own father), and, indeed, of the fundamental values of Welsh rural life.¹¹² Its author was both a pivotal figure in the intellectual life of the fledgling Welsh socialist movement and a harbinger of what was to become a major change of consciousness on the part of the following generation.

The most interesting and important of the indigenous Welsh socialists in 1890s Cardiff, however - and the last to be examined in this selective study - was the individual that seconded Dr. Parr's resolution at the Hotel Metropole, another medical doctor by the name of David Rhys Jones. Jones was born in Llangunllo,

¹¹¹ Anthony Farley [Sam Hobson], *Letters to My Nephew*, George G. Harrap and Co., London (1917), p. 229.

¹¹² 'Yesterday and To-day: An Incident of Welsh Life', *Labour Leader*, 16 February 1895 & 23 February 1895.

Cardiganshire in 1845, the son of a tenant farmer, and was educated at Newcastle Emlyn Grammar School and Carmarthen College.¹¹³ Before settling in Cardiff he travelled widely. In 1866 he went to Australia, where he lived possibly for several years,¹¹⁴ although by the 1870s he had returned to Britain and entered the medical profession, gaining qualifications at University College London in 1876 and Glasgow in 1881.¹¹⁵ During the early 1880s he held the position of Deputy Superintendent at the Joint Counties Lunatic Asylum, Carmarthen, and was an acknowledged expert in lunacy cases.¹¹⁶ He spent some of the 1880s in London,¹¹⁷ and moved to Cardiff in 1889 to set up in general practice.¹¹⁸ It is, of course, possible that Jones came into contact with socialist ideas while in London, although the decisive phase in his development as a socialist seems to have occurred around 1890 in Cardiff, under the influence of Dr. Parr. ‘Thanks to Dr. Parr, I saw a “great light”, and now all other science has second place’, he wrote in 1893.¹¹⁹ Enthused by his conversion, Jones became one of the most active members of the socialist movement in early 1890s Cardiff. He frequently wrote to the press, driving his metaphorical ‘Fabian Bus’ through the correspondence columns of the *Western Mail*.¹²⁰ Apart from being a founder member of the Cardiff Fabian Socialist Society, he also attended the Cardiff Labour Church,¹²¹ and was an early advocate of independent labour representation.¹²² In 1894 he was elected to Cardiff’s Board of Guardians.¹²³ What is of particular interest about Jones, however, is that he was the most prominent of the Cardiff socialist pioneers in his advocacy of socialism within a specifically Welsh context, and through the medium of the Welsh language.

¹¹³ Obituary of David Rhys Jones, *British Medical Journal*, January 1926, p. 73.

¹¹⁴ Jones travelled to Australia for the sake of his health. See ‘Summary of Evidence Proposed to be Given Before The Royal Commission of Land in Wales & Monmouthshire by David Rhys Jones, 19 Paget Street, Cardiff, 14 April 1894’, NLW MS3601E (Letters of Evidence to the Welsh Land Commission, 1894), National Library of Wales.

¹¹⁵ *Medical Register*, 1887. He is recorded living at 17 Alington Street, London.

¹¹⁶ *Western Mail*, 17 August 1893.

¹¹⁷ He married there in 1885. His wife, Matilda, was born in Middlesex. The 1901 census records two sons born in London, aged 13 and 14.

¹¹⁸ Obituary, *British Medical Journal*, January 1926, p. 73.

¹¹⁹ *Western Mail*, 6 January 1893.

¹²⁰ *Western Mail*, 28 December 1893, 6 January, 19 January, 7 March, 7 May, 8 May & 21 December 1894.

¹²¹ *Celt*, 10 February 1893.

¹²² Jones was the second person in Wales to send his name to the *Workman’s Times* in 1892 (and the 39th in Britain). *Workman’s Times*, 14 May 1892.

¹²³ *Western Mail*, 18 December & 31 December 1894, 28 January 1895.

Although Jones' socialism may have been moulded into a finished 1890s Fabian product in Cardiff under the influence of Parr and Thomas, its roots lay much deeper in his make-up. In 1894 Jones gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Land, and his written submission provides a valuable insight not just into the origins of his own socialist beliefs, but also into some of the key influences that shaped the kind of socialism that would, within the next decade, become attractive to an increasing number of young Welsh professionals. In his submission Jones gave a history of his family's farm, Ffynnon-wen, which had been leased from the Lloyds of Bronwydd in Cardiganshire since the 1760s. On the one hand, he gave details of a paternalistic landlord-tenant relationship. Jones' father experienced 'great kindness' from a succession of landlords, who never extracted the full amount of rent due from him. Indeed, Jones went as far as to say – in a statement that is striking for its absence of romanticism – that his father's landlords were more honourable towards him even than his own neighbours. Indeed, in 1866 Sir Thomas Lloyd went so far as to offer Jones a letter of introduction to the Mayor of Melbourne, which enabled him to obtain a position there. Despite this apparently harmonious relationship, Jones nevertheless made it tersely clear that injustice was an inherent part of the landlord-tenant relationship. He recounted how his father had difficulty in securing improvements to the property and, crucially, that 'very nearly all the surplus after a coarse living for farmer family + servants went in rent year by year which was gathered with immense toil + anxiety + spent in one nights' feasting at the palace close by'. When, as requested, Jones wrote to Sir Thomas Lloyd from Melbourne to inform him of his progress, he recalled that his 'letter to him told him as I then saw the vast advantage to its people of a country not devoured by rent', and he reflected that '[s]ome twenty eight years more of life have only deepened my conviction of the injustice of the present system'. Jones went on to explain how prohibitively high rent had made it almost impossible to run the farm and pay fair wages to its labourers. As a result of rent and wage rises much of Ffynnon-wen's land had reverted to the same gorse covered state it had been in in 1760, despite the efforts of several generations of his family to improve the land. This had important implications. 'Not from choice is the country deserted for unhealthy towns by its lads and lasses. Rent drives them', Jones stated, and closed his testimony by advocating that land nationalisation should be

implemented through the parish and county councils, and ‘that the ancient duties of landlords as holders from the state should be revived’.¹²⁴

Jones’ testimony is illuminating in several respects, and yields important clues towards an understanding of his socialism. Significantly, this was not based upon bitterness, or a sharp consciousness of the class war. There are no episodes of harassment or evictions in his account of the history of Ffynnon-wen. Jones was no Michael Davitt, and southern Cardiganshire was not Ireland. The political convictions that it moulded were essentially moderate, and gravitated naturally towards the Fabianism that had arrived in Cardiff around the same time as Jones. They were, nevertheless, based upon a stark analysis - derived from personal experience - of the iniquitous economics of private land ownership. Importantly, though, Jones’ perception of the economics of his native country was sharpened by his time away from it. The juxtaposition of cultures and economic systems that he experienced as a result of his time in Australia clearly had a striking impact upon his thought, and opened his mind to new possibilities which ultimately led in the direction of socialism. Jones, of course, was not alone in coming to socialism as a result of such contact with multiple cultures. The same pattern has already been observed in the case of Sam Mainwaring, and further examples will be introduced in due course. If, however, part of the dynamic of a developing Welsh socialism was this tension between experience of the local and knowledge of the wider world, it was sharpened by the reading of socialist literature. In the case of David Rhys Jones, family experience of the land issue and the perspective of his time in Australia were supplemented by his reading of the publications of the various socialist and land reform societies. These almost certainly included the publications of the Land Nationalisation Society,¹²⁵ and definitely included Sidney Webb’s Fabian Tract on

¹²⁴ NLW MS 3601E; Herbert M. Vaughan, *The South Wales Squires: A Welsh Picture of Social Life*, Methuen, London (1926), pp. 175-177.

¹²⁵ Alfred Russel Wallace, *Land Nationalisation: Its Necessity and Its Aims*, W. Reeves, London (1882); Alfred Russel Wallace, *The ‘Why’ and the ‘How’ of Land Nationalisation*, Macmillan, London (1883); A.J. Ogilvy, *Land Nationalisation*, Co-operative Printing Society Manchester (1890); Helen Taylor, *Nationalisation of the Land: Land Nationalisation Society Tract XIX*, Shaw & Sparks, London (1888). The Society’s president, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) himself provides a fascinating study in the interplay between Wales and the wider world. Born near Usk in Monmouthshire of Scottish and English ancestry, he was brought up in Hertford and London, before returning to Wales, ultimately settling in Neath, although he seems to have considered himself an Englishman. Harry Clements, *Alfred Russel Wallace, Biologist and Social Reformer*, Hutchinson, London (1983); <http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/wallace/FAQ.htm#Welsh> [Accessed 28 July 2011].

land nationalisation, which Jones translated into Welsh.¹²⁶ The most direct source of Jones' ideas on land reform, though, was not the English-based Land Nationalisation Society, nor even the Fabian Society, but the Welsh *Cymdeithas y Ddaear i'r Bobl*, founded in 1883 by Evan Pan Jones. The two Jones, Rhys and Pan, originated from the same part of Cardiganshire, had what amounted to family ties and remained in contact through Rhys Jones' life in Cardiff.¹²⁷ They also shared the same mix of religious belief and concern for social justice, which made their social teaching essentially a salvationist mission.¹²⁸ Rhys Jones' links with Pan Jones, and the clear confluence of the former's Fabian socialist ideology with the latter's agrarian radicalism clearly demonstrate the way in which Welsh influences contributed to the making of socialism in Wales – a theme that will be explored further later.

If, however, Jones' socialism was a product of the convergence of native Welsh influences and late nineteenth century 'scientific' socialism,¹²⁹ an equally important function of his career as a socialist was the way in which he attempted to interpret his ideology to the Welsh, making a determined effort to promote socialism beyond the confines of cosmopolitan Cardiff. Jones was certainly conscious and proud of his own Welshness. Sam Hobson once referred to him as a 'Welshman of mighty fervour which is sometimes embarrassing'.¹³⁰ He maintained his Welsh connections while in London by attending meetings of the London Cymmrodorion,¹³¹ and once in Cardiff he continued to advocate particularist Welsh causes, arguing for example, for the

¹²⁶ Sidney Webb, *Practicable Land Nationalization (Fabian Tract No. 12)*, Fabian Society, London (1890). Jones' translation appeared under the Welsh title 'Y Ddaear i'r Bobl – Beth Allwn Wneud' in *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 1 October 1891.

¹²⁷ Evan Pan Jones was born at Waunllust, near Llandysul, which was only a matter of miles from Ffynon-wen, and Rhys Jones later helped Pan Jones in the writing of his autobiography, Evan Pan Jones, *Oes Gofion: Fraslun o Hanes fy Mywyd*, H. Evans, Bala (1911), pp. 4-5.; David Rhys Jones worked with the brother of Pan Jones, also called David, in the establishment of a Fabian Society at Llandysul, *Fabian News*, April 1892.

¹²⁸ It is not clear to which denomination Rhys Jones belonged, but, as with almost all of his contemporaries, his socialism had a strong religious element: 'It seems to me very strange to hear of Socialism as pitched against Christianity ... Why, Jesus Christ was, and, therefore, is, the very comrade whom any downtrodden, bedraggled, aye, condemned man, woman, or child, on roadside or in cell, may find by his or her side'. *Western Mail*, 16 September 1893.

¹²⁹ With regard to the scientific element of his socialism Jones stated 'Socialism is to me like the law of gravity', *Western Mail*, 28 December 1895.

¹³⁰ Sam Hobson to Thomas Jones, 25 February 1896, Thomas Jones C.H. Collection, X (Family and Personal) 2, National Library of Wales. The statement says as much about Hobson as it does Jones. Jones' Obituary in the *British Medical Journal* also noted that he 'took a warm interest in everything appertaining to Wales'.

¹³¹ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 17 June 1885.

official recognition of the Welsh language in university education.¹³² He was, however, aware of the limitations of Welsh culture in the modernised, urban, cosmopolitan world in which he lived, and he often equated the use of English with civilisation.¹³³ His arguments for Welsh particularism might be seen as an attempt to defend Welshness and the Welsh language in a rapidly Anglicising environment. His attempts to propagate socialism through the medium of his native language might equally be seen as an effort to modernise and enrich his own native culture. During the 1890s this manifested itself in several ways. Firstly, Jones translated socialist literature into Welsh.¹³⁴ He often stood up at the end of meetings in Cardiff drawing attention to the availability of such material.¹³⁵ Secondly, he frequently travelled out from Cardiff into the south Wales valleys to address socialist meetings in Welsh alongside English speakers. At Ystrad in the Rhondda in June 1894, for example, he addressed a meeting in ‘the vernacular’, alongside Fred Brocklehurst and Sam Hobson.¹³⁶ In this respect, he provided a valuable extra dimension to the early socialist forays into industrial Wales, and he consequently must be seen as a pioneer of socialism in the valleys.

It was not just in the south Wales valleys, though, that Jones attempted to promote socialism. He also used his personal connections and knowledge of Welsh cultural life to attempt to reach out into rural Wales. He was instrumental in setting up a branch of the Fabian Society at Llandysul.¹³⁷ He also contributed a flow of letters and reports to the Welsh language press. This included a series of regular and detailed reports which appeared under the name *Fabius* in Evan Pan Jones’ newspaper *Y Celt* and a series of letters signed ‘*Un o’r Ffabianiaid*’ in the north Wales Liberal newspaper *Y Genedl Gymreig*.¹³⁸ Thanks to David Rhys Jones, the Welsh reading public, well beyond the reach of the *Western Mail* or *South Wales Daily News*, could read detailed accounts of

¹³² *Western Mail*, 10 August 1893; *Genedl Gymreig* 7 March 1893.

¹³³ For example, ‘Whatever the Romans may have felt of the evil effects of the unrestricted development of hereditary greed and self-satisfying, it becomes more obvious year by year that these effects cannot be much longer tolerated among English-speaking people’, *Western Mail*, 28 December 1893.

¹³⁴ Apart from Webb’s pamphlet on land nationalisation he also translated Fabian Tract no. 1, *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 17 September 1891.

¹³⁵ *South Wales Daily News*, 3 May 1892 & 5 May 1892, for example, makes reference to Jones promoting Welsh language socialist literature at the Cardiff Labour Day demonstrations.

¹³⁶ *Labour Leader* 16 June 1894. Jones is also recorded as addressing a meeting in Welsh at Treharris in September 1895, *Labour Leader* 14 September 1895.

¹³⁷ See below, chapter 4.

¹³⁸ *Celt*, November 1891–April 1893; *Genedl Gymreig*, 20 April 1892 – 7 September 1892.

Cardiff's series of Fabian lectures,¹³⁹ or follow a detailed explanation of the theory of rent,¹⁴⁰ in their own language.

David Rhys Jones represented a different face of Cardiff socialism to that of his younger comrades, Charles Parr and Sam Hobson. He lived between two cultural worlds with a foot firmly placed in each. As a correspondent to the *Workman's Times* put it in 1892, he was 'a typical Welshman yet withal a thorough cosmopolitan'.¹⁴¹ His socialism was a hybrid creation – a product of the meeting of Welsh radical culture with scientific Fabianism – within which religion and science were interwoven in equal measure. He provided an important point of contact between cosmopolitan socialism and traditional Welsh culture, the urban and the rural, the universal and the local. It is possible that this was a limiting factor in his long term impact upon the socialist movement. Whereas the footloose Hobson, as we have seen, left Cardiff and went on to make a name for himself in various socialistic spheres in different parts of Britain, Jones seems to have retreated from the socialist movement towards the end of the 1890s, remaining in Cardiff, resident in Grangetown, and serving its inhabitants as a doctor until his death in 1926. It is a matter for speculation, but it is possible that as the socialist movement developed and expressed itself as a national movement, with aspirations and affiliations at a UK level, it left Jones, with his attachment to place and native culture, behind. Such speculation may be advancing the argument beyond the facts; Jones, after all, did not leave us a statement of his reasons for withdrawal from the socialist movement. It is, nevertheless, safe to conclude that Jones, and his fellow Fabian Socialists, represented a particular and self-contained phase of socialism in Cardiff, and indeed in Wales. By the mid 1890s the type of socialism they represented was already waning. As a regional phenomenon Fabianism was being displaced by the more politically strident ILP. As has already been stated, in Cardiff this was a slow and somewhat retarded process, but, as will be seen, the type of socialism that was expressed in Cardiff by the late 1890s and early 1900s was altogether different in character to the Fabian activity of the early 1890s. Nevertheless, the activities of the Fabian Socialists cannot be dismissed as irrelevant.

¹³⁹ *Celt*, 20 November 1891 (W.S. De Mattos), 1 January 1892 (Sidney Webb), 18 March 1892 (Katherine Conway), 8 April 1892 (W.S. De Mattos), 21 October 1892 (Keir Hardie), 3 February 1893 (H. Halliday Sparling).

¹⁴⁰ *Genedl Gymreig*, 31 August 1892.

¹⁴¹ *Workman's Times*, 21 May 1892.

They provided an important site of cultural and ideological inter-penetration, a melting pot for ideas coming from a number of different directions and arising from a variety of influences. Indeed, Cardiff provided a seed-bed for socialism in Wales, from which it would spread and take root elsewhere.

(ii). The Social Democratic Federation in South Wales.

Fabianism was not the only form of socialism to take root in south Wales in the early 1890s. It may have been dominant in Cardiff, but elsewhere along the south Wales coast it seemed to be the SDF that was making the running. Llanelli, Swansea and, on Cardiff's doorstep, Barry, all experienced some level of SDF activity in the 1890s. The industrialised south-west, which was the initial object of SDF interest, comprised the 'Tinopolis' of Llanelli, the 'Copperopolis' of Swansea and the industrial settlements strewn up the Loughor and Swansesa Valleys and around the Gower Peninsula, and was one of the most important metal producing centres in the world. In addition to the region's miners, most of the country's 25,000 tinplate workers were concentrated in this area. They had traditions of trade unionism going back to the early 1870s, and had in 1887 established a new Tinplate Workers' Union.¹⁴² Socialist interest was further encouraged by the strong degree of independent political consciousness that had been demonstrated by the workers of the Gower constituency in 1888, when they had combined to force the return to parliament of their own representative, David Randell, in a by-election.¹⁴³ The new unionism too had made rapid advances in the Swansea region by the early 1890s. A precursor to this was witnessed by delegates to the Trades Union Congress, held at Swansea in September 1887. Although the event is chiefly remembered for Keir Hardie's attack on Henry Broadhurst, an event of local significance was the speech given by W. Bevan, one of the representatives of Swansea Trades Council, in which he attacked 'the present system of society, which gives the riches of toil to those who do not produce', and

¹⁴² Idris C. Bell, 'The Tinplate Workers' Union', in Goronwy Alun Hughes (ed.), *Men of No Property: Historical Studies of Welsh Trade Unions*, Gwasg Gwenffrwd, Caerwys (1971), pp. 25-32.

¹⁴³ David Cleaver, 'Labour and Liberals in the Gower Constituency, 1885-1910', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1985), pp. 388-410, pp. 390-392. Randell was a sympathetic solicitor from Llanelli who had assisted in the establishment of the Tinplate Workers' Union.

argued for independent labour representation, declaring that ‘socialism has lost its terror for us’.¹⁴⁴ After the successful Swansea dock strike of May 1890, moreover, trade unionism was extended significantly across the region. By 1891, it was estimated that there were 10,000 trade unionists in Swansea alone. As was the case in Cardiff, prominent socialists such as Ben Tillett and Tom Mann were frequent visitors to the south west, where they attempted to radicalise the working class in the same way.¹⁴⁵

This did not necessarily mean that workers in the west were, as a group, any better disposed towards socialism than those elsewhere. Quite the contrary, anti-socialist statements, such as that in the *Welsh Industrial Times*, organ of the Tinsplate Workers’ Union, which declared in 1889 that ‘with Socialism of the red flag we have no sympathy’,¹⁴⁶ were more representative of working class opinion in the region than Bevan’s speech at the 1887 TUC. Indeed, the main forces in the politics of the south west were Liberalism, religious nonconformity and localism, and this remained the case well into the early twentieth century.¹⁴⁷ This, however, did not dampen the interest of socialists from across the English border. William Morris had read reports of Bevan’s speech at the 1887 TUC, and reflected that ‘it affords gratifying evidence of the growth of Socialism in the ranks of organised Labour’.¹⁴⁸ H.H. Champion, formerly of the SDF and by the 1880s attempting to stimulate independent labour representation through the columns of his *Labour Elector*, had come to Swansea to support Randell in 1888.¹⁴⁹ The SDF, too, occasionally covered events in south Wales in *Justice*.¹⁵⁰ Although never more than a tiny fraction of the journal’s content, these articles sometimes made the front page, and at the very least ensured that active socialists in other parts of Britain were aware of some of what was going on in Wales. This sometimes sparked interest on the part of the Federation’s members in England.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Thomas John McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea 1887-1918’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Swansea (1986), p. 60-61.

¹⁴⁵ P.J. Leng, *The Welsh Dockers*, pp. 16-18; McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea’, pp. 114-138.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea’, p. 87.

¹⁴⁷ Even in the case of Randell’s election in 1888, a mix of particularism and localism was arguably a more powerful factor than labourism. That the Liberals had chosen an outsider, Sir Horace Davey, to fight the constituency, was the deciding factor in precipitating Randell’s challenge. David Cleaver argues that Randell’s stand ‘emphasises the importance of community politics, as opposed to party politics, at that time’, Cleaver, ‘Labour and Liberals in the Gower Constituency’, p. 392.

¹⁴⁸ *Commonweal*, 17 September 1887.

¹⁴⁹ *Western Mail*, 27 March 1888.

¹⁵⁰ *Justice*, 11 February 1888, 14 February 1891, 8 October 1892 & 22 October 1892.

John Paterson of the Colne branch wrote to *Justice* in November 1892, having read of the distress in the tin-plate industry in south Wales, and suggested that a fund should be raised specifically for propaganda in the region. He suggested that a special appeal be made to all branches of the SDF asking them to vote a proportion of their weekly collections for the purpose of ‘an active propaganda of the principles of Social Democracy amongst the Welshmen’.¹⁵¹ Despite Paterson’s promise to raise the issue at his local branch, however, little seems to have come of the suggestion. One reason for this was the practical matter that had prompted Paterson to write his letter in the first place: the lack of available funds. Although seeing industrial south Wales as ‘a splendid field for socialist propaganda’, *Justice* complained that ‘the cursed impecuniosity of the SDF prevents, as usual, the Socialist agitation being vigorously carried into a district which is now ripe for revolutionary teaching’.¹⁵²

This did not, however, prevent the Federation from launching several propaganda campaigns in south Wales in the early 1890s. In July 1892, H. Alexander, a young member from London, held a public meeting in the People’s Park at Llanelli, with the aim of forming a branch of the organisation there. During the meeting he stressed the need for independent labour representation: ‘[t]he workingmen must necessarily have one of their own class in Parliament, if they wished to work for the elevation of working men’. This approach marked a departure from the more uncompromising revolutionary message of earlier propagandists, who tended to stress the need for a total overthrow of existing society and derided calls for mere labour representation, and it may be seen as a step in the direction of the more pragmatic policy of the Independent Labour Party, which was soon to become the most important influence in socialist politics. Alexander nevertheless linked the idea of constitutional change to wider objectives, drawing upon a Marxist understanding of social change: ‘Labour men’, he argued, ‘should steer an independent course of their own to secure the regeneration of humanity’. Reports of the meeting do not record Alexander making any comments specific to Wales, but he did make enough of an impression for a Mr. Griffiths, of William Street, Llanelli, to promise to use his endeavours to form a branch of the Federation in the town. He also distributed a quire of *Justice* and some

¹⁵¹ *Justice*, 12 November 1892.

¹⁵² *Justice*, 29 October 1892.

other SDF tracts, entitled *The Social Democrats' Ideal*, 'which were eagerly accepted'.¹⁵³

Several months later, the Federation made another effort to rouse the workers of industrial south-west Wales, by sending London member H.W. Hobart¹⁵⁴ to speak in the area, this time on a week long tour. Hobart's visit was organised by a local sympathiser, E.A. Cleeves, and included meetings in Llanelli, Gorseinon, Cidweli, Ammanford, Felinfoel and Penclawdd. The organisation also went to the expense and trouble of having three of its tracts translated into Welsh.¹⁵⁵ Despite this, Hobart's mission, judging from the reports he sent back to *Justice*, enjoyed only mixed success. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the reports sheds instructive – and sometimes amusing – light upon Hobart's attitude to Wales, and, indeed, on the Welsh response to his presence. Perhaps the first impression that might be gleaned is that as far as Hobart was concerned he might almost have been a missionary in Africa rather than Wales. *Justice* commented in early December that 'he has received sufficient evidence of a desire amongst the natives to learn something of Social-Democracy to encourage him to believe that we shall eventually reap a plentiful and valuable harvest amongst the Welsh people'. The problem was that 'on the admission of Welshmen themselves, they are very slow and cautious in adopting new ideas',¹⁵⁶ and '[t]aking all their characteristics into consideration, it is not surprising that there was a show of timidity when a London Social-Democrat was known to have invaded their domains'. It came as a matter of surprise that on some issues – church disestablishment, tithes, land nationalisation and Sunday closing – 'they are apparently more advanced than the Englishman'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ *Justice*, 13 August 1892; *South Wales Press*, 28 July 1892.

¹⁵⁴ H.W. (Harry) Hobart was a member of the London Society of Compositors, who had aided in the establishment of the Gasworkers' Union in 1889, Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1989) (First published 1925), pp. 69-71.

¹⁵⁵ *Justice*, 19 November 1892. 'Such translation will assist greatly in spreading the propaganda in Wales. But the printing of them will be expensive.' Also see *Justice* 3 December 1892: 'This visit of Hobart to Wales cannot fail to bring to our standard fresh recruits from districts hitherto almost untouched by Social Democratic propaganda, and our principles will be spread still further by the plentiful distribution of Socialist leaflets in Welsh.' The SDF financed the leaflets from a Provincial Propaganda Fund. The tracts translated were *What Use is a Vote?*, *The Gospel of Discontent* and *What Social Democrats Want*. Unfortunately it has not been possible to trace extant copies of the Welsh pamphlets.

¹⁵⁶ *Justice* 10 December 1892.

¹⁵⁷ *Justice* 17 December 1892.

During his visit Hobart faced a number of problems that were, by the early 1890s, becoming recurrent issues facing English socialists working in Wales. The first was the influence of the chapels. When Cleeves and Hobart tried to organise a meeting at Gorseinon, the attendance was poor, due to ‘the interference of certain influential personages, who advised those who had resolved to come to stay away, because Socialism meant Atheism and everything else that was bad’. At Felinfoel they had a similar experience, when a meeting they organised there clashed with a chapel meeting and was consequently poorly attended. The local trade unions, too, stood aloof. Tom Phillips, the Secretary of the Tin Plate Workers, withdrew his promise to chair one of them at short notice without explanation, and ‘the meeting was not nearly so large as it should have been, and in certain respects was rather disappointing’. At Pontarddulais Hobart experienced another disappointing meeting, which he attributed to the fact that the workers in the region had previously been subjected to ‘a sort of bastard Socialism’, which stressed the role of trade unionism and political pragmatism over ‘a thorough collective principle of ownership. The men themselves therefore seem more disposed to be satisfied with a little improvement of their present condition than to strive for an entirely new system’.¹⁵⁸

Although Hobart emphasised that socialists were in favour of a peaceful transition rather than ‘plunder and pillage’,¹⁵⁹ he nevertheless betrayed a lack of ability to articulate socialist aims and ideals to the demands of workers and trade unionists, suggesting perhaps that the transition of the SDF from revolutionary impossibilists to pragmatic socialists was, as yet, incomplete. In predominantly Welsh speaking south west Wales, Hobart discovered, these problems were compounded by the additional problem of the Welsh language. Despite coming armed with the specially printed Welsh tracts, Hobart certainly found this a challenge. On some occasions he was assisted in surmounting the language barrier by local sympathisers. Lecturing at Seion Baptist Chapel in Gorseinon, he was introduced to a ‘very attentive and enthusiastic audience’, by a friend of Cleeves, a Welsh speaker by the name of Ludwig. Ludwig ‘took the chair, and addressed them in their native tongue, and told them that Hobart would speak to them in English. Several of those present afterwards said they

¹⁵⁸ *Justice* 17 December 1892.

¹⁵⁹ *South Wales Press*, 8 December 1892.

understood every word'.¹⁶⁰ Other meetings, though, were not so easy. At Felinfoel, when the chapel had finally emptied and a 'fairly good gathering' had been assembled, '[t]he great difficulty was the language. Most of the men understanding very little English; but by a careful and slow delivery *we made them* understand us'.¹⁶¹ Hobart's words speak for themselves, and at times present an almost comic picture of the Englishman abroad amongst the natives.

Hobart's propaganda campaign of 1892 was not, however, without its successes. As demonstrated above, Hobart and his local contacts succeeded in securing a number of chapels as venues for meetings, which would suggest that local nonconformists were at least curious about his teachings, and that that the notion of universal nonconformist hostility to socialism is not wholly durable. More than this, though, Hobart's visit attracted the interest and patronage of none other than David Randell MP. He chaired one of Hobart's meetings, held at the Athenaeum Hall in Llanelli, and made an explicit statement aligning himself with the SDF. He also echoed the assertions of socialists about the inherent socialism of the Welsh people:

The Chairman, in opening the meeting, said that as one identified with movements, both social and political, he had pleasure in taking the chair that evening. To remove the doubt that might exist in the minds of the audience, he might say at once that as far as he was concerned, his own opinions and beliefs were tending more and more in the direction of Socialism ... The work of the Socialists of this country was chiefly propagandist, and amongst other associations the Social Democratic Federation was in the very front rank of the new movement. The Welsh workers were as instinctively Socialistic as any body of workers in this country.¹⁶²

At the end of the meeting, moreover, '[s]everal names were taken to render assistance in the formation of a branch in Llanelli, and foremost amongst those who promised every assistance possible was Mr. Randell'.¹⁶³ Randell's interest in the SDF is remarkable. It might partly be ascribed to his own somewhat maverick and politically

¹⁶⁰ *Justice*, 10 December 1892.

¹⁶¹ *Justice*, 17 December 1892. My italics.

¹⁶² *South Wales Press*, 8 December 1892.

¹⁶³ *Justice*, 17 December 1892.

eccentric personality. This would, though, be to underestimate its significance. Randell was a member of *Cymru Fydd* and an ally of Mabon, whose election campaign in the Rhondda he had supported in 1885. Only four months previously, moreover, he had been adopted as the official Liberal general election candidate for the Gower; a position he retained in 1895, despite there being no evidence that he renounced his sympathy towards the SDF. To the contrary, he seems to have held socialistic views well beyond his retirement as an MP in 1900.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Randell's SDF sympathies are further evidence of a relatively benign attitude of some sections of advanced Welsh Liberalism towards socialism. His comment that the work of socialists was 'chiefly propagandist' is significant in this respect. The confluence of social democratic and advanced Liberal thought was only tenable while the work of socialists remained 'chiefly propagandist'. Once it began to challenge Liberalism politically, the accommodating attitude of individuals like Randell would become less common within Liberalism.

This eventuality was still some years away in 1892, but in the wake of Hobart's propaganda tour Social Democratic activity became a more constant feature of the political and intellectual life of south-west Wales. By the summer of 1893 a branch of the SDF was active on an ongoing basis in Llanelli, holding weekly meetings at the Temperance Hotel in Stepney Street.¹⁶⁵ By the autumn Swansea too was host to numerous SDF meetings. Sam Mainwaring, who by now was back in the SDF and living in Swansea, provided a series of regular reports for *Justice*. "Gallant little Wales" is falling into line', he reported in September. Seven meetings had been held in Swansea and two in Llanelli in the previous week alone, at which forty names had been collected in Swansea and another ten or twelve in Llanelli. Mainwaring was working alongside Cleeves, and the two had been joined for a fortnight by a Comrade Wolfe, another visiting propagandist – this time from Lancashire.¹⁶⁶ Landore, Morriston and Neath too, came under their influence. Their first attempt at a meeting

¹⁶⁴ Randell retired as MP for Gower in 1900 due to ill health, but he appeared again on an ILP platform in 1908 at Brynaman, stating '*fod ei fywyd a'i ddyheadau yn gyfryw nes cydweddu yn hollol ac egwyddorion syflaenol Cymdeithasiaeth yn eu gwahanol gyfeiriadau*' ('that his life and his aspirations were such that they fully corresponded to the basic principles of Socialism in their different manifestations'), *Llais Llafur*, 4 April 1908.

¹⁶⁵ *Justice*, 16 September 1893. It is not clear exactly when the branch started. It is the first Welsh branch to be listed in *Justice's* SDF Directory, from June 1893 (although details of meetings are not recorded until September).

¹⁶⁶ *Justice*, 16 September 1893.

in Neath fell foul of the competition provided by non-political popular culture, when it was disrupted due to the arrival of the 'Great Neath Fair'. Nevertheless, despite there being no branch in the town, Comrade Davis, an SDF member, was secretary of the Neath Trades Council. Another Neath sympathiser, Comrade Rees,¹⁶⁷ also travelled down to Swansea to attend SDF meetings at this time. At 'desolate' Landore and Morriston the names of supporters who were interested in forming branches were collected after open air meetings, and as the result of two weeks propaganda work in September 1893 Mainwaring estimated that about 150 new recruits had been made.¹⁶⁸ 'Wales is awakening. It is Cambria *rediviva*', rejoiced Mainwaring in *Justice*, socialism would soon spread like a wildfire over the mining and manufacturing districts, and the people were 'ripe for it – rotten ripe'.¹⁶⁹ By October some form of regular branch activity was taking place in Llanelli, Landore, Morriston and Swansea. This included weekly meetings in Llanelli and Swansea, and regular open air speaking sessions in the other centres. By the winter of 1893 the Swansea branch was organised and stable enough to have set up a penny-a-month circulating library¹⁷⁰ and to have made its own banner,¹⁷¹ and by the end of November it was contemplating the building of a meeting hall.¹⁷² Signs appeared promising for the SDF in south-west Wales towards the end of 1893.

Behind the exuberant reports in *Justice*, however, the SDF's position was fragile. Its fortunes were in reality over-dependent upon the presence of prominent, experienced speakers from outside Wales – from the SDF strongholds of London and Lancashire. It was only events such as the visits of Alexander, Hobart and Wolfe that attracted significant attention. Once they had gone it was difficult to sustain either interest or organisation. 'Unfortunately the district is too large to be organised sufficiently rapidly by the few experienced comrades in the district', lamented Mainwaring on Wolfe's departure in late September 1893, 'and we think if Wolfe could return here

¹⁶⁷ Comrade Rees is almost certainly W.J. Rees, later to be secretary of the South Wales ILP Federation, see *Labour Leader*, 5 May & 13 October 1894, his gravitation towards the ILP provides an illustration of the way in which the SDF created interest in socialism that was to be harvested later by the ILP. In Rees's case the harvest was unfortunately short lived, as he died in November 1895, *Labour Leader*, 23 November 1895.

¹⁶⁸ *Justice*, 23 September 1893.

¹⁶⁹ *Justice*, 30 September 1893.

¹⁷⁰ *Justice*, 30 September 1893.

¹⁷¹ *Justice*, 4 November 1893.

¹⁷² *Justice*, 25 November 1893.

for two months the results would be very satisfactory'.¹⁷³ The SDF, however, did not have the resources to arrange such extended visits. Neither, though, was it in possession of sufficient human capital on a local level to sustain a satisfactory level of activity in the absence of external help. 'I think there is good ground for sowing Socialist seed in Wales, - all we need is speakers' opined J. Arnold of the Swansea branch in November 1893,¹⁷⁴ implying a deficit of local oratorical talent. The few committed local activists that did exist, also faced numerous problems beyond their control. One of these was opposition from both irate members of the public and the police, who attempted to break up their meetings.¹⁷⁵ The chapels too continued to be a source of frustration. 'The pulpits are using their influence against the movement as they did in London twelve years ago, and the fact of our holding a meeting on Sunday morning is turned to our disadvantage', complained Mainwaring.¹⁷⁶ The work patterns practised in the industries of the region also militated against organisation, particularly the prevalence of night work, which prevented local workers from attending meetings.¹⁷⁷ The work of the small group of socialists in industrial south-west Wales in the early 1890s was indeed uphill.

About that group of individuals we know very little. Griff Jones, who in 1902 became secretary of the Swansea Socialist Society (the SDF's successor in the town), later lamented that the early history of socialism in Swansea, which was the primary centre of socialist activity in the south west in this period, was 'shrouded in impenetrable darkness'.¹⁷⁸ It unfortunately remains so, although a precious few gleanings from contemporary sources and reminiscences do allow some tentative conclusions about the nature of the membership. Clearly, the leading individual in the region was Sam Mainwaring.¹⁷⁹ As already discussed, he had local origins and was a Welsh speaker.

¹⁷³ *Justice*, 30 September 1893.

¹⁷⁴ *Justice*, 25 November 1893.

¹⁷⁵ *Justice*, 16 September 1893 records harassment of socialist speakers by the Swansea Dock and Harbour Trust Police, and *Justice*, 4 November 1893 records a violent attempt to break up a meeting in Swansea, resulting in bloodshed. According to the reports both instances of intimidation failed. At the second meeting Mainwaring reported that the intimidator 'and others like him will probably hesitate before trying on the same game again, as the afore mentioned blood was not that of a Socialist!'

¹⁷⁶ *Justice*, 4 November 1893.

¹⁷⁷ *Justice*, 30 September 1893.

¹⁷⁸ Griff Jones, 'Script of Swansea Socialist Party and Labour Party' [Written in 1956], Glamorgan Archive D/D AW H14/4, Glamorgan County Record Office, Cardiff.

¹⁷⁹ Stan Awbery, *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea*, Swansea Printers, Swansea (1949), pp. 49-50 discusses Mainwaring 'whose pioneering work for Socialism was of the highest quality' and describes him as 'the man chiefly responsible' for the permeation of socialism into Swansea politics by the end

He had returned to live in south Wales in 1892, initially spending ten months in the Rhondda (where he organised informal economics classes in the room of an inn), and then settling with his family in Swansea.¹⁸⁰ He continued to use Welsh at meetings, which drew appreciation from his audiences.¹⁸¹ He also, despite a pragmatic re-alignment with the SDF, retained a level of commitment to anarchist rather than strictly socialist ideology, thus ensuring a degree of ideological heterodoxy on the part of the local branch.¹⁸² Under his influence the group's meeting place was named 'Liberty Hall', and alongside *Justice*, the anarchist-communist newspaper *Liberty* was among the group's reading material.¹⁸³ The influence of Mainwaring, an 'eloquent, deeply-read man, possessing a fascinating personality', was clearly seminal, and when he left Swansea in the mid-1890s Sir Hussey Vivian declared that there were no socialists left.¹⁸⁴ This was not, however, strictly accurate. Other socialists who worked alongside Mainwaring included some of the local trade unionists, such as George Hollett of the Dockers,¹⁸⁵ and William Morris of the Engineers. Morris is, perhaps, of particular interest. A native of Swansea, he was also a long standing Rechabite, and his primary intellectual influences were John Ruskin and William Morris. He went on to serve as president of Swansea Trades Council and to represent St. John's ward on Swansea council.¹⁸⁶ He might thus be seen as both an early link between the native Swansea working class and socialist ideology, and an element of continuity between the origins and the later development of the socialist and labour movement in Swansea.

Arguably though, the single other most important figure was E.A. Cleeves, who had been instrumental in arranging Hobart's visit in 1892, and who was from rather the

of the 1890s. Awbery, later MP for Bristol Central, was born and raised in Swansea, and joined the labour movement there a decade after Mainwaring's involvement.

¹⁸⁰ *Freedom*, February 1927.

¹⁸¹ *Justice*, 23 September 1893.

¹⁸² *Freedom*, February 1927: 'the platform was so catholic, the organisation so free from cut-and-dried dogma, that it performed very useful work in breaking up what was practically virgin soil'.

¹⁸³ *Liberty*, April – October 1894 advertises the Swansea group's meetings and records Mainwaring as agent for the journal. William Mainwaring states in *Freedom*, February 1927 that *Liberty* was 'pushed most whole-heartedly in Swansea and South Wales generally' by Mainwaring.

¹⁸⁴ John Littlejohns, 'The Rise of the Swansea Labour Party', in W.C. Jenkins (ed.), *Trade Union Congress, Swansea 1901 Souvenir*, pp. 101-109, p. 104.

¹⁸⁵ Stan Awbery, *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea*, p. 43. Hollett was originally from Plymouth, and is recorded on the 1891 census as George Howlett at 5 Baptist Well Street, occupation, fuel shipper.

¹⁸⁶ Stan Awbery, *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea*, p. 40; *Swansea and District Workers' Journal*, September 1899; *Swansea Trade Union Congress Souvenir*, pp. 139-40.

opposite of a trade union background. Another Swansea SDFer reported of him that he ‘belongs to the middle classes; which somewhat astonishes the people; but he boldly tells them they are fools to let him remain so’.¹⁸⁷ Edmund Cleeves, in his early 20s in the early 1890s, was a colliery owner and coal exporter, originally from Yorkshire, who had, most likely, only been in Swansea a year or two in 1893.¹⁸⁸ An outsider from the start, his independent and elevated social position put him beyond the reach of victimisation,¹⁸⁹ and also enabled him to give financial support to the Swansea branch.¹⁹⁰ His prominence, however, underlines the extent to which the Swansea SDF, notwithstanding the contributions of Mainwaring and Morris, was driven by individuals who, although they may have been domiciled in Swansea, were essentially outsiders.¹⁹¹ By the summer of 1894, the relatively shallow roots of SDFism in the south west were exposed, and the local branches collapsed. H.W. Lee, the Federation’s secretary, expressed regret in August 1894 at ‘the unsuccessful attempt to spread Socialism in Wales.’¹⁹² The work of Mainwaring, Cleeves and the others, was nevertheless not without significance. It marked a distinct phase in the history of socialism in the region. As Stan Awbery later observed, its protagonists were ‘teaching each other. They were feeling their way, and seeking in their discussions the direction in which they should advance’.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ *Justice*, 25 November 1893.

¹⁸⁸ Griff Jones, Glamorgan Archive D/D AW H14/4, refers to him as a colliery owner and coal exporter. He doesn’t seem to appear on the 1891 census at all, but is recorded on the 1901 census, along with his wife from Neath, three young children, two Welsh domestic servants and a French governess at ‘Chez Nous’, Gower Road, Cockett. His occupation is given as Colliery Agent (Employer). The only members of the household recorded as Welsh speakers are the two domestic servants. If Cleeves’ house name is anything to go on, his awareness of Welsh sensibilities was probably limited.

¹⁸⁹ It also enabled him to protect other socialists. A few years later, Paul Cocks, a member of the Swansea Socialist Society at the turn of the century and representative of the shop-assistants on Swansea Trades Council, was employed by Cleeves. Griff Jones, Glamorgan Archive D/D AW H14/4 states, ‘How he [Cocks] must have enjoyed “thumbing-his-nose” in the faces of the impotent shop-keepers, who were powerless to injure him. And no doubt his employer Mr E.A. Cleeves must have enjoyed the unique situation, just as keenly, for he was not without a sense of humour.’

¹⁹⁰ ‘Our comrade Cleeves, of Swansea, strove very hard to accomplish [the establishment of a socialist movement in Wales], and devoted much time, money and energy to its realisation. Unfortunately these efforts were not crowned with overwhelming success.’ *Justice*, 4 July 1896.

¹⁹¹ Even Mainwaring’s attitude towards the locality may have been less than homely. William Mainwaring states that his return to Wales ‘was nothing less ... than a species of self-inflicted exile’ and that ‘he himself regarded these years as a sort of banishment’. He returned to London in 1896, and died in 1907 - in full flow on a political platform on Parliament Hill, *Freedom*, February 1927

¹⁹² *Western Mail*, 6 August 1894.

¹⁹³ Stan Awbery, *Labour’s Early Struggles in Swansea*, p. 52. From the SDF’s point of view, as expressed upon the re-establishment of a Socialist Society in Swansea later in the decade, ‘no good seed sown is quite wasted’, *Justice*, 4 June 1898.

Neither was the collapse of SDFism in the south west in 1894 the end of that organisation in Wales. Indeed, by 1896 the SDF was reporting a strong presence in the newest of all the south Walian coastal towns, Barry.¹⁹⁴ The branch owed its initial existence to Sam McCorde, who had migrated to Wales from London twelve months previously.¹⁹⁵ He was joined by another new arrival in Wales, Cornishman John Spargo, who had moved to Barry in 1895, at the age of 19, after spending his teenage years working in the tin mines and quarries of his native county. On his arrival in Barry he found work as a stone cutter and threw himself into socialist activism, soon taking a place on the SDF's Executive Council.¹⁹⁶ Another key member was the branch secretary, Matthew Sheppard. Sheppard seems to be the only prominent member of the Barry SDF to have been born in Wales, at Undy, Monmouthshire in 1868, although - following a pattern already observed in other Welsh activists - he had travelled abroad before returning to the country. Moving to Cardiff at the age of 11, he worked for a spell in a market garden, until moving to America and working as a printer in the mid-1880s. In 1887 he returned to Cardiff, and then moved to Barry, where he worked as a railwayman. *Justice* described him as 'an uncompromising Socialist of the Marxian School', and like Spargo he was active within the SDF at a national level.¹⁹⁷ The likes of McCorde, Spargo and Sheppard represented something of a socialist vanguard in Barry. 'Whatever may be said of Socialism or Socialistic organisation', commented the *Barry Herald* in May 1896, 'it would be difficult to find a more determined go-ahead set of fellows than those who comprise the local branch of the Social Democratic Federation'.¹⁹⁸

The branch sustained a vigorous level of activity in Barry for several years. It held a weekly economics class at rooms in the Universal Restaurant, led by the local

¹⁹⁴ *Justice*, 25 January 1896 claims a branch of 30 members at Barry, and *Justice*, 6 June 1896 reports a 'financial membership' of 40.

¹⁹⁵ *Justice*, 6 June 1896: 'isolated though he was, Sam lost no time in proclaiming our gospel. His reward has been a bad attack of boycott, and the formation of one of the best branches of the Federation'. McCorde seems to have been involved in the socialist movement in London. He gave 'some interesting reminiscences of the early days of the movement in London' to the branch in October 1896, *Barry Herald*, 23 October 1896.

¹⁹⁶ Kenneth Hilton, 'John Spargo, the Social Democratic Federation and the 1898 South Wales Coal Strike', *Welsh History Review*, 16, 4 (1993), pp. 542-550.

¹⁹⁷ *Justice*, 4 July 1896; *Barry Herald*, 19 June 1896. Sheppard was also president of the Barry Trades Council in 1896.

¹⁹⁸ *Barry Herald*, 29 May 1896.

activists, among whom, it was reported, 'there is no dearth of speakers'.¹⁹⁹ The talents of such aspirant orators were regularly exercised throughout 1896 and 1897 at open air meetings outside the Free Library at Barry Dock and outside Barry gasworks.²⁰⁰ Local trade unionists were a particular target for the branch's propaganda efforts. Indeed, the Barry SDF enjoyed close links with the unions. Sheppard served as both treasurer and secretary of the Barry branch of the Amalgamated Railway Servants, and both he and Spargo held the presidency of Barry Trades Council at various times in the 1890s.²⁰¹ It was amongst the navvies, however - thousands of whom were at work on dock building projects in Barry in the 1880s and 1890s - that most efforts were made to extend socialism to the local working class. McCord addressed meetings under the banner of the Navvies' Union at Barry Dock in January 1896,²⁰² and Sheppard lectured to its members on 'The Historical Basis of Socialism' the following month.²⁰³

As with other local socialist organisations the the significance of Barry SDF was not just in the activities of its local adherents, but in its role as a contact point for representatives of the wider socialist movement. Foremost among these was the SDF's Political Secretary, Joseph Chatterton, who became a frequent visitor to south Wales in this period. Chatterton visited, and addressed meetings, along with another London activist, W.G. Pearson, on several occasions in 1896,²⁰⁴ and returned alone for a two week stay the following summer, during which visit he addressed an audience of striking navvies at Cadoxton on 'Poverty: Its Cause and Cure', and audiences of dockers at Barry Dock and Barry on 'Socialism and Current Politics' and 'What Social-Democracy Means'.²⁰⁵ James MacDonald, Secretary of the London Trades Council, also visited in 1896 and addressed several meetings at Barry and Cadoxton, resulting in the recruitment of seven new members, including three women.²⁰⁶ The speakers were not restricted to SDF representatives. They included

¹⁹⁹ *Justice*, 25 January 1896.

²⁰⁰ *Justice*, 10 July 1897.

²⁰¹ *Justice*, 4 July 1896.

²⁰² *Justice*, 25 January 1896.

²⁰³ *Justice*, 29 February 1896.

²⁰⁴ *Barry Herald*, 29 May & 28 August 1896; *Justice*, 14 November 1896.

²⁰⁵ *Justice*, 7 August 1897. After the latter speech the audience, although not large, 'resolved itself into groups after the formal proceedings were over and stood discussing the situation for nearly two hours'

²⁰⁶ *Barry Herald*, 6 November 1896; *Justice*, 14 November 1896. MacDonald's visit also extended to Cardiff.

ILP members such as Enid Stacy and Tom Taylor,²⁰⁷ as well as Joseph Hyder of the Land Nationalisation League, who illustrated his lecture with the use of oxy-hydrogen limelight apparatus.²⁰⁸ An even more exotic visitor was refugee Russian revolutionist, R. Rosetti, who spoke three times in June 1897 to ‘good audiences’ at Barry and Cadoxton on ‘Socialism: Past, Present, and Future’. Most spectacular, though, was his lecture ‘How I Escaped Death and Siberia’, which attracted an audience of between 1,500 and 2,000 and yielded a 23 shilling collection.²⁰⁹

Rosetti’s lecture was not just part of a process of ideological and informational interchange between Barry and the outer world, it was also an expression of a growing socialist culture, which was becoming a common and defining aspect of the socialist movement in the 1890s. John Spargo made efforts to enhance the possibilities for a culture of comradeship in the summer of 1897 by working to establish a ‘club’ at York House in Wyndham Street. ‘For a long time we have felt the need of such an institution’, he wrote, ‘where members can meet each other more frequently than at present, and enjoy themselves in the fashion of comrades. We have secured fine premises in a central position, and intend having a reference library of books on social, political and general subjects; a reading room, branch room, lecture hall, &c.’. This, he suggested, would be the first Socialist club in Wales’.²¹⁰ Spargo appealed through the columns of *Justice* for help in gathering resources for the club, and received donations from nearby Newport, and far-off Blackburn and Manchester.²¹¹ Chatterton was impressed, and reported the hope that the club rooms would ‘become a good centre for Socialist propaganda in the district’. He also enjoyed the branch’s social and cultural activities, which included frequent parties and musical recitations. ‘The members of Barry SDF possess a capacity for enjoyment in a marked degree, and I also enjoyed myself immensely’, he remarked approvingly.²¹²

It is, perhaps, through a consideration of these cultural activities that the branch’s attitude towards and relationship with Welshness might be assessed. Evidence is

²⁰⁷ *Barry Herald*, 11 September & 11 December 1896.

²⁰⁸ *Barry Herald*, 1 January 1897.

²⁰⁹ *Justice*, 10 July 1897.

²¹⁰ *Justice*, 3 July, 1897. The club had seating for 150 people (*Justice*, 28 August 1897), and the rent was £50 per annum (*Justice*, 7 August 1897).

²¹¹ *Justice*, 28 August 1897. The donation from Manchester came from R.J. Derfel.

²¹² *Justice*, 7 August 1897.

sparse, but it would suggest that the branch had only tenuous links with Welsh culture of any sort. The branch's musical culture drew on the by now established canon of the British socialist movement. James MacDonald's Cardiff meeting in October 1896 was preceded, for example, by the singing of 'England Arise'. His meeting at Barry Dock (which opened with the singing of William Morris's 'No Master' and included a piano recital from a Comrade Roberts) saw his audience sing Harry Salt's 'Hark the Battle Cry is Ringing' to the tune of 'Men of Harlech' - a song, as already seen, favoured by the Cardiff Fabians.²¹³ While this should not be read as any sort of locally initiated concession to Welshness - it was the standard arrangement used by socialists for this anthem - it does present an example of cultural blending going on within the wider socialist movement. Otherwise though the branch largely accepted the standard culture of British socialism. The work of William Morris was prominent in the tastes of its members. When Morris died in October 1896 a William Morris Memorial Night was held, which included performances of Morris's works set to piano accompaniment,²¹⁴ and the author of Morris's eulogy in the *Barry Herald* claimed to have been humming Morris's 'All For The Cause' when he heard the news of its composer's death.²¹⁵ When not drawing upon the culture supplied by the British socialist movement, Barry SDFers tended to simply borrow from existing British popular culture. Their New Year's meeting in 1896/7 for example, opened with Kelso Carter's 'The Hope of the Ages' and closed with 'Good Night', and there is no evidence of any specifically Welsh cultural content.²¹⁶

The Barry SDF's lack of Welsh cultural credentials was not a reflection on the nature of its locality. Barry may have been an entirely new and cosmopolitan town (the spectacular growth of which was compared to that of contemporary American cities),²¹⁷ but it was nevertheless host to a vibrant Welsh culture in the 1890s. St. David's Day was enthusiastically celebrated, and according to one English observer was 'in all things ... distinctly Welsh'.²¹⁸ The town had an active branch of *Cymru Fydd*, which organised a wide range of social activities,²¹⁹ there were columns in

²¹³ *Justice*, 14 November 1896; *Barry Herald*, 6 November 1896.

²¹⁴ *Barry Herald*, 23 October 1896.

²¹⁵ *Barry Herald*, 9 October 1896.

²¹⁶ *Barry Herald*, 8 January 1897.

²¹⁷ *Barry Herald*, 12 June 1896.

²¹⁸ *Barry Herald*, 6 March 1896. Also see *Barry Herald*, 5 March 1897.

²¹⁹ *Barry Herald*, 20 March, 2 October & 20 November 1896.

Welsh in the local press and there was an ongoing debate about the promotion and teaching of Welsh in the town's schools.²²⁰ Advocates of this Welsh culture were, moreover, cognisant of Barry's cosmopolitan nature and made efforts to make their activities inclusive to all of Barry's inhabitants – a sentiment symbolised by the opening of the local *Cymru Fydd* St. David's Dinner to English guests in 1897.²²¹ The local SDF, though, seemed oblivious to this, and remained largely disconnected from Welsh culture. They had no equivalent of Cardiff's Dr. Rhys Jones to provide a link. The closest the Barry SDF could offer was probably the Undy born Matthew Sheppard. Sheppard did not speak Welsh,²²² but he did sing in Welsh. Chatterton - impressed and tongue-twisted in equal measure - reported one such performance at the SDF club: 'To hear comrade Sheppard sing "Wrhydmlynofdooyd" would have touched a tender spot in a "Patti's" heart, even as it did in Spargo's'.²²³

The relationship of the Barry SDF to Welsh culture may have been tangential rather than integral, but this did not prevent its members from reaching out beyond Barry into the industrial valleys beyond. Indeed, with the encouragement and involvement of Chatterton, the branch made a concerted effort to export Social Democracy into the south Wales coalfield. The main object of their aspirations was Aberdare, where a small socialist society had been independently established in 1896. Chatterton and Pierson went there shortly after its formation,²²⁴ and Chatterton returned with Matthew Sheppard on a three day speaking tour in August 1897, which included meetings at Aberaman and Cwmbach. As a result the Aberdare Socialist Society voted unanimously to affiliate to the SDF and Chatterton and Sheppard cycled back to Barry satisfied with their success. This was not, however, before Chatterton had experienced the perennial language problem, which he attempted to solve in the usual manner. 'The majority of those present', he wrote of the meeting at Cwmbach, 'understood the Welsh language much better than English, and consequently I had to speak rather slowly and deliberately and adopt an explanatory tone in order to make myself understood'. Although he was satisfied with his success in this respect, Chatterton had begun to grasp the nature of some of the challenges of socialist work

²²⁰ *Barry Herald*, 28 February, 10 April & 18 December 1896,

²²¹ *Barry Herald*, 22 January 1897.

²²² The 1901 census records his language as English.

²²³ *Justice*, 7 August 1897.

²²⁴ *Justice*, 14 November 1896.

in Wales. Conscious of this, perhaps, he advised that ‘it would be wise to build up and strengthen the movement a little in both Barry and Aberdare before extending propagandist efforts to districts further afield’.²²⁵

The Barry activists, however, did not follow his advice, and by the autumn of 1897 they had Pontypridd in their sights.²²⁶ In late September Spargo and another branch member, Buzzo,²²⁷ travelled from Barry to hold a series of meetings there, one of which, Spargo claimed, was attended by 1,000 people, yielded fourteen shillings in literature sales and 30 names for a new SDF branch.²²⁸ Spargo returned to Pontypridd in early October, where he was impressed by the calibre of the new branch, which was already in the process of arranging the supply of *Justice* to the local free library’s reading room. He was also taken by one of the local activists to address a meeting at Tonypandy, before returning to Pontypridd to speak to an audience of 2,000 people.²²⁹ What is perhaps most interesting about Spargo’s activity in the coalfield in 1897 is what can be gleaned from it about the nature of nascent social democracy in the south Wales coalfield. Some of the members of the branch at Pontypridd were of Welsh origin. The activist who accompanied Spargo to Tonypandy, for example, Comrade Gower, was bilingual and addressed an open air meeting there in English and Welsh, attracting an audience of 200 before Spargo got up to speak.²³⁰ Possibly more representative, though, was the branch’s President, Moses Severn. Born in Nottinghamshire in 1850, before moving to Wales in 1888 Severn had lived in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire where he had worked in the coal industry, ultimately as a colliery manager. His unexplained move to south Wales involved a return to the coalface, and also precipitated his involvement in socialist politics.²³¹ His chief contribution to that cause, before serving as President of the SDF branch, was the publication of an extended pamphlet, *The Miners’ Evangel*,²³² in 1895-

²²⁵ *Justice*, 14 August 1897.

²²⁶ *Justice*, 11 September 1897.

²²⁷ Buzzo had migrated to Barry from Southampton, where he had been a member of the ILP, *Justice*, 10 July 1897.

²²⁸ *Justice*, 9 October 1897.

²²⁹ *Justice*, 23 October 1897.

²³⁰ *Justice*, 23 October 1897.

²³¹ I am grateful to Vicki McKenna and Clare Fuller for information on their great grandfather, Moses Severn. For biographical details see Vicki McKenna, ‘A Miner on a Mission’, *Your Family Tree*, September 2010, pp. 34-36.

²³² Moses Severn, *The Miners’ Evangel: A Text Book For All Manual Workers*, John W. Ford, Pontypridd (1895).

a text which must be ascribed importance as one of the earliest pieces of socialist propaganda to be generated from within the heart of the south Wales coalfield.

Severn's socialism, as expounded in the *Evangel*, was clearly informed by a Marxist reading of economics, which held that 'Capital always has been, and always will be derived from Labour' and that labour was 'the sole element of wealth'.²³³ Severn's Marxism, though, was part of a catholic ideology which drew not just upon Marx but upon a range of other thinkers, including the Irish political economist Cliffe Leslie, Ferdinand Lassalle, Mazzini, St. Simon and Ruskin. It also reveals a degree of religious faith, encapsulated in the argument that 'true religion is on the side of Labour'.²³⁴ The *Evangel* is, however, by no means an abstract ideological treatise. Rather, the bulk of the text is concerned not with ideology, but with the practical issues of economics and organisation within the coal industry, and in this respect it represents an effort to apply socialism to the reality of working life in the coalfield. Specifically it contains an attack on the contemporary method of wage regulation in the south Wales coalfield, the 'mysterious winnowing machine' of the sliding scale.²³⁵ It concludes with comments on the organisation of the miners, which are built upon a Marxist analysis of social change. 'What is called "Organisation of labour" is the problem of the whole future. Organisation of labour is the only key capable of unlocking the doors of the "Golden age" which lies before us',²³⁶ argued Severn, concluding that the way forward was for the south Wales miners to join the Miners Federation of Great Britain. In attacking the sliding scale and advocating membership of the MFGB Severn was a few years in advance of the main body of the south Wales miners. Significantly, in terms of union politics, he was also aligned on this issue with the English speaking William Brace and the more anglicised Monmouthshire miners against Mabon – the personal embodiment of Welshness – and his Cambrian Miners Association.²³⁷ In short, although its contemporary influence was doubtless limited,

²³³ Moses Severn, *The Miners' Evangel*, pp. 5 & 10.

²³⁴ Moses Severn, *The Miners' Evangel*, pp. 5-18, p. 17.

²³⁵ Moses Severn, *The Miners' Evangel*, p. 52.

²³⁶ Moses Severn, *The Miners' Evangel*, p. 62.

²³⁷ For the dispute between Brace and Mabon over the sliding scale and federation, which resulted in considerable animosity and a lawsuit see, E.W. Evans, *Mabon (William Abraham 1842-1922): A Study in Trade Union Leadership*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1959), pp. 47-63; E.W. Evans, *The Miners of South Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1961), Chapters 10 & 11; E.W. Evans & John Saville, 'Abraham, William (Mabon)' in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 1, pp. 1 – 4; R. Page Arnot, Joyce Bellamy & John Saville, 'Brace, William',

The Miners' Evangel was a harbinger of change within the coalfield. Published between the divisive and indecisive 1893 haulier's strike and the most definitely more decisive 1898 lock-out, its primary significance was in identifying the position of socialism on the anglicising wing of the miners' movement, aligned with the forces that wished to centralise trade unionism on a UK basis. Equally important, and a function of this process, it confirmed English as the primary medium for discussion of socialist ideas in print in the coalfield.

The SDF maintained a foothold in the coalfield up to and beyond the 1898 coal dispute. The branch at Pontypridd remained active through 1897 and into 1898,²³⁸ and Spargo continued to invest his energy in the region. He was active in the 1898 coal strike, and took part in a major public debate in Pontypridd at the end of June on the theme 'Would Socialism Benefit the People?'.²³⁹ The branch at Barry remained a going concern,²⁴⁰ and there seemed to be signs of SDF growth within the coalfield, branches being reported at Ynysybwl,²⁴¹ Porth,²⁴² Tonyrefail,²⁴³ Abercynon²⁴⁴ and Mountain Ash²⁴⁵ up to and beyond the turn of the century. As far as the SDF went, though, this period was something of a false dawn. Despite such promising signs, although the organisation did not thereafter vanish entirely from south Wales, neither

Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 1, pp. 51-53; Robin Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners: A History of the South Wales Miners federation 1898-1914*, Allen & Unwin, London (1967), pp. 30-31. For a contemporary analysis of the division within miners' trade unionism perceived as a clash of Welsh and English influences see the report by T. Daronwy Isaac on the meeting at Merthyr in *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 3 August 1893.

²³⁸ *Justice*, 4 & 18 December 1897 & 1 January 1898. It was reported to be organising a visit of H.M. Hyndman to south Wales.

²³⁹ For further discussion of Spargo and the SDF attitude to the 1898 strike see below p. 127-30. For the debate at Pontypridd, see *Justice*, 23 & 30 July 1898. The title of the debate is of interest, as it took for its model debates between Hyndman and Charles Bradlaugh, and Ernest Belfort Bax and Bradlaugh in 1884 and 1887 respectively (*Will Socialism Benefit the English People: Verbatim Report of a Debate Between H.M. Hyndman and Charles Bradlaugh Held at St. James' Hall, April 17 1884*, Freethought Publishing Company, London (1884); *Will Socialism Benefit the English People: A Written Debate Between E. Belfort Bax and Charles Bradlaugh*, Liberty and Property Defence League, London (1887)). In the case of the debate between Spargo and W.H. Davies the word 'English' was quietly dropped, doubtless in deference to the fact that the debate was being held in Wales. Interestingly, this marks a departure from the policy of earlier socialist lecturers in south Wales, who had made, as already discussed, extensive reference to 'the English working men' etc. in their speeches, and is symptomatic, arguably, of the move in context from the Anglicised towns of the coast to the coalfield.

²⁴⁰ *Justice*, 25 August 1900.

²⁴¹ *Justice*, 11 June 1898. 150 members were claimed, *Justice* 24 September 1898.

²⁴² *Justice*, 30 July 1898.

²⁴³ *Justice*, 6 August 1898.

²⁴⁴ *Justice*, 24 September 1898.

²⁴⁵ *Justice*, 1 June 1901 & 20 July 1901.

did it prosper. The nature of the SDF's problems might be illustrated by going back to where this chapter began – cosmopolitan Cardiff, where it might be thought that prospects for the SDF were comparatively good. Certainly, the town was a target for the Barry activists. Since the dissipation of the Fabian Socialist Society around the middle of the 1890s some attempts had been made to establish an ILP branch in the town, although with only limited success.²⁴⁶ From 1896 onwards the SDF attempted to muscle in and establish their own version of socialism in the town. Chatterton and Pierson spoke there on their visit in 1896, as did James MacDonald, during whose visit contact was made with SDF members in the town – a Glaswegian, James Colton, a German, Comrade Smith, and two un-named Russians.²⁴⁷ Four SDF sympathisers from Cardiff also attended one of Chatterton's meetings at Barry in July 1897, and urged him to help establish a branch in Cardiff. There were however difficulties. 'An attempt was made to form an SDF branch at Cardiff last summer', he explained in his report to *Justice*, 'but failed for want of support from the local Socialists. if there really are any socialists in the town I shall be glad if they will come out of their shells and do some work'.²⁴⁸

A branch was eventually formed in Cardiff, in September 1897, and over the autumn meetings addressed by Spargo, Colton and others were held at St. Mary's Street on Sunday afternoons and The Hayes Market on Sunday evenings.²⁴⁹ The branch even managed to establish its own bakery for a period in 1898.²⁵⁰ The problem was, however, that it never succeeded in gaining a full ascendancy in the town. Firstly there was the issue of competition with the ILP. James MacDonald's meeting in 1896 had raised the ire of local ILPers, who questioned him and 'seemed to dislike the idea of our forming a branch of the SDF in Cardiff',²⁵¹ and the issue was never truly resolved. Ultimately, the form of socialist organisation that represented Cardiff was a generic Cardiff Socialist Society, which refused to align exclusively with any of the established national organisations.²⁵² In May 1899 its members decided that the best

²⁴⁶ See below p. 103.

²⁴⁷ *Justice*, 14 November 1896.

²⁴⁸ *Justice*, 7 August 1897.

²⁴⁹ *Justice*, 25 September 1897.

²⁵⁰ James Colton was a biscuit baker, but was sacked by his employer for his advocacy of socialism, so the branch established its own co-operative bakery as a response. *Justice*, 24 September & 29 October 1898.

²⁵¹ *Justice*, 14 November 1896.

²⁵² *South Wales Daily News*, 1 March 1899.

way forward was to affiliate half their number with the SDF and half with the ILP.²⁵³ As the Cardiff Socialist Party it went on to play a small, but lively, part in the life of Cardiff into the twentieth century, distributing ‘advanced literature’ from its Labour Pioneer and Socialist Institute on the balcony of the Castle Arcade,²⁵⁴ and publishing its own *Labour Pioneer* monthly newspaper. The same pattern was followed in Swansea, where a revival in socialist organisation in 1897 did not result in the establishment of an SDF branch, but the non-aligned Swansea Socialist Society.²⁵⁵ In Aberdare too, despite the enthusiasm for SDF affiliation reported to Spargo in 1896, the cluster of socialist societies in and around the town never seems to have used the SDF title, and indeed by 1902 they had affiliated, in several stages, to the ILP, under the title Aberdare Valley ILP.²⁵⁶

This failure of the SDF to survive and replicate on a local level in south Wales is puzzling, particularly when viewed in the context of the later (but not much later) rise to prominence of Marxism in the south Wales coalfield. Certainly, the ongoing fortunes of the SDF in south Wales would be a topic worthy of further research. In one sense the problem might be seen as part of a wider discussion about the failure of social democracy in Britain, projected in terms of a debate about ‘British exceptionalism’ or the inherent conservatism of the British working class.²⁵⁷ If so, the discussion needs relating specifically to the nature of the working class in south Wales. Certainly, some aspects of SDFism would have been particularly jarring in Liberal and nonconformist Wales. The inherent Toryism of the SDF leadership may have been one off-putting factor, although there does not seem to be any direct evidence for this.²⁵⁸ In more general terms, though, the tone and nature of the SDF was clearly irritating to some within the radical wing of politics. One contributor to the *Barry Herald* in 1896 castigated the Barry socialists as ‘that conglomeration of

²⁵³ ILP National Administrative Council Minutes, 6 May 1899.

²⁵⁴ *Labour Pioneer*, November 1901.

²⁵⁵ McCarry, *Labour and Society in Swansea*, pp. 235-245.

²⁵⁶ Aberdare Valley ILP / Aberdare Socialist Society Papers, Glamorgan Archive DXHJ2, Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff.

²⁵⁷ Ross McKibbin, ‘Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?’, *The Ideologies of Class*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1990), pp. 1-41.

²⁵⁸ The argument that independent political action would split the progressive vote and allow Tory victories was certainly used, but more against the ILP than the SDF. *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 6 September 1894 & 19 November 1896.

noise, cheek, discontent, and nothingness'.²⁵⁹ There is also evidence that some of the more 'advanced' statements and beliefs of the Federation's members created opprobrium within south Walian society. After one meeting in Pontypridd, for example, the SDF was accused of being in favour of atheism and 'the hideous doctrine of free love', in support of which the accuser could legitimately quote SDF member Ernest Belfort Bax.²⁶⁰ Despite replies by Chatterton and other socialist sympathisers from within the coalfield,²⁶¹ it is likely that the accusations stuck in the minds of many. Such arguments, though, were deployed indiscriminately against socialism in general, and although the SDF may have provided more ammunition than other socialist groups for its opponents in this respect, its failure cannot be explained on this basis alone. Indeed, an understanding of the failure of the SDF to put down firm roots in Welsh soil cannot be restricted to a study of the SDF alone. Ultimately SDFism failed to grow in Wales because it was displaced by a quicker growing and better adapted plant in the form of the ILP, and this represented the advent of a new period in the history of socialism in Wales.

The periodisation of the growth of socialism in Wales is a hazardous business. It is potentially untidy, and must take account of the uneven development of socialist organisation in both territorial and ideological terms.²⁶² Between them, though, the activities of the Fabians and the SDF in urban south Wales in the 1890s represent a specific phase in the interaction between Wales and modern socialism. Through their activities the members of these societies initiated the development of socialism from an idea brought into Wales by missionaries from afar into a movement that was rooted in Wales itself. It is true, as Edward Foulkes suggested in the quotation that opened this chapter, that this was very largely an urban phenomenon, and that it was initiated to a large extent by incomers, rather than indigenous Welsh people. This is, however, only a partial truth. The growth of socialist societies in the urban centres of south Wales in the 1890s was more complex a process than simply one of the implantation of a foreign doctrine in Welsh soil. While they acted as a seedbed for the propagation of socialism in the Welsh society beyond their urban horizons, the

²⁵⁹ *Barry Herald*, 18 September 1896.

²⁶⁰ *Glamorgan Free Press*, 7 May & 21 May 1898.

²⁶¹ *Glamorgan Free Press*, 14 May, 28 May & 9 July 1898.

²⁶² Deian Hopkin, 'The Rise of Labour in Wales 1890-1914', *Llafur*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (1994), pp. 120-141 makes the most coherent attempt to date.

socialist societies of Cardiff, the Swansea and Loughor Valleys and the port of Barry also acted - admittedly, in widely varying degrees - as meeting places between socialism and Welsh culture. The resulting cultural and ideological product was, in the long term, to change the course of Welsh history. In order for it to do this, however, it needed to move beyond the cosmopolitan world of Cardiff or the docks of Barry into the heart of Welsh society. It needed to develop the human capital that the early societies lacked. It needed to become embedded in Welsh communities and to reflect those communities in all of their aspects. This process demanded an even more intense interplay between ideology and practice, between the universal and the local and between Wales and the wider world. The primary medium for this was the Independent Labour Party, which is the focus of the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 3

SOUTH WALES AND THE ILP ASCENDANCY

Of all the socialist organisations formed in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the most important was undoubtedly the Independent Labour Party. Created in 1893, the ILP was both an expression and a beneficiary of the spectacular growth of interest in socialism that took place in Britain in the 1890s, but it was qualitatively different from the existing socialist organisations. As its name implied, the ILP aspired to be a political party rather than a simple socialist society.¹ Although it was committed to a socialist programme and retained the idealism of the already established socialist societies, the ideological content of its socialism tended to be vague, flexible and arguably more limited than the putative revolutionism of some of the earlier groups. Rather than theorising or just ‘making socialists’, the ILP aimed to intervene in British party politics in order to recast the political system to the benefit of the working class, and its advent saw socialists ‘working with the grain of British politics’² in a way in which they had previously either been reluctant, or simply too ineffective, to do. The party’s central strategy was the creation of an alliance with the trade unions – most of whose members were not socialists – to achieve specific political aims.

On a national level this resulted in the creation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which in 1906 formally became the Labour Party.³ Neither of these bodies were explicitly socialist. Rather, they were umbrella organisations, open to anyone committed to the parliamentary representation of labour independent of the existing political parties. To their advocates, the ILP and the Labour Party represented an intrinsically British road to socialism.⁴ Their necessarily ambiguous relationship to

¹ Reference to the word socialism was deliberately dropped from the title of the party at its inaugural conference, on the grounds that (in the words of Joseph Burgess) ‘to demand a declaration as a Socialist from all the members of the party would merely be to stop the development of the army of workers, upon whom they were relying, and ought to rely’, *Independent Labour Party, Report of the First General Conference*, Labour Literature Society, Glasgow (1893), p. 3.

² David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 5.

³ Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, *Labour and Politics, 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1958).

⁴ J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Socialism and Society*, ILP, London (1905), pp.134-148; J. Ramsay MacDonald, ‘Socialism and the Labour Party’, *The Socialist Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1908), pp. 13-23.

that ideology nevertheless drew criticism from many socialists, who, arguing that the political advance of labourism was eclipsing and weakening their movement, urged the creation of a united and explicitly socialist party.⁵ Such criticisms may have had virtues from a purist socialist perspective, and their advocates may have been energetic and articulate, but the fact that the ILP quickly became the largest of all the British socialist organisations was inescapable.⁶ Indeed, the party developed stronger and deeper roots in more communities than any other socialist group had (or has yet) succeeded in doing. Consequently, the ILP was the primary medium in pre-First World War Britain through which the universal ideals of socialism were related to local conditions and situations. The rise to prominence of the ILP in Wales will therefore dominate the content of the following chapter.

This was fundamentally a regional phenomenon. Up until 1906, the growth of the ILP in Wales was almost totally confined to the south, and the party's subsequent dominance of socialist politics within the country was built upon its southern ascendancy. This chapter will therefore focus upon the intertwined phenomena of the growth of the ILP and the spread of socialist ideas in south Wales in the period before 1906. Measuring the spread of socialism through the region is, however, hardly straightforward. In order to assess the extent to which socialism became implanted in south Walian society in this period various expressions of its presence need to be considered together. The first, and most widely recognised, measure is structural and territorial in nature, and charts the growth of socialism in terms of the development of ILP branches at a local level and of organisational structures at a regional level. This allows an understanding of the advance of socialism in formal terms and measures its growth as expressed in the public sphere. This is an essential starting point, but it only allows a one dimensional understanding of the dynamic of the spread of socialism. A fuller assessment demands an analysis which penetrates the private sphere, which is

⁵ Keith Laybourn, 'The Failure of Socialist Unity in Britain, c. 1893-1914', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, Vol. 4 (1994) pp. 153-75; Martin Crick, "'A Call to Arms': the Struggle for Socialist Unity in Britain, 1883-1914", in David James, Tony Jowitt & Keith Laybourn (eds.), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party*, Ryburn, Halifax (1992), pp. 181-204.

⁶ In 1901 the ILP claimed a membership of 13,000, as opposed to the SDF's 9,000 and the Fabian Society's 861, Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, Appendix A, p. 229. For further discussion of the membership of the ILP and SDF see, Deian Hopkin, 'The Membership of the Independent Labour Party 1904-1910: A Spatial and Occupational Analysis', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1975) pp. 175-97; P.A. Watmough, 'The Membership of the Social Democratic Federation, 1885-1902', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No. 34 (1977), pp. 35-40.

of course a more difficult proposition, and one which involves the deployment of a more qualitative approach. This chapter will attempt to combine assessments of the public and the private – or the structural and ideational – spread of socialism through south Wales in the 1890s and early 1900s. In so doing it will aim to shed light upon the nature of the interaction between the universal and the local, and evaluate the ways in which socialism became adapted to the life of the region.

The first section will explore the period before 1898. It will set the context by making some general observations about the ILP, and then examine the party's growth alongside the influence of other socialist enterprises such as the *Clarion* movement. The second section will examine the coal strike that dominated industrial and political events in south Wales in 1898. It will discuss the ways in which socialists used the strike to become more established within the communities of south Wales, and the way in which the strike drew south Wales into a closer relationship with the British socialist and labour movement. In particular it will discuss the success of the ILP in using the strike to gain an ascendancy over the other socialist groupings in Wales. The final section will combine a discussion of the role played in Wales by the ILP's most important figure, Keir Hardie, with an analysis of the political culture that was created by the ILP in south Wales. Through these linked discussions the chapter will aim to illuminate some of the central themes in this thesis: the interplay between external influences and the organic growth of socialism within Wales; the relationships between the national and the local; between leaders and communities; between the universal ideals of socialism and the actual conditions in which it grew.

(i). The ILP and Socialism in South Wales Before 1898.

The main theatre for the development of the ILP was undoubtedly its heartland in the north of England. This was centred upon the woollen manufacturing districts of the West Riding of Yorkshire,⁷ where troubled industrial relations had begun to drive a

⁷ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, pp. 174-203; Keith Laybourn & David James, *The Rising Sun of Socialism: The Independent Labour Party in the Textile District of the West Riding of Yorkshire between 1890 and 1914* (Wakefield, 1991); David James, Tony Jowitt & Keith Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Halifax, Ryburn, 1992); J.A. Jowitt & R.K.S. Taylor (eds.), *Bradford 1890-1914: The Cradle of the Independent Labour Party* (Leeds, 1980); Jack Reynolds and Keith Laybourn, 'The Emergence of the Independent Labour

wedge between the working class and the Liberal Party,⁸ but it also extended across the Pennines to Lancashire, and included a significant outlying area in central Scotland.⁹ By 1896, three years after its foundation, the ILP comprised 381 local groups. Of these, 222 were in the north of England (of which 118 were in Yorkshire alone), and a further 41 in Scotland.¹⁰ This geographical pattern was, naturally enough, reflected in the party's national (UK) leadership. From the beginning, the ILP's main representative body, the National Administrative Council, was dominated by delegates from the north of England and Scotland,¹¹ and as the leadership crystallised around a few key figures in the late 1890s the domination of the north became even more striking. Of the four outstanding individuals who came to command the party – Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, John Bruce Glasier and Philip Snowden – three were Scots and one a Yorkshireman.¹²

The ILP's geography was also reflected in its intellectual and cultural make-up, which drew upon a range of allied organisations that focused upon social, cultural, educational and spiritual - rather than directly political - activities.¹³ The intellectual roots of this movement were firmly located and nourished in the industrial culture of northern England, from which its most important communicators drew their inspiration. Out of the 70 local newspapers in Britain that directly supported the ILP

Party in Bradford', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1975), pp. 313-46; E.P. Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire'.

⁸ Cyril Pearce, *The Manningham Mills Strike, Bradford, December 1890-April 1891 (Occasional Papers in Economic and Social History No. 7)*, University of Hull, Hull (1975); Mary Blewett, 'Diversities of Class and Gender Experience and the Shaping of Labour Politics: Yorkshire's Manningham Mills Strike, 1890-91 and the Independent Labour Party', *Labour History*, Vol. 47, No. 7 (2006), pp. 511-535

⁹ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, pp. 131-173 & pp. 204-229; Alan McKinlay & R.J. Morris, *The ILP on Clydeside, 1893-1932: From Foundation to Disintegration* (Manchester, 1991); Kevin McPhillips, *Joseph Burgess (1853-1934) and the Founding of the Independent Labour Party*, Edward Mellen Press, Lewiston (2005); J. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford Politics and the Early Development of the Independent Labour Party', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1981), pp. 171-201; James Robert Moore, 'Progressive Pioneers: Manchester Liberalism, The Independent Labour Party and Local Politics in the 1890s', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 44 No. 4 (2001), pp. 989-1013; Joyce Whitehead, 'The Independent Labour Party in Swinton and Pendlebury', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 56 No. 1 (1991), pp. 12-14.

¹⁰ *Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party*, Labour Literature Society, Glasgow (1896), p. 10.

¹¹ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 296.

¹² Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924*, Royal Historical Society, London (1998), pp. 45-51.

¹³ The most important of these were those grouped around the *Clarion* newspaper. J. Fincher, *The Clarion Movement: A Study of a Socialist Attempt to Implement the Co-operative Commonwealth in England 1891-1914*, M.A, Manchester (1971); Logie Barrow, *The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and the Clarion Newspaper, 1889-1918*, PhD, London (1975).

in the period before 1906, almost a third (22) were published in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and many of the others were based in Lancashire or Cheshire.¹⁴ The work of their propagandists was often explicitly addressed to the inhabitants of the great northern industrial conurbations. This was epitomised by the most famous and successful of them, Robert Blatchford, whose emblematic ‘hard headed working man’, ‘John Smith’, to whom his hugely influential *Merrie England* was addressed, was specifically located in Oldham.¹⁵ To Blatchford, the socialist movement could be synonymous with what he called ‘the Northern Party of Progress’.¹⁶ The newspapers of that party, such as Joseph Burgess’s *Yorkshire Factory Times* or Blatchford’s own *Clarion*, carried articles and serialised fiction which drew upon and depicted a specifically northern English working class experience.¹⁷ Its protagonists’ use of religious language, as exhibited in Philip Snowden’s hugely popular lecture and pamphlet *The Christ That Is To Be*, was a direct export from the world of northern English nonconformity. Their mythology was deliberately and methodically built upon events, such as the free speech struggles at Boggart Hole Clough in 1896, that took place in the north of England.¹⁸ Their popular culture, which included an array of cycling, singing, nature study, rambling and philanthropic clubs, was a direct outgrowth of northern factory life - a product of the aspiration of those who lived it for a better, cleaner and freer existence beyond their immediate urban horizons.¹⁹ The ILP, which was the political expression this culture, was created, in the words of Joseph Clayton, by ‘fusing local elements into one national whole’.²⁰ What Clayton didn’t need to say was that these local elements were overwhelmingly northern British in composition.

¹⁴ Deian Hopkin, *The Newspapers of the Independent Labour Party 1893-1906*, PhD, University of Wales (1981), pp. 44-73.

¹⁵ Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England*, Journeyman, London (1977), p. 3 (First published *Clarion*, London, 1893): ‘Dear Mr. Smith ... You live in Oldham and you are a spinner’.

¹⁶ Robert Blatchford, ‘The New Party in the North’, in Andrew Reid (ed.), *The New Party*, Hodder Brothers, London (1895), pp. 9-25, p. 12. By this Blatchford meant not just the ILP, with which he had an ambiguous and sometimes awkward relationship, but the whole socialist movement.

¹⁷ E.g. ‘Lancashire Lads and Lasses’, in *Yorkshire Factory Times*, November 1895 – February 1896.

¹⁸ H.C. Rowe, *The Boggart Hole Clough Contest*, Labour Press Society, Manchester (1896).

¹⁹ A.J. Ainsworth, ‘Aspects of Socialism at Branch Level 1890-1900: Some Notes Towards Analysis’, *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, Vol. 4 (1977), pp. 6-35; Dennis Pye, ‘Fellowship is Life: Bolton Clarion Cycling Club and the Clarion Movement 1894-1914’, *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, Vol. 10 (1984), pp. 20-30; D. Prynne, ‘The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and the Holiday Associations in Britain Since the 1890s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 11 (1976), pp. 65-77; Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1990).

²⁰ Quoted in A.J. Ainsworth, ‘Aspects of Socialism at Branch Level 1890-1900: Some Notes Towards Analysis’, *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, Vol. 4 (1977), pp. 6-35, p. 9.

Wales, it seemed, was initially marginal to these developments. Of the 115 delegates at the Inaugural Conference of the ILP at Bradford in 1893 there was famously not one from west of Offa's Dyke,²¹ and by 1896 Wales could only account for four of the officially recorded 381 local ILP groups in Britain.²² Until the south Wales coal strike of 1898, the main newspaper associated with the ILP, Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader*, gave considerably more column inches to events in distant New South Wales than it did to events in the Wales closer to home. This situation was, however, temporary, and from the early twentieth century onwards the party's fortunes in Wales changed dramatically, as indeed did the role of Wales within the wider British labour movement. John Bruce Glasier commented in 1904

A few years ago nobody outside of South Wales took any heed of the place; few, indeed, knew of its existence. Now it ranks in political importance with West Birmingham.²³

The turnaround was the result of socialism outgrowing its roots in the coastal towns and becoming implanted in the communities of the south Wales coalfield, and the primary agent of this was the ILP. It is important not to overstress the ease, rapidity or completeness of this process in the period before the Great War. Indeed, the Liberal Party remained a formidable barrier to the advance of labour and socialism in the region until at least the 1920s.²⁴ Nevertheless, the influence of the ILP in south Wales was profound. In the ten years up to 1916 it was estimated that the party organised 20,000 meetings in the coalfield alone.²⁵ A powerful engine of political progress and education, it was a formative influence upon the key Welsh politicians of the inter-war period – men like James Griffiths and Aneurin Bevan, who played a seminal role

²¹ As already discussed, Sam Hobson was meant to represent Cardiff but missed the train. Wales was only mentioned once at the Conference, when a delegate asked why Wales and the Western Counties were not to be represented on the executive. Francis Johnson, who had chaired the committee which considered the basis upon which the executive was elected, replied that there was no delegate present, but that both Ireland and Wales, if represented at the next conference, would be able to choose representatives for the executive. *Independent Labour Party, Report of the First General Conference, Bradford 14th January 1893*, Labour Literature Society, Glasgow (1893), p. 8.

²² *Independent Labour Party, Report of Fourth Annual Conference*, p. 10.

²³ *Labour Leader*, 19 March 1904.

²⁴ K.O. Morgan, 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1973) pp. 288-312.

²⁵ 'Observer', 'The Mind of the Miner', *Welsh Outlook*, 1916, p. 218.

in the creation of the British welfare state. The long term effects of the ILP's ascendancy in south Wales acted to integrate the country into that essentially unionist project. This process was, however, not simply imposed upon Wales from outside, it was equally initiated from within the region. In order to understand how a political party formed in and driven from northern Britain could become central to the politics of south Wales it is necessary to begin in the early 1890s.

The first stirrings of interest in socialist-inspired independent labour politics in Wales may be traced, not unexpectedly, to the coastal towns of the south. As early as July 1892, six months before the official launch of the national (UK) ILP at Bradford, a group met in Cardiff with the aim of establishing a local branch, and 'decided to commence active propaganda ... of the principles of the party, by means of indoor and outdoor meetings'.²⁶ It took several more years, however, for the ILP to gain a real foothold in the town. A teetotal ILP club existed in Splott in 1894,²⁷ although it was not until the following year that a formal branch of the party developed out of the Fabian Socialist Society, with Ben Evans as its Secretary. Soon after its foundation it was contemplating electoral activity, inviting Sam Hobson back to stand as a parliamentary candidate,²⁸ and putting up Rhys Jones as a candidate for the local school board.²⁹ Evans reported to Thomas Jones in March 1896 that the branch had about 40 members,³⁰ but it hardly seems to have prospered. It was reported as 'still alive' in the *Labour Leader* near the end of 1897,³¹ although by February 1898 it had amalgamated with the local SDF for 'election and propaganda purposes'.³² Newport similarly showed early signs of an ILP presence. A branch was established there in 1893,³³ and by October 1895 it had 28 members. Its club and lecture rooms were open every evening, and it organised regular Wednesday evening lectures.³⁴ By March 1896 its membership had reportedly grown to 40,³⁵ although its secretary had reported

²⁶ *Western Mail*, 12 July 1892. The secretary was W. Tyler Hammond.

²⁷ *Labour Leader*, 5 May 1894.

²⁸ *South Wales Daily News*, 10 & 13 April 1895.

²⁹ *Labour Leader*, 7 December 1895.

³⁰ Benjamin Evans to Thomas Jones, 1 March 1896, Thomas Jones C.H. Papers X2, National Library of Wales.

³¹ *Labour Leader*, 11 December 1897.

³² *Labour Leader*, 26 February 1898.

³³ *Western Mail*, 13 January 1893.

³⁴ *Labour Leader*, 19 October 1895.

³⁵ Benjamin Evans to Thomas Jones, 1 March 1896, Thomas Jones C.H. Papers X2, NLW.

months previously that progress was ‘very slow’.³⁶ In December 1897 the branch was reported to be re-organising,³⁷ and by February 1898 it was claiming to be the largest branch in the district.³⁸ If the testimony of the SDF’s Joseph Chatterton is to be trusted, though, the situation was hardly promising. He reported in 1896 that ‘[a]t Newport and Cardiff there are supposed to exist branches of the ILP, but they are doing nothing’.³⁹

Chatterton’s harsh words may have contained grains of truth, but they were not entirely fair. One thing that the Cardiff ILP members had been doing was travelling north to spread the socialist message in the coalfield. One of them reported such a visit in August 1895:

On Monday, Bank Holiday, some of our comrades went as missionaries up into the colliery district to try and convert the natives to Socialism, and show them the necessity for I.L. [independent labour] representation. They, the natives, were deeply impressed with the truths they heard, many impressions made will encourage our comrades to pay another visit, armed with a big supply of ‘M.E.s’ [*Merrie Englands*].⁴⁰

On some of these trips they took speakers from the wider British socialist movement with them. In June 1894, for example, Rhys Jones, Sam Hobson and Ben Evans escorted Fred Brocklehurst on a journey up the Rhondda, during which Jones addressed meetings in Welsh, while Brocklehurst and Hobson spoke in English.⁴¹ These expeditions were portent to what quickly became a flood of socialist speakers in south Wales. In addition to the efforts of Spargo, Chatterton and the other SDF members discussed in the last chapter, numerous speakers from both Fabian and ILP backgrounds undertook extensive tours during the 1890s. Some were locally based, like John H. Roberts of Preston Cottage, Newport, ‘an experienced lecturer’ who

³⁶ *Labour Leader*, 18 January 1896.

³⁷ *Labour Leader*, 11 December 1897.

³⁸ *Labour Leader*, 5 February 1898.

³⁹ *Justice*, 6 June 1896.

⁴⁰ *Clarion*, 24 August 1895.

⁴¹ *Labour Leader*, 16 June 1894. Brocklehurst also visited Swansea on this visit, where he worked alongside Sam Mainwaring, leading to the two of them being prosecuted for obstruction. *Labour Leader*, 30 June 1894.

offered his services in return for third class railfare and hospitality,⁴² or Edward Robinson, of the Cardiff ILP, who offered a lantern show and lecture, in the making of which he ‘spared no expense to make the affair interesting and instructive’.⁴³ In addition to the local activists, though, some of the big names of the movement visited the region - individuals like Keir Hardie⁴⁴ and Tom Mann.⁴⁵ They in turn were supported by a cast from the next tier down of socialist personalities, members of the rising class of full time ILP-related agitators, such as J.S. Hamilton,⁴⁶ Enid Stacy⁴⁷ and Tom Taylor,⁴⁸ to name just a few. This incursion of socialist speakers represented the most significant phase of interaction between Wales and the wider socialist movement that had occurred up to that point.

The society – or rather, mosaic of societies - into which they were taking their message offered promise and challenge in roughly equal measure. In the 1890s the ‘magnetic south’ was in the process of transition from a frontier, consisting of what had been described as ‘colonies in the desert’,⁴⁹ to a more settled, full and vibrant industrial society, with its own regional consciousness and its own culture, in which the chapel, the tavern and the boxing ring vied for space on the steep terraced valley sides. This transformation was driven by astonishing rates of in-migration, which even before the 1890s were beginning to shift the ethnic, cultural and linguistic balance of the region away from its traditional Welsh roots towards the ‘American Wales’ that Alfred Zimmern was to discern in the 1920s.⁵⁰ This process took place at

⁴² *Labour Leader*, 24 August 1895.

⁴³ *Labour Leader*, 5 February 1898.

⁴⁴ Hardie’s role is dealt with in detail later in this chapter.

⁴⁵ Tom Mann was a frequent visitor to south Wales. He spoke, for example, at Neath, Morriston and Cardiff in 1894, *Labour Leader*, 7 June 1894. He extended his activities into the coalfield in 1896, speaking at Treharris, Merthyr, Aberdare and Maerdy. At Aberdare he urged south Walesians not to ‘stand aloof’ from the British trade union movement, *Merthyr Express*, 4 & 11 July 1896.

⁴⁶ Hamilton delivered a series of ‘well attended’ lectures at Cardiff, Newport, Treharris, Maerdy, Merthyr, Pontypool, Neath and Bury Port in 1896, *Labour Leader*, 5 December 1896.

⁴⁷ *Labour Leader* 12 & 19 March & 7 May 1898.

⁴⁸ In 1896 Taylor lectured, among other venues, at Bedlinog, Nelson and Aberdare, supporting his talks with a lantern show entitled ‘Darkest England’. His style was that of an evangelical preacher: ‘Many Christians have hitherto thought that Socialism meant infidelity and bomb-throwing. They never thought that Socialists could preach as well as lecture; but Tom has, with the result that we have many Christian sympathisers’. *Labour Leader*, 9 January 1897.

⁴⁹ The phrase was used by one of the Government’s Commissioners of Education in 1847, see Thomas Jones C.H., *Rhymney Memories*, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (1990) (first published 1938), pp. 1-29.

⁵⁰ Alfred Zimmern, *My Impressions of Wales*, Mills & Boons, London (1921); Dai Smith, *Wales! Wales?*, Allen & Unwin, London & Sidney (1984); Philip N. Jones, ‘Some Aspects of Immigration

different speeds and at different intensities in different places. Thus some parts of the coalfield – Merthyr, for example - had long established communities with relatively long traditions of industrial and social activism and organisation, while others – Senghenydd being a case in point - were no more than tiny villages in 1890, but had become substantial industrial settlements by the end of the decade.⁵¹ The regional process of cultural and linguistic change was therefore by no means even, and Welsh remained the language of many of the communities – and communities within communities – of the coalfield.⁵² What the old and the new, the Welsh and the Anglicised, the religious and the secular aspects of this society had in common, and what made it attractive to socialist propagandists was the huge discrepancy in wealth and power between its masters - coal-owners like D.A. Thomas, Viscount Rhondda and William Lewis, Lord Merthyr of Senghenydd – and its workers. In short, south Wales hosted a society in which the process of capitalist exploitation was stark and transparent.

It was also a society in which labour was beginning to flex its political muscle. The workers of the Rhondda had demonstrated this emphatically in 1885 when they elected the miners’ leader William Abraham (Mabon), in preference to a coalowner, to represent them in Parliament.⁵³ Mabon was certainly not sympathetic to the socialism of the 1890s, but there were some among his constituents who were. One of them wrote to the *Western Mail* from Maerdy in January 1893, celebrating the advent of the ILP, and predicting that ‘...Socialism ... in the future – maybe the near future – will sweep everything before it’.⁵⁴ The author of this letter was certainly one of a small minority in 1893. It was not long, however, before his viewpoint became more common. By early 1894, stimulated by a visit from Keir Hardie, ILP branch activity was being reported in a range of other centres beyond Cardiff and Newport. These included Morryston, Cwmavon, Swansea and Neath in the west, but also the coalfield communities of Abertillery and Pontypridd. By the middle of the decade, though, the

Into the Glamorgan Coalfield Between 1881 and 1911’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1969), pt.1, pp. 82-98.

⁵¹ Michael Lieven, *Senghenydd: The Universal Pit Village 1890-1930*, Gomer, Llandysul (1994).

⁵² Philip N. Jones, ‘The Welsh Language in the Valleys of Glamorgan c. 1800-1914’, in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 147-180.

⁵³ L.J. Williams, ‘The First Welsh “Labour” M.P.: The Rhondda Election of 1885’, *Morgannwg*, Vol. VI (1962), pp. 78-94; Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, pp. 29-37.

⁵⁴ *Western Mail*, 19 January 1893.

greatest concentration of ILP activity in the coalfield was at Treharris, which might legitimately be regarded as the birthplace of the ILP in the south Wales valleys.

In March 1896, when Ben Evans provided information about the ILP to Thomas Jones, the only centres he referred to outside of Cardiff and Newport were Treharris and Merthyr, which hosted ILP branches of thirty and ten members respectively.⁵⁵ The Treharris branch organised numerous meetings, drawing in speakers from Cardiff, Bristol and beyond. These included James Sexton, leader of the Liverpool Dockers and Jesse Butler, of the Manchester ILP, who were taken to Treharris from Cardiff, where they were attending the Trades Unions Congress, by David Rhys Jones, who spoke alongside them in Welsh.⁵⁶ By October, ‘after a months work’, the Treharris activists were still feeling ‘encouraged and very much strengthened’, particularly as the local branch of the Railwaymen’s Union had declared in favour of independent labour representation,⁵⁷ and they went on to organise meetings featuring Hugh Holmes Gore of Bristol,⁵⁸ Tom McCarthy⁵⁹ and Fred Brocklehurst⁶⁰ over the winter of 1895-6. This activity took place against the background of regular monthly meetings, and by February 1896 the branch was contemplating putting up candidates in the forthcoming local elections and sending a delegate to the forthcoming ILP conference at Nottingham.⁶¹

A significant feature of the activities of the Treharris branch was the way in which its members worked methodically to export socialism to the surrounding area, thus taking the initiative from the activists of Cardiff and establishing the first elements of a propagandist dynamic internal to the coalfield itself. In the summer of 1896, they organised a lecture campaign by J. W. Wood, who spoke on the ‘Religious Aspect of Socialism’ at a large number of centres within striking distance of Treharris. These

⁵⁵ Benjamin Evans to Thomas Jones, 1 March 1896, Thomas Jones C.H. Papers X2, NLW.

⁵⁶ *Labour Leader*, 14 September 1895. The ILP had been denounced at the 1895 Cardiff TUC, but the secretary of the Treharris branch protested in the columns of his local paper that ‘we as Independent Labourites, and as a political party in this country have come to stay’. The ILP, he asserted was ‘the front horse of the labour movement’, and ready to face the opposition of the Liberals and Conservatives combined. *Merthyr Express*, 7 & 14 September 1895.

⁵⁷ *Labour Leader*, 5 October 1895.

⁵⁸ *Labour Leader*, 30 November 1895; *Merthyr Express*, 23 November 1895.

⁵⁹ *Labour Leader*, 7 December 1895; *Merthyr Express*, 7 December 1895.

⁶⁰ *Clarion*, 22 February 1896. Brocklehurst’s meeting was chaired by Rhys Jones, indicating his involvement with the branch’s activity.

⁶¹ *Labour Leader*, 1 & 15 February 1896.

included Cilfynydd, Nelson, Bedlinog, Llanbradach, Pontypridd, Merthyr, Merthyr Vale, Troedyrhiw, Maescymmer, Mountain Ash and Aberdare. It was claimed that up to 2,000 people attended some of the meetings, and during the campaign 10,000 assorted leaflets and copies of the *Labour Leader* and *Clarion* were distributed.⁶² The efforts of the Treharris branch were not without success. Its members assisted in establishing a branch at Merthyr towards the end of 1895,⁶³ which in turn organised joint meetings with sympathisers in Dowlais.⁶⁴ In this way a rudimentary ILP branch structure began to spread across the coalfield. Although most advanced around Treharris and Merthyr, a similar process was taking place in other valleys. A branch was established at Maerdy by 1896, under the leadership of Hugh Lloyd,⁶⁵ and at Abertillery a rather grandly termed ‘conference of Socialists’ took place in the home of Charles Frowen of Portland Street in March 1898.⁶⁶ Thus, as south Wales drifted towards the great conflict of the 1898 coal strike socialists and ILP sympathisers there began to identify one another and coalesce, through a combination of personal contact, letters to the local press and advertisements in the *Labour Leader*. By the end of 1897 branches were reported in nine locations: Abertillery, Cardiff, Dowlais, Ebbw Vale, Maerdy, Maescymmer, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport and Treharris. Some of them were certainly of questionable strength, and only returned fees and reports to central office irregularly.⁶⁷ One ILP activist later observed that ‘[m]any of them were weak, none were really powerful as they are in the North [of England], and some of them had almost shuffled off the mortal coil, after doing what they could against great odds’.⁶⁸ They nevertheless represented the public expression of an underlying proliferation of socialist ideas through the region.

The socialists of south Wales also aspired to create an over-arching structure for their branch activities. This raised questions about exactly where they fitted into the national (UK) movement, as well as inviting their engagement with that movement’s ideological and strategic debates. An examination of these attempts at organisation yields some indication of the nature of their protagonists’ regional and national

⁶² *Labour Leader*, 15 & 22 August 1896.

⁶³ *Labour Leader*, 7 December 1895.

⁶⁴ *Labour Leader*, 8 January 1898.

⁶⁵ *Labour Leader*, 5 December 1896 & 11 December 1897.

⁶⁶ *Labour Leader*, 12 March 1898.

⁶⁷ *ILP News*, August 1897 & December 1897.

⁶⁸ Willie Wright in *ILP News*, September 1898.

identity, and their sense of belonging within the wider socialist movement. The first moves were taken at the end of March 1894, when a conference of around 20 delegates assembled at Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Swansea socialists, with Sam Hobson in the chair. Its aim was the adoption of a constitution and programme for a ‘Welsh Independent Labour Party’, and it established an Administrative Council, with Hobson as chairman, W.J. Rees of Neath as secretary and E.J. Clarke of Swansea as treasurer. All of the members of the Council, which included Sam Mainwaring, were from either Cardiff, Neath or Swansea, with the exception of Henry Davies, a young man from Cwmavon who was to play an important role in the rise of the ILP and the Labour Party in south Wales over the next two decades. The first matter to be discussed was the issue of identity, and the first thing to be agreed was that the name of the organisation should, rather than the ‘Welsh ILP’, be the ‘ILP of South Wales and Monmouthshire’.⁶⁹ This limiting of territorial ambition was, even at this embryonic stage in the development of Welsh socialism, of deep significance. It was the first sign that Welsh socialists would not be easily organised along national lines, and it suggested that regional consciousness would be a more important driving force within Welsh socialism than national consciousness. In this sense it foreshadowed critical debates that were to take place over a decade later.⁷⁰ By May, when W.J. Rees was arranging for the printing of 20,000 constitutions, the new body was going under the name of the ‘South Wales ILP Federation’, and was considering arranging for the production of a partially bilingual edition of the *Labour Leader*, with four pages devoted specifically to south Wales.⁷¹ Any idea of reaching beyond the heads of the valleys, it seemed, had been abandoned.

Indeed, there were some who were more inclined to reach across the Bristol Channel. The Newport branch passed a resolution in October 1896 inviting ‘the other Socialist branches in Bristol and South Wales to consider the necessity of a district committee for the purpose of spreading the doctrine of Socialism amongst the workers, by combining together to furnish speakers, distributing literature, arranging public meetings [and] establishing branches where required’.⁷² The resulting meeting, at which Bristol, Newport, Cardiff, Treharris and Merthyr ILP, as well as the Newport

⁶⁹ *Western Mail*, 2 April 1894; *Labour Leader*, 28 April 1894.

⁷⁰ See chapter 5.

⁷¹ *Labour Leader*, 5 May 1894.

⁷² *Labour Leader*, 10 October 1896.

Fabian Society, were represented, took place on 6 November at Caerphilly. It was decided to form a 'federation of such socialist bodies as are in existence in S. Wales and the West of England', which was to be open to 'all bodies ... that advocate the socialisation of capital and industry'.⁷³ The new organisation continued to meet through the winter of 1896 at the Anchor Coffee Tavern in Cardiff,⁷⁴ an expression of territorial ambiguity within the nascent Welsh socialist movement. Its open membership policy, moreover, hinted at another form of structural and strategic ambiguity that was being imported into Wales from the wider British movement. Disagreements over electoral strategy and party structure dogged the socialist movement throughout the 1890s and into the twentieth century. In the early 1890s they revolved around the so-called Manchester Fourth Clause, which demanded that ILP members vote only for ILP candidates in elections and abstain in their absence, and later in the decade they developed into a more general campaign for 'One Socialist Party' to be created in place of the existing socialist configurations. Socialists in south Wales were no strangers to these debates, and it was by no means clear until the end of the decade that the ILP would emerge as the dominant party in the region.

After the issue of the Federation's name had been resolved, the Fourth Clause had dominated discussions at Liberty Hall in March 1896. It was reported in the *Labour Leader* that 'to the surprise of most people, the Conference almost unanimously adopted the Fourth Clause',⁷⁵ although other reports of the meeting suggest that the debate was more closely fought. The provisional committee that had organised the Conference recommended that members of the ILP in south Wales should neither belong to any other political party nor vote for any other candidates than ILP ones at elections. The proposal was not, however, universally approved, and several delegates, including David Rhys Jones of Cardiff, spoke in opposition, arguing that the new party should be more flexible and 'if the new party could not get all it wanted at first, they must use those forces which were in existence for the purpose of getting as much as they could'. The meeting was however carried by the pro-Fourth Clause lobby, led by Sam Mainwaring and E.J. Clark of Swansea, and adopted both

⁷³ *Labour Leader*, 14 November 1896.

⁷⁴ *Labour Leader*, 5 December 1896.

⁷⁵ *Labour Leader*, 28 April 1894.

recommendations by a vote of 10/9.⁷⁶ The issue was, however, not resolved by the Conference's decision. At Newport, socialists were concerned about the policy and it took an explanatory visit from Sam Hobson before they were prepared to affiliate to the ILP,⁷⁷ and there were reports that Dr. Parr and Hobson were preparing a pamphlet on 'The Discipline Clause' in order to inform and, perhaps, pacify the membership.⁷⁸

Of more concern, perhaps, from the point of view of the ILP leadership was the clear tendency of socialists in south Wales to favour the movement for socialist unity, which potentially threatened to undermine the ILP in the late 1890s. Early in 1896 the Newport branch unanimously passed a resolution 'favouring the union of the Socialist forces in one grand Socialist party'.⁷⁹ The Cardiff branch too was unanimous in the view that 'the ILP might with advantage be merged in a National Socialistic Party'.⁸⁰ Up in the coalfield, the Treharris branch favoured the creation of a 'Socialist Political Party' in place of the existing organisations,⁸¹ and practised a non-sectarian approach to the other socialist organisations, extending its lines of communication as far as the SDF in Salford, from which it received a supply of books in February 1896.⁸² Signs of this groundswell in favour of the campaign for socialist unity combined with a growing regional consciousness were evident on Jubilee day 1897, when 100 south Wales socialists held a rally outside Caerphilly Castle at which members of the ILP, SDF and a number of 'unattached socialists' were present. The meeting was initiated and organised by members of the Treharris branch, a member of which, Dan Osborne, photographed the proceedings. Resolutions were passed favouring an annual May Day meeting and the formation of a district federation, and the meeting was closed by the singing of 'revolutionary songs'.⁸³ The gathered socialists adopted the title of the 'West Glamorgan Socialist Society', and it was made explicit that the aim of the meeting was to initiate the fusion of SDF and ILP branches in the region.⁸⁴ Such expressions of socialist unity and regional solidarity were somewhat stuttering,

⁷⁶ *Western Mail*, 2 April 1894.

⁷⁷ *Labour Leader*, 16 June 1894.

⁷⁸ *Labour Leader*, 2 June 1894. The pamphlet does not seem to have made it to press.

⁷⁹ *Labour Leader*, 18 January 1896.

⁸⁰ *Clarion*, 25 January 1896.

⁸¹ *Labour Leader*, 1 February 1896.

⁸² *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1896. The Treharris branch continued to support the socialist unity campaign, and in 1898 severed its connection with the ILP for a while and joined the SDF, on the grounds that the latter organisation favoured fusion, *Justice* December 10 1898.

⁸³ *Labour Leader*, 3 July 1897.

⁸⁴ *Merthyr Express*, 26 June 1897.

intermittent and confused in the 1890s. The SDF complained about the poor organisation of the Caerphilly meeting,⁸⁵ and the other attempts at regional federation fell through, as their most energetic protagonists either left the region (Hobson and Mainwaring), died (W.J. Rees) or gradually lessened their involvement in the movement (Rhys Jones). Such defections created a deficit of human capital and expertise, leading one observer to comment that ‘[t]he party suffers from inexperience and distrust of their own abilities’.⁸⁶ Despite this, the efforts of socialists to create a regional structure in south Wales in the 1890s are by no means insignificant. They represent the natural tendency of a nascent popular movement to find its own political form and, from the bottom up, to reach out, make contact and fit into a wider and more developed context. As such, they were an integral part of the dialogue between the local and the universal.

They also had the virtue of persistence. In March 1898 south Wales ILPers were attempting to re-organise into yet another Federation.⁸⁷ By this time, though, the political context was changing. Through much of the 1890s, the visits of speakers like Keir Hardie aside, south Wales had been left to fend largely for itself. By the end of 1897, though, the number of socialist speakers showing an interest in south Wales was beginning to increase exponentially. Enid Stacy became a regular visitor to places like Dowlais and Maerdy, speaking on such topics as ‘Character and Environment’ or ‘Should Christians Be Socialists’.⁸⁸ Similarly Harry Snell of the London Fabian Society, and ILPer Joe Grady toured in the Spring of 1898.⁸⁹ Even more significant, ILP head office was developing a more systematic interest in the region. This may have been in part a response to the potentially worrying outbreak of socialist unity evidenced at Caerphilly, or the activity of the SDF, both of which threatened to steal a march on the ILP. Whatever the case, the signs of bottom-up activity that were evident in the coalfield were being met by top-down interest, and a new chapter in the dialogue between the local and the national was being initiated. In early 1898 the NAC of the ILP voted a grant of £5 towards the expenses of a tour in south Wales by

⁸⁵ *Justice*, 10 July 1897.

⁸⁶ *ILP News*, March 1898.

⁸⁷ *Labour Leader*, 19 March 1898.

⁸⁸ *Merthyr Express*, 19 March 1898; *Labour Leader*, 22 January 1898, 12 & 19 March 1898.

⁸⁹ *Merthyr Express*, 7 & 21 May 1898; *Labour Leader*, 19 March 1898.

two of its semi-professional propagandists, Pete Curran and Russell Smart.⁹⁰ Between them, Smart and Curran covered most of the western and central part of the coalfield, speaking at a range of centres including Newport, Cardiff, Dowlais, Treharris, Merthyr, Maerdy, Abertillery and Maescymmer. The topics they covered in their addresses also showed the way in which the ILP message was being articulated to the immediate and local concerns of their audiences. At Treharris, Curran, addressed a meeting at which ‘only standing room was to be had’, during which he discussed mining royalties and ‘showed to many that the only way for the miner to get a living was through Socialism’.⁹¹ His topic on another evening was ‘Trades Unionism and its Relationship to Socialism’.⁹² Russell Smart, on the other hand, attempted to ensure that the beneficiary of his tour was going to be not just socialism in general, but the specific party that employed him, by lecturing on ‘The History of the ILP’.⁹³

In early 1898, though, it was unclear which socialist party, if any, would ultimately gain ascendancy in south Wales. Indeed, the establishment of socialist groups was only one expression of the spread of socialism through the south Wales valleys. It was built upon the gradual infiltration of socialist ideas into the intellectual life of the region, which was stimulated by the reading and discussion of socialist publications – an activity that took place largely outside of the public sphere. The most important and popular element in the construction of this intellectual base was Robert Blatchford’s *Clarion* newspaper, and his propagandist masterpiece *Merrie England*. In this, of course, Wales was by no means unique, and the *Clarion* - and all that went with it - was certainly an influence that drew Welsh socialists into a generic British socialist culture. It might be tempting to see this as a one way process. The knowledge of the *Clarion* staff and writers about Wales could hardly have been considered expansive. Blatchford had visited the country in the 1870s and had come into contact with the Welsh language,⁹⁴ but, as discussed earlier, the roots and main appeal of the

⁹⁰ ILP NAC Minute Books. Organising Committee, 8 January 1898. The limit of the NAC’s ability to fund such operations was, however, underlined by some embarrassing confusion about the exact level of Curran’s expenses and remuneration. Curran charged 15/- per lecture, although it seems that the NAC was not aware of this rate at the outset of the agreement. Curran’s explanation, that 9/- per lecture went on expenses and 6/- was a fee, was accepted as ‘satisfactory’ by the NAC – although not ‘perfectly’ so, as that word is written, but scored through, in the NAC Minutes, 12 April 1898.

⁹¹ *Labour Leader*, 5 February 1898.

⁹² *Merthyr Express*, 5 February 1898.

⁹³ *Labour Leader*, 26 February 1898.

⁹⁴ Robert Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*, pp. 154 – 160.

Clarion were most definitely Northern English in character. In 1895 the paper moved its head office to London, but if anything this simply re-inforced its essentially English style and orientation. Indeed, the extensive coverage given to the theatre, football and cricket, which were some of the paper's main pre-occupations after socialism – and in many respects the secret of its success – were hardly attuned to the mentality of nonconformist Wales. From the *Clarion* perspective Wales was most definitely a foreign domain. In 1893 the paper sent one of its reporters to south Wales to investigate the dispute in the coal industry then underway. He took with him a certain amount of prejudice. 'I have always been told ... that the Welsh are a suspicious people', he informed readers. Failing to find the 'coal war' that he had been led to believe was going on in the district, he went to the Gordon Coffee Tavern in Cardiff, where he interviewed Cochfarf, who informed him that the Welsh were, in fact, a 'quiet, industrious and religious people'.⁹⁵ One stereotype, it seems, had been exchanged for another.

Despite the *Clarion*'s sense of distance and its stereotypical depictions of Wales, there were nevertheless some senses in which the paper's socialism was closer to nonconformist Welsh sensibilities than that of the other socialist factions. Blatchford's emphasis on the classless, altruistic 'religion of socialism' did not necessarily provide a direct challenge to dominant nonconformist notions of morality or community.⁹⁶ Rather, it subverted them. In any case, the extent to which south Wales exhibited a wholly monolithic nonconformist hegemony can be overplayed, and there is a sense in which the fun-loving tone of the *Clarion* spoke to the new 'American Wales' that was being created in the south Wales valleys. Indeed, the popularity of the *Clarion* might even be seen as one of the many elements in its creation. Throughout the second half of the 1890s - and certainly into the next century - the reading of the *Clarion* gradually began to displace the more traditional radical Welsh newspapers, such as *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* or *Tarian Y Gweithiwr* at the hearths of radical households across south Wales. This happened in the Tredegar home of David Bevan, father of Aneurin Bevan, sometime in the early 1900s.⁹⁷ Bevan's household may have become one of the most famous to take the paper, but it

⁹⁵ *Clarion*, 26 August 1893.

⁹⁶ This changed in 1903 when Blatchford declared himself an atheist.

⁹⁷ Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, Vol. 1, Paladin, London (1975 ed.), p. 15.

was wholly representative of the radical and socialist culture that had begun to emerge in south Wales in the 1890s. Griff Jones of the Swansea Socialist Society became a *Clarion* reader late in the decade, and felt that ‘a weekend without the *Clarion* was unthinkable’. He obtained his copies from Mansel Bevan, a Wesleyan lay preacher from the Gower, who distributed them personally in and around Swansea.⁹⁸ In the Merthyr Valley, the young W.J. Edwards subscribed to the *Clarion* sometime in the early 1900s and began using Blatchford’s book reviews to guide him through the local free library.⁹⁹ At Treherbert in 1898, a socialist agitator met William Morgan, ‘[a] *Clarion* reader for four years, and a fine intelligent chap’.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, if there is one thing that is common to the testimony of socialists who came into the movement from the 1890s until the Great War it is their *Clarion* readership.

What attracted most of them to Blatchford’s paper in the first place was, of course, *Merrie England*. This propagandist masterpiece – the most widely read book on socialism published in Britain in the 1890s - presented socialism in a simple, straightforward and wholly convincing manner.¹⁰¹ It acted, moreover, as a unifying force across the British socialist movement, in that a socialist in London or Aberdeen would most likely be using the same propagandist text as one in Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, or the south Wales valleys. The book quickly became an important part of the ideological armoury of the fledgling ILP branches and socialist societies in south Wales, for the purposes of both self-education and propaganda. By 1895 at the latest it was available in mainstream shops in Cardiff.¹⁰² It wasn’t through shops, though, that *Merrie England* was chiefly distributed; it was through the direct efforts of socialists themselves, as reported by Ben Evans in 1894:

Merrie England is being distributed over the whole of Glamorganshire by a member of our *Merrie England* class, who is getting rid of them at the rate of 40 a day throughout the colliery districts of South Wales. Last week he was

⁹⁸ Griff Jones, ‘Script of Swansea Socialist Party and Labour Party’, Glamorgan Archive D/D AW H14/4.

⁹⁹ W.J. Edwards, *From the Valley I Came*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report from South Wales, July 16-Aug 6 1898.

¹⁰¹ Ramsay MacDonald once said that ‘*Merrie England* is like a man fully explaining a motor car by describing a wheelbarrow’, quoted in Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford, Portrait of an Englishman*, Gollancz, London (1955), p. 96.

¹⁰² *Clarion*, 2 March 1895: ‘*Merrie England* is on sale at some of the very respectable shops here; I bought a copy today at the principal shop in the main street’.

asked by a detective whether he was the person that was selling ‘Anarchist literature’, to which he replied yes, and sold one to the detective.¹⁰³

At Treharris, it was reported in 1895, ‘*Merrie England* is a byword’,¹⁰⁴ and Oliver Jenkins, the branch secretary, claimed in 1897 that he had distributed over 1,000 copies of the book single-handedly.¹⁰⁵ The *Merrie England* classes, mentioned by Ben Evans in his report, allowed the book to be discussed, analysed and interrogated, and helped to turn those attending into more effective propagandists. The Cardiff branch ran them at the Victoria Coffee Tavern in Queen Street in 1894,¹⁰⁶ whereas the Treharris branch’s Sunday class in 1896 rotated around its members’ houses.¹⁰⁷ The classes took the reading of the text from the private into the public sphere, and ensured it both a circulation and a social role. They also offered a challenge to the culture of the Sunday school and the chapel.

The *Merrie England* classes were not quite so attention grabbing or challenging, though, as the other main agent in the spread of socialism that hit the south Wales coalfield in 1897, the *Clarion* van. Launched in 1896, the *Clarion* van campaign involved a fleet of horse drawn caravans, staffed by full-time volunteer propagandists and packed with socialist literature, touring Britain, taking the socialist message beyond the cities into the countryside and industrial villages.¹⁰⁸ The van that toured Wales in the summer of 1897 was the second of the *Clarion* vans to be built, the ‘Caroline Martyn Memorial Van’, which was named after an iconic ILP activist, whose death resulted, it was believed, from her over-work for ‘the Cause’.¹⁰⁹ A description of the van while parked at Merthyr was published in the local press:

¹⁰³ *Clarion*, 1 December 1894.

¹⁰⁴ *Labour Leader*, 9 November 1895.

¹⁰⁵ Oliver Jenkins to Tom Mann, 18 August 1897, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1897/55.

¹⁰⁶ *Clarion*, 1 December 1894.

¹⁰⁷ *Labour Leader*, 1 & 15 February 1896.

¹⁰⁸ Judith Fincher, *The Clarion Movement*, pp. 161-164 deals with the *Clarion* vans, although a full study of the fascinating phenomenon of ‘vanning’ in this period remains to be undertaken. By 1902 there were separate dedicated Scottish and English vans, although, interestingly, not one dedicated to Wales, *Clarion*, 9 May 1902. By the peak of the *Clarion* van campaign in 1909 there were at least 8 vans touring Britain during the summer months, *Clarion*, 28 May 1909. The vans, though, were a drain on resources, *Clarion* 6 May 1910, and thereafter the days of what one vanner described as the ‘ugly, cumbersome structures’ were numbered, *Clarion*, 20 October 1911.

¹⁰⁹ According to Fincher, the Caroline Martyn Van was equipped with the necessary technology for a lantern lecture show, although there does not seem to be a record of this being used during the Welsh tour of 1897. Two other points relating to the van are worth noting. Firstly, its funding and building was the subject of some competitive controversy between the *Clarion* and the ILP. The ILP wanted to

The *Clarion* Van is a veritable home on wheels, and is neatly fitted up with sleeping bunks, side benches, with lockers underneath for literature and clothes, a marvellous sliding table which draws out and vanishes mysteriously when it is no longer required, while a cooking stove and patent wash stand, in addition to a food cupboard and clothes press, complete the indispensable furniture. When the Vanners are numerous or the ground permits, a tent is pitched for use as a sleeping place of the men, the van itself being appropriated for the ladies' use ... A feature of the van tour is the amount of free literature which is distributed in all places through which the van passes while actually en route.¹¹⁰

During August and early September 1897 the van toured the south Wales valleys, and either passed through, or dispatched propagandists on foot to, Newport, Pontypool, Abertillery, Llanhilleth, Aberbeeg, Blaina, Ebbw Vale, Aberdare, Rhymney, Pontlottyn, Merthyr, Dowlais, Pontmorlais, Troedyrhiw, Merthyr Vale, Treharris, Abercynon, Mountain Ash, Maerdy and Pontypridd.¹¹¹ This was the most extensive and sustained series of socialist meetings to take place in Wales before the coal strike of 1898, and the van's progress, as recorded in the pages of the *Clarion*, gives an insight into the trials and tribulations of socialist propaganda in the south Wales valleys in this period.

One of the most fundamental problems faced by the vanners was the physical geography of the place. A plan to take the van into Nant-y-Glo in early August was thwarted by a combination of steep, rough roads and heavy rain,¹¹² and later in the

raise the money for a van to commemorate the life of Caroline Martyn, but was outdone by the efforts of *Clarion*, and instead had to make do with a series of propaganda leaflets, leaving the *Clarion* to run the van campaign. ILP NAC Minutes, 5 January & 26 February 1897. The second point is that the van offered an interesting sidelight on the gender balance of the socialist movement. Apart from the dedication to a notable female propagandist, the finance for the van was raised by 'Julia Dawson', the *Clarion* women's columnist, and its activities were reported through her column. The activities of the van also subverted the contemporary notion of separate spheres: 'The Vanners do all their own work themselves, and it is a sight for gods and men to see the woman in charge, a BA in honours of London University – washing the dishes, while prominent men in the Labour Movement, such as Tom Mann, or Bruce Glasier, sit round meekly "drying up" under her direction', *Merthyr Express*, 28 August 1897. This would have provided something of a spectacle and a challenge to south Wales patriarchs.

¹¹⁰ *Merthyr Express*, 28 August 1897.

¹¹¹ *Clarion*, 7 August – 18 September 1897.

¹¹² *Clarion*, 28 August 1897.

month, after a classic Welsh summer had set in, meetings were frequently broken up by rain and ‘discussions carried on under umbrellas’.¹¹³ Human agency also intervened to undermine their progress. A plan to take the van by train to Abergavenny (because it was stranded in Merthyr and could not be taken out by road) fell apart because the rail company could not find a suitable carriage and then kept hold of the van for three days. To make matters worse the vanners, having made their own way to Abergavenny, were refused permission to hold meetings there by the police and the Markets Committee.¹¹⁴ The van also had to compete with other users of public space. At Bedlinog, a meeting could not be organised because temperance campaigners had already taken possession of the village’s meeting place, and at Pontypridd, the vanners had to compete with the Salvation Army for space on the town’s square.¹¹⁵ Despite these problems, though, the tour was considered a great success. Literature sales and distribution had been impressive. At Newport alone, where a handbarrow full of *Merrie Englands* had been wheeled around the streets, over a thousand copies had been sold in four days, not to mention other assorted pamphlets and copies of the *Clarion*.¹¹⁶ Throughout the valleys socialist literature had been sold in the streets and delivered door-to-door. Contact had been made with the local socialists, who had been invigorated and inspired by the vanners, and ILP branch membership had been increased. In Newport even the church organist had joined the movement, and planned to start a *Clarion* choir, and *Clarion* cycling clubs were planned for Newport and Treharris.¹¹⁷

Successful as it was, it might be tempting to see the *Clarion* van campaign - and the general influx into the coalfield of other *Clarion* and ILP related propaganda – as a foreign import, an anglicising influence working to draw the communities of the region into a homogeneous British socialist culture, in which the language and culture of Wales had no part. It would not be difficult to find evidence for such an interpretation. The composition of the *Clarion* van’s staff was overwhelmingly pan-British in terms of nationality, with a bias towards the Anglo-Scottish tendency of the socialist movement. Members included, Fenton and Mary Macpherson from Scotland,

¹¹³ *Clarion*, 4 September 1897.

¹¹⁴ *Clarion*, 11 September 1897.

¹¹⁵ *Clarion*, 11 & 18 September 1897.

¹¹⁶ *Clarion*, 14 August 1897; *Merthyr Express*, 28 August 1897 reported that 1,200 copies of *Merrie England*, 1,000 other pamphlets and 10,000 other leaflets had been distributed.

¹¹⁷ *Clarion*, 4 & 11 September 1897.

George Belt of Hull, a Mr. Brabham of Bristol, the Irish born Jim Connell (author of the socialist anthem, ‘The Red Flag’), Bert Alpass from Gloucestershire and Amy Harrison and Isabel Tiplady from England. Their tour represented a territorial incursion to which many within the Welsh establishment were hostile. Certainly, most of the Welsh working class leaders in the coalfield were suspicious of what they perceived as the English socialists who, as the miners’ leader T. Daronwy Isaac put it, ‘like travelling gypsies, travelled Wales in their vans [and] were the greatest frauds that ever ascended a platform’.¹¹⁸ This, however, is only to mobilise part of the evidence, and the reality is more complex. In fact, the propaganda of the *Clarion*, and the tour of its van through the coalfield in 1897, represented the most thorough interaction that had yet occurred between socialism and Welsh culture. It was part of a wider dialogue across the linguistic divide, which was taking place with a growing intensity by the late 1890s.

The *Clarion* van tour was, in fact, instigated by a Welshman, the Rev. Richard Roberts, who had drawn the attention of the van organisers to the fact that the National Eisteddfod was taking place in Newport in the first week of August, and insisted that the van should go there and capitalise on the opportunity offered to make contact with ‘All Wales’.¹¹⁹ There was, therefore, an element of sensitivity towards Welsh culture and a feeling for the propagandist opportunities it presented inherent in the arrangements. The London-based Roberts, who had attempted to initiate a debate on socialism within the *Cymru Fydd* movement in the late 1880s,¹²⁰ travelled with the van and during the tour he addressed audiences of colliers in Welsh ‘to their great satisfaction’. Two other Welshmen also joined the party, Thomas Jones of Rhymney and the Rev. Jenkyn Owen, secretary of the Aberystwyth University Fabian Society, who also addressed numerous meetings in Welsh.¹²¹ If the van’s members were pan-British in composition, then, Wales – with its language included - was represented as part of the mix. Neither was the presence of touring propaganda vans unfamiliar to audiences in Welsh towns and villages. In 1891, the first van ‘crusade’ of Evan Pan Jones, the Welsh land reform agitator, had involved very similar vans following,

¹¹⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 19 August 1899. Also see Robert Williams’ comments, *Clarion*, 2 September 1899.

¹¹⁹ *Clarion*, 7 August 1897.

¹²⁰ Richard Roberts, ‘Wales and Socialism’, *Cymru Fydd*, January 1889, pp. 35-39.

¹²¹ *Clarion*, 28 August, 11 & 18 September 1897.

initially at any rate, almost exactly the same itinerary.¹²² When the Rhymney correspondent for *Tarian y Gweithiwr* saw the *Clarion* van pull up in 1897, he was so surprised not to see Pan Jones himself get out that he committed some lines to verse:

Dyma'r nef yn dod i Rymni
Wrth cwt ceffyl yn y Van
Dyma ddynion a menywod
*Ond pa le mae Dr Pan?*¹²³

In a sense, then, the *Clarion* was following in the wheel-tracks of already established Welsh causes.

In any case, the *Clarion* van should not be considered apart from the more general infiltration of socialist ideas that was beginning to take place across the language barrier in the coalfield. The most prolific Welsh medium writer on socialism in this period was R.J. Derfel, who was based in Manchester and who had published an extensive series of letters in *Y Cymro* and *Cwrs y Byd* in the early 1890s.¹²⁴ The extent to which these were read in the coalfield is uncertain, but in 1896 a translation of Blatchford's *Merrie England* was published in the Aberdare based *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, which had a circulation of 15,000 across the coalfield.¹²⁵ The translation was the work of a Congregationalist minister, D.D. Walters, otherwise known by the bardic name of Gwallter Ddu. The son of a colliery manager from Sketty, Walters had served as pastor at two chapels near Pontardawe in the Swansea Valley in the 1880s, although in 1890, in his late 20s and in the process of becoming 'a powerful Welsh preacher', he moved to southern Cardiganshire, where he remained for the rest of his life, serving congregations in Newcastle Emlyn and Cenarth.¹²⁶ At the time he translated *Merrie England* Walters was just stepping into public life, as a popular

¹²² Evan Pan Jones, *Oes Gofion*, pp. 189-190. Pan Jones' tour was more extensive, and his van went on to tour the anthracite region of the coalfield and then went north into rural Wales.

¹²³ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 26 August 1897 ('Here is heaven coming to Rhymney, On the tail of a horse in the van, Here are men and women, But where is Dr. Pan?').

¹²⁴ For discussion of Derfel see below pp. 218-232.

¹²⁵ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 9 January – 3 December 1896; The circulation figure is from Aled Jones, *Press, Politics and Society: A History of Journalism in Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1993), p. 96, and relates to the 1880s. If anything, the circulation would have been more in the mid 1890s.

¹²⁶ *Cardigan and Tivy-side Advertiser*, 14 January 1927.

speaker,¹²⁷ and for the next three decades he devoted much of his talent to the promotion of socialism, both on the platform and in print. His work in translating and emulating Blatchford in the 1890s¹²⁸ was one of the first signs of the emergence of a new and distinct group of young Welsh ministers and professionals who were to make a determined and conscious attempt to integrate socialism into Welsh culture a decade later. Walters certainly attempted to give Blatchford's work a Welsh twist. Although largely faithful to Blatchford's original in terms of content and structure, Walters' *Cymru Ddedwydd* is no longer addressed to John Smith of Oldham, but to 'Annwyl Mr. Jones' – John Jones, who is not a hard headed cotton spinner 'fond of facts', but a '[C]ymro o waed coch cyfan'.¹²⁹

It is difficult to evaluate the reception of *Cymru Ddedwydd*. There was little discussion of it in the Welsh press, and a request that it be published in pamphlet form does not seem to have been followed up.¹³⁰ On the other hand, there wasn't a negative response either, and the idea that the Welsh speaking element of coalfield society was universally hostile to socialism isn't really viable. Certainly, there were ardent and prominent critics of socialism within it. 'Owain Glyndwr' of *Tarian y Gweithiwr* poured forth satirical scorn on socialism, painting it as an anti-Christian, anti-Welsh, anti-Liberal, wild, impractical tendency that would destroy personal freedom.¹³¹ By the late 1890s, though, such outbursts did not go uncontested. Two correspondents responded to his account of '*Y Socialiaid a'u Breuddwydion*' ('The Socialists and their Dreams'), and sustained a well-informed attack in the paper's letter column, which quoted scripture in equal measure with socialist theory, and forced Glyndwr's retreat – albeit temporarily – from the fray.¹³² Indeed, the attitude of established Welsh radicalism, as represented by *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, towards socialism was more nuanced than a simple interpretation would allow. It was certainly bitterly hostile to both independent labour representation, which it considered divisive, and its principal

¹²⁷ His first appearance as a public speaker is recorded as 'full of wit and humour', *Cardigan and Tivy-side Advertiser*, 8 November 1895.

¹²⁸ Another piece that Walters wrote in the 1890s, published in *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 21 May 1898, shows the unmistakable hallmark of Blatchford's influence.

¹²⁹ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 9 January 1896 ('A Welshman of full (i.e. pure) red blood').

¹³⁰ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 10 December 1896.

¹³¹ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 26 August, 16 September, 21 October, 4 November, 18 November & 2 December 1897.

¹³² *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 9 & 30 September, 28 October, 9 & 30 December 1897, 20 January & 16 February 1898.

spokesman, Keir Hardie, who it considered insolent and lacking in authority.¹³³ Behind this defensive façade, though, there was another dimension to the paper's attitude. As already discussed, it had printed translations of socialist work by both David Rhys Jones and D.D. Walters, and it was not universally hostile to all socialists. Tom Mann, for example, received favourable treatment in its columns.¹³⁴ Its attitude towards labour relations was complex. While it stressed the mutual interests of capital and labour,¹³⁵ it also shared some common ground with the socialists in the belief that the 'labour question' – the relationship between labour, capital and the state – was *the* question of the future, and, like them, it foresaw a political realignment which would force oppressors and workers into mutually hostile political camps. What it differed on was the exact composition of those camps.¹³⁶ It would be fair to say that Welsh opinion within the coalfield was divided, or perhaps undecided, on socialism, but it would not be accurate to call it hostile.

The most convincing evidence for this is to be found in the launch, in early 1898, of a new bilingual newspaper in the coalfield, which was explicitly supportive of both socialism and the ILP: *Llais Llafur – Labour Voice*. The paper was the inspired work of Ebenezer Rees of Ystalyfera. Born in 1848, Rees had been brought up in Cwm-twrch, and, from the age of seven, he had worked in the coal mines of Aberdare, Mountain Ash and Cwm-twrch, where he had become involved in trade unionism. Victimised as a result of his activism, Rees emigrated to the United States in 1869, but ultimately returned to south Wales and established himself as a printer.¹³⁷ *Llais Llafur* was, in many respects, a reflection of Rees's own personality and interests, which are revealed in a fascinating notebook he kept in the 1870s, and which survives in Swansea University Archive. Written mainly in Welsh, it contains extensive notes on Ystalyfera in the 1870s and south Wales local history, as well as a list of '*Rhai o'r helyntion cyhoeddedig yn y newyddion, 1878*' ('Some affairs published in the news, 1878'). These include such diverse matters as famine in China, the selling of livings

¹³³ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 6 September 1894, 2 January & 19 November 1896.

¹³⁴ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 19 October 1893: 'Er yn anghytuno ag ef yn aml, credwn ei fod wedi effeithio llawer o ddaioni, ac wedi gwneud byd o les i'r gweithwyr' ('Although we often disagree with him, we believe that he has effected a great deal of good, and has greatly improved the welfare of the workers').

¹³⁵ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 2 September 1897.

¹³⁶ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 19 January 1893.

¹³⁷ David Cleaver, 'Swansea and District's Labour Press, 1884-1914', *Llafur*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1984), pp. 35-42, p. 37; Robert Smith, '*In the Direct and Homely Speech of the Workers*': *Llais Llafur 1898-1915*, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth (2000), p. 1.

in the Church of England, the attempt on the life of the German Emperor, the banning of women from Carmarthen reading rooms and people being fined in Llandovery for keeping dogs without a license.¹³⁸ In other words, the book reveals a mind which was fascinated by the juxtaposition of the local and the universal, and it was this approach that was deployed in *Llais Llafur* to great effect. Alongside local news, the results of eisteddfod competitions, profiles of local personalities and syndicated news from beyond Wales, the *Llais* published a constant flow of articles on socialism in both languages, which represented differing aspects of socialist ideology.

In its first year these included a number of articles from Evan Pan Jones, which dealt with the land issue, thus linking the paper's socialism to traditional Welsh radicalism.¹³⁹ Similarly, the Rev. D. Bassett (Twrchfab) linked the cause of *y werin* to the Welsh national awakening in his own Welsh language writings.¹⁴⁰ A selection of R.J. Derfel's Welsh letters on socialism was reprinted, along with other writings by Derfel in both Welsh and English.¹⁴¹ An exposition of more explicitly Marxist socialism was provided in Welsh, in the form of a catechism, by John Lewis,¹⁴² whereas the leader writer, 'Carrusk' (Henry Davies of Cwmavon), expounded Marxist ideas on capital through the medium of English, advocated the nationalisation of the mines, and urged the Welsh colliers to join the MFGB.¹⁴³ In addition to these practical matters, the *Llais* also published a translation of Edward Bellamy's popular American collectivist text *Looking Backwards*.¹⁴⁴ The paper consciously aligned itself with the socialist movement's national (UK) papers, sometimes reprinting pieces from the *Clarion*,¹⁴⁵ and stating that it was a '*cyw o'r un hatch*' (a chicken from the same hatch) as the *Labour Leader*.¹⁴⁶ In fact, it was rather more. It represented the fusion of socialist journalism with local life to a depth that was rare among locally produced socialist newspapers. What was, though, most remarkable about the emergence of *Llais Llafur* – apart from its success as a business venture, which was exceptional in an age when socialist journalism was generally distinguished by business failure – was

¹³⁸ Ebenezer Rees Papers, Coalfield Collection, Swansea University Archive, SWCC: MNA/PP/95/1.

¹³⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 22 January, 26 February & 25 June 1898.

¹⁴⁰ *Llais Llafur*, 19 February & 5 March 1898

¹⁴¹ *Llais Llafur*, 29 January – 13 August 1898.

¹⁴² *Llais Llafur*, 9 April & 7 May 1898.

¹⁴³ *Llais Llafur*, 14 May, 4 & 25 June 1898.

¹⁴⁴ *Llais Llafur*, 10 September – 3 December 1898.

¹⁴⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 30 April & 14 May 1898.

¹⁴⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 25 June 1898.

its immediate geographical context. It was the product of a part of the south Wales coalfield in which the activities of ILP activists had not previously been recorded to any significant extent. James Griffiths later wrote, with his own roots in the western part of the coalfield in mind, of the origins of socialism in south Wales, commenting that its fire did not burst into life quickly, like that of the 1904-5 Religious Revival, rather '[i]t was more like the fires of Anthracite – slow burning with sustained heat and long lasting as it spread through the valleys'.¹⁴⁷ The appearance – and positive reception – of *Llais Llafur* in 1898 is compelling evidence that those fires were already burning beneath the surface of coalfield society.

Llais Llafur was the most impressive product of a wider dialogue that was taking place across south Wales in the 1890s. In two languages, in numerous communities and through diverse media, this dialogue was gradually linking the local and the national, the practical and the abstract, the specific and the universal. At the beginning of 1898, when the *Llais* was launched, the process of connection between socialism and south Wales society was incomplete – the dialogue was broken and indistinct against a noisy background. It was, though, very much underway. One final illustration of this may be provided by returning to the heart of the coalfield, to Merthyr – a community which was soon to raise that dialogue to new levels. In August 1896 Lewis Jones, an inhabitant of the town, wrote a letter to his local newspaper, telling of an encounter with a socialist speaker, which is worth quoting in full:

I was one of the many who stood to listen to a Socialist speaker last Sunday evening at Pontmorlais. He is the first Socialist I have heard in Merthyr, and I am glad I heard him, inasmuch as I previously held, as I now know, erroneous ideas on the subject. During his speech he referred to the present state of affairs, and said it was due to individualism, at present prevailing to an awful extent in the country. If he was a Merthyr man, he could name a case in point, namely, the Plymouth Collieries. We Merthyr people all know the misery entailed by the Plymouth workmen during last winter by that lamentable dispute, which was not of their sowing. And to what end was all this misery

¹⁴⁷ James Griffiths Papers, D 3/2, Notebook 2 &3, National Library of Wales.

caused and endured? Was it not so that a certain class of individuals should profit by their labour? I am, or at least was, a Liberal, but when I come to think that one of our MPs is an individual who lives by the life's blood of other men, and the other who promised to do so much for us during the last election, when elected shipped to Australia to prospect for gold, and has recently bought large claims there, I want to know how he is going to look after our interests and rights in Parliament while he is out prospecting and looking after No. 1 in Australia? Does he do so by cable? I say that if the Independent Labour Party brought down here an efficient man and got a few of the sort of the man that spoke last Sunday at Pontmorlais to help him, there's no earthly power to stop them getting a seat in Merthyr in the present state of affairs.¹⁴⁸

Jones' letter throws a spotlight on the process of change that was beginning to grasp the mindset of the workers of the south Wales valleys. His encounter with the socialist under Pontmorlais bridge had stimulated the connection in his mind between the universal principles of socialism and the life of his own community. Jones was certainly not alone in making these connections, and his letter was as prophetic as it was illustrative. What was needed to drive the process forward and make it more general was a catalyst, and for that south Wales didn't have to wait long.

(ii). The 1898 Coal Strike.

Between the mid 1890s and 1906 the ILP made substantial progress towards its political objective of winning over the trade unions and establishing a Labour Party in Britain. Much of the credit for this must go to the party's leadership, and Ramsay MacDonald in particular, for the careful manipulation of political opportunities at a national (UK) level that encouraged Liberal trade unionists to abandon their previous political allegiances, and Liberal politicians to allow an opening within British politics into which the Labour Party could enter. These national developments, though, were built upon foundations that were put down at a local level, and

¹⁴⁸ *Merthyr Express*, 15 August 1896.

stimulated by events that were the result of local conditions, in numerous communities across Britain. If Wales had lagged behind some other parts of Britain in these respects before 1898, that was certainly not the case thereafter. In that year a series of events began to unfold that would both embed socialism into the political culture of south Wales and tie the region firmly into the British labour and socialist movement. The first of these was the coal strike of 1898, which has traditionally been seen as one of the great watersheds in the history of the south Wales coalfield.¹⁴⁹ The dispute - a strike or a lock-out, depending upon how it is viewed - lasted from April to September of that year and resulted in a crushing defeat for the miners. The colliers did not, however, fail to learn lessons from the experience,¹⁵⁰ and their response - the formation of the South Wales Miners Federation - signalled 'the start of what would be a profound shift of emphasis' in the life of the region.¹⁵¹ Part of this shift, as the classic histories of the south Wales miners and later revisionist works are agreed, 'was the introduction of socialist discourse into the coalfield on a scale hitherto unknown'.¹⁵² It has also been observed, however, that the dramatic improvement in socialist fortunes brought about by the strike was not sustained, and within months of the end of the dispute socialist activity tailed off almost as dramatically as it had increased.¹⁵³ The socialist advances of 1898, it has been argued, were 'just a bubble',¹⁵⁴ and did not represent a genuine strengthening of socialist organisation in south Wales.

The sum of these potentially conflicting interpretations suggests that the reality might have been more complex, and that due regard needs to be given to the underlying continuities behind the narrative of socialist involvement in the dispute. It has already been argued that the spread of socialism in south Wales during the 1890s had gone further than a mere tally of established socialist societies or branches would suggest. It has also been shown that socialist activity was increasing in both scope and nature

¹⁴⁹ John Williams, 'The Strike of 1898', in *Was Wales Industrialised?*, pp. 192-213.

¹⁵⁰ E.W. Evans, *The Miners of South Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1961), pp. 175-6.

¹⁵¹ Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1980), p. 1. For Robert Griffiths the six months of the strike were 'a decisive gestationary period for the working class movement', *Turning to London*, p. 2.

¹⁵² Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, p. 60; As for the traditional view, Robin Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation 1898-1914*, Allen & Unwin, London (1967), pp. 47-49, states that 'never before 1898 had there been such a concentration of socialist agitators and their journals'.

¹⁵³ Deian Hopkin, 'The Rise of Labour in Wales, 1890-1914', *Llafur* (1994), p. 127.

¹⁵⁴ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, p. 245.

on the eve of the strike. That the strike was incidental to this trend, rather than causative, is suggested further by the fact that socialists were, on the whole, caught unawares by its outbreak. Indeed, socialists did not see the strike as an unmixed blessing. The idea that strikes in general provided an agency for the advancement of socialism was by no means widely accepted in socialist ranks,¹⁵⁵ and shortly after the Welsh miners ceased work in April 1898 the ambivalence of the ILP was made clear at its Annual Conference at Birmingham. J. Wilson, the delegate for Broxburn, moved a resolution congratulating the colliers of south Wales on their stand against the masters and pledging the support of the party. The motion, which was seconded by Pete Curran (who had not long returned from the region), did not however go uncontested. Joseph Clayton, who also had experience of south Wales, argued that the miners had been misled into the strike, and ‘questioned the desirability of congratulating a body of men who were not organised, and had no reasonable chance of success’. It was only after a rebuke from Keir Hardie, who asserted from the chair that the Welsh miners could win the strike, that the motion was passed.¹⁵⁶ The SDF also expressed ambivalence about the strike, which it saw as diverting energy and material resources away from genuine socialist work. Joseph Chatterton appealed in *Justice* for financial support – not for the strikers, but for the SDF’s work in south Wales. ‘There is no hope of any help from the colliers’, he complained, ‘because ... they are all starving, and this includes a large portion of our own members’,¹⁵⁷ and by June John Spargo was predicting defeat for the miners. The strike, he argued, would be a ‘lamentable and catastrophic failure’, and he urged that the workers ‘learn the lessons of the great failures of the old time methods against the ramifications of modern capitalism, and abandon the antiquated and inadequate weapon of the strike, in favour of the mightier and more easily wielded weapon of political action’.¹⁵⁸

The socialists may have failed to grasp the implications of the dispute at its outset, but it soon became clear that the strike was to have effects of long-term significance. The most profound of these was its role in catalysing the integration of the south Wales miners into the wider British labour movement. In the words of Caroline Benn ‘the

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, John Bruce Glasier, *On Strikes*, Labour Literature Society, Glasgow & Labour Press Society, Manchester (1894).

¹⁵⁶ *ILP News*, April 1898.

¹⁵⁷ *Justice*, 7 May 1898.

¹⁵⁸ *Justice*, 11 June 1898.

strike brought South Wales abruptly into the national labour family'.¹⁵⁹ The most obvious outcome of this was the decision of the new South Wales Miners Federation to affiliate to the Miners Federation of Great Britain after the strike. The process of integration, however, operated on many different levels during the course of the dispute, and socialists frequently worked as its agents. Their press acted as an effective conduit through which the wider British socialist and labour movement was informed of events in south Wales. Both *Justice* and *The Labour Leader* covered the strike in detail. John Spargo provided regular reports in *Justice*, which dealt with the economic and political aspects of the dispute clearly and intelligently.¹⁶⁰ It was, however, Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* that was undoubtedly more effective in this respect. As already noted, before 1898 the *Leader's* coverage of Wales had been sparse. The strike changed this radically. In particular, a series of articles by Keir Hardie dealt with events in the coalfield in a detailed and impassioned manner.¹⁶¹ The *Leader* was critical of the established British labour movement for not offering the miners more determined support. The colliers, it stated, were 'weighted down by the stupidity, faithlessness, and inactivity of those who, as allies in and out of Parliament, ought to be fighting their battle'.¹⁶² Such attacks became a recurrent motif of the ILP coverage of the strike. The mine-owners, argued the *Leader*, were attempting to take the miners back to feudalism, while the British trade unions stood watching.¹⁶³ These stinging rebukes were an attempt by the ILP to divide the miners from the established Lib-Lab trade union leadership, as personified by Mabon.

In June, the ILP attempted to make itself yet more relevant to the miners by launching a relief fund, which was administered from the office of the *Labour Leader* in Glasgow. Money immediately began to flow in from all parts of the UK,¹⁶⁴ and the *Leader* used the emotive issue of the miners' starving children to prick the

¹⁵⁹ Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie*, Richard Cohen, London (1997), p. 142. (First published 1992).

¹⁶⁰ Spargo's principal news reports appeared in *Justice*, 9 April 1898, 11 June 1898, 18 June 1898 & 3 September 1898. The dispute also made the front page of *Justice* on 16 April 1898, 30 April 1898 & 23 July 1898. In addition to Spargo's articles Joseph Chatterton also provided coverage in *Justice*, 7 May & 21 May 1898, as did a miners' agent, 'W.S.', on 23 July 1898.

¹⁶¹ The principal articles by Hardie were 'Peaceful Fighting Wales' (*Labour Leader*, 2 July 1898), 'Leaderless Wales' (*Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898), 'In Darkest Wales' (*Labour Leader*, 13 August 1898) and 'Maimed and Plundered Wales' (*Labour Leader*, 20 August 1898). Apart from Hardie's contributions, the *Leader* also published regular editorials and contributions from other socialists active in the region.

¹⁶² *Labour Leader*, 28 May 1898.

¹⁶³ *Labour Leader*, 11 June 1898.

¹⁶⁴ *Labour Leader*, 25 June 1898.

consciences even of those who were ambivalent about the claims of the colliers themselves. By mid August almost £150 had been collected, which represented meals for over 44,000 children.¹⁶⁵ Money collected was pointedly not given to the strike fund, but to a separate fund for the miners' families,¹⁶⁶ which, with its attendant publicity, successfully created a strong emotional bond between labour and socialist sympathisers in other parts of the UK and the coalfield. Neither were the ILP's efforts to orchestrate material support for the miners confined to the labour movement. Sympathetic employers were persuaded to make donations, and the tea producer Lipton and the chocolate manufacturers Cadbury made significant contributions, both financial and in kind, to the miners' cause.¹⁶⁷

The links created between the south Wales coalfield and the rest of the UK as a result of the strike did not stop at the transfer of money, sympathy and newspaper column inches. They also had a direct human dimension. Miners' delegates travelled from the coalfield to various parts of England to enlist support for their cause – an experience which brought them into contact with elements of the wider socialist and labour movement. In Nottingham, for example, on 26th June, two such delegates attended a meeting of the Labour Church, where they were allowed to make an address on the 'brave men of Wales', and a collection of 32 shillings was taken.¹⁶⁸ A similar deputation toured Yorkshire and the north of England in July, making emotive appeals for help.¹⁶⁹ Two miners visited Wallden ILP in mid-August.¹⁷⁰ Such visits could prove an educational experience on both sides. The organiser of one such visit to London in August commented that the two colliers involved 'had never seen the great town before, and were, of course, astonished at the traffic and display of wealth, and were equally surprised at the poverty of the slums'.¹⁷¹ Neither were trips to England composed only of small groups of individuals. By August whole choirs were making the journey with the aim of raising relief funds. The Rhondda Valley Glee singers, a 31 strong choir, performed twice daily for six days at Westminster Royal Aquarium in early August, on a benefit tour organised by the London Trades

¹⁶⁵ *Labour Leader*, 13 August 1898.

¹⁶⁶ *Labour Leader*, 20 August 1898.

¹⁶⁷ *Labour Leader*, 27 August 1898.

¹⁶⁸ *Labour Leader*, 2 July 1898.

¹⁶⁹ *Labour Leader*, 16 July 1898. 'No-one can withstand W. Davies's appeal for the children'.

¹⁷⁰ *Labour Leader*, 20 August 1898.

¹⁷¹ *Labour Leader*, 13 August 1898.

Council,¹⁷² and they were followed later in the month by the Merthyr Male Voice Choir.¹⁷³

The ILP role in all of this must, of course, be placed in its proper perspective. In financial terms, the sums collected through the *Labour Leader* were relatively small compared to the support organised by the mining unions. The MFGB, for example, voted £1,000 in support soon after the commencement of the dispute, followed by a weekly grant of £500.¹⁷⁴ Substantial sums came in independently from the coalfields. The Nottinghamshire miners voted a grant of £500 in May,¹⁷⁵ and miners in Durham also contributed substantially,¹⁷⁶ as did various trades councils.¹⁷⁷ In this sense the ILP contribution was a relatively small part of a much greater process. Importantly, though, it was by far the most significant effort made by any of the explicitly socialist organisations. It put the SDF, which failed to raise its own relief fund, to shame. This clearly irritated some members of the Federation. Tom Proctor, an SDFer and member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers from Plymouth, chided the organisation for this, and contrasted its failure in the case of the miners with its willingness to start such a fund during the previous year's engineering lock-out. He had raised 6 shillings at an SDF meeting in Plymouth, but in the absence of a relief fund was compelled to send it directly to John Spargo in south Wales 'for distribution amongst the worst cases he comes across'.¹⁷⁸ A month later no action had been taken, and a member from Sevenoaks suggested, somewhat improbably, that pressure be brought through the Irish party in Parliament to vote £50,000 in relief to the local authorities in south Wales.¹⁷⁹ Still nothing was done at a national level by the SDF, and members had to be content with their contributions going to the ILP fund.¹⁸⁰ The contrast between the efforts of the ILP and SDF was stark, and was one factor which enabled the ILP to eclipse the SDF, in which lies one of the most significant outcomes of the dispute.

¹⁷² *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 31 July 1898; *The Morning Post*, 2 August 1898.

¹⁷³ *Labour Leader*, 20 August 1898.

¹⁷⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 April 1898; *Reynold's Newspaper*, 1 May 1898.

¹⁷⁵ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 7 May 1898. Voluntary collections at Nottinghamshire pits also yielded further sums, see *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 2 July 1898.

¹⁷⁶ *Morning Post*, 27 June 1898.

¹⁷⁷ The London Trades Council, apart from organising concerts also collected £150 for the miners' relief in August, *Morning Post*, 17 August 1898.

¹⁷⁸ *Justice*, 26 June 1898.

¹⁷⁹ *Justice*, 23 July 1898.

¹⁸⁰ See the letter from Robert Williams, *Justice*, 13 August 1898.

Another reason why the ILP managed to marginalise the SDF during the strike was its policy in flooding the coalfield with its own literature. The distribution of literature was one of the most important methods that socialists used, in their own words, to ‘drive home the lessons of the strike’.¹⁸¹ Local activists repeatedly expressed an urgent need for a supply of such literature, which was, in the early days of the strike, often frustrated. Hugh Lloyd, of the small ILP branch at Maerdy, complained in early June that ‘the greatest drawback is the want of literature’, and appealed through the *Labour Leader* for comrades in other parts of Britain to send any spare pamphlets to him for distribution.¹⁸² The ILP leadership acted decisively to meet this need. By July the *Labour Leader* was supplied free to Miners’ Committee Rooms and to ‘reliable parties’ who would distribute it.¹⁸³ Hardie arranged with the *Leader’s* business manager in Glasgow, David Lowe, for copies of the paper to be sent to Dai Davies and Llewelyn Francis, ILP stalwarts in Merthyr and Penydarren, for distribution among members and sympathisers. He also arranged for a hundred copies of the paper to be distributed in each of the seven stoneyards in the Merthyr area, where locked out miners were provided work by the local authorities. This may have made propagandist sense, but it also represented a financial burden to a newspaper company that more or less constantly hovered on the point of bankruptcy, and Hardie felt the need to justify the policy to Lowe, writing ‘[a] thousand papers don’t cost much, and that number will go a long way here’.¹⁸⁴ Hardie clearly had his eye on the long-term possibilities of providing such a loss-leader, not just in educational but also in business terms. He wrote to Llew Francis at the beginning of July with instructions: ‘In distributing the *Leaders* that are being sent weekly, give a copy to each member of the Branch, that is to say, to each one who gives his name to join, and when the strike is over, try and get each of them to sign an order to have the paper weekly from their local news-agent’.¹⁸⁵ The SDF did not make the same type of investment. Although, there are reports of the distribution of ‘large numbers of leaflets’ at SDF meetings at Porth,¹⁸⁶ a more common theme in reports of the SDF agitation is disappointment at the levels of literature sales due to the poverty of the striking miners. Joseph

¹⁸¹ *ILP News*, June 1898.

¹⁸² *Labour Leader*, 4 June 1898.

¹⁸³ *Labour Leader*, 2 July 1898.

¹⁸⁴ Keir Hardie to David Lowe (undated), Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1898/67.

¹⁸⁵ Keir Hardie to Llew Francis, 1 July 1898, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1898/68.

¹⁸⁶ *Justice*, 7 & 21 May 1898.

Chatterton reported, after a series of meetings in May, that '[t]he sale of literature has only been moderate, but had the colliers been working we could have disposed of almost any amount of reading matter'.¹⁸⁷ Again the ILP had stolen a march on its Marxist rival.

It was, however, neither finance nor literature distribution that was the deciding factor in allowing the ILP to eclipse the SDF during the strike, it was the imbalance of human resources between the two organisations. While the SDF had Spargo and Chatterton, who – it is true - were energetic and committed propagandists of no mean ability,¹⁸⁸ the ILP had access to a greater depth of propagandist talent. First and foremost among the numerous ILP speakers who travelled to the region during 1898 was, of course, Keir Hardie. Hardie played a critical role in the promotion of socialism, the ILP and himself during the strike. He was shortly to become the central figure in the rise of the ILP in the region, and his role will be analysed in the next section of this chapter. During 1898 he was supported by a cast of talented deputies, who offered propagandist resources that the SDF could not match. Among them was Robert Williams, a Welsh speaking friend of Hardie's, who was originally from Llantrisant, but who had grown up in Merthyr, before moving to London to follow a career in architecture.¹⁸⁹ Williams acted as a key facilitator in the process of communication between the coalfield and the capital. It was him that organised the tour of the Merthyr choir to London, and he worked tirelessly throughout the strike, organising collections and speaking on behalf of the miners in England, and campaigning on the ground in south Wales. He contributed articles to the *Labour Leader*, which appealed to the miners in explicitly Welsh terms, through the medium of their own language:

Mae gweithwyr y cymry [sic] wedi llafurio er ys dwy fil o flynyddoedd yn yr ynys hon, mae'nt wedi hau a medi; maent wedi adeiladu tât, cestyll a themlau; mae'nt wedi gneid heolydd a fyrdd dwr; mae'nt wedi tori myrddiynau o

¹⁸⁷ *Justice*, 21 May 1898.

¹⁸⁸ Spargo's role is outlined in Kenneth Hilton, 'John Spargo, the Social Democratic Federation and the 1898 South Wales Coal Strike', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1993), pp. 542-550.

¹⁸⁹ Williams recalled his childhood at one meeting in Merthyr, *Merthyr Express*, 17 September 1898.

*dunelli o lo ac wedi troi y mwn yn haiarn yn ddicyfrif; eth, nid ydych chwi, eu hiliogaeth, yn llawer gwell na chaeth-weision.*¹⁹⁰

Yet he placed this directly national appeal within an internationalist, labourist framework, stressing the contribution that could be made by the Welsh to the wider labour struggle, as in this contribution from August:

Then arise, ye Welshmen; stand shoulder to shoulder, an unbroken phalanx!
This is your Waterloo. Your Wellington is the God of Righteousness. Stand, then, as one man. Keep cool and determined, remembering always that you are not fighting your own battle only, but that of the world of Labour.¹⁹¹

Williams' contribution was valuable, to say the least, to the ILP. As a genuine Welsh speaking Welshman, albeit an expatriate, Williams could legitimately make the case that socialism was not exclusively a foreign import to Wales. He attempted to represent a distinctive Welsh strain of socialism, which he balanced within the wider socialist ideal. There were tensions within this balance, as suggested by Williams' use of what amounts to the language of sedition alongside the imagery of British military greatness in the two pieces quoted above. His accommodation of Welsh identity within a British framework was, however, essential to the emerging socialist culture of south Wales. It was also a process that would be debated and contested at length before Wales as a whole had come to terms with the growth of the new political creed.

Arguably the most important of the socialist agitators in Wales during the strike made an appeal to the miners not on the basis of their nationality, however, but on the grounds of a shared occupational and class background. He was Willie Wright, a coal miner from Mexborough in Yorkshire, who had, at some point in the 1890s, given up mining to become a full-time socialist agitator.¹⁹² His presence in south Wales was in

¹⁹⁰ *Labour Leader*, 2 July 1898 ('The Welsh workers have laboured for two thousand years on this island, they have sown and reaped; they have built houses, castles and temples; they have made roads and water-ways; they have cut countless tons of coal, and turned an inestimable amount of ore to iron, yet, you, their offspring, are not much better than slaves').

¹⁹¹ *Labour Leader*, 13 August 1898.

¹⁹² It is probable that Wright originally came from Durham. A William Wright, coal miner, aged 29 and born in Durham, is recorded boarding at 20 Hall Gate, Mexborough on the 1891 census. By 1897

itself a sign of the growing professionalism of the ILP, as he had been appointed by the party's NAC – on the initiative of the South Wales ILP Federation - as a full-time paid organiser just before the outbreak of the strike.¹⁹³ Arriving in the region on 16 May, he reported that during the first month of the dispute the ILP had held 50 meetings, recruited 450 new members and established 10 new branches.¹⁹⁴ He immediately began to make his own contribution to the work, and during the following months he undertook a punishing schedule, addressing up to 20 meetings a week, recruiting members and aiding in the establishment of numerous new branches. Initially he focused his efforts on the central part of the coalfield, where the ILP was already partially established. During mid May he visited Treharris, Dowlais, Merthyr Vale, Troedyrhiw, Merthyr and Mountain Ash, as well as Newport and Pontypridd. As May turned to June he expanded his activities, and focused more upon the Rhondda, holding meetings in Pontypridd, Porth, Tonypany, Gelli, Pentre, Maerdy and Ferndale, while still holding regular meetings around the Taff and Cynon Valleys.¹⁹⁵ In late June and early July he took a break from Wales to go and work with the *Clarion* Van in the north of England,¹⁹⁶ but by 12 July he was back in south Wales, where he remained for most of the summer, battling – like the *Clarion* vanners the previous summer - against incessant rain.¹⁹⁷ He continued to devote most of his time to the central part of the coalfield, especially the Taff, Cynon and Rhondda Valleys, but he occasionally visited Cardiff and Newport, and also spread his efforts into the Rhymney Valley. At the end of August he opened a new agitation in the western part of the coalfield, holding a series of meetings in the Swansea Valley,

Wright was living one street away at Hirst Gate, and advertising his services as a socialist lecturer, *Labour Leader*, 24 April 1897.

¹⁹³ Wright was paid 25 shillings a week, and employed initially on a six week contract, ILP NAC Minutes, April 1898. The idea of a nationally employed organiser had been raised as early as 1896, when the Treharris branch urged the appointment of J.W. Wood, *Labour Leader*, 15 & 22 August 1896. It is clear that much of the impetus for the appointment came from the south Wales branches themselves. The idea was revived at the end of 1897, *Labour Leader*, 11 December 1897, and the decision to push ahead was made at the meeting of the South Wales ILP Federation in March 1898, at which the front runner for appointment seemed to be Joseph Clayton, *Labour Leader*, 19 March 1898. The appointment of Wright and the outbreak of the strike seem to have been entirely coincidental – or perhaps, from the ILP point of view, serendipitous would be a better word.

¹⁹⁴ *ILP News*, June 1898.

¹⁹⁵ *Labour Leader*, 28 May, 4 & 18 June 1898.

¹⁹⁶ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright's Report, 8-25 June 1898; *Clarion*, 25 June 1898 & 9 July 1898.

¹⁹⁷ He returned briefly to Mexborough to see his family in August, ILP NAC Minutes, 6-20 August 1898.

before returning to the east again in September.¹⁹⁸ He remained in the coalfield for the rest of the year, until he was forced to leave for personal financial reasons.¹⁹⁹

Wright was certainly an effective organiser, and quickly attained a popular personal following. He was, according to local ILPers, ‘the (W)right man in the (W)right place’.²⁰⁰ His status as a former miner, and his technical knowledge of the mining industry, gave him credibility, while his oratorical skill produced enthusiasm almost wherever he went. ‘He is received everywhere with open arms’ reported a local activist in July. ‘The miners are eating every word as it leaves his lips. He has won his way into the hearts of my countrymen’.²⁰¹ His appeal, moreover, did not seem to be limited to the English speaking colliers alone, and Ebenezer Rees of *Llais Llafur* recognised Wright’s primacy as the most important socialist speaker in south Wales:

*Diau y gwyr pawb o honoch am y person hwnw, o’r enw Willie Wright, - un o siaradwyr mwyaf derbyniol y dydd ar gwestiynau Llafur. Efe ydyw cynrychiolydd yr ‘Independent Labour Party’, yn Neheudir Cymru.*²⁰²

The role played by Wright in the coalfield in 1898 – and the aspect of it that demands interrogation for the purposes of this discussion - would seem to fit that of the classic ‘outside agitator’, and confirm the view of socialism as a doctrine imported by foreigners. Even the sympathetic *Llais* seemed to concede this at times:

*Llawer o son sydd am y gwr enwog Willie Wright yn bresenol. Gwyr pawb ag sydd yn talu rhyw gymaint o sylw i lenyddiaeth y dydd am y cyffroad sydd wedi ei beri yn Nghymoedd Aberdâr a’r Rhondda, trwy ymweliadau y gwr dyeithr hwn, ag eraill, a hwynt.*²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report, 29 August – 17 September 1898.

¹⁹⁹ *Labour Leader*, 3 December 1898.

²⁰⁰ *Labour Leader*, 4 June 1898.

²⁰¹ *Labour Leader*, 23 July 1898.

²⁰² *Llais Llafur*, 27 August 1898 (‘Doubtless all of you know about this person, Willie Wright, - one of the most acceptable speakers of the day on labour questions. He is the representative of the ‘Independent Labour Party’ in south Wales’).

²⁰³ *Llais Llafur*, 3 September 1898 (‘There is a great deal of talk presently about the renowned Willie Wright. Everybody who pays any amount of attention to the literature [news] of the day will know about the excitement that has been created in the Aberdare and Rhondda Valleys through the visit of this foreigner, and others, there’).

Wright himself, though, was clear that much of the credit for the growth of socialism in south Wales was due to the Welsh activists themselves: ‘the success of Socialistic work in Wales is largely due to local men’, he reported in July.²⁰⁴

Indeed, while Wright may have been a catalyst in the advance of socialism, he was acting upon an already existing reservoir of socialist sympathies that had been released by the industrial circumstances, and which made itself repeatedly evident during his tour. At the end of a meeting in the Rhondda in July, for instance, ‘an old Socialist sprang up and had to go to the platform, when he gave his address at Treherbet and is prepared to have a debate with any comer on Socialism’.²⁰⁵ Also at Treherbert, was William Morgan, the *Clarion* reader mentioned earlier. At Gwaencae gurwen, according to one local socialist, there were ‘a number of young men in our neighbourhood [who] have taken very keen interest in Socialism for some years past’, as well as ‘a large quantity of raw material ready to be made into socialists’.²⁰⁶ Wright was certainly a gifted propagandist, but his green fingers owed something also to the fertile ground he was working.

He also depended for everyday support – as indeed did all the ‘outside agitators’ that came into the region – upon the work of local activists. These included individuals like Dan Osborne the photographer of Treharris, who, according to Keir Hardie, was ‘well to the fore all the time’ and ‘takes an easy first amongst the pioneers of Socialism in South Wales’, and Hugh Lloyd of Maerdy, who ‘trudged over hills and through dales, night and day almost, organising meetings and forming branches’.²⁰⁷ At Penydarren, Wright was entertained by Llew Francis, the secretary of the local branch, whose barber’s shop ‘has become the local “floor of St. Stephen’s”, where Francis is chaplain, speaker and barber combined’.²⁰⁸ At Bedlinog, ‘our ubiquitous Sparkes’, provided the main inspiration for ILP organisation.²⁰⁹ Local ILPers acted as guides and interpreters for the visitors, making them more acceptable to the Welsh community by speaking in Welsh alongside them on platforms, and providing a

²⁰⁴ *Labour Leader*, 16 July 1898.

²⁰⁵ Letter from Hugh Lloyd, Maerdy to ILP Head Office, ILP NAC Minutes, Report from Head Office 25 June – 16 July 1898.

²⁰⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 10 September 1898.

²⁰⁷ *Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898.

²⁰⁸ *Labour Leader*, 18 June 1898.

²⁰⁹ *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898.

Welsh cultural dimension to socialist meetings. Seth Rees of Merthyr, for example, spoke alongside Wright in Welsh at a meeting in Merthyr Vale on 20 July, while another local man ‘gave “Land of my (step) Fathers” in fine style’.²¹⁰ Bert Alpass, a visiting speaker from Gloucestershire,²¹¹ was guided through the valleys by Tom Parker, an ILP activist from Porth, who ‘proved a real boon companion, being guide ... and Director-in-Chief’.²¹² In the anthracite region, of course, it was Ebenezer Rees and his son David, the editors of *Llais Llafur*, alongside members of the Swansea Socialist Society, who facilitated the work of the visiting socialists.²¹³ This close working relationship resulted in a mutual affection between Wright and the local activists, and he developed a sensitivity towards the uniqueness of the locality, and its Welsh identity. In one of his reports to Head Office, he exclaimed with delight that the locals ‘said I was too good for an Englishman, and good enough for a Welshman! Henceforth I am to be known as Willie Wright Jones. (Talley Hooley!)’.²¹⁴ Thereafter he began signing his reports as with his new name. The ‘outside agitator’ had ‘gone native’.²¹⁵

The impact of the strike upon the society that had temporarily adopted him was profound. As discussed earlier, it played a major role in drawing south Wales into the British labour movement, and in raising the profile of the south Wales miners in the consciousness of the British public. In effect, it nationalised the miners in the same way that the ‘Great Strike’ of 1889 had done the London dockers, the starkly contrasting outcomes of the two disputes notwithstanding. Politically, the main beneficiaries of the strike were the socialists, and the ILP in particular. The dispute had weakened the existing miners’ moderate leadership, and raised the profile of the ILP dramatically. This was immediately evident in the number of ILP branches at the end of the strike. In addition to the nine that had existed at the outset, Wright could

²¹⁰ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report, July 16-August 6 1898.

²¹¹ For a report of meetings addressed by Alpass in the Rhondda, see *Llais Llafur*, 3 September 1898. Alpass had cycled to Wales from Gloucestershire in the company of George Belt of Hull, *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898.

²¹² *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1898.

²¹³ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report, 29 August-17 September 1898.

²¹⁴ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report, Report from Head Office, 6 – 20 August 1898.

²¹⁵ Wright’s affinity with the region clearly ran deep, as he made efforts to domicile himself permanently in south Wales. In November 1898 he competed unsuccessfully with Alfred Onions for the post of Miners’ Agent at Tredegar, *Western Mail*, 10 November 1898. He returned to south Wales frequently in the aftermath of the strike to speak and attend ILP meetings. He also returned with the next *Clarion* van tour in 1899, *Western Mail*, 15 & 18 November & 30 December 1898 & 16 May 1899.

list 12 new branches, at Bedlinog, Fochriw, Rhymney, Penydarren, Merthyr Vale, Mountain Ash, Ferndale, Tylorstown, Ynyshir, Treherbert, Ystalyfera and Gwauncaegurwen, and a prospective one at Pontypridd.²¹⁶ This marked a significant step forward. The core areas of ILP activity in the central part of the coalfield had been markedly strengthened, and many of the branches, the new ones included, reported a substantial membership. The larger branches included Bedlinog with 120 members, Merthyr Vale and Penydarren both with 100 members, while Abercanaid, Abertillery, Maerdy and Treharris all reported 50 members or more. For the first time the size of the south Wales branches began to rival those of the ILP heartland in northern England. On paper, in October 1898 Manchester had only 20 more ILP members than Bedlinog!²¹⁷

It is true that these figures should not be taken at face value, and that many of the members melted away soon after the strike, leaving some of the branches to fall into disrepair. If they did not represent a permanent structural gain for the ILP, though, they certainly represented a groundswell of sympathy and support. They were also matched by a qualitative, and arguably more significant, change in the nature of ILP activity. One manifestation of this was a growing level of regional consciousness and ambition, as evidenced by an ILP conference held at Porth in early September 1898. 29 delegates and a 'large number' of members attended, representing all parts of the coalfield. This marked a significant shift in the centre of gravity of south Walian socialism since the earlier attempts at regional organisation, away from the coastal towns and towards the coalfield. Various methods of strengthening the ILP in the region were discussed and agreed upon, including devising a system of visitations of weak branches, creating a regional administrative council funded by a levy on branches and launching a tea and tobacco trading scheme, the profits of which would fund a regional organiser.²¹⁸ The meeting was followed by another at the Welcome Coffee Tavern in Merthyr the following week,²¹⁹ and although not all of the plans agreed at Porth came immediately to fruition, their launch represented a ratcheting up of ILP activity, which had long-term ramifications.

²¹⁶ *ILP News*, September 1898. *Labour Leader*, 10 September 1898 claimed that there were 31 branches in south Wales, some with a membership in excess of 200.

²¹⁷ *ILP News*, October 1898.

²¹⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 10 September 1898; *Labour Leader* 10 September 1898.

²¹⁹ *Labour Leader*, 17 September 1898.

The psychological impact of 1898 upon communities and individuals also had long-term ramifications which were not necessarily immediately obvious. W.J. Edwards recalled from his Merthyr childhood the memory of men marching during the strike and ‘yearning ... for a deeper richer life’.²²⁰ The crushing defeat experienced by the miners meant that new avenues needed to be explored towards this end. One of their sympathisers, John Daniel of Aberdare, described in a letter to Keir Hardie in 1906 his own irreversible shift in consciousness caused by the events of 1898:

Very early in the year 1898, - ‘A memorable year’ in South Wales was 1898, something agitated me to write. The great Strike inspired me. So you see I am a convert of the ministration of loss. To be rid of a burden I wrote and ever since writing has been my safety valve.²²¹

Under the name of Iwan Glyn, Daniel wrote, almost without a break, a weekly column in Welsh for *Llais Llafur* for the next 15 years. It may be pushing the argument too far to say that Daniels’ moment of epiphany represented that of a whole society, but it was certainly the harbinger of a deep psychological shift in that society. In any case, there is a sense in which behind the dramatic-traumatic foreground of the 1898 strike, less dramatic but equally profound changes were taking place. The death of William Gladstone near the beginning of the strike, in May 1898, was followed by the death of two of the great voices of Welsh Radical Liberalism near the end, Thomas Gee in September and Michael D. Jones in November. Henry Davies (‘Carrusk’), the leader writer of *Llais Llafur*, observed that ‘with Gladstone’s death there comes also the irresistible reflection that the phase of Liberalism which he so ably represented also passes away’.²²² The same could have been argued with regard to Jones and Gee. Behind the scenes in 1898 a generational change was underway. It was as if the personnel of history was being re-organised to reflect a deeper, underlying ideological shift; the stage was being cleared to make room for a new cast. The strike of 1898, moreover, had provided just the act for a new leading figure to take centre-stage, and there was no mistaking who that figure was. Willie Wright may

²²⁰ W.J. Edwards, *From the Valley I Came*, p. 37.

²²¹ John Daniel to Keir Hardie, 25 February 1906, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1906/115.

²²² *Llais Llafur*, 28 May 1898.

have done most of the day-to-day agitating, Robert Williams may have given the national ILP effort a degree of Welsh respectability, and a large and growing cast of local activists may have been the bedrock upon which this effort rested. All of these, though, were but a supporting cast for the undisputed leader of socialism in south Wales, James Keir Hardie.

(iii). Keir Hardie, Merthyr Boroughs and the Culture of ILP Socialism.

The presence of Keir Hardie in our midst is working wonders.²²³

*Pan ddaeth Keir Hardie i Merthyr dechreuwyd cyfnod newydd yn hanes Cymru.*²²⁴

The role of leaders within popular movements has long been a matter for debate. Dai Smith has made a case based specifically on a study of south Wales that leaders are authentic representatives of their societies, ‘standing witness’ for those who do not have the opportunity to express themselves, and ‘speaking for the people’.²²⁵ Keir Hardie, the ‘grisly little tribune’ of British socialism,²²⁶ was the pre-eminent socialist leader in south Wales from the 1898 strike up until shortly before his death in 1915. His status as one (albeit the junior) of the representatives of the Merthyr Boroughs parliamentary constituency after 1900 raised the profile of south Wales within the British labour movement immeasurably, and was a key factor in the ongoing process of welding the emerging Welsh socialist movement into a wider British socialist

²²³ *South Wales Labour Annual* (1902), p. 7.

²²⁴ T.E. Nicholas, *Pioneer*, 1 April 1911 (‘When Keir Hardie came to Merthyr a new period began in the history of Wales’).

²²⁵ David Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, pp. 67-89. Also see S.E. Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan: A Society and its Political Articulation 1890-1929’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales (1990) for an analysis of the relationship between leadership and community in a particular south Wales valleys community. Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, pp. 229-240 presents an analysis of essentially the same issue from an English perspective.

²²⁶ The words are John Bruce Glasier’s. John Bruce Glasier to Matt Giles, 28 October 1903, NLW ex 2312 (Papers donated by Frank G. White of Bristol in 2004 relating to the establishment of the ILP in the Swansea area), National Library of Wales. It is worth quoting the full sentence from which the phrase is taken, as it gives insight into the level of adoration that Hardie was able to engender in his admirers: ‘I hardly dare confess how much I love our grisly little tribune: there is no one like him no not one. His simplicity his patience, his wisdom and his faith are above all recent political fame’.

project. In the words of John Bruce Glasier, Merthyr Boroughs was ‘the first field reaped in the dawn’, and Hardie’s victory there was ‘an event that fixed irrevocably the destiny of Labour policy in South Wales’.²²⁷ The growing importance of south Wales within British socialism was recognised in 1904, when the annual ILP Conference was held at Cardiff,²²⁸ and again in 1912, when – despite some concerns about the remoteness of the location – Merthyr itself was chosen as the conference venue.²²⁹

Hardie’s position, however, was not unproblematic. As an outsider, a socialist leader of national importance and a local representative, he was obliged to balance numerous roles within his political career. On one level this was a practical problem. Hardie’s workload was phenomenal. He estimated in 1903 that he answered 5,000 letters a year and spoke at 4 meetings a week, before even thinking about his journalism or his parliamentary work.²³⁰ This meant that the time he could give to the local affairs of his constituency was limited, and this could cause tension between him and his supporters. During the 1906 election campaign, for example, Frank Smith, who was representing him in the constituency, communicated a feeling of ‘nervousness and rage’ among the local rank and file at Hardie’s failure to spend enough time in the constituency.²³¹ More than this, though, Hardie’s claim to be speaking for the people of Merthyr – or south Wales, or indeed all Wales – was contested on a more fundamental level. Opponents sought to paint him as an opportunist carpetbagger, who had imposed himself upon Wales uninvited. In the words of one of his most vitriolic enemies, W.F. Phillips, he was ‘one of the strangers of our country, without honour in [his] own country’, who had come ‘to sow Socialist tares in the wheatfield of ... Wales’.²³² Immediately after the 1900 election, Mabon, who himself had gone to the polls in 1900 claiming to be the ‘Labour Member for Wales’,²³³ famously

²²⁷ *South Wales Labour Annual* (1903), p. 74.

²²⁸ *Labour Leader*, 9 April 1904; *Report of the Twelfth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party, Cory Hall, Cardiff, April 4th & 5th 1904*, ILP, London (1904).

²²⁹ *Pioneer*, 24 June 1911; *Labour Leader*, 16 February & 31 May 1912; For an interesting discussion of events surrounding the 1912 Merthyr Conference see Andy Croll, *Civilizing The Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2000), pp. 209-210.

²³⁰ Keir Hardie to C.B. Stanton, 25 May 1903, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1903/114.

²³¹ Frank Smith to Keir Hardie, 12 January 1906, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1906/26.

²³² W.F. Phillips, *Open Letter to Keir Hardie* (1911). For W.F. Phillips see below, chapter 5.

²³³ Roger Fagge, *Power, Culture and Conflict in the Coalfields: West Virginia and South Wales 1900-1922*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York (1996), p. 234.

claimed that the Merthyr seat was ‘occupied by a stranger’, and hinted that Hardie would find it difficult to retain at the next election.²³⁴ He was quite wrong. Hardie managed to do more than simply retain his position as junior member for Merthyr Boroughs, he managed to establish himself as a labour legend within Wales.

Hardie was, of course, not alone in his efforts to achieve adoption by the Welsh. John Hodge, the secretary of the British Steel Smelters Association, who was originally from Muirkirk in Ayrshire (just a few miles from Hardie’s own home at Cumnock) contested the Gower constituency, also in 1900. He faced a Welsh opponent, J. Aeron Thomas, an employer in the coal and tinplate industries, whose election address claimed that ‘my country’s aims are mine’,²³⁵ and who - despite some questions about the quality of his own spoken Welsh - banged ‘the big Welsh drum’, as Hodge later put it.²³⁶ Hodge had some hopes of winning, considering that he had worked for some years to organise branches of the steelsmelters’ union in the region.²³⁷ He also had the backing of *Llais Llafur*, which countered Thomas’s nationalistic appeal by arguing that ‘for Welshmen the best national movement is that which aims at the bettering of their condition and seeks to give them true economic freedom’.²³⁸ He nevertheless failed, and had to admit – in a statement translated into Welsh and published after the contest - that his defeat at least partly resulted from the fact that he was foreign to the constituency.²³⁹

Similarly, the docker’s leader, Ben Tillett, coveted a parliamentary seat in south Wales. He was nominated to fight at Swansea on a labour ticket in 1900, but his campaign didn’t really get off the ground, and he had to withdraw before the poll.²⁴⁰ When he did get to the poll there in January 1910, the circumstances of the election illustrated well the complexities of socialist and labour politics in Wales. The original labour choice for the seat, David Williams was a local man, and he was chosen to fight the Liberal, Alfred Mond, who was an English born son of German-Jewish refugees. The exigencies of national (UK) labour politics (the Gladstone-MacDonald

²³⁴ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 20 October 1900.

²³⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 6 October 1900.

²³⁶ John Hodge, *Workman’s Cottage to Windsor Castle*, Sampson Low, London (1931), pp. 140-144.

²³⁷ John Hodge, *Workman’s Cottage to Windsor Castle*, pp. 118-136.

²³⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 6 October 1900.

²³⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 13 October 1900.

²⁴⁰ McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea’, pp. 259-264.

pact, which led to an electoral accommodation between the Liberals and Labour in some seats) led to Williams standing aside and allowing Mond a free run. Tillet was ultimately nominated by the local socialists, more than anything as a sign of their displeasure at the pressure exerted from the national (UK) to allow Mond a free run. He fought an explicitly socialist campaign, and was heavily defeated. Thus, the influence of national (UK) politics shaped politics at a local level.²⁴¹

One factor in Tillet's defeat was the refusal of the UK Labour leadership to support him. Ramsay MacDonald issued a statement declaring that if he had lived in Swansea he would not have voted for Tillet. Twelve years later, though, MacDonald himself was being driven into Wales in a car decorated with a huge leek, celebrating his own parliamentary victory just along the coast and into the hills from Swansea, at Aberavon. Chris Howard has demonstrated how MacDonald's relationship with the Aberavon constituency later deteriorated, and has suggested that this might hold clues towards a wider understanding of the relationship between the Labour Party and the people it represented in the inter-war period.²⁴² Likewise, a study of Hardie's relationship with Merthyr, and with south Wales more generally, presents an opportunity to examine the development of the relationship between socialism as a national (UK) phenomenon and south Walian society in the period before the Great War. The remainder of this chapter will therefore place Hardie's victory at Merthyr Boroughs in 1900 into a wider perspective. It will then combine a discussion of the political culture that was created by ILP members in south Wales with a consideration of Hardie's role within a regional and national (Welsh) context.

There were certainly immediate political reasons why Hardie's fortunes at Merthyr fared better than Hodge's on the Gower or Tillet's at Swansea. Hardie's victory in 1900 was helped by divisions within the constituency's Liberal party, upon which he was able to capitalise in the two seat constituency. In addition to this, one of the sitting MPs, Pritchard Morgan, had alienated a significant part of his working class electorate by spending much of the previous parliamentary term prospecting for gold

²⁴¹ David Cleaver, 'The General Election Contest in the Swansea Town Constituency, January 1910 – The Socialist Challenge', *Llafur*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1990), pp. 28-33; Jonathan Schmeer, *Ben Tillet*, pp. 138-146; Thomas John McCarry, 'Labour and Society in Swansea', pp. 399-414.

²⁴² Chris Howard, "'The Focus of the Mute Hopes of a Whole Class': Ramsay MacDonald and Aberavon, 1922-29', *Llafur*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1996), pp. 68-77.

abroad.²⁴³ By contrast, significant sections of the local labour movement were hostile to Hodge and Tillett, both of whom faced united Liberal opposition in their single seat constituencies.²⁴⁴ These factors notwithstanding, Hardie's victory was still exceptional – all the more so considering that he had only accepted the nomination at the last possible moment, and had spent most of the election campaigning at Preston, rather than Merthyr. Bruce Glasier famously described the victory as 'one of those "providential occurrences" lying outside the region of ordinary political probability'.²⁴⁵ There may be grounds to contest Bruce Glasier's statement, but the concern here is not to explain Hardie's victory in either a psephological or short-term political sense, rather it is to place it within the context of his wider relationship with Wales, and south Wales in particular.

An attempt to understand the phenomenon of Hardie in Wales demands a journey into the realms of myth. On the one hand there is the myth of Hardie himself, in the words of one of its chief architects, John Bruce Glasier, 'the greatest agitator of his day ... the first man from the midst of the working class who completely understood them, completely sympathised with them, completely realised their plight ... completely championed them [and] never deserted them'.²⁴⁶ Then there is the myth of Merthyr, in all its phases: first as the crucible of the Welsh industrial revolution and birthplace of the Welsh working class, then as political epicentre of the Welsh radical tradition; the Merthyr of Dic Penderyn and the Merthyr of Henry Richard.²⁴⁷ Hardie's election in 1900 initiated the new myth of socialist Merthyr, herald of the new social order, the Merthyr of Keir Hardie. Hardie himself played no small part in fashioning this myth, as illustrated in this statement from 1912:

²⁴³ K.O. Fox, 'Labour and Merthyr's Khaki Election of 1900', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1965); David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, pp. 241-253; K.O. Morgan, 'The Merthyr of Keir Hardie', in Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working Class Tradition*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1966), pp. 58-81.

²⁴⁴ K.O. Morgan, 'The "Khaki Election" in Gower', *Gower*, Vol. 13, pp. 20-225; David Cleaver, 'The General Election in the Swansea Town Constituency'.

²⁴⁵ John Bruce Glasier, *Keir Hardie: The Man and his Message*, ILP, London (1919), p. 9.

²⁴⁶ John Bruce Glasier, *James Keir Hardie: A Memorial*, National Labour Press, Manchester & London (1915), pp. 4-5.

²⁴⁷ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil: A Study in the Politics of an Industrial Borough in the Mid Nineteenth Century', in *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*, Gomer, Llandysul (1981), pp. 193-214; Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Merthyr of Henry Richard', in Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Merthyr Politics*, pp. 28-57.

And in the golden days to come, when poverty has been destroyed, and freedom instituted, the Merthyr Boroughs will hold a warm place in the affections of the happy people as having been the pioneer constituency in heading the Revolution which led to the setting up of the new Social Order.²⁴⁸

The mythical Merthyr was, moreover, projected as representative of the aspirations of Wales as a whole, as Evan Pan Jones asserted in 1911:

*Gwnaeth Merthyr enw iddi ei hun wrth ddewis Henry Richard, ond gwnaeth enw mwy iddi ei hun wrth ethol Keir Hardie. Mae'n amlwg fod Merthyr yn deall angen y wlad, ac yn dewis y dyn iawn i drin yr achos.*²⁴⁹

This consecrated Hardie, not just as hero of Merthyr Boroughs, but as hero of the whole Welsh working class – a status that was not confined to his following in the south, but which was recognised all the way to the end of the Llŷn. When, in 1915, the Rev. J.T. Pritchard (Myfyrfab) of Aberdaron published a series of articles on 'Arwyr y Werin' ('Heroes of the Common People'), Hardie was number one, and Pritchard commented that 'os nad yw yn aelod Cymreig, efe o ran ei safle yw yr aelod tros Gymru mor bell ag y mae Llafur yn myned'.²⁵⁰ Mabon had been well and truly supplanted. In order to untangle this myth and to perceive the reality of Hardie's relationship with Wales, and what it reveals about the relationship between Wales and socialism more generally, it is necessary to backtrack a little.

Hardie had, of course, come to national (UK) prominence on what was almost certainly his first visit to Wales, when he engaged in a bitter exchange with Henry Broadhurst at the Swansea TUC in 1887.²⁵¹ He also addressed his first meeting in Merthyr Boroughs in 1887, when he spoke alongside Thomas Burt at a meeting of

²⁴⁸ Independent Labour Party, *Souvenir of the Twentieth Annual Conference, Merthyr Tydfil, Easter 1912*, p. 13.

²⁴⁹ *Pioneer*, 20 May 1911 ('Merthyr made a name for itself by choosing Henry Richard, but it made a greater name for itself by electing Keir Hardie. It is obvious that Merthyr understands the needs of the country, and chooses the right man for the occasion').

²⁵⁰ *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 20 January 1915 ('if he is not a Welsh member, he is, due to his position, the member for Wales, as far as Labour goes').

²⁵¹ Hardie's action at Swansea in 1887 has been seen by historians as the launch of the 'new unionism' of the late 1880s. Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 62; K.O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie, Radical and Socialist*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London (1975), pp. 18-20 (1997 Phoenix edition).

miners at Aberdare, and discussed socialism with the local miners' agent David Morgan (Dai o'r Nant).²⁵² It was, however, in the early 1890s that his relationship with Wales began in earnest, and throughout that decade he worked assiduously to develop a profile, particularly in the south, and to learn about the country and its people. More than this, an analysis of Hardie's repeated visits and interventions in Welsh affairs reveals the central role he played in connecting the universal principles of socialism to local and (Welsh) national circumstances. His next visit was in October 1892, when he was the guest of the Fabian Socialist Society at a 'fairly well filled' Colonial Hall in Cardiff, with Dr. Parr in the chair and all the leading lights of Cardiff socialism on the platform. His speech covered a wide range of labour issues, the universal nature of which he was at pains to stress: 'From autocratic Russia to the Republican United States the industrial problem was the same, and in every land were the unemployed and starving'. He also, however, wove a number of local references into his message. These included an attack on the Marquis of Bute (for which he was applauded), a discussion of the disestablishment issue and a specific assault on the local Liberals.²⁵³ Hardie also spoke the following evening at Neath, with David Randell in the chair, where he appealed to his overwhelmingly nonconformist audience by telling them that '[t]he labour movement was a religious movement. It was the cause of Jesus of Nazareth, having the true principles of Christianity'. At the end of this meeting the miners' leader Isaac Evans moved a vote of thanks to Hardie, but also expressed regret that 'Mr. Hardie had not dealt more fully on the land question and the accumulation of wealth in this country'.²⁵⁴

A reading of Hardie's speeches, and responses like Isaac Evans', reveals that he was in dialogue with the working class of south Wales, communicating to them the principles of his political beliefs, but also learning from them and adapting his discourse to local conditions - a process that was doubtless facilitated by the local socialists who gave him accommodation and guidance. This learning process was not, however, without some mishaps. Hardie returned to Cardiff again in 1892, staying as the guest of Dr. Parr, to support the Progressive Labour League in the municipal elections. His contribution was certainly a coup for the local activists, and 'the

²⁵² Francis Johnson, *Keir Hardie's Socialism*, ILP, London (1922), p. 10; Independent Labour Party, *Souvenir of Twentieth Annual Conference*, p. 1.

²⁵³ *Western Mail*, 14 October 1892.

²⁵⁴ *Western Mail*, 15 October 1892.

meetings, through his presence, were larger than the labour meetings generally [had] been hitherto'. Hardie's lack of intimate local knowledge was, however, exposed at a meeting in Splott, where he commended the Irish party on its neutrality towards the labour candidates, when in fact the Irish faction was not sympathetic to the Labour League at all.²⁵⁵ Worse still, in another speech he attacked members of the council who had recently accepted the hospitality of Lord Bute – without realising that one of the candidates he was supporting, John Jenkins, had been among them. The *Western Mail* seized the opportunity to characterise Hardie as 'an outsider, whose presence at Cardiff presumes the incapacity of Cardiffians to mind their own business.'²⁵⁶

Hardie was not easily deterred, and he continued to take an interest in Wales throughout the 1890s, notwithstanding his numerous other commitments. In 1893, he asked a series of questions in the House of Commons about the use of troops against striking miners in the south Wales hauliers strike,²⁵⁷ which won him 'a Heartily [sic] vote of thanks' from the miners of the Rhondda Sub District branch of the MFGB.²⁵⁸ He returned to south Wales in 1894, holding a series of meetings at Cardiff, Swansea and Llanelli. On 3 March he spoke twice at Cardiff's Labour Church, mixing a call for the nationalisation of the mines with a more esoteric appeal which drew on the teachings of Christ, Ruskin and Carlyle.²⁵⁹ A few days later he was in Swansea's Drill Hall speaking on 'The Labour Party and Parliamentary Action', at which meeting a resolution forming an ILP branch in Swansea was passed.²⁶⁰ In June, during a lock-out in the tinplate industry, he spoke alongside David Randell to a meeting of 5,000 at Llanelli.²⁶¹ Local activists relished such visits, and were convinced that they stimulated the movement. 'When [Hardie] came amongst us there was no actual ILP organisation, although there was a few Labour societies based on ILP principles. ... Before this year is much older there will be twenty more [ILP branches]' claimed a correspondent to the *Labour Leader* in 1894.²⁶²

²⁵⁵ *Western Mail*, 28 October 1892.

²⁵⁶ *Western Mail*, 29 October 1892.

²⁵⁷ *Western Mail*, 22, 23 & 25 August 1893.

²⁵⁸ Samuel Griffiths to Keir Hardie, 4 September 1893, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1893/96.

Also see Francis Johnson Correspondence 1893/95 & 1893/190.

²⁵⁹ *Western Mail*, 5 March 1894.

²⁶⁰ *Western Mail*, 7 March 1894.

²⁶¹ *Labour Leader*, 23 June 1894.

²⁶² *Labour Leader*, 26 May 1894.

It was not through a personal visit, though, that Hardie had his greatest impact upon Wales in the period before the 1898 strike, but through use of his joint position as newspaper editor and MP. The occasion was the Albion Colliery explosion at Cilfynydd in June 1894, in which 290 colliers were killed.²⁶³ As an ex-miner Hardie had an acute understanding of the impact of pit disasters, and had experienced a pit collapse himself as a boy,²⁶⁴ his response therefore came from the heart. He publicised the disaster in the *Labour Leader*,²⁶⁵ but most dramatically he used his position in the House of Commons to make a stand on behalf of the miners' families. He outraged the Commons by opposing the passing of a motion congratulating the Duke and Duchess of York on the arrival – on the same day as the pit explosion – of a baby son, on the grounds that the government would not pass a vote of condolence to 'those who are lying stiff and stark in a Welsh valley'.²⁶⁶ The Cilfynydd disaster was something of a precursor to the 1898 strike, in that it attracted the attention and sympathy of the wider British labour movement.²⁶⁷ Hardie's personal intervention, though, polarised opinion. It marked him out in the eyes of many – and even some in the labour movement – as an irresponsible firebrand.²⁶⁸ In south Wales, though, and especially among ILP sympathisers, it met with a different response. Sam Hobson reported that Hardie's outburst was received with 'cordial approval' among the south Wales ILPers, in whose eyes Hardie was 'the only *man* with moral courage enough to protest against the mummery of congratulations in the hour of suffering and disaster'.²⁶⁹ By standing up against the British establishment Hardie had won himself a yet more secure place in the hearts of a growing band of supporters in the south Wales valleys.

²⁶³ R. Meurig Evans, *One Saturday Afternoon: The Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd Explosion of 1894*, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff (1984).

²⁶⁴ Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie*, pp. 9-10.

²⁶⁵ *Labour Leader*, 30 June 1894.

²⁶⁶ Emrys Hughes (ed.), *Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings*, Forward Printing and Publishing Company, Glasgow (1915), pp. 32-36; William Stewart, *Keir Hardie*, ILP, London (1921), pp. 88-90 gives a full account of the scenes in the Commons. Hardie also opposed the passing of a motion of condolence to the French people, whose President Carnot had been assassinated the day after the explosion, on the same grounds. It was the perceived attack on royalty that caused deep offence though.

²⁶⁷ A demonstration attended by 2,000 people was, for example, convened by trade, labour and friendly societies in Walthamstow, *Labour Leader*, 28 July 1894.

²⁶⁸ K.O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, pp. 71-73; Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie*, pp. 122-3.

²⁶⁹ *Labour Leader*, 7 July 1894.

In this sense his involvement in the strike of 1898 was as much the culmination of a process as it was a beginning. It was nevertheless 1898 that cemented Hardie's reputation in the coalfield, and laid the foundations for his future relationship with the region. Unlike many in the ILP, he immediately realised the potential of the strike, reporting to the NAC after a visit to the region in April, that 'a splendid field for ILP work was being opened up',²⁷⁰ and during the dispute he combined powerful and sustained journalism with a strong personal presence. He returned in June for a stay of two weeks, which he later described as 'the best holiday I ever had', tramping an itinerary that included Abertillery, Rhymney, Pontypridd, the Rhondda, Mountain Ash, Treharris, Merthyr Vale, Troedryhiw and Merthyr.²⁷¹ During this visit he addressed up to 15 meetings,²⁷² which were exceptional in terms of their size and enthusiasm. A meeting at Newport of six to seven hundred people passed a unanimous resolution in favour of nationalising the mines and yielded a collection of £1/1/8, which was promising enough.²⁷³ It was, however, dwarfed by some of the meetings held in the coalfield. At Troedryhiw, where Hardie addressed a meeting of 5,000 in late June, the surrounding villages had been decorated with bunting and streamers in anticipation of his visit, and five colliery bands led delegations from Plymouth colliery, Merthyr, Dowlais, Treharris and Merthyr Vale to hear him, despite pouring rain.²⁷⁴ Neither was the Troedryhiw meeting an isolated event. Most of the meetings addressed by Hardie in June 1898, including meetings at Mountain Ash and Aberdare,²⁷⁵ attracted audiences of at least 1,000. At one in Pontypridd Hardie claimed 10,000 were present.²⁷⁶ Even the correspondent from the unsympathetic *Tarian y Gweithiwr* was impressed by Hardie's oratory,²⁷⁷ while Willie Wright commented after the June meetings that '[t]he prejudice and bigotry vanished wherever he went'.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁰ ILP NAC Minutes, 12 April 1898.

²⁷¹ *Souvenir of Twentieth Annual Conference*, p. 10. It is questionable whether Mrs. Hardie would have agreed. He had promised to take her and the children on holiday in Scotland before the strike broke out.

²⁷² William Stewart, *Keir Hardie*, p. 138. Hardie reported that he had addressed 13 meetings, *Labour Leader*, 2 July 1898.

²⁷³ *Labour Leader*, 2 July 1898.

²⁷⁴ *Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898. *Merthyr Express*, 2 July 1898 supports the attendance figure of 5,000, although the less sympathetic *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 30 June 1898, reports 4,000.

²⁷⁵ *Merthyr Express*, 2 July 1898. *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 30 June 1898, reports an audience of 2,000 at Aberdare.

²⁷⁶ *Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898.

²⁷⁷ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 30 June 1898.

²⁷⁸ *Labour Leader*, 16 July 1898.

Hardie returned to the coalfield several times before the strike was over. Early July saw him speaking at Abertillery, to its newly founded ILP branch,²⁷⁹ but the majority of his meetings were concentrated in the Merthyr area. At the end of July he addressed a meeting of 6,000 at Dowlais, and his presence at a meeting in a packed Merthyr theatre swelled the membership of the newly reformed ILP branch there to 200.²⁸⁰ In August he preached a number of ‘socialistic sermons’ on the ‘Cinder Hall’ of Penydarren tips to audiences as large as 2,000.²⁸¹ Willie Wright may have done most of the day-to-day agitating in 1898, and gained a substantial following of his own, but there was no doubt who the main attraction was. Hardie was sowing seeds that would bear fruit for the rest of his political career, and after 1898 his name was increasingly ‘mentioned with a respect approaching reverence’ in the Merthyr district.²⁸² Neither was he backward in using the capital built up in the 1890s to his political advantage. His 1900 Election Address asserted

WE ARE NO STRANGERS TO ONE ANOTHER

I was among you endeavouring to cheer, encourage and strengthen you in the dark days of your recent great Industrial struggle. Not many years ago, when during the Hauliers’ Strike, the Government sent soldiers into your District, it was MY VOICE THAT PROTESTED against this in Parliament, when others upon whom you had more claims were silent.²⁸³

Hardie’s return at Merthyr in 1900 was, then, less a ‘providential occurrence’ than the consummation of a long courtship.

What was truly remarkable, though, about Keir Hardie’s career in Wales was not his victory in 1900, but the longevity of his tenure at Merthyr, and the way that ‘the Scot who looked like a mixture of a Hebrew prophet and a Highland chief’²⁸⁴ managed to win the adoration of a significant section of south Walian society. In the election of

²⁷⁹ *Merthyr Express*, 9 July 1898.

²⁸⁰ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report, 6 Aug – 20 August 1898.

²⁸¹ ILP NAC Minutes, Willie Wright’s Report, 25 - 31 July & 16 July – 6 August 1898; *Merthyr Express*, 13 August 1898.

²⁸² W.J. Edwards, *From the Valley I Came*, p. 36.

²⁸³ D.A. Thomas Papers, C2, National Library of Wales.

²⁸⁴ Emrys Hughes, *Keir Hardie, Some Memories*, Francis Johnson, London (n.d.), p. 6, copy in ILP Organisational and Regional Records 1856-1955.

1906, Hardie managed to increase his vote substantially, despite a challenge from the Dowlais-born Cardiff shipowner Henry Radcliffe, in a contest that was described by the suffragette Mary Kenny (who was among those who canvassed for Hardie) as ‘the dirtiest and meanest ever fought’.²⁸⁵ If anything, the election of January 1910, at which Pritchard Morgan renewed his challenge – helped by the intervention of the Anti-Socialist Union - was even dirtier and meaner, yet Hardie still managed to improve his poll, and in December 1910 he won almost 40% of the vote.²⁸⁶ Crucially, though, this achievement was not Hardie’s alone. His existence at Merthyr depended upon the active support of a hard core of enthusiasts. It was only through their direct efforts that he was persuaded to stand there in the first place, and it was largely through their ongoing work that he retained the seat.²⁸⁷ The activists of Merthyr Boroughs were representative of an emerging social group within south Wales that was in the process of creating its own political culture. Hardie stood at the apex of this group, and this was true at the local level (in Merthyr), the regional level (within south Wales) and, indeed, at the national (UK and Welsh) levels. A detailed analysis of this group and the intellectual and social world it created would provide enough material for a thesis by itself, but for the purposes of this discussion (and to conclude this chapter) a general outline of south Walian socialist political culture will be presented, and then the way in which it - through its leader, Hardie - related to Welshness will be discussed.

An impressionistic analysis of prominent ILP activists at a local level would suggest that the party’s workers did not faithfully represent the social structure of the wider society from which they came. Although heavy industry was not totally unrepresented among their ranks, the majority were not industrial proletarians. S.D. Shallard, one of the group of supporters that was imported to canvass for Hardie in 1900, observed that the ILP leadership in Merthyr comprised ‘a little barber, a signalman, one or two insurance agents and Scotch drapers, and a handful of miners’.²⁸⁸ In this sense the movement in south Wales exhibited the same characteristics as the wider British

²⁸⁵ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 27 January 1906; Radcliffe stressed his local origins, his Calvinistic Methodism and the fact that he was ‘a handsome contributor’ of funds to the local hospital on his Election Address, D.A. Thomas Papers, C2.

²⁸⁶ Beti Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif / Welsh Elections 1885-1997*, Y Lolfa, Talybont (1999).

²⁸⁷ Hardie later admitted that between 1900 and 1906 he ‘was seldom in the constituency’, *Souvenir of 20th Annual Conference*, p. 12.

²⁸⁸ *Labour Leader*, 20 October 1900.

movement.²⁸⁹ There were certainly exceptions, and the ILP did ultimately attract individuals, such as Charles Stanton, James Winstone, Vernon Hartshorn and Edmund Stonelake,²⁹⁰ who more closely reflected the region's predominantly heavy industrial nature. The men that were initially prominent in the making of socialist political culture in south Wales, though, tended to occupy positions which made them less vulnerable to blacklisting and victimisation than would have been the case for most industrial workers. Llew Francis, secretary of the South Wales ILP Federation, treasurer of the Merthyr Trades Council and the lynch-pin of the movement in the Merthyr District - in Hardie's view 'the one man who had made it what it is'²⁹¹ - was the 'little barber' referred to by Shallard. Hugh Lloyd of Maerdy worked as an assurance agent, as did Henry Davies, of Cwmavon.²⁹² Matt Giles, the 'sun of the local Labour constellation' in Swansea,²⁹³ who served as secretary of the Swansea Socialist Society, founded the Labour Press Association (publishers of the *Swansea & District Workers' Journal*) and ultimately became a full-time organiser for the Workers' Union in south Wales, worked for Fry's Chocolate of Bristol as their publicity agent in Swansea.²⁹⁴

For many, their position outside of the dominant occupational groups of the community was not a matter of choice. Ebenezer Rees ended up a journalist because he was victimised as a miner due to his union activities. Joseph Sparkes of Bedlinog was forced out of mining because of his political activism during the 1890s, and resorted to selling meat to make a living, ultimately becoming a grocer.²⁹⁵ Of the genuine industrial workers, it was the railwaymen who were the most prominent, such as the signalmen Oliver Jenkins and George Richards of Merthyr and Aberaman

²⁸⁹ Deian Hopkin, 'The Membership of the Independent Labour Party, 1904-1910: A Spatial and Occupational Analysis', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 20, Part 2 (1975), pp. 175-197.

²⁹⁰ Peter Stead, 'Vernon Hartshorn: Miners' Agent and Cabinet Minister', *Glamorgan Historian*, Vol. 6 (1969), pp. 83-94; Edmund Stonelake, *The Autobiography of Edmund Stonelake* (Edited by A Mór O'Brien), Mid Glamorgan County Council (1981).

²⁹¹ Keir Hardie to Llew Francis, 23 July 1902, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1902/80; *South Wales Labour Annual* (1902), p. 27.

²⁹² Hugh Lloyd is recorded on the 1891 census as an assurance agent, and Henry Davies is recorded on the 1901 census as an assurance agent and rate collector.

²⁹³ *South Wales Labour Annual* (1903), p. 9.

²⁹⁴ Griff Jones, 'Script of Swansea Socialist Party and Labour Party'; Stan Awbery, *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea*, pp. 55-56; J. Graham Jones, 'John Littlejohns, Matt Giles and the ILP at Swansea: Some New Evidence', *Morgannwg*, Vol. XLIX (2005), pp. 79-99.

²⁹⁵ Edgar Evans (Broadhaven, Pembrokeshire), Transcript of Interview with D. Smith and H. Francis, 14 July 1973, South Wales Miners' Library, AUD/213.

respectively.²⁹⁶ They were balanced, though, by members of the professions. John Littlejohns, for example - one of the leading lights of the Swansea Socialist Society - was an art teacher at the local grammar school, who exhibited his work in the Glyn Vivian Art Gallery.²⁹⁷ Socially unrepresentative and internally disparate, its members nevertheless sought to become, in the words of John Davies of the Aberdare ILP, 'the intellectual and vital organs of the Labour body'.²⁹⁸

Week by week and meeting by meeting, at both a local and a regional level, this group painstakingly created their own political culture with this end in mind. Their efforts fluctuated between periods of energetic activity, which were perhaps stimulated by the visit of an outside speaker or a local electoral contest, and periods of dissipation, during which members fell away and branches fell into disrepair. Their main seedbed was the local branch meeting, which, along with its attendant activities of outdoor speaking, electioneering, fundraising and socialising, nourished a culture of mutual improvement and open debate. The Treharris branch was holding a weekly debating class on Tuesday evenings by 1895,²⁹⁹ and the Dowlais branch was running an economics class by 1897,³⁰⁰ by which time the Merthyr branch also boasted a 'literature department'.³⁰¹ At Penydarren, the local branch met in the Elim Schoolroom and took turns, in the absence of visiting speakers, to read and debate papers on topics such as 'Does Socialism and the Bible Agree',³⁰² 'The Wages of Labour',³⁰³ 'The Nationalisation of the Railways',³⁰⁴ or 'Socialism and Drink',³⁰⁵ to name just a few. The Merthyr branch met at the Welcome Coffee Tavern, and among its papers was an intriguing discussion on 'Socialism and Love, Are They Separate?'.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁶ Aberdare Socialist Party Minute Book, 1901-1906, PY4/5, Aberdare Public Library.

²⁹⁷ Griff Jones, 'Script of Swansea Socialist Party and Labour Party'.

²⁹⁸ *Labour Leader*, 23 January 1904.

²⁹⁹ *Labour Leader*, 19 October 1895.

³⁰⁰ *Labour Leader*, 11 December 1897.

³⁰¹ *Labour Leader*, 11 December 1897.

³⁰² *Merthyr Express*, 16 July 1898. Llew Francis presented this paper and after a debate, 'it was unanimously agreed that Socialism was in accordance with the Bible teaching'. Francis gave the same paper at Willis's rooms, Georgetown later in the year, and it was followed by a discussion in which numerous members took part, *Merthyr Express*, 3 September 1898.

³⁰³ *Merthyr Express*, 10 September 1898.

³⁰⁴ *Merthyr Express*, 24 September 1898.

³⁰⁵ *Merthyr Express*, 8 October 1898.

³⁰⁶ *Merthyr Express*, 24 December 1898. ('The meeting came to the conclusion that they are one, because both were humanising in effect').

The few surviving branch documents and minute books from this period reveal the ebbs and flows of this ILP activity in some detail. At Dowlais, a branch met regularly throughout the early 1900s, with the exception of a year's break from September 1902 to September 1903, when it fell into disrepair and needed reviving. It hosted discussions on a wide range of issues, including 'Individualism and Collectivism', 'Labour Representation', 'Thrift', 'Co-operation', 'Eight Hours By Law', 'Socialist Fusion' (which by this time they had agreed to oppose) and 'The Definition of Socialism'. It is recorded on occasions that 'members took part in a jocular and excellent way', or that the discussions were 'lively and edifying'. The branch also co-operated with the Penydarren branch – which was sometimes represented at its meetings by Llew Francis - to organise an open air speaking campaign. It organised systematic study of Blatchford's *Merrie England*, and his follow-up book, *Britain for the British*, and managed the distribution of the contents of a Fabian Society book box among the members. It also engaged with the regional and national ILP structures, arranged visits by national speakers (including Philip Snowden, Katharine Bruce Glasier and John Penny) and dabbled in a tea trading scheme.³⁰⁷ Elsewhere in Merthyr Boroughs, the Aberdare Valley ILP (formerly the Aberdare Socialist Society) had, by 1907, organised a market stall, an institute with its own caretaker and a socialist Sunday school. It also organised an annual children's concert, an annual branch tea and its own annual Christmas tree.³⁰⁸

This work was undertaken on a financial shoestring, as exhibited by the surviving account book of another ILP branch at Bedlinog, which shows that the bulk of branch income was derived from local contributions averaging less than a few shillings, and that income from the sale of pamphlets and photographs was cancelled out by the payment of fees for lecturers, the costs of purchasing propaganda, NAC fees and charges for conference attendance.³⁰⁹ Despite these limitations, the south Wales ILP gradually built up a vibrant political culture, which played a crucial role in developing the human capital of its membership – a process which was essential to its long-term existence as an influence in south Wales politics. Crucially, this culture incorporated most of the elements that were to be found in the more developed socialist movement

³⁰⁷ Dowlais ILP Minute Book, SWCC: MNA/PP/69/1, Swansea University Archive.

³⁰⁸ Aberdare Valley ILP / Aberdare Socialist Society Papers, DXHJ2, Glamorgan Record Office.

³⁰⁹ Independent Labour Party, Bedlinog Branch, Account Book and Press Cuttings, 1901-1921 SWCC:MNA/POL/5/1, Swansea University Archive.

across the English border, and in this sense it was a factor in the integration of the Welsh movement into the greater British whole. The influence of the *Clarion* continued to be important in this respect. The *Clarion* van, which returned in 1899 and 1907 and made extensive tours of the south Wales valleys, played its role in the further dissemination of socialist ideas in south Wales.³¹⁰ More diffuse was the continued influence of *Clarion*-related literature, which was particularly important to a political culture that placed a high premium on the printed word. Most notably, the publication of Blatchford's *Britain for the British* in 1902 recreated to some extent the excitement of *Merrie England*. At Swansea, for example, the sales in the Swansea Socialist Society's shop 'went up with a bang' after its publication. David Richards, a signalman at Landore and a member of the society, hawked copies around the pubs of Swansea by the dozen and even sold them to passengers at Landore station.³¹¹ The Society also ran a *Britain for the British* study class.³¹²

Increasingly, after the turn of the century, the *Clarion*-related culture that went alongside ILP activism became something that was not simply imported, but which grew from the bottom up in south Wales itself. Initially this took place, like the early growth of socialism in the region, in the coastal towns. A *Clarion* club was launched at Newport in early 1900.³¹³ *Clarion* 'Cinderella Clubs', which organised meals for slum children, appeared at Newport as early as 1899,³¹⁴ and Swansea and Cardiff in 1900.³¹⁵ The Cardiff club claimed to have arranged meals for over 680 slum children during its first winter.³¹⁶ *Clarion* Fellowships were established at Swansea in 1900,³¹⁷ Newport in 1902,³¹⁸ and Cardiff in 1904.³¹⁹ Cardiff even had a *Clarion* chess club.³²⁰ Those who were more attracted to the open air – which was an integral part of British socialist culture – could join the squadrons of *Clarion* cyclists that departed from Cardiff on a weekly basis during the summer months from the early 1900s onwards,

³¹⁰ *Clarion*, 6 May-20 July 1899 & 12 April-27 September 1907.

³¹¹ Griff Jones, 'Script of Swansea Socialist Party and Labour Party'.

³¹² *Labour Leader*, 31 January 1903.

³¹³ *Clarion*, 27 January 1900.

³¹⁴ *Labour Leader*, 4 February 1899.

³¹⁵ *Labour Leader*, 22 December 1900; *Clarion* 10 February 1900.

³¹⁶ *Labour Pioneer*, January, February & March 1901; *Clarion*, 10 March 1900 & 11 May 1901.

³¹⁷ *Swansea and District Workers' Journal*, December 1900.

³¹⁸ *Clarion*, 24 January & 18 July 1902, March 13 & 4 April 1903.

³¹⁹ *Clarion*, 11 November & 9 December 1904.

³²⁰ *Labour Pioneer*, March 1902.

to explore the Glamorgan coast, the valleys and rural Monmouthshire.³²¹ Another cycling group met regularly outside the Shaftesbury Hotel at Newport and included Raglan, Caerphilly and the western valleys of Monmouthshire in its itineraries.³²² Swansea too established a club in 1902, which explored the Mumbles on its opening run.³²³ Gradually *Clarion* clubs spread from the coastal towns and became established in the valleys. By 1904 a *Clarion* cycling group was active in the Rhondda,³²⁴ and by the second half of the decade cycle-mounted socialist ‘scouts’ were a common feature of the movement in south Wales.³²⁵

These activities were a cultural expression of the ongoing dialogue between Wales and the wider British movement, which took place through the columns of the socialist press, but which was also encouraged by the personal visits of individual personalities to south Wales. In 1904 the Cardiff cyclists were joined by A.J. Paton, otherwise known as the ‘Flying Scotsman’, editor of the regular *Clarion* ‘Cyclorama’ feature, for their annual picnic.³²⁶ Another visitor was G.A.H. Samuel, or ‘Marxian’, of the *Labour Leader*. Samuel was originally from Swansea, and although he had left the town at the age of six he maintained a pride in his Welsh origins. He lectured frequently in the towns of south Wales and also contributed to the local socialist press.³²⁷ Robert Blatchford himself also included south Wales on his after dinner speaking circuit, visiting Cardiff, Swansea and Newport in February 1901.³²⁸ At Newport, much to his delight, he met an old army friend, and the evening was a huge

³²¹ *Labour Pioneer*, May 1901 refers to the group entering its third season. Also see *Labour Pioneer*, June 1901 & April & May 1902; *Clarion*, 25 August 1900 & 26 August 1904.

³²² *Clarion*, 19 May 1900, 23 & 30 June 1900

³²³ *Clarion*, 9 May 1902.

³²⁴ *Clarion*, 14, 21 & 28 October 1904.

³²⁵ For scouts in the Rhondda see *Labour Leader*, 16 October 1908; For Cardiff scouts see *Clarion*, 18 December 1908, 1 & 29 January 1909; For the Swansea Valley ‘Red Flag Scouts’, see *Llais Llafur*, 11 July 1908 & *Labour Leader*, 10 July 1908.

³²⁶ *Clarion*, 12 August 1904. The following ‘Cyclorama’ featured a trip through south Wales, *Clarion*, 19 & 26 August 1904. As for Paton, two years later he was among the surprisingly large number of socialist cyclists who met their end on the saddle. He was found dead by the roadside at Nuneaton, after a cycling accident. ‘How the accident was sustained is not exactly known, but a book was found on the handle-bar of his bicycle. It is supposed that he was reading at the time’, *Clarion*, 20 July 1906.

³²⁷ *Swansea and District Workers’ Journal*, January & February 1900 contain reports of meetings addressed by Samuel, and a brief biographical article is included in *Swansea and District Workers’ Journal*, December 1900. Samuel’s contributions to the south Wales press included a lengthy series on the history of Swansea entitled ‘Swansea’s Lords’, *Swansea and District Workers’ Journal*, August 1900-June 1901.

³²⁸ *Labour Pioneer*, March 1901; *Clarion* 9 & 16 February 1901; *Swansea and District Workers’ Journal*, March 1901.

success.³²⁹ At Swansea, though, he was reported to be ‘uncommunicative and grave almost to grumpiness’,³³⁰ which might explain why he didn’t return there on his second trip to south Wales in November 1902 – although the vicissitudes of his personality did not prevent *Clarionettes* travelling down from the valleys to hear him speak at Cardiff and Newport on this return visit.³³¹ By getting involved in such activities and indulging in the culture of socialist fellowship south Wales enthusiasts were consciously emulating their comrades across the English border. ‘The fellowship in South Wales and Monmouth bids fair to equal that of the North and Midlands’,³³² opined Cardiff’s *Labour Pioneer* proudly in 1901.

Like their counterparts elsewhere in Britain, Welsh socialists also generated a musical culture to accompany their activities. The Treharris ILP, which had a socialist string band as early as 1897, was a pioneer in this respect, but its efforts were not isolated.³³³ The Newport branch was running monthly ‘smokers’ (smoking concerts) by 1899,³³⁴ and ‘glees and solos [were] given in good style’ at Blatchford’s visit to Cardiff in February 1901.³³⁵ By 1904 Cardiff had a *Clarion* Choir,³³⁶ and in 1908 it had a *Clarion* orchestra, which provided accompaniment to a Labour Day production of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for which members of the Cardiff labour movement provided the cast.³³⁷ Up in the valleys, the Aberdare Valley ILP had its own branch pianist,³³⁸ and in February 1906 it appointed Councillor John Davies to be conductor of singing at its meetings, the repertoires of which included Keir Hardie’s election songs along with ‘When Wilt Thou Save the People’ and the “Marseillaise”. Although it seems that not all Aberdare socialists were comfortable with the musical element of their activities. At a meeting on 18 February 1906 a

³²⁹ *Clarion*, 2 March 1901.

³³⁰ *Swansea and District Workers’ Journal*, March 1901.

³³¹ *Clarion*, 5 December 1902.

³³² *Labour Pioneer*, March 1901.

³³³ *Merthyr Express*, 26 June 1897.

³³⁴ *Labour Leader*, 4 February 1899.

³³⁵ *Labour Pioneer*, March 1901.

³³⁶ *Clarion*, 27 January 1904.

³³⁷ Labour and May Day Festival, Theatre Royal, Cardiff, 6 May 1908 (Typescript), Cochfarf Papers, Box 5.

³³⁸ Aberdare Socialist Party Minute Book, February 21st 1901, PY4/5, Aberdare Public Library. It also proudly recorded in its papers the buying of a new piano for £30 in 1907, Aberdare Valley ILP / Aberdare Socialist Society Papers, DXHJ2, Glamorgan Record Office.

motion that singing be curtailed at a forthcoming public lecture was debated, although it was ultimately rejected and singing was allowed.³³⁹

The extent to which any distinctly Welsh material was included in the content of the cultural activities of the south Walian socialists seems to have been limited. When, for example, the Briton Ferry ILP branch published its own book of *Socialist and Labour Hymns*, it borrowed wholesale from a generically British socialist cultural canon. The first three songs in the book were Williams Morris's 'The Day is Coming', Jim Connell's 'The Red Flag' and Edward Carpenter's 'England Arise', and the remainder of the pamphlet did not contain a single Welsh tune or word of Welsh.³⁴⁰ It would be easy to see the culture of socialism in south Wales as part of a greater process of cultural homogenisation that was gripping south Wales in this period. 'Marxian' was aware of this process when he visited Cardiff in 1900. 'I paced the Metropolis of the country of my birth, and of the land of my fathers, only to discover afresh the weary characteristics of Liverpool and Hull and Birmingham', he mused, lamenting what he saw as 'the commercial repression of nationality and individuality'.³⁴¹ The process was not, however, all one way. When the Ystalyfera ILP Theatre Company put on its performance of 'The Poacher' in 1909, for example, it informed the prospective audience that 'numerous local incidents connected with industrial and political activities have been worked into the play'.³⁴² It appears therefore, that if Welsh socialists were the recipients of an imported generic culture, they were also the agents of its adaptation for local use.

The same is true with regard to the more serious set of core beliefs behind socialism's recreational cultural façade. These revolved around the concepts of self and mutual improvement, and demanded the pursuit of a strict moral code. This is something that socialists in south Wales had in common with their contemporaries in other parts of Britain, and was partly the product of inherited notions concerning 'rational

³³⁹ Aberdare Socialist Party Minute Book, 18 February, 25 February & 5 March 1906.

³⁴⁰ Independent Labour Party (Briton Ferry Branch), *Socialist and Labour Hymns*, Whittington Printers, Neath (n.d.). It is not clear when this pamphlet was published. It was probably nearer the end of the decade, and a little later than the focus of the current discussion. The point nevertheless remains valid.

³⁴¹ *Labour Pioneer*, September 1900. Samuel saw socialism as a force that could work against the general trend of the elimination of national characteristics, see *Labour Leader*, 21 December 1901.

³⁴² *Llais Llafur*, 6 January 1909.

recreation'.³⁴³ Welsh socialists both adopted and adapted this ideology, and in some respects it provided a link to other social movements in Wales. There was a degree of confluence, for example, between socialists and temperance advocates, as testified by John Littlejohns' pamphlet, *Black Glamorgan*, published by the Swansea Socialist Society in 1901, which appealed for the help of all political parties in south Wales to address the drink problem. It advocated a system of supervised municipal lodgings, where 'a desire for purer recreation and mental development' would supplant the desire for drink, so that 'this sin-ridden county may no longer deserve the name of "Black Glamorgan"'.³⁴⁴ At the heart of this was an essentially revivalist message, and the role models that it encouraged and created were not that different to those of the religious revivalism with which it co-existed. In one of Hardie's *Labour Leader* articles on the coal strike he recounted a meeting with a man who, much to the delight of his wife, had given up beer and tobacco since becoming a socialist. 'The man who can do that', he commented, 'that he may have more money for propaganda purposes is among the heroes of the movement'.³⁴⁵

Alongside this quest for 'purer recreation and mental development' socialists were, however, also driven by a sense of social isolation derived from widespread opposition to their beliefs. They quickly learnt to define themselves in opposition to their social environment. On the death in 1895 of W.J. Rees, the secretary of the first South Wales ILP Federation, one of his contemporaries commented that 'he and a few Socialist comrades lived an isolated life in the dreary desert of narrow Nonconformity and bigoted Liberalism'.³⁴⁶ This naturally drove them to seek support from a wider movement. In some cases this went as far as direct material support for individuals. In 1895, W.J. Dunn of the ILP in Swansea was dying, like his friend and comrade Rees, of consumption. He explained in a letter to Tom Mann how he hoped that Sam Hobson could send books of raffle tickets for a fund to help him to the branches in England 'where we are strong', because 'locally I don't expect support ... as we stink in the nostrils of this Hypocritical Community'.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*.

³⁴⁴ John Littlejohns, *Black Glamorgan*, Swansea Socialist Society, Swansea (1901), pp. 11-12.

³⁴⁵ *Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898.

³⁴⁶ *Labour Leader*, 23 November 1895.

³⁴⁷ W.J. Dunn to Tom Mann, 30 August 1895, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1895/138.

It is this combination of factors, the ascetic, self sacrificing moral core of ILP socialism, rather than its more colourfully counter-cultural *Clarion* alter ego, that takes this analysis back to the heart of the relationship between Keir Hardie and his followers in south Wales. This relationship worked on several levels. At one level, Hardie's supporters were relating to a version of their own idealised selves. Hardie actively played upon this, and a recurrent theme in his speeches in south Wales was self-identification with his audiences. 'He asks the workers to be true to themselves in being true to him',³⁴⁸ the *Leader* reported, paraphrasing his election address, during the 1900 campaign, and ten years later he told an audience at Merthyr's Drill Hall 'I love the people to whom I belong – I am one of yourselves'.³⁴⁹ This appeal was highly effective. John Daniel (Iwan Glyn of *Llais Llafur*), who described himself as 'an insignificant Welshman', explained Hardie's appeal (to Hardie himself) by stating that in 'declaring what you wanted you reechoed very comprehensively what I want'.³⁵⁰ Crucially, it also transcended the language barrier. Jack Jones later recalled that Hardie's method of discourse, and his particular use of the word 'comrades', 'made closer contact with his audiences of Welsh-speaking miners than ever their own Welsh-speaking leaders had made'.³⁵¹

On another level this relationship went beyond the mere transmission and reception of political rhetoric. Indeed, Hardie played an active role in shaping and encouraging the political culture of the ILP branches. His journalism was one tool, as exhibited by the above quotation concerning the 'heroic' ILP abstainer. More than this, though, he intervened personally in branch life to ensure that socialist societies in the region were run according to his wishes. He gave some advice, for example, regarding the establishment of branch premises, to the members at Dowlais in June 1904.

It is essential to the progress of the cause that each branch should have a home, where the members could gather to read papers, discuss important questions, and carry on the work of mutual improvement. Avoid a club make

³⁴⁸ *Labour Leader*, 13 October 1900.

³⁴⁹ Quoted in *Keir Hardie and Harry Morris Memorial Meeting Programme*, Llywelyn Davies, Merthyr (1926).

³⁵⁰ John Daniel to Keir Hardie, 25 February 1906, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1906/115.

³⁵¹ Jack Jones, *Unfinished Journey*, Hamilton, London (1938), p. 86.

the headquarters a home. Keep out the drink and billiards. We want working thinking members and not a body of loungers.³⁵²

Indeed, a key element of the relationship between Hardie and his supporters was a belief in self and mutual improvement. Hardie's credentials in this respect are a well known element of his life story, and at least one biography was published during his lifetime with his social elevation through self-help as its main theme.³⁵³ Less prominent, but equally evident – indeed often recorded with pride – in the historical record, is the same theme in the lives of Hardie's supporters across south Wales. Henry Davies of Cwmavon (Carrusk of *Llais Llafur*), for example, was, according to the *South Wales Labour Annual*, 'A marvel. Really well read in economics and many other sciences, general literature and theology',³⁵⁴ while David Davies, of Briton Ferry, was a 'pioneer of the Free Library' there.³⁵⁵

These observations, of course, would equally pertain to the relationship between many ILP leaders and their supporters in other parts of Britain – or indeed between Hardie and the British ILP rank and file more generally. This relationship was complicated – and arguably strengthened – in south Wales by another factor, which was the mutual need of Hardie and his supporters to establish a relationship with Welsh national identity. There were, of course, members of the indigenous Welsh community within the ranks of the socialists. As a group, however, ILP activists had what can only be considered an ambiguous relationship with Welshness. In ethnic terms the organisation was – and in this respect it did represent its host society – a melting pot, and included both Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers. Linguistically, English became established as the dominant language of branch life very early on in the movement's history. All of the surviving minute books and branch records were kept in English, and branch discussions in Welsh seem to have been a rarity.³⁵⁶ Even in the anthracite region, where Welsh remained the dominant language of the community, by the turn of the century branches were sending their

³⁵² Dowlais ILP Minute Book, 10 June 1904, SWCC: MNA/PP/69/1.

³⁵³ Anon., *From Coal Pit to Parliament: Complete Life of James Keir Hardie MP – Stories of Success No. 10*, The Self Help Press, London (1907).

³⁵⁴ *South Wales Labour Annual* (1902), p. 27.

³⁵⁵ *South Wales Labour Annual* (1903), p. 9.

³⁵⁶ For example, the Dowlais ILP Minute Book records only one discussion taking place in Welsh between January 1901 and October 1904.

reports to the bilingual *Llais Llafur* in English only. This was an active choice. Activists known to be Welsh patriots tended to subjugate their Welsh patriotism to their socialism, and use the English language. Edgar Chappell,³⁵⁷ for example, originally from Ystalyfera, and an activist with the Swansea Socialist Society, was a Welsh speaker and a member of the patriotic *Cymdeithas y Ddraig Goch* (Red Dragon Society) in Ystalyfera.³⁵⁸ He chose, however, to contribute articles to *Llais Llafur* in English. More than this, his work, such as his series on ‘Social Movements of the Nineteenth Century’ published in 1903, reveals a clearly British, rather than Welsh, historical perspective.³⁵⁹

Welsh national issues were occasionally raised by ILPers, but they were firmly subjugated to wider socialist concerns. John Littlejohns, for example, argued for ‘Socialism as the end, Home Rule as the means’.³⁶⁰ Indeed, the consciousness of south Walian socialists was primarily regional, rather than national. This was exhibited by the launch in 1902 of a *South Wales Labour Annual*. This publication lasted two years, and combined news and information about the labour movement in south Wales with more general information about the national (UK) movement, as well as a curious section which contains a miscellany of articles on such topics as the British landscape and cooking. Any sign of a national (Welsh) consciousness was entirely absent. This was also reflected in the structural arrangements that were adopted by the ILP. A South Wales ILP Federation ultimately emerged after the 1898 coal strike, and any idea of creating a national (Welsh) structure was quietly abandoned.³⁶¹ Perhaps, though, the best symbolic illustration of the attitude of the south Wales socialists towards Welshness was provided by the Aberdare Socialist Society, which held a complimentary dinner for Keir Hardie on St. David’s Day 1901. Despite the occasion, St. David didn’t figure in the proceedings at all. The menu was printed in English, without even the presence of some token Welsh, and the toasts, apart from those to the guest and the branch, were to International Socialism and the

³⁵⁷ E. Margaret Humphries, ‘Edgar Leyshon Chappell (1878-1949): A Biography’, Unpublished Diploma in Higher Education Dissertation, Cardiff (1993).

³⁵⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 4 April 1903.

³⁵⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 10 January 1903 – 11 April 1903.

³⁶⁰ *Llais Llafur*, 14 & 21 February 1903.

³⁶¹ *South Wales Labour Annual* (1902), p. 37; *South Wales Labour Annual* (1903), pp. 9-15.

Brotherhood of Man. *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* was conspicuous by its absence, and the banquet began and ended with the singing of the Marseillaise.³⁶²

The relationship between the ILP in south Wales and Welsh national identity was, of course, refracted through the figure of Keir Hardie, whose relationship with Welshness worked on several different levels. On the general level Hardie aligned himself with Welsh national sentiment through an emotional appeal to the Welsh as Celts, and by insisting upon their racially predetermined disposition to socialism, as in this representative piece from 1907:

All Celtic people are, at heart, Communists. ... All the qualities for which the people of Wales are most famous and upon which they pride themselves most are ... those which have come down to them from their communistic forefathers. The qualities which are in the blood and which will keep asserting themselves, are they not part of the race as much as the features or the language? And the love of Socialism is one of the strongest of these.³⁶³

As much as possible - and he obviously relied on the help of his supporters in this - he used the Welsh language in his campaigning. In 1906 this included the production of a Welsh 'Election Hymn', written by John Daniel of Aberdare, to be sung to the tune of 'Hark the Herald Angels' or 'Aberystwyth':

Gweithwyr anwyl Gymru glân,
Seiniwn uchel ddiolch gân,
Iachawdwriaeth llafur sydd
Heddyw'n wir i gael y dydd;
Dewch yn llon a chodwch lef,
Rhyddid fo i wlad a thref;
Na foed gweithiwr yma'n ol

³⁶² Aberdare Socialist Society, Menu and Programme of Complimentary Banquet for Keir Hardie, 1 March 1901, SWCC: MNA/PP/131/3, Swansea University Archive.

³⁶³ James Keir Hardie, 'Socialism and the Celt', in T. Stephens (ed.), *Wales Today and Tomorrow*, Western Mail, Cardiff (1907), pp. 89-96.

Beneath this veneer, though, Hardie needed to confront the individual elements of Welsh national identity, the ‘narrow Nonconformity and bigoted Liberalism’ so reviled by socialists. This demanded a more specific range of responses, and it was when it came to Welsh particularist issues that the ambiguity of Hardie’s position arguably became more acute.

Hardie, of course, started his political life as a Liberal, although he frequently went to lengths to explicitly differentiate himself from Liberalism and Lib-Labism. He told an audience at Aberaman in 1903, for example, that ‘if they wanted someone tied to the Liberal Party he would not be the one’.³⁶⁵ His election campaigns were also explicitly socialist, and there could have been no doubt as to his hostility to official Liberalism. Despite this, though, there was a great deal of common ground between Hardie’s ideology and the radical Liberal tradition. Indeed, Hardie’s propaganda consciously placed him in the tradition of Henry Richard,³⁶⁶ a position that his stance on the Boer War to some extent legitimised. S.D. Shallard commented on the 1900 election that ‘Keir fought his fight primarily upon the war. He elected to stand or fall by his condemnation of the war’,³⁶⁷ and Hardie himself believed that the influence of the surviving supporters of Henry Richard, who had been won over by his anti-war stance, had played a crucial part in securing his return in 1900.³⁶⁸ It was also a factor in his accommodation with D.A. Thomas, who in 1906 ‘referred to the pleasant relations that had existed between himself and Mr. J. Keir Hardie during the past five years’.³⁶⁹ Thomas, though, was quite aware of the ambiguities of Hardie’s position, and kept a close and suspicious eye on what he was up to. He kept a scrap book of newspaper cuttings about Hardie and the ILP, in which there is a cutting from the *Daily News* that reports a speech made by Hardie in London. It quotes Hardie declaring that ‘to the politicians outside [of the labour movement] there should be no

³⁶⁴ Printed by G.M. Evans at the office of *Y Darian*, Aberdare, and published by Frank Smith. D.A. Thomas Papers, C2, NLW. There were two additional verses. John Daniel identifies himself as the author in Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1906/115.

³⁶⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 16 May 1903.

³⁶⁶ *Labour Leader*, 13 October 1900.

³⁶⁷ *Labour Leader*, 20 October 1900.

³⁶⁸ *ILP Souvenir of Twentieth Annual Conference*, p. 10.

³⁶⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 10 January 1906.

quarter – nothing but a fight to the finish’. Thomas has carefully underscored the offending statement.³⁷⁰

Hardie’s ambiguous position towards the shibboleths of radical Liberalism was evident on the issues that mattered most to Welsh Liberals, home rule and church disestablishment. He was a putative enthusiast for both causes, and they appeared in prominent positions on his 1900 election manifesto.³⁷¹ When examined in more detail, however, his support was not unequivocal. As a supporter of Irish home rule from the start of his political career, he also claimed to be in favour of ‘Home Rule for the four countries’. Within this general support, though, he constructed a hierarchy, and argued that ‘the Irish people had proved their right to priority of treatment because of the fight they had made to win it for themselves’.³⁷² In Wales (and Scotland), on the other hand, Hardie believed that there was ‘no academic feeling’ in favour of Home Rule.³⁷³ This judgement was built upon an assumption that Welsh claims to nationhood were essentially weak, which was implicit in his statement that Ireland was a nation ‘in quite a different sense from any in which the term can be applied to either Wales or Scotland’.³⁷⁴

Hardie was open minded towards ‘Welsh issues’ such as home rule and disestablishment. He was distinctly friendly and positive towards the less political aspects of Welsh culture, and he showed respect towards the Welsh language. Neither was he inherently antagonist to Welsh religious nonconformity; indeed, his own rhetoric and beliefs shared many of its tenets.³⁷⁵ All of these things were nevertheless entirely secondary in his world view to his belief in socialism and independent labour representation. He was quite explicit about this. ‘It is ... as a Socialist, a Trade Unionist, and a Social Reformer that I base my chief claim to your support’, he informed his constituents during the 1906 Merthyr Boroughs election campaign.³⁷⁶ For Hardie the demands of his class clearly came before the demands of any nation.

³⁷⁰ D.A. Thomas Papers, C2, NLW.

³⁷¹ Keir Hardie Election Postcard (1900), D.A. Thomas Papers, C2, NLW.

³⁷² *South Wales Daily News*, 8 January 1906.

³⁷³ *Merthyr Express*, 16 December 1905.

³⁷⁴ Keir Hardie to J. Hugh Edwards, 26 February 1906, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1906/116.

³⁷⁵ Hardie’s relationship with the chapels and other aspects of Welsh culture will be returned to in chapter 5.

³⁷⁶ Keir Hardie, 1906 Election Address, D.A. Thomas Papers, C2, NLW.

His existence as one of the MPs for Merthyr Boroughs, let alone his iconic status, indicates that this was also true for a significant part of south Wales society in the early 1900s. This was an important and defining aspect of the new society that was being made in south Wales. That society was, however, only one component of the geographical and psychological entity that was Wales at the turn of the twentieth century - and one, at that, which did not necessarily co-exist comfortably with some of the others.

Chapter 4

BEYOND THE HEADS OF THE VALLEYS

Wales is a singular noun but a plural experience.¹

By the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century socialism had become embedded, albeit as the belief and enthusiasm of a minority, into the culture of the industrial regions of south Wales. This, however, only comprised part of the Welsh experience of socialism in this period. Welsh historiography has little to say about the fortunes of socialism outside south Wales in the period before 1906, but if a full understanding of the relationship between Wales and socialism is to be achieved, there is a need to cross the heads of the valleys and engage with the Wales beyond. This demands both a geographical and a cultural shift, but neither are straightforward. In the first place, the geographical and cultural boundaries of Wales have never been coterminous. A significant amount of Welsh culture was created outside of Wales, and, as Emrys Jones has recognised, ‘had there not been a distinctive Welsh identity beyond Wales ... the cultural heritage of Wales would have been considerably diminished’.² Many of the major British cities had significant Welsh populations, which kept their native language and culture alive during this period,³ and members of these expatriate communities played their role in infusing socialism into Welsh thought. A full consideration of the interaction between Welshness and socialism cannot, therefore, be restricted to the geographical boundaries of Wales.

This is not, however, the end of the problem. If a geographical definition of Welshness is difficult to achieve, a cultural definition is hardly any easier. Wales was

¹ Dai Smith, *Wales! Wales?*, Allen & Unwin, London & Sidney (1984), p. 1.

² Emrys Jones, ‘The Welsh Language in England c. 1800-1914’, in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1998), pp. 231-259, p. 231.

³ Emrys Jones, *The Welsh in London 1500-2000*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2001); R. Merfyn Jones & D. Ben Rees, *Cymry Lerpwl a’u Crefydd: Dwy Ganrif o Fethodistiaeth Galfinaidd Gymreig / The Liverpool Welsh and their Religion: Two Centuries of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism*, Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, Liverpool (1984); D. Ben Rees, *The Welsh of Merseyside, 2 Vols.*, Modern Welsh Press, Liverpool (1997 & 2001). Welsh communities, were of course, not confined to the British Isles, see William D. Jones, *Wales in America: Scranton and the Welsh, 1860-1920*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1993); Ronald L. Lewis, *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields*, University of North Carolina Press (2008); W. Ross Johnston, ‘The Welsh Diaspora: Emigrating Around the World in the Late Nineteenth Century’, *Llafur*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1993), pp.50-74.

³ Emrys Jones, *The Welsh in London 1500-2000*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2001).

(and continues to be) host to a variety of competing and evolving cultures, ideologies and identities.⁴ This chapter, though, is concerned with what might be considered ‘traditional’ or ‘national’ Welsh culture. The very concept is potentially invidious and almost impossible to define, but its existence is also inescapable, and during the 1880s and 1890s it was resurgent. This culture was (and is) partly defined by language, although language alone is insufficient to establish its full nature, as a contributor to *Cymru Fydd* explained in 1888.

*Y mae cenedlaetholdeb yn sylfaenedig ar undod mewn meddwl a theimlad.
Mewn cymundeb, ac nid mewn cyfrwng cymundeb y mae sylfaen
cenedlaetholdeb. ... Y mae i bob cenedl ei meddyliau mawrion llywodraethol a
nodweddiadol, nad oes yr un genedl arall ar y ddaear yn eu meddu fel eu
meddienir ganddi hi. A diben bodolaeth cenedl ydyw datguddio y meddyliau
hyny i'r byd.⁵*

Religious, literary, musical and political culture – conveyed either through Welsh, English or both languages - all played a part in defining Welshness. It is tempting to argue that another important defining factor was a sense of separateness and opposition to the burgeoning, new, bilingual, industrial culture of the south. This, though, would be dangerous. The impressive geological barrier running from the Black Mountain to the Black Mountains was eminently permeable in cultural terms. Consequently, Welsh national culture existed jeek by jowl with the new ‘international’ or ‘American’ culture of the south – very often within individual personalities. To some observers even Monmouthshire, which was legally English and was the most apparently anglicised of all the Welsh counties, could appear, in terms of its political traditions, to be ‘more Welsh than Wales’.⁶

⁴ See Merfyn Jones, ‘Beyond Identity? The Reconstruction of the Welsh’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (October 1992), pp. 330-357; Neil Evans: ‘Gogs, Cardis and Hwntws: Regions, Nation and State in Wales, 1840-1940’, in Neil Evans (ed.), *National Identity in the British Isles (Coleg Harlech Occasional Papers in Welsh Studies No. 3)*, Harlech (1989), pp. 60-72; Emyr W. Williams: ‘The Dynamic of Welsh Identity’, in Neil Evans, *National Identity in the British Isles*, pp. 46-59.

⁵ William Jones ‘Y Deffroad Cenedlaethol’, *Cymru Fydd*, November 1888, pp. 405-412, pp. 405-6 (‘Nationalism is founded on unity in thought and feeling. The foundation of nationalism is in community, and not in the medium of community, every nation has its own great governing and characteristic thoughts that are not owned in the same way by any other nation on earth. And the point of the existence of a nation is to disclose those thoughts to the world’).

⁶ “Gwent”, ‘The Revolution in Monmouthshire’, *Cymru Fydd*, March 1889, pp. 131 – 134, p. 131.

In many respects, then, the boundary used to demarcate this chapter from what has gone before is artificial, and a journey ‘across the heads of the valleys’ can demand a revisitation of Ystalyfera or Bedlinog, just as it can take in Bethesda or Manchester. With these important qualifications in mind, this chapter will begin with an examination of the diffusion of socialism in the geographical entity of Wales beyond the heads of the valleys. It will then examine the impact of one of the great industrial disputes of twentieth century Wales, the Penrhyn dispute of 1900-1903, and discuss the ways in which socialists responded to it. Finally it will examine some of the ways in which ‘native’ Welsh political culture was beginning to relate to socialism, both within Wales and, in one notable case, in the epicentre of industrial England.

(i). British Socialism and Welsh Wales.

Most of rural Wales, including the industrial districts of the north, provided much less fertile ground for the growth of socialist organisations than the industrial south. The penetration of rural Wales by socialist propagandists during the 1880s was, as we have seen, limited to a few random holiday visits by members of the SDF and Socialist League, while the development of formal socialist societies seems to have been restricted to the establishment of a Fabian Society at Aberystwyth University in 1886.⁷ This does not mean, however, that socialism was an entirely unknown creed during the 1880s. Indeed, it was frequently discussed in the press, and by the end of the decade readers of both the Welsh and English language presses in Wales had been offered a variety of interpretations with which to furnish their imaginations. Many of these portrayed socialism as a bogey, which originated and continued to exist primarily on the European mainland, but which constantly threatened to spread closer to home. Mr Benjamin Piercy JP, of Marchwiel Hall, near Wrexham, for example, thought it appropriate to warn his audience when opening a new chapel school in Wrexham in 1885 of a range of dangers arising from the evils of the present time. These included ‘Nihilism in Russia ... Socialism in Germany, Communism in France, and things in our own country and in Ireland [which] were all more or less traceable

⁷ Deian Hopkin, ‘Labour’s Roots in Wales’, in Tanner, Williams & Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales*, pp. 40-60, p. 51.

to the same cause'.⁸ Likewise, Colonel Platt of Gorddinog, Llanfairfechan, told an audience of the Primrose League at Bangor's Masonic Hall in 1887 that 'Socialism was making great progress in our midst, and unless it was combatted it could have but one ending – the ruination of the country'.⁹ Despite failing to produce any concrete evidence to support such claims, it was occasionally asserted that socialism was putting down roots in rural Wales. The leader writer of the *North Wales Chronicle* claimed to have met a socialist 'madcap' at Machynlleth in 1887, who was 'a pattern of many others in the Principality ... a man ... in advance of his time [who] for the sake of decency [should] have been born in the twentieth instead of the nineteenth century', and whose ideas threatened to seriously endanger the public morals.¹⁰ A correspondent to *The Times* in the same year asserted that Montgomeryshire was a hotbed of socialism:

Englishmen have long been blind to the fact that the fires of the spirit of lawlessness – call it Socialism or Communism, or what you will – have long been smouldering on the lonely hillsides of Wales.¹¹

Indeed, the bogey was so convincing that by the end of the decade, in response to the supposed rapid spread of 'the spirit of Socialism' in Wales, a Conservative Registry had been established, which aimed to vet prospective tenants on behalf of landlords and 'ascertain whether candidates for their farms are the friends of order and justice, or of anarchy and confiscation'.¹²

Such representations do not, however, account for the whole spectrum of debate concerning socialism in Wales in this period. Comment on the socialist agitation of the 1880s in England began to permeate the Welsh press relatively quickly, and by the turn of the decade more intelligent analysis was appearing. Indeed by the mid 1880s the Welsh press was increasingly being forced to admit that the questions raised by

⁸ He had given the same warning a few days previously to an audience at the Wrexham Music Festival, opining his hope that 'When music comes to reign supreme, such plants as the Nihilism of Russia, the Socialism of Germany, and the Communism of France will not thrive. ... Neither will the Fenianism of our unhappy Ireland'. *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 28 February 1885.

⁹ *North Wales Chronicle*, 23 April 1887.

¹⁰ *North Wales Chronicle*, 26 March 1887. The article asserted that the chief agitators responsible for the spread of socialism were nonconformist ministers.

¹¹ The article is reported in *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 3 December 1887.

¹² *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 30 October 1889.

socialists in England were of fundamental importance, even if editors and contributors were by no means supportive of socialism. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, for example, implicitly accepted the precepts of the socialists when it stated in a series of articles on the labour question in Wales in 1886 that ‘*Pwngc masnachol mawr y ganrif ddiweddar oedd sut i gynnyrchu fwyaf o gyfoeth. [...]. Ond pwngc mawr y dyddiau hyn ydyw sut i ranu cyfoeth*’,¹³ and within a year the paper was conceding the significance of the rise of socialism in Britain:

*Ni bu ‘Sosialaeth’ erioed yn dangos ei hun mor amlwg yn Mhrydain ag y gwna y flwyddyn hon. Un o ‘arwyddion’ amlycaf ‘yr amseroedd,’ yn ddiau, ydyw, cynnydd yr egwyddorion ‘sosialaidd’ yn mysg y werin Brydeinig.*¹⁴

Y Faner was never reconciled to socialism, or even (or perhaps especially) to independent labour representation, and made hostile comment on both throughout the period of this study. Indeed, it saw its own radicalism as an antidote to both socialism and anarchism,¹⁵ and saw socialist leaders like Keir Hardie as extremists.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the hostility of such influential media did not wholly inhibit the discussion of socialism within Welsh society, and there is evidence that during the late 1880s and increasingly throughout the 1890s the concept was being discussed at a local level in many parts of Wales.

One site for this was provided by the numerous literary and debating societies, which, operating through the media of both Welsh and English, acted as centres of intellectual and cultural transmission in many Welsh towns and villages. St. Tudno’s Literary Guild at Llandudno included a session on socialism in its programme as early as 1888,¹⁷ and by the 1890s the topic was becoming a more commonplace feature in the programmes of similar groups across Wales. The Wesleyan Mutual Improvement

¹³ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 25 August 1886 (‘The great commercial question of the last century was how to produce the greatest amount of wealth ... but the great subject of the present is how to share wealth’).

¹⁴ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 9 March 1887 (‘Socialism has never manifested itself so prominently in Britain as it is doing this year. One of the most obvious “signs of the times” is surely the growth of “socialist” principles amongst the *gwerin* of Britain’).

¹⁵ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 20 January 1894.

¹⁶ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 4 July 1894: ‘I’n tyb ni, y mae Keir Hardie yn ddyn eithafol iawn, ac yn mhell o flaen ei oes’ (‘In our opinion, Keir Hardie is a very extreme man, and far in advance of his time’).

¹⁷ *North Wales Chronicle*, 5 May 1888.

Society at Wrexham discussed a paper on socialism which was read by one of their members in April 1891,¹⁸ and later in the same year a Mr. Tickle of Liverpool visited the Christian Meeting House there to deliver a paper on ‘the socialism of Christianity’, to which the shop assistants of the town were specially invited.¹⁹ The annual *Cylchwyl Lenyddol* at Salem chapel in Pwllheli at Easter 1893 offered a prize of £1/1 for a victorious essay on the subject of ‘*Cymdeithasiaeth Gristionogol* (Christian Socialism)’.²⁰ The subject of socialism was again on the agenda at Wrexham in 1893, when the Arena Society discussed a paper on the subject,²¹ while nearby at Coedpoeth the Cymdeithas Lenyddol yr Adwy undertook a similar debate, but through the medium of Welsh, in November 1894.²² The subject was debated again at Llandudno in 1895, this time under the auspices of the Llandudno Literary and Scientific Society.²³ The *Cymdeithas Lenyddol* at Dinorwig joined the debate in 1896, under the presidency of the Reverend Puleston Jones, who was to become a prominent nonconformist advocate of socialism during the succeeding decades. On this occasion though the majority voted against socialism.²⁴ The same was true at Porthmadog, although only narrowly, when the Presbyterian Church Literary Society there held a debate on the socialism of *Merrie England* in 1897,²⁵ while members of the *Cymdeithas Lenyddol* Ebenezer at Pwllheli were content to hear a paper on ‘*Sosialaeth*’, which was presented by the Reverend Owen Evans in 1898, without taking a vote.²⁶

By the end of the decade, though, there were perhaps signs that the ideal of socialism was making progress. The Young Men’s Literary Society at Ponkey, for example, debated Individualism and Socialism in 1899, and voted in favour of socialism.²⁷ Such events were signs that the cultural and intellectual leaders of at least some Welsh communities were finding socialism a significant enough topic to merit interest. In some cases, this interest went beyond just taking part in discussions. In

¹⁸ *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser and North Wales News*, 11 April 1891.

¹⁹ *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser and North Wales News*, 12 September 1891.

²⁰ *Genedl Gymreig*, 14 December 1892.

²¹ *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser and North Wales News*, 18 November 1893.

²² *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 21 November 1894.

²³ *North Wales Chronicle*, 26 January 1895.

²⁴ *Genedl Gymreig*, 11 February 1896.

²⁵ *North Wales Chronicle*, 13 February 1897. The margin was 14-12.

²⁶ *Genedl Gymreig*, 15 March 1898.

²⁷ *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser and North Wales News*, 28 October 1899.

1899 the Reverend O.D. Williams, curate of Berse-Drelin Court, Wrexham, gained an M.A. from Durham University for a thesis on socialism.²⁸ Academic awareness of the subject was also shown by Professor Brough of Aberystwyth, who claimed in 1891 that land ownership among the early Welsh tribes was organised on a socialistic basis, thus adding an interesting academic dimension to the debate about the inherently socialistic nature of the Welsh.²⁹ Neither were such scholarly investigations restricted to the English language. The Anglesey schoolteacher and antiquarian Owen Williamson, for example, produced a detailed survey in Welsh of the various schools of socialism, under the title '*Cymdeithasiad*'.³⁰

What exactly was being discussed and debated under the name of socialism is another matter. Certainly, it was agreed that arriving at a definition was not easy. The Radical newspaper *Y Genedl Gymreig* discussed '*Sosialaeth – Hen a Diweddar*' in November 1898, tracing the roots of socialism in a range of historical situations and movements, but admitting '*nid hawdd rhoddi i'r darllenydd ymofyngar ddefiniad cyflawn o athrawiaeth Sosialaeth yn ei hagwedd bresenol. Y mae yr athrawon yn gwahaniaethu yn fawr*'.³¹ For Owen Williamson, '*cymdeithasiaeth*' included any attempt to improve society.³² For some, as we have seen, the mention of socialism was enough to trigger accounts of bomb-throwing Russian nihilists or French revolutionaries. It must be emphasised, however, that not all references to socialism were hostile. Indeed, for every mention of socialism as a bogey in the Welsh press of this period, there is also a positive reference, more often than not towards something very vaguely defined as 'Christian Socialism'. As Mr E.O.V. Lloyd put it, when opening a new Parish Institute at Ruthin in 1889,

They had heard a good deal those days about Socialism, a system which would put all men on the same level. That, of course, was impossible, but there was a kind of Christian Socialism, in which they could all be equal. In

²⁸ *North Wales Chronicle*, 24 June 1899.

²⁹ *North Wales Chronicle*, 27 June 1891.

³⁰ Bangor MS 1781. It is not clear exactly when Williamson (1840-1910) wrote this document, although it is feasible that it was produced sometime in the 1890s, possibly as an entry to a local eisteddfod competition.

³¹ *Genedl Gymreig*, 8 November 1898 ('Socialism – Old and New'; 'It is not easy to give the inquiring reader a complete definition of socialist philosophy in its present form. The teachers differ greatly).

³² Bangor MS 1781, p. 8: 'Yr enw cyffredinol am bob ymgais i wella cymdeithas ydyw "Cymdeithasiaeth"'. ('The general name for every attempt to improve society is "Socialism"').

that Socialism he was a believer, and its doctrines he would recommend to them all.

Mr. Lloyd saw the parish institute he was opening as a means of ‘bringing [its users] closer together in the bonds of common Christian socialism’.³³ This ‘Christian Socialism’ was, moreover, non political, and something quite separate from independent labour politics. Indeed, it could be quite comfortably expressed within the Liberal Party, as reported in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, when Mrs Tomkinson of Willington Hall, Cheshire, opened the Connah’s Quay Liberal Club in 1891: ‘*Yr oeddynt wedi clywed pobl yn sôn yn fynych am Sosialaeth Gristionogol. Yr oedd Sosialaeth Gristionogol a Rhyddfrydiaeth yn dermau anghyfnawidiol ac anwahanol*’.³⁴ On one level this usage might be seen as a cynical attempt to capture or outflank the idea of socialism, although the fact that such speakers felt the need to make these references does say something about their perception of the spread and potential of socialist ideas. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss all such references as cynical. Sometimes a belief in ‘Christian Socialism’ could be strongly and genuinely held. W. Lewis Jones of Bangor, a journalist and prospective newspaper editor, outlined the issues that he thought Welsh Liberalism should address in 1889:

How to redress the balance between class and class, how to solve the problem of the enormous inequalities which we see around us, how to readjust the relations between vast wealth and terrible poverty, between capital and labour, between the large-estated landlord and the toiling labourer – these are questions which we must face and which are common to all nations. I think we should learn to look a little beyond our own insular concerns, and take our stand shoulder to shoulder with the great party of freedom and justice throughout the world. In doing this, we would be striving to realise the great ideal of the Gospel in the brotherhood of all men. ... In other words, what I believe in is nothing less than Socialism – but not the Socialism of anarchy

³³ *North Wales Chronicle*, 26 June 1889.

³⁴ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 17 October 1891 (‘They had heard people speaking frequently about Christian Socialism. Christian Socialism and Liberalism were immutable and identical terms’).

and revolution; but what I believe can, without cant, be called Christian Socialism.³⁵

If socialism was gradually spreading beyond the coalfield in the form of an abstract idea – anathema in some forms, but acceptable in others - in the late 1880s and 1890s, the establishment of formal socialist societies was a much slower process. Predictably though, it was the University towns that offered the most conducive environment, and the most successful of the socialist societies in this context was the Fabian Society. The Fabians first established a branch at Aberystwyth in 1886, but its existence was fleeting and it was not until the the mid 1890s that a stable and flourishing Fabian Society was established there.³⁶ By then, however, the Aberystwyth society was considered significant by the Fabian Executive at a national (UK) level, and was referred to along with the societies at Oxford, Glasgow and to a lesser extent Cambridge, as ‘the most important branch of the Society’s local organization’.³⁷ The numerical strength of the Aberystwyth branch wavered during the 1890s and early 1900s from 13 in 1898 to 32 in 1902, when it was the largest university Fabian society in Britain.³⁸ At the college election of 1897, the socialist candidate, W.H. Darby, polled a respectable 53 votes, well behind the Liberal candidate, but ahead of both the Welsh Nationalist and the Conservative candidates.³⁹ Admittedly, B. Scott Williams, the society’s secretary, did less well the following year, and the socialists slipped into fourth place.⁴⁰ The influence of socialism at Aberystwyth, however, cannot be judged in quantitative terms alone, and consideration must be given to the vibrancy of the socialist contribution to academic debate, as recognised in the college magazine:

For intensity of conviction and earnestness of tone the Socialist speakers, whether at College elections or debates, are always noticeable; and perhaps it

³⁵ W. Lewis Jones, Bangor to the Welsh Newspaper Company, 30 December 1889, Bangor MS 479(iii), Bangor University Archive.

³⁶ *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1896, p. 2.

³⁷ *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1897, p. 7.

³⁸ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1899, p. 9; *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1900, p. 22; *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1901, p. 16; *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1902, p.11; A.M. MacBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics*, pp. 168-9. The society collapsed, however, in 1904, and was not revived until 1912.

³⁹ *University College of Wales Magazine*, Vol. XX (1897-8), pp. 119-123.

⁴⁰ *University College of Wales Magazine*, Vol. XXI (1898-9), pp. 47-50.

would be safe to say that at elections the cogency of many of their arguments is keenly felt by many who, with the object of obtaining a more practical outlet for the political energy represented by a vote, give that vote to the Liberal cause.⁴¹

The Aberystwyth Fabians were also successful in attracting some important speakers to the town. In 1896 these included Hubert Bland and Enid Stacy,⁴² and in 1897 Fred Brocklehurst lectured to an audience of 150.⁴³ In November 1898 Ramsay MacDonald battled his way through snow to lecture at the Buarth on ‘Socialism and Current Politics’,⁴⁴ and Bernard Shaw visited in 1899.⁴⁵ In addition to speakers from England, the Aberystwyth Fabians also hosted academics from elsewhere in Wales. Professor Burrows of Cardiff, for example, lectured on ‘Socialism – Ideal and Practical’ in 1900.⁴⁶ Through such meetings the Aberystwyth Fabians were successful in introducing socialism into the intellectual world of a significant and influential section of Welsh society in the 1890s and early 1900s. Among the students who were influenced by socialist ideas at the college in this period were figures like Mary Parry, who later, as Mary Silyn Roberts, became a key worker for the Workers’ Educational Association in North Wales. She wrote from Alexandra Hall to her future husband, Robert Silyn Roberts, giving her impressions of W.H. Darby’s stand as a socialist candidate in the 1897 student elections.⁴⁷ An even more influential figure to come into contact with socialism at Aberystwyth was Thomas Jones, who was to exert a considerable influence on Wales, and indeed Britain, during the next century. Jones stood as a Labour candidate in the 1894 student elections, and by the time he left Aberystwyth for Glasgow had become a committed socialist.⁴⁸

Aberystwyth may have been the most important of the university towns to exhibit socialist leanings, but it was not the only one. At Bangor, students were beginning to

⁴¹ *University College of Wales Magazine*, Vol. XX (1897-8), p. 120.

⁴² *Fabian News*, July 1896.

⁴³ *Fabian News*, January 1897.

⁴⁴ *University College of Wales Magazine*, Vol. XXI (1898-9), p. 152.

⁴⁵ *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1900, p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Goleuad*, 28 February 1900.

⁴⁷ Mary Parry to Robert Silyn Roberts, 24 October 1897. Silyn Roberts Papers, National Library of Wales.

⁴⁸ E.L. Ellis, *T.J.: A Life of Dr. Thomas Jones CH*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1992), pp. 28-53.

discuss socialist ideas by the mid 1890s. William Eames, for example, a future editor of *Y Genedl Gymreig*, recalled discussing Blatchford's *Merrie England* with a former student who had become a local Independent minister and several members of the college football team around 1894,⁴⁹ and before long socialism was 'one of those questions which seem to crop up in the [debating] Society with periodic regularity'.⁵⁰ The socialists were defeated in debate in 1894,⁵¹ as was a motion in favour of trade unionism in 1895,⁵² but this did not deter them from raising the matter again in 1896. Once more they were defeated in a debate on 'Is Socialism Practicable?', by a margin of 58 to 18. There were nevertheless signs of clear socialist influence among the students, of whom upwards of 100 were present to hear the proceedings.⁵³ The influence of Blatchford's *Merrie England*, 'the great *locus classicus* of the socialists' was noted, and speakers in favour of socialism included John Jenkins ('Gwili'), who 'delighted his hearers by his poetical effusions on "dreams" in general and socialistic dreams in particular, and waxed eloquent over the question of equality'. It was only after a speech by D. Miall Edwards that was considered 'the best heard for years in the Literary and Debating Society' that the socialists were defeated.⁵⁴ Both Jenkins and Edwards would emerge within a few years, on opposite sides of the debate, as prominent spokesmen on the issue of socialism, and there is a sense in which the university debating society contests of the 1890s were portents of the great ideological clashes of the next century. Not discouraged by defeat, the socialist element at Bangor continued to make its presence felt, and by the turn of the century a formal Fabian Society had been established there, which would, it was expected in classic Fabian language, 'assist in the formation of a healthy sentiment as to the duties which Society expects the educated to discharge'.⁵⁵ The group continued to raise the issue of socialism at college debates,⁵⁶ although its formal allegiance to the Fabian

⁴⁹ William Eames, 'Brithgofion Newyddiadurwr', *Y Genhinen*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring 1961), pp. 78-82, p. 79.

⁵⁰ *Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol V, no. 2 (March 1896), p. 34.

⁵¹ *Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol. II, no. 2 (March 1894), p. 31.

⁵² *Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol. IV, no. 2 (March 1895), p. 25.

⁵³ *Y Goleuad*, 29 January 1896.

⁵⁴ *Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol V no. 2 (March 1896), pp. 34-35.

⁵⁵ *Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol. X, no. 1 (December 1900), p. 33.

⁵⁶ Other names appear amongst its membership that were to feature in the later history of socialism in the north – such as J.R. Jones, author of the only Fabian Tract to be originally composed in Welsh (*Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (Dec 1902), p. 46). The group met with only limited success in college debates. A Labour candidate came a bad 3rd in the college elections of 1903 (*Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol XIII, no. 3 (Dec 1903), pp. 44-5), and socialism was considered unpractical by a wide margin as late as 1907 (*Magazine of the University*

Society was relatively short-lived. In 1902 it seceded from membership ‘for the typically Fabian reason that its members think they can wield a wider influence if they are not officially associated with our name’.⁵⁷

While it might be tempting to see the university towns as a spearhead of socialist advance in rural Wales in the 1890s, they were in fact preceeded by a surprisingly strong manifestation of Fabian socialism in rural Cardiganshire, which differed in many respects from the nature of the university societies. In the Spring of 1892 a Fabian Society was established near Llandysul,⁵⁸ the main mover of which was Dr. David Rhys Jones, the Cardiff doctor, who, as we have seen, originated from southern Cardiganshire, but who had become an active socialist at Cardiff a couple of years previously.⁵⁹ Jones launched the society, with an initial membership of up to 15, when he lectured, outlining the objects of Fabianism and advocating the common ownership of land, at Gwernllwyn, Penrhiwllan on 11 March 1892.⁶⁰ By the end of April, the society was claiming 26 members, and was holding monthly meetings,⁶¹ which it continued to do for several years. Unlike the university societies, which consisted of a mobile, professional membership, and notwithstanding the role of the Cardiff-based Jones as an external catalyst in its formation, the *Cymdeithas Ffabianaid Dyffryn Orllwyn*, as it called itself, was firmly rooted in its own local community. Its secretary, David Jones of Llyngwyn, Penrhiwllan, was a local minister,⁶² and it counted among its members other individuals of prominence in the locality, including at least one lay-preacher, John Jones of Blaentir.⁶³ David Jones was the brother of the land reformer Evan Pan Jones.⁶⁴ Significantly, the group transacted its business entirely through the medium of Welsh. This provided a source of puzzlement to Edward Pease, the secretary of the Fabian Society, who laboured under the mistaken belief that *Cymdeithas* was the name of the place where the society had been

College of North Wales, Vol XVI, no. 2 (March 1907), p. 41). Although the Literary and Debating Society did vote in favour of railway nationalisation in 1908 (*Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol. XVII, no. 2 (March 1908), p. 51).

⁵⁷ *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Executive of the Fabian Society*, May 1902, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *Fabian News*, April 1892.

⁵⁹ See above, pp. 67-73.

⁶⁰ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 6 April 1892.

⁶¹ Fabian Society Archive (British Library of Political and Economic Science), COLL MISC 375 – Volume 4. (Newspaper cutting dated 28 April 1892).

⁶² *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 6 April 1892.

⁶³ Fabian Society Archive (BLPES), COLL MISC 375 – Volume 4.

⁶⁴ *Fabian News*, April 1892. For Pan Jones see below pp. 212-217.

established.⁶⁵ It also, however, ensured that the Cardiganshire Fabians experienced virtually total autonomy. *Fabian News* noted in 1894 that the society ‘speaks Welsh, and consequently does not often communicate with headquarters’.⁶⁶ This was no merely incidental fact, and the group was clearly conscious of its role as a distinctly Welsh socialist society. It advertised itself in the press as ‘*y gymdeithas Gymreig gyntaf o Socialists*’,⁶⁷ and advocated the formation of similar societies throughout Wales.⁶⁸

This was not, however, to be the case, and the Dyffryn Orllwyn Fabian Society must be seen as an exceptional flowering of Fabian inspired activity, which occurred due to a particular convergence of circumstances in a specific place. While Fabianism may have played an important role in influencing members of a coming generation in Wales with socialist ideas, it did not succeed in creating any significant political structure. As has already been demonstrated, the creation of such structures – in the form of ILP branches - in industrial south Wales, where conditions might be considered more favourable, was difficult enough. Beyond the southern ports and the coalfield, however, it proved virtually impossible. Indeed, the most striking feature by far in the pattern of socialist activity in Wales in the 1890s is the failure of socialists to establish any local political structures outside of the industrialised south. Evidence of ILP activity beyond the heads of the valleys is limited in the extreme. A list of contributions to the ILP’s election fund in 1899 included only two from beyond the industrial south, one from Builth Wells and one from Rhyl.⁶⁹ There were some signs of ILP influence just over the border, such as in Oswestry, where a member was elected to the local school board in 1899.⁷⁰ It is also possible to find evidence of individuals in isolated parts of rural Wales with ILP sympathies, such as W. Rees of Llechryd, who followed Keir Hardie’s career with ‘a kind of Hero-Worship’ from the early 1890s onwards.⁷¹ The obstacles to such individuals combining to form ILP

⁶⁵ *Fabian News*, April 1892; Also see Edward Pease to T.J. Roberts, 3 March 1943, T.J. Roberts Papers, NLW MS 23452 D: ‘There was one Society called Cymdeithas (?) something or other. I supposed cymdeithas was the name of a place, and I called it the C. Fabian Socy. Later on I discovered that C. means “Society”. The place was somewhere in S. Wales’.

⁶⁶ *Fabian News*, July 1894.

⁶⁷ *Celt*, 29 April 1892 (‘the first Welsh society of Socialists’).

⁶⁸ *Celt*, 16 September 1892.

⁶⁹ *Labour Leader* (Supplement), 6 May 1899.

⁷⁰ *ILP Annual Conference Report*, 1899.

⁷¹ Undated letter (1914) from W. Rees to Keir Hardie, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1914/468.

branches were, however, overwhelming. Hugh D. Williams and his son, were two such socialist sympathisers from Builth Wells. They distributed socialist literature in the town, with the help of a local newsagent who discretely recommended the material to likely customers. In frustration Williams even resorted to distributing the literature anonymously through the post, by sending it to the *Clarion* office for forwarding. Overt socialist activity was, however, not possible, as he explained in a letter to ILP head office in 1899:

I have given much thought to the subject of forming a branch of the ILP or other Socialist body in this town, and with a full knowledge of our supporters and their circumstances. I can confidently say that at present it is impracticable. The town contains only about 1,300 inhabitants. The people are consequently all known to each other, and are so intimately connected in their business and other relations, that it would be very easy to bring [pressure] to bear upon some of our people if they did anything publicly.⁷²

One region which may have offered an exception, and in which the ILP did show some signs of life in the 1890s was the north east, in the coalfield communities around Wrexham. We have already seen that the topic of socialism was discussed throughout the 1890s by debating societies in the area, perhaps more than in other areas of Wales. Several prominent socialist speakers also visited this region during the 1890s, including Ben Tillett in 1892 and 1893 and Tom Mann in 1895.⁷³ There was also a *Clarion* inspired Cinderella Club in Wrexham in the Mid 1890s, which organised feasts and magic lantern shows for children with the support of activists from Chester.⁷⁴ Attempts to establish ILP branches were, however, intermittent and of limited success. A 'Wrexham and District Independent Labour Party' organised a meeting at the Albion Hotel Assembly Room in the town in 1894, at which Robert Wheare of Liverpool spoke on 'Labour Politics'. The extent to which the branch was genuinely rooted in Wrexham is nevertheless questionable, as attendance was small

⁷² Hugh D. Williams to John Penny, 21 June 1899, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1899/48.

⁷³ *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 2 April 1892, 28 October 1893 & 21 September 1895. Keir Hardie was also booked to attend a miners' demonstration at Pentre Broughton in 1893, but had to send apologies at the last minute, *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 29 July 1893 & 5 August 1893.

⁷⁴ *Scout*, February 1896.

and the chair was taken by an ILP representative from Chester.⁷⁵ Several months later an ILP branch at Broughton hosted a lecture on ‘The Evils of Capitalism’,⁷⁶ but there is no evidence of sustained ILP activity.

While ILP activists from Chester and Liverpool were reaching out and attempting to influence the coalfield communities of the north east, socialist ideas were afforded a very different route into Wales by the expanding holiday trade of the 1890s, particularly in the burgeoning seaside towns. Indeed, by the end of the century readers of the *Clarion* were offered apartments for rent in most of the seaside resorts of Wales, implying not only that Welsh boarding house owners were aware of the paper, but also that a significant number of *Clarion* readers counted Wales among their holiday destinations.⁷⁷ If they went to Llandudno, holidaymakers could visit the Masonic Hall and witness Mr Cheetham’s Phrenological and Cinematographic Entertainment. In 1897 this included a series of ‘Sunday talks for the people’, one of which was on ‘Christian Socialism’ and was supported by limelight effects, songs and solos arranged by Mrs Cheetham.⁷⁸ While Mr and Mrs Cheetham would have aimed their Sunday talks at the holidaying factory, shop and office workers from the north-west of England rather than at the local population, their decision to include the topic of socialism in their act does say something about the interests of their audience. We have already seen that some of the first socialists to come to Wales from England came as holidaymakers and took the opportunity to mix propaganda and leisure,⁷⁹ and it is likely that at least some of the holidaymakers of the 1890s did the same.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that *Clarion* activists, albeit in small numbers, had even begun to penetrate more deeply into rural Wales by the mid 1890s, introducing their characteristic brand of leisure, humour and propaganda. One of them subverted a Primrose League parade in Dolgellau on New Year’s eve 1896, by joining the procession and sticking *Clarion* stickers to the marchers and their instruments.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 16 November 1894.

⁷⁶ *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 23 March 1895.

⁷⁷ See for example, *Clarion* 23 June 1900, in which apartments are advertised in Rhyl and Llandudno, and *Clarion* 21 July 1900, in which apartments in Aberystwyth, Conwy, Llandudno and Rhyl are advertised.

⁷⁸ *North Wales Chronicle*, 14 August 1897.

⁷⁹ James Joynes to Llandudno in 1884 and Haydn Sanders to Barmouth in 1887. See chapter 1.

⁸⁰ *Scout*, February 1896.

Other Clarionettes used North Wales as a retreat for painting during the 1890s.⁸¹ By the end of the decade the Birmingham *Clarion* Cycle Club was organising an annual cycle tour of Wales. In 1900 this comprised a train ride to Llangollen, followed by a week long bicycle ride, taking in Corwen, Cerrigydrudion, Beddgelert, Portmadoc, Llanberis, Caernarfon, Barmouth, Aberdyfi, Aberystwyth and Dolgellau.⁸² Indeed, during the early 1900s rural, what might be called ‘picturesque Wales’ became an increasingly popular destination for *Clarion* cyclists from across the border. In 1901, the *Clarion’s* cycling correspondent took the north Wales steamer from Liverpool to Llandudno to undertake a tour of north Wales which took in Llangollen, Corwen, Llandrillo, Bala, Ffestiniog, Bettws y Coed, Llanrwst and Conwy.⁸³ The Wye Valley also became a popular destination in the early 1900s, particularly with *Clarion* cyclists from the English midlands.⁸⁴

This increasingly leisure-oriented relationship between socialists from urban-industrial England and ‘picturesque Wales’ was, however, problematic. The extent to which it involved serious propaganda work is difficult to measure, but there is little evidence in the published reports of such tours that propaganda was the chief priority, and it is quite likely that as the relationship developed propaganda work became an increasingly smaller part of it. Indeed, the more serious propagandists of the *Clarion* vans consciously avoided engaging with rural Wales. One reason for this was the problem presented by the Welsh language. When the van visited Wales for the second time, in 1899, it was intended, after a tour of the south Wales valleys, to travel from Neath ‘through the wilds of Wales’ to Aberystwyth. After discovering from Thomas Jones (who had come down from Glasgow to support the work of the vans), however, that this would involve traversing large expanses of Welsh speaking Wales it was decided that the plan should be abandoned, and the van was taken by train directly to Shrewsbury. The revelation that rural Wales was largely Welsh speaking came as a shock to John Bruce Glasier, who was the van’s principal propagandist on the 1899 tour:

⁸¹ *Clarion*, 7 November 1896 & 23 December 1896.

⁸² *Clarion*, 18 August 1900.

⁸³ *Clarion*, 27 July 1901.

⁸⁴ For reports of cycle trips in the Wye Valley see *Clarion*, 26 August 1904, 9 August 1907, 17 July 1908, 2 July 1909, 29 July 1910.

it seemed as if the roof of the Van suddenly opened, and the truth flashed in upon my brain. The people of that remote part of the empire do not understand English! I had never thought of it before. I had imagined that the Welsh people like my kinsmen in the Highlands were everywhere nowadays familiar with the imperial tongue. Instead of which English is hardly better understood than Hindustanese in central Wales. ... Did I not say that Wales was virtually an unknown land?⁸⁵

This 'unknown land', with its mysterious language, picturesque landscape and abundance of ancient ruins presented itself to most English socialists more as the subject of scientific inquiry than a potential socialist seed-bed. Even before the decision was made to abandon the *Clarion* van's tour through central Wales, Bruce Glasier was envisaging a journey which had more in common with a scientific expedition than a socialist propaganda tour. 'By the time the Van winds up its tour at Aberystwyth', he wrote, 'its log-book, I venture to predict, will be replete with invaluable relics and variegated scientific lore pertaining to present day and primitive Cymric civilisation'.⁸⁶

Bruce Glasier was by no means alone amongst British socialists in adopting a somewhat romantic and stereotypical view of rural Wales and its people, somewhat in the style of George Borrow. To John Burns, visiting North Wales in 1897, the Welsh were 'the kind of people one would associate with such beautiful scenery', and exhibited a melancholy, particularly in their language and song, which was 'natural to people living in mountaneous [sic] countries'.⁸⁷ To Robert Blatchford, who recalled in his autobiography a walking tour he made of mid-Wales in the late 1870s, a Welshman he met on the way 'clucked with his throat and rumbled in his chest, and made wild passes in the air with his arms, like Merlin working a spell'.⁸⁸ Keir Hardie too was prone to deal in stereotypes when discussing the Welsh. Most of Hardie's were rooted in the industrial south, where the people were 'simple, kindly, affectionate ... warm hearted and trusting ... [and] gregarious'.⁸⁹ Interestingly,

⁸⁵ *Clarion*, 27 May 1899.

⁸⁶ *Clarion*, 6 May 1899.

⁸⁷ *North Wales Chronicle*, 15 May 1897.

⁸⁸ Robert Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*, Cassell, London (1931), p. 155.

⁸⁹ *Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898.

though, his stereotypes of the north were slightly different. ‘The Celtic fire which so brightly illumines the eye of the South Walian’, he wrote after a visit to the slate quarrying communities of Caernarfonshire in 1901, ‘seems to be smouldering in the dull sunken eye so common in the North’.⁹⁰ To Hardie, as to other socialists, the rural Welsh – even those engaged in industry - were a breed apart, tied to their communities and homes ‘by the hallowed associations which inevitably grow up with the generations, and which appeal to the men and women of Wales in even a deeper way than to the average Briton. For the Highlanders in all countries are attuned by the influences which emanate from the everlasting hills to finer issues than the mere Lowlander’.⁹¹

It was thus to a stereotype that British socialists more often than not related when confronting most of Wales in the 1890s and early 1900s. For many, Wales north of the heads of the valleys was less a testing ground for socialism than a picturesque and romantic land of fairy tales and curiosities. In this sense it harmonised with many of the impulses that fed late nineteenth and early twentieth century British socialism. It appealed to the anti-industrial, pastoral ideals that informed so much of the period’s socialist thought.⁹² It also provided a perfect venue in which to take part in the expanding culture of alternative recreation and fellowship that was associated with the socialist movement. This was epitomised from 1907 to 1910 by the series of Fabian summer schools which took place at Pen yr Allt, near Llanbedr in Meirionnydd. The location was discovered by a Fabian, Dr. Lawson Dodd, who was touring the region by bicycle in 1907, and was inspired by the surroundings to organise a series of summer schools which included not just socialist lectures, but river and sea bathing, daily Swedish drill and walking excursions through the nearby ‘scenery unsurpassed in wildness and grandeur’. The summer schools were inspiring experiences for those who came to take part, but the local community looked askance at some of the eccentricities that took place.⁹³ Like the increasingly leisure focused *Clarion* cycling programme, the Fabian summer schools exemplified a somewhat one-way relationship between socialists and Wales. For *Clarion* cyclists and Fabian summer

⁹⁰ *Labour Leader*, 17 August 1901.

⁹¹ *Labour Leader*, 11 April 1903.

⁹² For discussion of this aspect of late Victorian society see Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914*, Quartet, London (1982).

⁹³ Katherine Watson, ‘Some Letters Concerning the Fabian Summer Schools in Merioneth, 1907-10’, *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, Vol. XIII, Part IV (2001), pp. 392-400.

school attenders alike picturesque Wales was less a place to plant socialism than a venue in which to relax, rejuvenate and experience fellowship, before returning to the real theatre of socialist effort in industrial-urban England.

Significantly, this meant that rural, picturesque Wales was understood by many socialists as part of a hierarchy of British recreational landscapes that would later in the twentieth century become nationalised to the United Kingdom under the influence of that offshoot of British socialism, the amenity movement. Keir Hardie articulated this comprehension in some notes he wrote in 1898 about the Co-operative Holidays Association, which was planning, much to his approval, to open camps at Barmouth, Bangor and Conwy:

Thanks to the influence of Jefferies, Thoreau, Ruskin, and comrades like Harry Lowerison we are getting a bit more reasonable in our ideas of holiday enjoyment. New love for meadows, woods, and mountains has brought into existence the fellowship called the Co-operative Holidays Association, in whose guesthouses so many Socialists have met during recent years. The illustrated programme conjures up visions of summer days spent in joyous comradeship amid the bewitching splendours of Snowdon + Scawfell, Borrowdale + Bettws-y-Coed. It tells of holidays in Wales, the Lake District, on the South Coast + at Whitby⁹⁴

It was within this context that the relationship between that part of Wales beyond the heads of the valleys and British socialism was created and defined. This may have provided many with an opportunity to relax and seek fellowship in beautiful surroundings. It also, nevertheless, must have given many a rather one-dimensional and partial view of Wales. One *Clarion* cycling enthusiast wrote in 1901 that he had discovered a perfect holiday venue for Clarionettes. ‘The roads are good for cycling’, he reported. ‘It is within easy reach of nearly every show place in North Wales; lodgings and food are good, and fairly cheap. There is good free (fly) fishing’.⁹⁵ That

⁹⁴ Keir Hardie Manuscripts, 15 June 1898, ILP Archive (Organisational and Regional Records, 1856-1955).

⁹⁵ *Clarion*, 11 May 1901. Also see *Clarion* 8 June 1901, where Julia Dawson suggests Bethesda as an ideal holiday location. Holidaying was seen as a way of bringing money into the community and thus helping the locked out quarrymen and their families in their struggle against Lord Penrhyn.

place was Bethesda, where the most bitter industrial dispute of modern Welsh history was just beginning to gather momentum.

(ii). Socialists, Quarrymen and Lord Penrhyn.

Aside from the coalfield of the north-east, the region which arguably offered the most fertile ground for the spread of socialism outside of south Wales was that comprising the quarrying communities of the north-west. Here, in the valleys of Snowdonia, were close-knit, largely single occupation industrial communities with well established traditions of literacy and political debate. The experience of several decades of tense industrial relations, moreover, meant that by the 1880s and 1890s the quarrymen were exhibiting a growing sense of class solidarity.⁹⁶ This was not lost on H.M. Hyndman who visited Llanberis during an industrial dispute in 1886, and reported that a ‘formidable movement’ was being organised among the workers of the district.⁹⁷ His optimism may have been fanciful, but he was not alone in noticing a political awakening among the region’s workers. The Caernarfon based Liberal newspaper *Y Genedl Gymreig* referred to this in its reports of the activities of the region’s quarrymen’s union,⁹⁸ going as far as to state in 1890, ‘*nodweddir y dyddiau hyn gan ymddeffroad yn mysg y dosbarth gweithiol.*’⁹⁹ Occasionally, it even implied the spread of specifically socialist ideas. One contributor in 1891 commented that this was encouraged by conditions in the quarries themselves. The poor management of the quarries in the Nantlle valley, for example, provided a striking indictment of the individual ownership of industry, and the quarrymen there favoured state ownership of the quarries as a solution. This effectively made them socialists:

⁹⁶ For social and political developments in the quarry communities in the period up until the late 1890s see Cyril Parry, ‘Socialism in Gwynedd 1900-1920’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Bangor (1967), pp. 1-33; Cyril Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics: A Study of Liberal and Labour Politics in Gwynedd 1900-1920* (University of Hull, 1970), pp. 1-21; R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen 1874-1922* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1982), pp.1-174; Jean Lindsay, *The Great Strike: A History of the Penrhyn Quarry Dispute 1900-1903* (David & Charles, London, 1987), pp. 7-60; Frank Price Jones, ‘Gwleidyddiaeth Sir Gaernarfon yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg’, in *Radicaliaeth a’r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1977), pp. 148-180.

⁹⁷ *Justice*, 23 January 1886.

⁹⁸ *Genedl Gymreig*, 23 April 1890.

⁹⁹ *Genedl Gymreig*, 21 May 1890 (‘These days are characterised by an awakening among the working class).

*Pe buasai y Sosialiaid yn myned i gychwyn coleg i ddysgu eu hegwyddorion yn Ngogledd Cymru, credaf yn sicr na chaent fan mwy priodol i'w sefydlu na Dyffryn Nantlle. ... Ac fe gaent ddigon o efrydwyr i'w coleg. SOSIALIAID RHONC ydyw chwarelwyr Dyffryn Nantlle bob copa walltog.*¹⁰⁰

Indeed, despite its individualist Liberal political stance, *Y Genedl* was prepared to concede the cogency and immediate relevance of socialist ideas. It approvingly viewed Gladstone's local government reforms as socialistic, and repeated William Harcourt's view that 'we are all socialists now'. 'Clywir llais y Sosialydd yn ein heolydd', the paper noted in 1893, 'a gwr dawnus a dil-ildio [sic] ydyw efe. Dyrchafiad y lluaws ac nid yr ychydig ydyw baich ei genadwri. ... Athrawiaeth ryfedd ydyw hon o eiddo y Sosialydd, ond y mae yn prysur lefeinio cymdeithas yn y dyddiau hyn. ... Nid yw y gair Sosialaeth yn dychryn neb yn awr'.¹⁰¹

Evidence to support the *Genedl*'s assertion is sparse, but not non-existent, and it is likely that the voice of the socialists could indeed be heard on the streets of some north Wales quarrying towns in the 1890s. The way had been prepared to some extent by the visit of the Irish land reformer Michael Davitt to Blaenau Ffestiniog, where he was given a rousing welcome in 1886,¹⁰² and by the early 1890s it was reported that the quarrymen there were keen to entertain a socialist speaker, such as John Burns or Ben Tillett.¹⁰³ A number of industrial disputes in the 1890s, moreover, attracted the interest, both in person and through the columns of their press, of socialist agitators. Keir Hardie spoke at a quarrymen's demonstration at Blaenau Ffestiniog during the industrial dispute there in 1893.¹⁰⁴ It was the first of the disputes at the Penrhyn quarries at Bethesda in 1896-7, however, that really began to attract the attention of the British socialist and labour movement. John Burns attended the quarrymen's *Gŵyl*

¹⁰⁰ *Genedl Gymreig*, 29 April 1891 ('If the socialists were going to start a college to teach their principles in north Wales, I believe certainly that they couldn't get a more appropriate place to establish it than the Nantlle Valley. ... And they would get plenty of students for the college. The quarrymen of the Nantlle Valley are out and out socialists to a man').

¹⁰¹ *Y Genedl Gymreig*, 14 February 1893 ('The voice of the socialist is heard in our streets, and he is a talented and unyielding individual. The elevation of the many and not the few is the onus of his message. ... This philosophy of the socialist is surprising but it is busy leavening society these days. ... The word socialism scares no-one now').

¹⁰² R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 163.

¹⁰³ *Genedl Gymreig*, 28 October 1891.

¹⁰⁴ *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, 6 May 1893.

Llafur at Caernarfon in 1897,¹⁰⁵ and he also raised the matter of the dispute in the House of Commons.¹⁰⁶ Keir Hardie raised the issue at the ILP conference in London in 1897, chiding Lord Penrhyn for his intransigent attitude and characterising him as ‘the latest and most successful Socialist agitator’.¹⁰⁷ The SDF too poured scorn on the ‘feudalist slave driver’ Penrhyn, arguing that the dispute was ‘sad for the quarrymen, but ... a lesson to the world’.¹⁰⁸ Socialist organisations in England were also involved in organising fund-raising concerts for the Bethesda Male Voice Choir.¹⁰⁹ Foreshadowing the events of three years later, though, the most detailed treatment of the dispute was given by the *Clarion*. Early in the lock-out, the paper published a piece by the London Welshman Richard Roberts giving the background to what he called ‘probably the most important event in the history of the North Wales slate industry’,¹¹⁰ and as events unfolded Blatchford himself contributed some detailed articles drawing sharp socialist lessons from the dispute.¹¹¹

The socialist response to the 1896-7 Penrhyn dispute was no more than a foretaste of socialist activity in the bitter and more protracted conflict just after the turn of the century, and, in any case, its impact within the slate quarrying districts themselves would have been strictly limited. The fact that the socialist press of this period was printed exclusively in English would have made it inaccessible to many of the quarrymen, and even those who read English may not have taken to the rather self-justificatory tone of some of the articles.¹¹² Nevertheless socialist interest in the dispute does mark the beginning of a rather tentative process of the integration of the

¹⁰⁵ *North Wales Chronicle*, 15 May 1897. Burns, of course, was shifting away from the socialist movement to a Liberal position in this period (see, K.D. Brown, *John Burns*, Royal Historical Society, London (1977), pp. 82-109). Even before his shift towards Liberalism Burns was admired by sections of the Liberal press in north Wales. See *Genedl Gymreig*, 24 January 1893: ‘John Burns ydyw un o arweinwyr mwyaf ffyddlon a beiddgar y dosbarth gweithiol’ (‘John Burns is one of the most faithful and bold leaders of the working class’).

¹⁰⁶ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁷ *Labour Leader*, 24 April 1897.

¹⁰⁸ *Justice*, 13 February 1897.

¹⁰⁹ The Bow and Bromley SDF were involved in organising the choir’s visit to London, *Justice*, 27 February 1897. Also see *Daily News*, 21 January 1897, which reports a visit of the choir to the City Temple. The Leicester Trades Council also organised a series of concerts in Leicestershire, although the audience for the concert in Leicester was judged disappointing, *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*, 17 April 1897. For further details of the tours of Leicestershire see *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*, 14 April, 15 May, 24 & 31 July 1897.

¹¹⁰ *Clarion*, 31 October 1896.

¹¹¹ *Clarion*, 9 January & 6 February 1897.

¹¹² For example, statements like Blatchford’s that ‘the only people in England who have cause to be satisfied with the fiasco of the Penrhyn debate [in the House of Commons] are the Socialists’, *Clarion*, 6 February 1897.

north Wales quarrying districts into the wider British labour and socialist movement. There is also some evidence that the literature of that movement, most notably Blatchford's *Merrie England*, was facilitating that process within the quarrying communities. In 1898, for example, a popular young quarryman left the Oakley quarry at Blaenau Ffestiniog to go and work at a quarry on the slopes of the nearby Manod, and his workmates wanted to buy him a leaving gift. *Y Genedl Gymreig* reported the presentation in a humorous story which throws light upon the status of socialism among the quarrymen:

*Gwyddent ei fod yn llyfrbryf, ond ofnent ychwanegu at ei ystorfa o wybodaeth na blaenllymu ei eiriau, oblegyd cawsent brofi droion fin ei watwareg, yn eu barnu ac yn tynu i lawr seiliau cymdeithas fel y cerir hi yn mlaen yn bresenol. Am hyny, wedi dwys a maith ymgynghori, penderfynwyd rhoddi iddo offeryn y mae yn orhoff ohono i beri iddo freuddwydio am Merrie England a chymdeithasiaeth. Cyflwynwyd yr anrheg, sef cetyn hardd mewn case, iddo gan Mr. Evan Owen, Manod road.*¹¹³

This story suggests not only that socialist literature was being read and discussed in the north Wales quarries of the 1890s, but that support for socialism did not necessarily lead to social ostracism or community disapproval, which was the common lot of many socialists elsewhere. At worst, this socialist was seen as an eccentric, but he was clearly respected to a certain degree due to his well-read status. Keir Hardie claimed a few years later that eight out of ten members of an ambulance corps from Blaenau Ffestiniog attending the 1901 *Eisteddfod* at Merthyr were members of the ILP.¹¹⁴ If this is true, it is unlikely that the crew was representative of its wider community. Indeed, it would be misleading to imply that socialism was at all prominent in the proceedings of the *cabanau* in the quarries, and the available evidence would suggest that religious and denominational controversy continued to

¹¹³ *Genedl Gymreig*, 20 September 1898 ('They knew he was a book-worm, but feared adding to his store of knowledge or further sharpening his vocabulary, because they had frequently experienced his cutting scorn, criticising them and pulling down the foundations of society as it is carried on at present. Consequently, after intense and protracted consultation it was decided to give him a tool that he was very fond of to induce him to dream about *Merrie England* and socialism. The gift, namely a beautiful pipe in a case was presented to him by Mr. Evan Owen, Manod Road').

¹¹⁴ *Labour Leader*, 17 August 1901.

eclipse socialism as a topic into the twentieth century.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless the presence of the *Merrie England* pipe dreamer mentioned above represented an important toehold for socialism in north Walian society that should not be ignored.

The years 1900-1903, which witnessed, at Bethesda, the most bitter and protracted industrial dispute in modern Welsh history, presented an opportunity for socialists to expand upon such already existing toeholds and embed their ideas more firmly into the political culture of the quarrying communities. Indeed, the Penrhyn dispute potentially offered to create exactly the same kind of political watershed in north Wales as had the 1898 coal dispute in the south. As has already been demonstrated, the 1898 coal strike had attracted the interest of socialists to south Wales on a hitherto unprecedented scale, it had made many workers more receptive to socialist ideas, and it had drawn the south Wales coalfield into the wider British labour and socialist movement. To some extent the same processes may be seen at work in the north during the Penrhyn dispute. Indeed, the three years from the closure of the quarries in November 1900 to the end of the dispute in November 1903 saw a greater socialist presence in north Wales, and a greater coverage of north Wales in the socialist press, than ever before. Bethesda suddenly found itself on the circuit for socialist speakers. Keir Hardie made the ten hour forty-five minute train journey from Merthyr in August 1901, and spoke to an audience of between four and five thousand, urging the quarrymen to continue the struggle and assuring them that the English trade unions would support them.¹¹⁶ While Hardie may have been the most prominent of the socialists to visit Bethesda, he was by no means alone. His friend Robert Williams, who had been so active in the support of the south Wales miners in 1898, had already visited in the early months of the dispute and made contact with the quarrymen's supporters.¹¹⁷ As the dispute unfolded other socialist speakers came to give their support and opinions to the quarrymen, including Pete Curran, Ben Tillett and Robert Blatchford.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Vivian P. Williams, 'Cipolwg ar Lyfr Cofnodion (1902-04) "Caban Sink y Mynydd", Chwarel Llechwedd, Blaenau Ffestiniog', *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, Vol. XIV, Part III (2004), pp. 240-255.

¹¹⁶ *Llais Llafur* 10 August 1901; *Labour Leader*, 17 August 1901. Hardie also raised the matter in the House of Commons, see R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 253.

¹¹⁷ *Llais Llafur*, 4 May 1901; Williams went on behalf of Lambeth Trades Council, see *Justice* 4 May 1901.

¹¹⁸ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 269.

The socialist press also gave attention to the dispute. Of particular significance was the role of the *Clarion*, in which a series of articles by A.M. Thompson, the paper's co-founder, appeared under the title 'Desolate Bethesda' in the spring of 1901.¹¹⁹ Thompson visited Bethesda several times, travelling around with the help of an interpreter, and produced a detailed account of the history of industrial relations in the quarries and the background to the lock-out, as well as an emotive account of the suffering caused to the quarrymen's families. In addition to Thompson's articles the paper also gave support and space to W.J. Parry, the quarrymen's most prominent supporter at Bethesda, to give an account of some events in the dispute, although this backfired, as Parry was sued by Penrhyn for libel and the *Clarion* had to appeal for funds for his defence.¹²⁰ The *Clarion* had already initiated the establishment of a relief fund for the quarrymen's families, which raised over £1,800 by the time subscriptions were closed in December 1901,¹²¹ and the fundraising efforts of the various *Clarion* organisations were the most prominent among the socialist bodies in England. Local committees were established to co-ordinate the relief fund,¹²² and *Clarion* clubs arranged fund-raising concerts by the Penrhyn choir.¹²³ The *Clarion's* leading role in the Bethesda campaign was tacitly acknowledged when Robert Blatchford took the chair at a crowded meeting in support of the quarrymen at the Memorial Hall in London on 22 May 1901, presiding over a cast of speakers which included socialists such as Keir Hardie, George Barnes and Pete Curran but also Liberals like Lloyd George and the quarrymen's own leader D.R. Daniel.¹²⁴

The *Clarion's* efforts certainly raised the paper's profile in Bethesda. Mrs Myddleton-Worrall, better known as 'Julia Dawson', the author of the paper's women's column, made the journey from her home at Wallasey to Bethesda in June 1901, and attended a meeting at which three cheers were given for the *Clarion*. Although she couldn't understand the details of the meeting, which was conducted in Welsh, she did report that

¹¹⁹ *Clarion*, 16, 23 & 30 March & 6 & 13 April 1901.

¹²⁰ For a full account of the libel action see J. Roose Williams, *Quarryman's Champion: The Life and Activities of William John Parry of Coetmor*, Gwasg Gee, Denbigh (1978), pp. 213-224.

¹²¹ *Clarion*, 27 December 1901.

¹²² *Clarion*, 23 March 1901, for example, mentions a local committee at York.

¹²³ For example at Sheffield, see *Clarion* 11 May 1901.

¹²⁴ Jean Lindsay, *The Great Strike*, p. 132.

The *Clarion* is a household word in Bethesda now! One old man at the meeting, who couldn't speak English, saw the badge in my husband's cap, and grasped his hand, with the word *Clarion* welling gratefully more from his heart than his lips. It was a golden moment.¹²⁵

It wasn't just the *Clarion* that received attention in the quarrying districts as a result of the dispute, but socialism in general. Quarrymen's leaders like W.W. Jones began to articulate socialist ideas in the local press during the dispute,¹²⁶ and in November 1901 the North Wales Quarrymen's Union showed sympathy towards socialist ideas when it bought and distributed 1,000 copies of Fabian Tract no. 87, the Welsh Translation of the Rev. J. Clifford's *Socialism and Christ's Teaching*.¹²⁷ Such articulations of socialist sympathy among the quarrymen confirmed the views of anti-socialists that the dispute was the result of socialist interference,¹²⁸ and the *Cambrian News* claimed that the whole affair was a socialist plot to take over Lord Penrhyn's quarries.¹²⁹

Such claims were even more fanciful than some of the socialists' own claims of widespread support. Nevertheless, a number of important processes were clearly at work during the dispute. As had been the case in the south in 1898, the Penrhyn lock-out encouraged the development of stronger links between the workers of the quarrying districts and what Caroline Benn referred to in the 1898 context as the 'national labour family'. All parties involved emphasised that the implications of the dispute went far beyond Bethesda itself. At the outset the socialist press claimed that the quarrymen had 'not merely the sympathy and support of the neighbourhood where the quarries are, but practically of the nation', meaning, of course, the British nation.¹³⁰ The Penrhyn quarrymen too understood that the support of the wider British labour movement was essential, as the Rev. W.W. Lloyd, secretary of the relief fund at Bethesda, expressed on their behalf in 1901, 'The success of the poor Penrhyn

¹²⁵ *The Clarion*, 8 June 1901. Also see the letter from W.W. Lloyd, secretary of the relief fund at Bethesda, expressing gratitude for the *Clarion* efforts, *The Clarion*, 13 July 1901.

¹²⁶ *Herald Cymraeg*, 18 February & 21 October 1902.

¹²⁷ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, pp. 280-281.

¹²⁸ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 273.

¹²⁹ *Labour Leader*, 20 July 1901.

¹³⁰ *Labour Leader*, 1 December 1900.

quarrymen depends upon the amount of support granted them by the British public, especially all friends of labour everywhere'.¹³¹ Indeed it was agreed by all that the issues at stake were universal. The fight was against not just Lord Penrhyn himself, but against what Sidney Webb coined as 'Penrhynism' – the extreme manifestation of individualistic landlordism and industrial exploitation.¹³² 'For the honour of Trade Unionism, for the sake of all that is precious in our common humanity, this arch enemy of combination must be beaten', urged the *Labour Leader* as the dispute neared the end of its second year.¹³³

Socialist arguments went beyond mere rhetoric to a more fully considered advocacy of solutions to the struggle being imposed within an all-British framework. One reader of the *Labour Leader* argued, under the pseudonym 'All Britain', in October 1902 that appealing to trade unions was only part of the solution, and that the issue needed to be made '500 miles wider'. The dispute should be compulsorily resolved through a court constituted by parliament, he argued. 'The court should represent all Britain, and give the verdict of all Britain. If the verdict of all Britain says "The men are found to be in the right," it shall then be all Britain's duty to bring about a settlement'.¹³⁴ Another correspondent argued that the struggle at Bethesda had 'become the common property of the workers of Great Britain', and that 22 November, the anniversary of the beginning of the strike, should be marked throughout the British Isles as 'Oppressors Day', and that a committee should be established to organise collections on that day. Tellingly, the suggested committee, with John Burns at its head, included a range of representatives of the British labour and socialist movement, but only one representative (W.J. Parry) from the quarry community itself.¹³⁵

¹³¹ *Clarion*, 20 April 1901.

¹³² Lord Penrhyn too would have agreed that the struggle was part of a more universal campaign. See E.H. Douglas Pennant, 'Penrhynism: The Second Lord Penrhyn and Trade Unionism', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, Vol. 66 (2005), pp. 126 – 136; E.H. Douglas Pennant, 'The Second Lord Penrhyn and Local Government, 1861-1902', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, Vol. 61 (2000), pp.77-88; E.H. Douglas-Pennant, 'Landlordism: The Second Lord Penrhyn and the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, Vol. 57 (1996), pp. 101-124.

¹³³ *Labour Leader*, 11 October 1902.

¹³⁴ *Labour Leader*, 23 October 1902.

¹³⁵ *Labour Leader*, 5 November 1902.

The activities of the quarrymen and their community organisations in campaigning for support brought them into contact with the wider labour movement, and indeed with the British public more generally, as a matter of course. Important agents in this process were the Bethesda choirs, three of which toured Britain during between 1901 and 1903,¹³⁶ as had been the case in 1897, and as had the miners choirs of south Wales in 1898. The choir tours offered active socialists in the industrial centres of England and Scotland a practical role in supporting the quarrymen. In April 1901, for example, a group of six socialists organised two concerts in Sheffield, but a much wider group of *Clarion* readers and other socialists were involved in advertising the concerts, distributing tickets and providing accommodation for the singers.¹³⁷ During the spring and summer of 1901 the tour took in the industrial towns of the midlands and the north of England, and by 1902 the scope of the tour had widened to include Scotland.¹³⁸ Throughout the tours, the opportunity for socialists to become involved in the arrangements continued, as did the contact between the singers and members of the labour and socialist movement. At Erith in London, in May 1901, socialists, co-operators, trade unionists and a local Baptist chapel came together to organise a concert.¹³⁹ In Bolton in September one of the choirs took part in a Labour Church service.¹⁴⁰ This process continued right through 1902, into 1903, when for example, the Stalybridge Trades and Labour Council entertained the Penrhyn Ladies' Choir, which was supported by the Mossley *Clarion* Quartette.¹⁴¹ By the end of the various choirs' tours over £31,000 had been raised for the distress fund,¹⁴² but more than this, the extent of the social and cultural interchange between the members of the choirs and the various sections of the British labour and socialist movement was incalculable.

The Penrhyn dispute did not just promote a closer relationship between the quarrying communities and the labour movement across the English border. Possibly more significant was the increasingly close relationship that was fostered between the quarrying communities of the north and the coal mining communities of the south.

¹³⁶ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 275.

¹³⁷ *Clarion*, 27 April 1901.

¹³⁸ *Clarion*, 4 May & 18 May 1901; *Labour Leader*, 3 August 1901, 18 & 23 October 1902.

¹³⁹ *Clarion*, 18 May 1901.

¹⁴⁰ *Labour Leader*, 21 September 1901.

¹⁴¹ *Clarion*, 9 January 1903.

¹⁴² *Clarion*, 15 January 1904.

The transfer of population between these two regions was, of course, a significant aspect of the economic, demographic and cultural history of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Wales, and it was significantly accelerated by the Penrhyn dispute.¹⁴³ After the closure of the quarries between 1,400 and 1,600 quarrymen left north Wales to find work in the south.¹⁴⁴ *Llais Llafur*, the prominent south Walian socialist newspaper, urged the colliers of the south to show kindness to the newly arriving quarrymen, and to help them in seeking work in the mines, despite the potential difficulties this might raise for members of the Miners' Federation, who might have been uncomfortable acquiescing in the employment of non-Federation workers. '*BRAWD YW Y CHWARELWR*', urged the paper, '*a gobeithio yr ymddyga ei gydweithwyr a'i frodyr tuag ato yn yspryd y rheol euraidd*'.¹⁴⁵ As the dispute progressed, the relationship between the slate and the coal communities strengthened further still, and in addition to quarrymen working in the south, various emissaries travelled between the two regions. As was the case with the growing relationship with industrial England, music played a part in the process. In autumn 1901, for example, the Penrhyn Ladies' Choir held a series of concerts in the Aberdare area, where there was a quickly developing socialist movement.¹⁴⁶ The spring of 1902 saw a more extensive tour, this time by the Penrhyn male voice choir, through the anthracite region of the south, including concerts in Gorseion, Ammanford, Glanamman, Brynamman, Swansea, Ystalyfera, Cwmtwrch, Cwmllynfell, Ystradgynlais and Clydach.¹⁴⁷ Apart from the workers and the choirs, other representatives of the quarrymen toured the south speaking about the dispute and collecting for the relief fund. A 60 year old quarryman, John Williams, lectured throughout the anthracite region during late 1901 and 1902, accompanied at times by a colleague, W.T. Jones, and both received a warm welcome and generous contributions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ See Dafydd Roberts, *Y Chwarelwyr a'r Sowth*, Gwynedd Library Service, Bethesda (1982).

¹⁴⁴ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 212.

¹⁴⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 1 December 1900 ('The quarryman is a brother, and hopefully his fellow workman and brothers will behave towards him in the spirit of the golden rule'). Also see *Llais Llafur*, 8 December 1900 & 22 June 1901. The North Wales Quarrymen's Union later arranged for faithful union members to have their membership transferred to the South Wales Miners Federation, to facilitate their move to the south, see Dafydd Roberts, *Y Chwarelwyr a'r Sowth*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 26 October 1901.

¹⁴⁷ *Llais Llafur*, 24 & 31 May 1902.

¹⁴⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 12 October & 9 November 1901, 26 July, 9 & 16 August 1902.

The Penrhyn quarry dispute, then, was not without significant effects, both in north and south Wales, and in terms of the relationship between socialists in Britain and the quarrying community centred on Bethesda. Ten months into the dispute, the general secretary of the North Wales Quarrymen's Union, D.R. Daniel, emphasised the importance of the relationship between the quarrying communities of the north and the coal mining communities of the south. The fact that striking quarrymen could work in the mines, he argued, was critical in providing financial support to the community through the strike. The implications of the exodus to the south, however, went further than this:

it kept the minds of the men healthy and independent. ... He had no doubt that some day they would return to work once more at their old industry; but they would not be exactly the same men. (Hear, hear.) They would not be so easily enslaved as they had been in the past. (Cheers).¹⁴⁹

Indeed, some of the quarrymen doubtless came into contact with the established branches of the ILP in south Wales, and it was almost certainly the influence of quarrymen returning from the south, which they did periodically throughout the dispute, that introduced socialist ideas most readily into the quarrying communities of the north.¹⁵⁰ The presence of a significant number of quarrymen in the south Wales coalfield, and the constant flow of news from the north - either in person or through the pages of the press - likewise had an impact upon opinion in the south. It enhanced the consciousness of the south Wales labour movement in relation to that of the north, and worked to clarify political opinion with regard to specifically Welsh industrial affairs. This process may be clearly observed in the pages of *Llais Llafur*, for example in a debate that took place between two regular contributors (both of whom claimed to represent socialist standpoints), D. Jones of Chester and Henry Davies (Carrusk) of Cwmavon, as the dispute neared its end in 1903. Jones, writing in Welsh, argued that had the Liberals been in power the dispute would have been resolved earlier and more easily, and that the way to deal with Penrhynism was through the taxation of land values. Davies, replying in English, argued that the Liberals, even in power, would

¹⁴⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 7 September 1901.

¹⁵⁰ See Emyr Hywel Owen, 'Cyn y "Chwalfa" – ac Wedyn', *Lleufer*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (Summer 1963), pp. 55-60, p. 57.

not have effected an end to the dispute and that the taxation of land values was no more than an unnecessary half-way-house on the road to full nationalisation, which would only be achieved by independent labour representation.¹⁵¹

It is tempting to see the debate between Jones and Davies as the (English) voice of the new combatting the (Welsh) voice of the old. In the final analysis, however, what is most striking about the socialist response to the Penrhyn dispute, especially when compared to the socialist role in the 1898 coal dispute, is the unresolved nature of this debate and the incompleteness of the process of integration of the Welsh quarrying communities into British socialist and labour movement. Although the same processes were clearly at work in both disputes, there were a range of factors which meant that the Penrhyn dispute did not ultimately catalyse the growth of British socialism in the north in the same way that 1898 had in the south, and that British socialists were not so successful at forging a relationship with the north Wales quarrymen as they were with the south Wales colliers. The issue of language was clearly an important part of the problem. In 1901 over three fifths of the inhabitants of Bethesda spoke and understood only Welsh.¹⁵² This provided an instant barrier to the socialists, which could have tragi-comic dimensions. One socialist visitor to Bethesda in 1901 initially mistook the hundreds of signs in the cottage windows that read '*Nid Oes Bradwr yn y Tŷ Hwn*' to mean 'Apartments to Let'.¹⁵³

This was not a mistake that could have been made by a representative of Welsh Liberalism,¹⁵⁴ which was in so many ways better placed than socialism to exploit the dispute at Bethesda. As K.O. Morgan has recognised, the majority of Welsh Liberals were more attuned to the aspirations and trials of the Penrhyn quarrymen than they had been to the demands of the colliers in 1898, and their support 'revealed an instinctive and sympathetic appreciation of the small, chapel-going rural community fighting for its status'.¹⁵⁵ In the Welsh Liberal imagination the quarrymen occupied an

¹⁵¹ *Llais Llafur*, 31 May 1903, 6 June 1903, 13 June 1903 & 20 June 1903.

¹⁵² Dafydd Roberts, *Y Chwarelwyr a'r Sowth*, Appendix A.

¹⁵³ *Clarion*, 29 June 1901. The signs actually meant 'There is not a traitor in this house'.

¹⁵⁴ Indeed, even when non-Welsh speaking Liberals came to the region from outside they could rely on the Liberal press in the region to provide what amounted to a simultaneous translation of their speeches. This had been the case, for example, when John Gorst spoke at the *Gŵyl Llafur* in 1892, see E. Morgan Humphries, 'Profiadau Golygydd', *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions*, Vol. II (1950), pp. 81 – 92, p. 85.

¹⁵⁵ K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922*, pp. 211-212.

almost heroic position as exemplary representatives of *y werin*,¹⁵⁶ and the Liberals managed to capitalise on their already solid relationship with the quarrying communities in their battle with an archetypal Tory Lord, winning the appreciation at times even of the socialist press.¹⁵⁷ The socialists, on the other hand, more often than not, portrayed the quarrymen less as heroes than victims. While south Walian colliers were archetypal proletarians, whose status confirmed and reinforced socialist views of history, the quarrymen of Bethesda did not fit so comfortably into the socialist world view. The word that was used most often in the socialist press in relation to the Penrhyn dispute was ‘feudalism’. Lord Penrhyn, admittedly with some justification, was portrayed as a ‘feudal baron’, while the quarrymen were seen as his serfs.¹⁵⁸ A.M. Thompson, in his ‘Desolate Bethesda’ articles, saw the quarrymen as essentially passive, and betrayed a fundamental lack of understanding of the culture of their communities when he referred to ‘the too submissive and too “respectable” workers of Bethesda’, who, ‘whether they lacked gall to make oppression bitter, or courage to risk well-doing for the gains of liberty, have busied themselves more to build chapels and churches than to assert the rights of their manhood’.¹⁵⁹ ‘[I]f Lord Penrhyn’s quarries had been in the Rhondda Valley ... it is possible that his castle might have been pulled down about his ears’, commented John Burns.¹⁶⁰ Elsewhere, in a singularly wide of the mark attempt to draw a contemporary resonance, the quarrymen were referred to by socialists as ‘outlanders’.¹⁶¹

It was not just a lack of cultural comprehension, though, that militated against socialist efforts to capitalise on the Bethesda dispute. The scale and length of the dispute also worked against the fostering of a sustainable relationship between socialists and quarrymen in the way that had been achieved between socialists and colliers in the south. 1898 was a much larger, but much shorter affair than 1900-3. Whereas it had made sense to keep a full-time organiser in south Wales in 1898 to propagandise among 100,000 striking miners, no such organiser could be justified in 1900-3. Indeed

¹⁵⁶ See H. Paul Manning, ‘The Streets of Bethesda: The Slate Quarrier and the Welsh Language in the Liberal Imagination’, *Language in Society*, 33 (2004), pp. 517-548.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, *Llais Llafur* 24 November & 1 December 1900 for sympathetic coverage of Lloyd George’s attitude, and *Llais Llafur* 30 August 1902 for sympathetic coverage of Mabon’s attitude.

¹⁵⁸ E.g. *Clarion*, 23 March, 29 June & 10 August 1901; *Justice*, 15 June 1901.

¹⁵⁹ *The Clarion*, 16 March 1901.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p. 243.

¹⁶¹ By Henry Davies in *Llais Llafur*, 5 October 1901. Also see *Labour Leader*, 14 November 1903.

there is no record of the ILP's National Executive Committee even discussing the Penrhyn dispute during its three year duration, neither did Penrhyn feature in the official organ of the party, *ILP News*. As far as Wales was concerned, the attention of the ILP remained focused overwhelmingly upon the south. Beyond this, the *Labour Leader* betrayed something of the party's northern British centre of gravity by the far more extensive coverage it gave to the arguably less significant quarry dispute at Ballachulish in Scotland in 1902-3.¹⁶² Whereas the Ballachulish dispute, of 18 months duration, was a long-drawn out affair, the three year long Penrhyn dispute was a marathon, which ultimately worked against the relationship between the quarrymen and the wider socialist and labour movement. Indeed, the impression conveyed by the socialist press is that as the dispute protracted into its later phases the movement simply lost interest. Coverage of the dispute dropped off markedly after its first year. Complaints by socialists that the support given by the wider labour movement was insufficient and not commensurate with the importance of the dispute were commonplace from the summer of 1901 onwards,¹⁶³ but the socialist organisations betrayed a similar level of fatigue.

Aside from the ILP, the SDF lost the plot fairly early on. *Justice* reported the effective end of the dispute, and what it saw as an inevitable victory for capital in June 1901,¹⁶⁴ and its reportage was thereafter either non-existent, or reduced to near farce. In September a list of 6 rather carping questions about the dispute was published in *Justice*, on the grounds that if the SDF was to support the quarrymen it had a right to know the facts of the dispute.¹⁶⁵ This amounted to a public admission of complete detachment. Only the *Clarion* maintained any significant interest in the later part of the struggle, and even this began to drop off after the end of 1901. Indeed, even at the height of the dispute there was an underlying reticence on the part of some of the *Clarion* staff. Julia Dawson, for instance, was uncomfortable that the efforts going into fundraising for the quarrymen were 'robbing the two *Clarion* vans'.¹⁶⁶ In

¹⁶² *Labour Leader*, 23 & 30 August, 6, 13, 20 & 27 September, 4, 11 & 18 October & 6 December 1902, 17 & 31 January & 7 March 1903. For the dispute at Ballachulish see Neville Kirk, "A State of War in the Valley of Glencoe": The Ballachulish Quarries Disputes, 1902-1905', *Scottish Labour History*, Vol. 38 (2003), pp. 14-36, & Neville Kirk, *Custom and Conflict in the Land of the Gael: Ballachulish, 1900-1910*, Merlin Press, Monmouth (2007).

¹⁶³ E.g. *Llais Llafur*, 29 June & 25 October 1901; *Clarion*, 8 June 1901.

¹⁶⁴ *Justice*, 15 June 1901.

¹⁶⁵ *Justice*, 7 September 1901.

¹⁶⁶ *Clarion*, 8 June 1901.

November 1901, *The Clarion* ran a series of articles, based upon a questionnaire it had circulated to trade union leaders, which summarised the opinions of the leadership of the British trade union movement, and urged an ‘organised and systematic effort’ on behalf of the quarrymen.¹⁶⁷ This represented an effort to generalise the struggle, but by the end of the year it was beginning to look like a last ditch attempt, and thereafter the efforts of even the *Clarion* appear more as a rearguard action in a defeated cause – collecting money to defray W.J. Parry’s legal expenses in the libel case brought against him by Penrhyn being the chief activity – rather than a hopeful struggle.¹⁶⁸

By the time the quarrymen finally resolved to concede defeat in November 1903, the British socialist and labour movement had long adopted a fatalistic approach to the dispute, and to all intents and purposes had abandoned the quarrymen’s cause. Although the Penrhyn strike had brought the quarrying communities of north Wales into closer contact with the wider socialist and labour movement, both in England and in south Wales, and had begun a process of integration, this was very far-off completion in 1903. Unlike the 1898 miners’ strike in the south, the Penrhyn dispute was not followed by a political breakthrough like Merthyr in 1900, neither did the strike immediately stimulate the establishment of ILP branches. Nevertheless, the tragic events of 1900-3 were by no means without significance. This was powerfully articulated in *Llais Llafur*, alongside news of the quarrymen’s vote to return to work:

*Enill am enyd ac enill arwynebol amheus, yn yr ystyr isaf yw enill brwnt
 Arglwydd Penrhyn, ond y mae yna enill arall yn y frwydr hon. O’r golwg y
 mae hyd yma, - o’r golwg yn y ddaear fel hedyn, ond wedi ei hau mewn
 dagrau a’i fwydo a gwaed a gweddiau. Few ddaw i’r golwg maes o law, ac i’r
 golwg yn ffrwyth toreithiog iawn. Wedi hau mewn dagrau, mae medi mewn
 gorfoledd i ddilyn.*¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ *Clarion*, 2, 9, 16 & 23 November 1901.

¹⁶⁸ The ILP and *Labour Leader* were also involved in supporting Parry in the libel action. See *Labour Leader*, 21 March, 11 April & 5 September 1903. Also see Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1903/34 (T. Griffith to Keir Hardie, 13 March 1903), 1903/39 (E.R. Jones to Keir Hardie, 22 March 1903) & 1903/58 (J. Winton Evans, 16 April 1903). These letters request that Hardie adds his name to the campaign to support Parry, which is some index of Hardie’s own growing popularity.

¹⁶⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 14 November 1903 (‘Lord Penrhyn’s dirty victory is truly a temporary, doubtful and superficial victory, but there is another victory in this struggle. So far, it is hidden from view, - hidden from view like a seed in the ground, but sown in tears and fed with blood and prayers. It will come to

The words of the *Llais* were prophetic. Before the end of the decade a socialist movement would emerge in the north, and would exhibit a significantly different character from that based in the south Wales coalfield.

(iii). Towards an Indigenous Welsh Socialism?

Despite the efforts of British socialists to make their creed relevant to the dispute at Bethesda in the early 1900s, when anti-socialists like Lord Penrhyn and his colleagues in the North Wales Property Defence Association made reference to socialism and socialists, more often than not they did not have what might be called mainstream British socialists in mind. When Penrhyn wrote to the *Times*, complaining of socialist influence in his quarries, he was not referring to the ILP, the SDF or the *Clarion*, but to Welsh agitators like Michael D. Jones and Evan Pan Jones, who have not usually been considered by historians as part of the modern British socialist movement at all. Similarly, the lessons drawn from the Penrhyn struggle by many of the quarrymen's representatives, and indeed even by the socialist *Llais Llafur* in the south, tended to focus primarily not on the socialist shibboleths of class struggle or even production for use rather than profit, but on the more familiar Welsh radical totem of the land. This raises an important set of questions. To what extent was Welsh radicalism, and indeed the Welsh political establishment more generally, moving towards socialism under its own volition? To what extent were the ideas of Welsh radicals influenced by the broader British socialist movement, and to what extent were they devising their own socialistic responses to the problems of their country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? In other words, is it feasible to refer to an indigenous Welsh socialism in this period?

In addressing this question it must be remembered, of course, that by the late nineteenth century, Wales already had a long and rich tradition of indigenous radicalism to draw upon. If the French Revolution is taken as a starting point, it is possible to trace a succession of radical writers and agitators that sought to devise specifically Welsh contributions to the social, economic and cultural movements of

view in due course, and will come to view as a very plentiful fruit. Sown with tears, there is a joyous harvest to follow').

their day; individuals such as Jac Glan y Gors, Twm o'r Nant, or, from the next generation, David Rees ('Y Cynhyrwr'). Arguably the most important figure in this tradition, but also, as far as his relationship to Wales goes, the most ambiguous, was Robert Owen of Newtown. Owen, the 'utopian socialist' best known for his ideas concerning the influence of environment upon human nature and his social experiments at New Lanark, has traditionally been seen as 'the father of British socialism'. His relationship with his native Wales has been substantially occluded in much of the secondary literature, which until recently has tended to concur with the view that 'Robert Owen, the Socialist, belongs rather to the World than to Wales',¹⁷⁰ and has worked on the assumption that Owen's 'influence on Wales has been part of the general impact of his work on the social history of Britain as a whole'.¹⁷¹ This view has been revised in recent years, and although it has by no means been overturned, a more sophisticated view of Owen is now available, which disaggregates his Welsh and British contexts and presents his life, ideas and influence as a more distinct part of Welsh history.¹⁷² Despite the efforts of scholars to analyse Owen's background and the early influences that forged his character in Newtown, however, a deficiency of evidence makes it difficult to come to any firm conclusion about Owen's own sense of nationality. Nevertheless, and more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, it is possible to evaluate his legacy within Wales. It seems reasonably safe to accept the view that during his own lifetime, and for several decades thereafter, this was relatively slight.

Few Welshmen are known to have been involved in Owenite communities,¹⁷³ and although there were two such settlements in Wales in the 1840s and 1850s, one in Meirionnydd and one in Carmarthenshire, they were both initiated from outside the

¹⁷⁰ *The Welsh Outlook*, Vol. 5, 1918, p. 218.

¹⁷¹ Brinley Thomas, 'Robert Owen of Newtown', *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1960), pp. 18-35, p. 18.

¹⁷² See Ian Donnachie, 'Robert Owen's Welsh Childhood: kin, culture and environment 1771-1781', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 86 (1998), pp. 81-96; Geoffrey Powell, '“They shall no longer see as through a glass darkly”: Robert Owen and the Welsh Enlightenment', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 91 (2003), pp. 53-69; Jane Moore, '“Parallelograms and circles”: Robert Owen and the satirists', in Damian Walford Davies and Lynda Pratt (eds), *Wales and the Romantic Imagination* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 243-67; Chris Williams, 'Robert Owen and Wales', in Noel Thompson and Chris Williams (eds.), *Robert Owen and His Legacy* (forthcoming volume). I am grateful to Chris Williams for allowing me sight of this text prior to its publication, and wish to acknowledge his contribution, through discussion with me, to my ideas here.

¹⁷³ Brinley Thomas, 'Robert Owen of Newtown', p. 34.

country and populated by incomers.¹⁷⁴ It is true that at least one of Owen's works was translated into Welsh (in Manchester),¹⁷⁵ but if the comments on the defaced copy in the Salisbury Collection at Cardiff University Library, which brand it as '*un o'r llyfrau mwyaf cythreulig a gyfansoddwyd erioed*', are in any way representative of Welsh opinion, it is safe to assume that Owen's written word had, at best, limited influence in Wales.¹⁷⁶ In particular, it was Owen's views on religion that inhibited the adoption of his ideas in Wales. When not referred to in the Welsh press as '*Robert Owen Y Socialist*', he was known as '*Robert Owen Yr Anffyddiwr*' ('the Atheist').¹⁷⁷ Indeed, ten years after his death Owen's supposed atheism was given as a reason by the local authority in Newtown for turning down money raised by his admirers and refusing to erect a monument to him in the town.¹⁷⁸ Twenty-five years later Owen's grave still languished untended under weeds,¹⁷⁹ and Owen's name remained associated with negative anti-Christian views. The view of Richard Williams, as expressed in his collection on *Montgomeryshire Worthies* in 1884, that Owen's 'views on religion were crude and pernicious and he was a most erratic, unsafe, and dangerous guide to those who took him for their leader on religious and moral questions',¹⁸⁰ was seized upon and repeated by contributors to discussions on Owen in the Welsh religious press up to the end of the century.¹⁸¹

By the 1890s and early 1900s, however, there were signs of a growth of interest in Owen's work on the part of some of his countrymen. In 1893, Edward Edwards, the brother of O.M. Edwards, went to visit Owen's grave at Newtown, and recorded his ideas on Owen in his brother's journal *Cymru*.¹⁸² Nine years later, in 1902, resistance to creating a memorial to Owen at Newtown appears to have been overcome, and his

¹⁷⁴ The best discussion of the two Owenite communities is in Chris Williams, 'Robert Owen and Wales'. Also see W.H.G. Armytage, 'Pant Glas: a communitarian experiment in Merionethshire', *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, 2 (1953-6: 1955), pp. 232-4.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Owen, Yswain, *Talfyriad o'r Gyfundrefn Resymol, seiliedig ar ffeithiau diwrtheb-brawb yn amlygu cyfansoddiad a deddfau y natur ddynol, sef, yr unig foddion effeithiol i symud y drygau sydd yn poeni ac yn dryysu poblogaeth y byd*, R. Jones, Bangor, (n.d.) [1841].

¹⁷⁶ ('one of the most diabolical books ever composed').

¹⁷⁷ This was how his death was reported in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 24 November 1858. It must be conceded, though, that the accompanying editorial gave a fairly positive account of Owen's life.

¹⁷⁸ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 26 August 1868.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Edwards, 'Robert Owen o'r Drenewydd', *Cymru*, Vol. 4 (1893).

¹⁸⁰ Richard Williams, *Montgomeryshire Worthies*, Stephens & Edwards, Newtown (1884), p. 228.

¹⁸¹ *Goleuad*, 3 January 1900.

¹⁸² Edward Edwards, 'Robert Owen o'r Drenewydd'.

grave was restored with funds provided by the Co-operative Society.¹⁸³ In the same year, another article appeared in *Cymru*, this time by Richard Roberts of London (who had accompanied the *Clarion* van in 1897). It detailed Owen's influence upon Wales and gave a brief account of the Owenite settlement at Pant Glas in Meirionnydd.¹⁸⁴ In 1900, moreover, Roberts won the essay prize at the National Eisteddfod at Liverpool with an essay on Owen, which, in an expanded form, was published in two volumes in 1907 and 1910.¹⁸⁵ He announced that the work was the first to present a fair and complete history of Owen to his fellow countrymen, and that it aimed to rectify the many prejudices about him. He also used Owen's legacy to make a case, wholly in keeping with socialist claims about the instinctively socialistic nature of the Welsh, for Welsh centrality in the development of the international working class movement:

*Nid lleiaf ymhlith clodydd Cymru yw mai hi, drwy Robert Owen, roddodd yr ysgogiad effeithiol cyntaf i ddiwygiad cymdeithasol yn yr ynnysoedd hyn, a gobeithiwn mai blaenffrwyth yn unig yw o gnwd cyfoethog o Gymry a ymroddant i gwblhau ei waith i sicrhau iawnderau gwerin, nid yr hen wlad yn unig, ond holl wledydd Prydain y tu yma a thu hwnt i'r môr.*¹⁸⁶

Neither was Roberts alone in his advocacy of Owen. Among those who assisted him in getting his book to press was Thomas Jones, by then in an academic post at Glasgow University.¹⁸⁷ Another key figure to draw upon Owen's influence was the Mancunian Welshman Robert Jones Derfel, who went as far as to suggest that Owen should be adopted in place of St. David as the patron saint of Wales.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ *Robert Owen Co-operative Memorial at Newtown: The Unveiling Ceremony on July 12th, 1902* (Manchester, n.d. [1902]).

¹⁸⁴ Richard Roberts, 'Robert Owen a Chymru', *Cymru*. Vol. 13 (1902), pp. 39-40. Some indication of the limited circulation and availability of the translation of Owen's *Outlines of the Rational System of Society*, mentioned above, is given by Roberts, who states in this article that he had not seen a copy himself.

¹⁸⁵ Richard Roberts, *Robert Owen* (2 vols., Caernarfon, 1907 and 1910).

¹⁸⁶ Richard Roberts, *Robert Owen*, Vol 1., pp. 5-6 ('Not least among the commendations of Wales is it that, through Robert Owen, she gave the first effective impulse to social reform in these islands, and it is to be hoped that this is the first fruit only of a rich crop of Welsh people that are devoted to completing his work in ensuring the rights of the common people, not just of the old country, but of all the countries of Britain and those beyond the sea').

¹⁸⁷ Roberts acknowledges Jones' help in vol. 1 of his work.

¹⁸⁸ See, R.J. Derfel, 'Dewi Sant: Saint Newydd yn Eisiau', in D. Gwenallt Jones (ed.), *Detholiad o Ryddiaeth Gymraeg R.J. Derfel*, Vol. II, pp. 82-84.

Admittedly, these individuals were all expatriate Welshmen that had been influenced not just by Owen, but by the socialist movement more generally. Owen's influence did not, however, stop there. Indeed, claims on his legacy were made from the 1890s onwards directly from the heart of Welsh Liberalism. The boldest of these was made by none other than Tom Ellis, in a speech delivered at Bangor University in 1892. The speech, 'The Memory of the Kymric Dead',¹⁸⁹ was in many senses a classic of late nineteenth century nationalism, in which Ellis urged the students to play a role in ensuring that the heroes of the Welsh past were memorialised in the towns and villages of Wales. In it, however, Ellis made a significant observation. Britain and Europe, he argued, were in the midst of a 'great movement for placing upon a stabler and a more satisfactory and permanent basis the social relations and duties of man to man', a movement towards what he explicitly called socialism. He continued by asking what was the contribution of Wales to this movement, answering himself thus:

Though Wales is, in modern times, largely individualist, we cannot but feel that it has been the land of *cyfraith, cyfar, cyfnawdd, cymorthau, and cymanfaoedd*, the land of social co-operation, of associative effort. It is significant that the initiator in Britain of the movement for collective and municipal activity in the common effort for the common good was Robert Owen, who embodied in these latter days the spirit of the old Welsh social economy.¹⁹⁰

Owen, he argued, apart from being the father of British Socialism ('the Socialism that discovers itself in works and not in words') was 'the bearer of *Neges Cymru* (the message of Wales) to the modern world'.¹⁹¹

Ellis's claim upon Owen's legacy on behalf of Welsh Liberalism raises the wider question of the extent to which socialist ideas were influencing, or being developed within, the radical Liberalism that Ellis represented. This is, of course, part of a much wider debate on 'Liberalism and the Rise of Labour', which has occupied historians

¹⁸⁹ T.E. Ellis, 'The Memory of the Kymric Dead, Delivered at the University College Bangor, October 21 1892', in Annie J. Ellis (ed.), *Speeches and Addresses by the late Thomas E. Ellis M.P.*, Hughes & Son, Wrexham (1912), pp. 3-26.

¹⁹⁰ T.E. Ellis, 'The Memory of the Kymric Dead', p. 22.

¹⁹¹ T.E. Ellis, 'The Memory of the Kymric Dead', p. 23, p. 24.

of modern Britain since the 1930s. Welsh historians have sometimes been at pains to emphasise the deep differences between the mentalities of socialists and Liberals in Wales in this period, arguing that the two traditions were ‘worlds apart’.¹⁹² There might be strong elements of truth in such a view, but it is essentially based upon a false dichotomy between the extremes of both sides. It contrasts coalfield Marxists like Noah Ablett with traditional Liberal nationalists like O.M. Edwards, and does not take due account of the substantial areas of ideological confluence in-between. It has been argued that Welsh Liberalism subscribed to a broadly conceived ‘Progressivism’ that stressed the class harmony of the ‘productive’ classes against the feudal pretensions of the bishop and the squire, and that Welsh politicians in the period before the Great War remained wedded to the old themes of disestablishment, education, temperance, home rule and the eternal memories of the ‘great election’ of 1868. Those advocating a more labour-orientated politics, were prone to charges of sectionalism and were perceived as essentially hostile to the advance of the Welsh nation.¹⁹³ We have already seen, however, that this dichotomy could be subverted by socialist ideas when they were expounded in an abstract form, particularly when they were wrapped in the idea of ‘Christian socialism’. When we consider alongside this the fact that a leading Welsh Liberal like Tom Ellis was claiming the mantle of the socialist pioneer Robert Owen in 1892, it invites further speculation about the rate and extent to which socialist ideas were permeating Welsh Liberalism.

There were certainly points of contact between radical Welsh Liberalism, as expressed by the *Cymru Fydd* movement, and the wider British socialist movement. Ellis himself rubbed shoulders with the London socialist leadership. His Westminster rooms at Palace Chambers, in which *Cymru Fydd* was founded in 1886, were in the same block as the rooms in which the SDF held its committee meetings in the 1880s. In 1885 moreover Ellis and O.M. Edwards attended a meeting of the Socialist League in Oxford, at which William Morris and Edward Aveling spoke, and after which Ellis and Edwards discussed socialism with the two speakers.¹⁹⁴ Ellis also followed the

¹⁹² K.O. Morgan, *Wales 1880-1980, Rebirth of A Nation*, p. 154.

¹⁹³ K.O. Morgan, ‘The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929’, *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1973).

¹⁹⁴ Dewi Rowland Hughes, ‘Y Coch a’r Gwyrdd: Cymru Fydd a’r Mudiad Llafur Cymreig, 1886-96’, *Llafur*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1995), pp. 60-79, p. 60; Dewi Rowland Hughes, *Cymru Fydd*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2006), p. 15. They also identified a shared Celtic antecedence, as Aveling was Irish and Morris of Welsh descent.

events surrounding the socialist movement in London in the following years. In 1886 he witnessed the demonstrations, in which the SDF played a leading role, in Trafalgar Square.¹⁹⁵ Two years later he went on to draw a parallel in the House of Commons between the use of the military against anti-tithe protesters in Denbighshire and the use of the military against the socialists in London on ‘Bloody Sunday’ in November 1887.¹⁹⁶ More than this, Ellis’s contact with socialism in the later 1880s overlaid his experience at Oxford earlier in the decade, where he had come into contact with the ideas of a range of thinkers that gave him a stake in the same intellectual hinterland as the generation of socialists that emerged in the 1880s. Such influences ranged from John Ruskin to Arnold Toynbee, and included the social thought of the Fabian Society.¹⁹⁷ At Oxford too he discovered the artistic ideas of Edward Burne Jones and William Morris,¹⁹⁸ and the extent to which Morris’s essentially pastoral vision of the ideal society harmonised with Ellis’s own belief in the virtue of agrarian life is striking.

Indeed, there were areas in which Ellis’s agrarian radicalism ran in confluence with some of the main streams of British socialist thought. The land issue, of course, provided the main area of overlap,¹⁹⁹ but Ellis’s rhetoric on most subjects could take on socialistic dimensions. He tended to wrap up all of the causes to which he was committed as a means of restricting, in words that were his own but which closely shadowed those of the first *Fabian Tract*, ‘*awdurdod a breintiau i’r ychydig, a blinder a llafur a chaethiwed i’r lluaws*’.²⁰⁰ Indeed Ellis considered, as he put it in a letter to Herbert Lewis, the Liberal candidate for Flintshire in 1891, that ‘Nationality

¹⁹⁵ Dewi Roland Hughes, *Cymru Fydd*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁶ Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner: The Dilemmas of Tom Ellis*, Christopher Davies, Llandybie (1972), pp. 94-5.

¹⁹⁷ K.O. Morgan, ‘Tom Ellis Versus Lloyd George: The Fractured Consciousness of Fin-de-Siècle Wales’, in Geraint H. Jenkins & J. Beverley Smith (eds.), *Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922: Essays in Honour of Ieuan Gwynedd Jones*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1988), pp. 93-112, pp. 98-9.

¹⁹⁸ Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner*, p. 46-7.

¹⁹⁹ Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner*, p. 83 discusses Ellis’s advocacy of land nationalisation; J. Graham Jones, ‘Michael Davitt, Lloyd George and T.E. Ellis: The Welsh Experience, 1886’, *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1997), pp. 450-482, esp. p. 475, discusses the influence of Michael Davitt’s ideas on Ellis; Frank Price Jones, ‘Tom Ellis’, in *Radicaliaeth a’r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg*, pp. 181-195, quotes on p. 192 Ellis’s statement of advocacy of the 1894 Local Government Act as ‘an instrument for furthering social equality A considerable step towards the municipalisation of the land’.

²⁰⁰ Quoted in T.I. Ellis, *Thomas Edwards Ellis, Cofiant, Cyfrol II (1886-1899)*, Gwasg y Brython, Liverpool (1948), p. 161 (‘the authority and privilege of the few, and the distress, labour and bondage of the many’).

and Labour are the two main principles’ and foresaw that ‘when disestablishment is settled Wales will throw herself heart and soul into the Labour movement’.²⁰¹

Ellis was not alone among the *Cymru Fyddwyr* in either sharing some of the common ideological heritage of the socialists or being willing to use socialistic rhetoric. Like many socialists, Ellis’s colleague Lloyd George counted the ideas of John Ruskin and Henry George, alongside the municipal radicalism of Joseph Chamberlain’s ‘Unauthorised Programme’ and the agrarian socialism of Michael Davitt among his early influences.²⁰² He also frequently advocated some form of wealth redistribution, as at Bangor in 1891, when he told an audience that ‘it is not in the creation of wealth that England lacks, but in its distribution’.²⁰³ He occasionally went as far as to use the word ‘socialism’ directly. His original vision for the newspaper *Yr Udgorn Rhyddid*, for example, was, as he put it in a letter to D.R. Daniel in 1887, for it to be ‘thorough, nationalist and socialist – a regenerator in every respect’.²⁰⁴ Some members of *Cymru Fydd* went even further. David Randell, as already demonstrated, explicitly gave his support to socialist organisations, and had he not fallen ill, may even have departed from the Liberal Party and played a role in the development of the ILP in Wales.²⁰⁵ Even Mabon, doyen of Welsh Lib-Labism and persistent critic of Keir Hardie though he was, could find ways of accommodating socialism within his world view. Like many others he made the distinction between what he called Christian socialism and material socialism. The latter, he told an audience in the Rhondda in 1896, ‘meant the levelling of all properties and of social positions’, ‘was intended to be obligatory and general’ and was an erroneous doctrine. Nevertheless ‘he did not think it was ever intended that there should be such a vast difference in the distribution of wealth and the suffering of poverty, that the selfish and the glutton should be so extremely rich while the striving workman was half famished by poverty’. Consequently he supported Christian socialism which ‘meant nothing but what was voluntary and special’ and ‘was based upon sacrifice, and sympathy, and charity’.²⁰⁶ This may have

²⁰¹ Quoted in Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner*, pp. 170-171. The letter continued to state, in socialistic language, that ‘nationalisation of the tithe is restoring to the working man his interest in the land’.

²⁰² Emyr Price, *David Lloyd George*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2006), pp. 8-25.

²⁰³ Quoted in, Chris Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, Harvester Press, Brighton (1976), p. 7.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Emyr Price, *David Lloyd George*, p. 46.

²⁰⁵ See above pp. 79-80.

²⁰⁶ *Cardiff Times & South Wales Weekly News*, 28 November 1896.

been ideologically vague, but it did leave the door open for his eventual acceptance of wider socialist doctrines, and by 1908, by which time it appeared that socialism was going to be a permanent part of Welsh life, Mabon was claiming ‘It is well known that I have been an evolutionary Socialist for many years, and mean to be till the end of my days. More than that, I have at the present moment very little faith in anything else as a real means of liberating and elevating the people’.²⁰⁷

Indeed, there is an argument that radical Liberalism and socialism between them formed an ideological continuum. Certainly, socialists at the Fabian end of the spectrum were not necessarily hostile to Liberalism, and the social content of radical Liberalism undoubtedly incorporated elements of socialist thought. This was not lost upon exponents of the Welsh Liberal tradition, particularly after the formation of the Labour Party in 1906. In 1910 Ellis W. Davies, a Liberal from north Wales, could state that ‘the socialist principle is now an essential part of our national life and the question that remains is not of principle but of degree’.²⁰⁸ As the above discussion demonstrates, it is not difficult to find evidence to support this assertion. The argument, though, can be pushed to almost absurd lengths. Even Hardie’s dubious running partner at Merthyr, the industrialist D.A. Thomas, a man ‘born and cradled in the strongest form of individualism’, who was explicitly and implacably opposed to socialism to the end of his life,²⁰⁹ included socialistic elements, such as the eight hour day, in his electoral appeals as a ‘Liberal and Labour’ candidate.²¹⁰ In reality, though, radical Liberals were separated from socialists in some important ways, and there is no need to use an example like D.A. Thomas to make the point. Tom Ellis, for example, while he may have been prepared to dabble with Robert Owen, had little time for most of the socialist leadership. He saw Hyndman as ‘a thoroughly hollow fellow’,²¹¹ and viewed the revolutionary speeches of the socialists at Trafalgar Square in the 1880s as ‘a disturbing sign’.²¹² As for Lloyd George – and the same would be equally true of Ellis – Chris Wrigley rightly notes that beneath his fiercer rhetoric

²⁰⁷ *Labour Leader*, 17 April 1908.

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, p. 307.

²⁰⁹ Harold Begbie, ‘His Philosophy’, in *D.A. Thomas, Viscount Rhondda by His Daughter and Others*, Longmans, Green & Co., London (1921), pp. 278-290.

²¹⁰ 1900 and 1906 electoral material in D.A. Thomas Papers, C2. Ultimately, under wartime conditions, Thomas managed to accommodate the nationalisation of industry alongside his continued hostility to socialism as a philosophy.

²¹¹ Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner*, p. 80.

²¹² Dewi Roland Hughes, *Cymru Fydd*, p. 16.

there was a marked difference between his position and that of the socialists, particularly on issues such as land, industry and profits.²¹³ There were, in fact, a range of core beliefs common to all socialists – central to which was the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange – that very few radical Liberals could have swallowed whole.

There was, though, a distinct group on what might be considered the extreme left of Welsh radicalism that was developing what may be termed ‘proto-socialism’, and it might be argued that their ideas represented an indigenous route to socialism. The thinking of Michael D. Jones, for example, combined an agrarian, decentralist mutualism with a commitment to nationalism.²¹⁴ He also asserted his own version of the labour theory of value in the realisation, made in an article on workers’ rights near the end of his life, ‘*mai gweithwyr yw’r bobl sydd yn cario cymdeithas ar eu cefnau*’.²¹⁵ Similar claims for a nascent indigenous Welsh socialist-internationalist philosophy may be made in relation to the anti-materialistic convictions of Emrys ap Iwan.²¹⁶ A more convincing case, though, could be attached to John Owen Jones (Ap Ffarmwr) of Anglesey, who during his short life agitated and propagandised on behalf of the rural farm labourers of north Wales. A farmer’s son who started his working life as a draper’s apprentice, he studied at Aberystwyth and Manchester, before returning to Anglesey, where, in the late 1880s, he took up the cause of the region’s agricultural labourers. He initiated the agitation by writing a series of powerful articles in the north Wales radical paper *Y Werin* in 1889,²¹⁷ and during the early 1890s he led attempts to unionise the Anglesey farm labourers. A newspaper editor by profession, Ap Ffarmwr initially worked as sub-editor for the Liberal *Genedl Gymreig*, but his involvement in the Anglesey labour movement was truncated when he moved to Merthyr at the end of 1894 to become editor of the *Merthyr Times*. He

²¹³ Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, p. 5.

²¹⁴ Evan Pan Jones, *Oes a Gwaith y Prif Athraw Parch. Michael Daniel Jones, Bala*, H. Evans, Bala (1903), pp. 215-276; E. Wyn James & Bill Jones (eds.), *Michael D. Jones a’i Wladfa Gymreig*, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, Llanrwst (2009); D. Gwenallt Jones, ‘Michael D. Jones’, in Gwynedd Pierce (ed.), *Triwr Penllyn*, Plaid Cymru, Cardiff (n.d.), pp. 1-27.

²¹⁵ Michael D. Jones, ‘Cyfiawnder i’r Gweithiwr’, *Geninen* (1897), pp. 205-6 (‘The workers are the people that carry society on their back’).

²¹⁶ D. Myrddin Lloyd, *Emrys ap Iwan*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1979); Thomas Gwynn Jones, *Emrys ap Iwan, Dysgadwr, Llenor, Cenedlgarwr: Cofiant*, Cwmni’r Cyhoeddwr Cymreig, Caernarfon (1912).

²¹⁷ *Werin*, 23 November – 28 December 1889.

subsequently moved to Nottingham, to take a post as leader writer with the *Nottingham Express*, and died there in 1899 at the age of 39.²¹⁸

Ap Ffarmwr's own intellectual world was informed by a combination of Welsh literature with the classical nineteenth century British radical canon, including Ruskin and Carlyle.²¹⁹ In the 1890s he added to this, as did many conventional British socialists, the work of Henry George and the Fabian *Tracts*. He would also have read the socialist writings in *Y Genedl Gymreig* of Dr. Rhys Jones of Cardiff. He was steeped in the culture of mutual improvement, and as a young man he was a founder of the *Cymdeithas Lenyddol Moriah* at Caernarfon.²²⁰ This clearly influenced his political outlook, and he subsequently advocated various measures to raise the intellectual and moral condition of farmworkers,²²¹ among which was the organisation of exclusive workers' *eisteddfodau* for farm servants.²²² He viewed his educational and cultural aims within a specifically national context, and argued for the creation of an education system that would foster Welsh culture and patriotism,²²³ as well as being personally involved in numerous local Welsh literary festivals and *eisteddfodau*.²²⁴ Alongside this cultural activism he put forward a methodical and clinical case for land nationalisation, arguing that the land question - which he viewed as both a rural and urban issue - needed to be looked at from a national perspective. By this he meant that it was no use just regulating the relationship between landlord and tenant, but that the land needed to be owned and managed in the interests of the nation as a whole.

Ap Ffarmwr envisaged that this could be enacted at a British level, but he also insisted that the land issue had explicitly Welsh dimensions, as very often, he claimed, English landlords demonstrated a particular disrespect towards Wales and its

²¹⁸ David A. Pretty, *The Rural Revolt That Failed: Farm Workers' Trade Unions in Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1989), pp. 20-44; R. Maldwyn Thomas & Cyril Parry, 'John Owen Jones, "Ap Ffarmwr", 1861-1899', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society & Field Club* (1967), pp. 72-107; Cyril Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics*, pp. 12-14.

²¹⁹ E. Hevin Jones, wrote on Ap Ffarmwr's death, 'darllenai bobpeth y gallai gael gfael arno yn Gymraeg a Saesneg, ond yn arbenig yr olaf' ('he would read everything that he was able to get hold of in Welsh and English, but especially the latter'), *Genedl Gymreig*, 7 March 1899.

²²⁰ *Genedl Gymreig*, 8 October & 12 November 1890.

²²¹ *Genedl Gymreig*, 9 September 1891.

²²² *Genedl Gymreig*, 19 December 1893, 13 March & 8 May 1894.

²²³ John Owen Jones (Ap Ffarmwr), 'Anhawsderau Gwladgarwch Cymreig', *Geninen* (1891), pp. 226-230.

²²⁴ *Genedl Gymreig*, 7 January 1891, 21 December 1892, 21 November 1893 & 3 May 1894.

customs.²²⁵ His arguments went beyond individualistic reformism and Welsh particularism, though, and embraced full socialistic public ownership. What was needed, he argued, was

*chwyldroad trwyadl yn ein cyfundfren dir, sef diddymu meddiant personol o dir, a gwneyd y Wladwriaeth yn berchenog, yn osodydd, ac yn rheolydd holl dir y deyrnas.*²²⁶

Ap Ffarmwr's move to Merthyr in 1894 brought an end to his direct involvement with the north Wales agrarian movement, but it did bring him into contact with the south Wales labour movement. During his period at Merthyr, he continued to combine social activism with an advocacy of Welsh cultural causes. He adjudicated at local *eisteddfodau* and joined the Merthyr Cymmrodorion Society, but he also dabbled with Merthyr's nascent socialist movement. In December 1895 he presided over the foundation meeting of the Merthyr ILP, and in the following year he attended at least one socialist meeting in the town.²²⁷ Ap Ffarmwr never joined the ILP, and he remained politically loyal to the Liberal Party, yet his political philosophy clearly contained substantial elements of socialist thought. The combination of Welsh educationalism and political activism that he exhibited was, moreover, to become one of the hallmarks of a generation of Welsh socialists that was to emerge within just a few years of his death.

An even stronger expression of indigenous Welsh proto-socialism was arguably provided by the last of the individuals to be considered in this section, Evan Pan Jones. One of the most remarkable of all late-Victorian Welsh radicals, Pan Jones was born into poverty, the son of a widow, near Llandysul, Cardiganshire in 1834. Working by the age of 10, he spent his early years breaking stones, plaiting rush stools and stocking knitting to help support his family, before completing a tailor's apprenticeship. In the 1850s he moved to Glamorganshire, where he worked as a tailor at Pentyrch and Blaina, and preached in Independent chapels. Later he attended

²²⁵ John Owen Jones, 'Y Tir a'r Genedl', *Geninen* (1892), pp. 111-116.

²²⁶ John Owen Jones, 'Y Tir a'r Genedl (II)', *Geninen* (1893), pp. 33-35, p. 33 ('A thorough revolution in our land regime, namely the dissolution of personal land ownership, and the appointment of the state as owner, landlord and manager of all the kingdom's land').

²²⁷ David Pretty, 'John Owen Jones (Ap Ffarmwr) and the Labour Movement in Merthyr Tydfil, 1894-6', *Morgannwg*, 38 (1994), pp. 101-114.

Bala Independent College, and during the 1860s he studied at Carmarthen Presbyterian College and Marburg University in Germany, before settling in Mostyn, Flintshire in 1870. Apart from a brief spell in America in the 1880s, he remained there, as minister of Mostyn church, until his death in 1922, and it was from Mostyn that he wrote profusely, edited newspapers (*Y Celt* and *Cwrs y Byd*) and orchestrated his energetic and impressive social campaigning.²²⁸ As was the case with Ap Ffarmwr, at the heart of Pan Jones' social philosophy was a belief in the need for a fundamental change in the nature of land ownership. He began addressing this issue in earnest in *Y Celt* in early 1883,²²⁹ and in August he launched *Cymdeithas Y Ddaear i'r Bobl* (Society of the Land for the People).²³⁰ In 1886 he was involved in organising Michael Davitt's visit to Wales,²³¹ and in the early 1890s he added another dimension to his land campaign by accompanying the first of a series of touring vans, of which there were eventually seven, to take the land reform message into the countryside and towns of Wales.²³²

Pan Jones argued that the land question was '*yr unig gwestiwn gwerth i ymdrin ag ef*', that it was fundamental to all else.²³³ This statement invites a consideration of the question raised at the outset of this section (which is equally pertinent to the other individuals considered here), can Pan Jones be fairly described as a socialist? The land issue might be seen as a radical, rather than an explicitly socialist issue. It could certainly be pursued as part of an individualist (rather than a socialist or collectivist) agenda, and while most late-nineteenth century British socialists counted the land reform movement among their formative influences, most also argued that addressing land monopoly was only a partial solution to the social problem, and that socialism demanded the abolition of industrial monopoly and the end of the appropriation of surplus value. If the latter considerations are seen as essential elements of socialism, then neither Pan Jones, nor any of the other individuals considered here, may be

²²⁸ Evan Pan Jones, *Oes Gofion: Fraslun o Hanes fy Mywyd*, H. Evans, Bala (1911); Tom Davies, 'Pan Jones', *Y Llenor*, Vol. 13 (1934), pp. 144-157; Peris Jones-Evans, 'Evan Pan Jones – Land Reformer', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1968), pp. 143-159; Rev. Richard Griffith Owen, 'Evan Pan Jones', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.

²²⁹ Peris Jones-Evans, 'Evan Pan Jones', pp. 149-150.

²³⁰ 'Y Tir a'i Berchenogion', *Celt*, 23 February 1883.

²³¹ J. Graham Jones, 'Michael Davitt, David Lloyd George and T.E. Ellis: The Welsh Experience'.

²³² *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 15 January, 18 June, 27 August & 10 September 1891; *Celt*, 13 February & 22 May 1891; *Llais Llafur*, 25 June 1898.

²³³ *Llais Llafur*, 25 June 1898 ('The land question was the only question worth dealing with').

considered socialist. Some elements of Pan Jones' thought would lend credence to this conclusion. His calls for families to be provided with three acres and a cow,²³⁴ and for a general return from the towns to the countryside,²³⁵ in many ways hark back to the radicalism of the mid nineteenth century more than they chime with the analysis of his contemporary 'scientific' socialists. Indeed, Cyril Parry, among others, has concluded that 'Pan Jones showed no interest in socialism or the problems of industrial workers'.²³⁶

The question is, however, not so simple as Parry suggests. In certain other respects Pan Jones' ideology did engage with contemporary analyses that, by implication, went beyond the core issue of the land. In *Llais Llafur* in 1899, for instance, he listed what he saw as the five great (temporal) issues of the future as '*rent, enillion, llogau, cyflogau, swindle*' (rent, profit, interest, wages and 'swindle').²³⁷ He also advocated class-conscious, direct and independent working class political organisation, in a way that aligned him more with the ILP position than any of the other individuals considered here. Indeed, in the early 1890s, before the foundation of the ILP, he anticipated its political philosophy. '*Mae yn llawn bryd i'r gweithwyr gael eu lle yn y ddrama fawr wleidyddol, i gael actio eu rhan, ac nid cario coed a dwfr i ereill*', he wrote in 1892.²³⁸ This position alienated Pan Jones from Liberalism in a way that was not true of other Welsh radicals, such as Ap Ffarmwr, who remained fundamentally loyal and whose last act of political affirmation was to write a hagiographic biography of William Gladstone.²³⁹ Pan Jones, on the other hand, was frequently and harshly critical of the Liberal Party and its leadership, which he took care to differentiate from *y werin*. He argued that the party's Newcastle Programme did not go far enough in addressing working class concerns,²⁴⁰ and in response he launched his own ten point workers' programme. This included a range of traditional radical claims, such as payment for MPs, regulation of the drink trade and educational reform, alongside a

²³⁴ *Llais Llafur*, 22 January 1898; Evan Pan Jones, 'Y Ddaear i'r Bobl', *Geninen* (1908), pp. 132-136, discusses the idea of giving 2 acres to every family.

²³⁵ *Celt*, 16 December 1892.

²³⁶ Cyril Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics*, p. 22.

²³⁷ *Llais Llafur*, 16 December 1899.

²³⁸ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 9 June 1892 ('It is high time that the workers had their place in the great political drama, and acted their part, rather than carrying wood and water for others').

²³⁹ John O. Jones (Ap Ffarmwr), *William Gladstone*, Swyddfa'r Wasg Genedlaethol Gymreig, Caernarfon (1898).

²⁴⁰ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 19 February & 16 April 1891 & 9 June 1892; *Celt*, 3 & 24 June 1892.

number of Welsh particularist issues, such as home rule and the recognition of the Welsh language in law courts. It also, however, reached towards socialism in its demand for the nationalisation of royalties by the state. The accompanying statement ‘*at weithwyr Cymru*’ (to the workers of Wales) was, moreover, an unmistakeable call for militant class consciousness:

*Yn eich llaw chwi mae y cwbl; yr ydych yn y rhan fwyaf o'r etholaethau yn y mwyafrif, ac yn yr oll yr ydych yn ddigon lluosog i droi y clorian fel y mynoch ond i chwi fod yn unol, heb uno ni fyddwch amgen teganau chwareu y cyfoethogion a phobl hunangeisiol.*²⁴¹

Pan Jones also associated with a considerable number of individuals that did explicitly accept socialist ideology, and in this respect he provided, at the very least, a direct link between the socialist movement and the advanced wing of Welsh radicalism. Helen Taylor, with whom he collaborated in organising land reform meetings in 1883 was a member of the SDF.²⁴² He also communicated with the Welsh Mancunian socialist R.J. Derfel, whom he greatly admired. In 1890 he wrote to Derfel, who had in the previous year published the first explicitly socialist pamphlet in Welsh, and informed him ‘*mae eich syniadau gwleidyddol yn cydforfio yn dda ar eiddof fi*’.²⁴³ He also gave Derfel space to publish his letters on socialism in *Cwrs y Byd*, his editorship of which brought him into contact with the socialism of Ebenezer Rees of Ystalyfera, who published articles by Pan Jones in *Llais Llafur* from time to time. In addition to this, he also had close links with members of the Cardiff Fabian Socialist Society, with whom he would have celebrated May Day in 1892, had he not been otherwise engaged.²⁴⁴ His relationship with David Rhys Jones, who supplied reports on the activities of the Cardiff Fabians to *Y Celt* and worked with Pan Jones’

²⁴¹ *Celt*, 25 December 1891 (‘Everything is in your hand; you form the majority in the majority of constituencies, and in all of them you are numerous enough to turn the balance as you insist, but only if you are united, without unity you will be nothing but another toy to be played with by the rich and the self-seeking’).

²⁴² Peris Jones-Evans, ‘Evan Pan Jones’, p. 150.

²⁴³ Evan Pan Jones to R.J. Derfel, 12 December 1890, NLW MS 23440D (‘your political ideas converge well with those of mine’). In another letter to Derfel dated 28 May 1891, also in NLW MS 23440D, Pan Jones explicitly states his agreement with the contents of Derfel’s socialist pamphlet *Aildrefniad Cymdeithas*.

²⁴⁴ *Celt*, 29 April 1892.

brother to establish the Fabian group at Llandysul has already been discussed, but he was also close to Benjamin Evans, who ultimately became secretary of the Cardiff ILP. Pan Jones sponsored Evans' membership of the Fabian Society,²⁴⁵ and Evans subsequently supported Pan Jones' van campaigns, making his maiden appearance as a public speaker on the land issue at Lampeter in 1891.²⁴⁶

Pan Jones' status as a socialist or otherwise cannot, however, be decided on either ideological or associational grounds alone. He never made the full step to taking up ILP membership, arguing rather that the Liberal Party should transform itself and absorb the socialist societies and the ILP. A conclusion based simply on the content of his thought, moreover, depends ultimately on using a fixed definition of socialism as a measure, and would thus be built upon inherently shifting sands. He was certainly viewed as a socialist in some quarters. North Walian Conservatives saw him as a 'socialist or semi-socialist',²⁴⁷ while there were those among his supporters that pointed out '*Ef, ac ef yn unig sydd yn ymladd ar y maes cyhoeddus dros iawnderau y gweithiwr yn gyffredinol*', and made the case that this necessarily took him beyond the territory of Liberalism.²⁴⁸ Crucial to the argument, though, is the way in which Pan Jones saw himself. The highly variegated ideological nature of late nineteenth century socialism meant that ultimately the key factor in determining whether or not an individual fell within the movement was that individual's own self identification. In this, as in many other respects, Pan Jones provided conflicting evidence. On occasions he seemed to distance himself not just from socialism, but from all other social movements, and declare his own philosophy unique.²⁴⁹ On other occasions though he explicitly identified himself as a socialist, by adopting the English word to describe his ideology. '*Byddaf yn cychwyn ar daith i bregethu Socialism o'r Van*', he informed R.J. Derfel in May 1891.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Ben Evans to R.J. Derfel, undated, NLW MS 23440D.

²⁴⁶ *Celt*, 31 July & 11 December 1891.

²⁴⁷ *North Wales Chronicle*, 23 April 1887.

²⁴⁸ *Celt*, 12 April 1889 ('It is he, and he alone that fights in the public sphere for the rights of the worker in general').

²⁴⁹ Evan Pan Jones, 'Y Ddaear i'r Bobl', *Geninen* (1910), pp. 30-31.

²⁵⁰ Evan Pan Jones to R.J. Derfel, 28 May 1891, NLW MS 23440D ('I am starting on a trip to preach Socialism from the Van').

If there is enough evidence to sustain an argument that Pan Jones could be described as a socialist, there remains one outstanding question: to what extent did he represent a genuinely indigenous Welsh form of socialism? In some senses the case for this is strong. His calls for class consciousness by no means meant an abandonment of Welsh particularism. He was a fierce defender of the Welsh language, and criticised the North Wales Liberal Federation equally for its failure to use Welsh as he did for its attitude towards the working class.²⁵¹ More than this, in Pan Jones' view the land revolution was also a national revolution, which would allow Wales to be itself. '*Rhaid tynu danedd y landlords cyn byth y ceir gweled Cymru yn ei lliw ei hun*', he explained to readers of *Llais Llafur* in 1898.²⁵² E.G. Millward has demonstrated, not least with reference to Pan Jones' verse, how his revolutionary sentiments intertwined with his nationalism,²⁵³ and it would be difficult to imagine a more comprehensively Welsh figure. Pan Jones nevertheless produced a complex and uneven fusion of ideas that came from a wide variety of different directions. These included influences from Henry George's America, Michael Davitt's Ireland, the England of the Land Nationalisation Society and the Germany of Bismark. They were blended with a range of native Welsh influences, derived from rural Llandysul, industrial Pentyrch and Blaina and theological Bala. As was the case with all the other individuals discussed in this thesis, his ideas were the product of a geographical interplay between a wide range of ideological and cultural influences. The fact that they were synthesised and expressed in Wales arguably makes the resulting synthesis Welsh, regardless of the original provenance of its separate elements. This argument would seem reasonably self-evident, except that it does not embrace the most important and sustained synthesis of socialism and Welsh particularism to be made in the period before 1906, which was the work of a man who used the pseudonym 'Socialist Cymreig' and lived for most of his life in Manchester: R.J. Derfel.

²⁵¹ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 16 April 1891.

²⁵² *Llais Llafur*, 25 June 1898 ('There is a need to pull the teeth of the landlords before ever Wales can be seen in her own colour').

²⁵³ E.G. Millward, 'Dicter Poeth y Dr. Pan', *Cof Cenedl*, 9 (1994), pp. 163-190.

(iv). Robert Jones Derfel, ‘Socialist Cymreig’.

There were various types of socialists in late-Victorian Wales. There were the classic incomers, activists like Willie Wright or Keir Hardie, much derided from pulpit and Lib-Lab trade union lodge alike, who did their best to communicate their socialism across cultural and linguistic barriers that only in rare cases they could hope to transcend. Then there were those that had settled in the melting pot of industrial south Wales, many Welshmen among them, who embraced the new creed. Very often this entailed the subordination of any strident sense of Welsh identity to the theoretical demands of internationalist socialism. This would often be expressed in choice of language, so that even Welsh speakers like Henry Davies of Cwmavon or Edgar Chappell from Ystalyfera chose to communicate their socialism in English. There were also those on the left wing of Welsh Liberalism, epitomised by Ap Ffarmwr and Evan Pan Jones, who expressed a sharp, culturally and linguistically defined sense of Welshness, and whose radicalism took them virtually within the socialist camp, but who nevertheless remained apart from the formal socialist organisations. For them, Welsh particularism and social radicalism were intertwined, but their relationship with mainstream socialism was ambiguous.

The final group, which was also the smallest, comprised a number of equally nationally conscious Welshmen, who had clearly crossed the boundary from radicalism to socialism. This group, some of whom were expatriate, included David Rhys Jones of Cardiff, Robert Williams and Richard Roberts of London and D.D. Walters of Newcastle Emlyn. They actively considered themselves to be socialists and aligned themselves with the wider British socialist movement, but they nevertheless made efforts to retain their Welsh identity alongside their socialism, part of which involved communicating their politics through the medium of Welsh. The fact that the most prominent of this group, Robert Jones Derfel, lived not in Wales but in Manchester, says something about both the geographical ambiguities of Welshness and the spatial interplay inherent in the spread of socialist ideas. His life was the product of a complex and multifaceted interplay between Wales and England, Welsh and English, socialism and nationalism and the rural and the urban, to identify just

some of its dimensions. Indeed, Derfel – who was a consummate publicist of both himself and socialism - provides one of the best documented case studies, from the period before 1906, of a socialist who attempted to square his socialism with his Welshness. This chapter will therefore conclude with an examination of Derfel’s life and work, with the aim of illuminating some of the central themes of this thesis.

Robert Jones²⁵⁴ (1824-1905) was the son of a farmer and cattle dealer from Llandderfel.²⁵⁵ As a child he worked at farming and in a woollen mill, until running away at the age of 11 to live with an uncle near Rhiwabon, where he became a Baptist, learnt handloom weaving and began to master poetic composition. For the next ten years he worked at the declining craft of handloom weaving in north Wales, until, after frequent periods of unemployment and poverty, and ‘dissatisfied with myself and all the world’, as he later put it, he moved to England. After several years in Liverpool, Manchester and London, living in ‘a pitiful state of poverty’, he settled in Manchester, where he ultimately became a travelling salesman for a silk company. During the next decade he travelled extensively through the English midlands, Yorkshire and north and mid Wales, while also writing – often literally by the roadside - a prolific amount of poetry, prose and drama. By the 1860s, having formally adopted the bardic name Derfel, he had achieved considerable literary fame, which led one of his contemporaries, Iwan Jenkyn, to recall later ‘*nid oedd neb yn fwy adnabyddus yn y byd Cymreig*’.²⁵⁶ His work combined an essentially romantic celebration of nature, religion and folk life with strong nationalist and patriotic

²⁵⁴ He only adopted the name Derfel (believing that there were too few Welsh surnames) in the 1850s.

²⁵⁵ The main primary source for Derfel’s life, upon which this discussion is largely based is R.J. Derfel, ‘A Brief Account of My Life’, *Llais Llafur*, August-December 1905, NLW MS 23449 B ; Ionarwyn Williams, ‘Llyfr Nodiadau o Hanesion Cymry Manceinion’, NLW MS 12525 B, also provides useful information, particularly about his context in Manchester; Secondary sources include Islwyn ap Nicholas, *Derfel: Welsh Rebel, Poet and Preacher*, Foyle’s, London (1945); D. Gwenallt Jones (ed.), *Detholiad o Ryddiaeth Gymraeg R.J. Derfel*, Y Clwb Llyfrau Cymreig (1945), (2 volumes), which contains a useful introductory discussion; S.E. Williams, ‘Astudiaeth o Fywyd a Phrydyddiaeth R.J. Derfel’, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Wales (1975); Eddie Cass, ‘Robert Jones Derfel: A Welsh Poet in the Cotton Factory Times’, *Llafur*, 7, 1 (1996), pp. 53-67; W.G. Evans, ‘R.J. Derfel and Huwco Meirion’, *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, 10 (1985), pp. 48-56; Prys Morgan, ‘R.J. Derfel a’r Ddrama Brad Y Llyfrau Gleision’, in Prys Morgan (ed.), *Brad Y Llyfrau Gleision: Ysgrifau ar Hanes Cymru* (1991), pp. 1-21; A.M. Roberts, ‘R.J. Derfel, 1824-1905’, *Y Traethodydd*, CLXV, 688 (January 2009), pp. 34-54.

²⁵⁶ Iwan Jenkyn, ‘R.J. Derfel, Manceinion’, *Celt*, 24 February 1888 (‘there was no-one more well-known in the Welsh world’).

themes,²⁵⁷ and on the strength of his literary output in the years before 1865 he justified Jenkyn's assessment that he was '*un o'r cenedlgarwyr puraf a welodd ein cenedl ni erioed*'.²⁵⁸

Derfel's move from north Wales to Manchester positioned him between two worlds. The world of his childhood was the deeply rural, largely monoglot, Welsh cultural heartland of Meirionnydd. It had its own traditions of agrarian radicalism - the immediate vicinity of Derfel's birthplace also produced Tom Ellis and Michael D. Jones – which represented a rural counterpoint within Welsh radicalism to the industrial traditions of Merthyr. From this world, Derfel made the transition to cosmopolitan, but distinctly English, Manchester, premiere theatre of British class struggle; in the words of Engels, 'that classic soil on which English manufacture has achieved its masterwork and from which all labour movements emanate', home of the manufacturing proletariat 'in its fullest classic perfection'.²⁵⁹ This involved Derfel in a profound personal journey, which was partly signified by his own language shift. He went to Manchester a monoglot Welshman, but after a short period lodging with Welsh speaking families, he moved into English lodgings and quickly mastered English. By the time he began travelling the roads selling silk, Derfel was a fully integrated cosmopolitan. Importantly, though, part of his cosmopolitanism was a retention of Welshness. Both his marriages were to Welsh speaking women, and his work demanded that he keep travelling back and forth to Wales, where he continued to preach and lecture when on the road.²⁶⁰ He also continued to correspond for the rest of his life, largely through the medium of Welsh, with many of his fellow countrymen back in Wales.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ *Rhosyn Meirion* (1853), *Caneuon Min y Ffordd* (1861), *Munudau Segur* (1863), *Caneuon Gwladgarol Cymru* (1864), *Songs for Welshmen* (1865), *Brad y Llyfrau Glesion* (1854), *Traethodau ac Ariethiau* (1864).

²⁵⁸ *Celt*, 24 February 1888, ('one of the purest national patriots our nation has ever seen').

²⁵⁹ Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Grafton, London (1969) (First published in Britain 1882), p. 75.

²⁶⁰ For evidence of Derfel's preaching in Wales see Dr. Owen Davies to Myrddin Fardd, 22 September 1864, which makes reference to preaching alongside Derfel at Ffestiniog, Bangor MS 5019 (13), Bangor University Archive. Accounts of Derfel preaching, lecturing and adjudicating at *eisteddfodau* in Bangor, Llandderfel, Bala, Holyhead and Dolgellau appear in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 16 December 1863, 10, 17 & 24 February 1864, 1 & 22 February 1865 & 10 March 1866.

²⁶¹ NLW MS 23440D contains correspondence to Derfel from all parts of Wales.

Manchester, moreover, which had a substantial Welsh population of its own,²⁶² provided a microcosm in which the two cultural worlds of Wales and England existed side by side, and by the 1860s Derfel lived in both of them. He was a member of the Welsh Baptist Church in Granby Row, at which he frequently preached.²⁶³ Outside the church, he was also actively involved in other aspects of Welsh Mancunian culture. He served on the committee of *Cymdeithas Lenyddol Cymry Manchester*, where he associated with other notable Mancunian Welsh poets, including William Williams (Creuddynfab) and John Jones (Idris Fychan).²⁶⁴ He frequently lectured to Welsh audiences and contributed to discussions at Welsh cultural events, not just in Manchester, but across north-west England.²⁶⁵ In the late 1860s he became involved in the world of Manchester radicalism, serving on the executive of the Reform League, alongside the old Chartist, Ernest Jones,²⁶⁶ and working in the election of 1868 to mobilise the Welsh vote.²⁶⁷ He acted, moreover, as a link between the two worlds, and spoke on radical issues to Welsh audiences. In May 1867, for example, he spoke in Welsh on Votes for Women to the Cambrian Literary Society, and in 1868 he addressed the Manchester *Cymreigyddion* on *Rhyddid Ymadrodd* (Freedom of Speech).²⁶⁸

Derfel later described his political views in this period as ‘very advanced radical, in fact ... Chartist’,²⁶⁹ and, as a former handloom weaver, he was classic Chartist material. In this sense his politics accord with Deian Hopkin’s assessment of him as a classic product of the early period of the industrial revolution.²⁷⁰ In the mid 1860s, though, his ideological make-up was in the process of radical change. Partly as the result of a failed business venture, he seems to have experienced some sort of

²⁶² At the end of the century this was estimated at 8-10,000, ‘Llyfr Cofnodion Cymeithas Genedlaethol Cymry Manceinion, 1900-1911’, NLW MS 15467 C.

²⁶³ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 1 January & 16 July 1862.

²⁶⁴ The rules of the society and notes on its members are included in Ionarwyn Williams, ‘Llyfr Nodiadau o Hanesion Cymry Manceinion’, NLW MS 12525B; *North Wales Chronicle*, 19 October 1867.

²⁶⁵ *North Wales Chronicle*, 9 March 1867; *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 7 April, 20 & 27 June 1866 & 11 December 1867.

²⁶⁶ *Manchester Times*, 1 June & 16 November 1867 & 3 October 1868.

²⁶⁷ *Manchester Times*, 14 November 1868; For Ernest Jones and the 1868 election see A. Taylor, ‘“The Best Way to Get What He Wanted”: Ernest Jones and the Boundaries of Liberalism in the Manchester Election of 1868’, *Parliamentary History*, 16, 2 (1997), pp. 185-204.

²⁶⁸ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 8 May 1867 & 12 February 1868.

²⁶⁹ R.J. Derfel, ‘A Brief Account of My Life’ (X).

²⁷⁰ Deian Hopkin, ‘Y Werin a’i Theyrnas: Ymateb Sosialaeth i Genedlaetholdeb, 1880-1920’, *Cof Cenedl*, VI (1991), pp. 162-192, p. 167.

breakdown.²⁷¹ He ceased writing for the best part of twenty years, and when he began again it was as an enthusiastic and thoroughgoing socialist. He later recounted the process of conversion, which occurred when he was at his lowest ebb, when,

fortunately for me, I came accidentally across some of the works of Robert Owen, and the ideas contained within them captured my convictions almost instantly, and I became a Socialist. The new ideas gave me a new life. I was, so to speak, born again. The world and all in it seemed new, and I began again to take an interest in life and its duties.

I was profoundly ignorant, as others were, of the only remedy for all the ills of society, till the light of socialism penetrated my understanding. The light burst upon me almost suddenly. The darkness that covered the world disappeared and everything seemed new. ... In the sunshine of the new light, I saw clearly that the sources of the World's evils and sufferings was in the social order.²⁷²

This is a classic account of a conversion to the 'religion of socialism', of a type that was common in Britain in the 1880s and 1890s,²⁷³ and Derfel subsequently embraced this aspect of socialism enthusiastically. He attended a Labour Church,²⁷⁴ and wrote in 1891 that 'I see no reason why our movement should not develop into a religion of humanity'.²⁷⁵ 'Socialism', he argued, 'is a religion in the best and fullest sense of the word. It is truth, justice, and righteousness. Its prayer is work, its worship is service of man, its rewards prosperity and happiness in the world. Its gospel is peace and universal brotherhood'.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ It is not exactly clear what happened to Derfel and when in this period. He claimed to have experienced a business failure when he attempted to set up a Welsh book shop in Manchester, due to the reluctance of the Welsh community to support him, and this became a frequently repeated element of his biography (e.g. see *Llais Llafur*, 27 August 1898). There are, however, various confusing aspects to his account. For a fuller discussion see Paul Ward and Martin Wright, 'Mirrors of Wales – Life Story as National Metaphor: Case Studies of R.J. Derfel & Huw T. Edwards', *History*, 95, 317 (January 2010), pp. 45-63.

²⁷² R.J. Derfel, 'A Brief Account of My Life' (III & X).

²⁷³ Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain', *History Workshop Journal 1883-1896* (Autumn 1977), pp. 5-56.

²⁷⁴ J.E. Broadbent (Oldham) to R.J. Derfel, 26 October 1891, NLW MS 23440D.

²⁷⁵ R.J. Derfel, *On the Importance of Right Methods in Teaching Socialism: A Paper Read to the Manchester and District Fabian Society, 10 February 1891*, p. 12.

²⁷⁶ R.J. Derfel, (Unidentified cutting in scrap book) NLW MS 23446B.

In Derfel's case, though, his conversion – at least according to his own account - took place the best part of two decades before the period normally associated with such phenomena. Indeed, his ideological roots lie not in the post-Marx socialism of the 1880s, but in the earlier tradition of utopian socialism. As he stated, his main inspiration was Robert Owen, and this was manifested in his interest in co-operation as an agency for political and social change. He repeatedly outlined the transformative possibilities of co-operation in a manner that might almost be described as proto-syndicalist: 'by organising themselves, not to talk and fight, but to produce wealth for themselves, instead of for others, they [the workers] would do more in a lifetime to bring about the desired social revolution, than can be done by political agitation in centuries', he argued in the early 1900s.²⁷⁷ Other elements of his thought too were clearly derived from Owen. His advocacy of garden cities explicitly made reference to Owen's idea of 'villages of unity',²⁷⁸ and his central and frequently expressed belief in environmental determinism - 'surround man with good moral, social, and physical conditions, and the bad will be made good, the good will be made better, and the best will be preserved in their goodness'²⁷⁹ - could easily have been Owen writing about the *New Moral World* eighty years previously.

In this sense Derfel might be seen as a link between socialism utopian and scientific. His socialism, though, was also a product of a complex geographical and cultural interplay. As we have seen, Owen was himself a Welshman, whose socialism was a product of his own journey from Wales into the rest of the world, and who was by the late nineteenth century being reclaimed by some of his own countrymen. Derfel discovered Owen in Manchester (it is even possible that he saw Owen himself speak in either Manchester or Liverpool),²⁸⁰ and there is a good chance that he was introduced to Owen's work by members of the Manchester Welsh community. Not only was the only Welsh translation of Owen's writing undertaken in Manchester, but Derfel also worked alongside one of Owen's biographers, another Mancunian

²⁷⁷ R.J. Derfel, *A New Departure in Socialist Propaganda*, NLW MS 23446B.

²⁷⁸ R.J. Derfel, 'Garden Cities Etc.', *Manchester Evening News*, 8 September 1902, NLW MS 23446B.

²⁷⁹ R.J. Derfel, *Free Will or No Free Will*, NLW MS 23446B.

²⁸⁰ O. Llew Owain, 'Bywyd a Gwaith R.J. Derfel' (Essay for the 1941 National Eisteddfod, Old Colwyn), p. 13, NLW MS 23617 E.

Welshman, Lloyd Jones, when organising for the 1868 election.²⁸¹ Derfel, though, was also an agent in the re-introduction of Owen's ideas to both the Manchester Welsh community and within Wales. In 1898, for example, he read a paper on Owen to the Manchester Welsh National Society, an expanded form of which was subsequently serialised in *Llais Llafur*.²⁸² The paper began by stressing Owen's attachment to Wales, which was contrasted with his status as a world citizen. Derfel had travelled a very similar journey to his hero.

Whatever the ideological provenance of Derfel's socialism, by the end of the 1880s, he was fully located within the British socialist movement. Like many British socialists, he spent some time in the SDF, although, critical of the Federation's 'strong language and bitter tone',²⁸³ he ultimately found a political home in the Fabian Society. Firmly ensconced within Manchester Fabianism, he engaged in the debates and exhibited the apparent contradictions that were typical of late-Victorian British socialism. Consistent with his Fabianism, he rejected the concept of violent revolution, in favour of 'reason, argument, and persuasion',²⁸⁴ and argued that evolution was the primary agent of social change. 'Evolution works slowly but surely', he explained elsewhere, 'It is a growth. It brings about greater changes than any revolution, however successful, could accomplish',²⁸⁵ and although he accepted the concept of a class war, he saw it not as part of a necessary dialectical process of change, but as a negative and injurious diversion: '*rhyfel dosbarth yn fwy dinystriol i'r genedl fawr, sef y werin, na holl frwydrau gwaedlyd y byd*'.²⁸⁶ Rather, society would be perfected through material improvement, education and the consequent development of superior institutions and forms of social behaviour. In keeping with one of the apparent paradoxes of late-Victorian socialist thinking, though, the

²⁸¹ *Manchester Times*, 14 November 1896; Lloyd Jones, *The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen* (edited by William Cairns Jones), Swan Sonnenschein, London (1890).

²⁸² *Llais Llafur*, 3, 10 & 17 December 1898; Also see 'Robert Owen y Socialist', *Cymro*, 24 May 1894.

²⁸³ R.J. Derfel, 'A Brief Account of My Life' (X).

²⁸⁴ R.J. Derfel, *On the Importance of Right Methods In Teaching Socialism*, p. 3

²⁸⁵ R.J. Derfel, *An Unauthorised Programme Showing How To Abolish Poverty, Without Doing An Injustice To Anyone, or Leaving A Feeling Of Wrong Behind. A Complete Revolution Without Bloodshed, Confiscation, Or Physical Force*, , p. 12.

²⁸⁶ NLW MS 23446B ('class war is more destructive to the great nation, namely the common people, than all the bloody conflicts of the world').

shadow of revolution was never far behind the soft tones of Derfel's propaganda. 'In the sense of evolution,' he asserted, 'all socialists are revolutionary'.²⁸⁷

Indeed, alongside Robert Owen, the other most prominent influence on Derfel's work was the revolutionary William Morris, whom Derfel singled out, along with Owen, as an exception to his general distrust of leaders.²⁸⁸ Morris had lectured in Manchester in the 1880s,²⁸⁹ and the Marxist ideas of Morris (along with those of H.M. Hyndman) were promoted there by an active SDF presence.²⁹⁰ Their influence upon Derfel's thought is clear. His definition of socialism, for example, as 'a complete change in the basis of society'²⁹¹ is directly derived from Morris's own definition of revolution: 'we use the word revolution in its etymological sense, and mean by it a change in the basis of society'.²⁹² Derfel was ideologically closer, in fact, to the revolutionary Morris than he was either to his fellow Fabians or the political labour movement of the 1890s and early 1900s. His outright and frequently repeated rejection of palliatives, for example, echoed Morris's uncompromising position in the socialist strategic debate of the 1880s. 'I have no hesitation', he asserted,

in expressing my deep conviction that some of the palliatives agitated for, if won, will do nothing more than benefit a few at the expense of the many, and at the same time will make the slavery of the masses more secure, and their emancipation more difficult to accomplish.²⁹³

In this sense Derfel was something of a fundamentalist. He rejected attempts to form a labour alliance between socialists and trade unionists and repeatedly criticised strategies to advance socialism through parliamentary politics. He dismissed the idea

²⁸⁷ R.J. Derfel, *On the Importance of Right Methods in Teaching Socialism*, p. 2.

²⁸⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 24 June 1899.

²⁸⁹ *Justice*, 27 September 1884 & 30 October 1885.

²⁹⁰ *Justice*, 22 & 29 March & 19 & 26 July & 2 August 1884, 3, 24 & 31 January & 16 May 1885, 13 March 1886, 10 September 1887, 4 August 1888; Jeffrey Hill, 'Social Democracy and the Labour Movement: The Social Democratic Federation in Lancashire', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, no. 8, 1982, pp. 44-55.

²⁹¹ R.J. Derfel, 'The Most Important Thing First', NLW MS 23446B.

²⁹² William Morris, 'How We Live And How We Might Live', in G.D.H. Cole (ed.), *William Morris: Prose, Verse, Lectures and Essays*, Nonesuch Press, New York (1974 ed.), pp. 565-587, p. 565.

²⁹³ R.J. Derfel, 'The Most Important Thing First', NLW MS 23446B

of ‘practical socialism’,²⁹⁴ in favour of communism: ‘The Socialism I believe in and advocate is Communism. To me Socialism and Communism are convertible terms – Communism is Socialism, Socialism is Communism. ... Others may ... talk of social democracy, collectivism, labourism, and so forth, but I am satisfied with the word Socialism. If the other isms mean anything less than Socialism, they mean no full social salvation for man’.²⁹⁵

All this marks Derfel as a classic example of the interaction between Marxism and native British modes of thought that, according to Stanley Pierson, characterised late nineteenth century British socialism.²⁹⁶ Derfel’s case, though, also invites an examination of the relationship between socialism and his Welsh identity. An outcome of his conversion to socialism was the modification, and considerable weakening, of his nationalism. He recalled in 1905,

I was an enthusiastic Welsh nationalist. ... I must have been drunk on patriotism, for I used to pray patriotism, talk patriotism, preach patriotism, and write patriotism. In fact, patriotism tinged all my thoughts and influenced all my work. ... [but a] great change ... has come over myself in politics. My opinions on most things are different now to what they used to be. I am a nationalist of a sort still, but the sort is different to the old one. My patriotism is less tribal and more cosmopolitan than it used to be. ... I do not place so much importance on the language as I used to.²⁹⁷

The linguistic implications of this were potentially drastic, and he argued that ‘a multiplicity of languages is an inconvenience, a hindrance to communication, fellowship, and progress’. ‘Different speeches’ were, to the socialist Derfel, a means used by the wealthy classes ‘to keep the toilers in subjection’, and the adoption of an international language, which he explicitly stated would be English, was of primary importance to radicals, freethinkers and socialists, in order to ‘do something real to

²⁹⁴ R.J. Derfel, ‘The Housing Problem’, NLW MS 23446B.

²⁹⁵ R.J. Derfel, *Socialism: What It Is, And What It Teaches. A Paper Read at the Literary and Debating Society, Winsford, February 9th 1892*, p. 3.

²⁹⁶ Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism; The Struggle for a New Consciousness*, Cornell University Press (1973).

²⁹⁷ R.J. Derfel, ‘A Brief Account of My Life’ (IX).

bring about a time when all nations will be one people, and in effect of one speech'.²⁹⁸

More than this, Derfel's vision of internationalisation, which would be both necessary for - and a natural outcome of - the adoption of socialism, extended at times not just to linguistic standardisation, but to the virtual elimination of national cultures. He foresaw that this would take place through the agency of evolution, and at times even suggested that the British Empire could be an influence in encouraging the process, which he described in 1905:

At first every man was for himself, individually. Gradually, the individual merged in a clan or tribe. Later, the tribes were absorbed in a state. It seems to me as likely that ultimately the Welsh, Scots, Manx, Irish and English will evolve into one British nation; and in the course of time I see no [im]possibility for all the nations of Europe to become one European nation, using one common tongue.²⁹⁹

This apparently straightforward displacement of Derfel's nationalism by socialism was, however, by no means as complete as he appeared to claim.

Despite his ideological commitment to internationalism, and his Mancunian socialist context, Derfel did not abandon either his Welsh identity or his enthusiasm for Welsh culture. He continued his involvement with the Manchester Welsh community until the end of his life, serving as Vice-President of the *Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Cymry Manceinion*, and frequently speaking at its meetings.³⁰⁰ His contributions also continued to address traditional Welsh cultural topics such as *Rhai Pethau Eisiau eu Gwneud yn Gymru Sydd Tuag at Ddyrchafu Cymru Fydd* ('Some Things That Need Doing That Tend Towards the Elevation of the Future Wales') (which included the nurturing of the Welsh language alongside an adopted international language).³⁰¹ More than this though, he attempted to relate his socialism to Wales and Welshness

²⁹⁸ R.J. Derfel, 'Language', NLW MS 23447 B.

²⁹⁹ R.J. Derfel, 'A Brief Account of My Life' (IX).

³⁰⁰ *Cymro*, 14 April & 10 November 1892; Llyfr Cofnodion Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Cymry Manceinion, 1900-1911, NLW MS 15467 C.

³⁰¹ *Genedl Gymreig*, 16 November 1892.

by choosing to use the Welsh language as a medium for his propaganda. His first contribution to the debate on socialism was an article, written in Welsh, published in *Cymru Fydd* in 1888, in which he clearly advances the argument for socialism within a nationalistic framework. He argued that ‘*yr elfen gyntaf a’r bwysicaf mewn dyngarwch ydyw cenedlgarwch*’, but then went on to demonstrate, using concepts borrowed from Marx, that the existing *Cymru Fydd* manifesto was insufficient. He introduced his own programme for national regeneration which comprised a full scale scheme of nationalisation, beginning with the land, and the dissolution of the ruling class (*meistrolaeth*). It was, moreover, explicit that the nationalisation (*ceddleiddio*) envisaged by Derfel would take place at a Welsh, and not a British, level: ‘*Mae ddaear Cymru a’i holl drysorau – glo, mwneu, aur, chwareli, ac felly yn y blaen, yn perthyn i’r Cymry sydd yn byw yn y wlad*’.³⁰²

Derfel continued to write profusely on socialism, in both Welsh and English, until his death 17 years later, but he never contradicted the position he set out in 1888. He attempted, moreover, to pursue socialist propaganda within specifically Welsh contexts. At the end of the year he made a similar case to that in his *Cymru Fydd* article to the Manchester Welsh National Society, which he published in 1889, and which holds the distinction of being the first Welsh language tract of the ‘Socialist Revival’.³⁰³ In 1894 he explained to the Manchester branch of *Cymru Fydd*, ‘*Paham yr Ydwyf yn Socialist*’ (Why I Am a Socialist).³⁰⁴ Of more significance, though, was the series of letters he wrote under the pseudonym *Socialist Cymreig*, for *Y Cymro* in 1892, entitled *Cymdeithasiaeth*, and which were reprinted and expanded in several newspapers, including *Llais Llafur*, *Y Cymro* and *Cwrs y Byd*, during the 1890s and early 1900s.³⁰⁵ Amounting to a full exposition of socialism over a total of 57 different articles, the letters exemplify the connection between mainstream British

³⁰² R.J. Derfel, ‘Ein Rhagolygon a’n Gwaith’, *Cymru Fydd* (May 1888), pp. 270-271 (‘the first and most important element in the love of mankind is the love of nation’; ‘The land of Wales and all its treasures – coal, ore, gold, quarries, and so on and so forth, belong to the Welsh that live in the country’).

³⁰³ R.J. Derfel, *Aildrefniad Cymdeithas: Papyr a Ddarllenwyd i Gymdeithas Genedlaethol Cymry Manceinion, Nos Wener, Rhagfyr 16eg 1888*, R.J. Derfel, Manchester (1889); the meeting of the Manchester Welsh National Society at which Derfel delivered the paper, and its reception, is reported in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 5 December 1888 (presumably Derfel got the date wrong on his pamphlet). A paper was delivered in reply in the new year, but Derfel was not present to hear it, *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 13 February 1889.

³⁰⁴ *Genedl Gymreig*, 4 December 1894.

³⁰⁵ *Cymro*, 17 March – 6 October 1892 & 31 July – 25 June 1903; *Llais Llafur*,

socialism and the culture of Wales. Derfel's pseudonym – an amalgam of Welsh and English, not *Cymdeithaswr Cymreig* (or even *Cymraeg*), but *Socialist Cymreig* - hints at a sense of cultural dislocation and reconnection, and his chosen form is a direct imitation of Blatchford's *Merrie England* letters. Indeed, many of the letters contain direct importations of arguments for socialism from contemporary English language propagandists, forged around Derfel's wonderfully distilled central synthesis of *cyd-feddiant*, *cyd-llafur* and *cyd-fwynhad* (co-ownership, co-labour and co-enjoyment). They rehearse debates and arguments that were commonly repeated within contemporary British socialist propaganda, encapsulated in titles such as *Aneffeithioldeb Pob Moddion ond Cymdeithasiaeth i Ddifodi Tlodi a'i Ganlyniadau* (The Ineffectiveness of all Means except Socialism to Eradicate Poverty and its Results), *Ydyw Cymdeithasiaeth yn bosibl?* (Is Socialism Possible?) and *Ysglyfaeth Y Drefn Presenol* (The Plunder of the Present System). The arguments are conducted in general terms, and their supporting statistics are drawn almost exclusively from urban England, as presented in mainstream socialist publications such as the Fabian Tract *Facts for Socialists*.

This facet of Derfel's work has led to assertions that there was 'nothing exclusively Welsh in his socialism', or that it was 'manifestly alien' to the Welsh radical tradition.³⁰⁶ Aspects of it obviously were, but as a general conclusion this understates Derfel's concern to relate his socialism to his national identity. One significant way in which he attempted to do this was by relating socialism to the tenets of nonconformist Christianity. Derfel's attitude to religion was complex,³⁰⁷ but twelve of the 57 separate letters are devoted to a direct exploration of the relationship between socialism and Christianity. They represent a sublimation of the relationship between Welshness and socialism that foreshadowed the intense encounter between the chapels and the socialists that was to gather pace within a few years of Derfel's death. Other aspects of Derfel's socialist writings also converge with issues that traditionally had great prominence in Wales. His concern with the land issue is an obvious example, but so too is his emphasis on educationalism. More than this, though, in

³⁰⁶ Cyril Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics*, p. 25.

³⁰⁷ He rejected Christianity and became a freethinker sometime after the 1860s, although it is not clear exactly when. He was capable of expressing virulent anti-Christian views and railed against 'priestcraft' in all its forms. A series of articles he published in the *Freethinker*, 26 July 1903 – 24 December 1905 represents this aspect of his ideology. Alongside it, though, he clearly retained many elements of his former Baptist modes of thought.

several of his letters Derfel turned explicitly to the issues of Welshness and national identity.

In *Gwladgarwch dan Cymdeithasiaeth* (Patriotism under Socialism), for instance, he criticised the hollow nationalism witnessed in the dining and speechifying of St. David's day, and argued that real nationalism must embrace and lift up the whole of the nation, as represented by *y werin*. He went further than this, however, to argue that the brotherhood and unity that patriotism implied was not only a virtue, but was innate in human nature and impossible to extinguish – as testified by the unlikely survival of the Welsh nation itself. Arguing for the creation of a new form of non-aggressive nationalism that was consonant with internationalism, he went on to discuss the implications of this for his Welshness.

*Mae gwladgarwch o ryw fath, yr wyf yn meddwl, yn rhwym o barhau o dan Gymdeithasiaeth. Yr wyf yn methu â gweled bod dim Cymdeithasiaeth yn gofyn i mi am beidio â bod yn Gymro. Dyletswydd pob gwlad ydyw trefnu eu thŷ ei hun yn gyntaf, a chynorthwyo eraill wedi hynny, os gall. Pe byddai'n bosibl cymysgu pob cenedl â'i gilydd i wneud un genedl o'r cwbl, nid wyf yn meddwl yr enillid dim trwy hynny. Ond y mae hynny yn amhosibl. Yr hyn sydd eisiau ydyw unoliaeth mewn amrywiaeth.*³⁰⁸

This new sense of nationalism would demand a reconstruction of the Welsh nation, and to this end Derfel advocated a range of measures that were specifically addressed to Wales. They included the re-creation of the eisteddfod as a non-competitive forum in which all forms of science and culture would be nurtured; the transformation of the chapels to pursue a temporal agenda of social improvement; the creation of a secularist education system, which would replace the influence of 'priestcraft' with a rational scientific education, while maintaining the nation's native language; a thorough redistribution of property, starting with land and housing, that would improve the material condition of the Welsh people and put them in charge of their

³⁰⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 3 March 1900 ('Patriotism of some type, I think, is bound to continue under socialism. I fail to see that any type of socialism asks me not to be a Welshman. The duty of every country is to organise its own house first, and after that help others, if it can. If it were possible to mix up all the nations together to make one nation out of the lot, I don't think anything would be gained. But that is impossible. What is needed is unity in diversity').

own destiny. The outcome of this programme, Derfel argued, would create an environment that would encourage the development of a people fit for the arrival of socialism, and the whole project would be symbolised by the replacement of St. David as patron saint of Wales by Robert Owen.³⁰⁹ As a means of beginning the work, Derfel advocated an all-Welsh conference of interested parties from all denominations to consider the social condition of the Welsh nation.³¹⁰

Derfel's request anticipated the desire of some Welsh socialists in the following generation to establish a Welsh ILP, although it fell upon stony ground within his own lifetime. Indeed, there is a broad historical consensus that Derfel's influence upon Wales was minimal.³¹¹ As the prize winning *eisteddfod* essay writer O. Llew Owain put it in 1941, '*fel eos oedd Derfel i weithwyr – yn canu yn y nos*'.³¹² This should not, however, occlude his significance. His initial letters in *Y Cymro* stimulated only a small reaction from its readers at the time of their publication,³¹³ and it is difficult to evaluate their subsequent impact. The editors of *Llais Llafur* claimed that they reprinted the letters in 1898 in response to popular demand,³¹⁴ and the paper occasionally received correspondence praising Derfel's work and requesting its publication in pamphlet form.³¹⁵ It is arguable, moreover, that the reproduction of his work in the socialist press was disproportionately influential, in that it contributed to the process of education and the building of human capital that was taking place within the socialist movement. Its context is important in this respect. In the *Llais*, for example, his pieces on the housing issue, which advanced abstract and general ideas on housing reform, were published alongside the writing of 'Oliver Twist', which dealt with the specifics of the housing crisis in Ystalyfera.

³⁰⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 4 April 1903.

³¹⁰ R.J. Derfel, 'Cymdeithasiaeth' (LVII), NLW MS 23448B.

³¹¹ John Davies, *A History of Wales*, Penguin (1993), pp. 417, 477; Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen 1874 – 1922*, University of Wales Press (1982), p. 69; Richard Lewis, 'Political Culture and Ideology', in C. Williams, D. Tanner and D. Hopkin, *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, University of Wales Press (2000), pp. 86-111, p. 94; Robert Pope, *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question, 1906-1939*, University of Wales Press (1998), p. 23.

³¹² O. Llew Owain, 'Bywyd a Gwaith R.J. Derfel', NLW MS 23617 E (Derfel was like a nightingale to [the] workers – singing in the night').

³¹³ *Cymro*, 4, 11 & 25 August & 1 September 1892.

³¹⁴ *Llais Llafur*, 29 January 1898.

³¹⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 13 & 20 May 1899.

Readers were thus invited to make the connection between the local and the universal.³¹⁶

Derfel's influence may have been limited, but he was by no means totally unknown within Wales during his own lifetime. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* referred to him in 1896 as 'y *Sosialydd Cymreig adnabyddus o Fanceinion*'.³¹⁷ His primary significance, however, does not lie in his immediate influence. It has been suggested that British socialism was one of the 'invented traditions' of the British nation.³¹⁸ If this is the case, Derfel was trying to invent an alternative, within which the existing cultural traditions of Wales had a place and Welsh national consciousness was not submerged. He was trying to create a synthesis of the universal and the particular. This was not unproblematic, and he was only partially successful. There were many points of dislocation within his work. The possibility of a distinctly Welsh socialist ideology that he implicitly proposed was, during his own lifetime, inhibited by a wide range of influences. In both territorial and ideological senses socialism had spread unevenly across Wales and through Welsh culture. Derfel's Manchester was a world away from Keir Hardie's Merthyr, which was equally distant from the Caernarfonshire of Ap Ffarmwr. All the elements for a genuinely rooted Welsh socialism existed, but they were disconnected. Despite (or perhaps because of) being himself separated from Wales, Derfel made some important connections, which he passed on to the next generation, and this is his primary significance. '*Y ffaith yw, y mae Derfel wedi bod yn byw yn mhell o flaen ei oes*', reflected *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* in 1896.³¹⁹ The paper was not wrong; in his advocacy of both Welsh nationalism and socialism Derfel had been ahead of public opinion. But, as previous chapters have demonstrated, he was not alone in this, and in the case of socialism he wasn't that far ahead. His death at the end of 1905, just over a month before the formal creation of the British Labour Party, represents a watershed in Welsh socialist history. Thereafter the spread of socialism in Wales quickened dramatically, and within only a couple of years members of another generation of socialists were

³¹⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 9, 23 & 30 May 1903.

³¹⁷ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 15 January 1896 ('the well-known Welsh socialist from Manchester').

³¹⁸ Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924*, Royal Historical Society (1998), p. 203.

³¹⁹ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 15 January 1896 ('The fact is that Derfel has been living far ahead of his time').

obliged to confront the core challenge of relating their socialism to their national consciousness and immediate environment.

Chapter 5
SOCIALISTS, CULTURE AND LANGUAGE
1906-1914

The final chapter of this thesis will focus upon the period after 1906, when socialism experienced a period of growth in Wales. One characteristic of this period was an internal debate within Welsh socialism concerning its relationship with Welsh nationality. The chapter will begin by examining the nature of socialist growth in general terms, and will then focus upon those socialists who sought to create a distinctively Welsh form of socialism. It will then conclude by examining some of the intrinsic problems of expressing socialist ideas through the medium of the Welsh language.

(i). The Socialist Movement in Wales after 1906.

The development of the socialist and labour movements, in both Wales and Britain, entered a new phase around 1906, in which several different processes may be discerned. The most important of these in the long term was the emergence of the Labour Party as the primary vehicle for labour and socialist politics in Britain. Labour Representation Committees were established on an ad hoc basis in parts of south Wales from the early 1900s onwards - a process that was encouraged by both the 1901 Taff Vale decision and Labour's breakthrough in the 1906 general election - and although their formation continued to be somewhat chaotic thereafter, the Labour Party ultimately became an established part of south Wales politics.¹ The decisive factor in this was the affiliation of the SWMF to the Party in 1908.² This marked a major shift in the balance of power in south Wales. Even the arch Lib-Lab Mabon was forced to acknowledge that the ground was moving beneath him. In 1906 he had described the LRC as 'a party roaming in the wilderness without a place to put down

¹ Peter Stead, 'Establishing a Heartland: The Labour Party in Wales', in K.D. Brown (ed.), *The First Labour Party 1906-1914*, Croom Helm, London (1985); Eddie May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918', in Tanner, Williams & Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales*, pp. 61-85.

² K.O. Fox, 'The Emergence of the Political Labour Movement in the Eastern Section of the South Wales Coalfield, 1894-1910', Unpublished MA Thesis, Aberystwyth (1965), pp. 106, 123.

its tent',³ but by 1908 he was arguing that affiliation would 'make Trade Unionists better Socialists, and Socialists better Trade Unionists'.⁴ When T. Mardy Jones, an organiser for the new Labour Party, claimed in 1909 that 'the divorce from Liberalism is definite and permanent'⁵ he was arguably being a little premature; in many parts of south Wales Labour organisation was not properly established until just before the Great War. His words were, however, accurately prophetic. As Peter Stead has observed, 'deep currents were always taking things Labour's way'.⁶ This was to tie Wales into a pan-British and overwhelmingly unionist political project for the remainder of the twentieth century.

In some respects, though, this process represented less a break with Liberalism, and the Welsh particularism that it represented, than a seamless progression, and many of the old Lib-Labs - although they were now officially pure and simple Labour representatives - remained distinctly Liberal at heart. John Williams, for example, the Western District Miners' Association agent who had failed to support John Hodge on the Gower in 1900, was described by his supporters, when he successfully contested the same constituency in 1906, as 'simply a Labour candidate with Radical sympathies'.⁷ He never truly abandoned his Liberal beliefs, but nevertheless remained the Labour MP for Gower through the two elections of 1910, having quietly joined the ILP.⁸ His tenure there was directly due to his ability to reflect 'a network of values in which Welshness, nonconformism and, above all, community values played a part',⁹ and, like Mabon, he was prepared to absorb elements of socialist ideology, so long as it was what he called 'socialism of the right sort'.¹⁰ Indeed, in the period before the Great War, it was the more strident socialists who continued to be the political outsiders. Ben Tillett's unsuccessful electoral efforts at Swansea have already been discussed,¹¹ but even the south Wales born and bred ILPer Vernon Hartshorn discovered that his socialism was an electoral liability. When he contested

³ *South Wales Daily News*, 23 July 1906.

⁴ *Rhondda Leader*, 23 May 1908.

⁵ *Labour Leader*, 26 March 1909.

⁶ Peter Stead, 'Establishing a Heartland', p. 86.

⁷ Quoted in David Cleaver, 'Labour and Liberals in the Gower Constituency, 1885-1910', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1985), pp. 388-410, p. 403.

⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 20 June 1908.

⁹ David Cleaver, 'Labour and Liberals in the Gower Constituency', p. 409.

¹⁰ *Llais Llafur*, 20 February 1909.

¹¹ See above pp. 142-143.

the mid Glamorgan constituency in 1910 he found himself painted as an atheist, revolutionist and advocate of free love, and was consequently defeated.¹² At a community level it remained the case that ‘those who were in sympathy with this new doctrine were considered to be very queer people’.¹³ The socialists’ day was yet to come, but it wasn’t far off.

One indication of this was what Mabon referred to as ‘the severe struggle between the old and sane trade unionism and the new socialistic unions’¹⁴ that was raging in south Wales by the end of the decade, and which ultimately resulted in the displacement of Mabon himself from the top of the SWMF. There were indications of a new militant, indeed revolutionary, undercurrent in parts of the coalfield even before the middle of the decade. A slight resurgence of the SDF around 1904 was one sign of this, as was the foundation of the Blaenclydach Marxian Club in 1907,¹⁵ and by the end of the decade the process of radicalisation was hastened by the industrial convulsions of the great ‘Labour Unrest’. This added a new dimension to the south Wales labour movement, which was inspired by the activism of a new generation of militant leaders, such as Noah Ablett and A.J. Cook, and expressed through the Unofficial Reform Committee of 1911 and *The Miners’ Next Step* of 1912.¹⁶ Many of the activists of this new working class movement were educated at the SWMF funded Central Labour College,¹⁷ the ideology of which was profoundly universalist and classist in nature. Its students experienced a ‘scientific’ Marxist education ‘enabling [them] to assist as effectively as possible, in the emancipation of [their] class’. On the college’s deep and rich syllabus were classes on ‘The History of Socialism in England’, and courses in ‘Foreign Languages’ (‘to facilitate a mutual understanding among the workers of different countries as a means to greater international unity of

¹² *Labour Leader*, 8 April 1910; C. Howard, ‘Reactionary Radicalism: the Mid-Glamorgan By-Election, March 1910’, *Glamorgan Historian*, 9 (1973), pp. 29-42.

¹³ Cliff Prothero, *Recount*, G.W. & A. Hesketh, Ormskirk (1982), p. 1.

¹⁴ Quoted in E.W. Evans, *Mabon (William Abraham 1842-1922): A Study in Trade Union Leadership*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1959), p. 88.

¹⁵ K.O. Fox, ‘Emergence of the Political Labour Movement’, p. 146; *Rules of the Marxian Club and Institute, Blaenclydach*, SWCC: MNA/PP/66/1.

¹⁶ D. Egan, ‘The Unofficial Reform Committee and the Miners’ Next Step’, *Llafur*, 2, 3 (1978), pp. 64-80.

¹⁷ W.W. Craik, *The Central Labour College 1909-1929*, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1964); R. Lewis, ‘The South Wales Miners and the Ruskin College Strike of 1909’, *Llafur*, 2,1 (1976), pp. 57-72.

aim and action’).¹⁸ Within this new movement there was no place for Welsh, or any other (non class-based) particularism.

The internationalism inherent in the new ideology that was permeating south Wales was expressed by William Phippen, a socialist who contested a seat on the Rhondda Urban District Council in 1908. Implicitly objecting to Welsh particularism, he asked voters to support him,

Because he is not narrow-minded, as he believes in the Universal Brotherhood of mankind ... The Printers & Compositors of the Rhondda are the brothers of the Printers & Compositors of Birmingham, and the real Foreigner and Arch-enemy of Labour is Capitalism.¹⁹

Phippen was a member of the ILP, and his mention serves to make the point that there is a danger of over-stating the extent of the revolutionary militancy discussed above. Indeed it was the propaganda of the ILP that was, in the words of Mardy Jones, ‘the dominant factor in the political life of the coalfield’.²⁰ To some extent the ILP overlapped with the militant miners’ movement (A.J. Cook, for example, was a member of both the ILP and the URC). Many of its members certainly espoused the same anti-particularist internationalism. It was, however, essentially different. It continued to take its inspiration more from ethical socialism and (as Hardie never tired of repeating) the Sermon on the Mount, in preference to the *Communist Manifesto*, and its members tended to favour the less rigidly scientific and classist education of the Workers’ Educational Association to that of the CLC.²¹ Ultimately – and this was in many respects the key to the success of ILP socialism - it allowed a greater range of ideological possibilities, particularly when it came to the accommodation of national identity. Thus Edgar Chappell, of the Swansea Valley ILP, could combine a belief that socialism was essentially consistent with both the

¹⁸ The Plebs League, *What is Independent Working Class Education?* (n.d. ?1908) & Syllabuses of the Central Labour College, James Griffiths Papers, A1/15 (‘The Labour College: Bound Volume of Printed Documents’), National Library of Wales.

¹⁹ William Phippen, *Electoral Address for 1908 Rhondda Urban District Council Election* (Ward 4), SWCC: MNA/PP/12/2/1, Swansea University Archive.

²⁰ *Labour Leader*, 26 June 1909.

²¹ This is something of a generalisation, and the matter was often the topic of intense debate, see Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales 1906-1940*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1993), pp. 1-47.

culture of the chapel and Welsh national consciousness, while still declaring that ‘the Socialist comes with a new message, a message of hope for humanity. Not greater privilege for a favoured race, but justice for all’.²²

The growth of the ILP was dramatic after 1906. In January 1908 a Welsh contributor to the *Labour Leader* announced the ‘awakening of Wales’,²³ and by that year’s annual conference at Huddersfield there were 84 branches in south Wales.²⁴ The 34 Welsh delegates made their presence felt by singing *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* from the platform, with Keir Hardie giving a solo rendition of the first verse.²⁵ They could also report considerable electoral progress in local government. By 1908 the party had 4 county councillors, 27 urban district councillors, 18 town councillors, 3 rural district councillors, 18 parish councillors and 29 poor law guardians in south Wales. There were also 5 full-time organisers employed in the region.²⁶ By November, when the south Wales ILP held its own annual conference, the number of branches had risen to 95, and it was estimated that the South Wales and West of England ILP Federation had organised 2,000 meetings in the first nine months of the year.²⁷ The Scots ILPer Willie Stewart spent a considerable part of 1908 and 1909 touring what he called ‘the huge maze’ of the south Wales valleys,²⁸ and he recorded his impressions of the ILP’s growth.

The facts are that the ILP is all over South Wales: that it is systematically establishing itself in every valley, and in every town and village in every valley. ... Here it may be weak, there it may be strong, *but it is there*. It has taken its grip and it will not let go. These branches are not isolated from each other. They are interdependent. They all hang together. For in every district there is to be found one man or more with a genius for organisation. ... And thus, bit by bit, Socialism gets a hold, not only of the minds of the people, but

²² *Llais Llafur*, 30 May 1908.

²³ *Labour Leader*, 24 January 1908.

²⁴ Independent Labour Party, *Report of 16th Annual Conference, Town Hall, Huddersfield, April 19th, 20th & 21st 1908*, ILP, London (1908).

²⁵ *Labour Leader*, 24 April 1908.

²⁶ Independent Labour Party, *Report of 16th Annual Conference*; Peter Stead, ‘Establishing a Heartland’, p. 17.

²⁷ *Labour Leader*, 20 November 1908. (Figures given in this article for ILP branches in the preceding years are: 1901, 7; 1902, 11; 1903, 20; 1904, 26; 1905, 34, 1907, 43 (no figure is given for 1906)).

²⁸ *Clarion*, 26 June 1908.

of the local government machinery. South Wales will shortly be administered by the ILP.²⁹

Some caution is required here. This was not the first time that socialists had celebrated the ‘awakening’ of Wales, and the boom of 1908 ultimately showed similar cyclical features to earlier periods of ILP growth. By 1910 the party was again contracting, and by only 36 branches were paying fees to the South Wales Divisional Council.³⁰ There was, however, a qualitative change in the dynamic of ILP growth after 1906. Even during the period of contraction after 1908, there remained strongholds in south Wales where the ILP was a permanent and vibrant feature. Briton Ferry, for example, hosted a particularly active ILP branch, which bucked the cyclical trend, and by 1912 was being held up in the *Labour Leader* as a national (UK) model of success.³¹ Even more significant, though, was the territorial expansion of the ILP beyond the seedbed of the coalfield. Some of this was generated from within south Wales itself. Horatio Bibbings, one of the full-time organisers, arranged a series of meetings at Brecon in 1908, for example, which led to an intense ‘free speech struggle’ with the local authority.³² In rural west Wales D.D. Walters led the way, although not without opposition. At a meeting in Brynson chapel at Abercych, Pembrokeshire in October 1908, for example, ‘fists were clenched and sticks were brandished’, and Walters only managed to avoid injury by the strength of his personality.³³

More promising was the emergence of an ILP movement in the quarrying and mining districts of north Wales. Activity resumed in the north Wales coalfield in 1906, with the establishment of branches at Wrexham and Rhosllannerchrugog, and by 1908 the movement was putting down roots in Caernarfonshire and Meirionnydd. An ILP branch was established at Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1908 with the declared aim of ‘*addysgu’r werin yn egwyddorion Sosialaeth*’.³⁴ A North Wales and Chester ILP

²⁹ *Clarion*, 4 June 1909.

³⁰ *Labour Leader*, 22 July 1910.

³¹ *Labour Leader*, 16 December 1912.

³² *Labour Leader*, 17 July & 18 September 1908; *Clarion*, 17 July 1908; *Llais Llafur*, 18 & 25 July & 19 September 1908.

³³ *Llais Llafur*, 24 October 1908.

³⁴ *Glorian*, 18 April 1908 (‘educating the common people in the principles of socialism’). Also see *Glorian*, 16 May 1908.

Federation was active by May 1908,³⁵ and during the year further socialist meetings were held in Bangor and Blaenau Ffestiniog.³⁶ Local leaders such as David Thomas and Robert Silyn Roberts began to take over the work of organising, and by the end of the decade there were ILP branches at Caernarfon, Llanrwst, Llandudno, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Llan Ffestiniog, Penrhyndeudraeth, Bangor, Llanllyfni, Portdinorwic, Llanberis, Penygroes, Talysarn and Harlech.³⁷ Indeed, during the last years of the decade, socialism well and truly entered the public sphere in north Wales.

Newspapers such as *Y Glorian* and *Yr Herald Cymraeg* carried extensive discussions on the topic. When, for example, the Reverend Stanley Jones preached a sermon on socialism at Capel Pendref, Caernarfon, in January 1908, and came to the conclusion that socialists were misguided, he sparked off a reaction in the press that continued more or less for the rest of the year.³⁸ That this was a reflection of what was happening at a community level is suggested by a cartoon published in *Yr Herald Cymraeg* in March, which shows a group of men sitting around a shoemaker, with the heading ‘*Senedd y Pentra – Dadl Sosialaeth yn ngweithdy’r crydd*’ (‘The Village Parliament – a debate on socialism in the cobbler’s workshop’).³⁹ The harvest predicted by *Llais Llafur* in 1903 was being reaped.

The growth of socialist activity in Wales in the period after 1906 was part of a national (UK) phenomenon. It was encouraged by the electoral success of the Labour Party, which, although not a socialist body itself, nevertheless directed attention towards socialism more generally. Extra momentum was added by the spectacular victory of Victor Grayson, standing as an out-and-out socialist, in the Colne Valley by-election of 1907,⁴⁰ and this was not without an impact upon Wales. Indeed, the socialism being preached in Wales by revivalist style orators such as the Rev. J. Stitt

³⁵ *Labour Leader*, 15 May 1908.

³⁶ *Clarion*, 12 June 1908.

³⁷ Cyril Parry, ‘The Independent Labour Party and Gwynedd Politics, 1900-1920’, *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (1968), pp. 47-66, pp. 52-53.

³⁸ The original report of the meeting is in *Herald Cymraeg*, 14 January 1908. Immediate reaction to Stanley Jones’ sermon is in *Herald Cymraeg*, 21 & 28 January 1908. The remainder of the year saw an extensive debate take place in *Herald Cymraeg* with David Thomas and J.R. Jones representing the socialists and Gwynedd Hughes, Llanberis, the individualists, *Herald Cymraeg*, 4 February – 22 September 1908.

³⁹ *Herald Cymraeg*, 24 March 1908.

⁴⁰ For Grayson see, David Clarke, *Labour’s Lost Leader: Victor Grayson*, Quartet, London (1985).

Wilson and his brother Ben, on their ‘Great Social Crusades’ of 1908 and 1909,⁴¹ had a great deal in common with the socialism of the Colne Valley. With the ‘new theology’ of R.J. Campbell as an important influence,⁴² it was built on the same nonconformist Christian foundations, and appealed to the same emotionalism that had been evident during the Welsh religious revival of 1904-5.⁴³ There were, moreover, direct links between the socialism of the valleys of Colne and south Wales. Victor Grayson himself visited Wales on several occasions,⁴⁴ as did some of his close supporters from the Colne Valley. T. Russell Williams, for example, who had contested Huddersfield (which was immediately to the north of the Colne Valley) in the 1906 general election, was a frequent speaker in south Wales.⁴⁵ So too were some of the nonconformist ministers whose support had been so important in securing Grayson’s victory. These included the Rev. W.B. Graham of Holmfirth, who, when he visited the Swansea Valley in 1908, urged his audiences to create a ‘socialist earthquake’ there.⁴⁶

Other speakers from the national (UK) movement also continued to come to Wales. These including John Bruce Glasier, Katharine Bruce Glasier, Margaret MacMillan, Margaret Bondfield, Mrs Despard, Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald, to

⁴¹ *Labour Leader*, 17 July, 21 August & 27 November 1908, 1 January, 9 & 23 July & 17 September 1909; *Llais Llafur*, 2 January 7 & 6 February 1909. The ‘crusades’ of the brothers Wilson often attracted hundreds to their meetings, which were accompanied by parades, teas and dancing. They were highly popular and generally supported by the ILP, although not without their critics, who accused Stitt Wilson of egotism and drawing energy away from the political side of the movement, see John Blunt in *Llais Llafur*, 13 February 1909.

⁴² Rev. R.J. Campbell, *The New Theology*, Chapman and Hall, London (1907). Campbell’s new theology was what he called a form of ‘spiritual socialism’, part of a ‘great social movement which is now taking place ... towards universal peace and brotherhood, and a better and fairer distribution of wealth’, and he considered it to be ‘the religious articulation of the social movement’ (*New Theology*, p. 14). Campbell, who was a friend of Keir Hardie, toured south Wales in 1907-8, see Christopher B. Turner, ‘Conflicts of Faith? Religion and Labour in Wales 1890-1914’, in Deian Hopkin & Gregory S. Kealey (eds.), *Class Community and the Labour Movement: Wales & Canada 1850-1930*, Llafur / CCLH (1989), pp. 67-85, pp. 73-4. Among the many who were impressed by Campbell’s ideas and the feelings that overlapped with the Religious Revival of 1904-5 was James Griffiths, see James Griffiths, *Pages From Memory*, Dent & Sons, London (1969), pp. 11-12. Tickets for Campbell’s meetings were often sold out on the day of issue, see *Llais Llafur*, 2 May 1908.

⁴³ D. Densil Morgan, ‘Diwygiad Crefyddol 1904-5’, *Cof Cenedl*, XX (2005), pp. 167-200.

⁴⁴ James Griffiths, *Pages From Memory*, p. 16 recounts Grayson’s visit to Brynaman in 1908. True to his contradictory personality, Grayson shocked the local (teetotal) ILPers by asking to be taken to a bar after his address so that he could get a drink of whisky. It took a visit from the Wilson brothers to restore Griffiths’ faith in socialist ‘stars’.

⁴⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 28 March 1908, 2 January 1909; *Labour Leader*, 26 May 1911; *Pioneer* 18 March 1911. For Russell Williams’ views on south Wales and the ILP there see *Swansea and District Workers Journal*, February 1912.

⁴⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 6 June 1908. Also see *Llais Llafur*, 30 January 1909. For Graham, who was the most prominent of the clergymen who helped Grayson to victory, see Clarke, *Victor Grayson*, p. 36.

mention just a few of the more prominent names.⁴⁷ At any single, active branch there could be an almost constant throughflow of speakers from the wider socialist movement. During 1908, for example, the Penygraig ILP branch in the Rhondda hosted visits from Alderman Hartley of Bradford, Dora Montefiore, Katharine Bruce Glasier, Alderman Sanders of London County Council and the Rev. W.B. Graham of the Colne Valley.⁴⁸ Although the south continued to be the main destination for socialist speakers coming to Wales, the number of visits to north Wales began to increase too. James Parker, the Labour MP for Halifax, spoke to a large meeting at Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1908, to which a local silver band accompanied him.⁴⁹ Philip Snowden spoke both at Wrexham,⁵⁰ and at the quarrymen's *Gwyl Llafur* at Caernarfon in 1909.⁵¹ The Fabian Society organised a series of lectures in north Wales towns, by Clifford Sharp, also in 1909.⁵² Thus the interplay between Wales and the wider movement both intensified and broadened. Keir Hardie, of course, continued to be the central and most important influence; part property of south Wales and part property of the national (UK) movement, the 'G.O.M. of Labour'⁵³ stood as a living symbol of the connection between the Welsh socialist movement and a greater whole. He frequently toured south Wales, but also began to play an increasing role in the north. In March 1907, for example, he spoke at Wrexham,⁵⁴ and in 1913 he spoke at Bethesda.⁵⁵ One of his more unusual speaking engagements, perhaps, was a speech to the Literary and Debating Society at Bangor University College in 1911. The 'tremendous ovation' he received there, and the way in which he 'won the respect, and, so to speak, gained the friendship of his hearers' - who considered themselves to

⁴⁷ E.g. *Llais Llafur*, 15 January 1908 (John Bruce Glasier at Cardiff), *Llais Llafur*, 23 May 1908 (Margaret Bondfield & Mrs. Despard in south Wales), *Llais Llafur* (Katharine Bruce Glasier at Ferndale), *Llais Llafur*, 13 February 1909 (Margaret MacMillan and Katharine Bruce Glasier in the Swansea Valley); *Labour Leader*, 15 February 1909 (Philip Snowden at Cardiff); *Labour Leader*, 19 February 1909 (John Bruce Glasier at Briton Ferry), *Labour Leader*, 12 November 1909 (John Bruce Glasier at Cardiff), *Labour Leader* 17 October 1911 (Katharine Bruce Glasier at Briton Ferry and Philip Snowden at Cardiff); *Labour Leader*, 22 December 1911 (Ramsay MacDonald in Swansea).

⁴⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 30 January 1909.

⁴⁹ *Herald Cymraeg*, 29 September 1909; *Glorian*, 26 September 1908.

⁵⁰ *Labour Leader*, 15 January 1909.

⁵¹ *Herald Cymraeg*, 11 May 1909; *Glorian*, 8 May 1909.

⁵² *Herald Cymraeg*, 23 February 1909.

⁵³ *Labour Leader*, 28 January 1910 ('Grand Old Man' – appropriating the sobriquet of William Gladstone).

⁵⁴ *Herald Cymraeg*, 26 March 1907.

⁵⁵ Bangor MS 19301 (Scrapbook of meetings in which David Thomas played a part) contains a report of this meeting.

be 'the leaders of the future' - confirmed his status as the primary representative of socialism in Wales, and the myth continued to grow.⁵⁶

Another sign of socialist advance in Wales was the launch of a number of new, local socialist newspapers. Some of the Welsh Liberal newspapers, particularly *Y Genedl Gymreig*, *Yr Herald Cymraeg* and *Y Glorian* had shown an increasing sympathy to some of the more moderate socialist ideas during the course of the decade, but until 1911 the number of explicitly socialist newspapers in Wales was small indeed. The Swansea Trades Council's *Swansea and District Workers' Journal* continued to show distinct sympathy towards socialist politics, and *Llais Llafur* continued to provide a strongly socialist and bilingual voice, despite the death of its founder, Ebenezer Rees, in 1908.⁵⁷ The coverage of Welsh affairs in national (UK) socialist papers, particularly the *Labour Leader*, also increased significantly. Early in the new decade, though, the range of local Welsh socialist papers was considerably enhanced. In March 1911, the launch of the *Pioneer* at Merthyr realised the long standing ambitions of the labour activists there to have a paper of their own.⁵⁸ It was welcomed by local socialists as 'a paper that will keep us in touch with the doings of the Labour Party, both local and national',⁵⁹ and it practised an editorial policy not unlike that of *Llais Llafur* - of mixing labour and socialist politics with local news, including a football column. The *Pioneer*, of course, also provided Keir Hardie with a highly efficient means of reporting his national (UK) activities back to his local constituency, and so another channel was added to the ongoing interplay between Wales and the British socialist movement.

1911 also saw the launch of the monthly *Rhondda Socialist*. Produced and distributed entirely by voluntary effort, the 'Bomb', as it was affectionately known, aimed to provide 'a real educative medium' for the workers of the Rhondda,⁶⁰ and by March 1912, with a claimed circulation of 6,000, it was being produced every other week. It survived only until 1913, when it was incorporated into the *South Wales Worker*, but during this relatively brief period, it mixed news of the ILP with articles on literature

⁵⁶ *Magazine of the University College of North Wales*, Vol. XX, No. 3 (June 1911), pp. 44-46.

⁵⁷ *Llais Llafur*, 10 October 1908.

⁵⁸ Deian Hopkin, 'The Merthyr Pioneer 1911-22', *Llafur*, Vol. 2 No. 4 (1979), pp. 54-64.

⁵⁹ *Pioneer*, 18 March 1911.

⁶⁰ *Rhondda Socialist*, September 1911.

and economics, and it also provided a forum for a debate on the relative merits of syndicalism and political action. Both the *Pioneer* and the *Rhondda Socialist* published sections in Welsh, which dealt with issues deemed to be of interest to Welsh speaking readers. Of a different character entirely, though, was the *Dinesydd Cymreig*, launched in 1912 at Caernarfon. The paper was founded by striking printers,⁶¹ and by July it had been adopted as the official organ of the North Wales Quarrymen's Union.⁶² Given the explicitly socialist nature of much of its content, this was an indication of just how far opinion among the quarrymen had moved to the left since the Penrhyn dispute. The *Dinesydd* was not bilingual, it was an entirely Welsh medium newspaper, and by September 1912 it was declaring its national (Welsh) aspirations by claiming to be '*Arweinydd Gwerin Cymru*' (The Leader of the Welsh Common People).⁶³ Like the *Pioneer*, *Y Dinesydd* was not formally allied to any individual political group or party; unlike the *Pioneer*, though, it was respectful of radical Liberalism, and sought to build upon radical Liberal traditions. The differing tones of these newspapers represented different shades of socialism that were developing as a result of differing local conditions. They were nevertheless unmistakably part of the same movement.

This apparent upsurge in socialism was met in Wales, as was the case across Britain, by an intense reaction. By the end of the decade the Anti-Socialist Union was co-ordinating what it called 'a great national movement on purely Anti-Socialist lines' across the UK,⁶⁴ and it tailored this campaign to Wales by having at least one of its tracts, *Socialism and the Family* (which argued that socialism would destroy family life) published in Welsh as *Sosialaeth â'r Teulu*.⁶⁵ More effective in Wales than the largely Conservative ASU, though, was the generally hostile attitude of the chapels.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Picton Davies, *Atgofion Dyn Papur Newydd*, Gwasg Y Brython, Liverpool (1962), pp. 129-133; Aled Jones, *Press, Politics and Society*, pp. 140-141.

⁶² *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 3 July 1912.

⁶³ *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 11 September 1912.

⁶⁴ Anti-Socialist Union of Great Britain, *Statement of Objects, Policy and Work* (1910), David Thomas Papers, Box 1, National Library of Wales; Also see material relating to Anti-Socialist Union in the Merthyr election of January 1910, DXEV/6, Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff.

⁶⁵ Ernest E. Williams, *Sosialaeth â'r Teulu*, (Authorised Translation by H. Powell Hughes), Anti-Socialist Union, London (1910).

⁶⁶ Some care is needed here, and the discussion should be considered in the light of the comments above on the revivalism of Stitt Wilson etc., and also the comments below regarding the likes of T.E. Nicholas and Silyn Roberts. Although socialists strongly believed that the chapels were hostile to their cause, and in the majority of cases they were correct, the situation was in fact more complex, and opinion within nonconformity was divided. See Robert Pope, *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity*

This worked on several levels. At the community level moral censure could be a highly effective means of retarding socialism. When William Phippen contested a Rhondda council seat in 1908, for example, the pavements were chalked with ‘Don’t vote for William Phippen because he believes in free love’. Seventy years later, moreover, his daughter recalled that the local chapel (Bodringarth) expelled its members if they joined the ILP.⁶⁷ This was by no means an isolated incident. Socialists were frequently denied the use of chapel premises, and this applied even when they were hosting Christian ministers. Briton Ferry ILP, for example, was refused the use of the local chapels when it hosted a visit from R.J. Campbell in 1908.⁶⁸ This was also the case when another ‘new theologian’, T. Rhondda Williams (a Welsh Congregationalist minister at Bradford) visited south Wales at the same time.⁶⁹ For ministers within Wales who were sympathetic to socialism the consequences could be serious. When it was alleged, for example, that the Rev. R.W. Hughes of Moeltryfan in Caernarfonshire had chaired a meeting at which an ‘anti-Christian’ socialist had spoken, he was ostracised by the deacons of Capel Pendref, Caernarfon, and prevented from preaching there.⁷⁰ The Rev. George Neighbour of Nazareth Baptist Chapel at Mountain Ash was forced out of his ministry altogether in 1907, after refusing to sign an agreement with the deacons that he would not preach socialism from the pulpit, and he ended up establishing his own ‘Brotherhood Church’ instead.⁷¹

The clash between nonconformity and socialism that was taking place in communities across Wales was reflected by an intense debate at a national (Welsh) level. Some ministers went to the lengths of having their thoughts on the matter published as

Labour and the Social Question in Wales, 1906-1939, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1998); Robert Pope, ‘“Pilgrims Through a Barren Land”: Nonconformists and Socialists in Wales 1906-1914’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (New Series), 7 (2001), pp. 149-163; Robert Pope, ‘Facing the Dawn: Socialists, Nonconformists and *Llais Llafur* 1906-1914’, *Llafur*, Vol. 7 (1998-9), pp. 77-87; Christopher B. Turner, ‘Conflicts of Faith? Religion and Labour in Wales 1890-1914’; R. Tudur Jones, *Ffydd ac Argyfwng Cenedl: Hanes Crefydd yng Nghymru 1890-1914*, John Penry Press, Swansea (1982), pp. 265-271.

⁶⁷ Mr & Mrs D.J. Davies, Ystrad, Rhondda, interviewed by Hywel Francis 14 October 1974, AUD394, Tape No. 181, South Wales Miners Library.

⁶⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 18 April 1908.

⁶⁹ Christopher B. Turner, ‘Conflicts of Faith? Religion and Labour in Wales’, p. 74.

⁷⁰ *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 18 February 1914.

⁷¹ Christopher B. Turner, ‘Conflicts of Faith? Religion and Labour in Wales’, p. 75.

pamphlets, so that they could gain a wider audience,⁷² but it was in the pages of nationalist journals such as *Y Geninen*, and in the denominational press that the debate was most fully rehearsed. There is not space here to enter the labyrinthine world of Welsh denominational discourse on socialism,⁷³ except to note that a huge amount of intellectual energy was expended in the years from 1906 to the Great War upon a detailed consideration of such topics as the putative socialism of Jesus Christ, the relative merits of individual and social salvation, the relative roles of environment and spirituality in the making of human character and a host of other related theological topics. Much of this debate, which represented one of the primary interfaces between Welsh intellectual culture and socialism, was conducted in a thoughtful and reasonable manner, and it is certainly the case that many ministers of religion experienced considerable spiritual concern over the apparent estrangement from the chapels of the socialistically inclined among their congregations.

Less reasonable in tone was the work of the anti-socialist cheerleader of Welsh nonconformity, W.F. Phillips. Originally from Penmaenmawr, Caernarfonshire, Phillips was a Methodist minister and Oxford academic, who had allegedly once been a member of the ILP himself.⁷⁴ He poured scorn – both in print and in person – on socialism and socialists, which he considered to be both anti-Christian and anti-Welsh. His personality, its considerable instability notwithstanding, provided a link between the national debate and the localities, as he toured Wales debating his views with all-comers.⁷⁵ The appearances of ‘Willie’, as he was derisively called by the socialists, were fiercely contested by them, both in print and in person. T.E. Nicholas of Glais in the Swansea Valley responded to his article in the press,⁷⁶ while his

⁷² For two examples that give different sides of the argument see Parch. W. Price (Caerdybi), “*Sosialaeth*”: *A Ddylid ei Chefnogi?*, J.R. Edwards, Holyhead (1908), which started life as a paper given to the Hebron Literary Society, Holyhead, and argues that the churches have no need to embrace socialism because they offer a superior teaching, and J. Morgan Jones MA, *Religion and Socialism*, Southey & Sons, Merthyr (1910), which was a series of addresses given at Hope Church, Merthyr, and argues for a reconciliation between socialism and christianity.

⁷³ This has been explored in detail by Robert Pope. In particular, see *Building Jerusalem*, pp. 31-71.

⁷⁴ Robert Pope, *Building Jerusalem*, pp. 62-65.

⁷⁵ E.g. see, *Is Socialism Anti-Christian in its Tendency?: Debate Between Mr. W.F. Phillips and Professor W.T. Mills at the Workmen’s Hall, Nantymoel, Verbatim Report from the Shorthand Notes of George Thomas* (no date, no place of publication (c. 1910)). A series of Phillip’s articles on socialism, from *Y Geninen* were reprinted as W.F. Phillips, *Y Ddraig Goch ynte r’Fanner Goch? Ac Erthyglau Eraill*, Rees Electric Press, Caerdydd (1913).

⁷⁶ T.E. Nicholas, ‘Y Ddraig Goch a r’Fanner Goch: Cenedlaetholdeb a Sosialaeth’, *Geninen* (1912), pp. 10-16.

meetings frequently met with a hostile reaction. One of his appearances, at Abercynon in 1911, for example, was swamped by socialists, who repeatedly heckled him, forcing him to wander from his subject, until he eventually responded with insults. ‘The meeting, which had been a farce from the beginning, terminated in uproar’, recorded the *Merthyr Pioneer*.⁷⁷ On the whole, however, socialists attempted to maintain a more neutral attitude towards the chapels. As Horatio Bibbings put it at a meeting in Trecynon in 1908, they ‘had no quarrel with the churches except that they were impatient of the slowness of the coming of the Kingdom and the apathy of so many church members in helping it forward’.⁷⁸ Indeed, to many socialists there was no apparent clash between the message of the chapels and the cause of socialism. Cliff Prothero, who came to socialism as a young man in the years immediately before the Great War, later reflected ‘I have no regret that I had to attend chapel so often because it gave me a firm foundation and an outlook on life which I have been able to link up with the kind of Socialism which I have attempted to follow and accept as a way of life’.⁷⁹ The dichotomy between the views of W.F. Phillips and some of the more materialistic socialists was, therefore, only one end of a wide spectrum.

At the centre of this spectrum, as was the case with most other aspects of the discourse on socialism in Wales, was the figure of Keir Hardie. Hardie realised well the importance of the chapels in Welsh politics, and he sought to demonstrate that he was on good terms with them very early in his career at Merthyr Boroughs. ‘He had’, the *Labour Leader* emphasised in 1901, ‘during the short time he had represented the Merthyr Boroughs received more appeals for help from churches and chapels than during the three and a half years he represented West Ham’.⁸⁰ Hardie’s socialism, of course, contained very large elements of religious feeling, and like other ‘ethical socialists’, although he sometimes used harsh words against the practice of the churches, his strategy was to subvert the principle of organised Christianity rather than deny the need for its existence. His pamphlet *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* did this, for example, by intertwining spiritual and materialist discourse. By arguing that the economic position of the working class made it difficult for them to practice anything other than Christian morality he associated

⁷⁷ *Pioneer*, 3 June 1911.

⁷⁸ *Llais Llafur*, 25 January 1908.

⁷⁹ Cliff Prothero, *Recount*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Labour Leader*, 9 March 1901.

Christianity with asceticism, and by implication with socialism. ‘The direct outcome of the teachings of Jesus upon those who lived nearest to His time, and who became His followers, was to make them Communists’, he argued, and socialism was merely ‘the application to industry of the teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount’.⁸¹ This approach clearly attracted attention in Wales, and *Can a Man Be a Christian* was the best selling pamphlet on the Merthyr ILP market stall (which was, incidentally, the stall with the best sales figures in the UK).⁸² It also led him into conflict with local nonconformist leaders,⁸³ and, in 1911, as the debate intensified, Hardie set out his position in the pages of the *Pioneer*. His challenging, autobiographical, almost confessional, ‘Open Letter to the Ministers of the Gospel in Merthyr Boroughs’ extended a direct challenge to the local (and by implication national) nonconformist ministers to embrace socialism or face extinction.⁸⁴ At the same time, however, Hardie claimed that ‘it was Christianity which led me into Socialism, and now Socialism enables me to understand Christianity. To me they are the complements of one complete whole’.⁸⁵ All this was too much for W.F. Phillips, who wrote his own ‘Open Letter’ to Keir Hardie, pointedly in Welsh, so that Hardie could not read it.⁸⁶

The debate over socialism and religion was of course not unique to Wales. In Wales, however, it was tied up with the issue of Welsh identity, and so formed part of a wider challenge for Welsh socialists. In the same way that they sought to subvert the power of the chapels, they sought to appropriate the politics of Welsh nationalism. This demanded a rationalisation of the relationship between national sentiment and socialism that was frequently achieved by drawing a distinction between ‘spurious nationalism’ and ‘true nationalism’ - a common device among socialists in many nations.⁸⁷ One contributor to the *Pioneer* demonstrated an acute awareness of the over-arching tension between the universal, the national and the local, that an adherence to socialism implied.

⁸¹ James Keir Hardie, *Can A Man Be A Christian on a Pound a Week?*, Labour Leader, London & Galsgow, n.d. (1901), pp. 9, 11.

⁸² W.J. Edwards, *From the Valley I Came*, p. 123.

⁸³ E.g. see *Merthyr Express*, 20 January 1906, which reports Hardie being refused the use of Pontmorlais Methodist Chapel.

⁸⁴ *Pioneer*, 13 & 27 May, 10 & 17 June 1911.

⁸⁵ *Pioneer*, 13 May 1911.

⁸⁶ *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 17 August – 7 September 1911.

⁸⁷ E.g. in notes by the ‘Ferret’, *Pioneer*, 15 April 1911 & R.T. Evans, *Pioneer*, 6 May 1911.

Labour and Socialist societies are in the nature of things cosmopolitan in tendencies and sympathies, but the cosmopolitan aspect is only the obverse side of human society, and unless a corrective is supplied the cosmopolitan spirit tends to become diffuse and ineffective. The needful correction is supplied by national sentiment (and this national aspect is the reverse side of human society), which merely guarantees that charity shall begin at home, although, of course, it need not necessarily end there.⁸⁸

Socialists used various vehicles to achieve this ‘needful correction’. Hardie, for example, used the Investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1911 to make distinctly nationalist political capital,⁸⁹ and declared that he wished to see ‘the red dragon of Wales ... emblazoned on the red flag of socialism’.⁹⁰ In his speeches he pushed the concept of identification with his audiences to the limit, in an attempt to demonstrate his patriotic sympathies. In 1910, for example, he told audiences around Merthyr Boroughs that ‘I too, like yourselves, am a Celt, with all the love of the homeland, its language and its literature which every true Celt feels. I love the common people to whom I belong. I am one of yourselves. *Yr wyf yn un o honoch chwi*’.⁹¹ On a collective level too, the South Wales Divisional Council of the ILP passed several resolutions declaring that socialism was not antagonistic to Welsh nationalism.⁹²

By the second half of the decade, moreover, concessions to Welsh national sentiment were also becoming evident in the wider political culture of socialism in Wales. One example of this was the innovation of socialist *eisteddfodau*. Socialists had been known to harbour mixed feelings about the *eisteddfod*. The competitive element was a problem to some (R.J. Derfel included), and others alleged that the institution was corrupt. It was even argued in *Llais Llafur* in 1899 that Wales would be better off without the national *Eisteddfod*.⁹³ By the second half of the decade, however, ILP branches were beginning to hold their own *eisteddfodau*. Pontardawe ILP held what

⁸⁸ *Pioneer*, 1 April 1911.

⁸⁹ John S. Ellis, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales, 1911-1969*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2008), pp. 115-124.

⁹⁰ *Pioneer*, 14 October 1911.

⁹¹ Keir Hardie, handwritten notes for speech, 1910. ILP Organisational and Regional Records, 1856-1955 (Reel 23). (‘I am one of you’).

⁹² *Labour Leader*, 17 June 1910 & 10 March 1911.

⁹³ *Llais Llafur*, 18 February 1899.

was advertised as its second annual *eisteddfod* in the Rechabites' Hall, Pontardawe in September 1908. Mixed choirs competed for a first prize of £3 and an enlarged photograph of their successful conductor, by singing the 'Marseillaise', which they could do in either English or Welsh.⁹⁴ Another Annual ILP *Eisteddfod* was launched at Mountain Ash in March 1909.⁹⁵ Prizes were awarded for English and Welsh essays, and a prize winning *arwrgerdd*, written by a coal trimmer from Barry Dock, was published in both its original Welsh, and in English translation. The subject of its 18 stanzas and more than 200 lines of epic verse was, of course,

Keir Hardie! Pwy a gân ei fywyd ef
 Heb roi i'r arwr ei rydeddus le
 Yn ngherdd ei wlad – han aig barddoniaeth wir –
 A'i golli ynddynt fel y Nef yn Nuw?⁹⁶

The extent to which these events marked the ILP's establishment as a bastion of Welsh culture is however questionable. The advertising material and press notices of both events were in English only, and the cultural content also seems to have been overwhelmingly English in nature. At Mountain Ash only one out of the ten musical test pieces was Welsh; 'Chwi Fawrion y Ddaear' sat rather incongruously among pieces such as 'Autumn Memories', 'Lusitania', 'A Chartists' Chorus' and 'Revolution'.⁹⁷

Indeed, it might be argued that such events amounted to tokenism, and that as far as most ILPers were concerned deference towards Welsh national feeling was more of a political strategy than a genuinely held belief. Observance of what were perceived as

⁹⁴ *Llais Llafur*, 8 August & 19 September 1908.

⁹⁵ *Programme of First Annual ILP Eisteddfod, Workmen's Institute, Mountain Ash, Friday 22 March 1909*, SWCC SC653, Swansea University Archive. The event's claim to be the first seems to have been incorrect.

⁹⁶ 'Abou Ben Adhem', *J. Keir Hardie A.S. Arwrgerdd Fuddugol, Eisteddfod Gadeiriol, P.A.Ll., Aberpennar (1909)*, Saunders Printers, Mountain Ash (1909), Keir Hardie Papers, ILP Organisational and Regional Records 1856-1955, ILP Archive; Daniel Owen (Ap Rhydderch), *Keir Hardie MP: The Prize Epic at the Mountain Ash ILP Eisteddfod, March 22 1909, ILP, Mountain Ash (1909)*. ('Keir Hardie! Who shall sing his life and work/Withholding from the hero his honoured place/In song – true poetry's ancient ocean wide -/And lose him in it as the heavens in God?'); *Labour Leader*, 26 March 1909.

⁹⁷ For a more detailed examination, which takes the discussion beyond the period of the Great War see Deian Hopkin, 'Llafur a'r Diwylliant Cymreig 1900-1940', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (New Series), Vol. 7 (2001), pp. 128-148.

harmless Welsh customs was one thing, but when it came to hard politics it is likely that the majority of socialists in Wales would have shared the view of the author of an 'Open Letter to a Welsh Nationalist', published in the *Pioneer* in 1911:

Tush, man, your Nationalism is not Nationalism if it does not make for the uplifting of the masses, the betterment of people's lives, rather than the embitterment of them. ... You, my Welsh comrade, have no grievance which is not shared by your comrades on the other side of Offa's Dyke, and by your Scotch and Irish comrades, too. ... The national question of Germany, of Russia, of France, of Spain; and, indeed, of England and even of Wales, has been discovered to be an international one after all'.⁹⁸

(ii). The Struggle for a Welsh Socialist Consciousness

I am a congregationalist minister, and am 31 years of age, have won 18 bardic chairs, and have published a book of poems on Socialism, called *Salmau'r Werin*. ... So you will understand why I am a great admirer of your late father [R.J. Derfel]. ... I would love to have his photo to put on my desk, to keep company to a few Labour Poets which I already have there. ... I have made up my mind that the memory of so strong a man shall be kept green for a long time, and will do my best to bring the life-story and life-work of the great Pioneer before the young Comrades of Wales.⁹⁹

In a way I have taken up a part of his great work. He died in Dec. 1905. And I wrote my first Labour Poem in January 1906. Since then I have written hundreds. ... He sang in the night, I sing to day in the light of the Day he made possible.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Pioneer*, 13 May 1911.

⁹⁹ T.E. Nicholas to Edward M. Derfel, 5 May 1911, T.J. Roberts Papers, NLW MS 23452 D, National Library of Wales.

¹⁰⁰ T.E. Nicholas to Jane Derfel, 24 May 1911, T.J. Roberts Papers, NLW MS 23452 D, National Library of Wales.

So wrote Thomas Evan Nicholas ('Niclas y Glais'), minister of Capel Sion at Glais in the Swansea Valley, to two of R.J. Derfel's children in 1911. That Nicholas could think of including an explicitly Welsh socialist voice among the influences represented by the photographs on his desk was testimony to Derfel's achievement. Nicholas exemplified those who, by seeking to build upon Derfel's legacy and create a distinctively Welsh form of socialism, dissented from the majority view within Welsh socialism in the period after 1906. They included socialists from all parts of Wales, and formed an identifiable group, in that, as Deian Hopkin has put it, '*Cymru, ac nid y byd, oedd canolbwynt eu sosialaeth*'.¹⁰¹ For want of a better term, they might be referred to as 'culturally Welsh socialists'. Prominent among them were David Thomas of Talysarn, Caernarfonshire and Robert Silyn Roberts of Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, who between them played a critical role in building up the ILP in north Wales. Some, like D.D. Walters at Newcastle Emlyn, had been active within the socialist movement before 1906, but most were members of a new generation, born in the late-nineteenth century, who had discovered socialism around or after the turn of the twentieth. They shared a common aim to achieve, in the words of David Thomas, 'the presentation of Socialism in a Welsh dress', meaning 'not only teaching Socialism to speak the Welsh language, but also saturating it with the history and traditions of the Welsh democracy'.¹⁰²

Most of the members of this group had roots in the working class, or more accurately *y werin*: Silyn Roberts worked as a quarryman in Caernarfonshire for five years after leaving school at 14;¹⁰³ David Thomas was the son of a stone mason;¹⁰⁴ and T.E. Nicholas was brought up on a small upland tenant farm in Pembrokeshire.¹⁰⁵ In

¹⁰¹ Deian Hopkin, 'Y Werin a'i Theyrnas: Ymateb Sosialaeth i Genedlaetholdeb, 1880-1920', *Cof Cenedl*, VI (1991), pp.162-192, p.165 ('Wales, and not the world, was the focus of their socialism').

¹⁰² David Thomas, 'Wales and the Politics of the Future', Typescript, David Thomas Papers, Box 3, National Library of Wales. Also see *Labour Leader*, 12 September 1912.

¹⁰³ David Thomas, *Silyn (Robert Silyn Roberts) 1871-1930*, Gwasg Y Brython, Liverpool (1956), pp. 6-11.

¹⁰⁴ David Thomas, *Diolch Am Gael Byw, Rhai o F'Atgofion*, Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, Liverpool (1968), p. 1. For David Thomas's full biography see Angharad Tomos, 'Bywyd a Gwaith David Thomas, 1880-1967', Unpublished M Phil Thesis, Aberystwyth (2000) (Published as *Hiraeth am y Fory: David Thomas a Mudiad Llafur Gogledd Cymru*, Gomer, Llandysul (2002)).

¹⁰⁵ '*Lle moel, digoed a digysgod ... Perthynai'r tir i foneddigion pell a ddeuai ddwy waith y flwyddyn i gasglu'r rhent*' ('A bare, treeless, shadeless place ... The land belonged to distant aristocrats that would come twice a year to collect the rent'). T.E. Nicholas, Typescript of Reminiscences, Bangor MS 23359, Bangor University Archive. For more biographical information on T.E. Nicholas see, Siân Howys Williams, 'Bywyd a Gwaith T.E. Nicholas 1879-1971', Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Bangor (1985); David Howell, *Nicholas of Glais, The People's Champion*, Clydach Historical Society,

almost every case, though, they had risen socially to occupy professional positions, and in this sense they represented a Welsh socialist elite. David Thomas was a schoolteacher, as was Edgar Chapell of the Swansea Socialist Society.¹⁰⁶ Thomas Jones, who had accompanied the *Clarion* van tours in the late 1890s and in 1909 advocated the creation of a Welsh Labour Party, was a university professor.¹⁰⁷ Members of the Welsh literati were also prominent, John Jenkins ('Gwili'), who had delighted the audiences at Bangor University debates in the 1890s, went on to teach, and ultimately head Gwynfryn Academy at Ammanford, where he continued to advocate socialism and *Iawnderau Dyn* (The Rights of Man).¹⁰⁸ Another advocate was Thomas Gwynn Jones, winner of the 1902 Bangor *Eisteddfod* chair. Most numerous among this group, though, were the nonconformist ministers. Among the most prominent, T.E. Nicholas and D.D. Walters were Congregationalists, and Silyn Roberts was the Methodist minister of several chapels in the Blaenau Ffestiniog district.¹⁰⁹ To this core group a multitude of names may be added, including John Puleston Jones, Calvinistic Methodist minister at Dinorwig, George Neighbour of Mountain Ash, David Gwynfryn Jones of Flint and R.W. Hughes of Moeltryfan, Caernarfonshire.¹¹⁰ Together they represented an alternative face of Welsh nonconformism to the hostile one exemplified by W.F. Phillips. Socialists may have believed that the chapels were overwhelmingly hostile to their movement, and on the whole they may well have been right, yet it is equally true that without the input of such nonconformist ministers the indigenous Welsh socialist leadership would have been seriously denuded of both talent and credibility.

Clydach (1991); J. Roose Williams (ed.), *T.E. Nicholas: Proffwyd Sosialaeth a Bardd Gwrthryfel: Teyrnged Gwerin Cymru*, Welsh Committee of the Communist Party, Cardiff (1971); Islwyn Pritchard, 'Thomas Evan Nicholas', in D. Ben Rees (ed.), *Herio'r Byd*, Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, Liverpool (1980), pp. 16-22, and other material cited in the bibliography.

¹⁰⁶ Although he wrote almost exclusively for the socialist press in English, Chappell (the son of a shoemaker) became increasingly interested in harmonising socialism with Welsh national feeling in the period after 1906, and may be considered a member of this group. See *Llais Llafur*, 30 May 1908 & *Labour Leader*, 20 May & 26 August 1910.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Jones, 'Y Mudiad Llafur yng Nghymru', *Cerrig Milltir*, Llyfrau'r Dryw, Llandybie (1942), pp. 7-21. For Jones' life see, E.L. Ellis, *T.J.: A Life of Dr. Thomas Jones CH*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1992).

¹⁰⁸ E. Cefni Jones, *Gwili: Cofiant a Phregethu*, Gwasg Gomer, Llandysul (1937), see esp. 151-155 for his relationship to the labour movement; John Gwili Jenkins, 'Iawnderau Dyn', *Geninen*, 1912-1914; J. Beverley Smith, 'John Gwili Jenkins, 1872-1936', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1974-5), pp. 191-214.

¹⁰⁹ David Thomas, *Silyn*, pp. 53-65.

¹¹⁰ E. Morgan Humphries, *Gwyr Enwog Gynt*, Gwasg Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth (1953), pp. 40-48 (for Pulestin Jones); Ivor Thomas Rees, 'David Gwynfryn Jones: Methodist, Socialist, Welshman', *Llafur*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2009), pp. 101-116.

A second observation about this group is, on the face of it, almost too obvious to need stating; that its members were steeped in Welsh culture and the Welsh language. David Thomas, Silyn Roberts, T.E. Nicholas and T. Gwynn Jones, for instance, were all either regular *eisteddfod* winners or adjudicators. Their cultural world was created, in differing measures, by the influences of the *aelwyd werinol Gymreig*, the chapel, the literary and debating society and institutions like Watcyn Wyn's Gwynfryn Academy. This is obviously what made them distinctive among socialists, and what led them to pursue the creation of a distinctive Welsh socialism. There is, however, a paradox here. The primary medium of their culture may have been different to that of the mainstream British socialists, but its content had significant similarities, in that it shared a similar romantic heritage. All of these individuals were bilingual, and well-read in the radical-romantic canon of the English language,¹¹¹ but there was also a unity in the content of their culture that crossed the linguistic divide. The Welsh Arthurian romanticism of Silyn Roberts or T. Gwynn Jones,¹¹² for instance, had a great deal in common with the English romanticism of William Morris. Likewise, the pastoralism of R.J. Derfel's pre-socialist poetry, would have been as in sympathy with the sensibilities of the young John Bruce Glasier, as it was popular with Derfel's audiences of *eisteddfodwyr*.¹¹³ Indeed, a significant part of the anti-capitalist revolt of the culturally Welsh socialists was driven by the same romantic impulse as that of any other socialist, and in this sense there was as much in their cultural world view that united them with the mainstream of British socialist thought as divided them. This translated easily into their poeticism, and the same elements may be seen in both English language and Welsh language socialist poetry of this period. The themes and imagery in the work of Derfel and Nicholas – the breaking dawns, coming days and

¹¹¹ For example, see the notebooks kept by the young David Thomas, which reveal a wide range of English influences, including Wordsworth, Dickens, H.G. Wells, George Elliot, Conrad and many others, Bangor MS 18958 & 18961.

¹¹² Robert Silyn Roberts, *Trystan ac Esyllt a Chaniadau Eraill*, Jarvis & Foster, Bangor (1904); T. Gwynn Jones, *Ymadawiad Arthur a Chaniadau Ereill*, Cymni y Cyhoeddwyr Cymreig, Caernarfon (1910).

¹¹³ For a discussion of Glasier's poeticism see Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, pp. 141-149. What Pierson calls 'the poetic impulse in British socialism' clearly did not stop at linguistic boundaries.

transient working class suffering – are more or less identical, for example, to those in the work of authors like William Morris or J.L. Joynes.¹¹⁴

As with all socialists, the individuals in this group were converted to socialism by a multiplicity of factors working simultaneously. The role of socialist literature was, of course, important. In Derfel's case, as already discussed, it was the work of Robert Owen, although for the following generation it was most often Robert Blatchford that provided the active intellectual ingredient. T. Gwynn Jones, for example, discovered Blatchford while working as a columnist for *Y Faner* in Liverpool in the 1890s,¹¹⁵ and David Thomas was set on the road to socialism when he was given a copy of *Merrie England* at a *Cymru Fydd* meeting in 1895.¹¹⁶ The atmosphere of the literary and debating society was also often a key influence.¹¹⁷ A common factor, however, in the personal evolution of many of the socialists under discussion here – and this is surely the key to an understanding of not just their socialism, but of their need to combine it with a strong sense of national identity – was an experience of geographical dislocation. T.E. Nicholas, for example, moved from the tightly-knit rural community of north Pembrokeshire, via Treherbert in the Rhondda and Dodgeville in America, before returning to Glais, in the Swansea valley, where, in the memorable description given by Gwenallt, industrialism had changed even the pattern of the seasons.¹¹⁸ The juxtaposition of rampant industrial capitalism upon the elements already developed in Nicholas's personality by his upbringing and his time at the Gwynfryn Academy quickly turned him towards socialism, but it also confirmed the strength of his Welsh identity.¹¹⁹

David Thomas provides another example. Early adulthood took him from Llanfyllin, via Bridgend, to the nail and chainmaking region of the Black Country, before he

¹¹⁴ T.E. Nicholas, *Cerddi Gwerin*, T.E. Nicholas, Caernarfon (1912); T.E. Nicholas, *Salmau'r Werin a Chaneuon Ereill*, Hughes & Son, Wrexham (1913); J.L. Joynes, *Socialist Rhymes*, Modern Press, London (1885).

¹¹⁵ David Jenkins, *Thomas Gwynn Jones*, Gwasg Gee, Denbigh (1973), p. 92.

¹¹⁶ Angharad Tomos, 'Bywyd a Gwaith David Thomas', p. 36.

¹¹⁷ In David Thomas's case, for example, it was the Myllin Literary and Debating Society at Llanfyllin. The affairs of this society were conducted in English, which supports the point made above. Angharad Tomos, *David Thomas*, p. 12.

¹¹⁸ Gwenallt, *Ffwrneisiau: Cronicl Blynnyddoedd Mebyd*, Gwasg Gomer, Llandysul (1982).

¹¹⁹ Sian Howys Williams, 'T.E. Nicholas', pp. 4-8.

returned to north Wales.¹²⁰ He recorded his impressions of the Black Country, the heart of Blatchford's *Dismal England*, where, he pined, 'the sky is never blue, the brooks are never clear ... The sensibilities of the people are blunted for lack of sunshine, [and] their lungs are choked with the impure atmosphere' in a notebook that survives in Bangor University Archive.¹²¹ His experience there encouraged him to read his copy of *Merrie England* more closely, and developed his socialistic inclinations. It also, however, sharpened his national identity. A contribution that he made at the Cradley Heath Mutual Improvement Society during his time there, makes this clear. In his discussion on 'The Study of Our National Mission' he argued that 'we should [not] lose our love of home and native land and change it for a vague and mystical love of humanity. We can do both – love the great and the small at the same time'.¹²² This is exactly the approach that he applied to his socialist thought as it developed a little later in the decade.

These are classic cases, but the same geographical interplay may be observed in the lives of other culturally Welsh socialists, such as Tom Jones and Silyn Roberts. It was, of course, also a central feature of R.J. Derfel's life, and, in some form, it was almost certainly present in the lives of many of the other socialists that have been discussed in this thesis, Sam Mainwaring and David Rhys Jones presenting the more obvious examples. The juxtaposition of the local and the universal, the rural and the industrial, the Welsh and the 'other' - and the tension it created - was surely a key factor in the development of both a strong commitment to socialism and the confirmation of Welsh identity. Those who experienced it were, by the very nature of their experience, set apart from their communities. They were, though, put in a position where they could relate to those communities simultaneously as members and outsiders. From this vantage point they were in a special position to articulate the universalist teachings of socialism through both local and national (Welsh) levels of consciousness, and their attempt to do this, as a group, represents a struggle to achieve a distinctively Welsh socialist consciousness. In practical terms this comprised three main fields of activity: the first was to stimulate and organise the growth of the ILP, not just in the south Wales valleys, but across the whole of the territory of Wales; the

¹²⁰ Angharad Tomos, 'David Thomas', pp. 11-20.

¹²¹ Robert Blatchford, *Dismal England*, Walter Scott, London (1899), pp. 101-110; Bangor MS 18959.

¹²² Quoted in Angharad Tomos, 'David Thomas', p. 19.

second was an attempt to create an over-arching Welsh structure for the Party; and the third – and arguably the most enduring – was to provide socialism with a distinctive Welsh voice, by writing about it in the Welsh language.

In terms of stimulating ILP activity, the primary role played by members of this group was to supply the long and frequently reported need for Welsh speakers at ILP meetings. Their contribution in this respect gave the ILP a new dimension. When John James, a Welsh speaking socialist from Cwmgors in the Amman valley, went to speak in the Rhondda in 1908, for instance, it was reported that he ‘touched strata that our ordinary propagandists have failed to reach’.¹²³ Figures like T.E. Nicholas, D.D. Walters and Silyn Roberts used the skills that they had developed in the pulpit to enthuse audiences at socialist meetings. Walters, for example, delivered speeches on a number of themes, including ‘*Hawliau’r Werin*’ (‘The Rights of the Common People’) and ‘*Iesu yn Gymdeithaswr*’ (‘Jesus as a Socialist’). His masterpiece, though, was ‘*O Gaethiwed i Ryddid*’ (‘From Slavery to Freedom’), the title of which echoed Hardie’s *From Serfdom to Socialism*. Walters gave this speech in numerous versions, which varied according to the immediate circumstances of its delivery, from the early 1900s until sometime after the Great War. Its epic content embraced the whole of world history, from the Garden of Eden ultimately to the Russian Revolution, and its final version ran to 85 typed pages of foolscap. Walters delivered his socialist oratory to the coracle fishermen at Cenarth as well as to the miners and heavy industrial workers of the Swansea valley and the Rhondda, and he prepared the way for his visits by contacting local nonconformist ministers beforehand in an attempt to overcome their prejudice.¹²⁴

That the platform oratory of Walters and others amounted to a national (Welsh), rather than just a local, effort is indicated by its geographical coverage. Welsh speaking socialists facilitated and promoted visits from their counterparts in different parts of Wales. Silyn Roberts, for example, brought his own earnest brand of socialist educationalism to south Wales on several occasions, not least when he spoke at the Merthyr May Day demonstration in 1911, at which he met Keir Hardie for the first

¹²³ *Llais Llafur*, 18 July 1908. Also see James Griffiths, *Pages From Memory*, p. 14, John James was ‘all the more influential because he could talk to the miners in the Welsh language’. For John James’ views on socialism and Welshness see *Labour Leader*, 4 August 1911.

¹²⁴ D.D. Walters Papers, National Library of Wales.

time.¹²⁵ David Thomas also spoke throughout Wales. He visited south Wales in 1911, for example, addressing meetings at Seven Sisters, Gwauncaegurwen, Ystradgynlais and Swansea,¹²⁶ and in 1912 he undertook a speaking tour of the north Wales coalfield, holding meetings in both English and Welsh at Rhosllannerchrugog, Wrexham, Brymbo, Coedpoeth, Caergrwle and Rhostyllen.¹²⁷ T.E. Nicholas, on the other hand, reached out from the Swansea Valley to the slate quarrying districts of the north when he toured there in 1913. Mixing socialism and Welsh culture, he spoke, often in chapels, to large and enthusiastic audiences on ‘*Paham Mae’r Werin yn Dlawd*’ (‘Why the Common People are Poor’) and ‘*Telynu’r Werin*’ (‘Folk Lyrics’), as well as adjudicating at local *eisteddfodau*.¹²⁸ Indeed, by the turn of the decade, Wales can be said to have developed its own distinctive, indigenous group of socialist personalities to match what had become a professional class of socialist speakers from across the border.

In terms of organisational effort, the outstanding figure was David Thomas. More than any other individual, he was responsible for the growth of the ILP outside of south Wales in the period before the Great War. He applied a meticulous and incredibly diligent personality to the tasks of arranging meetings, collecting fees, distributing literature, translating propaganda material, singling out useful or influential individuals to help the party and answering random queries. He kept up a barrage of letters to the press, and publicly debated socialism with all-comers, which included local objectors to socialism as well as major figures such as W.F. Phillips or Professor Henry Jones of Glasgow University. As secretary of Caernarfonshire Labour Council, and later the North Wales Congress of Labour, he was also responsible for co-ordinating the relationship between the ILP and the trades unions in the region. This is not to mention his work as president of his local branch of the

¹²⁵ *Pioneer*, 6 May 1911. Also see *Llais Llafur*, 13 February 1909 for Silyn touring the Swansea Valley.

¹²⁶ Angharad Tomos, ‘Bywyd a Gwaith David Thomas’, p. 61; *Llais Llafur*, 8 July 1911.

¹²⁷ Bangor MS 19291.

¹²⁸ *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 29 January, 19 February, 12, 19 & 26 March & 2 & 9 April 1913. Opinion on Nicholas’s power as an orator is divided. Robin Page Arnot recalled hearing him speak and thought that he was a ‘marvellous orator’ (Interview with Hywel Francis, 6 March 1973, AUD 337, Tape no. 53, South Wales Miners’ Library). Another interviewee, Tom Watkins, on the other hand, thought that ‘he didn’t have the voice and the power to put it over’ (Interview with David Egan, 23 October 1972, AUD 335, Tape No. 17).

NUT, or his work on the district and county councils.¹²⁹ Thomas's work at a regional level might be compared with that of Henry Davies of Cwmavon (who also showed a developing interest in reconciling socialism with the national question),¹³⁰ or perhaps John Watt of Cardiff,¹³¹ although in terms of volume, scope and quality it was unparalleled within the Welsh socialist movement.

Thomas, moreover, had ambitions that went beyond regional organisation, and embraced the concept of creating an ILP structure at a national (Welsh) level. As discussed in previous chapters, the question of organisational structure had arisen early in the development of the Welsh socialist movement, and by the early 1900s this had been resolved by the creation of a number of divisional groupings that effectively separated the south from the north, and, as far as the socialist movement was concerned, fragmented the Welsh nation. David Thomas led an attempt to challenge this implicit rejection of Welsh nationhood by seeking to create what he termed a 'Welsh ILP'. He set out the case in the socialist press in 1911, arguing 'Those of us who are Welshmen in blood and language feel strongly that the Socialist movement cannot hope to succeed in Wales (outside certain districts), unless it is established upon a distinctly National basis; the twin movements of nationalism and [socialism] must grow up together as one'. He asserted that all the ILP districts in Wales and Monmouthshire should be united in one division, that an agricultural programme and rural propaganda should be devised in order to extend the movement beyond the industrial districts of Wales, and that the study of the Welsh political history should

¹²⁹ Some insight into the diligence and thoroughness with which Thomas undertook his organisational work on behalf of the socialist movement in north Wales may be gained from an examination of the various notebooks and papers that are preserved in Bangor University Archive. In particular, for the pre-war period, see Bangor MS19159 (Various lists of potential members); Bangor MS19161 (More lists of members, branches etc.); Bangor MS 19162 & 19163 (More lists and accounts); Bangor MS 19182 & 19184 (Correspondence); Bangor MS 19289 (Talysarn ILP branch minutes); Bangor MS 19301 (Scrapbook of reports of meetings in which David Thomas played a role). That this only represents a small part of Thomas's activities is astounding. Another 3 boxes of material at the National Library of Wales also provide evidence of Thomas's work.

¹³⁰ There is no single collection of material to illuminate the life of Henry Davies, who was one of the most important ILP and Labour Party organisers in pre-war south Wales. There are scattered letters in collections such as the David Thomas papers at the National Library of Wales, and also his contributions to the press, most notably as 'Carrusk' in *Llais Llafur*. Davies's career in the labour movement came to a sad end in 1918, when he was convicted at the Glamorganshire Assizes for the embezzlement of public funds (Report of Glamorgan Assizes, 6 March 1918). I am indebted to Aled Eurig for this piece of information. For Davies's thoughts on the issue of socialism and Welshness see *Labour Leader*, 22 August 1912.

¹³¹ Evidence of John Watt's work is provided in the collected material on the ILP in south Wales in the David Thomas papers at Bangor University Archive, esp. Bangor MS 19181 & 19291.

be promoted ‘with a view to establishing the historical continuity of the present Labour movement in Wales with the democratic movement of the last century’.¹³²

Thomas did not, however, receive the backing that he had hoped for. *Llais Llafur* was vaguely sympathetic to the idea,¹³³ but the editorial response of the *Pioneer*, published in the same issue as his original suggestion, was sharply negative. It began by citing the geography of Wales as a reason against creating a united Welsh ILP. ‘The Black mountains form a dividing line between North and South Wales, and their influence can be seen in all directions’, it argued; factors such as the predominantly east to west alignment of the communications infrastructure made the organisation of two separate regions easier, and there were simply too many differences between the rural north and the industrial south to make unity feasible. Having established the case this far the *Pioneer* editorial then went onto the offensive, by rehearsing the core argument of the anti-particularist, internationalist, British socialist culture that dominated the movement in south Wales.

Running through the letter there seems to be a hankering after what is called Welsh ‘Nationalism’, but what is more accurately described as Welsh ‘Exclusiveness’. There is a movement in Wales today ... which parades under the name of ‘Nationalism’. But it is not Nationalism. It is a spurious sentiment ... if anything distinctively Welsh is worth preserving, it will not require an Exclusive movement to preserve it. ... The closer the bonds of understanding between the workers of Wales and the workers of England and the workers of other parts of the world, the greater will be their power to secure the opportunity for a full and free existence. And that is what is wanted.¹³⁴

Thomas and his supporters got as far as organising a meeting to discuss the proposal, which was held during the National *Eisteddfod* at Carmarthen in August 1911, under the chairmanship of Edgar Chappell. Support came from some perhaps surprising quarters, including Vernon Hartshorn and the SWMF activist William Harris (both

¹³² *Pioneer*, 15 July 1911. Also see Bangor MS 18964; *Labour Leader* 7 July 1911; *Llais Llafur* 22 July 1911. For further arguments in favour of a Welsh ILP see the letter from John James, Cwmgors, *Labour Leader*, 4 August 1911.

¹³³ *Llais Llafur*, 15 July 1911.

¹³⁴ *Pioneer*, 15 July 1911.

from relatively anglicised parts of south Wales), and Mark Harcombe (one of the leaders of the striking Cambrian Combine workers), as well as from the more obvious Welsh cultural socialists.¹³⁵ The meeting concluded that ‘the only party that can truly represent the democracy of Wales is the Labour Party, and that the spirit of Welsh Nationalism can only find full scope for its political and industrial activities in the policy of nationalisation of the land and industries of the country’, and urged the formation of a Welsh ILP to this end.¹³⁶ In reality though, the cause was lost from the outset. Even the ostensibly sympathetic Hardie argued, albeit with more tact than the *Pioneer’s* editor, that branches should not act on Thomas’s advice, and that the way forward was to organise separately in the north and the south.¹³⁷

Thomas continued to argue the case. In his view, by failing to take account of the particularities of Welsh nationality, the ILP in Wales threatened to make the same mistake as the SDF had in England, and would appear to be a foreign influence.¹³⁸ His arguments, however, began to take on an almost desperate and self-defeating tone, which, if anything, merely revealed the extent of the divisions within Welsh socialism. ‘Some of our comrades who have built up the ILP movement in the English speaking districts of Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire may find it difficult to appreciate this point of view’, he pleaded, ‘but they must try to realise that [these] districts do not constitute the whole of Wales’.¹³⁹ In one article he inadvertently admitted both the marginality of the socialist movement outside of the south Wales coalfield, and the defining influence of physical geography upon Welsh political life.

In the slate quarrying districts of Caernarfonshire there are eight or nine branches, and two or three in the colliery districts around Wrexham, and between them stretches a wilderness of mountains and agricultural land sixty or eighty miles wide. What bond of union is strong enough to bind together two small movements so widely separated? The bonds of a common nationality, however, or the consciousness of having a mission to deliver to

¹³⁵ For a full account of this meeting and surrounding events see Angharad Tomos, ‘David Thomas’, pp. 65-73; Dylan Morris, ‘Sosialaeth i’r Cymry – Trafodaeth yr ILP’, *Llafur*, Vol. IV, no. 2 (1985), pp. 51-63; Deian Hopkin, ‘“Y Werin a’i Theyrnas”: Ymateb Sosialaeth i Genedlaetholdeb, 1880-1920’.

¹³⁶ *Labour Leader*, 18 August 1911; *Llais Llafur*, 19 August 1911.

¹³⁷ *Labour Leader*, 26 August 1911.

¹³⁸ Bangor MS18964.

¹³⁹ Bangor MS 18964.

their fellow countrymen, would be sufficient to bind them to the strong labour movement in South Wales.¹⁴⁰

Possibly, but the south Wales majority was not going to be dictated to by those from the much weaker wing of the movement in what some of them anyway considered to be more or less a different country.¹⁴¹ Thomas and others continued to air their arguments in the socialist press,¹⁴² but the overwhelming weight of the south Wales labour movement – in both cultural and statistical terms - ensured that their ambitions would remain indefinitely thwarted.

David Thomas and his supporters may have failed in their attempt to create a Welsh ILP. Their efforts to harmonise socialism and Welsh national consciousness were not, however, without either significance or a long term legacy. Indeed, arguably more important than their organisational effort was their literary achievement. A third resolution passed at the Carmarthen meeting in 1911 called for the publication of more socialist literature in Welsh.¹⁴³ Its advocates believed, in the words of Henry Davies, that ‘it is only in the Welsh language that the Welsh people can be made to realise that the traditions and ideals of the Welsh are not opposed to the Socialist idea’,¹⁴⁴ and they consequently strove to create a body of Welsh socialist literature. At the pinnacle of their achievement was Thomas’s much celebrated *Y Werin a’i Theyrnas*, published in 1910, which remains the most significant original work of socialist propaganda ever published in the Welsh language. The primacy of this text should not, however, draw attention away from the fact that it is representative of a much wider body of work. This included one other full length text, D. Tudwal Evans’ *Sosialaeth*,¹⁴⁵ as well as a number of pamphlets and Fabian *Tracts*.¹⁴⁶ As was the case

¹⁴⁰ *Labour Leader*, 8 September 1911; Bangor MS 18964.

¹⁴¹ For this see the comments in the *Pioneer*, 5 August 1911 (also quoted in Dylan Morris, ‘Sosialaeth i’r Cymry’, p. 60): ‘there is no such thing as a Welsh nation today, there are at least two Welsh nations. One hails from North Wales and the other originates in South Wales. The two people never mix’.

¹⁴² E.g. *Labour Leader*, 22 August & 12 September 1912.

¹⁴³ *Labour Leader*, 18 August 1911.

¹⁴⁴ *Labour Leader*, 22 August 1912.

¹⁴⁵ D. Tudwal Evans, *Sosialaeth*, Jones & Son, Barmouth (1911). For Tudwal Evans see Robert Pope, *Building Jerusalem*, pp. 52-54.

¹⁴⁶ R. Silyn Roberts, *Y Blaid Lafur Anibynnol, Ei Hanes a’i Hamcan*, Y Glorian, Blaenau Ffestiniog (1908); T.E. Nicholas, *Cyflog Byw*, T.O Jones, Pontardawe (1913); David Thomas, *Y Blaid Lafur a Dinasyddiaeth y Gweithwyr*, Labour Literature Society, Manchester (1911); *Paham Mae y Lluaws yn Dlawd*, Fabian Society, London (1891); Rev. John Clifford, *Sosialaeth a Dysgeidiaeth Crist*, Fabian Society, London (1899 & Reprinted 1908); Rev. John Clifford, *Sosialaeth a’r Eglwysi (Tract no. 141)*,

with socialist literature generally though, by far the greatest volume of Welsh socialist propaganda was the ephemeral material that appeared in the press. Like Blatchford's *Merrie England*, Thomas's *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas* originated as a series of letters to the press, and was just a fraction of its author's journalistic output.¹⁴⁷ Although Thomas was the most prolific of the Welsh language socialist journalists, he was only one of many. The work of Silyn Roberts in *Y Glorian* was also significant, as was the contribution of T.E. Nicholas, most notably as Welsh editor of the *Pioneer*, while *Llais Llafur* carried the work of Iwan Glyn and D.D. Walters, among many others. There is not space here to analyse fully this body of work, but one key question does need to be considered: to what extent does it represent an original Welsh contribution to socialist thought?

If content is taken as the decisive measure of Welshness, the question is almost impossible to answer. There were certainly Welsh influences within it. The influence of R.J. Derfel, for example, was particularly clear upon the work of T.E. Nicholas, who explicitly sought to ensure that Derfel's legacy was passed on.¹⁴⁸ The stamp of Welsh nonconformity is also clear upon the work of authors like Silyn Roberts and D.D. Walters.¹⁴⁹ Issues such as the land question, which might be considered to have a specifically Welsh - or at least Celtic - dimension also had a strong presence. As Nicholas put it, '*Cwestiwn mawr Cymru yw Cwestiwn Gwaith, a Chyflog, a Thyloidi. Ac o dan yr holl bethau hyn gorwedd pwng y Tir.*'¹⁵⁰ Certain elements of the Welsh socialist press made even more explicit attempts to include and appropriate the Welsh radical tradition. *Y Dinesydd Cymreig*, for example, contained features on such classic themes of Welsh radicalism as '*Arwyr '68*' and '*I Godi'r Hen Wlad yn ei Hol*',¹⁵¹

Fabian Society, London (1909); J.R. Jones, *Sosialaeth yng Ngoleuni'r Beibl*, Fabian Society, London (1909). All of the Fabian tracts were translations of English tracts except the one by J.R. Jones.

¹⁴⁷ *Herald Cymraeg*, 11 February 1908-11 August 1908.

¹⁴⁸ *Pioneer*, 7, 14, 21 October & 9 & 16 December 1911; *Geninen Gwyl Dewi* (1912), pp. 23-4.

¹⁴⁹ E.g. see 'Y Ddaear Newydd', *Glorian* 11 July 1908 – 26 September 1908.

¹⁵⁰ *Pioneer*, 6 May 1911 ('The great Welsh question is the question of work, wages and poverty. And beneath all of these things lies the issue of the land'). Also see R. Silyn Roberts, 'Hafod a Hendre i Bawb', *Glorian*, 29 February 1908 – 4 July 1908; David Thomas, *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas*, pp. 234-246; Demos, 'Y Tir a Gollant', *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 22 May 1912, David Thomas, 'Y Blaid Lafur a'r Tir', *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 14 August 1912, *Dinesydd Cymreig* 17 July 1912 & 29 October 1913 (Editorials); David Gwynfryn Jones, 'Pwnc Y Tir Yng Nghymru', *Herald Cymraeg*, 23 February – 16 March 1909.

¹⁵¹ '*Arwyr '68*' (The heroes of 1868) recorded the names of all those who had voted against their landlords in the 'Great Election of 1868', *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 3 July 1912 – 22 January 1913. The series '*I Godi'r Hen Wlad yn ei Hol*' included articles on staple Welsh radical concerns such as '*Dic Sion Dafyddiaeth*', '*Ysgrifennu a Darllen Gymraeg*', and '*Rhaglen yr Eisteddfod*', *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 17 July, 7 August, 25 September, 16 October, 27 November & 18 December 1912.

while the work of authors like J.T. Pritchard of Aberdaron, who held explicitly socialist views but remained a convinced Liberal, indicated that there was a continuum between the Welsh radical tradition and socialism.¹⁵² The socialists' appropriation of the radical tradition was symbolised by their use of the term 'gwerin', which was usually associated with a particular, Liberal, nonconformist, mythical entity; a people rooted in their *milltir sgwar*.¹⁵³ Welsh socialists, though, began to use the term in a broader sense. T.E. Nicholas, who later stated, '*O werin Cymru codais i, ac ni bu ynof awydd erioed i berthyn i ddsbarth arall*',¹⁵⁴ wrote his *Salmau* and *Cerddi* to the *werin* and, in the opening piece of the *Salmau* projected himself as '*Bardd y Werin*'.¹⁵⁵ The word was also taken from its Welsh context and used in relation to the British, and even the international, working class.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, Thomas's choice, *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas*, for the title of his main work was a deliberate appropriation of Welsh radical vocabulary.

If it is possible to argue that the work of the Welsh socialists was ideologically distinct, it is equally possible to argue the opposite. Significant elements – indeed, some of the most important works – within this body of literature were direct or near-direct translations of material from English socialist literature. As already discussed, the process of translating the key texts of socialism into Welsh began in the 1890s with D.D. Walters' '*Cymru Ddedwydd*'. During the first decade of the twentieth century the number of translations of English socialist works increased substantially. These included translations of Fabian Tracts, as well as translations of a wide variety of other pamphlets and articles.¹⁵⁷ This had important ramifications. It meant that there was no such thing as a socialist intellectual world free of English influence. Even in the case of original works, the extent of the influence of English texts was considerable. In the case of *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas*, for example, while there are clearly

¹⁵² For Pritchard's views see *Dinesydd*, 11 September 1912.

¹⁵³ Frank Price Jones, 'Gwerin Cymru', in *Radicaliaeth a'r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg*, pp. 196-206; Prys Morgan, 'The Gwerin of Wales – Myth and Reality', in Ian Hume & W.T.R. Pryce (eds.), *The Welsh and Their Country*, Gomer, Llandysul (1986), pp. 134 -152.

¹⁵⁴ Bangor MS 23359.

¹⁵⁵ T.E. Nicholas, *Salmau'r Werin*, pp. 5-8.

¹⁵⁶ See the article 'Braster Prydain' by Demos, *Dinesydd Cymreig*, 25 September 1912, and Henry O. Jones poem, '*Deffroad y Werin*', *Dinesydd*, 23 October 1912 for its use in a British context. David Thomas, uses the word in relation to the American working class, *Dinesydd*, 16 October 1912.

¹⁵⁷ Examples include Blatchford's *Altruism (Llais Llafur*, 5 September 1908), Keir Hardie's *The Red Dragon and the Red Flag (Dinesydd Cymreig*, 3 July 1912), Keir Hardie on 'The Land Question' (*Dinesydd Cymreig*, 30 October 1912), Hardie's *Liberalism and Labour in Wales (Dinesydd*, 16 July 1913) and Philip Snowden's *The Christ That Is To Be (Dinesydd Cymreig*, 6-27 August 1913).

some Welsh influences present - the influences of of R.J. Derfel and Evan Pan Jones may be seen in the chapters on ‘*Dinasoedd fel Gerddi*’ and ‘*Y Tir i’r Bobl*’ respectively¹⁵⁸ - it is the extent of the foreign influences that is striking. These are clearly acknowledged,¹⁵⁹ and include Prince Kropotkin, Henry George, Carlyle and Ruskin, Blatchford, William Morris and Philip Snowden, among others. The absence of influences from what Thomas would have called the ‘Welsh democracy’ is striking, and it is perhaps remarkable that the major work of a socialist who sought to ‘saturate’ socialism in Welsh traditions and influences contained so few of them.

Ultimately, though, these arguments become circular and begin to lose meaning. They could be applied to any aspect of Welsh thought, and their application would result in the same insecure conclusion. Surely the critical point about the socialism of individuals like Thomas, Silyn and Niclas y Glais is that it was articulated through the medium of Welsh. If ever there was a case of the medium representing the message this was it. To write about socialism in Welsh, rather than using English, was a conscious and active decision. It has been suggested that this was simply a pragmatic device, adopted in order to assist in the spread of the socialist message in Welsh speaking areas; that it was a mere response to the challenge presented by nationalism.¹⁶⁰ Surely this is wrong. It was rather the other way around. Using Welsh to express socialist ideas was the natural choice of culturally and linguistically Welsh socialists. The fact that they made this choice created a space within Welsh culture within which socialism could be discussed, and there is evidence to suggest that they were successful in this. The influence of *Y Werin a’i Theyrnas*, for example, was felt across Wales. Numerous letters in the David Thomas Papers testify to this. A reader from the Rhondda wrote in 1912, ‘*diolchaf yn gynhes i chwi am eich llyfr gwerthfawr Y Werin a i Theyrnas, y mae wedi bod yn ysprydiaeth i mi ac eraill yma*’,¹⁶¹ while another from Bethesda reported, ‘*Y mae eich llyfr rhagorol gennym yn ein darllenfa*

¹⁵⁸ (‘Cities like Gardens’ and ‘The Land for the People’), *Y Werin a’i Theyrnas*, pp. 198-208 & 234-246.

¹⁵⁹ David Thomas, *Y Werin a’i Theyrnas*, pp. 344-346.

¹⁶⁰ R. Merfyn Jones & Ioan Rhys Jones, ‘Labour and the Nation’, in Tanner, Williams & Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales*, pp. 241-263, p. 244.

¹⁶¹ [?] Evans, Ferndale to David Thomas 11 June 1912, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW (‘warm thanks to you for your valuable book *Y Werin a’i Theyrnas*, it has been an inspiration to me and others here’).

yma ers llawer dydd, ac y mae allan gan rhywun bob wythnos'.¹⁶² Its influence also permeated the labour movement, particularly in the north, where the quarrymen's union set an exam on the text.¹⁶³ The influence of *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas* also transcended the Great War. The Trawsfynydd branch of the Labour Party, for example, ran a weekly winter study class in the 1920s, in which the book was studied,¹⁶⁴ and the highly influential trade unionist Huw T. Edwards also recalled that as a young man '*Fe'm trwythais fy hun yn Y Werin a'i Theyrnas a phan ddeuthum yn swyddog Undeb, hwn oedd y Beibl y dyfynnwn ohono ddydd ar ol dydd*'.¹⁶⁵

One of the achievements of Thomas and the Welsh socialists discussed in this section was to influence individuals like Huw T. Edwards, who played an important role in the development of the socialist and labour movement in Wales during the twentieth century. Edwards considered himself a '*Sosialwr Cymreig a Chymraeg*',¹⁶⁶ and this self-definition would have been shared by socialists from his and succeeding generations, many of whom cited the influence of Thomas and Nicholas upon their own development.¹⁶⁷ In this sense, the struggle for a Welsh socialist consciousness discussed here was successful. It was, however, a qualified success, and some of the fundamental reasons for this will be examined in the final section of this thesis.

¹⁶² R.W. Roberts, Bethesda to David Thomas, Christmas 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW ('we have had your excellent book here in our reading room for some time, and it is out with someone every week').

¹⁶³ '*Rwyf yn deall fod yna arholiad i fod ar y Werin a'i Theyrnas gan bwyllgor Undeb y Chwarlewyr. Gobeithio na fyddwch yn galed*' ('I understand that there is to be an exam on *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas* [set] by the committee of the Quarrymen's Union. I hope it won't be too hard), wrote Thos G. Hughes, Cwm y Glo to David Thomas, 11 January 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW. The questions may be found in Bangor MS 18964.

¹⁶⁴ Morris Davies, Trawsfynydd, to David Thomas, 13 October 1921, David Thomas Papers, Box 3 NLW.

¹⁶⁵ Huw T. Edwards, 'Dafydd Tomos', in Ben Bowen Thomas (ed.), *Lleufer y Werin: Cyfrol Deyrnged i David Thomas M.A.*, Cwmni Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, Abercynon (1965), pp. 51-57, p. 56 ('I saturated myself in *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas*, and when I became a union official this was the Bible I would quote from day after day'). Also see Huw T. Edwards, *It Was My Privilege*, Gee & Son, Denbigh (1957), p. 20 – *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas* was 'a book which greatly influenced political thought in Wales for many years'.

¹⁶⁶ ('A Welsh and Welsh speaking socialist'). The term is used by Edwards in notes for a speech (undated and untitled) in Huw T. Edwards Papers, C7, National Library of Wales.

¹⁶⁷ For example, Goronwy Roberts and Elystan Morgan, see, Andrew Edwards, 'Answering the Challenge of Nationalism: Goronwy Roberts and the Appeal of The Labour Party in North-West Wales During the 1950s', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (June 2004), pp. 126-152; J. Graham Jones, 'Elystan Morgan and Cardiganshire Politics', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 2004), pp. 730-761.

(iii). Welsh Socialism and the Limitation of Language

Even sympathetic historians have been forced to admit that the Welsh language was marginal to the main thrust of the socialist and labour movement in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Wales, particularly in the all-important south.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, it is possible to see the spread of socialism and the displacement of the Welsh language as part of the same process. As Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has argued, ‘the language of socialism was English’, and the abandonment of Welsh was a symbolic gesture of the rejection of old Liberal nonconformist values and the affirmation of the new secular labourism in the years after the 1904-5 religious revival.¹⁶⁹ Neil Evans and Kate Sullivan have gone even further, and suggested that by the early twentieth century Welsh was ceasing to be a viable political language at all. ‘As a vigorous language of politics’, they conclude, ‘Welsh belonged only to the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Thereafter its days were numbered’.¹⁷⁰ The likes of David Thomas, T.E. Nicholas, and Silyn Roberts would have disagreed. As argued above, the most significant element of their collective endeavour was to attempt to animate socialism through the medium of the Welsh language. The fact that they were in a minority had long term implications for the nature of socialism in both Wales and Britain. It meant that the ideology that shaped so many aspects of life in twentieth century Britain was, on the whole, indifferent to the culture and language of one of its constituent nations. It is surprising, given the tendency of many of the historians of the last generation to use the role of language as a primary analytical and explanatory tool, that the linguistic politics of parts of the UK where there is more than one language have not been explored in more detail.¹⁷¹ The final section of this thesis will therefore examine some of the factors at work within the linguistically conflicted growth of socialism in Wales.

¹⁶⁸ Deian Hopkin, “‘Y Werin a’i Theyrnas’: Ymateb Sosialaeth i Genedlaetholdeb, 1880-1920’, p. 182.

¹⁶⁹ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, ‘Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales’, in *Mid-Victorian Wales: The Observers and the Observed*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1992), pp. 54-79, p. 78.

¹⁷⁰ Neil Evans and Kate Sullivan, “‘Yn Llawn o Ddan Cymreig’ (Full of Welsh Fire): The Language of Politics in Wales 1880-1914’, in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains 1801-1911*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2000), pp. 561-585, p. 585.

¹⁷¹ This is despite some excellent work examining the nuances of English in relation to the growth of labour in south Wales, see Peter Stead, ‘The Language of Edwardian Politics’, in David Smith (ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales 1780-1980*, Llafur / Pluto, London (1980), pp. 148-165.

The first, and most fundamental, of these is the innate capacity of Welsh to absorb and articulate the new political language created and demanded by socialism. Dylan Morris has suggested that there was nothing intrinsic about the Welsh language that prevented its effective use for the discussion of socialist ideas.¹⁷² R. J. Derfel would not have agreed. In the last of his first series of letters in *Y Cymro* in 1892 Derfel observed

*Wrth wneuthur yr ymchwiliad presenol, cefais allan fod tipyn o anhawsder ar brydiau i ysgrifenu yn ystwyth a dealladwy yn Nghymraeg, ar y pwnc, oherwydd diffyg enwau a broddegau arferadwy i osod allan gynseiliau a gosodiadau y wybodaeth newydd.*¹⁷³

Indeed, there was not universal agreement among Welsh authors even regarding the correct Welsh term for socialism. Derfel, as we have seen, coined the term *cymdeithasiaeth* for socialism, or *cymundebiaeth* for what might more commonly be called communism, in the late 1880s.¹⁷⁴ As the 1890s progressed, however, other writers began to introduce alternatives. These included *cymrodyddiaeth* and *socialyddiaeth*,¹⁷⁵ as well as *cyfranyddiaeth*,¹⁷⁶ *cydfeddianaeth*,¹⁷⁷ *cymrawdialaeth*,¹⁷⁸ and *cymrodoliaeth*.¹⁷⁹ Significantly, though, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, while Derfel's original *cymdeithasiaeth* had not become entirely

¹⁷² Dylan Morris, 'Sosialaeth i'r Cymry – Trafodaeth yr ILP', *Llafur*, IV, 2 (1985), pp. 51-63, p.54.

¹⁷³ R.J. Derfel, 'Cymdeithasiaeth' Llythyr XXX, *Cymro*, 6 October 1892 ('In undertaking the present inquiry, I experienced some difficulty at times in writing flexibly and understandably in Welsh on the subject because of the deficiency of names and accustomed phrases to set out the premises and propositions of the new information').

¹⁷⁴ See Derfel's letter on 'Cymundebiaeth', D. Gwenallt Jones (ed.), *Detholiad o Ryddiaith Gymraeg R.J. Derfel*, Y Clwb Llyfrau Cymreig, Llandysul (1945), Vol. II, pp. 62-67. The distinction between 'socialism' and 'communism' is, in fact, not entirely straightforward. Derfel uses the two terms to describe what he calls 'Cymdeithasiaeth rannol and Chymdeithasiaeth gyflawn' (partial and complete socialism). The distinction, perhaps, is less one between socialism and communism, but more in keeping with the distinction drawn by Robert Blatchford between 'practical' and 'ideal' socialism (see *Merrie England*, p. 44).

¹⁷⁵ Evan Davies, 'Cyfalaf a Llafur', *Geninen*, Vol. 14 (1896), pp. 19-23.

¹⁷⁶ David Rhys Jones, *Celt*, 20 November 1891. He also refers to socialists as 'Cyfranyddion', *Genedl Gymreig*, 20 April 1892.

¹⁷⁷ Michael D. Jones, 'Cyfiawnder i'r Gweithiwr', *Geninen*, Vol. 15 (1897), pp. 205-6; also *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, 7 March 1901.

¹⁷⁸ This was used by D.D. Walters, see D.D. Walters Papers, NLW; also *Llais Llafur*, 25 July 1908.

¹⁷⁹ Evan Pan Jones, 'Y Ddaear i'r Bobl', *Geninin* (1910), pp. 30-31.

obsolete, the most commonly used Welsh term for socialism in print was simply a derivative of the English, *sosialaeth*.

More serious perhaps than any inherent problems in translating socialist terms and concepts into Welsh was the socio-economic context which dictated the ways in which Welsh could or could not be used for political purposes. A primary factor here was in-migration into Wales, which from the 1880s onwards – and most dramatically after 1901 – was dominated by a flow of culturally and linguistically English migrants into the industrialising south. This culturally submerged the Welsh element of the population, and, it has long been argued, swung the balance of ‘cultural advantage’ to the side of anglicisation, undermining any hope of preserving a native Welsh culture on the coalfield.¹⁸⁰ It matters not whether one subscribes to the ‘internal colonisation’ model, which stresses the role of ‘national cultural institutions’ ‘penetrating the periphery’,¹⁸¹ or whether one takes more account of the internally generated dynamics of language change.¹⁸² The point is that socialists attempting to create a distinctively Welsh political culture were working against the grain of socio-linguistic change – change which was most dramatic and overwhelming in exactly that part of the country where the establishment of a socialist inspired labour movement was most feasible. William Harris of Pontllanfraith, Secretary of the South Wales Labour Federation, a Welsh speaker and a sympathiser with David Thomas’s efforts to form a Welsh ILP, looked back in 1919 upon the enormous changes that he had experienced first hand in the previous quarter century. He referred to industrial villages that had been Welsh speaking in his boyhood, where the majority language had become English in the course of a decade or so, and concluded that industrial Wales had become ‘more cosmopolitan than ... almost any of the other industrial districts in Britain’. In his view the term ‘patriot’ was being replaced by the term ‘proletariat’.¹⁸³ Within this context the intellectual culture of the labour movement was overwhelmingly English, and the texts on socialism, politics and economics that began to accumulate in the

¹⁸⁰ Philip N. Jones, ‘Some Aspects of Immigration into the Glamorgan Coalfield Between 1881 and 1911’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1969), pp. 82-98.

¹⁸¹ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, Routledge, London (1975), pp. 191-206.

¹⁸² Tim Williams, ‘The Anglicisation of South Wales’, in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Volume II: Minorities and Outsiders*, Routledge, London (1989), pp. 193-203.

¹⁸³ ‘Labour and Home Rule for Wales’, *Welsh Outlook* (1919), pp. 145-7.

workmens' libraries of the south Wales coalfield from the 1890s onwards, published by international publishing houses such as Swann Sonnenschein and Kerr, were invariably in the English language.¹⁸⁴

There were of course exceptions to the galloping anglicisation that was gripping the eastern valleys of the coalfield. The anthracite region of the west remained culturally and linguistically Welsh at a deeper level and for longer than the rest of the coalfield,¹⁸⁵ and the north of the country, of course, remained a bastion of the Welsh language.¹⁸⁶ Even in the midst of the rapidly anglicising steam coal valleys, Welsh language communities persisted and stood out against the prevailing trends. Bedlinog, for instance, was both a centre of ILP militancy and remained overwhelmingly Welsh-speaking into the 1920s, thus providing an exception to the overall pattern of anglicisation and socialist-labourism going hand in hand.¹⁸⁷ Despite such exceptions, however, the dominating theme of the period covered in this thesis is undeniable. It was, moreover, clear to at least one contributor to *Y Geninen* as early as 1893:

*Yr oedd yr hen Gymru yn trigo mewn castell diogel, rhag cael eu llygru gan lenyddiaeth ac iaith estroniaid, sef Castell 'Dim Saesneg.' O fewn i furiau hwn, gallent hwy a'u plant deimlo yn hollol dawel; cyhoedded y Saeson eu cyfrolau anffyddol, eu newyddiaduron llygredig a'u pamphletau aflan, - yr oedd 'Cymru Fu' yn gallu herfeiddio yr holl ddylanwadau estronol hyn o'i hen gastell – "Dim Saesneg." Ond erbyn heddyw, y mae yr hen gastell hwn yn cael ei chwalu yn deilchion, a chyn hir y bydd yr gydwastad â'r llawr.*¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Chris Baggs, 'The Miners' Libraries of South Wales From the 1860s to 1939', Unpublished D Phil Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth (1995), pp. 378-389.

¹⁸⁵ Ioan Matthews, 'The Welsh Language in the Anthracite Coalfield c. 1870-1914', in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (1998), pp. 125-146.

¹⁸⁶ Although even the north was by no means immune from the march of English. Cyril Parry notes the spread of English language reading and periodicals in his study of Gwynedd socialism, Cyril Parry, 'Socialism in Gwynedd', Unpublished PhD, University of Wales, Bangor (1967), p. 183. Dot Jones also explores one important influence upon language change in Dot Jones, *The Coming of the Railways and Language Change in North Wales 1850-1900*, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth (1995).

¹⁸⁷ For evidence of this see interviews of Tom Watkins by David Egan, 23 October 1972 (SWCC AUD 335) and Edgar Evans by Dai Smith and Hywel Francis, 14 July 1973 (SWCC AUD 213). Transcripts in South Wales Miners' Library.

¹⁸⁸ E. Herbert Evans, 'Cymru Fydd', *Geninen* (1893), pp. 1-5, p. 1. ('Old Wales dwelt within a safe castle, which protected it from being corrupted by foreign literature and language, namely the Castle of "No English". Within these walls they and their children could feel wholly undisturbed; the English published their atheistic books, their corrupt newspapers and their obscene pamphlets, - the Wales of

The breach in the walls of the ‘Castle of No English’ may have been deeply alarming for those, like the author of this extract, who saw English agitators as one of the greatest dangers to the Welsh worker. It also, however, had deep implications for the indigenous Welsh activists who, alongside those very agitators, were attempting to carry a similar message through the medium of Welsh.

It is not that there was no demand for the work of David Thomas and his colleagues. Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that there was. Predictably there was a call for more Welsh language socialist literature from the north west of the country. A correspondent from Rhosgadfan, for example, wrote to David Thomas in 1911, that it was ‘*gresyn nad ellid cael mwy o lenyddiaeth yn Gymraeg ar y cwestiynau hyn [socialism], yn enwedig mewn ardaloedd fel hyn lle mae gan lleied yn ymwneyd ar Seisnig*’.¹⁸⁹ Such calls also came from those in the south, however, who were keen to emphasise that socialism was not simply an English-based movement. Such a voice was J.M. Williams of Bedlinog, who wrote to Thomas in the same year with a promise that the local ILP branch would purchase a number of copies of *Y Werin a’i Theyrnas*. He went on to emphasise the need for such works in a letter that demonstrates a demand for Welsh medium socialist material in the industrial south, but also clearly defines the problems experienced by socialists trying to win over the culturally influential sections of Welsh speaking society:

Y mae arnom wir angen yma am lenyddiaeth Gymreig ar y pwnc [socialism]. Oherwydd y mae yma gynifer wedi dod yma yn ddiweddar o Sir Gaernarfon a sir Feirionydd, a rhanau Cymreig eraill – llawer ohonynt yn bobl ddarllengar a thra diwylliedig, ond heb fod yn gallu gwerthfawrogi ein propaganda i’r graddau dyladwy tra yn dygir hi yn ym mlaen yn Saesneg. Ac yn wir nis gall agwedd Seisnig y mudiad ddim llai na chynyrchu rhagfarn mewn pobl felly tu

old could brave out all of these foreign influences from the old Castle of “No English”. But today this old castle has been smashed to pieces and before long will be levelled to the ground”).

¹⁸⁹ Owen E. Hughes, Angorfa, Rhosgadfan, Caernarfon to David Thomas, 1 June 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW (‘it is a pity that we can’t have more literature on these questions in Welsh, especially in regions like this where [only] the minority have anything to do with English’).

*ag ato. Siaradwyr Cymraeg a llenyddiaeth Gymraeg, dyma ein hangen mawr ni yma.*¹⁹⁰

In seeking to meet this ‘great need’, however, socialists were faced with a plethora of problems, which ranged from the structural to the technical.

To some extent these problems arose from the status and social situation of the Welsh language itself, that is as a vernacular with certain, defined spheres of use.¹⁹¹ The issues here are complex. While Welsh medium publishing had experienced something of a golden age in the century or so prior to the arrival of socialism, much of the impetus for this was, as Ieuan Gwynedd Jones points out, so much a function of religion that it is almost possible to see the printing press as ‘an extension of the pulpit’.¹⁹² As we have seen, the pulpit had at best an ambiguous and tense relationship with socialism, which ranged from wholesale support to bitter opposition. It follows that socialism had an ambiguous relationship with the Welsh language, particularly in its printed form. This was critical because the socialist movement placed a high premium on the printed word as an engine of conversion and advance. Reports that regions were ‘sadly in need of literature’,¹⁹³ or that ‘the greatest drawback is the want of literature’¹⁹⁴ are a recurrent theme in the socialist press. The publication of a wide range of socialist newspapers and pamphlets was necessary, in the words of Keir Hardie’s Welsh speaking friend Robert Williams, so that ‘the seed of Socialism in all

¹⁹⁰ J.M. Williams, 32 Hylton Street, Bedlinog to David Thomas, 24 October 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW (‘There is a real need here for Welsh literature on the subject [of socialism]. Because there is a fair number that have come here recently from Caernarfonshire and Meirionnydd, and other Welsh parts – many of them are well read and well cultured people, but they cannot appreciate our propaganda to the appropriate degree while it is carried on in English. And truly, the English aspect of the movement can do nothing but produce prejudice in such people towards it. Welsh speakers and Welsh literature, these are our great need here’).

¹⁹¹ Both incoming and indigenous socialists frequently referred to Welsh as ‘the vernacular’. See for example *Labour Leader* 16 June 1893, in which it is reported that David Rhys Jones spoke alongside Fred Brocklehurst on a propaganda trip to the Rhondda in ‘the vernacular’; John Daniel (Iwan Glyn of *Llais Llafur*) wrote to Keir Hardie, 25 February 1906, that ‘It is in the vernacular I from week to week contribute on matters of great consequence to the multitude that earn a living’ (Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1906/115). A contributor to *The Welsh Outlook*, on the other hand, observed that a failure on the part of Labour candidates in the coalfield to speak ‘the vernacular’ opened the party up to charges that it was not sympathetic to national feeling, ‘Observer’, ‘The Mind of the Miner (Part II)’, *Welsh Outlook*, 1916, pp. 247-249, p. 247.

¹⁹² Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, ‘Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales’, p. 66.

¹⁹³ W.J. Dunn, secretary of Morryston ILP in *Labour Leader*, 26 May 1894.

¹⁹⁴ *Labour Leader*, 4 June 1898.

its fullness and variations may be sown'.¹⁹⁵ The establishment of literary departments as adjuncts to even fledgling ILP branches was a matter of priority, and socialists believed that 'once people begin to read about Socialism their ultimate conversion is certain'.¹⁹⁶ In seeking to produce Welsh language material however, socialists were frustrated by a number of different factors, some of which were directly related to the language's real and perceived vernacular status.

Firstly, the writers and editors of Welsh material faced the fundamental problem of getting the Welsh correct. This was more difficult than might be initially supposed. It was also a serious matter, in that the publication of incorrectly spelt or grammatically poor Welsh provided grounds for critics of socialism to claim that socialists really were the foreign incomers that they claimed them to be, and were treating the Welsh language with disrespect. Even R.J. Derfel, a professional printer who considered himself something of a master of Welsh prose, was not immune to criticism of the quality of his printed Welsh. When *Aildrefnaid Cymdeithas* was briefly reviewed in *Y Goleuad* in 1889, the journal found more to say about the misprints and grammatical errors in the pamphlet than about Derfel's socialist ideas.¹⁹⁷ This was a sign of things to come, and matters could get far more complicated when non-Welsh speakers became involved in the publication process. The Fabian Society experienced problems when attempting to get its Tracts translated into Welsh in the 1890s, as its secretary, Edward Pease, recalled in a letter written in the 1940s:

We asked a man to translate Tracts into Welsh. As none of us could read the language we asked another Welsh speaker if it was a good translation. He said it was very bad, and he sent another. Then we submitted the two to a third man, He said they were both impossible, and sent us a third. Then we gave up, and printed the third. ... All I recollect about the Jones [Derfel] tract is that we submitted it to Mr. Lloyd George. I don't remember that he made any observations on it, but I do remember a Welsh reviewer complaining of the

¹⁹⁵ *Labour Leader*, 29 July 1899.

¹⁹⁶ W.W. Price to Aberdare Valley ILP, 7 November 1907, PY4/10, Aberdare Public Library.

¹⁹⁷ *Goleuad*, 31 January 1889.

Society publishing as much bad grammar. I am afraid that Welsh is not a very settled language.¹⁹⁸

Pease's explanation that Welsh was not a 'settled language' is instructive, in relation to both the attitude of English socialists and the linguistic situation in Wales itself. The problem did not go away, rather it intensified as the movement developed. One reason for socialist publications getting the Welsh wrong was that they employed non-Welsh speakers in the production process. When the *Rhondda Socialist* launched a Welsh section in 1912, under the editorship of David Evans of Blaenclydach, the launch went horribly wrong. The type was set up by an English typesetter, who failed to send the proofs to Evans, and the Welsh was mangled. The embarrassed Evans was forced to publish an apology and an explanation that conceded '*dichon fod rhai o'r gelynyon wedi cael testun i grechwenu a gwawdio*'.¹⁹⁹ Neither was this an isolated incident. A similar mistake was made with an early edition of the Merthyr *Pioneer*, because the Welshman who was responsible for reading the proofs was taken ill.²⁰⁰

Such explanations for poorly constructed and typeset Welsh are, however, a little too simple. While illness or the involvement of English typesetters could undoubtedly create embarrassing situations, there is evidence of deeper issues relating to the use of Welsh in socialist propaganda. The pool of those involved in the production of Welsh language socialist material, whether original or translated, was relatively small. Indeed, the number of individuals who both had time and freedom enough to be involved in such enterprises, and, critically, who were confident enough of their written Welsh, might be counted at best in the dozens. Of these David Thomas was the pre-eminent Welsh writer. Others involved were not so confident of their abilities with the written form of the Welsh language, particularly when it came to conveying complex social or economic ideas. Even T.E. Nicholas, winner of numerous bardic

¹⁹⁸ Edward Pease to T.J. Roberts, 3 March 1943, T.J. Roberts Papers, National Library of Wales.

¹⁹⁹ *Rhondda Socialist*, 16 March 1912 ('possibly some of our enemies have been given cause to guffaw and ridicule'). Also see the letter from David Evans to David Thomas, 1 March 1912, which accompanied a copy of the paper. Evans explains the mix-up to Thomas and vows '*Rhaid i ni ochel hyn yn y dyfodol*' ('We must avoid this in the future'), David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW.

²⁰⁰ T.E. Nicholas to David Thomas, 23 March 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW: '*Amgauaf gopi o'r papur newydd oeddwn yn son am dano. Y mae llawer o wallau ynddo am i'r Cymro oedd yn darllen y prawfleni fynd yn wael ar yr adeg*' (I enclose a copy of the newspaper I was speaking about. There are lots of mistakes in it because the Welshman that was reading the proofs was ill on this occasion').

chairs and a man to whom preaching in Welsh was a central part of his daily life, was not wholly confident of his Welsh terminology when it came to writing about economics. When writing an article on poverty in 1912, he wrote to David Thomas to seek assistance and assurance that he had used the correct Welsh terminology, feeling safer in sending the article to press once Thomas had seen it and made some suggestions.²⁰¹ Other Welsh speakers were less confident still of their ability to render socialist ideas into acceptable Welsh. John Beynon, of Merthyr Vale, agreed in 1911 to translate one of Keir Hardie's speeches into Welsh, but when he sat down to undertake the task he had second thoughts and turned to Thomas. Giving up, and asking Thomas to take the job over, he explained that '*rwyn awyddus iawn am gael yr hen iaith yn ei dillad goreu*'.²⁰² Another contributor to the Welsh language press, Rhys Davies of Manchester, was similarly anxious that David Thomas check his Welsh. Having completed a pamphlet on the ILP in 1911, he asked Thomas to correct his grammar, explaining '*Yr ydych yn well Cymro Llenyddol na mi*'.²⁰³ The other side of the coin, which perhaps explains why some individuals were reticent to offer their Welsh language services, was the critical, arguably over-precious, attitude shown towards written Welsh by some members of the Welsh community. This could include members of the socialist movement. In 1910 a translation was made of Keir Hardie's *Liberalism and Labour in Wales* by Harri Edwards.²⁰⁴ It was examined by what Henry Davies called 'a few comrades who are excellent Welsh scholars'. They, however, were 'of the opinion that the translation has been too faithfully literal to the original', and sent another translation in its place.²⁰⁵

Such disputes over the details of Welsh language publications, when considered alongside the errors of printers and proof readers, would doubtless have been dispiriting to potential contributors to the Welsh socialist press. More serious still was

²⁰¹ T.E. Nicholas to David Thomas 9 January 1912 & 29 January 1912, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW.

²⁰² John Beynon to David Thomas, 2 December 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW ('I am very anxious to get the old language in its best clothes').

²⁰³ Rhys J. Davies to David Thomas, 4 March 1912, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW. ('You are a better literary Welshman than me'). A postcard dated 6 March 1912 in the same collection solicits further help with Davies's Welsh grammar.

²⁰⁴ Henry Davies (Cwmavon) to David Thomas, 3 October 1910, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW. (This translation is usually attributed to David Thomas – and it seems that Thomas was initially going to be the translator (See Henry Davies to Thomas 4 September 10), but it turned out that Harri Edwards took the job on instead).

²⁰⁵ Henry Davies to David Thomas, 17 October 1910, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW.

the structure of the publishing industry, upon which they relied to ensure that Welsh material saw the light of day at all. This reflected the concentration of power within the socialist movement as a whole, and was centralised in England. After 1909 the main ILP publishing and printing agency was the National Labour Press,²⁰⁶ managed by Edgar Whitely, and operating from a main centre in Manchester and a subsidiary office in London. This meant that if socialists in Wales wished to have propaganda material published officially by the ILP their efforts and aspirations were mediated through what was in effect a commercial business based in industrial England. The resulting relationship was problematic and often tense. Henry Davies summarised some of the tensions in a letter to David Thomas in relation to a series of pamphlets that he was trying to initiate in 1910.

Like most Englishmen they are imbued with the notion that Welshmen cannot digest politics except in a religious garb. But in this matter I intend that the movement in Wales shall represent Socialism in all its aspects and ... I am determined that by hook or crook they shall publish what Welshmen think will suit their countrymen. ...we must and shall get our own way in this.²⁰⁷

This, however, was easier said than done. Davies did not succeed in getting all the pamphlets that he wanted, and the commissioning of Welsh language material remained problematic.

Nothing illustrates this better than the publishing history of David Thomas's *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas*. Thomas initially wanted the ILP to publish the book, but the party refused on the grounds that it was not prepared to risk funds on what it saw as a venture of uncertain commercial value. Thomas eventually managed to get the project underwritten by the Fabian Society, but had to resort to publishing the book himself, using the Welsh Publishing Company at Caernarfon as his agent. The company, though, went into liquidation and in 1921 Thomas ended up trying to bargain with W.J. Parry, who was acting as the company's receiver, to try to obtain the remaining stocks of the book – which he failed to do. Tellingly, Thomas wrote to Parry in 1921 that 'I cannot ignore the fact that it has taken 12 years to sell 1200 copies of my

²⁰⁶ For National Labour Press see Deian Hopkin, 'The Newspapers of the ILP', p. 42.

²⁰⁷ Henry Davies to David Thomas, 3 October 1910, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW.

book'.²⁰⁸ While the influence of Thomas's book cannot be judged simply in terms of sales figures, it was sales figures that determined its commercial value, and that fact is that Welsh publishing was a commercially marginal enterprise. D. Tudwal Evans similarly experienced difficulties selling copies of *Sosialaeth* and feared that he would make a loss on the book. 'Yr wyf wedi colli llawer eisioes am fy mod yn Sosialydd', he lamented to David Thomas in 1911.²⁰⁹

The fate of *Y Werin a'i Theyrnas* was symptomatic of the plight of Welsh language socialist publishing more generally, and this had serious consequences for the viability of the Welsh language within the socialist movement. A final, and critical, illustration of this may be found in the socialist press, which was, of course, the primary medium for socialist ideas. When *Llais Llafur* was launched in 1898 it was widely welcomed by socialists because of its Welsh content. 'We are glad to welcome this new arrival, especially as it is in Welsh, as it can speak straight to the heart of the Welsh miner', rejoiced the *Labour Leader*.²¹⁰ In fact, the perception of the *Llais* as a Welsh language newspaper was not strictly accurate. It was a bilingual newspaper, and the fact that it contained news in English was surely as important to its commercial success as were its Welsh elements. The proprietors of the *Llais* were keen to receive news in English about events outside of Wales, as this not only filled their need for copy, but clearly sold newspapers.²¹¹ What is striking, however, is the change in the balance between the Welsh and English content of the *Llais* – at the expense of the Welsh – that occurred between its launch and the Great War. The same is true of other socialist papers. The *Rhondda Socialist*, which began in 1911 with a substantial Welsh content had almost ceased publishing material in Welsh altogether by the time it was merged into the *South Wales Worker* in 1912. The north may have been able to sustain a fully Welsh language newspaper much later than the south of Wales, but what had happened, particularly to the Welsh in *Llais Llafur*, was a portent of a process that was to become irresistible during the course of the century.

²⁰⁸ David Thomas to W.J. Parry, 14 October 1921, David Thomas Papers, Box 2, NLW.

²⁰⁹ D. Tudwal Evans to David Thomas, 16 December 1911, David Thomas Papers, Box 1, NLW.

²¹⁰ *Labour Leader*, 22 January 1898.

²¹¹ See David Rees's suggestion for a socialist literary bureau, David Rees to John Penny, 19 September 1900, Francis Johnson Correspondence, 1900/93.

By 1915 *Llais Llafur* gave up the pretence of being a bilingual paper altogether and continued under the title *Labour Voice*. It published an editorial explaining this decision, the contents of which are relevant to all of the socialists who wished to use Welsh as a medium for their political activism.

A Welsh newspaper cannot be run except at a loss. We regret the fact, but it is not our fault. We did not invent the English conquest, or the industrial revolution. We did not draft the school curricula in which Welsh children are taught English all the week, and Welsh for one hour. ... Welsh remains the language for ordinary speech and public worship, but as a literary medium it becomes increasingly unadaptable to newspaper exigencies. ... We regret the anglicising of the *Llais* as much as anybody, but sentiment does not alter facts.²¹²

The Great War did not by any means mark the end of the interplay between Welshness and socialism, but it did mark the end of an important phase in that interplay. The anglicisation of the *Llais* was but one signal that an important battle had been lost. Socialists like David Thomas and T.E. Nicholas did not cease to be socialists, but they did not regain the intensity of their pre-war activism in the post-war world. New ideological influences were to come into the mix, particularly after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and new personalities were to mediate the ongoing interplay between Wales and the wider world, attempting - consciously or otherwise - to achieve the balance encapsulated in T.E. Nicholas's verse:

Mae'r byd yn fwy na Chymru
'Rwy'n gwybod hynny'n awr,
Ond diolch fod hen Gymru fach
Yn rhan o fyd mor fawr.²¹³

²¹² *Labour Voice*, 16 January 1915.

²¹³ From T.E. Nicholas 'Mae'r Byd Yn Fwy Na Chymru', *Salmau'r Werin a Chaneuon Ereill*, p. 75. ('The world is more than Wales/I know that now/But thanks that little old Wales/Is part of such a big world').

Conclusion

The rise of socialism was one of the defining features of early twentieth century Welsh history. In order to understand it fully, though, it is necessary to begin in the 1880s. Although active socialists were never more than a small minority at any point before the Great War - and indeed a tiny minority in the early part of the period covered in this thesis - they were nevertheless an important one. Their critique of society was penetrating and in step with the times, and their very presence changed the political dynamic of their host societies. By the end of the period discussed here there was a sense in which William Harcourt's often quoted statement, 'we are all socialists now', was applicable to Wales. To speak of the 'rise of socialism', however, is to simplify, perhaps to unify artificially, a number of differing, even disparate, contemporaneous processes. Socialism was an ideology with multiple manifestations. From the early 1880s onwards it spread unevenly across the territory of Wales and permeated Welsh thought and culture erratically. Its diffusion through Welsh society was governed by the complex spatial and ideological interplay of a wide variety of influences. The overwhelming direction of these influences may have been inwards. In other words, as its opponents insisted at the time, socialism was an ideology that was imported into Wales.

If this is true, however, it is only partially so. While the 'scientific socialism' of the 1880s was undoubtedly of foreign origin, Wales was by no means its passive recipient. Indeed, some of the supposedly 'foreign' agitators bringing socialist ideas into Wales were themselves Welsh. Due notice should also be taken of the dynamic of socialist growth that quickly developed within Wales itself. Initially this resulted in the spread of socialism from the coastal towns of the south up into the coalfield. Coalfield socialism then rapidly developed its own internal dynamic. Critical mass was achieved during the 1898 coal strike, and although the subsequent socialist ascendancy was far from unbroken, it is safe to argue that from 1898 onwards the presence of socialism as a political force within the region was an irreversible fact. Events during the coal strike also determined the type of socialism that was adopted in Wales. Although Marxism was to play an important role in south Wales politics in subsequent decades, Britain's Marxist party, the SDF, took very clear second place in

socialist politics to the ILP. During the first decade of the new century the ILP developed to political maturity in south Wales, with its own political culture and a growing political base, which was increasingly integrated into the wider British socialist and labour movement. This process was symbolised by the relationship of the British socialist leader, Keir Hardie, with Merthyr Boroughs in particular and Wales more generally.

The growth of socialism in Wales prior to 1906 was an overwhelmingly regional phenomenon. In structural terms it was confined to south Wales, and the spread of socialist ideas beyond the heads of the valleys was a much slower process. Socialists did begin to interact with north Wales during the protracted Penrhyn dispute of 1900-1903, but the spread of their ideas was retarded, not least by the barrier presented to them by the dominance of the Welsh language in the region. Consequently the socialist movement of the south had a significant head start on that of the north. South Walian socialists had broadly adopted English as their medium of communication, and their movement had only a tenuous relationship with Welsh national consciousness. Its dominant ideology and political culture was internationalist in outlook, and tended to be sharply dismissive of Welsh particularism. There was however another socialistic tradition in Wales which fused nationalist and radical social ideology and, it may be argued, sought to create a distinctively Welsh form of socialism. In both geographical and political terms, this tradition was diffuse. It did not have the same regional critical mass as the British-internationalist socialism of the south, and although it had advocates in the south, its adherents were scattered across and beyond Wales, and were not politically organised. They were consequently marginalised.

After 1906 socialism began to spread more evenly across Wales. This resulted in the emergence of a group of socialists within the ILP who sought to persuade the party to become more responsive to the traditions and culture of Wales. Although their calls for the creation of a political structure that recognised the territorial integrity of Wales met with a negative response, they did succeed in one important respect. They succeeded in articulating socialist ideology at a national (Welsh) level, through the medium of the Welsh language. Their efforts in this respect might be seen as a struggle to create a Welsh socialist consciousness. In doing this they were consciously

building upon the work of a small minority of socialists from the previous generation, into which they sought to integrate the traditions of Welsh radicalism. In this sense, it might be suggested that they were seeking to establish a Welsh socialist tradition.

The defining feature of their work was less ideological than linguistic. Their use of Welsh was an act of affirmation and rejection, just as the adoption of English made the same statement for mainstream British-Welsh socialists. The linguistic and cultural tide was, however, flowing against the Welsh dissidents, and language became a tool of their marginalisation. The consequent dominance of a linguistically English and culturally British socialism in Wales had profound long-term implications for both Wales and Britain, many of them undoubtedly beneficial. It provided an essential component of the bedrock upon which the unionist-socialist project of the twentieth century welfare state was built. The voice of the dissident Welsh socialists, however, was never truly silenced. It may be discerned in the debates over socialism and nationalism that took place in the pages of the *Dinesydd Cymreig* in the 1920s, or in the *Gwerin* movement of the 1930s. It is clear in the Parliament for Wales Campaign and the dramatic resignation of Huw T. Edwards from the Council for Wales in the 1950s. There are hints of it in the work of Harri Webb or in Miles and Griffiths' *Sosialaeth i'r Cymry* of the 1970s.

The tectonic plates of history have moved considerably in recent decades and the unionist-socialist project of the twentieth century is all but dismantled. It is therefore apposite to consider the process of interplay from which that project originated, and, perhaps, speculate on some of its alternative potential outcomes. After all, Derfel's *unoliaeth mewn amrywiaeth* – unity in diversity – once again has a very modern ring.

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ILP Archive (Harvester Microfilm)

Bangor University Archive

Bangor MS 5019(13)
Fardd

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Bangor MS 479

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SWCC:MNA/POL/5/1

Bedlinog ILP Accounts Book and Press Cuttings

SWCC: MNA/PP/69/1

Dowlais ILP Minute Book

SCWW: SC653	Mountain Ash ILP Eisteddfod Programme (1909)
SWCC D1-7	John Thomas Papers
SWCC: MNA/PP/129/1-5	ILP Printed Material
SWCC/MNC/PP/20/1	Sam Mainwaring Collection
SWCC: MNA/PP/131/3	Aberdare Socialist Society Banquet, 1 March 1901
SWCC: MNA/PP/66/1	Rules of the Marxian Club and Institute, Blaenclydach
SWCC: MNA/PP/12/2/1	1908 Rhondda UDC Election Papers

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AUD 337	Robin Page Arnot
AUD 213	Edgar Evans
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Clarion
Commonweal
Cymro
Cymru
Cymru Fydd
Daily News
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Freedom
Gendl Gymreig
Geninen
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Glorian
Goleuad
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Lleufer
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