

**IS WALES
A POOR COUNTRY**

?

**THE CASE FOR
SELF-GOVERNMENT**

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IS WALES A POOR COUNTRY?

THIS article was sent as a letter by Rev. Ben Owen, Trewen, and was published in the *Cardigan and Tivy Side Advertiser*, 4.3.49. As it admirably sums up the economic case for Welsh self-government, we are grateful to Mr. Owen for sending a copy to publish in *The Welsh Nation*, as an article.

ONE of the most disturbing—and in many respects one of the most disgusting—features in the last Welsh Day debate in the House of Commons, was the reply made on behalf of the Government by Mr. James Griffiths, M.P., to some of the points raised in the debate. In his reply he stated:

"I as a Welshman believe it would be disastrous for Wales if we had a Government of our own, relying on our own resources and our own finances . . . We would be stabilising our poverty if we had to rely on our own internal resources."

It is a sad reflection on the nation of Wales that a Welshman, of all people, should have uttered such a fantastic and inaccurate statement.

Never in the history of the House of Commons has any English Member of Parliament spoken of Wales in such terms.

Disservice

To Wales

In uttering that statement, Mr. Griffiths not only did a disservice to Wales, but even to his own political party.

Some of the founders and leaders of the Labour Party were strong advocates of Welsh self-government. Keir Hardie repeatedly declared his belief in an autonomous parliament for Wales.

With this disgusting exhibition by a Welshman, let us compare the words of Mr. Arthur Henderson, who was secretary of the Labour Party for many years, when he was speaking at the party's Annual Conference at Cardiff in 1918. He stated:

"It is hardly possible to conceive an area in which a scheme of parliamentary self-government could be established with better chances of success than Wales.

"Given self-government, Wales might establish itself as a modern Utopia, and develop its own institutions, its own art, its own national

culture, its own idea of democracy in politics, industry and social life, as an example and inspiration to the rest of the world."

At the same conference, the late Mr. Morgan Jones, M.P., Caerphilly, declared:

"There can be no doubt as to the attitude a Labour Party ought to adopt towards the Home Rule Movement. Its one message to the people is, 'Govern Yourself' Labour is not likely to get enthusiastic over a glorified County Council."

Natural

Resources

These early Labour Party declarations and promises have now been conveniently forgotten, and Welshmen can be found to act as willing vassals to stamp out the past, and to belittle, and sometimes to betray, their own nation.

But there is an overwhelming body of evidence to prove that the irresponsible statements uttered on the Welsh Day are far from being the truth, as Wales, by comparison with her size, is one of the richest countries in the whole world.

Discussing her great natural resources, *The Times*, in a series of articles on Wales, admitted that

"Wales could support three times her present population."

Again, in 1937, a group of French economists issued a report based on scientific research stating that *in their opinion Mexico was the richest country in the world, and these Frenchmen actually scheduled Wales as being the second*—the country which Mr. Griffiths, the Welshman, said, would be stabilised in its own poverty if it had to rely on its own resources!

Coal

In coal resources—quantity and quality—Wales is the richest country in the whole world. Official surveys prove that the coal reserve in Wales per head of the population, is eight times greater than that of England.

There is a great deal of propaganda nowadays over the amount of subsidy which is being given to the South Wales coalfield. That could be answered in detail, but one fact will now suffice, namely, that Welsh coal is indispensable to the maintenance of English industries.

The quality of Welsh coal is infinitely better than English coal, and a great deal of it is being exported to England and sold at cheap industrial prices, whereas even today the greater geographical part of Wales is compelled to buy, for household purposes, inferior English coal at high prices.

Welsh coal is the best in the world for coking purposes for the steel industry. Only two small English coalfields, Durham and South Yorkshire, can produce coal for this purpose. Coal produced in the much-boasted English Midlands, or Scotland, is useless for coking in the steel industry.

Again, Wales alone produces more than one-fifth of the total steel ingot and castings for the whole of Great Britain, and the average output of the steel blast furnaces of Wales exceeds by 50 to 80 per cent. the average for English blast furnaces.

Official geological surveys show that Wales is rich in iron, lead, zinc, and copper deposits. The quality of her slate is unparalleled in the whole world. She has a great supply of water power, which, if we were allowed to develop it, would generate electricity to bring cheap light and power to every rural community in Wales.

Productive

Agriculture

Welsh agriculture, despite years of neglect by successive English governments, has a high productive yield. Even the recent White Paper on Wales was compelled to pay tribute to the great agricultural contribution made by Wales.

Welsh milk has earned generally a high reputation. The production of T.T. milk is higher in

Wales than in England, while the three counties of Cardiganshire, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen have a record in T.T. milk production which has no parallel in any one, or group of English counties. Yet nearly two-thirds of the Welsh milk production is exported to England at cheap prices, to be sold in English cities, and to be used as a basic raw material in many industries, especially plastics.

Under a Welsh Parliament, it would be the duty of the Government to see that subsidiary industries of that character were established in Wales, and any surplus Welsh milk could be sold by agreement to England.

While living under a scheme of strict rationing, Wales is today producing an abundance of fresh meat. Many local authorities have recently complained that inferior foreign meat is being brought into Wales, while the choice, rich Welsh meat is being sent to England. Perhaps Mr. James Griffiths in his London home enjoys far more fresh Welsh meat than we do in Wales, and is anxious that his process of feeding England at the expense of Wales shall continue.

Examples of this character could be easily multiplied to prove that the "poverty" envisaged by Mr. Griffiths is the figment of his own Ministerial imagination, and the result, as in the past, of the mis-government of Wales from London.

Higher

Pensions

Would he suggest that Denmark is too poor to govern herself? Denmark has one of the best systems of government in the whole world, yet she does not possess the rich resources of Wales, and her soil is poor.

Would Mr. Griffiths suggest that New Zealand is too small or too poor to govern herself?

New Zealand, with a population less than Wales, can provide for her own government, and at the same time pay old age pensioner and his good lady at 60 (not 65) a pension of £4 5s. per week.

If Mr. Griffiths was Minister of Pensions in New Zealand, he would not get his present salary of £5,000 per annum. It would be immediately reduced to £800, as the balance is used to pay better pensions to needy people.

Wales today is the highest-taxed small nation in the whole world. Yet of the tremendous amount of taxation paid by Welsh people, only a small proportion is returned. Our local authorities, for instance, have to maintain and develop costly social services, and only receive from the Government, poor, miserable grants.

Rural areas and rural services have been neglected. For the past few years farming

has improved, not because of any deliberate and wise Government planning, but because of sheer economic necessity.

If the Government's plan "for expanding exports" ever succeeds, it will be the signal for another slump for the farming community of Wales. As it is, because of the Distribution of Industry Act, it is virtually impossible to introduce a diversity of industries into our rural areas, because they are not scheduled as "Development Areas."

Unless Wales secures her own Government, we can never hope for the successful development of the whole of our country. Wales today is mainly exploited for her raw materials, in agriculture and industry, for the benefit of England and the English Government. Mr. James Griffiths has given his blessing to such a system.

Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalist Party) seeks to reverse that process, by giving Wales the responsibility to govern herself, and by instilling into Welshmen a sense of self-respect.

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