

From Culture to Tradition: The Political
Landscape of Monmouthshire, 1918-
1929

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Cardiff University, 2020

By James Phillips

Abstract

This thesis explores the transition from political cultures to political traditions in relation to the political landscape of Monmouthshire between 1918 and 1929. It examines the first decade of mass democracy through a county-wide focus, using the six interconnected constituencies of Monmouthshire as a gateway to uncovering the crucial nexus between people, place and political expression in the contemporaneous contexts of South Wales and Britain. It highlights the interplay between and within political cultures, and the evolution of practices into enduring political traditions through a constant process of recognition, assimilation and reinvention. The socio-economic challenges raised by war and wider enfranchisement precipitated initial apprehension from political parties, but eventually generated experimentation and differentiation, with both parties and non-party organisations attempting to respond to the revised political environment after 1918. Shifts in tactical outlook were intricately customised at a local level and broader issues were addressed, granted validity, or rejected, depending on the antecedent conditions of specific localities, the demands of the expanded electorate and the perceived stability of each political machine. The art of adaptation was not uniform or linear, and the agency of individuals and political communities not only led to the crafting of persistent traditions but the suppression and decline of competing cultures. With a focus on all three major political parties, this thesis therefore emphasises the reciprocity and interdependence of interwar Welsh and British political culture. In the process, it enhances our understanding of the relationships between the individual, the local, and the national, in the construction of political identities, networks and traditions. This thesis ultimately makes a nuanced contribution to the rich field of Welsh and British labour history, as well as pointing to new directions with the neglected histories of the Liberal Party in industrial constituencies and the Conservative Party in Wales.

This thesis is dedicated to Kenneth Williams,
1932-2018.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	p. v.
Abbreviations	pp. vi-viii.
Map of Monmouthshire's District Boundaries	p. ix.
Introduction	pp. 1-15.
Chapter 1: The Shy County and the Apprehensive Country - The Case of Monmouthshire	pp. 16-61.
I. Sir Fynwy – Society, Economy and the Industrial-Rural Dichotomy	pp. 20-34.
II. Sir Fynwy – Politics, People and the Post-War Landscape	pp. 34-61.
Chapter 2: From 'Lib-Labs' to Crusaders? The Cases of Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale	pp. 62-123.
I. 'nothing new under the sun'? – Extending the 'Lib-Lab' Endurance	pp. 69-80.
II. Two Steps Forward, One Step Back – Local Distinctions, Organisation and Representation	pp. 81-100.
III. The Swing of the Pendulum – Expanding the Labour Tradition	pp. 101-23.
Chapter 3: On the Fringes of a Tradition - The Liberal Apparition and the Case of Pontypool	pp. 124-67.
I. Evaporating Control – The Last Days of Reginald McKenna	pp. 128-37.
II. The Liberal Roadblock and the Challenge to Labour	pp. 137-54.
III. Lloyd George's False Dawn	pp. 154-67.

Chapter 4: A Lonely Tradition - The Conservative Bulwark and the Case of Monmouth	pp. 168-204.
I. Building an Alliance	pp. 172-84.
II. Fortifying the Stronghold	pp. 184-95.
III. Falling to Goliath	pp. 196-205.
Chapter 5: New Democracies and Swinging Cultures - The Case of Newport	pp. 206-47.
I. Contested Terrain	pp. 210-25.
II. Coalitions and Conflicted Identities	pp. 225-35.
III. Playing the Long Game	pp. 235-47.
Conclusion	pp. 248-52.
Bibliography	pp. 253-86.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to express a huge thank you to my primary supervisor, Dr. Martin Wright of Cardiff University, and my secondary supervisor, Professor Bill Jones of Cardiff University, who have both been incredible mentors over the past four years. Their wisdom, kindness, and tireless support, have been invaluable, and will always be hugely appreciated. Their consistent guidance has also not only made the completion of this study increasingly surmountable but their encouragement has made the research and writing of this thesis immeasurably more enjoyable. Diolch yn fawr iawn, Martin and Bill.

This study was funded in part by the James Pantyfedwen Foundation. Without this financial support, the thesis would never have come to fruition in four years. I am therefore incredibly grateful to the Foundation and its trustees for this funding, alongside its generosity and support since 2017.

Several archives and libraries have been accessed throughout my research. In particular, I am indebted to the people at the following institutions: Bristol University Special Collections and Archives; Cardiff Central Library; to Alison Harvey, Lisa Tallis, Anna Sharrard and everybody at Cardiff University Library and Special Collections; Cathays Branch and Heritage Library; to everyone in the Research Room at Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale; National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; to Lionel, Gabhan and Helen for their assistance during my many visits to Newport Reference Library; South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea; to Susan Thomas, Stacy O'Sullivan and everyone at Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University; all the staff at Tredegar Library.

I also want to express gratitude to many colleagues and friends who have helped me along the way to completion of this study. In particular, I would like to thank Nye Davies, for proofreading a final draft of the thesis, and thank Andrew Thorpe, Andy Croll, Sue Demont, Sian Rhiannon Williams, Ryland Wallace, Beth Jenkins, Stephanie Ward, David Selway, Ben Montgomery, Rhodri Hughes, James Brace, Tesni Street, James Ryan, Darren Macey and Sian Williams, for all their assistance and encouragement over the past four years.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents Jeff and Jane Phillips, my grandparents Kenneth and Margaret Williams, and my family for their immense and unwavering support. Thank you so much to you all, I simply could not have done this without you.

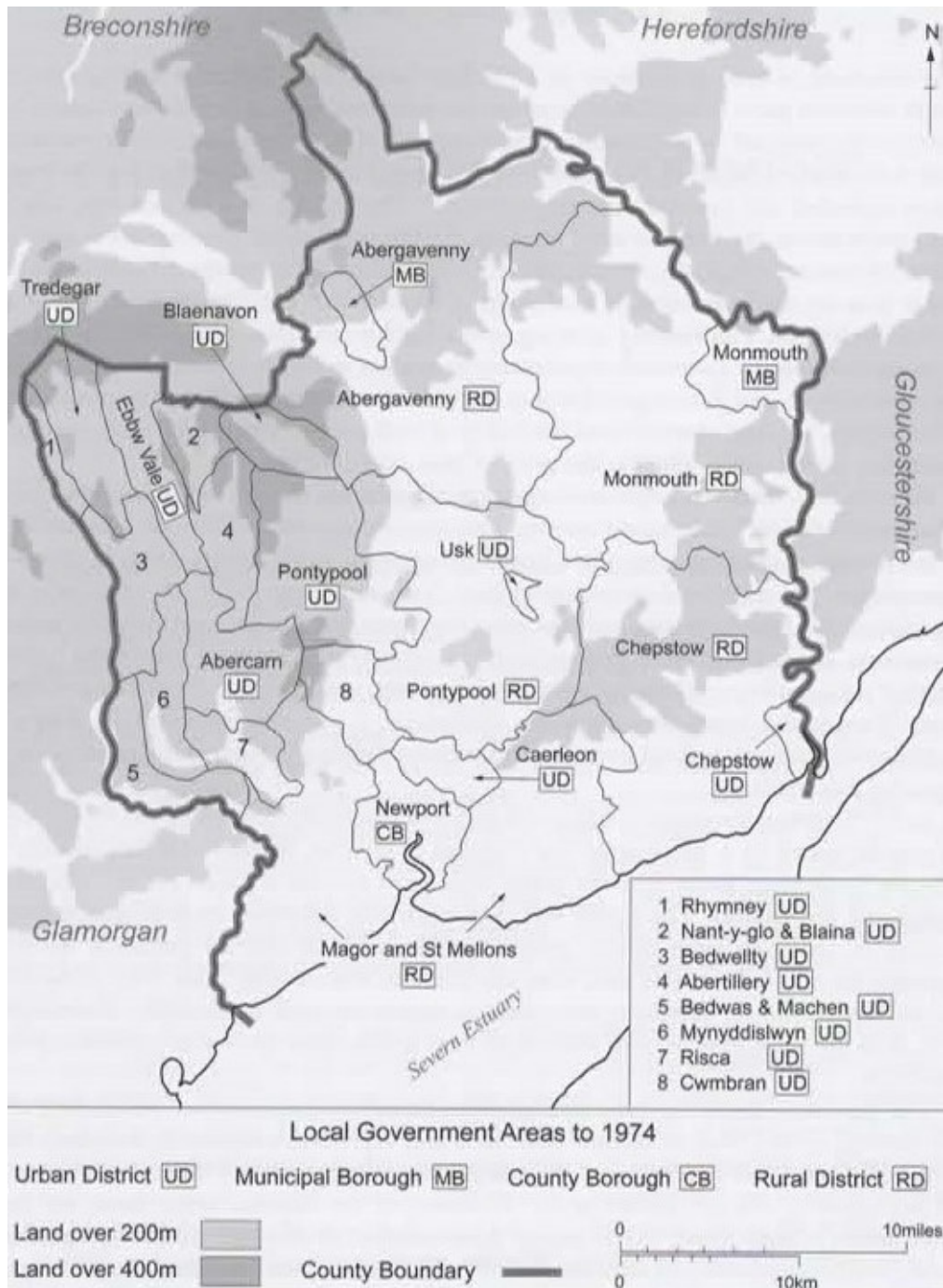
Abbreviations

<i>AC</i>	<i>Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser</i>
BBOG	Bedwellty Board of Guardians
BDLP	Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party
BUSCA	Bristol University Special Collections and Archives
<i>CA</i>	<i>The Cambrian</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Common Cause</i>
<i>CDL</i>	<i>Cambria Daily Leader</i>
CGW	Comrades of the Great War
CLC	Central Labour College
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
<i>CTSWWN</i>	<i>Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News</i>
CUSCA	Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives
<i>CWM</i>	<i>Colliery Workers' Magazine</i>
<i>DH</i>	<i>Daily Herald</i>
<i>DM</i>	<i>Daily Mirror</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Evening Express</i>
EVSICC	Ebbw Vale Steel, Iron & Coal Company
FCC	Food Control Committee
<i>FPM</i>	<i>Free Press of Monmouthshire</i>
GA	Gwent Archives
<i>GG</i>	<i>Glamorgan Gazette</i>
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
IWCE	Independent Working-Class Education
JIL	Junior Imperial League
LNU	League of Nations Union
<i>MB</i>	<i>Monmouthshire Beacon</i>

MCC	Monmouthshire County Council
MCUA	Monmouth Conservative and Unionist Association
MDLP	Monmouthshire Divisional Labour Party
<i>ME</i>	<i>Merthyr Express: West Monmouth Edition</i>
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
<i>MG</i>	<i>Monmouth Guardians and Bargoed and Caerphilly Observer</i>
MLA	Monmouth Liberal Association
MMM	Miners' Minority Movement
<i>MWP</i>	<i>Monmouthshire Weekly Post</i>
NALRWU	National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union
NCA	Newport Conservative Association
NCBC	Newport County Borough Council
NCF	No-Conscription Fellowship
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFDDSS	National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NLA	Newport Liberal Association
NLP	Newport Labour Party
NLW	National Library of Wales
NMLA	North Monmouthshire Liberal Association
NRL	Newport Reference Library
NUAW	National Union of Agricultural Workers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NWCA	Newport Women Citizens' Association
PBOG	Pontypool Board of Guardians
PCUA	Pontypool Conservative and Unionist Association

PDLP	Pontypool Divisional Labour Party
PLA	Pontypool Liberal Association
RDC	Rural District Council
<i>RL</i>	<i>Rhondda Leader</i>
RI	Rotary International
<i>SWA</i>	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
<i>SWE</i>	<i>South Wales Echo</i>
SWCC	South Wales Coalfield Collection
<i>SWDN</i>	<i>South Wales Daily News</i>
<i>SWDP</i>	<i>South Wales Daily Post</i>
<i>SWG</i>	<i>South Wales Gazette</i>
SWMF	South Wales Miners' Federation
SWML	South Wales Miners' Library
<i>SWWA</i>	<i>South Wales Weekly Argus</i>
TICC	Tredegar Iron and Coal Company
TLC	Trades and Labour Council
TUC	Trades Union Congress
<i>TWL</i>	<i>The Woman's Leader</i>
UDC	Urban District Council
URC	Unofficial Reform Committee
WCA	Women Citizens' Association
WDC	Warwick Digital Collections
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WI	Women's Institute
WLA	Women's Liberal Association
WLL	Women's Labour League
<i>WM</i>	<i>Western Mail</i>
<i>WO</i>	<i>Welsh Outlook</i>
WUO	Women's Unionist Organisation

Map of Monmouthshire's District Boundaries



Constituency boundaries in relation to urban and rural districts will be clarified in each chapter.

Source: Robert McCloy, 'Changes in Local Government' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 128.

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the transition from political cultures to political traditions in the first decade after the Great War. Using the six electoral constituencies of the border county of Monmouthshire in South Wales as a framework, it seeks to uncover how individual and collective political experiences were reshaped during the early interwar era. Specifically, the eleven year period between the conclusion of conflict in 1918 and the 1929 General Election, the first to be contested with universal enfranchisement, is considered here as the crucial epoch during which political loyalties were exercised by a broader cross-section of British society, and secured on the ground with an enduring consistency which lasted into the 1930s and beyond. Indeed, in the case of Monmouthshire, the political allegiances currently in place today, most strikingly in favour of the Labour Party and the Conservatives, can trace their point of maturation back to this period. At the time of writing, in a moment in British history which threatens to test the strength and flexibility of these bonds more than ever before, it is therefore apposite that an even more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of these political loyalties is established. Through an expanded holistic and comparative approach between adjacent constituencies, this thesis will therefore analyse the formations of political traditions, how they were contested internally and, also, how they developed in relation to neighbouring, divergent identities.

An investigation of both political cultures *and* political traditions is required by the dynamic political landscape of interwar Monmouthshire, and also by the mutual relationship between the two terms. To distinguish both, and clarify each, is by no means a straightforward task. While the potential for these concepts to be ‘unifying’ forces have been recognised by political scientists and historians alike, the issue of individual agency in systemic cultures and the multiplicity of identities between localities and national communities, has left a ‘Rubik’s Cube’ of a puzzle for researchers to solve.¹ As a starting point for this thesis, political culture is defined here as the inculcation of a set of practices and organised actions which are increasingly characterised by civic and social objectives, often to gain political power and legitimacy, and constructed by a growing community of individuals

¹ Stephen Chilton, ‘Defining Political Culture’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, 41:3 (Sep., 1988), p. 419; Willibald Steinmetz and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, ‘The Political as Communicative Space in History: The Bielefeld Approach’ in Willibald Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Hotley and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Writing Political History* (Frankfurt; New York, 2013), pp. 11-36.

in both local, regional and national contexts. To speak of a political tradition is in reference to the reconstruction of this fluid process into a sustained political presence that transcends electoral success, leading to a continuation of commitment across a broader collective of adherents and in relation to multiple generations. Neither term implies homogeneity of experience or linearity in the translation from one state to the other. Politics is, after all, a continuously reflexive and iterative practice where traditions disintegrate as well as proliferate. Previous strategies are also redefined in relation to the immediate setting and the hopes and fears of political change in the future. As a starting point, this study initially positions itself in relation to the international shift towards what Henk Te Velde describes as, ‘the change from political history to the history of politics and the political... a discipline whose central question is the nature of its object’.² It also examines the interwar political transition between a set of intrinsically linked historical contexts, both universal and specific. Monmouthshire is therefore a gateway to uncovering the crucial nexus between space, place, identity, and political expression, in the contemporaneous contexts of South Wales and the wider United Kingdom.

The complexity of interwar politics was generated against a backdrop of profound social, economic and electoral transformation, both locally and nationally. The onset of mass democracy fundamentally reformed the way politics was perceived and acted upon in both a collective and individual sense. The anxieties over post-war reconstruction, alongside worsening living standards, mass unemployment, and the escalation of industrial militancy, only served to intensify the transfiguration. With the right to vote won for a greater proportion of the population, and universally applied in 1928, the act of engaging in politics became increasingly conventional, every day and pluralistic.³ Adaptation was therefore demanded, not just required. Political parties, and an increasing multiplicity of non-party organisations, attempted to respond to an expansion of political interest with varying degrees of success and failure.⁴ Further shifts in tactical outlook were customised at a local level, as broader issues were addressed, granted validity, or rejected, depending on antecedent political

² Henk te Velde, ‘The Opening Up of Political History’ in Willibald Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Hotley and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Writing Political History* (Frankfurt; New York, 2013), p. 383.

³ Pat Thane, ‘What Difference Did the Vote Make?’ in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 253-88; Pat Thane, ‘The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918-1939’ in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 54-69.

⁴ Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, 50:4 (Dec., 2007), pp. 891-912; Jon Lawrence, ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War’, *Past and Present*, 190 (Feb., 2006), pp. 185-216.

cultures in specific localities, individual leaders and participants in these interconnected organisations, and the evolving priorities of the wider electorate.⁵ Significant challenges arise from engaging with this reality. The versatility of political responses, and the balance between the role of the individual and wider industrial, political and social structures, can often be lost in the ‘continued dialectic of tension’ between wider grand narratives of high politics and the detailed worlds that spring to life from grass root studies of constituency activism.⁶ In order to avoid a simplified and nostalgic vignette of the interwar political landscape, a third way is needed. By readjusting the lens to a county-wide focus, while still concentrating on the individuals in these collective cultures, the intricacy of politics on the ground can be appreciated without losing sight of the wider socio-economic and political undercurrents of interwar Britain.

The motivation to bring the camps of British and Welsh political history closer together also ties into this revised attention on the county. Several branches of British and Welsh political historiography have been consulted for this study, and have proven essential in addressing a range of historical contexts from Monmouthshire to Westminster. However, even at the point of writing, when promising interventions are already underway through a ‘Four Nations’ history approach, an inspection of both fields crystallizes the challenges that historians still face to bridge the epistemological gaps between past realities and disparate narratives based on place and political identity.⁷ A survey of both fields quickly mutates into a problematic endeavour as interwar assessments are simultaneously extensive and uneven. From the wider British perspective, major political parties have inevitably become the focal point for investigation. Before the 1960s, research into the interwar transition after 1918 centred on the collapse of the progressive alliance between the Liberal Party and the Labour Party. In the work of G.D.H. Cole, Henry Pelling and Trevor Wilson, the subsequent rise of Labour at the expense of the Liberals after the war, was placed neatly in the grand narratives

⁵ Matthew Worley, Introduction: Labour’s Grass Roots’ in Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 1-6; Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London, 2008), pp. 2-3; Stuart Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organization’ in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 261-314; Sian Jones, ‘The Political Dynamics of North East Wales, With Special Reference to the Liberal Party’ (PhD, University of North Wales, Bangor, 2003); Gavin Freeman, ‘Beyond Westminster: Grass-roots Liberalism in England, 1910-1929’ (PhD, University of Leicester, 2013).

⁶ Mike Savage, ‘The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective’, *The Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 10:1 (1990), pp. 1-15, p. 2.

⁷ Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret Scull (eds.), *Four Nation Approaches to Modern ‘British’ History: A (Dis)united Kingdom?* (London, 2018).

associated with both movements, from ‘Labour’s Forward March’ towards the Attlee Government of 1945,⁸ to the Liberal fall from grace into obscurity after 1929.⁹ The reversal of fortunes for the Labour Party and Liberal Party, cemented by the dramatic downfall of David Lloyd George’s Coalition Government in 1922, were therefore perceived to be intrinsically linked and pivotal in the trajectory of interwar British politics. In contrast, the Conservative Party, the most successful party at a national level after 1918, received relatively little early attention outside the realm of biographical studies. Robert Blake’s *The Unknown Prime Minister* and Keith Middlemas and John Barnes’, *Baldwin*, for example, presented a top-down glimpse of the cabinet table but only hinted at the Conservative Party’s wider influence on the body politic. The caricature of Baldwinite stability and harmonious Englishness subsequently characterised the Conservatives’ interwar approach, rather than the complex work of party activists across Britain during the 1920s.¹⁰

However, as the teleological methodologies that underpinned these narratives began to be disassembled, and the fascination with high politics gradually gave way to ‘history from below’ during the 1960s and 1970s, previous deterministic interpretations of the interwar period were challenged. The impact of the war and the extension of the franchise on the electorate was given greater precedence in relation to the shift in political attitudes across Britain.¹¹ The role of class in electoral behaviour was reconfigured and the question of political parties as an efficient vehicle for adherent’s demands was reopened and dissected, particularly in relation to Labour.¹² Pivotal to this development was the interpretation of Ross McKibbin, who contended in his seminal work, *The Evolution of the Labour Party*, that

⁸ G.D.H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948); Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (London, 1961); Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971).

⁹ Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-35* (London, 1966); P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971); P.F. Clarke, ‘The Electoral Position of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1914’, *The English Historical Review*, 90:357 (Oct., 1975), pp. 828-836. For an alternative depiction of the demise of the Liberal Party see George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York, 1935).

¹⁰ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858-1923* (London, 1955); G. M. Young, *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952); Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London, 1969). This trend continues to persist in relation to the history of the party. See Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹¹ H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and J.A. Kay, ‘The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party’, *The English Historical Review*, 91:361 (Oct., 1976), pp. 723-52; Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967* (London, 1968).

¹² Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (London, 1962); Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn (eds.), *Towards Socialism* (New York, 1966). See also David Coates and Leo Panitch, ‘The Continuing Relevance of the Milibandian Perspective’ in John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam (eds.), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester; New York, 2003), pp. 71-85.

Labour's position as a mass organisation rested on a proletarian paradox; a working-class consciousness that defined the party as an institution, but which also prevented it from gaining greater electoral supremacy on a consistent basis after 1918.¹³ McKibbin built upon his initial intervention with several cross-party analyses which contradicted contemporaries, such as Chris Cook, by arguing that the interwar political system was founded upon a non-violent status quo, marked by the anti-socialist rhetoric of both Liberal and Conservative parties, the disparate nature of the working-class vote, and the de-politicization of civic life by non-party organisations.¹⁴

McKibbin's counter-thesis has remained persuasive but it has also been critiqued on several fronts over the past forty years. As Eric Hobsbawm declared the halting of the 'Forward March of Labour' in 1978, and Thatcherism began to wage war against the British labour movement in the 1980s, the inquiry into labour history and the merits of class as an explanatory mechanism for political outcomes underwent renewed scrutiny.¹⁵ Fortunately, the following period of self-reflection produced some ground-breaking studies of the Labour Party's emergence after 1918. In particular, the work of Duncan Tanner has been critical in articulating a 'spatial or contextual perspective to electoral and political change', and asserting that political parties were not monoliths representative of social forces but instead, 'unstable coalitions of ideological groups with different interests and aims.'¹⁶ An emphasis on the micro, rather than the macro, has also proliferated, from the work of Mike Savage on Preston to Catriona MacDonald's study of Paisley, which has brought forward the complexity of Labour's progress at a grass roots level.¹⁷ McKibbin's class-conscious political community

¹³ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (London, 1974), p. 247; Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 2-10.

¹⁴ Chris Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922-1929* (London, 1975); Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 528-9; Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010), p. 33.

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?' in Francis Mulhern and Martin Jacques (eds.), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London, 1981); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983); Richard Price, 'The Future of British Labour History', *International Review of Social History*, 36:2 (1991), pp. 249-60; David Howell, 'Editorial', *Labour History Review*, 60:1 (1995), p. 2; Patrick Joyce, 'Refabricating Labour History; or, From Labour History to the History of Labour', *Labour History Review*, 62:2 (1997), pp. 147-52.

¹⁶ Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 13. See also Duncan Tanner, 'Gender, Civic Culture and Politics in South Wales: Explaining Labour Municipal Policy, 1918-39' in Matthew Worley (ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 170-93.

¹⁷ Mike Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987); Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951* (Cardiff, 1996); Catriona MacDonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland: Paisley Politics, 1885-1924* (East Linton, 2000).

has therefore been deconstructed and compartmentalised in the conversion to ‘new political history’.¹⁸

Similar developments have gradually impacted the writing of interwar narratives for the Liberals and Conservatives. While the work of Michael Hart fundamentally challenged the inevitability of Liberal ruin in the early 1980s, the regional studies of Michael Dawson, Sian Jones and Gavin Freeman have only just begun to be built upon.¹⁹ There remains far greater scope to examine the peculiarities of the Liberal interwar experience, not only in localities where they clung on to power, but also in relation to industrial communities where attempts to salvage broken bonds gradually failed. Studies of the Conservative Party have also been slow to accelerate since the overarching studies of John Ramsden in the late 1970s and Martin Pugh in 1985.²⁰ Important first steps have been taken. The research of David Jarvis, David Thackeray and Stuart Ball should not be underestimated in broadening portrayals of the Conservative response to mass democracy, through a reworked focus on class, gender and place.²¹ Comparative regional studies have also emerged, such as Thomas Wyn Williams’ study of North East Wales, or Nick Mansfield’s work on the county of Shropshire, but these have been far less prolific when compared to studies of the Labour Party.²² As Ball admitted in 2013, the decline of Thatcherite Conservatism in the early 1990s led to a comparative slump in monographs of the party and its interwar development. Despite

¹⁸ Lawrence Black, “‘What kind of people are you?’” Labour, the People and the “New Political History” in John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam (eds.), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester; New York, 2003), p. 24.

¹⁹ Michael Hart, ‘The Liberals, the War, and the Franchise’, *The English Historical Review*, 97:385 (Oct., 1982), pp. 820-32; Michael Dawson, ‘Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall 1910-1931: The Old-Time Religion’, *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 425-37; Jones, ‘The Political Dynamics of North East Wales’; Gavin Freeman, ‘The Decline of the Liberal Party in the Heart of England: The Liberals in Leicestershire, 1914-1924’, *Historical Research*, 89 (2016), pp. 531-49; Gavin Freeman, ‘The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 47-63.

²⁰ John Ramsden, *A History of the Conservative Party: The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940* (London, 1978); Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1830-1935* (Oxford, 1985). See also Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party From Peel to Thatcher*, New Ed. (London, 1985).

²¹ David Jarvis, ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5:2 (1994), pp. 129-52; David Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s’, *The English Historical Review*, 111:440 (Feb., 1996), pp. 59-84; Neal McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus, 1998); David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the Challenge of Mass Politics in Early Twentieth Century England* (Manchester, 2013); Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013).

²² Nick Mansfield, ‘Farmworkers and Local Conservatism in South-West Shropshire, 1916-23’ in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public Since the 1880s* (London, 2002), pp. 36-57; Thomas Wyn Williams, ‘The Conservative Party in North-East Wales, 1906-1924’ (PhD, University of Liverpool, 2008). See also Jonathan Bates, ‘The Conservative Party in the Constituencies, 1918-1939’ (D. Phil, Oxford University, 1994).

the overwhelming ‘range and depth’ of primary source material available for exploration on the subject, the history of the Conservative Party is yet to be fully written in many regions across Britain.²³

Finally, a more universal approach through the ‘cultural turn’, and the shift towards greater emphasis on political discourse, has seen a re-evaluation of comparative interwar issues, including electioneering tactics through the efforts of John Lawrence,²⁴ the increasing role of women in civic and political life in the work of Pat Thane,²⁵ and the democratizing impact of non-party organisations in the reassessments of Helen McCarthy.²⁶ By broadening the search, an unprecedented vitality has been generated in the study of interwar British political history. The ambitious work of Matthew Worley, for example, has pointed towards the sophisticated relationship between constituencies and national party frameworks in the case of Labour, that created ‘hundreds of Labour parties, all with similarities but distinctive in their own geographical context.’²⁷ Even so, there remain several historiographical holes to be filled, particularly in connecting different political cultures together. In order to build on the foundations that have already been constructed by historians of British politics, this thesis compares co-existing political cultures, and juxtaposes contiguous localities which are geographically connected yet ideologically distant. In doing so, the political traditions of interwar Monmouthshire, and by extension interwar Britain, are depicted as malleable and constantly shifting, rather than contingent on any single class or social determinant.

Some of these major issues have been addressed in a Welsh context, yet comparative problems also linger. The writing of Welsh history has been largely dominated by a labour history outlook. In the words of Gwyn A. Williams, one of the great proponents of the tradition, this stemmed from an adherence to E.P. Thompson’s instructions, to give a voice to

²³ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, pp. 1-8.

²⁴ Lawrence, ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics’, pp. 185-216; Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford; New York, 2009), pp. 96-129; Jon Lawrence, ‘The Culture of Elections in Modern Britain’, *History*, 96:324 (2011), pp. 459-76.

²⁵ Thane, ‘What Difference Did the Vote Make?’, pp. 54-69; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (Basingstoke, 1992); Harold L. Smith, *The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign, 1866-1928*, Rev. 2nd Edition (London; New York, 2013).

²⁶ McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics’, pp. 891-912. See also Helen McCarthy, ‘Whose Democracy? Histories of British Political Culture Between the Wars’, *The Historical Journal*, 55:1 (2012), pp. 221-38; Helen McCarthy, ‘Associational Voluntarism in Interwar Britain’ in Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 47-68.

²⁷ Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, p. 2; Matthew Worley, *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Farnham, 2009).

the ‘anonymous crowds on the hills’, and to allow the ordinary people to, ‘break briefly into the light’.²⁸ As a direct consequence of Thompsonian influence, Welsh historians charted a parallel course to the architects of ‘people’s history’, remembering and pushing forward the forgotten voices of the working-class. With the creation of Llafur: the Welsh People’s History Society in 1970, the art form was institutionalised and passed down to successive generations of Welsh historians.²⁹

However, an essential development with such explicit purpose did not settle without pitfalls. At the core of Welsh labour history, a teleological class-based narrative of progress also proliferated, depicting an embittered yet unrelenting propulsion forwards from the rising of the ironstone miners and skilled puddlers in the Merthyr Rising of 1831, towards the ‘solvent of tradition’ of the miners’ struggle in 1898, and on to the escalation of conflict, through the struggles of 1921 and 1926, that saw the Labour Party become the controlling force in Welsh politics.³⁰ As a chronicle built upon the realisation of a working-class consciousness, natural antagonists were identified in the ironmasters, coalowners and adherents of the Conservative Party, depicted as an anathema to the fabric of Welsh proletarian identity. The Liberal Party in Wales also came to represent an archaic Edwardian order stunned into shock by the war and beyond repair after 1918. Even leaders of the early labour movement, more commonly referred to as ‘Lib-Labs’, were declared futile defenders of the Liberal nonconformist faith built upon consensus, who represented a barrier on the road towards the ‘rise of Labour’.³¹ Those who confounded the narrative were either criticised for an inability to perceive the changes on the horizon, or, in the case of the Conservative Party, rejected for working against the relentlessness of the Labour tradition. Indeed, it is testament to the controlling hand of Welsh labour history on the tiller of

²⁸ Gwyn A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising*, Reprinted Edition (Cardiff, 1988), p. 14.

²⁹ Andy Croll, “‘People’s Remembrancers’” in a Post-modern Age: Contemplating the Non-crisis of Welsh Labour History’, *Llafur*, 8:1 (2000), p. 5.

³⁰ Williams, *The Merthyr Rising*, pp. 224-30; Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 218-43, p. 243. See also, Ness Edwards, *History of the South Wales Miners’ Federation* (London, 1938); Robin Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners: A History of the South Wales Miners Federation 1898-1914* (London, 1967); Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980); Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981); David J. V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985); Deian Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour in Wales 1890-1914’, *Llafur*, 6:4 (1994), pp. 120-41.

³¹ Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929’, *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp. 288-312; Williams, *When was Wales?* pp. 233-40; T.J. McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea, 1887-1918’ (PhD, University of Wales, Swansea, 1987), p. 234. See also David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields 1850-1926* (1992), pp. 54-80.

historical investigation that to study the Conservatives is still considered a largely peculiar and contradictory quest in a Welsh context.³²

The Welsh labour history paradigm has stimulated an exceptional standard of historical scholarship, and continues to do so, tipping the scales towards vital interpretations of the working-class majority in Wales. However, such a proliferation has not been without its blind spots, not least the ‘othering’ of oppositional political forces, and even ideological factions of the Welsh labour movement. These are not issues exclusive to Welsh labour history but as a result, an imbalance has set in, both thematically in favour of class antagonism, and regionally with the central South Wales coalfield remaining the epicentre of the historical struggle. The post-structuralist critique of the 1980s also appeared to do little to provoke a reflection, and perhaps unnervingly so. Writing in *Llafur*’s journal in 2000, Andy Croll confirmed the sense of unease when he argued that, ‘as yet, there has been nothing to compare with the ferocious exchanges that have been played out on the other side of Offa’s Dyke.’³³ Indeed, the shockwaves of the ‘linguistic’ and ‘cultural’ turns in subsequent years has not sent ripples through the Welsh historical community as they have elsewhere. Labour history continues to be the staple approach for historians of Welsh politics, with the work of Russell Deacon on the Liberals, and Sam Blaxland on the Conservatives, emerging as notable exceptions.³⁴

Perhaps this is a consequence of a longer period of introspection and a consistent emphasis on locality in the portrayal of Welsh labour history. Co-existing alongside the grand, Marxian narrative put forward by Williams, and the more harmonious alternative of Kenneth O. Morgan, stood the explanations of Peter Stead and Dai Smith who placed greater emphasis on the role of the individual and the complex, constantly changing relationship between leaders and led which ‘blurred the outcome’ of political transition.³⁵ The subsequent work of Stead, Croll and Chris Williams has also sought to challenge the suspicion of ‘Lib-

³² Sam Blaxland, ‘A Swinging Party? The Need for a History of the Conservative in Wales’, *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 9 (2014), p. 2. As Blaxland rather appropriately points out, ‘To study the Conservatism of Wales...is, somewhat ironically, a radical pursuit’.

³³ Croll, “‘People’s Remembrancers’”, p. 11. See also Martin Johnes, ‘For Class and Nation: Dominant Trends in the Historiography of Twentieth Century Wales’, *History Compass*, 8:11 (2010), pp. 1257-74.

³⁴ Russell Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties in Wales* (Cardiff, 2014); Blaxland, ‘A Swinging Party?’, pp. 1-10. See also Geraint Thomas, ‘The Conservative Party and Welsh Politics in the Inter-War Years’, *The English Historical Review*, 128:533 (August, 2013), pp. 877-913.

³⁵ Peter Stead, ‘Working-Class Leadership in South Wales 1900-1920’, *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp. 329-53; Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), pp. 67-75, p. 75.

Lab' figureheads such as William Abraham or William Brace.³⁶ Alongside others such as Susan Demont and Eddie May, they have established the significance of local political conditions as being critical in assessing the development of the Labour Party in its many forms in Wales.³⁷ The interventions of Deidre Beddoe, Angela John, Neil Evans and Paul O'Leary has also been crucial in opening up new debates about past Welsh society, and its associated political composition, through the assorted lenses of gender, race and ethnicity.³⁸ These developments have ensured both the survival and the continuing vitality of Welsh labour history. As the most recent assessment of Daryl Leeworthy in *Labour Country* eloquently summarises, it is 'not the teleology of a telescopic viewfinder but rather the shake of a kaleidoscope' that now commands the pursuit of the Welsh political past.³⁹

Nonetheless, Croll's previous apprehension has only been partially resolved by this vibrancy. Despite attempts to deconstruct the image, most notably in the work of Ioan Matthews on the anthracite mining region, traditional monolithic depictions of Labour's control remain pervasive, as does an ongoing reluctance to move focus outside the central coalfield regions, such as the Rhondda valley, and towards the fringes of the coalfield and beyond.⁴⁰ Without a renewed commitment to widening the historical gaze, alternative political cultures will continue to be overshadowed and the intricate flexibility of political activism will remain frustratingly out of reach. For political cultures are not homogenous or rigid. By design, they are reciprocal and remoulded in relation to immediate oppositional forces and ideologies at all levels. In analysing the variety of associated cultures that survived after the end of the Great War, this thesis will offer a fresh perspective on Labour's interwar development based on iteration, inconsistent adaptation based on both urban, industrial and

³⁶ Peter Stead, 'Establishing a Heartland – The Labour Party in Wales' in K. D. Brown (ed.), *The First Labour Party, 1906-1914* (London, 1985), pp. 64-88; Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*, pp. 31-72, p. 68; Chris Williams, 'Democracy and Nationalism in Wales: The Lib-Lab Enigma' in Robert Stradling, Scott Newton and David Bates (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence: Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 107-31; Andy Croll, 'Mabon's Day: The Rise and Fall of a Lib-Lab Holiday in the South Wales Coalfield, 1888-1898', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 72 No. 1 (April 2007), pp. 50-67.

³⁷ Susan Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan: A Society and its Political Articulation 1890-1929' (PhD, Cardiff University, 1990); Eddie May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 62-82.

³⁸ Deidre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000); Ryland Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009); Angela John (ed.), *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, New Edition (Cardiff, 2011); Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans and Paul O'Leary (eds.), *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved Wales*, New Edition (Cardiff, 2015).

³⁹ Daryl Leeworthy, *Labour Country: Political Radicalism and Social Democracy in South Wales, 1831-1935* (Cardigan, 2018), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', *Llafur*, 6:1 (1992), p. 96.

rural localities, and an expansion of outlooks beyond the industrial-political and towards a social and experimental labourism. By also directing attention to Liberal and Conservative Party cultures, that have been previously overlooked, the study will provide unique comparisons in the context of interwar Welsh history, in terms of how divergent political movements responded to each other through differing approaches to mass democracy, post-war organisation and the wider context of subsequent economic collapse.

The search for answers brings us closer to the border between England and Wales. As an area which has questioned its own character for centuries, Monmouthshire is an appropriate starting point for an exploration of political diversity and the transition from cultures to traditions.⁴¹ While there were already political tributaries that had begun to flow in deviating directions before 1914, creating a distinct county profile, the deeper basin that each culture fed into was disrupted significantly by the tide of war and electoral reform. In the General Election of 1910, the county was almost exclusively represented by the Liberal Party. Eight years later, the ripple effect had already begun to alter the local political landscape. The Labour Party emerged as the major electoral force in the four industrial constituencies of Abertillery, Bedwellty, Ebbw Vale and Pontypool. The Conservatives gained a foothold in the rural Monmouth constituency, and the Liberals clung on only in Newport. By 1922, the latter seat had been lost to the Conservatives and as Labour strengthened its hold, the last remnants of Liberal influence could only be found implicitly in Pontypool. By 1929, as Labour took an even firmer grip with victory in Newport, and Monmouth remained a Conservative stronghold, the transition appeared to be complete. These electoral headlines do little justice to the process of creating political traditions, the severing of ties with others, and the competition between contending cultures. However, they do speak to a wider process of transformation that extended beyond South Wales and impacted interwar British politics in various shapes and forms.

In order to carry out this study, a wide range of primary source materials have been used in order to traverse this divided political environment. The manifold nature of this task presents inevitable challenges, particularly when dealing with an assortment of urban and

⁴¹ Tony Hopkins, 'In Search of Monmouthshire, 1536-1972', *Gwent Local History*, 70 (1991), pp. 35-46; Tony Hopkins, 'In Search of Monmouthshire, 1536-1972', *Gwent Local History*, 71 (1992), pp. 3-14; Chris Williams, 'The Question of Monmouthshire' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 348-60; Chris Williams, 'Who Talks of My Nation?' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 343.

rural localities. While repositories that outline the national outlook of political parties have been consulted here, in particular the Archives of the Labour Party originally housed at the People's History Museum in Manchester, or the Papers of the National Liberal Club held at the University of Bristol, the local records referred to are far more inconsistent in scope and survival. As Stuart Ball, Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley have demonstrated in a comparative evaluation of the condition of local material, the party records of the Monmouthshire branches of the three major parties are incredibly revealing yet in no way comprehensive.⁴²

The situation remains largely the same almost sixteen years later since Ball, Thorpe and Worley's survey in 2004. For example, there is an impressive array of material on the Labour Party. Gwent Archives hold the minute books of the Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party which cover the entire interwar period, and Cardiff University Special Collections holds the complete collection of minute books and printed annual reports for the Newport Labour Party which run from 1912 to 1977.⁴³ However, there is a lack of consistency, with no comparative examples for Abertillery, Ebbw Vale and Pontypool. There are also very few cases of surviving personal papers and the documents that have endured, such as the George Barker scrapbooks, are haphazard in composition and inevitably partial in their coverage of this period.⁴⁴ In contrast, while there is a sizeable catalogue of information on the Conservative Party in rural Monmouthshire at the National Library of Wales,⁴⁵ there are no Liberal Party deposits registered in the county. The lack of Liberal information in general, outside of the Lloyd George papers in Aberystwyth, is a more pressing cause for concern and plays into the alarming assertion from Russell Deacon that after 1918, 'there was no real Welsh Liberal story to tell'.⁴⁶

The partial nature of the surviving political records in the county is therefore vexing for any researcher but the incompleteness has presented opportunities for creativity and

⁴² Stuart Ball, Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley, 'Researching the Grass Roots: The Records of Constituency Level Political Parties in Five British Counties, 1918-40', *Archives*, 29:110 (2004), pp. 72-94.

⁴³ The original Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party minute books can be accessed at Gwent Archives in Ebbw Vale. Records of the Newport Constituency Labour Party are part of the South Wales Coalfield Collection held at the Richard Burton Archives, but Harvester Microfilm copies of this material can also be accessed through the Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives (CUSCA). For the most part, the latter has been consulted for this thesis. See also Duncan Tanner, *Newport Labour Party: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm Edition of Newport Labour Party Records* (Wakefield, 2000).

⁴⁴ CUSCA: George Barker Scrapbooks, Uncatalogued.

⁴⁵ National Library of Wales (NLW): Monmouthshire Conservative and Unionist Association (MCUA) Records, NLW MSS MONION. See also Ball, Thorpe and Worley, 'Researching the Grass Roots', pp. 84-91.

⁴⁶ Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals*, p. xii.

reading against the grain. The vast newspaper resources available in physical and increasingly digitised form, from the *South Wales Argus* to the *Monmouthshire Beacon*, have allowed an inspection of the ongoing activities of all parties and even the role of non-party organisations in various localities. Details regarding the Liberal Party in areas such as Newport and Pontypool have also been uncovered from this assortment of press material. As a result, the voice of the party's adherents can be heard, thus confounding Deacon's claim.⁴⁷ In combination with the district council minute books for each constituency held at Gwent Archives, a representation of how politics was contested through local government has also been established.⁴⁸ The political landscape of the interwar years was also not cultivated by parties alone. In the South Wales Coalfield Collection accessed through the Richard Burton Archives at Swansea University, and the oral history interviews held at the South Wales Miners Library, an insight has also been formed stressing how the relationship between the political, the industrial, and the social, evolved within the labour movement, from the perspective of both leaders and led.⁴⁹ The trials involving source material have therefore not been insurmountable. In casting the spotlight beyond political parties, a more detailed and assorted picture of the political collage in the region has been revealed, leading to a broader confirmation of diverse activity and involvement.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the political communities in Monmouthshire between 1918 and 1929 and uncover how interrelated traditions evolved through an understanding of place and proximity, a distinct attempt to translate national issues and organisational objectives into local contexts, and differing responses, both inventive and practical, to the ever-changing democratic and socio-economic landscape. Chapter one will put forward a thematic consideration of Monmouthshire to show that the county is an appropriate proving ground for exploring the evolution of political cultures in both a Welsh and British context. In charting the social, economic and political development

⁴⁷ Records of the *Free Press of Monmouthshire*, *Merthyr Express*, *Monmouthshire Beacon*, *South Wales Argus*, and other key newspapers for the county can be accessed on Harvester Microfilm at both the Newport Reference Library (NRL) and Gwent Archives (GA).

⁴⁸ For examples from each constituency, see GA: Newport County Borough Council Minute Books, 1914-29, A110/M/22-36; Bedwellty Urban District Council Minute Books, 1914-29, A220/M/20-42; Abertillery Urban District Council Minute Books, 1914-29, A310/M/20-28; Tredegar Urban District Council Minute Books, 1917-29, A350/M/28-36; Pontypool Urban District Council Minute Books, A433/M/17-30; Monmouth Rural District Council Minute Books, A570/M/4-10.

⁴⁹ Swansea University Archive, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC): South Wales Miners' Federation Minutes of Council Meetings, Annual and Special Conferences, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1-2; South Wales Miners Library (SWML), Interview of James Griffiths, AUD/90; Interview of Will Coldrick, AUD/339.

of the shire, the county's ecosystem will be related to the wider national context of mass democracy, party anxiety and adaptation, before and after 1918.

Subsequent chapters will maintain a thematic agenda, through a focus on separate political parties, but each will be structured chronologically, allowing a comparative narrative analysis of complex political development shaped by elections, industrial and rural struggle, and the specific sequence of events that characterised the early interwar period. Chapter two will concentrate on the coalfield constituencies of Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale, and how competing philosophies in the Labour tradition coalesced in different configurations in each division. Through an examination of these internal contests, and in response to the catastrophic hardship experienced by localities in these valley areas, especially after the 1921 and 1926 lockouts, a prolonged 'Lib-Lab' endurance will be emphasised here. Indeed, the Stead-Williams thesis will be expanded to demonstrate that the 'Lib-Lab' influence directly impacted the capacity of purposeful, yet practical, Labour successors to attune to a revised political landscape.

Juxtaposed against the abiding Labour tradition, chapter three will seek to determine the increasingly tenuous place of the Liberal Party in this volatile habitat, using the constituency of Pontypool to explain how the party's influence was both problematic, but also peculiarly persistent as an oppositional force. The attempts by the Pontypool Liberal Association to rebuild between the General Elections of 1918 and 1923 will receive particular deliberation here, alongside the failed resurgence of the reunified Liberal Party after 1924. While the stubbornness was not replicated on the same scale elsewhere in the county, the example of Pontypool will be used to demonstrate how the Liberals transitioned from a position of relative control to one of dealing with the slow dissolution of a tradition.

Chapter four will then turn towards the rural constituency of Monmouth in order to dissect the prevailing Conservative Party culture in the fine margins of the county which contrasted so strikingly with the coalfield to the west. Specific attention will be paid to the development of new local alliances, alongside the consolidation of support from the landed gentry and Anglican Church. The extension of party organisation and ideology will be examined to show how the party altered its stance based on the framework of Baldwinite Conservatism, and in relation to both rural communities and the socialist influence in the Monmouthshire coalfield. The struggles faced by opposing parties in this largely agricultural

constituency will also be addressed, which further indicated the durability and strength of an independent Conservatism at a constituency level after 1922.

Finally, chapter five will delve into the clash of cultures between all three major political parties in the urban constituency of Newport, the influence of non-party organisations, and the arms race between Labour and the Conservatives to adapt and surpass the existing traditions in the town, especially after the critical 1922 by-election, which largely replaced the Liberal influence in the division. While no new tradition was truly established, with each party seizing electoral control between 1918 and 1929, the direct interactions between the three party machines helped reinvent the political composition of the town around mass participation of both male and female members of the electorate. As a result, Newport became a microcosm of the more indirect contest between industrial and rural Monmouthshire. It also exemplifies the need to reimagine the accepted patterns of political culture in regions such as South Wales and afford a greater appreciation for the multiplicity of political experience and exchange in interwar British politics.

Chapter 1

The Shy County and the Apprehensive Country - The Case of Monmouthshire

Demobbed in December 1918, after serving at Bois Grenier, Loos, Bethune, the Somme, Arras, Ypres and Passchendaele, the 35 year old Private Frank Richards had finally returned home to Blaina. The relief of leaving France was to be short-lived. Plagued by persistent rheumatism, and more pressing ailments which required immediate surgery, Richards found the normalcy of peacetime difficult to readjust to. This feeling of exasperation is inescapable in the conclusion of the autobiographical account of his experience on the front line, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, particularly in the brief but illuminating final chapter, satirically entitled 'Rewards for War Service'. While remaining stoic and seemingly unflustered in front of his friends about the lack of a fixed, long term pension after his medical operation, Richards' subsequent irritation at the abandonment of his fellow ex-service men by the state, and the bitterness towards the 'lead-swingers and dodgers' who served back at the 'Bases', demonstrate an inability to hide the psychological pain opened up during the war. The wounds did not heal during his time in hospital and in the immediate return to South Wales. As he admitted, 'My operation was a success in one way but not in another, and I have never been the same man as what I was before.'¹ Of course, Richards was not the only soldier left despondent and empty by his ordeal in the armed forces, but the tempered disgust, at the lack of support and tangible social improvement on return, also underlined the restlessness of a society that was in the middle of an upheaval, rather than one arriving at its culmination. The reality was the change was not as tangible as Richards had hoped but the mental trauma of the war had already taken hold. For not only were the individual soldiers who survived fundamentally altered by their experiences on the Front, but the towns and villages they wearily trudged back to had also undergone a transformation of their own.

In its various forms and guises, the county of Monmouthshire reflected the uncertainty that had worked its way across Britain by 1918. Over 5,000 servicemen originally

¹ Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, Library of Wales Edition (Cardigan, 2016), pp. 245-50, p. 247.

from the county had lost their lives during the war, and thousands more would return home to find the promise of social reform disappointingly unfulfilled and a land increasingly scarred by poverty and hardship.² For those who had remained exempt from military service in reserved occupations or objected to the conflict entirely, this was a world that was already in need of renovation. Maybe even revolution. On the home front, the findings of the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest in July 1917 pointed to further turbulence, from the more direct intentions of the ‘advanced men’ in the mining districts of the Sirhowy and Ebbw valleys but also simultaneously in the form of a ‘distinct cleavage’ in Monmouthshire society between industrial militancy and a ‘working class alive to the need for political action in the wider sense’.³ As a result, a dissonance emanated from the clashes surrounding the war in the industrial districts and urban centre of Newport. Disturbances between ‘patriots’ and the increasingly organised anti-war movement provided new parameters to local political debate and fuelled the grave concerns of the Home Office and Security Services further afield.⁴ Reservations remained over whether these rifts would be closed after the conflict had ceased. In the industrial disputes that followed, and the local government quarrels surrounding welfare and unemployment during the 1920s, these fears were not only exacerbated but fully realised.

The arrival of franchise reform in 1918 did little to silence the cacophony of demands for post-war reconstruction and representation. As Monmouthshire became a collection of six seats rather than four, with the industrial divisions of Abertillery, Bedwellty, Ebbw Vale and Pontypool conjoined with the rural constituency of Monmouth and the municipality of Newport, the additional boundary changes and the end of mixed constituencies culminated in the dissolution of the Liberal electoral equilibrium in the county.⁵ Non-party actors also became increasingly prominent, marked most clearly with the creation of branches of the Women Citizens’ Association (WCA) in Newport and Ebbw Vale. The regrouping of suffrage societies in the county, largely under the umbrella of the rebranded National Union

² Peter Strong, ‘The First World War’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 14-5.

³ Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, No. 7 Division, Report of the Commissioners for Wales, Including Monmouthshire (London, 1917), p. 17.

⁴ Aled Eirug, *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales 1914-1918* (Cardiff, 2018), p. xx. Eirug suggests that during the summer and autumn of 1917, the Coalition Government were deeply alarmed by ‘the dangers of serious social, industrial and political discontent in the south Wales mining valleys in particular.’ See also Eddie May, ‘A Question of Control: Social and Industrial Relations in the South Wales Coalfield and the Crisis of Post-war Reconstruction, 1914-1921’ (PhD, University of Wales, Cardiff, 1995), pp. 94-101.

⁵ Gerard Charmley, ‘Parliamentary Representation’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 301-2.

of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), provided further evidence of an evolving democratic arena that desperately required party adjustment to reflect the transformations.⁶ It was in this turbulent atmosphere that political participation took on revised meaning and the reformation of new political traditions began in earnest.

The unease intensified the tensions already firmly imbedded into Monmouthshire society. The findings of the Commission in 1917 also gave further cause for the mounting concerns of political parties at a national level. Having already passed the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which saw the inclusion of 8.5 million women on the electoral registers for the first time, the scope and composition of British politics was already in uncharted territory. Despite the optimism of the national and regional printed press, political parties did not transmit a corresponding assurance.⁷ Wartime shifts had already begun to accelerate the insecurity which would transform the trajectories of political parties after the war. The Liberal Party had begun to tear itself apart in December 1916, as Lloyd George staked his claim for Premiership of the Coalition Government at the expense of Herbert Asquith and his supporters. The division between Coalitionists and Asquithians, or ‘Wee Frees’, was made official by the 1918 General Election and the extension of the Coalition beyond the war. Having won the war, the Welsh Premier insisted on a mandate to determine the peace, though not with the whole force of his own party behind him.⁸ In government, Austen Chamberlain and other Conservative leaders also began to doubt the party’s own electoral potential, perceiving the extension of democracy as a Pandora’s box alongside the stubborn threat of socialism.⁹ In contrast, Labour’s post-war starting point appeared more optimistic, as the party sought a path away from the progressive alliance with the Liberals, embarking on an ideological and organisational process of contemplation to determine a form of socialism that would ‘provide a democratic alternative’ to Lenin’s Bolshevik Revolution.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the self-evaluation incurred its own doubts, about the ability of the party to be more than just a voice of the trade unions and organised labour in

⁶ Ryland Wallace, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009), p. 257; Joanne Smith, ‘From Suffrage to Citizenship: The Cardiff and District Women Citizens’ Association in Comparative Perspective, 1921-1939’, *Llafur*, 11:4 (2015), pp. 26-42.

⁷ *The Times*, 11 January 1918; 8 February 1918; *South Wales Argus (SWA)*, 7 February 1918.

⁸ Gavin Freeman, ‘The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), p. 49.

⁹ David Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s’, *The English Historical Review*, 111:440 (Feb., 1996), p. 81.

¹⁰ Andrew Thorpe, ‘Reasons for “Progressive” Disunity: Labour and Liberal politics in Britain, 1918-45’, *Socialist History*, 27 (2005), pp. 21-42.

order to grasp power for the first time.¹¹ An uncertain future therefore lay ahead for all parties as the war drew to a close.

Collectively though, the changing nature and perspective of the wider electorate caused the most consistent alarm. For the six million men that had served in the armed forces who returned home severely injured or psychologically scarred by what they had experienced on the Western Front, and the families of those 750,000 mortally wounded during the conflict, the poor state provision for the wounded soldiers, widows and dependents became a central focus of post-war political participation.¹² The continuation of state control of industry on the Home Front placed considerable strain on the relationship between the labour movement and the state in regions such as South Wales. A disparate working-class electorate, animated by the community responses to the war and the returning influx of the demobilised, was energised once more. Armed with the ability to vote, but divided over the intricacies of how best to utilise it, the majority nevertheless remained convinced of the need for social improvement.¹³ The enfranchisement of women, even if it was not universal, also encouraged a continuation of campaigns now with the objective of universal suffrage, and represented the high difficulty tariff of managing British public opinion while appealing to a wider audience.¹⁴ These interlinked and complex grievances, and the disorientation they generated, led to what Pat Thane has described as, ‘the one period of the twentieth century when the party political system was peculiarly weak.’¹⁵ From the intentions laid bare by Sidney and Beatrice Webb depicting ‘a war on the old social order’, to the lament found in the personal letters of Herbert Asquith, the uncertainty and paranoia of the major parties was a palpable reality of the immediate post-war political environment.¹⁶

This chapter will therefore bridge the gap between the political worlds of Parliament and the individuals on the ground in order to elaborate how parties, non-party organisations

¹¹ Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars*, Paperback Edition (London, 2008), p. 13.

¹² Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 360-1.

¹³ May, ‘A Question of Control’, pp. 95-144; Eirug, *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales*, p. 364.

¹⁴ Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women’s Movement, 1918-28* (London, 1997), pp. 30-5, p. 42; Pat Thane, ‘The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918-1939’ in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 54-69.

¹⁵ Thane, ‘The Impact of Mass Democracy’, p. 54.

¹⁶ LSE Digital Library: Beatrice Webb’s Diaries, Diary entry dated 30 June 1918, PASSFIELD/1/1; Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction* (London, 1918); Desmond MacCarthy (ed.) *H. H. A. Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to a Friend, First Series 1915-1922* (London, 1933), pp. 89-90.

and people attempted to make sense of the post-war environment in a specific South Wales context. Monmouthshire is a perfect proving ground to demonstrate how evolving political expectations developed and collided with each other between 1918 and 1929. However, in order to provide a cohesive portrait of the county's ecosystem, and lay the foundations for explaining how it would transform further after the war in following chapters, the world that Frank Richards left behind and the one he returned to need to be joined together. Only by tethering one to the other can the significance of the transformation caused by the war, and the scale of the post-war political task at hand, be truly realised

This chapter will initially introduce the shire's demography, economy and social composition up until 1929, acknowledging the stark geographical, occupational, religious and linguistic divides that helped define Monmouthshire and shape the contours of political engagement in the county, before, during and after the war. It will then explore the emerging political cultures that had begun to take shape in the region and how each was impacted by the prolongation of conflict, franchise reform and the revised post-war demands of both its industrial and rural communities after 1918. Using Monmouthshire as a template, it will argue that, in a climate of social crisis, economic ruin and political apprehension, the identities that had already formed, and the relationships fostered with the wider electorate, were to be actively remoulded through updated party and non-party structures. In practice, developing political cultures gained recognition, some withered in a sedentary position, and others were devised in direct response to the frustrations and desperation of the early interwar period.

I. Sir Fynwy – Society, Economy and the Industrial-Rural Dichotomy

The county of Monmouthshire was born into limbo. Granted renewed form by the Act of Union in 1536, the region had a confusing sense of identity from its very inception. Residing in the 'Dominion of Wales', the shire was bound to the institutions and legal frameworks of the 'Realme of England' through the assizes of the Oxford circuit and the judiciary of the chancery and exchequer in Westminster.¹⁷ In Monmouthshire's inception, there was therefore a sense of inescapable confusion. As Tony Hopkins has concluded in his

¹⁷ William Rees, 'The Union of England and Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1937), p. 83; Lloyd Bowen, 'Wales at Westminster: Parliament, Principality and Pressure Groups, 1542-1601', *Parliamentary History*, 22:2 (2003), p. 107.

assessment of the county's origins, the Act of Union had 'shaped the beast but did not tell it where it lived.'¹⁸ Officially English in its administration, but predominantly Welsh in the character, linguistic and cultural distinctions of its people, the county was increasingly torn.¹⁹ Over the next 300 years, there was little consistency in the answers put forward to the enigma that was to remain Monmouthshire. For example, in his journey through the shire in 1799, Reverend William Coxe veered towards neutrality, declaring the county had become 'the connecting link between England and Wales...it unites the scenery, manners and language of both'.²⁰ The Piccadilly priest was not the first to witness and make note of these contradictions and he would not be the last. From George Owen, the sixteenth century historian, to Fred Hando, the Newport writer and artist of the mid-twentieth century, the ambiguity of Monmouthshire's position has lived on in the consciousness of its people, acting as a riddle passed down, generation after generation.²¹

Despite the claims of visitors and inhabitants alike, the British state increasingly leaned towards treating Monmouthshire as Welsh. After its exclusion from the Sunday Closing Act in 1881, the county was incorporated into other landmark Welsh legislation during the Edwardian period, including the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889 and Welsh Church Act of 1914. Eventually implemented in 1920, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church paved the way for further recognition in the extension of Sunday closing to Monmouthshire in 1921 and the inclusion of the county as part of Wales in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Act of 1919 and Health Insurance Act of 1924.²² However, legislation alone could not quell the uncertainty. The endurance and increasingly vocal existence of Welsh and Cymmrodorion Societies in urban centres such as Newport pointed towards a persistent Anglo-Welsh debate that was very much alive.²³ The ensuing debate

¹⁸ Tony Hopkins, 'In Search of Monmouthshire, 1536-1972', *Gwent Local History*, 70 (1991), p. 36.

¹⁹ Chris Williams, 'Who Talks of My Nation?' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 342.

²⁰ William Coxe, *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire: Volume One* (London, 1801), p. 1.

²¹ Fred J. Hando, *The Pleasant Land of Gwent* (Newport, 1944); Hopkins, 'In Search of Monmouthshire, 1536-1972', p. 40; Chris Williams, 'The Question of Monmouthshire' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 352.

²² Williams, 'Who Talks of My Nation?', pp. 342-6.

²³ *Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser (AC)*, 3 November 1916; *Herald of Wales and Monmouthshire Recorder*, 8 September 1917. As J. Kyrle Fletcher, the Newport historian, postulated at a meeting of the town's Welsh Society in 1916, 'I have asked many people I have met, for definite opinion: "Is Monmouthshire in Wales?" but I added, "If not, why?" and I have had no satisfactory answer....What is strictly meant by the kingdom, or the land of Gwent?' Despite Fletcher's subsequent insistence that Monmouthshire had 'proved itself to be the centre of Welsh thought and feeling', the very existence of the Society implied that the dispute was far from resolved.

regarding the extension of Sunday closing in the pages of the *Free Press of Monmouthshire*, and in the demonstrations in Abergavenny, Pontypool and Newport in 1921, reaffirmed the gulf in opinions. However, as Chris Williams has argued such disputes ‘could transcend national identifications’, and to be on either side did not automatically make an individual pro-Welsh or pro-English.²⁴ The county had therefore become a pivotal public proving ground for battles of identity, where different manifestations of Welshness, Englishness and a loosely-defined Britishness circulated and contrasted with each other.

Yet, while the border between England and Wales provided a key backdrop to the conflicted identity of the county, the national partition was not the key part of Monmouthshire’s political formula. In terms of the impact on the politics of the region, the most significant and psychologically potent boundary was the topographical, yet still imagined, division between industrial and rural populations that cut through the county diagonally from the Bloreng mountain in the north to the eastern boundary of Newport in the south, where the River Usk made its final journey into the Severn Estuary.²⁵ On each side lay incongruent communities differentiated on occupational, linguistic and religious grounds. The county was therefore less akin to the Janus-like region of Williams’ estimations,²⁶ but instead resembled a hydra with multiple faces, each with its own unique appearance, attitude and demeanour. As a consequence, political cultures took shape in a direct reply to this specific set of contexts that developed before 1914 and were distorted by conflict, reform and rapid industrial and economic deterioration after the Great War. This section will therefore delve into the long-term socio-economic setting and the immediate post-war context between 1918 and 1929, in order to demonstrate how the multiple dichotomies of Monmouthshire politics mutated over time.

To the west of this imaginary margin lay the established towns of heavy industry at the head of the Rhymney, Sirhowy, Ebbw and eastern valleys, and at the edge of the South Wales coalfield. This included the urban industrial centres of Rhymney, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Pontypool, Blaenavon and Abersychan, sparked into life by the first coke-fuelled

²⁴ Williams, ‘Who Talks of My Nation?’, p. 344.

²⁵ Outside of the rural market towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth, the only exception to the rule was the rural district of Magor to the west of Newport.

²⁶ Williams, ‘Who Talks of My Nation?’, p. 349.

furnaces of the original ironworks founded in each of the four valleys after 1776.²⁷ As John Elliott has demonstrated, the specific expertise of each ironworks, such as Tredegar's reputation for engineering, produced local distinctions and even rivalries between localities during this formative stage of industrial development.²⁸ By 1841, this collection of settlements, coupled with neighbouring Glamorgan, accounted for over 30% of the output of the British iron industry.²⁹ In the process, this collection of towns would become a critical epicentre of the global production of wrought iron and steel. With exceptional industrial expansion and increasing technological advancement came the catalyst for intensifying competition both abroad and closer to home. Companies willing to innovate in terms of industrial process were more likely to survive than those who relied solely on wrought iron to supply profits. The latter examples in Monmouthshire slid towards a gradual decline during the mid-nineteenth century and particularly from the 1870s. Outside of the Rhymney and Tredegar companies, who continued to invest in the pioneering Bessemer process of mass producing steel, the Blaenavon, Ebbw Vale and Nantyglo ironworks all faced financial complications after 1840. The closure of the Beaufort and Nantyglo works in 1873 and 1874 respectively symbolised the perilous pitfalls of lagging behind in this world of escalating industrial capitalism.³⁰

Counterbalancing the measured deterioration of iron was the remarkable growth of the coal industry in the shire, which itself had existed within the shell of iron production since the 1780s but found a new gear from the 1850s onwards. This was largely due to the unrelenting global demand for steam coal and the increasing mandate for the bituminous variant for domestic markets. As Bill Jones has also suggested in relation to the county's reserves, the more difficult bituminous coal streams once out of reach became more

²⁷ John Gwyn Davies, 'Industrial Society in Monmouthshire 1750-1851' (PhD, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1980), pp. 11-67. The most significant early examples included Sirhowy (1778), Beaufort (1779-80) and Blaenavon (1787) ironworks.

²⁸ John Elliott, 'The Iron and Steel Industry' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 73-86, p. 75; John Lloyd, *The Early History of the South Wales Iron Works, 1760 to 1840* (London, 1906), pp. 150-7; Arthur Gray-Jones, *A History of Ebbw Vale* (Risca, 1971), pp. 38-40, p. 70; John Elliott, *The Industrial Development of the Ebbw Valleys 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 73-83; John Evans, 'Early Industrial Development' in Madeleine Gray and Prys Morgan (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 3, The Making of Monmouthshire, 1536-1780* (Cardiff, 2009), p. 375.

²⁹ Ryland Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!: A Study of Reform Agitations in Wales, 1840-1886* (Cardiff, 1991), p. 2.

³⁰ Elliott, 'The Iron and Steel Industry', pp. 77-81.

accessible with improved technology and refined mining techniques.³¹ As industrialisation gathered pace, with coal production becoming increasingly attuned to the export market, embryonic settlements were formed in North West Monmouthshire to accommodate the need for a much larger industrial workforce. These orbiting localities, such as Cwm and Llanhilleth, south of Abertillery, multiplied and transformed into industrially dependent communities.³² Amidst a corresponding higher demand, larger collieries also began to be sunk at Navigation and Marine in the 1870s, 1880s, and later at Oakdale in 1912 and Markham in 1913. The immediate present and future of the valleys therefore lay not in iron ore but in the seams of coal underneath the feet of these communities, even after 1918. War and successive slumps in 1921 and 1926 may have halted the record levels of coal production witnessed in Monmouthshire in 1913, but it did not curtail levels of local employment in heavy industry. By the time of the 1931 census, and as production fell below 11 million tonnes for the first time in five years, 35.5% of the occupied male workforce continued to work in mining and quarrying in the north-west of the county, a fall of less than 5% when compared to pre-war levels recorded in 1911.³³ Coal mining therefore remained the reality for a significant proportion of Monmouthshire's working population and conditioned subsequent political ambitions, demands and grievances.

Allied to this industrial expansion were wider patterns of migration that characterised the demographic profile of the Monmouthshire coalfield. Industrialisation on such a scale led to an exceptional century-long movement of people into the valleys in search of work, from both England and other regions of Wales, which saw the population of Monmouthshire rise from 45,568 in 1801 to an extraordinary 395,719 by 1911.³⁴ As a result, the established towns witnessed exponential increases in population, continuing to act as nodal points for the coal and emerging steel industries of Monmouthshire after 1918. As the 1921 census records show, Pontypool, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale's populations were 44,953, 31,088 and 35,381 respectively. Even Tredegar, despite the opening of the Oakdale and Markham collieries which attracted workers to settle further down the Sirhowy valley, retained a population of

³¹ Bill Jones, 'The Coal Industry' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 94.

³² Elliott, *The Industrial Development of the Ebbw Valleys*, p. 3, pp. 38-40.

³³ Trevor Boyns, 'The Coal Industry' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 34-5.

³⁴ L.J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics: Volume 1* (Cardiff, 1985), pp. 17-20.

25,000 after the war.³⁵ Other industrial towns had also formed as the expansion of industry spread down the Sirhowy, Ebbw and eastern valleys and beyond. In the Ebbw Fach, for example, Abertillery had grown exponentially since the 1850s due to the eventual opening of several deep coal mines that surrounded the town. Its population reflected this demographic boom as it gradually overtook the towns to the west, with 38,805 inhabitants by 1921.³⁶ As the mining industry began to creak under the pressure of the worsening economic climate during the next decade, population decline set in, once again contingent on locality and local rates of employment. As stark drops in population characterised the worst-hit areas for unemployment in the Ebbw Fach, particularly Blaina and Nantyglo, the Sirhowy and eastern valleys saw relatively lower levels of emigration away from the coalfield by the recording of the 1931 census.³⁷ The pace of demographic change, both in its rise and fall, was therefore uneven and impacted the specific distribution of Monmouthshire's industrial population.

Substantial linguistic disparities blended into this mottled landscape and continued to influence the county's societal makeup into the 1920s. Mass economic migration from North Wales, Mid-Wales and the underlying, small scale mobility of Welsh-speaking families travelling shorter distances from village to urban areas in search of employment, also gave Monmouthshire's industrial valleys a much larger Welsh-speaking proportion than the more anglicised rural districts of the county to the east.³⁸ In turn, this complex pattern of settlement and mobility produced urban districts with distinct linguistic characteristics even in the industrial districts.³⁹ According to the 1911 Census of England and Wales, the Tredegar (38.7%), Rhymney (38.0%), Mynyddislwyn (22.9%) and Bedwellty (20.0%) urban districts

³⁵ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, pp. 64-5; Susan Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan: A Society and its Political Articulation 1890-1929' (PhD, Cardiff University, 1990), p. 25.

³⁶ Elliott, *The Industrial Development of the Ebbw Valleys*, p. 30; Boyns, 'The Coal Industry', p. 45.

³⁷ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, pp. 64-5. Between 1921 and 1931, Abertillery saw a population decrease of over 7,000, dropping to 31,803. In contrast, Ebbw Vale, the worst hit urban settlement in the Sirhowy in terms of outwards migration, only fell to a population of 31,686. The urban area of Mynyddislwyn even increased its population over the same period of time, rising from 14,900 in 1921, to 16,204 in 1931.

³⁸ Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'Welsh in the Valleys of Gwent', *Planet*, 51 (1985), pp. 112-8; There is a continuing debate about the role industrialisation played in the development in the rise and fall of the Welsh language in the South Wales coalfield. See E. G. Millward, 'Industrialisation Did Not Save the Welsh Language', *Welsh Nation*, 7 (July, 1960), p. 4; Brinley Thomas, 'A Cauldron of Rebirth: Population and the Welsh Language in the Nineteenth Century', *Welsh Historical Review*, 13:4 (Dec., 1987), pp. 418-437; Sian Rhiannon Williams, *Oes y Byd i'r Iaith Gymraeg: Y Gymraeg yn Ardal Ddiwydiannol Sir Fynwy yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Cardiff, 1992).

³⁹ W.T.R. Pryce, 'Population and Language' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 157-60; Harry Lewis, 'Monmouthshire and the Welsh Language Censuses 1901 to 1971', *Gwent Local History*, 48 (1980), pp. 18-24; Williams, 'Welsh in the Valleys of Gwent', pp. 112-8.

had significantly higher proportions able to speak Welsh, when compared with communities east of the Ebbw River, or further south, such as Risca. The highest proportion in the Abertillery constituency was the Abercarn district with 13% able to speak Welsh.⁴⁰ A combination of the loss of Welsh speakers on the Western Front and subsequent educational policies which ‘played down’ the teaching of the language in infant schools saw the erosion of the Welsh-speaking core of West Monmouthshire. The trend was confirmed further still after 1918. A general decline was already evident at the beginning of the 1920s, but while the Sirhowy and Rhymney valleys clung on over the next decade, the urban districts of Abertillery (3.6%), Nantyglo and Blaina (2.4%) and Abersychan (2.4%) had almost entirely yielded their retention of the Welsh language by 1931.⁴¹ Therefore, the language of politics was almost exclusively delivered in English by 1929.

A receding linguistic fault line tied into the developing configuration of religious observance in these valley communities. A widespread commitment to nonconformity, which had proliferated during the nineteenth century with the assistance of the Liberal Party, continued to influence political allegiances and affiliations. The Baptists and Independents had been the most prominent denominations in the Monmouthshire coalfield since the first influx of migrants from rural Wales in the early nineteenth century, and both continued to attract a large working-class membership after 1918.⁴² However, while the remnants of Welsh-speaking communities often produced a residual faithfulness to the tenets of Liberal nonconformity, in the Sirhowy valley in particular,⁴³ the swift fall in Welsh speakers in areas such as Abertillery, Blaenavon and Blaina correlated with a more socially aware chapel discourse influenced by the vocal socialism that echoed through the Ebbw Fach.⁴⁴ While

⁴⁰ Pryce, ‘Population and Language’, p. 183.

⁴¹ Pryce, ‘Population and Language’, p. 183. The Rhymney urban district recorded an increase in proportion of Welsh speakers between 1921 (31.3%) and 1931 (34.6%) while Tredegar stayed steady with a drop from 26% to 24.6% over the same period. Ebbw Vale had begun to exhibit the weakest retention in the Sirhowy with a figure of 6.1% by 1931.

⁴² Jeremy Morris, ‘Religion’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 245-6; D. Ben Rees, *Chapels in the Valley: A Study in the Sociology of Welsh Nonconformity* (Liverpool, 1975), pp. 66-123.

⁴³ Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, pp. 76-8, p. 276. Demont asserts that the transfer of political allegiances for ministers from the Liberal Party to the Labour Party was often slow and inconsistent, contrasting the examples of Alfred Barrett, the Congregationalist minister and district councillor in Tredegar who only committed to Labour when joining the Divisional Party in 1920, with J.J. Harrison, ‘the red minister’ who led his congregation in support of the labour movement during the 1921 lockout.

⁴⁴ Lowri Newman, ‘Green, Beatrice (1895-1927): Labour Party Activist’ in Keith Gildart, David Howell and Neville Kirk (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 11* (Basingstoke; New York, 2003), pp. 77. Newman states that in urban areas such as Abertillery, ‘Many espoused a version of nonconformity that stressed the need for social morality and equality rather than a focus on the virtues and failings of the individual.’

Jeremy Morris has suggested that the 1920s, a period signposted by the eventual disestablishment of the Anglican Church in 1920, remained a 'golden age' for Welsh nonconformist theology and culture,⁴⁵ the inherent tensions between individual chapels in different industrial localities pointed towards a detectable deterioration of the sway these religious institutions held politically, a decline that eventually coalesced during the depression of the 1930s.

The impact of industrialisation, urbanisation and migration therefore created districts with similar broad characteristics but subtle distinguishing features. As John Elliott has also suggested, the 'highly differentiated form of industrial transformation' resulted in fundamental distinctions in terms of the nature and rapidity of socio-economic change between these localities in such close proximity, often draped onto the valley sides.⁴⁶ Such patterns were to have significant repercussions for the future ideological and political loyalties of those who lived and worked in the Monmouthshire coalfield. However, there were factors associated with these sweeping industrial and socio-economic processes which created an intricate network of connected, yet distinctive, communities. Most visibly, communication lines coupled together a constantly expanding industrial matrix, initially in the shape of the Merthyr, Tredegar and Abergavenny railway built during the 1860s.⁴⁷ The railway system continued to expand into the early twentieth century in these urban districts until the beginning of the sector's decline during the depression in the early 1930s.⁴⁸ In linking villages, town and urban centres, the railways provided tangible evidence of the shared industrial experience between valley communities.

Yet, it was more than molten metal and railway lines which provided a sense of solidarity. The emergence of the labour movement in the shire also served to unify, as well as divide. The grip of associated industrial companies, such as the Tredegar Iron & Coal Company and the Ebbw Vale Steel, Iron & Coal Company (EVSICC) tightened throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1920s, these dominant companies had become mostly amalgamated combines, exclusively operating in Monmouthshire in an effort

⁴⁵ Morris, 'Religion', p. 246.

⁴⁶ Elliott, *The Industrial Development of the Ebbw Valleys*, p. 3, pp. 38-40.

⁴⁷ W.W. Tasker, *The Merthyr, Tredegar and Abergavenny Railway and Branches* (Poole, 1986), p. 21. This major railway line was extended towards the Rhymney Bridge on the Monmouthshire county border with Caerphilly in 1871.

⁴⁸ Ben Curtis, 'Manufacturing, Communications and Commerce' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 90-1.

to monopolise the coal and steel output of the county.⁴⁹ With little economic diversity, urban populations became entirely reliant on the local colliery or steelworks, and by extension the whim of coalowners and steelwork managers who set the workers' wages and determined working hours and conditions. The firm and consistent control of companies provoked a number of responses from working-class communities in Monmouthshire, developing into the more focused industrial and political demands of local activists of the Chartist movement during the 1830s and 1840s. The miners of the Sirhowy and Ebbw Valleys, in particular, were key components of the local Chartist movement, which expressed itself most dramatically in the uprising contested outside the Westgate Hotel in Newport in 1839.⁵⁰

Despite the dispersal of radical energy into chapel politics, eventually harnessed by the Liberal Party after 1868, the enduring juggernaut of the corporate industrial structure caused renewed outbreaks of direct action in the later nineteenth century. Associated campaigns for unionisation, to combat the lack of control over industrial disputes and fight for working-class industrial and political representation, culminated in the initial formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) after the Newport conference of 1889, and the creation of the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF) in the aftermath of the tumultuous miners' strike and lockout of 1898. The eventual organisation of the majority of the workforce into an autonomous and powerful union, led and devised in part by miners' leaders who were raised and lived in the Ebbw and Sirhowy valleys, such as William Brace,⁵¹

⁴⁹ Boyns, 'The Coal Industry', pp. 37-9; John Elliott and Colin Deenan, 'Iron, Steel and Aluminium' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 59-61.

⁵⁰ Rhian E. Jones, 'Symbol, Ritual and Popular Protest in Early Nineteenth Century Wales: The Scotch Cattle Rebranded', *Welsh History Review*, 26:1 (2012), pp. 34-57; David J. V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985), p. 26. See also Ivor Wilks, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839: Class Struggle as Armed Struggle* (London, 1984).

⁵¹ Robin Page Arnot, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 'Brace, William' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 1* (London, 1972), pp. 51-3. Born in Risca, William Brace (1865-1947) initially entered the mining industry at Risca colliery before heading north towards the mines of Celynen and Abercarn. After bringing forward a legal challenge against the Abercarn Colliery Company in 1890, Brace earned the trust of his fellow miners, despite defeat, and was elected as miners' agent for the Monmouth and South Wales District Association. Brace continued to campaign for an improvement to miners' wages and working conditions, working alongside fellow mining figures from Risca such as James Winstone. Such a commitment led to him being elected the first vice-president of the SWMF in 1898, and as one of the first working-class Welsh MPs in South Glamorgan during the 1906 General Election. Before 1914, also served as a representative on the Monmouthshire County Council and would eventually replace William Abraham as president of the SWMF in 1912.

Thomas Richards,⁵² and Alfred Onions,⁵³ was a clear indication of the collective demands shared by Monmouthshire's coalfield districts during the later nineteenth century.

Aligned with the industrial heartlands lay Newport to the south, an urban hub with an entirely different urban character of its own. The intrinsic connection between the coalfield and the town was carved into the earth in the shape of the Monmouthshire canal in 1796, which originally flowed from Pontnewynydd, north of Pontypool, to the River Usk. An extension in 1842, to join the canal to Newport's newly opened docks, represented the emerging prominence of the port which was rapidly earning the reputation as the pre-eminent centre for coal exportation in South Wales, before its usurpation by Cardiff in the 1850s. Further expansions in its communication lines and commercial district were funded by industrialists and landed gentry such as the Homfray and Mackworth families. Through a combination of these developments and the promotion of its benefactors, the town's civic status drastically improved, with Newport increasingly perceived as the potential heir to the throne of the established industrial ports across the border with England.⁵⁴ While it never did emulate the sprawl and scale of the Bristol and Liverpool archetypes that it aimed to surpass, Newport's expansion continued throughout the 1850s and reached its zenith with the opening of the Alexandra docks in 1875. By the turn of the twentieth century, the infrastructural development had brought with it rapid commercial growth, as the town became the largest urban settlement in the county for trade and retail. With the decision to base Monmouthshire

⁵² Robin Page Arnot and Joyce Bellamy, 'Richards, Thomas' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 1* (London, 1972), pp. 285-7. Thomas Richards (1859-1931) was born in Beaufort, Ebbw Vale. Similarly to Brace, Richards became an increasingly active participant in advocating a collective working-class organisation to combat the control of the coalowners in the South Wales coalfield. He helped form the Ebbw Vale Miners' Association in 1884 and was appointed miners' agent for the Ebbw Vale district in 1888. After the momentous strike of 1898, Richards was appointed the inaugural secretary of the SWMF, a position he would hold until his death in 1931. He would also represent South Wales on the Executive Committee of the MFGB between 1903 and 1911, and then after the war between 1921 and 1931. He would also join Brace in becoming one of the first working-class Welsh MPs in Parliament, when he was elected to represent the West Monmouthshire division in 1904. He also had an extensive council career. He was elected to the MCC as early as 1892 and served on the Ebbw Vale UDC between 1894 and 1904.

⁵³ *Merthyr Express: West Monmouth Edition (ME)*, 9 July 1921. Alfred Onions (1858-1921) was a founding member and the first treasurer of the SWMF. A close ally of Abraham, Brace and Richards, Onions, originally from Shropshire, moved to Wales in 1883, where he began work at the Black Vein colliery in Risca. After spells in both the Rhondda and Abercarn collieries, he gained the trust of his fellow miners and was appointed checkweigher at the latter colliery. He became miners' agent for both the Rhymney Valley (1893-1898) and Tredegar Valley (1898-1918) districts soon after. He was also regularly elected to the MFGB Executive and would go on to represent the Caerphilly constituency as a Labour MP between 1918 and his death in 1921.

⁵⁴ *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 15 October 1842; Paul O'Leary, *Claiming the Streets: Processions and Urban Cultures in South Wales, c. 1830-1880* (Cardiff, 2012), pp. 38-9.

County Council (MCC) at Shire Hall in the town centre after 1889, Newport's status as unofficial capital of the county was all but confirmed.⁵⁵

The population boom, which saw Newport's inhabitants treble to 110,000 between 1871 and 1931, also fuelled the escalation in its wealth and infrastructure. However, by the outbreak of war, the demographic composition of Newport had become distinctive from the valley communities umbilically linked to the port. Earlier migration patterns, characterised by the movement of workers between Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, were compounded by an influx of workers from England, Ireland and further afield. Irish emigrants had begun to seek refuge in the town after the famine of the 1840s, while an English contingent had become increasingly pronounced by the 1911 census, with 21.8% of the Newport county borough's population originating from across the eastern border. The proportion was significantly higher than other parts of the county and the contiguous regions of Glamorgan and Brecon.⁵⁶

Unlike industrial districts in the Monmouthshire valleys, with the exception of Ebbw Vale and Pontypool, there was also a wider diversity of industries in Newport. As the occupational makeup of the town was revised, signalled by the growth of the Lysaght Orb into the largest steelworks in the world by 1923, and as the concentration of commercial businesses intensified, a composite industrial structure was created, alongside a more assorted class profile. As John Ramsden has calculated, while around 80,000 workers remained employed in a range of heavy industries, from coal exports to shipbuilding and engineering, the town's population also had the third highest proportion of middle-class residents in Wales by 1921.⁵⁷ Consequentially, and in the context of Monmouthshire, a unique urban settlement with an increasingly diverse social and business environment was formed, which encouraged a commitment to tenets of personal independence and free trade in its enfranchised constituents. In turn, its more assorted workforce, from shipbuilders to steelworkers, remained heavily influenced by the Liberal paternalism of local employers.⁵⁸ Industrialisation had therefore bound Newport and the western valleys together. However, in the process, the

⁵⁵ O'Leary, *Claiming the Streets*, pp. 39-40.

⁵⁶ Paul O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration: The Irish in Wales, 1798-1922* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 102; Chris Williams, "'Decorous and creditable': The Irish in Newport" in Paul O'Leary (ed.), *The Irish in Wales* (Liverpool, 2004), pp. 54-82; Pryce, 'Population and Language', pp. 160-1.

⁵⁷ Duncan Tanner, *Newport Labour Party: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm Edition of Newport Labour Party Records* (Wakefield, 2000), p. 1; John Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election and the Fall of the Coalition' in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London, 1973), p. 22. See also Gwent Archives (GA): The Newport Year Book (Newport, 1921), D975/6.

⁵⁸ Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 228-9.

additional investment and the multiplicity of civic, commercial and local government functions, had given rise to a town separate in its class configuration and therefore potentially conducive to a divergent set of political identities.

Looking out to the east, the county took on a rather different complexion. Towards the municipal boroughs of Abergavenny to the north, and the market towns of Chepstow and Monmouth on the border with England, the county retained a prolonged commitment to agricultural enterprise and seasonal harvest work. On the rural frontier, the class hierarchy remained largely insurmountable, particularly for the agricultural worker who sold his labour for wages and complied with the will of the landlords and large estates of Beaufort, Hanbury, Herbert and Tredegar.⁵⁹ As the valleys to the west witnessed such dramatic and observable transformations, the relentless exploitation of the rural working-class remained largely uninterrupted and the pre-industrial image of Monmouthshire's apathetic countryside remained pervasive. As David Pretty has summarised, the lack of abrupt fissures in the county's rural society appeared to lead to 'a passive submission to conditions of unremitting hardship and suffering' and the prolongation of 'a class apart' from that of the more secure tenant farmer.⁶⁰

Further evidence of subservience can be found in the lack of commitment to those movements which sought to challenge established social orders. Despite the labourer's revolt of 1830-1 in the south and west of England, and even with the commencement of the riots in the name of Rebecca emanating from Carmarthenshire and other parts of West and Mid-Wales during the late 1830s and early 1840s, there was little appetite shown for any form of organised stand against the dreadful poverty and ills of rural Monmouthshire society. As Liberal nonconformity spread into rural areas in the 1850s and 1860s, and with greater attention paid to the imposition of tithes and the broader demands of the tenant farmer against the imposition of the landlords, the equipoise between the estates and leaseholders was nevertheless retained. In turn, the voice of the poorest labourers was once again ignored.⁶¹ Arguably the most overt example of this disregard for the latter came in the findings of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire, published in full in 1896. Out of the total 1,086 witnesses called to provide evidence, only 21 agricultural workers from across

⁵⁹ Frederick Purdy, *Return to Parliament of Owners of Land in England and Wales* (London, 1876), p. 36.

⁶⁰ David Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed: Farm Workers' Unions in Wales, 1889-1950* (Cardiff, 1989), p. 3.

⁶¹ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, pp. 4-9.

the entirety of Wales were interviewed.⁶² With the culmination of the long nineteenth century, eastern districts in the county were subjected to a continuation of the difficult set of conditions that had beset much of rural Wales since the late 1870s, characterised by falling yields, rising commodity prices and a widespread decline in incomes.

Protracted yet relative economic struggle led to a diminishing pool of workers. By 1918, agricultural labourers made up an increasingly small fragment of Monmouthshire's rural society, amounting to only 6% of the county's workforce. The attraction of employment in the coalfield, the Forest of Dean, and, in smaller numbers, the promise of a fresh start overseas, had contributed to this exodus. A diminishing population had led to comparatively low levels of investment spent on the rural districts in terms of railway connections and communications, when compared to industrial districts of the county.⁶³ As David Howell has also suggested, the absence of surplus employment to foster discontent, the maintenance of favourable wage rates compared to most bordering English counties, and the continuing 'close interdependence' between tenant farmers and the local peasantry led to an aversion to organised forms of protest in rural Monmouthshire up until 1917 and 1918.⁶⁴

Even as the exodus of rural workers, and the scorn aimed at farmers for high produce prices during the war, initialised the beginning of the break with a past characterised by compliance,⁶⁵ significant obstacles remained to collective working-class unity as a result of the long term agricultural configuration of the region. The persistence of small farms created close-knit yet sparse and isolated communities, spread out across the countryside, dependent on the market towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow, and the municipal borough of Monmouth, for trade and commerce, but also the preservation of the landlord-tenant-farmer-labourer relationship in order to ensure employment. No matter how much resentment resided within the poorest rural communities, they remained reliant on a deferential system that was still largely intact. Even after the war, as agricultural markets withered and plummeted

⁶² *Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire, Vol. III: Evidence* (London, 1896), pp. 505-10; Daniel Lleufer Thomas, *The Welsh Land Commission: A Digest of its Report* (London, 1896), pp. 335-8. As the commissioners summarised, 'There is no impassable gulf, no great social cleavage or feeling of caste between the two classes...The labouring class merges imperceptibly into the farming class'.

⁶³ Ian Pincombe, 'The Rural Economy' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 102-25, p. 102, p. 114, p. 116.

⁶⁴ David J. V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales, 1793-1835* (London, 1973), pp. 58-64. See also David Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), p. 108, p. 157. As Howell has confirmed, the lack of direct protest during the nineteenth century, and the inconsistency of its instigation after 1918, was a trait that the county shared with neighbouring rural districts in Glamorgan.

⁶⁵ Petty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, pp. 66-9.

consistently between 1921 and 1933, and relations between farmers and labourers soured significantly, there was only fleeting prospects of revolt in the county as the power of the landed gentry lingered on.

Stability, rather than sweeping change, therefore marked the rural hinterland of Monmouthshire. Indeed, this continuity was reflected in wider patterns of work, language and religiosity. Firstly, rural settlements in the shire remained the preserve of small scale ‘family farming’, with the majority of holdings not exceeding fifty acres. A major and more radical shift appeared in the move from arable cultivation to the pastoral rearing of cattle and sheep during the interwar period, yet the transformation played into the more gradual long-term retention of smaller holdings by 1929.⁶⁶ Linguistically, the proximity of the English border, the sway of the English-speaking gentry and the wider anglicisation of the county accelerated by industrialisation and migration to the west, led to a minimal retention of the Welsh language in rural areas. In the municipal borough of Monmouth, for example, only 1.5% of local residents spoke any semblance of Welsh by the conclusion of the 1920s. Even in those settlements in close vicinity to industrial districts, such as Abergavenny and Magor, there were consistently small numbers of residents who retained an ability to speak the language by 1931.⁶⁷

The enduring Anglicanism of these villages and market towns, even after disestablishment, also confirmed a stark contrast in religious observance between sparse rural populations and the more marked nonconformist influence on the condensed industrial nuclei of the Monmouthshire coalfield. Indeed, the consolidation of the Church in Wales’ position after the war, and the re-establishment of the Monmouth diocese at St Woolos cathedral in 1921, indicated that there remained an animated and dedicated group of adherents in the rural districts of the county.⁶⁸ Through small-scale farming practices, and the linguistic and religious monopoly of English and Anglican traditions in rural areas, there was therefore a collection of commonalities which gave Monmouthshire’s agricultural communities a conflicting identity to their industrial neighbours and provided opportunities for widespread and lasting political sympathies.

⁶⁶ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, p. 187.

⁶⁷ Pryce, ‘Population and Language’, p. 183. Abergavenny rural district fell from 10.1% in 1901 to 2.9% in 1921, before rising slightly to 3.1% in 1931. Magor followed a similar trend over the same period, decreasing from 2.9% to 2.4% respectively. The largest decline in terms of rural districts came in St. Mellons which saw a drop from 19.7% at the turn of the century to 3.7% by the end of the 1920s.

⁶⁸ Morris, ‘Religion’, pp. 248-9.

Monmouthshire was therefore defined by its diversity. The region contained collections of both urban and rural life and was marked by divergent industrial, agricultural and commercial occupations, as well as the chasm between the chapels and the Anglican Church. The county was therefore split in perpetuity. On each side of the imagined partition, there were essential tensions. The most obvious examples were intensified between employers and employed in heavy industry and the tenant farmers and agricultural labourers who worked the land. Yet elements of local personality also served to create communities linked together through social, class and occupational hierarchies. Inside each pyramid lay inherently disparate principles and political outlooks. Up until 1918, the limits of suffrage prevented such pressures from fundamentally altering the electoral map of the county, but disenfranchisement did not prohibit the creation of embryonic political cultures across the shire before and after the war. Having established a general overview of the fractured Monmouthshire landscape, attention will now shift to the role played by political parties and associated organisations in addressing such contrasting societies in the immediate post-war context.

II. Sir Fynwy – Politics, People and the Post-War Landscape

(i). Liberalism, the Liberal Party and Electoral Reform

Before 1918, the significant frictions inherent in Monmouthshire society were not reflected in its electoral politics. In the 1906 General Election, the region's limited electorate firmly pledged an allegiance to the Liberal Party of William Gladstone, David Lloyd George and Henry Campbell-Bannerman, sharing in the political landslide which saw the Liberals hold thirty-three out of the thirty-four divisions across Wales.⁶⁹ Such continuity persisted up until 1918 and reflected the long-term conversion to Liberalism that had swept across Monmouthshire and the majority of Welsh constituencies since 1868. Indeed, three of the four MPs returned in December 1910 epitomised the different threads of Liberalism that had stretched across the county's mix of industrial and rural divisions, from the Chamberlainite to

⁶⁹ *South Wales Daily News (SWDN)*, 9 February 1906; 26 February 1906.

the Gladstonian, from Reginald McKenna in North Monmouthshire,⁷⁰ to Ivor Herbert in South Monmouthshire,⁷¹ and Lewis Haslam in the Monmouth Boroughs seat.⁷²

Before 1914, there was little evidence to suggest any sudden interruption to this supremacy. Aided by the backing of powerful, oligarchical local associations, the county's representatives were provided with a stable platform to preach the now accustomed Liberal nonconformist gospel of 'social and civil equality', and objections to 'national' grievances such as the established Anglican Church in Wales. Indeed, each rejoiced in the belief that, 'Y Ddraig Goch a ddyry gychwyn' ('Wales was to the front') in British politics.⁷³ The outcomes on a personal level were increasing governmental openings, particularly for McKenna, who held significant cabinet positions from Home Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.⁷⁴ In a collective sense, a remarkably consistent Liberal tradition was created in the shire,

⁷⁰ *SWDN*, 5 July 1895; 10 July 1895; *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News (CTSWWN)*, 13 January 1906; 22 January 1910; Stephen McKenna, *Reginald McKenna 1863-1943* (London, 1948), pp. 12-3; Martin Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier Among Statesmen 1863-1916* (London, 2008), pp. 17-49, pp. 44-45. Reginald McKenna (1863-1943) was born in Bayswater in London. After graduating with a law degree from Trinity Hall, Cambridge in 1882, and practising as a barrister from 1887, McKenna soon developed a keen interest in politics, leaning towards the outlook of Charles Dilke and Joseph Chamberlain. Having tried and failed to enter the House of Commons in 1892, McKenna found better fortune in the shape of the North Monmouthshire constituency. He was first elected to Parliament in 1895. Identifying with 'The historic traditions of North Monmouthshire...an ardent and advanced Liberalism', McKenna's conception of Liberal ideology emphasised 'sturdy independence', a 'patient and determined fight for equal laws and fair social conditions' and increasingly the fiscal responsibilities of the state.

⁷¹ *Western Mail (WM)*, 19 October 1933. Ivor John Caradoc Herbert (1851-1933), a resident landowner of Llanarth Court near Raglan, and descendant of the Treowen family, entered Parliament in 1906. After a decorated military career, Herbert assisted in the creation of the Edwardian Liberal tradition in Monmouthshire, assisting in the creation of the local Liberal machine in the South Monmouthshire and subsequent Monmouth and Newport divisions. Outside of political organisation, and his work as county councillor, Herbert was also a keen champion of the National Eisteddfod, the vice-president of the National Museum between 1912 and 1917, and also held an interest in both the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion. In his commitment to 'national' issues, Herbert represented the seemingly unbreakable bonds between the Liberal Party and the claims of Welsh nationhood before the war.

⁷² *SWA*, 16 September 1922; *The Times*, 16 September 1922. Lewis Haslam (1856-1922), a Bolton-born manufacturing and cotton-spinning director, had unsuccessfully attempted to enter Parliament twice as a Gladstonian Liberal, firstly in the Westhoughton constituency in Lancashire in 1892 and the Stamford division in Lincolnshire in 1900. He finally succeeded in 1906, when he secured victory in the Monmouth Boroughs seat. Haslam was highly supportive of Lloyd George throughout his parliamentary career and supported the second Coalition Government after 1918. He continued to represent the Liberal cause in Newport up until his premature death in 1922.

⁷³ *AC*, 29 May 1914; Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 6 (1973), p. 290; Russell Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties in Wales* (Cardiff, 2014), p. 40.

⁷⁴ N.D. Dalglish, 'A "difficult and somewhat thankless task": Politics, Religion and the Education Bill of 1908', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 31:1 (1999), pp. 19-35; Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, pp. 91-142. McKenna's first major cabinet role arrived when he was appointed president of the Board of Education in January 1907. In 1908, he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, where he oversaw the acceleration of the dreadnought battleship programme, before accepting the role of Home Secretary in 1911, a position he held for four years. McKenna gained the increasing trust of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith during the early war years, leading to his appointment as Chancellor in May 1915.

extending beyond the parliamentary arena. Indeed, the strength of the party was powerfully demonstrated elsewhere by revered Liberal councillors, such as Henry Mather Jackson and T.G. James, in their relatively stable control of the MCC after 1889, the local district councils and the Board of Guardians that represented the parishes of Bedwellty (BBOG), Pontypool (PBOG) and Abergavenny.⁷⁵ In both industrial and rural regions, this loyalty had been built upon the perception of ‘a common cultural bond’ between a non-industrial, professional Liberal elite and the working-class majority who toiled underground and on the land, still faithful to the chapel and devoted to the principles of self-help and individual independence.⁷⁶

The outbreak of war severely, and almost irreparably, damaged the Liberal equilibrium, both in Monmouthshire and across Britain. For the Liberals in high office, the conflict provided an increasingly exasperating ‘cruel conundrum’ which severely tested their ideological commitment to personal liberty. As it became apparent that the war would not be concluded before the Christmas 1914, the restrictions placed upon the civilian population and the freedom of the press, installed through the Defence of the Realm Act and Official Secrets Act, began to severely split the Liberals over the question of centralising power in the hands of the state. Worse still, the prolongation of war began to tear apart the party from the inside.⁷⁷ Despite attempts to convert the Edwardian principles of entrenchment and reform into hopeful predictions of a peaceful post-war world, the unease of theorists such as L.T. Hobhouse reflected the contortions of wider Liberalism, which increasingly rested on faith rather than conviction.⁷⁸ The divisions that surrounded the implementation of conscription in 1916 only aggravated the psychological quandaries that were now firmly in the minds of Liberal politicians and party members. Ultimately, they led to a lasting and explosive divorce. Detonated in December 1916, the party was torn asunder by an embittered feud, instigated by Lloyd George and leading to the overthrow of Asquith as Prime Minister and the resignation of McKenna as Chancellor. While not an official split, the grudge match between both camps continued after 1918, leaving the standing of the party diminished and its members torn

⁷⁵ *South Wales Echo (SWE)*, 10 January 1889; 18 January 1889; *WM*, 11 March 1892, 9 March 1895; 5 March 1910, 11 March 1913; Trevor Morgan, *Monmouthshire Education* (Cwmbran, 1988), pp. 1-12. The first chairman of the MCC was the Liberal Edwin Grove, the auditor and cashier of the Ebbw Vale Iron and Coal Company. He remained in this position until Godfrey Morgan, Lord Tredegar, was elected in 1902. Unanimously voted into the position, the Conservative landowner still had to work with a Liberal majority on the council that would last largely untouched until 1919.

⁷⁶ Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 198.

⁷⁷ Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 373-4.

⁷⁸ L.T. Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict* (London, 1915), pp. 73-74. Hobhouse confirmed this gloomy swing in outlook when he hoped, rather than proclaimed, that the irrationality of the war would shock mankind into eventual harmony, that ‘the chastening of adversity will itself shake this nonsense out of the world.’

between supporting Lloyd George's Coalition and those whom he had seemingly betrayed. As Michael Freedon has argued, 'for many of its supporters, [the split] had irreparably blemished its [the Liberal Party's] reputation as the party of peace'.⁷⁹ While the Liberals remained partially in power through the Coalition Government until 1922, the party had been shaken to its very core by the war and, and the schism between its leaders would undercut the unity of the party throughout the interwar period.

In Monmouthshire, the party dilemma over the war itself was not reciprocated initially but it gradually began to infiltrate the outlook of the Liberals at a grass roots level. On the surface, the shire's Liberal MPs were largely in favour of declaration and were key figures in the promotion of the war effort.⁸⁰ On Herbert's decision to retire from Parliament after receiving a peerage in 1917, the victory of the Liberal candidate and supporter of the war, Abraham Garrod Thomas, in the South Monmouthshire by-election,⁸¹ pointed towards the longevity of the Liberal tradition in the county, propped up by the pro-war sympathies of the local electorate. However, while the county's MPs may have been broadly in support, the disunion caused by the removal of Asquith in 1916 left local Liberal Associations in political purgatory, with rancour and discontent evident in branches such as Pontypool and Newport. In the former, for example, the specific clash of personalities between McKenna and Lloyd George was of particular concern. The North Monmouthshire Liberal Association (NMLA) had acquiesced during the wartime political truce and would only awake from its slumber with the resignation of McKenna from government in December 1916. Frozen by the fear of facing any future election represented by a candidate personally despised by the Prime Minister, the Liberal haven of North Monmouthshire was severely under threat and would prove to be the canary in the coal mine for the party across the county.⁸² Neighbouring party

⁷⁹ Michael Freedon, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914-1939* (Oxford, 1986), p. 45.

⁸⁰ *WM*, 8 February 1915; 8 April 1915; *Daily Mirror (DM)*, 19 January 1916. Haslam, for example, supported Lloyd George's Coalition vigorously after 1916. Unsurprisingly, Herbert, the former Grenadier Guard, was also willing to support the war's continuation. After becoming chairman of the Liberal War Committee in Parliament, he would help raise the Welsh Army Corps as Director of National Service for Wales, despite the death of his only son Elidyr in Palestine in 1917.

⁸¹ *Cambria Daily Leader (CDL)*, 25 June 1917; *WM*, 4 July 1917; *DM*, 14 July 1917. Abraham Garrod Thomas (1853-1931), the physician, local magistrate and founder of the *South Wales Argus*, ran against Bertie Pardoe-Thomas, the Newport ship-owner and 'Independent' candidate. Despite an inevitably poor wartime turnout, Garrod Thomas's pro-war stance resulted in an emphatic victory with over 90% of the vote. The full election result was as follows: Abraham Garrod Thomas (Liberal Party) – 6,769 votes (90.3%), Bertie Pardoe-Thomas (Independent) – 727 votes (9.7%). The turnout was approximately 32.6%.

⁸² Martin Farr, 'Reginald McKenna as Chancellor of the Exchequer 1915-1916' (PhD, University of Glasgow, 1998), p. 228. As Farr has suggested, McKenna's closeness to Asquith, and his deteriorating relationship with Lloyd George, which had reached a new nadir in the autumn of that year, were to be crucial in the dissolution of the first wartime Coalition and the 'gelding of the Party' in following years.

organisations, such as the Newport Liberal Association (NLA), were only jolted into life in 1917 and others, such as Monmouth Liberal Association (MLA) remained lifeless even as late as the General Election campaign in late 1918. In the process, each showcased conflicting attitudes on the leadership of the party and the alarm raised by Hobhouse and other Liberal ideologues that the party was abandoning its principles in its conduct of the conflict. There was suddenly a glaring detachment between the wider party, the actions of Monmouthshire's Liberal parliamentarians and the concerns of local party members in the respective constituencies. Underneath the surface, cracks had therefore begun to form in the Liberal edifice.

The implications of the Representation of the People Act did little to purge the uncertainty that now clouded the Liberal Party's judgement. The Act itself represented a significant transformation in British and Welsh politics. In raw numbers alone, the electorate almost tripled in size from 7,709,981 before the war to 21,392,322 in time for the General Election in December of the same year.⁸³ 79.5% of the adult population were now registered as eligible electors; a stark increase from the 29.4% registered for the January 1910 Election.⁸⁴ In Monmouthshire this translated into an increase in registered voters from 68,178 in 1910, to a staggering 207,339 by the General Election of 1923.⁸⁵ Perhaps most importantly, while it stopped short of granting universal enfranchisement, the Act also laid the legislative foundations for the further widening of the electorate that was to become a reality in 1928.⁸⁶ Most significantly, the Act was not just an extension of the franchise but a far more significant revision of the electoral system which directly impacted the fortunes of political parties throughout the entire interwar period.⁸⁷ Alongside simplifying the registration process for voters, and the standardisation of electioneering practices and

⁸³ Colin Railings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1999*, 6th Edition (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 100-1.

⁸⁴ Stuart Ball, 'The Reform Act of 1918 – The Advent of Mass Democracy', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), p. 1. The 1918 Act represented the largest increase in proportion of population enfranchised of any electoral reform in British political history, even more so than the legislation of 1867, 1884 and the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 that was to follow.

⁸⁵ Registered voter statistics aggregated from Beti Jones (ed.), *Etholiadau'r Ganrif/Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (Talybont, 1999), p. 53, p. 62, p. 69. By 1923, each of the six new divisions in Monmouthshire had been contested. The figure for the Abertillery electorate from the 1920 by-election has been used as a result of the lack of contests before 1929.

⁸⁶ Registered voter statistics aggregated from Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif*, pp. 77-8. As a result of the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, the shire's electorate grew further still, reaching 260,126 by 1929. Registered voter statistics aggregated from Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif*, pp. 77-8.

⁸⁷ Freeman, 'The Liberal Party', p. 48; Stuart Ball, 'The Conservative Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 23-46. See also Jon Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War', *Past and Present*, 190 (Feb., 2006), pp. 185-216.

expenditure, the most important change lay in the redistribution of parliamentary seats, which ended the preponderance of large, mixed constituencies.⁸⁸ With previous Liberal strategy reliant on the support garnered in these disbanded divisions, and in turn presenting opportunities for the Labour Party and Conservatives in distinctly industrial and rural constituencies, the past hegemony of the Liberals in Monmouthshire was immediately thrown into doubt in the new normal of the post-war political ecosystem.⁸⁹ The fears were viscerally confirmed in the results of the 1918 General Election, which saw the party relinquish power to Labour in all four revised industrial divisions, and to the Conservative Party in Monmouth. Only Newport was retained, until the death of Haslam in 1922.

However, it was less the Act itself, but rather the abject response to the legislation and the arrival of mass democracy, that turned Liberal chaos into calamity after 1918. Faced with the test of appealing to a wider electorate with an increasing demand for peace and social improvement, the party developed a complacency that infected it at almost every level. Despite the early intentions of Liberal reformers inside the Coalition Government to seek post-war social legislation, most notably in the case of the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act overseen by Minister of Health Christopher Addison, a combination of the ‘Geddes Axe’ in 1922, which swung towards severe cuts in expenditure on education and housing, and the disconnect between party members on both side of the Lloyd George-Asquith partition led to a paucity of evolution in terms of the party’s agenda. The inability to adapt policy limited the Liberal Party’s ability to address the key issues of post-war reconstruction and encroaching unemployment that would redefine the politics of the 1920s. It was not until the ceasefire between Lloyd George and Asquith in 1923, that the party sought to redraw the boundaries of policy and rhetoric through the Liberal Summer School initiative in 1924 and the following reports in the form of *Coal and Power*, *The Land and the Nation*, or *Britain’s Industrial Future*. Forming the basis of the Liberal’s manifesto for the 1929 General Election, the creativity inherent in these radical proposals belied the delay in seeking and acting upon a revised and appropriate strategy which had plagued the party after 1918.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ball, ‘The Reform Act of 1918’, pp. 10-2.

⁸⁹ Freeman, ‘The Liberal Party’, p. 55.

⁹⁰ *The Land and the Nation: Rural Report of the Liberal Land Committee, 1923-25* (London, 1925); *We Can Conquer Unemployment: Mr Lloyd George’s Pledge* (London, 1929). See also Sian Jones, ‘The Political Dynamics of North East Wales, With Special Reference to the Liberal Party’ (PhD, University of North Wales, Bangor, 2003), pp. 136-8.

Persistent organisational and representational issues exacerbated the problems the Liberals now faced in regions such as Monmouthshire. In a Welsh context, the party structure remained convoluted, effectively comprising of five key components; the North Wales Liberal Federation, the South Wales Liberal Federation, the Welsh National Council, the Welsh Parliamentary Party and individual constituency associations intermixed with local Liberal Clubs, Women's Liberal Federation branches and the League of Young Welsh Liberals groups. Forlorn attempts by party leaders, including Lloyd George, to form a more cohesive and unified national body, and the eventual formation of the reconstituted Welsh National Liberal Council in 1908, did not solve the lack of communication and collaboration between the disparate bodies, and, worse still, would serve to incapacitate the movement in its factional struggles between supporters of Lloyd George and Asquith, who controlled different auspices in this multidimensional framework after the war.⁹¹

The situation was compounded by the top-down composition of local Liberal Associations, such as the NMLA, that largely acquiesced outside of annual meetings and elections, and refused to incorporate local workers into the fold in divisions such as Ebbw Vale and Pontypool. Such unwillingness refused to dissipate after the progressive alliance with Labour devised in 1903 and, most alarmingly, in light of the electoral reforms in 1918.⁹² The Liberal platform remained the reserve of nonconformist ministers, local party councillors, magistrates and small businessmen, both in association gatherings and during election battles. This reality endured up until 1929 and had the undesired effect of quietly excluding the majority of working-class men and women from active Liberal Party participation.

In the intervening decade, and in light of such confusion, rancour and paralysis, it would be up to local associations to prevent the total surrender of the party to the problems they faced. Many failed to overcome these issues at the first or second hurdle, but a select few, such as the Pontypool Liberal Association (PLA), would ensure the Liberal's survival in a depleted and damaged state.⁹³

⁹¹ Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals*, pp. 37-9.

⁹² *CTSWWN*, 3 December 1910; *Free Press of Monmouthshire (FPM)*, 14 June 1918; 27 April 1928.

⁹³ Chris Cook, 'Wales and the General Election of 1923', *Welsh History Review*, 4:4 (1969), pp. 388-9.

(ii). The Conservative Party Response

If war and reform had reversed the Edwardian momentum of the Liberals, then it also presented conditional openings for the Conservative Party to capitalise on the void left behind. This would not be an automatic switch of allegiances and Conservatism would have to cultivate a post-war response of its own in order to profit from the failings of the Liberal Party. Indeed, in areas such as South Wales, it would take significant adaptation when the pre-war state of the Conservative Party is taken into account. In 1906, the party found themselves bereft of any Welsh representatives in Parliament. Such abject failure symbolised the limited confines of support polled for the party in the country even before the widening of the franchise in 1918, with an average vote share of only 37.7% between 1885 and 1910.⁹⁴

In Monmouthshire, there were some limited grounds for optimism, particularly in the pre-war Monmouth Boroughs and South Monmouthshire divisions. Conservative interests were promoted through sympathetic organisations such as the Primrose League,⁹⁵ and represented most openly in the rural district councils (RDCs) and the MCC. On the latter, a significant contingent of around twenty-five pro-Conservative ‘Independents’ had gathered by 1914, led by the likes of Godfrey Charles Morgan, the first Viscount Tredegar and his nephew Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker.⁹⁶ Other representatives from the landowning families joined them such as John Allan Rolls, the ageing Lord Llangattock, and his wife Georgiana, alongside other local party members such as the former Sheriff of Monmouthshire, Colonel William Curre. Nevertheless, the Conservative presence was not enough to earn a majority on the MCC, as the Liberal control of the chamber lingered on until

⁹⁴ Felix Aubel, ‘The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1935’ in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 97.

⁹⁵ *Hereford Times*, 29 April 1899, *SWDN*, 11 April 1907; *WM*, 14 October 1907; *Monmouthshire Beacon (MB)*, 22 April 1910. The Monmouth branch of the Primrose League was the most significant of the Habitations in the county with a recorded membership of 1,100 by the turn of the century. Lord and Lady Llangattock were particularly influential in maintaining the presence of this organisation before the outbreak of war and expanding the reach of the League to rural areas in the north of the county such as nearby Skenfrith, and Grosmont and Hendre, closer to Abergavenny.

⁹⁶ *MB*, 18 May 1934. Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker (1866-1934) was a Conservative Party MP for the Monmouth constituency between 1918 and 1934. Connected to the Tredegar family on his mother’s side, Forestier-Walker had brief spells working in the offices of Cardiff docks, and as a tea planter in Sri Lanka, before returning to Britain in 1889 to work in the coal and export industry. He soon became director of the Alexandra Docks and Railway Company, and Brecon and Merthyr Railway Company. He increasingly became interested in local politics, becoming a member of the MCC between 1907 and 1925 and then 1928 to 1931. He was also a longstanding chairman of St Mellons RDC after 1907, a position he held for twenty-four years, and remained a member of Graig Parish Council until his death in 1934. Up until his election to Parliament, Forestier-Walker had twice failed to enter the House of Commons, defeated by Ivor Herbert in the South Monmouthshire constituency in each of the 1910 General Election contests.

1919.⁹⁷ In the two General Election contests of 1910, the Conservative subservience to the Liberals was made clearer still. Even in South Monmouthshire, where the visiting speakers of the Tariff Reform League and Anti-Socialist League descended onto the county and the full force of the Tredegar, Llangattock and Raglan families was levied in favour of Forestier-Walker on both occasions, the Conservative candidate was denied with each attempt by Ivor Herbert and the Liberals.⁹⁸ Outmanoeuvred in almost every corner of the county, the Conservative Party found themselves on the periphery of Monmouthshire's electoral politics.

Structurally, and outside of election time, the organisation of the Conservative Party was relatively poor in the shire, when compared to the emerging organisation of the labour movement, and even the NMLA and other Liberal Associations in the county. The prolongation of administrative maladies, even after 1918 in industrial divisions, can only be partially explained by the Liberal arrival into Welsh politics after 1868. Indeed, the lack of Conservative reaction points to the failure of the party itself. Despite a concerted attempt to decentralise power after the disastrous results of 1906, with the creation of four regional provinces in Wales to oversee party activity, there was a paucity of action in Monmouthshire divisions outside of Newport, with particular reticence displayed in industrial districts such as Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale. Neither was there a plethora of active local associations, apart from the Monmouth Boroughs Unionist Association.⁹⁹ Even in the districts of the rural South Monmouthshire division, where organisation was recorded as being in 'a thoroughly efficient condition' by 1910, the modest claims were counterbalanced by concerns over the lack of financial income generated by membership.¹⁰⁰ Alienating itself from the nonconformist majority in its support of the Anglican Church and connections to the landed gentry, and up against 'the language and agenda of Welsh grievances' propagated by the Liberal Party in Wales, the Conservative response was not strong enough to break through the malaise across the entirety of the county, as it failed to reclaim all of the ground

⁹⁷ *WM*, 5 March 1910; *Hereford Times*, 12 March 1910; *MB*, 25 March 1910; Morgan, *Monmouthshire Education*, p. 2, pp. 13-4. Forestier-Walker was a particularly vocal member of the MCC Education Committee and enjoyed successive tussles with his Liberal rivals, particularly the long-serving Alderman P.W. Raffan.

⁹⁸ *MB*, 14 January 1910; 21 January 1910; 28 January 1910; 9 December 1910; 16 December 1910.

⁹⁹ *SWE*, 14 July 1893; *Weekly Mail*, 28 January 1899; *Evening Express (EE)*, 24 September 1901; *County Observer and Monmouthshire Advertiser*, 11 February 1905; 14 July 1906. The four provinces were North Wales, South Wales, Glamorgan and Monmouthshire respectively.

¹⁰⁰ *MB*, 22 April 1910.

lost before 1914. The sluggishness to respond to the Liberal dominance in Wales did not bode well for the party's ability to adjust to the post-war political world.¹⁰¹

Failures in Monmouthshire fed into the already established perception internally that the Conservative Party was doomed under the present electoral system to generations of defeat in the county and further afield.¹⁰² In the aftermath of Lloyd George's decision to form a Coalition in 1916, Conservative representatives were to suffer the paradoxical consequences of holding a majority stake in government while ceding political possession over to Liberal Coalitionist associates. Suspended in limbo, bitter backbench resentment developed that fed into the mind-set of local party agents and members in divisions such as Newport.¹⁰³ The rancour surrounding the Conservative complicity in a Lloyd-George-led government would churn away until the Coalition's termination in 1922. In light of expanded enfranchisement, disgruntlement fed into the perspective of party leaders who saw the potential dangers of an independent Conservative Party up against the potential influx of working-class voters, radicalised by the rhetoric of socialism offered by the Labour Party, and stimulated across national borders, by the revolutionary message of the Bolsheviks from Petrograd in 1917. Indeed, as the security of governmental power contrasted with the pessimistic perceptions of the Liberal alliance, divisions emanated from the leadership of the party, exemplified in the contrast between the warnings of breaking free from the Coalition perpetuated by Austen Chamberlain, and the opportunistic message in favour of independence, 'to promote party values to the masses', expressed by Neville Chamberlain.¹⁰⁴

Initially, it was the position of Austen, who himself would eventually become party leader in 1921, that would characterise the first nervous post-war steps made by the Conservatives after 1918.¹⁰⁵ Local Conservative Associations had to steer a narrow course between promotion of party values and respect for the Coalition's domination in Parliament up until 1922. However, the anxieties that festered in the Coalition would also motivate Conservative campaigners on the ground to grasp the tactical opportunities the

¹⁰¹ Geraint Thomas, 'The Conservative Party and Welsh Politics in the Inter-War Years', *The English Historical Review*, 128:533 (August, 2013), p. 879. See also Felix Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaptation' (PhD, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1995), p. 439.

¹⁰² *SWDN*, 21 September 1891.

¹⁰³ Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 39-40; Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), p. 227, p. 285.

¹⁰⁴ Jarvis, 'British Conservatism', p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ Even when the Coalition collapsed in 1922, doubts about the capabilities of the party in an independent state continued. See Stuart Ball, 'The Legacy of Coalition: Fear and Loathing in Conservative Politics, 1922-1931', *Contemporary British History*, 25:1 (2011), pp. 65-82.

Representation of the People Act presented the party and initiate activities aimed at rejuvenation at a grass roots level.¹⁰⁶ Unlike the Liberals under Asquith, the need for adjustments was recognised early on and the motivation to course-correct was carried into the Baldwinite era between 1924 and 1929. In the constituencies, Conservative Party branches, such as the Monmouth Conservative and Unionist Association (MCUA), were also successful in maintaining independence, even during the Coalition years. A process of gradual flexibility was therefore sculpted and carried out, responsive to change and context, and combined with a strengthening relationship with landed and commercial interests. Institutions, which enshrined and transmitted Conservative sympathies, were also developed and refined, from employer's associations to voluntary organisations such as the Women's Institutes (WIs) and Junior Imperial League (JIL). In Monmouthshire such concerted efforts, particularly in the new rural division of Monmouth, but not confined to the county's countryside, helped construct a varied support base after the war that guaranteed the Conservative Party a critical role in dismantling the Liberal sway over the shire.¹⁰⁷

(iii). Labour, the Labour Movement and Industrial-Political Struggle

The political wing of the labour movement, represented by both the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party (ILP), had also moved into a promising position to take advantage of Liberal disorder, especially in industrial South Wales. Through increasingly effective militant struggle since the formation of the SWMF in 1898, as evidenced in the successful strike of 200,000 miners in the coalfield in July 1915, the regional labour movement was certainly growing in confidence.¹⁰⁸ In the industrial districts of Monmouthshire, nobody epitomised the self-assurance more than James Winstone. The Eastern Valleys miners' agent and acting president of the SWMF had presented a combative message through the war and would continue to do so in his unwavering belief that the successive Coalition Governments had explicitly ignored the growing anger and frustration of the working-class communities in the coalfield over work conditions, wages and generational

¹⁰⁶ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), p. 262; David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 5:2 (1994), p. 131.

¹⁰⁷ Jeremy Smith, *The Taming of Democracy: The Conservative Party, 1880-1924* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 84-5.

¹⁰⁸ *CDL*, 17 July 1915; *Aberdare Leader (AL)*, 24 July 1915.

levels of poverty, in order to conduct a war in their own financial interests.¹⁰⁹ Speaking during the strike, he asserted that, ‘The Government does not understand the psychology of the South Wales miner. They may destroy him, but they will never coerce him.’¹¹⁰ A year later, and in a defiant stance against industrial conscription, Winstone told the Pontypool branch of the ILP that the labour movement needed greater representation in Parliament, in order to prevent the Coalition from enacting such measures that led workers back to serfdom and which would ‘divide this country in twain’.¹¹¹

Winstone’s appeal was echoed in the four reformatted industrial constituencies of the county throughout the war. His points also struck a chord with similar conceptions of industrial-political ambition emanating from local leaders in the county’s coalfield districts, which centred on the abandonment of communities by local and national auspices of government, the need for substantial and immediate social reconstruction, and a reinforcement of goals in terms of democratic, working-class, representation. The changing expectations were clear from Walter Conway in Tredegar, who urged constituents to ‘depend on their own class to remove the disabilities under which they laboured’,¹¹² to the declarations espoused by the returning Captain Ted Gill in Abertillery who spoke of the need for ‘tangible equality of opportunity’ and warned of ‘a rude awakening’ for Lloyd George in future parliamentary and local government elections.¹¹³ On a fundamental level, the war had

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Herald (DH)*, 28 July 1921. James Winstone (1863-1921) was a prominent trade unionist and socialist campaigner in the South Wales labour movement. Originally from Risca, he was elected checkweighman at United Colliery and campaigned alongside William Brace against the continued instigation of the sliding scale scheme of wages in the mining industry during the 1890s. He was a founding member of the SWMF, serving as the acting president in Brace’s absence between 1915 and 1918, the miners’ agent for the Eastern Valleys district until his death in 1921, and was an incredibly active member of the ILP throughout his career. He was a member of Risca and Abersychan UDCs, gaining the role of chairman on the latter, and was elected to the MCC in 1907. He was unsuccessful in three parliamentary contests, initially in Monmouth Boroughs in 1906, and most significantly when he failed to succeed the late Keir Hardie in the Merthyr by-election in November 1915, losing to the former ILP trade unionist turned ‘patriot’ Charles Butt Stanton.

¹¹⁰ *WM*, 14 July 1915.

¹¹¹ *Glamorgan Gazette (GG)*, 7 January 1916.

¹¹² *ME*, 17 November 1917. Walter Conway (1873-1933) was born in Tredegar Workhouse in 1875. Entering the mining industry at a young age, he became a member of the Bedwellty Board of Guardians in 1909 where he quickly became associated with the ILP representatives on the Board before becoming chairman in 1915. Self-taught and already well-versed in Marxian theory through his time in the refuge of the Workmen’s Institute, he began to run CLC classes in the town in 1917 and would continue to represent working-class interests on the local UDC and Tredegar Medical Aid Society. He would serve as an inspiration to a young Aneurin Bevan who followed in Conway’s footsteps in representing the local labour movement and eventually the Labour Party.

¹¹³ *South Wales Gazette (SWG)*, 22 November 1918. Edward ‘Ted’ Gill (1879-1923) was born in Leominster in Herefordshire in 1879. He moved with his family to Abertillery at the age of ten and became a miner five years later. Between 1907 and 1909, Gill attended Ruskin College on a SWMF scholarship for the Western Valleys district and was a founding member of the Plebs League in 1908. Before the outbreak of war he was a local Labour councillor on the Abertillery UDC and member of the SWMF Executive Committee. Enlisting in the South Wales Borderers after initially objecting to the war, his well-documented bravery at Festubert and

crystallised the political priorities for the labour movement and would clarify objectives further still in the years after 1918.

The eagerness of Winstone, Conway and Gill arrived at a moment of broader reconsideration for the leaders of the Labour Party. Indeed, the increasing potency of industrial struggle, exhibited by the South Wales miners during the strike in 1915, also provided further optimism for the prospects of political independence away from the progressive alliance with the Liberals. The trade union movement across Britain had reaped the rewards of the wartime economy, and the accepted spirit of collectivism the war had generated, with male membership increasing from 3,681,000 to 5,280,000, and female membership rising from 436,000 to 1,182,000, between 1914 and 1918. The financial strength of the unions, especially the MFGB, had also emboldened the labour movement to fund an increasing number of sponsored parliamentary candidates.¹¹⁴ Within the National Executive Committee (NEC), attitudes were also evolving after 1917. The combination of Liberal disorder and the possibilities opened up by the October Revolution in Russia had convinced party leaders, particularly Arthur Henderson, that this was the moment for Labour to forge its own path.¹¹⁵ Henderson, the party secretary, sought a breakaway, to reconstruct the Labour Party based on individual membership for men and women rather than solely union affiliation, a renewed focus on the connection between the parliamentary party and local branches, and the pursuit of ‘a new social order’ of Labour’s own creation.¹¹⁶ The ideals set forth by Henderson, were endorsed in Sidney Webb’s *Labour and the New Social Order*, and institutionalised as Labour Party policy after the Stockport Conference in June 1918.¹¹⁷

Mametz Wood earned him a Military Cross and an even greater degree of loyalty from the miners of Abertillery. He returned home as ‘Captain’ Ted Gill, the ‘gallant Labour leader’ who had shared in the sacrifices of his fellow soldiers and returned home a working-class hero. He remained a devout member of the ILP until his death in 1923.

¹¹⁴ Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives (CUSCA): Archives of the British Labour Party, Series 2: Pamphlets and Leaflets: ‘TUC and Labour Party – An Appeal to the British Trade Union Movement’ (1918), MFilm 005/18/2; Chris Wrigley, ‘The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 70-1. Wrigley also states that the political funds of the unions increased from £37,999 in 1913 to £133,000 in 1918.

¹¹⁵ Hildamarie Meynell, ‘The Stockholm Conference of 1917’, *International Review of Social History*, 5:2 (Aug., 1960), pp. 202-25; J. M. Winter, ‘Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party’, *Historical Journal*, 15:4 (1972), pp. 753-73; Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 395-7; Andrew Thorpe, ‘Labour Leaders and the Liberals, 1906-1924’, *Cercles*, 21 (2011), pp. 39-54.

¹¹⁶ CUSCA: Archives of the British Labour Party, Series 2: *The Aims of Labour* (London, 1918), pp. 19-21. MFilm 005/18/18.

¹¹⁷ CUSCA: Archives of the British Labour Party, Series 2: ‘The Principles of the Labour Party’ (London, 1918), MFilm 005/18/52; Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order*, pp. 4-16, p. 18. See also Lisane Radice, *Beatrice and Sidney Webb: Fabian Socialists* (London, 1984), pp. 211-3.

As the Labour Party readjusted to the new direction,¹¹⁸ it was clear to even its designers that Labour's revised mission was not an instant panacea for the peculiarities of the party's position. While Labour won four out of the six parliamentary contests in Monmouthshire, the marginal gains of only 57 seats across Britain in the General Election of December 1918 was indicative of the work it still needed to carry out.¹¹⁹ The fundamental break from the progressive alliance, represented by Clause Four of the new constitution, also pointed towards another balancing act. The 'Four Pillars of the House' outlined in the *New Social Order*, particularly 'The Universal Enforcement of the National Minimum' and 'The Democratic Control of Industry' now had to sit alongside the confrontational mood towards private ownership that gripped the leaders of the associated 'Triple Alliance' of MFGB, National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the National Transport Workers' Federation.¹²⁰ While Henderson, the Webbs and others pursued a more comprehensive approach to the British electorate, the lack of subsequent electoral advance in rural constituencies, where Liberal and Conservative politics remained entrenched, also resulted in vexation for Labour strategists. Indeed, as Clare Griffiths has demonstrated, the failure to break through in the countryside was perceived as 'the difference between "government" and "power"'.¹²¹ It would therefore take a renewed effort for the Henderson pitch, that Labour was no longer simply the party of the trade unions, to find credence in an environment of increasing unionisation, an already established network suspicious of any move away from the industrial-political pressure dynamic, and the struggle the party was already encountering in rural constituencies.

Nevertheless, Labour entered the post-war political environment reinvigorated and with the conviction that significant work was required to forge new alliances. In Monmouthshire, the target was no longer purely limited to the industrial confines of the coalfield, but opened up to the urban centre of Newport and the rural division of Monmouth, both of which had been largely barren territory for the party before the war. Initially, there

¹¹⁸ LSE Digital Library: Beatrice Webb's Diaries, Diary entry dated 30 June 1918, PASSFIELD/1/1; Ramsay MacDonald, *Socialism: Critical and Constructive* (London, 1921), p. 144. Even Labour's gradualist wing, including Ramsay MacDonald, was forced to accept that the war had 'revolutionized people's minds and still more their methods' and that the new formal party structure and programme was a necessary gamble.

¹¹⁹ Wrigley, 'The Labour Party', pp. 71-2.

¹²⁰ Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order*, pp. 4-5. See also Jose Harris, 'Labour's Political and Social Thought' in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge; New York, 2001), p. 13

¹²¹ Clare V. J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 9-10.

were at least hopeful indications that the transformative message, perpetuated from Winstone to Webb, was more likely to resonate across the industrial-rural border, now more than ever before. Spurred on by acute food shortages during the war, there were renewed efforts to unionise in the agricultural communities of the eastern fringes of the county. Successful attempts were made to organise the farm labourers of the county by several organisations associated with the South Monmouthshire Labour Party, including the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' union (NALRWU) and the National Farm and Dairy Workers' Union (NFDWU). In some respect, this was a partial response to the organisation of the farmers through the branches of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) set up in areas such as Abergavenny, Usk and Monmouth after 1910.

Nevertheless, this was more than just a reactionary revolt. As David Pretty has contended 'an unprecedented upsurge of rural trade unionism' in areas such as Rogerstone and Caerwent erupted in 1917, driven forward by SWMF and NUR representatives and backed financially by the Western Valley Miners' Association and Newport and Abertillery Trades and Labour Councils (TLCs). For political organisers such as William Harris, this was a long overdue breakthrough in the name of collective protection in rural Monmouthshire and the first signs of hope for Labour in the countryside.¹²² The demand for change had not only accelerated after 1914, but had spread to the rural communities of Monmouthshire, at least hinting at Labour's broader ambitions in the process. Advancement therefore lay in seizing the initiative on the ground and building a broader local and regional foundation that would turn belief into tangible political and democratic power.

In order to fortify allegiances Labour had already begun to nurture in industrial regions of Britain, it was also important for the party to recognise the significant changes taking place in areas where the wider labour movement had already gained a foothold. Indeed, Labour could not afford the same complacency exhibited by the Liberal Party after the war, as local distinctions already epitomised manifestations of its own political cultures. In industrial Monmouthshire, a range of political activities had already begun to materialise in relation to the county's labour movement, fundamentally propelled by the rifts over

¹²² Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, pp. 74-9. David A. Pretty, 'Women and Trade Unionism in Welsh Rural Society', *Llafur*, 5:3 (1990), pp. 5-13, pp. 7-8. A further seven NALRWU branches in the rural villages of Shirenewton, Magor, St Arvans, Castleton, Marshfield, St Bride's Wentloog and Catsash were formed by the end of 1917 and a collective set of demands was formulated at a mass meeting in Caerwent in December, including the demand of a 35s. minimum wage.

ideology, organisation and democratic control of union structures in the South Wales coalfield. From its very inception, the SWMF had been defined by the tensions between the ‘Lib-Lab’ approach of its leaders, in favouring dialogue and negotiation to settle wage and work condition disputes, and the radical alternative of militant strike action put forward by a band of socialists who sought to seize power, initially within the union itself, and then in the tussle with the coalowners in the coalfield. This dialectic was primarily a case of collective struggle but it has also been memorialised as a clash of personalities, between the former ‘Lib-Lab’ camp containing the inaugural president and Rhondda MP William Abraham (‘Mabon’),¹²³ his successor and South Glamorgan MP William Brace, and the union’s long-serving secretary and West Monmouthshire MP Thomas Richards, and the latter group of socialist firebrands including James Winstone and George Barker.¹²⁴ Not only did the profile of the SWMF Executive Committee continue to indicate the strength and longevity of the trade union movement in Monmouthshire itself, but in the examples of Brace, Charles Edwards,¹²⁵ Vernon Hartshorn,¹²⁶ and Winstone, all from or residing in the Risca and Bedwellty districts, the differing approaches also hinted at the emerging discrepancies in industrial outlook waged within local communities.

Increasingly, it appeared as if the approach in the ‘Mabon’-Brace-Richards mould was out of step with the mining majority. Indeed, after a period of relative industrial peace up until 1906, a succession of failed negotiations between 1908 and the Cambrian Combine dispute in the Rhondda valley in 1910 and 1911 reignited the indignant sentiments of the rank and file over a perceived lack of fighting spirit displayed by the Federation hierarchy. With the following publication of *The Miners’ Next Step*, by Noah Ablett and the Unofficial

¹²³ E.W. Evans, *Mabon: A Study in Trade Union Leadership* (Cardiff, 1959); E.W. Evans, ‘Mabon and trade unionism in the South Wales coalfield’ in Goronwy Alun Hughes (ed.), *Men of No Property: Historical Studies of Welsh Trade Unions* (Caerwys, 1971), pp. 51-8. William Abraham (1842-1922), more commonly known by his bardic title of ‘Mabon’, was the inaugural president of the SWMF and the first working-class MP in Wales, representing the Rhondda constituency between 1885 and 1918, and the Rhondda West division before his public retirement in 1920.

¹²⁴ Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?: A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985), pp. 242-9; Deian Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour in Wales 1890-1914’, *Llafur*, 6:4 (1994), pp. 120-41; T.J. McCarry, ‘Labour and Society in Swansea, 1887-1918’ (PhD, University of Wales, Swansea, 1987), p. 234; David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields 1850-1926* (1992), pp. 76-77.

¹²⁵ *WM*, 16 June 1954. Charles Edwards (1867-1954) was the parliamentary representative of Bedwellty between 1918 and 1950. Born and raised in Llangunllo near Radnor, Edwards moved to Risca to work underground at the age of fourteen. He became checkweigher at Nine Mile Point colliery in Cwmfelinfach and was soon elected as sub-agent for the Tredegar Valleys district to work alongside Alfred Onions and became an early member of the SWMF Executive in 1905. He also served on the Risca UDC and the MCC before his election to the House of Commons in 1918.

¹²⁶ *WM*, 14 March 1931; Peter Stead, ‘Vernon Hartshorn: Miners’ Agent and Cabinet Minister’, *Glamorgan Historian*, 6 (1969), pp. 83-94.

Reform Committee (URC) in 1912, and its crucial attack on ‘the Conciliation Policy’ of union leaders, it seemed that the sun was setting on ‘Lib-Lab’ control of the labour movement in South Wales.¹²⁷ The precariousness of the position, faced by Monmouthshire ‘Lib-Labs’ in particular, was further symbolised by the replacement of Richards, Brace and Alfred Onions on the Executive Committee of the MFGB in 1911, with the more radical alternatives of Hartshorn, Charles Butt Stanton and Barker. ‘Mabon’ also appeared to confirm such assertions with his resignation in 1912, and with Winstone voted in as vice-president, the first socialist to hold an official position in the SWMF, the security of the ‘Lib-Labs’ seemed perilous before the onset of war.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, the ‘Lib-Labs’ would ultimately endure these internal struggles and continue to serve industrial communities after the war, both through the SWMF and in Parliament. In their battles on several fronts with the coalowners, and their gradual shift away from a once-held alliance with the Liberal Party, as evidenced by the decision of ‘Mabon’, Richards and Brace to take the Labour whip in 1909, these individuals had been, and would continue to be, pivotal in initiating a fundamental shift away from the ‘popular’ politics of Liberalism past towards a strong and resilient culture based on the necessity of working-class organisation and representation.¹²⁹ Crucially, as the first working-class people to represent Welsh constituencies in Parliament, they also ensured that the aims and objectives of the labour movement expanded beyond the industrial sphere and into the political arena. In turn they had fed into the deepening basin of Labour culture that was already taking shape in the industrial valleys. It is important to stress that regardless of any potential socialist reinvention as claimed by ‘Mabon’, they were unequivocally representatives of labour and, after 1909, the Labour Party. In the words of ‘Mabon’, the ‘Lib-Labs’ had ‘obeyed the dictate of our people...knowing also that a great cause is greater than the means.’¹³⁰ The loosening of their firm grip on the SWMF Executive would ultimately not deter the ‘Lib-Labs’ from soldiering

¹²⁷ Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miners’ Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation*, Reprinted Edition (London, 1991), p. 9, p. 25.

¹²⁸ Swansea University Archive, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC): Minutes of SWMF Executive Council and Annual and Special Conferences, 1908-1913, SWCC/MNA/NUM/3/1/1.

¹²⁹ Peter Stead, ‘Working-Class Leadership in South Wales 1900-1920’, *Welsh History Review*, Vol.6 (1973), pp. 329-53; Chris Williams, ‘Democracy and Nationalism in Wales: The Lib-Lab Enigma’ in Robert Stradling, Scott Newton and David Bates (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence: Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe* (Cardiff, 1997), p.107-31; John Shepherd, ‘Labour and Parliament: the Lib-Labs. as the First Working-class MPs, 1885-1906’, in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 187-213.

¹³⁰ *CTSWWN*, 8 January 1910.

on. Not for the first time, they would dust themselves off, get back up and adjust to the new reality of the ‘Labour-only’ label.

The struggles over the direction of the SWMF also reflected the broader strokes of industrial-political conflict originating from the mining communities in the Monmouthshire coalfield. The inconsistent inroads made by the ILP into the South Wales coalfield in the 1890s had created distinct contrasts in outlook, fluctuating from a sustained socialism inherent in communities such as Abertillery, Blaina and Nantyglo in the Ebbw Fach,¹³¹ to a dogged commitment to ‘Lib-Lab’ industrial strategy in areas such as Ebbw Vale and Risca in the Sirhowy and Rhymney valleys.¹³² Associated provident and co-operative societies in districts such as Blaenavon, Blaina and Tredegar, that focused on funeral, sickness and industrial accident benefit and liability, alongside local miners’ associations that often valued workers’ rights and representation over political allegiances, added to the melting pot and blurred the ideological boundaries between union lodges, localities and the county’s coalfield network.¹³³ This concoction of different Labour cultures produced an intricate latticework of local identities and, in turn, a myriad of responses to both the war and the post-war industrial and political environment.

The weaving of interlaced yet distinguishable, threads of political identity is reflected in several key aspects of Labour’s development in the valleys of the county. Thanks to the incursions of the ILP, a debating culture was cultivated in areas such as Abertillery, Abercarn and Blaina that incorporated the old dissenting traditions of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon

¹³¹ Alun Burge, ‘Labour, Class and Conflict’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 320; Martin Wright, *Wales and Socialism: Political Culture and National Identity Before the Great War* (Cardiff, 2016), p. 46, pp. 90-1, pp. 98-9. Support at the head of the Ebbw valleys dates back to 1894 with the recognition of the Labour Church movement in areas such as Abertillery, but it was the precursor evangelists of the *Clarion* van that toured the South Wales valleys in the late summer of 1897 that helped the socialist creed gain a sustained local following. It was subsequently reported by the *ILP News* that branches had been set up in Abertillery and even Ebbw Vale by the end of the year, the first two of their kind in Monmouthshire.

¹³² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p. 48; Wright, *Wales and Socialism*, p. 115, p. 117; Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, p. 67, p. 107. There was fleeting evidence of Socialist Society activity in Rhymney during the 1898 strike and lockout, potentially encouraged by the visit of ILP organiser Willie Wright into the valley during the struggle, but it would take another ten years before the party would found a branch in Ebbw Vale and a further two years before the Tredegar variant was formed in 1911.

¹³³ Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-40* (Cardiff, 1993), pp. 93-6; Martin Purvis, ‘Nineteenth Century Co-operative Retailing in England and Wales: A Geographical Approach’ (D. Phil, Oxford University, 1987), p. 228. Purvis states that, ‘Progress in all parts of South Wales was also very limited.’ For a challenge to this interpretation, Alun Burge, ‘“A Task Worthy of the Most Sincere Devotion and Application”: The Co-operative Movement in South Wales and its History’, *Welsh History Review*, 23: 4 (December, 2007), pp. 59-71.

groups and Sunday schools with the co-operativism of T. W. Allen, the Baptist preacher and Blaina district councillor, and the increasing insistence on independent working-class education (IWCE) by ILP campaigners.¹³⁴ Surprisingly, impassioned deliberation ensured that ‘Lib-Labism’ was not rejected openly. Instead, the ideology was allowed to co-exist with the stronger ILP presence in the Ebbw Fach. The branches of the latter were led by some of the county’s most influential socialist leaders, most notably Ted Gill, George Barker, Abertillery Councillor and Guardian Theophilus (T.J.) Davies, future MFGB president Frank Hodges, and Communist Party founder Will Hewlett. The prominence of these individuals was confirmed in the organisations they helped establish, from the South Wales branch of the Plebs League in January 1909 to the foundation of the New Era Union in Abertillery in July of the same year.¹³⁵ In contrast, the Rhymney, Sirhowy and eastern valleys did not generate a comparable breadth and depth of socialist political activity. A bond with Liberalism often persisted in localities from Bedwellty to Rhymney, Tredegar and Pontypool, signified further by the prevailing presence of the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA). The influence of the IWCE movement only arrived with the Central Labour College (CLC) classes led by Sidney Jones in Blackwood after 1916.¹³⁶ Apart from Jones and allies such as Conway in Tredegar, the pool of socialist disciples was far shallower in the Sirhowy.

The irregularity between local areas was also evident in the differing degree of early political organisation before 1918. In the slow creation of the trades and labour councils in the coalfield after 1900, while Ebbw Vale (1898), Pontypool (1904) Blackwood (1906) and Tredegar (1907) led the way,¹³⁷ similar bodies were not founded in Bedwas, Rhymney and Rogerstone until 1915 and 1916 respectively. This is in stark contrast to the creation of the

¹³⁴ *EE*, 26 April 1907. The thirst for political discussion even extended to the local literary and debating societies which began to hold mock parliaments as early as 1907.

¹³⁵ National Library of Wales (NLW): Bert Pearce Papers, New Era Union Men’s Sunday Afternoon Class Minute Book 1916-19, NLW MSS PEARCE WD 1/24; Lewis, *Teachers and Leaders*, pp. 66-70, p. 95; Chris Williams, ‘The Odyssey of Frank Hodges’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 5 (1998), pp. 110-30. The New Era Union was a unique teaching organisation supported by one hundred local volunteers that aimed to ‘combine education, social work and spiritual guidance on a non-sectarian and non-party basis.’ Its influence continued beyond the end of the war up until 1919.

¹³⁶ *ME*, 18 February 1933; Harold Finch, *Memoirs of a Bedwellty M.P.* (Risca; Newport, 1972), pp. 37-8; Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, pp. 89-90; Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume 1: 1897-1945*, Main Edition (London, 2008), p. 63; Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p. 202. Sidney Jones became a crucial figure in the dissemination of IWCE after his own time at the CLC between 1910 and 1912. The miner from Blackwood became a lecturer in Marxist theory in the Sirhowy valley and would go on to be elected to the SWMF Executive in 1924, after multiple attempts.

¹³⁷ In the case of Ebbw Vale, see SWCC: Ebbw Vale Branch Iron and Steel Trades and Labour Council Records, Cashbook, 1899-1919, SWCC/MNA/POL/8/1.

Abertillery TLC in 1903.¹³⁸ Considering the importance of these organisations in campaigning for greater democratic working-class representation, and the TLC's centrality in politicising the local labour movement, the lethargy of these communities when compared with those in the Ebbw Fach is striking.¹³⁹ The divergence is also reflected in the early results for working-class candidates in local elections before 1914. Abertillery had already gained a Labour mayor by 1904 and the local Labour Party took control of the urban district council (UDC) as early as 1912. According to the *Labour Leader*, eight out of thirteen members of the UDC could be described as 'stalwart Labour men' and there was an even split between ILP representatives and TLC nominees.¹⁴⁰ This has led Eddie May to suggest that the town could lay some claim to be 'the first Labour town in Wales.'¹⁴¹ In contrast, the Liberal balance of power remained to the west, at least until 1919. In Tredegar, for example, the 'Independent Labour' candidate and chairman of the local ILP, D. J. Evans, was an exceptional case when compared to the other two successful councillors in 1910, Watkin Lewis and Sam Filer, two men firmly considered in the 'Lib-Lab' mould of Labour representative.¹⁴²

The choice of different miners' agents for the associated SWMF districts in the West Monmouthshire constituency is further evidence of local disparities. To be elected to the position of agent by the local lodge was not just a sign of popularity but an opportunity to climb the ladder of leadership.¹⁴³ However, while this progression may have become the convention in the majority of coalfield constituencies, the universality of the journey conceals what each district's choice reveals about the political culture of mining communities. The narrow election of George Barker by only 340 votes, over Labour organiser William Harris,

¹³⁸ Alan Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain, 1900-40* (Manchester 1977), p. 197. Records of Blaina TLC date to 1912 and the Abercarn equivalent was only formed in 1916. This is perhaps testament to the power and hold of Abertillery TLC on the Ebbw Fach workforce.

¹³⁹ Daryl Leeworthy, *Labour Country: Political Radicalism and Social Democracy in South Wales, 1831-1935* (Cardigan, 2018), pp. 219-20.

¹⁴⁰ *Labour Leader*, 27 March 1913.

¹⁴¹ Eddie May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 77.

¹⁴² Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 89, p. 114, p. 127. Evans, Lewis and Filer were the only three Labour councillors on the Tredegar UDC before 1914. Evans was a miner at Whitworth No.2 pit and chairman of the local ILP branch in Tredegar. Lewis worked at Grahams Navigation before becoming an insurance agent in Tredegar. Filer was a miner, lodge secretary and eventual checkweighman at Bedwellty Pit, and long-serving Labour member of the Tredegar UDC into the 1930s. He was the first secretary of the Tredegar TLC in 1908.

¹⁴³ NLW: James Griffiths Papers, Notebook entitled 'Miners' Leader, 1925-1936', NLW MSS JAMTHS D3/3. In the immortal words of James Griffiths, Ammanford miners' leader and eventual Labour MP for Llanelli, the position 'ranked high in the valleys...it was a key post which opened the doors to service and responsibility within the Union and the Community...and it could be a seat on the green benches at Westminster'.

for the Western Valleys district in 1908 pointed towards the assortment of Labour opinion across the sixteen lodges in the Ebbw Fach.¹⁴⁴ The more definitive elections of Alfred Onions and Charles Edwards as agent and sub-agent in the Tredegar Valley district, and Evan Davies for the Ebbw Vale district in 1913, pointed towards a continued endorsement of the Tom Richards' style of leadership and the sympathies of the mining majority in the Sirhowy valley.¹⁴⁵ The tempo and consistency of working-class representational change in each constituency was therefore a direct consequence of the contrasting Labour cultures that had taken shape in the county.

Efforts to bring these competing cultures together began to take shape during the war. The project had initially been spearheaded by an assortment of groups and trade union officials, with most recognising the need to expand the definition of Labour politics, not solely in industrial terms, but in its political parameters also. The ILP was particularly keen to promote these wider aspirations and 'encourage independence of thought and action' across the county.¹⁴⁶ Widespread propagandising followed, largely through public lectures and the pages of the *Pioneer* newspaper. Local individuals such as Minnie Pallister, an elementary school teacher from Brynmawr, also took up the mantle of collaboration. As a keen organiser of the party in her own town and the connected communities of Nantyglo, Blaina and Abertillery to the south, Pallister advocated an alliance between the political wing of the labour movement and the nonconformist chapels or 'little Bethels' in order to root Labour firmly into industrial society and the 'religious life and aspirations of Wales'. Elected as president of the Monmouthshire Federation of the ILP, the first woman to hold a position in the party, Pallister oversaw an expansion of the county-wide organisation that attracted support from delegates in Newport, Machen, Wattsville, Ebbw Vale, Risca, Pontypool, Pontnewydd and Cwmbran by 1915.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ *CTSWWN*, 17 October 1908. The official result published was 5,792 to 5,452 votes in favour of Barker. He won overwhelming majorities in his home of Abercarn and the Celynen and Llanhilleth lodges but struggled in Arrael Griffin (Six Bells), the other major lodge.

¹⁴⁵ *EE*, 10 November 1898; *ME*, 8 October 1910; *WM*, 18 December 1916. See also John Graham Jones, 'Evan Davies and Ebbw Vale', *Llafur*, 3:3 (1982), pp. 93-9.

¹⁴⁶ Leeworthy, *Labour Country*, pp. 106-7.

¹⁴⁷ *Llais Llafur*, 1 August 1914; *Pioneer*, 27 March 1915; 11 September 1915. Minnie Pallister (1885-1960) also assisted in the organisation of the NCF in Wales during the war. A lifelong pacifist and a prolific socialist writer, Pallister would be critical in shaping the collective post-war political response of the labour movement in Monmouthshire after 1918. Her skills of oratory and co-ordination attracted a further wave of political interest in the Ebbw Fach in particular. Pallister would remain an active propagandist and organiser for the ILP across Wales in the 1920s.

Trade unionists would also take up a similar collaborative enterprise. The TLCs were to become critical institutions after the war in organising the political forces of the labour movement in order to seek more widespread democratic representation and had already become a symbol of distinctive local identities before 1918, in their differing aims and objectives, composition and personnel. As Daryl Leeworthy has also demonstrated, these embryonic organisations consisted of representatives from a broader spectrum of occupations and interests, not just delegates from the miners' lodges.¹⁴⁸ Attempts were made to bring this assortment of groups and local representatives together during the early years of the war. A Monmouthshire Trades and Labour Council Conference was formed in September 1915, with 207 delegates in attendance representing 55,237 members from a range of unions, most notably the SWMF and the NUR. Set in motion by the SWMF's political organiser, William Harris, the Conference expressed a remarkable level of solidarity in opposition to wartime governmental strategy, particularly conscription, but also between unions that had previously been disconnected.¹⁴⁹ Forthcoming Labour conferences spurred on the political organisation of localities as far east as Chepstow, and dispel the notion from the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) that there were 'difficulties of character' in Monmouthshire.¹⁵⁰ The Labour Party constitution of 1918 would also feed into this endeavour and regulate the creation of comparative divisional Labour Party branches with expanded memberships after the war. In its numerous forms, the forces of Labour were therefore beginning to coalesce in order to take pivotal first steps towards cementing a political and electoral tradition in the county.

Paradoxically, the experience of war therefore reinforced and complicated the political picture in the industrial divisions of the county. Worryingly for the 'Lib-Labs', ensuing debates surrounding military service and the more challenging questions of conscription, 'non-unionism', and governmental control of the mines, would rekindle questions of competency regarding union leadership in the South Wales coalfield and created a hazardous path for the SWMF Executive to navigate in the remaining years of the war. The Military Service Bill of 1916 created an atmosphere of indignation whenever the actions of the miners were misconstrued as un-patriotic. At the same time, the distrust also fuelled the increasingly enthusiastic anti-war movement that was congregating in the ILP centres of

¹⁴⁸ Leeworthy, *Labour Country*, p. 221.

¹⁴⁹ *Pioneer*, 25 September 1915.

¹⁵⁰ *Pioneer*, 16 September 1916.

South Wales, most notably Merthyr Tydfil and Briton Ferry. Indeed, the creation of several branches of the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) in Abertillery, Blaenavon, Newport, Nantyglo and Risca was a case of too close for comfort for the Monmouthshire ‘Lib-Labs’.¹⁵¹

Any leaders with connections to the Coalition Government were therefore potentially at risk from the ire of the rank and file.¹⁵² While subsequent attempts to dislodge the ‘Lib-Labs’ during the ‘comb-out’ schemes of 1917 and 1918 would prove unsuccessful, the task at hand for the established leaders took on an even greater difficulty after the war.¹⁵³ On the ground, wider rifts began to open up, creating an atmosphere where dreams and disillusionment went hand in hand, where ideas and movements such as the URC were reborn and where the hopes crystallised in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia found greater resonance in the lodges than the SWMF Executive. Despite the widespread rejection of strike action against the comb-out schemes in the Rhymney, Sirhowy and Ebbw Valleys in 1917, the re-emergence of the URC potentially pointed towards a more embittered critique of leadership on the horizon. The growing number of unofficial industrial stoppages was confirmation that the attempts by the ‘Lib-Labs’ to ease tensions would be arduously prolonged into the immediate post-war years.¹⁵⁴

In this intimidating environment, a fluid set of responses were also formed at a local level. The more militant attitudes that were rolling into the Sirhowy valley through CLC classes heightened the sense of lingering hostility. The tutorials of union activists such as Sidney Jones began to make more of an impression on the working-class communities of the Sirhowy valley, as the wave of IWCE influence finally swept into Tredegar and Ebbw Vale

¹⁵¹ Eirug, *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales*, p. 48, p. 141.

¹⁵² Eirug, *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales*, p. 163. William Brace came under particular pressure from the anti-war campaigners. As chairman of the 1916 ‘Home Office’ scheme which created the controversial work camps for pacifists imprisoned during the war, he became a key antagonist in the debate surrounding objection to the war effort within the labour movement.

¹⁵³ SWCC: Minutes of SWMF Special Conference, 12 June 1917; 13 June 1917; 2 August 1917; 3 August 1917; 8 October 1917, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1; *Herald of Wales and Monmouthshire Recorder*, 16 June 1917; *WM*, 24 October 1917; *Monmouth Guardian and Bargoed and Caerphilly Observer (MG)*, 2 November 1917; *Pioneer*, 3 November 1917. The ‘comb-out’ campaigns in 1917 and 1918, which saw a vocal section of the rank and file react angrily to the Coalition Government’s attempts to select miners able for active military service, threatened to escalate into an embittered tussle between leaders and led during the war. A Cardiff Special Conference in August initially rejected the ‘comb-out’ by a significant majority of 236 votes to 25 but over the next two months, the public attempts of Richards and Brace through the Federation and the South Wales press to convince the miners to accept the scheme slowly eased the tensions. In the ensuing coalfield-wide ballot, every SWMF district voted for the comb-out. The Tredegar Valley, Ebbw Vale and the Monmouthshire Western Valley districts that Richards represented in Parliament had produced some of the highest majorities against the ‘down-tools policy’.

¹⁵⁴ Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, p. 167.

in the remaining months of 1917.¹⁵⁵ The lack of working-class representation on bodies such as Food Control Committees (FCCs), that decided issues of local subsistence during the war, created an environment of acrimonious class antagonism. The outbreaks of conflict, most surprisingly the strike action in the Sirhowy in 1918 between the newly established Tredegar Combine and the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company (TICC), reminded political organisers of the need for widespread democratic infiltration, not just through Parliament but also in local auspices of government such as the MCC and the BBOG and PBOG.¹⁵⁶ The culture of consideration and debate in Abertillery and the wider Ebbw Fach was also strained by the stretching of sympathies, between the pro-war sentiments of individuals such as Gill who had returned home a hero from the Western Front, and the anti-war stance of his URC colleagues, especially George Barker.¹⁵⁷ Such collective disagreements between industrial foes, and even socialist allies, demonstrated how loyalties were turned upside down across the county's industrial valleys. As the war came to a sudden end, the fissures opened in the wartime Monmouthshire coalfield would be imitated in post-war industrial and political activities, from the campaigns to gain local government control after 1919, to the disparate reactions to industrial action that exploded between 1918 and 1929.

After the arrival of peace in 1918, the intensification of industrial militancy, amidst the preliminary decline of the coal industry provided a further backdrop for Labour's post-war development. As the profits of the colliery companies began to evaporate after 1920, most notably in the cases of the TICC, Powell Duffryn and EVSICC,¹⁵⁸ prospects of further growth and industrial expansion were curtailed. The Report of the South Wales Regional Survey Committee, for example, gave a gloomy outlook in 1921, especially for the established towns at the heads of the valleys, as the post-war emphasis shifted towards dealing with the problem of overcrowding, a lack of housing developments and the survival,

¹⁵⁵ *Pioneer*, 21 July 1917; Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 167.

¹⁵⁶ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 160-73, pp. 192-212; Smith, *Aneurin Bevan*, p. 199.

¹⁵⁷ *SWG*, 5 April 1918; 12 April 1918; Eddie May, 'Charles Stanton and the Limits to "Patriotic" Labour', *Welsh History Review*, 18:3 (1997), pp. 500-6. Barker in particular, bore the brunt of the pro-Gill, pro-war group. His opposition to the war and public demands for strike action to reject conscription led to calls for his resignation as miners' agent from local lodges such as Llanhilleth in April 1918. As a result of this episode, the Llanhilleth lodge cut ties with the ILP-dominated Abertillery TLC and formed its own independent trades council.

¹⁵⁸ Boyns, 'The Coal Industry', pp. 38-9. The collapse in profits of the Ebbw Vale Company reflected the wider trend in the coalfield of a high watermark of employment and wages in 1920 and a gradual, and in some cases rapid, subsequent decline. While output remained high, the company's profits disappeared, falling from £1,162,308 in 1919 to a £327,560 loss by 1922.

rather than advancement, of these communities.¹⁵⁹ In turn, the widespread reduction in wages, provoked by the increasingly perilous financial position of these companies, produced an outpouring of militant responses and alarming levels of unemployment as early as 1921. In the coalfield-wide lockouts of the same year and in 1926, this double-edged sword was sharpened with an unprecedented severity. The rising spectre of unemployment had become endemic by early 1921, particularly in the valley towns covered by the BBOG. As Andy Croll has suggested, these towns, particularly Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo and Blaina, ‘bore the full brunt of the economic blizzard’.¹⁶⁰ By June 1922, one in six of the BBOG’s population received poor relief, with a marked increase being paid out in the form of ‘Outdoor Relief’.¹⁶¹

Not only were working-class communities in an increasingly impossible position but so too were the Labour representatives on the MCC, UDCs and Board of Guardians who had no choice but to raise the rates of pay to unprecedented levels as a result the orders of the British state, particularly after 1926. In the case of Newport and Pontypool, where ‘Independent’ Liberal and Conservative council majorities were prolonged in each division throughout the 1920s, Labour councillors were even more powerless. By 1929, it had therefore become indelibly clear, to both Labour representatives and the communities that they served, that the economic situation in South Wales was rapidly deteriorating out of control. It was in this acute and incredibly damaging environment that Labour’s commitment to working-class people would take on revised meaning and expression.

(iv). Suffrage, Voluntary Organisations and Party Apprehension

Finally, it is important to pause and briefly recognise the role of non-party organisations in reshaping political boundaries after 1918. Each political party faced

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of Health, *Report of South Wales Regional Survey Committee* (London, 1921), pp. 23-4. The only significant post-war industrial development predicted in the Rhymney valley were at Pengam and Blackwood. In the Sirhowy, Tredegar’s superiority was to give way to the Markham and Oakdale collieries and the neighbourhoods of Pontllanfraith and Ynysddu further down the valley. The single expansion anticipated in the western valleys was at the Ebbw Vale steelworks and no signs of promise were to be found in collieries such as Beaufort.

¹⁶⁰ *SWG*, 7 January 1921; *ME*, 16 April 1921; Andy Croll, ‘Poverty, Mass Unemployment and Welfare’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 208-9.

¹⁶¹ Croll, ‘Poverty, Mass Unemployment and Welfare’, pp. 214-5; Sian Rhiannon Williams, ‘The Bedwellty Board of Guardians and the Default Act of 1927’, *Llafur*, 2:4 (1979), p. 66.

significant post-war challenges in translating associated cultures into stable political traditions. Wartime and post-war political development signified the escalating trepidation of the political classes and the parties they represented, fearful of the loss of authority and disconnection with the electorate which could be potentially unrecoverable after such a prolonged military conflict and substantial electoral reform. The upsurge in non-party organisations and mass membership associations added a further complexity and nuance to the task of political parties after the war. In particular, the lack of universal enfranchisement in 1918 served to galvanize the post-war suffrage movement in the ensuing decade. There was, after all, still significant work to be completed. An education of women citizens now able to vote and run for public office was required, as was a renewed campaign for an universal extension of the franchise to include those women aged between twenty-one and thirty still deprived of voting rights. As a consequence, the various wings of the pre-war suffrage campaign, now incorporated into the rebranded NUSEC, regrouped and revamped their aims and objectives, pivoting from pressurising the electoral system from the outside to participating partly from within.¹⁶²

For political parties, the enduring presence of suffrage societies was an increasing complication. The continuing non-party position of these groups conflicted with the readiness of the Labour Party and Conservative Party, in particular, to attract women members and new voters. The campaigns for equal pay, birth control and an equal moral standard may have polarised the suffrage movement along class and gender lines during the 1920s but the divisiveness of the debates also led to a greater understanding and exploration of the issues at hand, a path of discovery that potentially clashed with alternative political opportunities attainable through party frameworks.¹⁶³ Autonomous organisations, such as the WCAs and Six Point Group that proliferated under the NUSEC umbrella, were often considered adversaries by political parties, rather than potential collaborators.¹⁶⁴ In Monmouthshire, Newport became a crucial meeting point for nascent suffrage societies, with the town's WCA branch sparking a significant dialogue with all three major political parties in the division,

¹⁶² Law, *Suffrage and Power*, pp. 127-36.

¹⁶³ Harold L. Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s' in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Cheltenham, 1990), pp. 47-65. For an example of how these campaigns could clash with party directives, see Margaret Douglas, 'Women, God and Birth Control: The First Hospital Birth Control Clinic, Abertillery 1925', *Llafur*, 6:4 (1995), pp. 110-22.

¹⁶⁴ Law, *Suffrage and Power*, pp. 127-36.

most significantly during the 1922 by-election in the constituency.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the objective of educating women activists and voters became contested terrain in the county throughout the 1920s and subsequent attempts by political parties to both engage with, and detract away from, these organisations was further testament to the psychological trauma that would fixate the political classes in the aftermath of war.

Even before the introduction of universal suffrage in 1928, organisations such as the League of Nations Union (LNU) or Rotary International (RI) attempted to harness the democratic zeitgeist brought into being by the Representation of the People Act, through campaigns on a variety of issues, both in terms of domestic and foreign affairs. In a direct contestation of previous historical suspicions of these bodies, Helen McCarthy has instead insisted that organisations from the WCAs to the WIs helped to foster awareness amongst the newly enfranchised of current affairs, political issues and perceived responsibilities associated with the vote, producing ‘a form of “democratization” which reached far beyond formal political citizenship’. Key to the majority of these independent, voluntary organisations was a secular model of active citizenship that motivated members to engage in alternative forms of popular participation, largely outside of the realms of partisan political debate.¹⁶⁶

Interventions by separate organisations caused a pronounced deal of suspicion from political parties across the ideological spectrum about the intentions of these pressure groups and the risk of diluted purpose, from Labour’s distrust of ‘bourgeois’ women’s groups to the Conservative hostility aimed at the ‘do-gooder pacifists’ in the LNU.¹⁶⁷ Certainly in Monmouthshire, these organisations resonated with the middle-class populations in the urban centre of Newport and rural districts such as Usk, Magor and Caerleon. However, the avoidance of political talk in strictly party terms did not necessarily mean a depoliticised society in practice. Revised perceptions of democracy itself, and the role of each citizen in

¹⁶⁵ *WM*, 3 March 1922; Angela John, *Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan, 2013); Angela John, *Rocking the Boat: Welsh Women who Championed Equality* (Cardigan, 2019), pp. 247-67, p. 256. In reality, it was unsurprising that Newport became an epicentre for the extension of the suffrage campaign in Monmouthshire, considering the town’s past connections to Margaret Mackworth (1883-1958) who herself had been pivotal in the construction of both the WCA and Six Point Group.

¹⁶⁶ Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, 50:4 (Dec., 2007), pp. 891-912. For previous critiques of these non-party organisations, see Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 96-8.

¹⁶⁷ McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics’, p. 893; June Hannam, ‘Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars’, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 77 (2010), p. 74. See also Karen Hunt, ‘The Local and the Everyday: Inter War Women’s Politics’, *The Local Historian*, 42 (2012), pp. 266-279.

the post-war political ecosystem, led to a raised awareness of the relationship between everyday life and politics, and fed into the multiplicity of cultures already forming in the county.

These additions were contested at a localised and county-wide level, where the relationships between party, voluntary organisations, and the expanded electorate, became even more multifaceted. In Monmouthshire, the emphasis therefore shifted towards a landscape where mass democracy, as a concept, had to be treated as an inevitable outcome of, and reaction to, the immediate post-war world. This was a realisation the county shared with the rest of Britain, but it was slowly transmogrified in relation to the specific set of socio-economic contexts that gave the shire its conflicting personality. There was no sudden epiphany for the established and developing political parties but instead contemplation and consideration, most effectively in the case of Labour and the Conservatives, of the significant groundwork and improved organisation both required to acclimatise to the post-war political landscape. The result was a slow learning curve for all organisations engaged in democratic processes, in order to attract the support of new voters, and convert already existing cultures into political traditions, deciphered at a constituency level. The remaining chapters will explore the subtle and complex ways these diverse factors played out in each of Monmouthshire's constituencies.

Chapter 2

From ‘Lib-Labs’ to Crusaders? The Cases of Abertillery, Bedwelty and Ebbw Vale

Writing in the *Welsh Outlook* in June 1919, William Harris declared that it was now intolerable for Labour’s voice to be ignored. The assertion was made in relation to the lukewarm response of organised labour in the South Wales coalfield to the post-war campaign for federal devolution, despite the commitment of Labour Party leaders, such as Arthur Henderson, to ‘Home Rule All Around’ in 1918.¹ Indeed, Harris, the Welsh-speaking Labour man from Pontllanfraith, and elected member of the NEC, admitted that the internationalism of the Welsh worker, and the increasing cosmopolitanism of his surroundings, would lead to an outlook where the priorities of the ‘Patriot’ would give way to the needs of the ‘Proletariat’. Importantly though, Harris viewed the situation with a renewed sense of determination rather than reticence, asserting that the industrial and political organisation of Labour in Wales had arrived at a point where it would now be ‘impossible for the settlement of any national problem without Labour’.² Making the most of the situation, at the potential expense of personal ambitions for self-government, Harris nevertheless understood that the time had arrived for Labour to translate its industrial organisation into a concerted political presence, both on the ground and in Parliament.

Harris was suitably positioned to make a bold decree on Labour’s position. Together with his colleagues Meth Jones in the Gower and T.I. ‘Mardy’ Jones in Glamorgan, Harris had been instrumental in overseeing the construction of Labour’s political machine in the county, acting as a political organiser for the SWMF for Monmouthshire since 1910. He had

¹ *Welsh Outlook (WO)*, 5:6, June 1918. Henderson addressed the issue of devolution in specific relation to Wales, claiming that, ‘Given self-government Wales might establish itself as a modern Utopia’. Henderson’s vision was part of the Labour Party’s wider commitment to a federal Britain expressed at the subsequent party conference in London, and also adopted in the national programme that Labour put forward in the General Election in December 1918.

² *WO*, 6:6, June 1919; National Library of Wales (NLW): E.T. John Papers, Letter from Wm. Harris to E.T. John, 16 July 1920 NLW MSS ETJOHN/2622; Letter from Wm. Harris to E.T. John, 16 August 1920 NLW MSS ETJOHN/2647. See also Duncan Tanner, ‘The Pattern of Labour Politics, 1918-1939’ in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 118-9. Harris had also held out hope for a Welsh National Council for the Labour Party along with Labour converts such as E.T. John. It was a fruitless demand at this stage yet it set the tone for the following debates over devolution in Wales.

campaigning on behalf of union-backed parliamentary candidates after the affiliation of the SWMF to the Labour Party in 1908 and assisted in the establishment and co-ordination of the embryonic TLCs that were emerging, and in some cases resurfacing, in even greater numbers during 1915 and 1916.³ Harris had also advocated collaboration between the nascent North and West Monmouthshire Labour parties during the war, promoting cross-district partnerships across not only the miners' lodges and TLCs, but also through more regional bodies such as the South Wales Labour Federation, an organisation inaugurated to 'assure that Labour interests are safeguarded in all social and political movements'.⁴ The response was encouraging and often immediate. By September 1916, the *Pioneer* recorded that 'Monmouthshire now stands undoubtedly in the forefront as to Labour organisations' and highlighted Harris, the former Abertillery checkweighman, for his organisational prowess in overseeing the creation of TLCs in Abercarn, Bedwas, Risca and Rhymney.⁵ With a network steadily piecing itself together and further expansion well under way, it was no wonder that Harris would advise the British political establishment to take notice of what had been achieved.

It is also no surprise that Harris greeted the determination ingrained in the 1918 Labour constitution with vigour, and embraced its edicts, working closely with the newly formed divisional party branches to standardise the structures and mechanisms of the Labour Party at a grass roots level. In his own Bedwellty constituency, he played a particularly pivotal role alongside Lewis Lewis,⁶ and prospective election candidate Charles Edwards, in drafting the Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party (BDLP) constitution which encouraged individual membership and equal contributions of men and women members. Political participation was no longer exclusive to lodge members, co-operators and delegates representing trade unions but incorporated those unaffiliated members willing to subscribe to

³ *Pioneer*, 25 September 1915; Gwent Archives (GA): BDLP Records, Blackwood Trades and Labour Council Minute Book, 1911-1915, D3784/123; Blackwood Trades and Labour Council Letter Book, 1917-19, D3784/125. See also Alan Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain, 1900-40* (Manchester, 1977), p. 197.

⁴ *Pioneer*, 19 August 1916. Harris was the secretary of the Federation from its inception in 1916.

⁵ *Pioneer*, 16 September 1916.

⁶ Harold Finch, *Memoirs of a Bedwellty MP* (Risca, 1972), pp. 37-8. Lewis Lewis of Pontlloftyn was a carpenter, trade unionist, and the founding member and secretary of the Blackwood TLC. Much like Conway in Tredegar, he was increasingly vocal on political issues in Blackwood, as both a campaigner for the ILP and as a WEA lecturer, and advocated handing local government control over to the 'consumers' in the district. Despite this condemnation, Lewis was invited onto the Bedwellty UDC in 1918. He would be active in local council work for the next forty years, holding the chairmanship on four occasions, and would also serve on the MCC.

the programmes of the Labour Party and Co-operative Society.⁷ Harris, in both his words and actions, therefore represented the gradual conversion in mentality that was slowly beginning to take shape in the industrial world of South Wales, not just in the upper echelons of the SWMF, but in the broader outlook of the coalfield.

To individuals such as Harris, the future therefore lay much more firmly with the fight at the ballot box, rather than relying on the disputes over wages and working hours contested between capital and labour. The political assault was to be at all levels, to secure representation in Parliament, local district and county councils, poor law administration and education and health committees. In doing so, the definition of ‘Labour’ itself was to be rewritten in increasingly political terms, with a basis in citizenship and no longer solely in trade unionism membership. Yet the tussle between industrial and political aims was by no means resolved across the county. At a Monmouthshire Labour Conference in the spring of 1920, Harris heavily criticised leaders in the eastern valleys, Newport, and Monmouth, for an ‘apathy and indifference’ in relation to ‘Labour matters’.⁸ In reflecting on his contribution to the labour movement in the inaugural edition of the Federation’s *Colliery Workers’ Magazine* in January 1923, he also warned that, ‘there are still some Trade Unionists...[who] cannot conceive of a Labour man or woman who do not toil in a manual sense, and who have not yet grasped the new concept of Labour “by hands or by brain”’.⁹ The transition was far from complete. Labour still had more work to do in strengthening its working-class allegiances and, perhaps more crucially, in demonstrating its intrinsic importance to wider society.

For the remaining years of his life, Harris’ energies would be spent on translating this redefinition into practical and persistent political organisation in the industrial and rural districts of the county.¹⁰ Sadly, Harris’ unrelenting and exhaustive pursuit of his political

⁷ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of BDLP Sub-Committee, 4 May 1918, D3784/1. The draft of the sub-committee was ratified with minor tweaks to management and individual contributions at a subsequent conference of Labour organisations in the constituency, in Blackwood on 7 September 1918. A previous emphasis on collaboration by Harris and fellow Labour organisers is also evident in the finalised BDLP constitution, especially in the objective of uniting ‘the forces of Labour within the Constituency’.

⁸ *Daily Herald (DH)*, 26 April 1920.

⁹ *Colliery Workers’ Magazine (CWM)*, 1:1, January 1923.

¹⁰ *Merthyr Express: West Monmouth Edition (ME)*, 26 September 1925. Harris would continue to be a mentor on matters of Labour administration and would also serve on the Mynyddislwyn UDC and Monmouthshire County Council. He was elected alongside his brother and fellow trade unionist Oliver (1873-1944), the editor of the *Colliery Workers’ Magazine* and eventual successor to Thomas Richards as secretary of the SWMF in 1931. Both would prove to be living examples of the opportunities opening up to working-class people to serve their communities through local government and often in the most difficult of financial and economic circumstances.

goals would come at the ultimate personal price. His growing battle with insomnia and depression, and his subsequent suicide in his Blackwood home in 1925, was tragic testament to the physical and mental exertions that members of the labour movement endured during this time of major socio-economic upheaval.¹¹ His legacy, however, was harder to extinguish. Harris had struck a critical balance, between respecting the industrial structures already assembled, and responding to the immediate mandate of the present, transforming perceptions of Labour's political capabilities in the process. In planting the kernel of an idea, and executing a practical strategy that would galvanise the localities around him into action, Harris embodied the 'language of priorities' that would be replicated by subsequent representatives from different strands of the labour movement in the Monmouthshire coalfield, from his colleague Charles Edwards in Bedwellty to George Barker in Abertillery and Aneurin Bevan in Tredegar.¹²

The designs of Harris and his fellow organisers led to a remarkable swathe of success across the industrial divisions in Monmouthshire, which extended far beyond the miners' lodges and the confines of the TLCs. At first glance, the reformatted industrial constituencies of Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale appeared to reflect the emerging coalfield hegemony which saw the Labour Party prevail in 94.3% of parliamentary contests in South Wales between 1918 and 1935. In these three seats, successive Labour candidates were successfully returned to Parliament after 1918, often unopposed and with increasingly heavy majorities when challenged.¹³ As a result of the widespread breakthrough, a legacy was created that echoed throughout the twentieth century, even after the redistribution of seats in 1983.¹⁴ All three electoral divisions also played a pivotal part in the emerging Labour control of local government in the coalfield.¹⁵ While control was more fleeting and inconsistent in Ebbw Vale, particularly in the case of the Rhymney UDC, Labour representatives in Abertillery and Bedwellty district councils gained the balance of power as early as 1919-22

¹¹ *ME*, 26 September 1925; 3 October 1925.

¹² Susan Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan: A Society and its Political Articulation 1890-1929' (PhD, Cardiff University, 1990), p. 369.

¹³ Chris Cook, 'Wales and the General Election of 1923', *Welsh History Review*, 4:4 (1969), pp. 394-5. Abertillery was the least contested seat in the South Wales coalfield with only one parliamentary contest after 1922.

¹⁴ The only change in party representation between 1918 and 1983 came when Abertillery MP Jeffrey Thomas was one of the twenty-eight Labour Party representatives who defected to the Social Democratic Party in 1981.

¹⁵ See Map of Monmouthshire's Constituency and District Boundaries, p. ix. After 1918, the Ebbw Vale constituency included the urban districts of Ebbw Vale, Rhymney and Tredegar. Abertillery included the urban districts of Abercarn, Abertillery and Nantyglo & Blaina. Bedwellty incorporated the urban districts of Bedwas & Machen, Bedwellty, Mynyddislwyn, Risca and the civil parish of Rogerstone in the rural district of St Mellons.

and refused to relinquish power right up until the eve of the Second World War. Labour's increasing influence was also evident in its majority on the Bedwellty Board of Guardians after 1919 and its eventual sustained control of Monmouthshire County Council between 1925 and 1939.¹⁶

There were other patterns that the industrial constituencies of North West Monmouthshire also appeared to fit neatly into, including the shift from the representation of 'Lib-Labs' or moderate Labour MPs such as Thomas Richards and William Brace to the more argumentative personalities of George Daggar and Aneurin Bevan. The electoral transition appeared to symbolise a changing of the guard in Labour politics.¹⁷ Indeed, Labour's development has been traditionally explored through this prism of stark generational and ideological divides. A stubborn narrative has endured, of an archaic and temperate hierarchy ensconced on the SWMF Executive Committee and in local councils eventually giving way to a new wave of progressive and forceful socialist firebrands.¹⁸ Such explanations have been critiqued by Peter Stead, Duncan Tanner and Eddie May who have confronted the popular portrayals of the Labour Party in South Wales during the early years of the twentieth century and instead represented the coalfield as a 'mosaic of individuals, groups, organizations and events... pieced together, against a background of rapid and sometimes traumatic social change'.¹⁹ Chris Williams has also endeavoured to confront conceptions of an indifferent and contemptible 'Lib-Lab' ethos and position figures such as 'Mabon', Thomas Richards and William Brace as important catalysts for independent

¹⁶ *ME*, 15 March 1919; 12 April 1919; 14 March 1925; 11 April 1925; 10 March 1928; 7 April 1928. See also Chris Williams, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government, 1919-1939' in Deian Hopkin, Duncan Tanner and Chris Williams (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales: 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 142.

¹⁷ John Graham Jones, 'Welsh Politics Between the Wars: The Personnel of Labour', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1983), p. 182.

¹⁸ Robin Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners: A History of the South Wales Miners Federation 1898-1914* (London, 1967); Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?: A History of the Welsh* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 233-40; Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980), p. 7, pp. 20-2; David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields 1850-1926* (1992), p. 77.

¹⁹ Peter Stead, 'Working-Class Leadership in South Wales 1900-1920', *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), p. 352; Eddie May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 62; Tanner, 'The Pattern of Labour Politics', pp. 113-39. See also Duncan Tanner, 'Gender, Civic Culture and Politics in South Wales: Explaining Labour Municipal Policy, 1918-39' in Matthew Worley (ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 170-93.

working-class politics who shared ‘assumptions about the rights and needs of labour’ with the ILP-led socialism in the coalfield.²⁰

Nevertheless, the idea of a hegemonic Labour Party, marked more by radical advancement than moderate tenacity after 1918, still persists.²¹ While Labour’s power by the end of the decade and the impact of its associated industrial and political institutions cannot be underappreciated, the passing down of popular myth has been largely successful. The notion of a monolithic Labour bloc, swiftly transitioning from conciliatory ‘Lib-Lab’ passivity to radical socialism, has not yet been fully cracked open. However, the diligence and responsiveness of individuals such as Harris and other experienced campaigners, who broadened Labour’s appeal and worked alongside members of various ideological factions within the labour movement, paint a rather different picture. In reality, the instigators of the Labour tradition cannot be easily categorised or codified. Neither was the ‘Lib-Labism’ of the past simply rejected as once anticipated, nor could it have been, when its DNA was so entrenched in the architecture of the SWMF, the wider labour movement and its subsequent political manifestations, from the TLCs to the divisional party organisations. Instead, a peculiar concoction of political philosophies and traits were embraced and passed on to collective party memberships and to the emerging political leaders in the coalfield. In this sense, Labour moved towards building a broad church movement for the first time in earnest, allowing for diffusion of ideas and disagreement, and, above all else, promoting a set of participatory, practical and democratic socialist ideals in order to represent the working-class communities of Monmouthshire.

As a result, Labour’s development was not linear but instead a case of trial and error, dependent on local parameters and conditions. After 1918, and despite attempts to create uniformity in terms of political organisation, each locality established its own unique blend of responses to the post-war political climate, dependent on the occupational and ideological makeup of Labour organisations already in existence. Local areas also began to co-operate,

²⁰ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951* (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 31-72, p. 68; Chris Williams, ‘Democracy and Nationalism in Wales: The Lib-Lab Enigma’ in Robert Stradling, Scott Newton and David Bates (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence: Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 107-31.

²¹ Tanner, ‘The Pattern of Labour Politics’, p. 124; May, ‘The Mosaic of Labour Politics’, p. 82; Richard Lewis, ‘Political Culture and Ideology’ in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 98. Even Tanner, for example, still contended that Labour had absorbed enough of a progressive radical appeal to ensure the metamorphosis into the party of the entire coalfield by 1929.

on an inconsistent basis, to build upon the vibrant network that Harris and his SWMF colleagues had helped generate. The instability of the war, which had provided Labour with an initial opportunity for an electoral breakthrough, also brought with it no guarantee of sustained success. After all, Harris' trepidation in the early 1920s is further evidence that a wider allegiance to Labour was still a goal yet to be earned as well as expanded on.²² The post-war transition would therefore be undertaken through a diverse set of foundations but, collectively, through an underlying iterative process. The original founders of the SWMF continued to play an integral role, and it would take reformation rather than revolution to ensure the electoral control Labour gained in each constituency would be translated into further post-war political development after 1918.

This chapter will therefore take a comparative approach by exploring the post-war Labour cultures in the Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale constituencies in order to explain how an assortment of Labour cultures was fashioned into an effective and varied Labour tradition in North West Monmouthshire by 1929. It will initially discuss the longevity of the 'Lib-Lab' political outlook and how the first post-war Labour parliamentarians such as Thomas Richards, William Brace and Charles Edwards immortalised electoral concepts such as industrial unity, trust in leadership and the importance of local identity that would be re-utilised by future Labour Party representatives. It will then explore the collection of local labourisms, underlying the 'Lib-Lab' resilience in these constituencies at a grass roots level, which aimed to embrace new voters, particularly women, and gain political control on local public bodies, particularly the MCC and UDCs. However, the frustration and unevenness which dented the initial electoral breakthrough, symbolised in the dismay of the 1921 lockout and rising spectre of unemployment that followed, forced Labour representatives to face the limitations of the power accrued after 1918. In turn, such discoveries unveiled pressure points, on ideological, occupational and organisational grounds, that existed between localities and within industrial divisions.

Finally, attention will shift towards the rise of new forms of Labour leader, in the shape of George Daggar and Aneurin Bevan, who were able to build a broader collective loyalty that combined the disparate creeds of past and present, both community and sectional clique. Despite individual setbacks and the narrowing margin for error, represented in their own experiences of the industrial decline that set in after 1920, they extended Labour's reach

²² *CWM*, 1:3, March 1923.

beyond industrial arenas. In deploying a workable strategy that was increasingly effective and widespread in terms of local influence, they portrayed loyalty to Labour as a social and democratic imperative in the most testing of circumstances, most significantly during the lockout of 1926. In sum, they elevated the position of Labour in relation to the industrial communities of Monmouthshire through a growing commitment to their own localities, and a respect for the industrial and social institutions already in place. Overall, it will be argued that these constituencies were not homogenous Labour areas but experimental laboratories for industrial politics, where only those willing to learn, and combine different strands of a shifting political culture, would be able to endure and succeed.

I. 'nothing new under the sun'?²³ – Extending the 'Lib-Lab' Endurance

'Some of them might be at variance with him at times, but in the end those who differed from him had to admit that "Tom Richards was right after all."' ²⁴ The tone of Enoch Morrell's tribute to the late secretary of the SWMF was unsurprising. The incumbent president had long been an ally of Richards since his election to the Executive Council of the Federation in 1899, and his selection as miners' agent for the Taff and Cynon District in 1908. Addressing the audience at Richards' funeral in Cardiff, Morrell therefore reflected on the character of a kindred spirit, courageous and sagacious in his principles and who had served the industrial communities to the best of his ability.²⁵ Morrell was not alone as tributes poured in from all sides, from Ebby Edwards, Richards' successor as president of the MFGB, to David Richard Llewellyn, on behalf of the coalowners. The most intriguing demonstrations of admiration, however, came from Richards' former adversaries on the Executive Committee of the SWMF. W.H. Mainwaring, previously secretary of the URC,²⁶ joined Oliver Harris, James Griffiths and Arthur Jenkins as a designated bearer at Richards' funeral. In subsequent commemorations, Noah Ablett, the chief architect of the URC,

²³ *CWM*, 1:1, January 1923.

²⁴ *Western Mail (WM)*, 12 November 1931.

²⁵ *South Wales Daily News (SWDN)*, 15 April 1899; *Rhondda Leader (RL)*, 2 May 1903; *Evening Express (EE)*, 7 November 1905; *WM*, 21 April 1934. Sitting on the Conciliation Board since 1903, Enoch Morrell (1860-1934) had also shared the conviction that the strike weapon was to be a last resort. In his eulogy, he promised to continue Richard's legacy in dealing with future industrial disputes 'by patient argument and shrewd and effective bargaining.'

²⁶ *WM*, 12 November 1931. William Henry Mainwaring (1884-1971) was secretary of the URC and co-wrote the constitution which appeared in *The Miners' Next Step*. He also became vice-principal of the CLC in 1919, miners' agent for the Rhondda district between 1924 and 1933 and Labour MP for the Rhondda East division between 1933 and 1959.

proclaimed that, 'We have lost the greatest man in the Federation; the greatest man in Wales'.²⁷ Both were quite astonishing interventions from the co-authors of *The Miners' Next Step*, where it was contended that 'Lib-Lab' leaders such as 'Mabon', Richards and William Brace were 'unable to be kings' and had outlived their usefulness.²⁸ In light of the death of fellow agitator Arthur Cook only a week earlier, Ablett's praise is given an even greater sense of gravity.²⁹

The fact is that Richards had earned the revised opinion of his contemporaries. Alongside those of a similar sensibility such as William Brace, Charles Edwards and Alfred Onions on the Federation Executive, he had resisted the onslaughts of 1910-11 and 1912, and had continued to serve the membership of the SWMF during a time of mounting militancy and uncertainty. These figureheads had also remained influential both in the coalfield and increasingly in Westminster, maintaining the reverence of not just the workforce but the wider electorate. Alongside Tom Griffiths in Pontypool, Brace, Edwards and Richards would either retain or capture the industrial divisions of Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale respectively, in the name of the Labour Party in 1918. These were therefore not the 'peace-at-any-price men' that the Aberdare populist C.B. Stanton had patronisingly claimed would soon be on the way out in 1912,³⁰ but instead were the revered survivors of the pre-war world, who demonstrated a flexibility of industrial approach and awareness, alongside an initial capacity to incorporate perceived demands of the mining majority into their own political rhetoric after 1918.

²⁷ Cited in Robin Page Arnot and Joyce Bellamy, 'Richards, Thomas' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 1* (London, 1972), p. 287. See also David Egan, 'Noah Ablett 1883-1935', *Llafur*, 4:3 (1986), pp. 19-30; Robert Turnbull, *Climbing Mount Sinai: Noah Ablett 1883-1935* (London, 2017). Noah Ablett (1883-1935) originally found prominence as a checkweigher at Maerdy colliery in the Rhondda, after 1909, and as a central figure in the Cambrian Combine dispute in 1910-11. He was elected to the SWMF Executive in 1911 and co-authored *The Miners' Next Step* the following year. He was a founding member of the South Wales Plebs League, a governor of the CLC and a key figurehead in the growth of the URC in the coalfield. After the war, Ablett became miners' agent for the Merthyr district and was also a member of the MFGB Executive between 1921 and 1926. A battle with alcoholism would serve to dampen the spark that had shone so brightly before his death in 1935.

²⁸ Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miners' Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation*, Reprinted Edition (London, 1991), p. 9, p. 25. The pamphlet demanded the removal of paid positions and that '[t]he Executive becomes unofficial'; Noah Ablett, 'Local Autonomy versus Centralisation in Regard to the Making of War and Peace. Report with Special Reference to the Facts, Structure and History of the South Wales Miners' Federation', Paper to the Barrow House Conference, July 1913.

²⁹ Paul Davies, *A. J. Cook* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 182-5. It should be noted that Ablett had been critical of Cook (1883-1931), his former comrade and the general secretary of the MFGB, in the last few months before his death, for his willingness to accept a compromise between the British Government and MFGB over a seven-and-a-half-hour working day on the existing wage rates for the miners.

³⁰ *EE*, 16 June 1912.

Firstly, Monmouthshire 'Lib-Labs' continued to hold positions at the top of the industrial pyramid. In critical ways, they even built upon this control. Despite the pre-war wave of revolts led by Ablett and the URC, established voices continued to preserve a majority on the Executive Committee of the SWMF up until 1920. As Anthony John Adams has highlighted, this retention was largely a result of the district level structure of the Federation that precipitated the consistent selection of experienced miners' agents and deputies to represent the rank and file.³¹ Indeed, in the Tredegar Valley and Monmouthshire Western Valleys miners' districts, the veteran Alfred Onions, and his younger colleagues Charles Edwards and Evan Davies, remained the representatives of choice in the Sirhowy and Ebbw valleys. There were a number of vocal supporters of the Ablett minority by 1918, such as the Abertillery contingent of George Barker and George Daggar, but ultimately the sway of the 'Lib-Labs' remained prevalent.³²

The election of William Brace to succeed 'Mabon' as SWMF president in 1912, despite the Cambrian Combine dispute the previous year, had already indicated the enduring appeal of the trusted leaders. Brace would hold the position until 1915, when he took leave to commit greater time and energy to his role in the Asquith Coalition as an Under Secretary in the Home Office.³³ On his departure from Whitehall in November 1918, he would return to take on the role once again, replacing James Winstone as acting president.³⁴ His final stint as head of the SWMF would be more troublesome and short-lived, marked by bouts of irritation and public demonstrations of annoyance. Nevertheless, Brace's re-appearance and successful defence of his presidency in June 1919, against the challenge of W.H. Mainwaring, was testament to the residual faith placed in his ability to oversee the immediate post-war transition. Brace also adeptly deflected criticisms of the role of parliamentarians on the Executive Council, downplaying the rejection of political action from members such as S.O. Davies, who in this moment favoured 'industrialism out and out'. A resulting card vote on the election of paid SWMF officials, and by extension the future strategy of the union, favoured the Federation president from Risca, rather than the dissenting voices from Swansea and

³¹ Anthony John Adams, 'Working Class Organisation, Industrial Relations and the Labour Unrest 1914-1921' (PhD, University of Leicester, 1988), p. 306.

³² Swansea University Archive, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC): Minutes of SWMF Executive Council Meeting, 20 April 1918, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1.

³³ *Llais Llafur*, 5 June 1915; Robin Page Arnot, Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 'Brace, William' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 1* (London, 1972), pp. 51-3.

³⁴ SWCC: Minutes of SWMF Executive Council Meeting, 17 December 1918, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1.

Abercwmboi.³⁵ The decision also revealed the desire for combined industrial-political action to take precedence over a strictly industrial response against the coalowners.

Richards' retention of the position of general secretary until his death in 1931 reflected the endurance of a similar vein of loyalties. Indeed, Richards was perceived to be an even more important cog in the union mechanism. When announcing his intentions to retire from either the union or his seat in Parliament in November 1919, SWMF delegates unanimously voted for Richards to remain as secretary.³⁶ The Beaufort leader would also extend his influence beyond the coalfield. While the pre-war election of Hartshorn, Stanton and Barker to the MFGB Executive in 1911, at the expense of Richards, Brace and Onions, has been portrayed as a symbolic death knell for 'Lib-Labism',³⁷ the return of Richards to the national Federation ten years later and his almost begrudging diligence on behalf of the MFGB complicates such assessments. Significantly, Richards' election as vice-president in 1924, and subsequently his selection as president of the MFGB and Miners' International in 1930, would potentially never have materialised had SWMF members not insisted that he stand once again. Having considered his responsibilities to the South Wales miners too great to divert his attention to other duties, a circular was sent out by Richards' assistant, Evan Thomas, to lodges across the coalfield urging Richards to think again.³⁸ The resolution of 1 May 1924, and the following ballot that saw Richards re-elected, encapsulated the underlying belief in Richards and his style of leadership, at most levels. The 'Lib-Labs' therefore remained at the heart of the industrial life of South Wales, not just North West Monmouthshire.

Admittedly, the preservation of power had not been a straightforward outcome of deference towards the SWMF. Respect had been accumulated with a significant degree of difficulty and it was not earned without collective struggle or personal adaptation. The trials encountered before and during the war had taken its toll on these individuals and fundamentally tested the relationship between leaders and led. As the war concluded in

³⁵ *Llais Llafur*, 21 June 1919. Brace gained 177 votes to Mainwaring's 61. Confidence was also placed in Alfred Onions as treasurer, who beat Noah Thomas by 173 votes to 71.

³⁶ SWCC: Minutes of SWMF Special Conference, 8 November 1919, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1.

³⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922*, Paperback Edition (Cardiff, 1991), p. 253; Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p. 77.

³⁸ *WM*, 3 June 1924. Thomas' plea was emphatic, declaring that, 'in view of the invaluable services rendered by him [Richards] during the life of the federation, and the exceptional ability displayed...we urge upon him to reconsider his decision, and unanimously pledge ourselves to recommend to the members of the South Wales Miners' Federation that they should make him their first choice in the forthcoming ballot.'

November 1918, the SWMF Executive had already begun to subtly adapt its own approach to the coalfield, in anticipation of the post-war issues that would be prioritised by industrial communities. Its stance once again reflected the capabilities of leaders such as Richards and Brace to adjust to immediate circumstances. At a meeting in May 1918, a series of resolutions was passed in preparation for the MFGB Annual Conference that encapsulated this flexibility. A more obstinate approach to wage agreements was agreed, ‘in view of the possibility of a fall in the standard living after the War’, with working hours also to be capped at six hours per day. Conciliation boards were deemed increasingly ineffective in securing further advances, leading to a renewed call for centralised machinery through the MFGB. Nationalisation was also presented for discussion, with the final conclusion of the members of the Executive present that, ‘it is clearly in the national interest to transfer the entire industry from private ownership and control to state ownership with joint control and administration by the workmen and the state.’³⁹

It is also evident that priorities had shifted, for the resolutions that were passed by the Executive Committee were not merely industrial in nature. It was decided that the issue of working-class housing was to be campaigned upon and to demand that local authorities were provided ‘adequate financial grants’ out of ‘Imperial funds’ to ensure social and educational improvements for local communities.⁴⁰ The influence of individuals such as James Winstone and George Barker is clear in these proposals. Winstone, staying true to his beliefs, moved the resolution on nationalisation at the following Annual MFGB Conference in July, stating that ‘The time has arrived...now is the time and this is the place’.⁴¹ However, passing these resolutions as a collective also implicitly demonstrated the capabilities of the ‘Lib-Labs’ to compromise with the more militant members of the SWMF Executive, and the former’s perception of the next steps the labour movement needed to take to expand.

Given the spur for political reorganisation in the form of *Labour and the New Social Order* and the party’s revised constitution of 1918, ‘Lib-Lab’ individuals also had to respond

³⁹ SWCC: Minutes of SWMF Executive Council Meeting, 2 May 1918, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1. The Executive Committee also agreed that the establishment of a weekly newspaper would be in the SWMF’s favour, although financial and logistical requirements would need to be investigated further. This finally came to fruition in 1923 with the creation of the *Colliery Workers’ Magazine*.

⁴⁰ SWCC: Minutes of SWMF Executive Council Meeting, 2 May 1918, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1.

⁴¹ GA: National Union of Mineworkers (South Wales Area) Records: Minutes of MFGB Annual Conference, 9-12 July 1918, D845/9. For Barker’s views on nationalisation, see George Barker, ‘Labour Views – Mr. George Barker, South Wales Miners’ Federation’ in Huntly Carter (ed.), *Industrial Reconstruction: A Symposium on the Situation After the War and How to Meet It* (New York, 1918), pp. 109-12.

to the Labour Party's restructuring at a grass roots level. As Matthew Worley has suggested, the steady reduction in interwar trade union membership, after the peaks of wartime, made fostering an 'approach to the wider community' an essential intervention, even in areas where there were dominant union frameworks such as South Wales.⁴² In the industrial constituencies in the county, established 'Lib-Labs' were influential in the formation of divisional Labour parties and pinpointing the direction, not only for the relationship with local TLCs, but also for the aspirations of the party in each locality. Charles Edwards, for example, was crucial in developing the Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party and its guiding principles. Edwards quickly forged a working relationship with other key local organisers, from William Harris and Risca Councillor John Powell, to Lewis Lewis.⁴³ It was Edwards, however, alongside Harris and Lewis, who would make the most forceful push to enshrine tenets espoused by Henderson and Webb in post-war Bedwellty. As part of the sub-committee that drafted the BDLP's constitution in 1918 and in a subsequent conference of the Labour organisations in the division in September, he emphasised the importance of establishing men's and women's groups for individual party members.⁴⁴ In actively encouraging the proliferation of Men's and Women's Sections and the elevation of individual membership that would pave the way for this development, 'Lib-Labs' such as Edwards began to embrace the Labour Party's revised political ambitions.

Coupled with his service to local miners, and Alfred Onions' decision to contest the Caerphilly seat, it was no surprise that Bedwellty members looked to Edwards, the district miners' sub-agent, as the preferred choice to represent Labour in the 1918 General Election. Edwards was unanimously adopted by the BDLP as candidate for the division in late November.⁴⁵ In his subsequent contest against the Coalition Liberal candidate and Newport barrister, William Henry Williams, Edwards sought to champion the rights and demands of an independent Labour Party away from the progressive alliance with the Liberals. Despite his efforts alongside Harris and Lewis in Bedwellty, success was not guaranteed given that

⁴² Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars*, Paperback Edition (London, 2008), p. 61.

⁴³ GA: BDLP Records, Blackwood Trades and Labour Council Letter Book, Letter from Lewis Lewis to T.J. Thomas, 10 January 1918, D3784/125. See also Finch, *Memoirs*, pp. 37-8.

⁴⁴ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the BDLP Conference of Labour Organisations in the Division, 7 September 1918, D3784/1. Edwards reasoning was founded on the belief that there was 'a considerable body of opinion in favour of Labour outside of the trade union movement, and these should be provided for.'

⁴⁵ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the BDLP Conference of Labour Organisations in the Division, 23 November 1918, D3784/1. The prospective parliamentarian confirmed that, 'His firm adherence to the principles of Labour would compel him to at all times to carry the trust of the workers in the right direction'.

Williams could potentially muster a working-class following, owing to his position as president of the Monmouthshire Discharged Sailors' and Soldiers' Association.⁴⁶ However, Edwards had allies of his own. He was supported frequently by Onions, Harris and Albert Thomas, the Rhymney Valley district sub-agent and fellow SWMF Executive member. Each one consistently emphasised the non-sectional appeal of the Labour Party now seeking to represent 'the soldiers and sailors who have fought the nation's battles abroad, and to the men and women workers at home'.⁴⁷ Subsequently, Edwards echoed the broader outlook of the Labour programme in 1918, emphasising the need for cross-class citizenship, equal opportunities for men and women in the electoral system through 'complete adult suffrage', and a detailed Public Health Act based on 'prevention rather than cure'. His inclusive rhetoric demonstrated the successful variation of the Labour plea to the wider electorate in Bedwellty. As a result, and bolstered by the BDLP's expanded organisation, Edwards successfully outmanoeuvred his opponent, defeating Williams by a majority of 1,560 votes.⁴⁸

Elsewhere, in Abertillery and Ebbw Vale, the election of Labour MPs to the House of Commons was more straightforward. Nevertheless, explaining individual positions were more of a challenge. Both Thomas Richards and William Brace had been elected unopposed but an examination of their activities during the election reveals how both sought to consolidate their status in the renewed electoral environment. The redistribution of parliamentary seats provided an alternative opportunity for Brace to become Labour candidate for the newly formed Abertillery constituency.⁴⁹ For Richards, war and electoral rearrangement put to rest any previous plans for parliamentary retirement, at least for the immediate future, and he continued as prospective Labour candidate for the neighbouring Ebbw Vale division. Despite a lack of opposition, both campaigns provided a chance for

⁴⁶ *Monmouth Guardian and Bargoed and Caerphilly Observer (MG)*, 15 November 1918.

⁴⁷ *Pioneer*, 7 December 1918; *MG*, 13 December 1918.

⁴⁸ *Cambria Daily Leader (CDL)*, 30 December 1918. The full election result was as follows: Charles Edwards (Labour Party) – 11,730 votes (53.6%), William Henry Williams (Coalition Liberal) – 10,170 votes (46.4%). The turnout was approximately 70.8%.

⁴⁹ *ME*, 27 November 1915; 4 December 1915; *WM*, 18 January 1918; Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 134. Brace had actually been considered as the leading candidate to replace Richards in the defunct West Monmouthshire seat during the war. As Richards contemplated retirement to focus on union duties, a debate ensued over Brace's suitability to replace the SWMF secretary, with members of the Ebbw Vale and Blackwood TLCs raising concerns over the proposed candidate's previous acceptance of a role in the Home Office as part of the wartime Coalition Government. However, Brace found solace in other Sirhowy valley lodges, particularly in Tredegar, where it was deemed that 'Labour could not afford to throw a man like Mr. Brace, with his ability, overboard.' Having received similar official recommendations from Abertillery, Brace was deemed an ideal candidate in the new division in the Ebbw Fach in 1918, further highlighting the importance placed on the indispensability of the 'Lib-Lab' leadership in the county even after the end of the war.

each candidate to defend their supportive stance on the war and also outline a vision for working-class advancement in peacetime.

The starting point for both proposals was a plea to the miners to accept the work of Labour members as part of the Coalition Government and the benefits of working-class representation in high office. In an initial campaign speech in Tredegar, Richards expanded on this exact argument to his constituents. After placing great emphasis on the much anticipated peace treaty, claiming that the Coalition should remain intact until the terms had been agreed, he lamented the perceived lack of sympathy with Labour representatives in government, who had since been ordered to leave their roles in Whitehall to help reconstitute an independent Labour Party after the Armistice. In turn, he stressed that Labour's presence in the hallways of power had been more than just a token gesture:

These men were in the Government because they believed they could render service in that way to the Labour section of the country. (Applause.) The Labour Party in this country, he assented will not become the Labour Government of the country until they learned more wisdom than that. The Labour representatives in the Government were being trained in the art of government, and this training would be disseminated to the rank and file. They were acquiring a fine storehouse of knowledge which would be available in the future.⁵⁰

To Richards, the appearance of Labour parliamentarians and advisors in the Coalition was no betrayal but instead a pivotal moment in developing the perception of Labour as an electable force. Of course, Richards was not blind to the wider concerns of the labour movement over working with both Liberal and Conservative opponents. While he refused to share Robert Smillie's assertion that 'Lloyd George was the enemy', he acknowledged that the Coalition would eventually come to its logical end. Presented with an opportunity to influence government, Labour's role in the Coalition was therefore an opening that working-

⁵⁰ *ME*, 30 November 1918.

class representatives could not afford to ignore.⁵¹ From Richards' point of view, knowledge of how to use power and the opportunity to learn skills of governance was therefore imperative in ensuring Labour moved forwards after the war.

In light of his service in the Home Office, Brace also shared with Richards a similar attitude to governmental service. Throughout the November campaign in Abertillery, Brace contemplated his time in government and questioned whether the Labour Party's decision to withdraw was the correct choice, before deciding that he could not serve 'without the sympathy and co-operation of his colleagues and the class to which he belonged'.⁵² Brace's hierarchy of allegiances was therefore still intact despite his experience in the Coalition Government. He reaffirmed this commitment alongside a new agenda for post-war reconstruction and drastic improvements to the social fabric of working-class communities. Brace had already sensed the psychological transformation that had taken place amongst working-class communities during the war, declaring that 'people had a new vision... They had not sacrificed to return to the old system of life.'⁵³ He therefore called for greater state intervention, proposing that 'a housing scheme should be of national character', and an end to the 'grey shadow' of the poor law.⁵⁴ However, it was an understanding of his local audience in the Ebbw Fach that perpetuated Brace's rhetoric during the election campaign. Accepting that he faced a challenge to win over the more militant attitudes present in the division, Brace called for an expansion of working-class education, the nationalisation of all key industries and a renewed focus on internationalism in the mining industry.⁵⁵ In accepting the opportunity to represent his 'native valley', Brace also accentuated his own local identity to appease the lingering Labour voices who may have objected to his continuing presence.⁵⁶

In an election dominated by national and local issues of trust and leadership, both leviathans of the SWMF were unanimously accepted as Labour Party representatives and

⁵¹ *ME*, 30 November 1918; 7 December 1918. Having to explain his stance could also lead to exasperation. In a subsequent address in Ebbw Vale, Richards made reference to his counterpart Brace in Abertillery stating that, 'the moment a man showed ability and stood out as a leader he became distrusted.... They would have to trust someone. If they did not trust Lloyd George then they should trust Brace.'

⁵² *South Wales Gazette (SWG)*, 29 November 1918.

⁵³ *SWG*, 6 December 1918.

⁵⁴ *SWG*, 6 December 1918; *ME*, 7 December 1918.

⁵⁵ *SWG*, 6 December 1918.

⁵⁶ *SWG*, 6 December 1918. Indeed, Brace was explicitly grateful to the socialist majority in Abertillery, stating that he 'felt deeply obliged to those members of the community who differed with his opinions of the Labour Party in not forcing him to a contest and causing the money of the Federation to be used for that purpose. Labour expected to have returned the customs and privileges of trade unionism which it enjoyed before the war, and which were abrogated for the sake of unity in the war.'

rewarded for their commitment to their respective communities. However, while Richards shared aspects of Brace's stance, particularly on housing for his own Ebbw Vale constituents,⁵⁷ there was still room for division surrounding conceptions of post-war industrial agendas. Divergence often centred on nationalisation, with Brace offering a nebulous form of support on his return to his constituency in 1919, insisting that 'mining would soon be worked for the national benefit, not for private ownership.'⁵⁸ In contrast, Richards refused to share the sentiments of his longstanding compatriot and went against the declaration of his comrades on the SWMF Executive, contending that it would be a mistake to place the mines under the control of state bureaucracy. Richards therefore perceived nationalisation as too much of a cessation of control to the British state, a decision that would 'send them [the miners] back to where they were 30 years ago'.⁵⁹ In both an appreciation and deliberation of the prevailing winds directing the labour movement, Richards and Brace reflected the subtle variations in the outlook of working-class representatives after the war, orientated by a combination of local circumstances and personal experiences.

Ultimately, Brace and Richards' post-war stints as parliamentary representatives came to an abrupt end in 1920 but the manner in which they exited the stage also revealed key contrasts between the two leaders. For Richards, the strain of holding a seat in the House of Commons and continuing his role as secretary of the SWMF became too great. When the SWMF rules were reconstituted to make the post full-time, disallowing occupants from sitting in Parliament, Richards announced his intention to retire as MP at a meeting of the Ebbw Vale Labour Party in January 1920.⁶⁰ Standing alongside Evan Davies, the current miners' agent for the Ebbw Vale district, and his old comrade Alfred Onions, Richards explained his decision in front of delegates from the Rhymney, Tredegar and Ebbw Vale urban districts before reflecting on entering Parliament sixteen years ago:

⁵⁷ *ME*, 7 December 1918.

⁵⁸ *ME*, 10 May 1919. For example, at a meeting of the Blaina miners at the Market Hall in Brynmawr as part of the May Day demonstrations in 1919, Brace supported the resolution of Alf Jones, the local district councillor, in calling for vast improvements to workers' compensation provision, amendments to the Coal Mines Regulation Act and the nationalisation of the mines with a shortened six hour working day.

⁵⁹ *ME*, 10 May 1919. At an identical May Day meeting of the Rhymney Valley miners at the Workmen's Hall in New Tredegar, Richards denied that nationalisation was a viable option, pointing towards the need to construct 'a new edifice'. Such vagaries were a potential sign of uncertainty creeping into his rhetoric and industrial ambitions.

⁶⁰ *ME*, 17 January 1920.

we had materially to contend with a great amount of hesitancy, to accept this departure from the old traditions that the division was one to be regarded as permanently within the line of Liberal Apostolic succession – and that it was little short of sacrilege for a mere miner to seek to attain to a position that had been occupied by eminent politicians in the past...Despite this, the majority exceeded what was considered the normal majority...As you know, since then we have been challenged upon one occasion only.⁶¹

Richards therefore departed on top, leaving Parliament on his own terms and able to appreciate the significance of his remarkable career. However, while Richards' withdrawal can be regarded as serene, Brace's resignation from Parliament was anything but. His role in negotiating a settlement of the Datum Line strike in October 1920, alongside Vernon Hartshorn brought stern criticism from MFGB members.⁶² Miners' leaders involved in the capitulation were castigated for their role in the debacle. Brace was no exception and murmurings of discontent in Abertillery became louder throughout the strike with some miners even accusing him of outright betrayal. Brace felt the force of these charges and his desperate attacks on the more condemnatory union leaders antagonised the miners even further.⁶³ He subsequently resigned as an MP after the culmination of the dispute. He had done so in a somewhat ironic fashion considering his early industrial activities, capitulating in a fight against a scale system used to calculate the wages of the miners he represented.

It appeared that Brace had forgotten the tactics that had served him well throughout his career and especially since the events of 1912. His political career was not over just yet though, despite his best efforts. Concentrating his energies on the Ministry of Mines, he

⁶¹ *ME*, 17 January 1920.

⁶² P.S. Bagwell, 'The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-1922' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923* (Camden, 1971), pp. 96-128, pp. 112-3. On 16 October 1920, a national strike of the miners broke out in relation to the rising scale of wages applied using the 'datum lines' of coal production. The threat of a sympathetic general strike ushered Lloyd George to the negotiating table. The Coalition Government's offer entailed an increase to two shillings per shift, rather than the previously agreed one shilling, and a proposed fresh set of negotiations on the long term plans for wage settlements in the coal industry. At the heart of these talks were Hartshorn and Brace who, along with the other national miners' leaders, and under increasing pressure, submitted to the government's offer and tabled a ballot of the MFGB membership. The miners rejected the subsequent proposal by a slim margin but as the result did not meet the two-thirds majority required to enact the decision, the strike was called off and work resumed on 3 November.

⁶³ *ME*, 6 November 1920.

became the Labour advisor to the department before he finally retired from political affairs in 1927.⁶⁴ Richards was also not quite finished in the industrial arena, ‘stepping into the breach’ of the MFGB presidency when the organisation faced a struggle to survive in the early 1930s amidst the global economic crisis.⁶⁵ In his sustained commitment to the SWMF and MFGB, the communities of his old constituency also maintained an admiration for his services. In the lockout of 1921, for example, where the local miners continued direct action against the Ebbw Vale Company after the end of the national stoppage, Richards oversaw the resolution of the dispute along with Evan Davies, James Griffiths, Vernon Hartshorn and Charles Edwards. After successful negotiations, Richards received unanimous praise from the miners awaiting the result outside the Company’s offices. He triumphantly declared, ‘It’s all over boys, all who can start work on Tuesday’.⁶⁶

In Bedwellty, the bond with the ‘Lib-Lab’ ethos would remain unbroken in the interwar years. Edwards endured as MP for the constituency until 1950, when he bowed out from public service. In the words of James Griffiths, he had already become a member of ‘the old guard...men who so worthily represented the old tradition.’⁶⁷ Even at this point, that very tradition remained as fluid and adaptable as ever. These individuals were therefore not just relics of the Edwardian past but vital forerunners in the interwar period, who steered a considered course in order to revise the post-1918 political and industrial world, in part in their image. Through an insistence on the fundamental importance of the trade unions alongside the parliamentary road to democracy, an awareness of the need to demonstrate renewed loyalty to the working-class localities they served, and an unrelenting tenacity in the face of potential overthrow and schism, they passed on traits that successive Labour members would need to sustain in order to replicate the initial success witnessed in 1918. In this sense, followers, critics and subsequent representatives were influenced by the durability of Richards, Brace and Edwards as custodians of a creed confronted and contested but ultimately sealed. In their resilience, these individuals would help frame the transformed Monmouthshire landscape, through their supporters and detractors alike. The ‘Lib-Lab’ philosophy therefore lived on, if not in name, then most certainly in spirit.

⁶⁴ *SWG*, 28 January 1921; Page Arnot, Bellamy and Saville, ‘Brace, William’, p. 53.

⁶⁵ Page Arnot and Bellamy, ‘Richards, Thomas’, p. 286.

⁶⁶ *ME*, 6 August 1921.

⁶⁷ NLW: James Griffiths Papers, Notebook entitled ‘The Voice of Wales’, NLW MSS JAMTHS E1/9.

II. Two Steps Forward, One Step Back - Local Distinctions, Organisation and Representation

In light of Richards' decision to step down from parliamentary duty, the Ebbw Vale Divisional Labour Party contemplated its next steps. There were already murmurings in the early weeks of January 1920 that the Conservative Party were considering contesting the vacant seat.⁶⁸ Ultimately though, the Conservative challenge failed to materialise, and members of the Ebbw Vale TLC, predominantly miners and steelworkers, soon understood that the power to choose the next constituency representative lay in its hands. William Harris was considered but an even more obvious local choice stepped forward.⁶⁹ Evan Davies shared the core experience of his predecessor Richards. He too had been raised in Beaufort and even attended the same local British school. He also had begun work underground at the age of twelve and followed Richards into the world of trade union work, becoming a miners' agent for the Ebbw Vale district in 1913. He had already served as chairman of the Ebbw Vale UDC in 1914 and was an active member of the Education Committee.⁷⁰ Most importantly, in his service to the community and his commitment to the local workforce, Davies had proven he had an acceptable outlook, as well as the necessary organisational skills, to make the grade as a parliamentary representative. In a mass meeting of the Ebbw Vale miners, where Davies announced Richards' decision, the support for his potential candidature was implicitly conditional on his moderation:

He [Davies] was regarded as one of the best and sanest leaders in the South Wales coalfield. His views on Labour are broad, and not confined to the narrow Socialistic view.⁷¹

It was clear that Davies' supporters held the local power in the Ebbw Vale Labour Party. The miners' agent faced no further opposition and was returned to Parliament forthwith, without a contest. In the Ebbw Fach, the choice of the miners of the Abertillery division had a similarly clear path to parliament. The local TLCs looked no further than

⁶⁸ *ME*, 10 January 1920. At a meeting of the Tredegar Conservative Association a resolution was passed 'with the object of stirring up the Conservatives and Unionists of the constituency', in order to rally for the next parliamentary election in the constituency.

⁶⁹ *ME*, 10 January 1920; *SWDN*, 14 May 1918.

⁷⁰ John Graham Jones, 'Evan Davies and Ebbw Vale', *Llafur*, 3:3 (1982), pp. 93-4. Davies (1875-1960) was also a Methodist, a keen temperance advocator, a local justice of the peace and secretary of the Monmouthshire Association of Friendly Societies. He was therefore very much a local Labour figure in the Richards' mould.

⁷¹ *ME*, 10 January 1920.

George Barker, the New Era Union and South Wales Plebs League founder and CLC governor.⁷² Barker had been miners' agent for the Western Valleys district since 1908 and in his time on the SWMF Executive had long been regarded as one of the 'advanced' agitators against the moderate elders. By 1920, he remained a committed socialist but had become an establishment figure himself.⁷³ Nevertheless, election to Parliament would cap an extraordinary personal journey for the Hanley born miners' leader who had travelled far to find a creed to fight for, from the Paternoster rocks and South African veldts during his time as a member of the Buffs at the Siege of Eshowe and Battle of Gingilhovo in 1879, to the trading post of Tientsin when he briefly departed Wales for China in 1893, and again in 1902. George was also not the only member of the Barker household in search of political answers. His daughter, Ethel, had managed the original Abertillery Women's Labour League (WLL) since 1911 and continued to administer the branch before it was absorbed into the local Labour Party Women's Section in 1918. Her mother Margaret had also taken 'a keen interest in social and political work' by this point and had become a committed member of the Labour Women's Section in the constituency and champion of the Abertillery and District Hospital.⁷⁴ George's selection as prospective Labour candidate was therefore an indicator of the Barker family influence in the division.

Despite the opposition of George Hay Morgan, Coalition Liberal and former Cymru Fydd disciple, and the attempts of cartoonist J.M. Staniforth in the *Western Mail* to denigrate the Labour candidate, Barker's victory in the 1920 Abertillery by-election was an even more definitive symbol of socialist control in the Ebbw Fach. Fighting on behalf of Labour and with support from the ILP, of which he was still a member, Barker won by a majority of 7,650 votes. In the process, Barker confirmed the cracking of the ice for a more radical form of Labour politics that had percolated underneath the surface of Brace's tenure, at a local,

⁷² Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives (CUSCA): George Barker Scrapbooks, Uncatalogued; Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, 'Barker, George' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 1* (London, 1972), pp. 37-8; David Egan, 'The Unofficial Reform Committee and the Miners' Next Step: Documents from the W. H. Mainwaring Papers', *Llafur*, 2:3 (1978), pp. 67-8, p. 78; Richard Lewis, 'The Central Labour College: Its Decline and Fall, 1919-29', *Welsh History Review*, 12:2 (December, 1984), pp. 225-245, p. 228.

⁷³ Egan, 'The Unofficial Reform Committee', p. 78. See also George Barker, 'A Foreword' in Mark Starr, *A Worker Looks at History, Being Outlines of Industrial History Especially Written for CLC – Plebs Classes* (London, 1917), p. i.

⁷⁴ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News (CTSWWN)*, 17 October 1908; *Labour Leader*, 10 March 1911; *SWG*, 30 October 1931; Bellamy and Saville, 'Barker, George', p. 37. George (1858-1936) and Margaret (1863-1931) had originally migrated from Stoke-on-Trent in 1884, moving between Newport and the Risca and Abercarn districts before finally settling in Abertillery.

molecular level.⁷⁵ Inadvertently, and in a rather dismissive summary of the campaign, it was Barker's opponent Hay Morgan who encapsulated the result, when he lamented that, 'I hammered away at Constitutionalism and Bolshevism. The mind of the Miners was, however, impervious to any national question.'⁷⁶ While the polarisation described by Morgan was largely inaccurate in its portrayal of the mind-set of the Abertillery workforce, the decision to choose Barker as Labour candidate had indeed tilted the balance towards the experimental socialism that had found its voice through the ILP, the Plebs League and local CLC classes, and which now echoed through the Abertillery Labour Party itself.

Alongside the retention of faith in Charles Edwards in Bedwellty, the choices of the divisional parties in Ebbw Vale and Abertillery reflected the importance of local distinctions in Labour's grass roots development. Triggered by the changing dynamics of the post-war political environment that were conducive to gaining the balance of political power in local government and in Westminster, specific Labour outlooks were put forward and contested in each division in the early 1920s. At this moment of opportunity, subsequent responses were debated and concocted at different levels, from the TLCs to the MCC. As a result, a range of local labourisms were formed, each with their own idiosyncrasies. As Alun Burge has argued, 'Each town and village, works and colliery, union branch and miners' lodge had its own character'.⁷⁷ This in turn created a tapestry of different ideologies and strategies between a close-knit network of industrial communities, woven together by the broader industrial turmoil that swept through the coalfield after the miners' lockout of 1921. In each community, there were commonalities in terms of broader socio-economic experience, and the scale of the challenges faced, but, importantly, there were delicate deviations in terms of reaction and expression. There was therefore no simple demarcation between moderate and radical voices within the political ecosystem of Monmouthshire's labour movement and the 'Lib-Lab' philosophy was translated into a myriad of local Labour identities. In the next

⁷⁵ CUSCA: George Barker Scrapbooks, Uncatalogued; *SWG*, 10 December 1920; *WM*, 18 December 1920; 21 December 1920; 23 December 1920; Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', *Welsh History Review*, 6:3 (June, 1973), pp. 306-7; Chris Williams, 'Cartooning the Rise of Labour, 1900-21' in Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (eds.), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885-1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester, 2015), p. 92. The full election result was as follows: George Barker (Labour Party) – 15,492 votes (66.4%), George Hay Morgan (Coalition Liberal) – 7,842 votes (33.6%). The turnout was approximately 70.8%.

⁷⁶ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Twilight of Welsh Liberalism: Lloyd George and the "Wee Frees", 1918-35', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22:4 (May, 1968), pp. 391-2.

⁷⁷ Alun Burge, 'Labour, Class and Conflict' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 321.

section, this assortment of local labourisms within North West Monmouthshire will be explored in more detail, in terms of successes, obstacles and failures.

The war had certainly made one thing clear for Labour in South Wales. The abandonment of communities by district councils and the Coalition Government, and the increasing realisation of the need for substantial post-war reconstruction helped redefine working-class desires in terms of majority democratic representation. The appearance of a select few Labour councillors on the local UDC was no longer deemed acceptable as the emphasis shifted towards gaining the balance of power on a more consistent basis, firstly in local government and then further afield in the House of Commons. The initial expression of revised expectations by Walter Conway, Ted Gill and Lewis Lewis during the war was therefore expanded upon at the next possible point of encroachment, the MCC and UDC elections in the early spring of 1919.

Preparations in all three constituencies began in earnest during November and December 1918 but they were not always smooth and amicable, as evidenced in the case of Ebbw Vale. Frustrations flared in the local TLC regarding the urgency of the changes now required, particularly in the matter of housing. At one meeting, Councillor George Davies shared the sentiments of local miners' delegates such as Jack Moses in demanding that the TLC demonstrate greater urgency in order to prevent the attempts of Frederick Mills, the managing director of the Ebbw Vale Iron and Steel Company, to cut out the local UDC and become the sole builders of any future housing in the town. For Davies, it was clear that 'there was no reason why Ebbw Vale should not be pioneers', but this was only a possibility if Labour commanded the UDCs.⁷⁸

The campaign started in a positive spirit with the Ebbw Vale TLC agreeing a 'compact' with the local co-operative society to provide extra funding in exchange for the opportunity to nominate a candidate for each district ward, BBOG position and one of the four seats for the MCC elections.⁷⁹ However, while Davies' ambitions signalled promise, the ensuing elections in Ebbw Vale were severely disrupted by organisational problems and conflicting priorities, a consequence of the more heterogeneous composition of the Ebbw

⁷⁸ *ME*, 14 December 1918; 7 June 1919. George Davies was an Ebbw Vale miner, WEA campaigner and local urban district councillor. In 1919, Davies replaced Onions in the Tredegar Valley district as miners' agent and was elected with a majority of 1,315 votes. He beat Oliver Harris and Sidney Jones, the CLC lecturer from Blackwood. See also GA: William Davies Papers, George Davies Diaries, D3132/67.

⁷⁹ *ME*, 11 January 1919.

Vale TLC. Indecision and hesitation ruled supreme at subsequent meetings, specifically in the case of the selection of trade union candidates and the mounting condemnation of the TLC Executive Committee for ignoring UDC candidates put forward by the rank and file. The intervention of Evan Davies in early February 1919, in order to quell the hostility, made the situation even worse, as delegates from smaller unions, such as the bricklayers and steel smelters, threatened to walk out. As Councillor Jack Griffiths warned, the dispute threatened to ‘smash up the Trades Council’.⁸⁰ His proposed solution that the TLC should take no official part in the upcoming elections was rejected, at least highlighting the exigency expressed by George Davies was finally being accepted.⁸¹ Nonetheless, the belligerence over the lack of democracy in the Ebbw Vale TLC, and the character of chosen candidates, exemplified the potential disharmony of the Labour voice on the ground.

If Ebbw Vale embodied the tensions at the beating heart of local political identities, then nearby Tredegar represented the inconsistencies inherent in Labour’s quest for local democratic control in 1919. The town’s TLC also took up the mantle of organising the upcoming district contests and selection of candidates but it was in a far more settled position than its Ebbw Vale equivalent. The result of the wartime FCC campaigns, alongside Conway’s rallying cry to end the reign of Liberal control on the UDC, led to a revitalised local TLC in terms of both membership and organisational attitudes.⁸² The relative harmony of the Tredegar labour movement resonated with not only the working-class population of the town but even the traders that Conway had targeted. In pre-election meetings of the Tredegar Chamber of Trade, it was clear to members that the stakes had been raised and the dominance of district councillors was about to be tested. Indeed, the echo of Walter Conway’s declaration in 1917 was finally ringing in the ears of Tredegar’s tradesman by the spring of 1919.⁸³

⁸⁰ *ME*, 1 February 1919; 22 February 1919. Evan Davies enquired about ‘weeding out’ candidates to make the process easier to complete and provide more time for campaigning. Such a proposition created further confusion and hostility when it was reported by the TLC in following meetings that Labour candidates were deciding to run without the official approval of the TLC. Griffiths once again painted a picture of chaos, lamenting that it was now a case of ‘official candidates fighting unofficial candidates...Labour fighting Labour.’

⁸¹ *ME*, 1 March 1919.

⁸² Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, p. 225.

⁸³ *ME*, 21 December 1918. One sitting Tredegar Councillor, the jeweller R.S. Grierson confirmed that the traders of Tredegar had to meet the challenge of the local TLC with a more aggressive approach otherwise the Chamber would lose its control over the town’s administration. In no uncertain terms he declared that, ‘They [the Chamber] had to bear in mind that they had on these local bodies at the present time men who...were not antagonistic to traders.’

The concerns of the Tredegar Chamber of Trade were soon justified. The TLC had already compiled a nine point programme that collected together local and broader demands, ranging from a reform of housing rates for working-class occupants to the municipalisation of milk supplies in the town. This programme was a requirement for all Labour candidates in the four Tredegar wards and clearly demonstrated the awareness of local working-class grievances in the district.⁸⁴ To assuage any potential concerns of the Tredegar electorate, and defend against the counter-claims of 'Independent' opponents, Labour candidates for both the UDCs and BBOG based demands on the need for improved sanitary and living conditions and denounced the notion that it was not financially possible to implement Labour's plans.⁸⁵ The combination of a progressive programme and a combative rhetoric helped give the local Labour campaign a dynamism unseen before in the community.⁸⁶ For the first time, it was Tredegar, rather than Ebbw Vale, that ran parallel to Abertillery in terms of electoral vibrancy.

It was clear from the local government elections in 1919 that variety was both a secret weapon and an underlying complication. Labour councillors took control of the MCC for the first time and secured all ten alderman positions available as a result of retirements.⁸⁷ The majority of Labour guardians on the BBOG also increased, with Walter Conway being elected as chairman of the body for the first time.⁸⁸ Incrementally, Labour had gained the balance of power in eight out of the ten district councils in the three divisions, with Risca and Rhymney UDCs remaining the only outliers.⁸⁹ In the cases of Abercarn, Abertillery, Nantyglo & Blaina, and Bedwas and Machen, the victory of Labour councillors would mark 'an unbroken sway over the local state' during the interwar period, as both UDCs would

⁸⁴ *ME*, 23 November 1918.

⁸⁵ *ME*, 9 November 1918; Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 225-7. To candidates such as a twenty-two year old Aneurin Bevan in Georgetown, the responsibility for funding lay with the Coalition, and the situation was so serious that, 'They [Tredegar TLC] should not care a "tinker's curse" where the money came from.'

⁸⁶ *ME*, 4 January 1919. To the town reporter for the *Merthyr Express*, the sheer number of Labour candidates prepared to enter the race gave the immediate impression that, 'Labour is determined to leave nothing undone in order to secure representation.'

⁸⁷ *MG*, 21 March 1919; *WM*, 21 March 1919. The attainment of aldermen positions represented the breadth of the Labour assault. Those who filled the role on behalf of the party included established miners' leaders such as Alfred Onions, Thomas Richards and John Powell, but also representatives elected to the MCC for the first time, such as Levi Harris from Abertillery.

⁸⁸ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 238.

⁸⁹ *ME*, 12 April 1919; 26 April 1919; *MG*, 11 April 1919; *SWG*, 11 April 1919. Despite the failure to gain control of the Rhymney UDC, Labour Councillor W.C. Williams was subsequently appointed to the chair for the ensuing year.

remain under the control of the party until 1939.⁹⁰ In other examples, success papered over the cracks laid bare during the local election campaigns. Remarkably, Ebbw Vale saw one of the largest conversions with the election of thirteen Labour councillors out of a possible eighteen. However, it was not a clear-cut victory for the local TLC. The loss of official candidates such as Jack Griffiths and the poor showing for Evan Davies which saw him scrape through in the North Central Ward demonstrated that the internecine disagreements over selection had taken their toll.⁹¹ Even with sweeping success, the organisational issues that still prevailed in Ebbw Vale had cost long-serving Labour councillors their place on the UDC and would plague the composition of local campaigns in the future. The sheer spread of Labour's success in North West Monmouthshire in March and April 1919 was an astonishing display of the party's potential in the post-war political environment but the Ebbw Vale experience also pointed towards the caveats of this newfound democratic presence that materialised as a result of internal contests as much as co-operation.

The accumulation of local power for the Labour Party was therefore sudden and widespread, but also indicative of local differences as opposed to a uniform strategy. Nevertheless, attention in all Labour-led councils turned to translating the gains of 1919 into tangible, social improvements, in spite of the limitations of local administrative power. Now in the ascendancy, Labour representatives sought to expand their influence on the various sub-committees on the UDCs, from gas and water, to health and sanitation.⁹² However, it quickly became apparent that the ambitions of Labour councillors could not be fulfilled in the way they had anticipated. As Chris Williams has contended, the combination of economic inflation which raised the prices of building materials, the impact of demobilised soldiers returning home from conflict, and the Coalition Government's slow abandonment of its own reconstruction proposals, provided Labour with an almost impossible juggling act in the confines of local government.⁹³ The lack of national strategy from the Labour Party also became an increasing issue, initially providing councillors with autonomy to set their own

⁹⁰ Williams, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government', pp. 142-3.

⁹¹ *ME*, 12 April 1919. As the *Merthyr Express* contributor 'Glynfab' acknowledged, 'Labour now has certainly got its opportunity...but one cannot express a certain amount of surprise that "official" Labour did so badly.'

⁹² GA: Tredegar Urban District Council Minute Books, Annual Meeting of the Tredegar Urban District Council, 29 April 1919, A350/M/30.

⁹³ Williams, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government', p. 153.

objectives but also leaving those inexperienced in the arena of local administration ill-prepared to deal with the bureaucracy and institutional frameworks of the council chamber.⁹⁴

The absence of broad party guidelines also often left Labour councillors isolated against the behemoths of local industry. The housing crisis became a focal point for all Labour-controlled councils in the Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale divisions, particularly after the 1919 Housing Act appeared to offer potential state support for the erection of housing on a mass scale.⁹⁵ Armed with the hope of external provisions through the 1919 Addison Act, pre-existing schemes were either accelerated or redrawn to provide improved strategies.⁹⁶ The determination was clear across all three constituencies. Tredegar UDC proposed the construction of a ‘model village’ and over 500 new houses. In Bedwellty, the proposals put forward amounted to a staggering 1,000 homes.⁹⁷ In a small number of cases, such as Abercarn, Labour was able to maintain a consistent council majority after 1919 *and* eventually progress proposals into the form of large-scale housing estates.⁹⁸ However, this was largely the exception to the rule, with most plans descending into sustained struggles between UDCs and the coal, steel and iron companies over funding, the responsibilities of construction and the location of new settlements. Such disputes, usually with local industrialists who saw the instigation of council housing as an impingement on their own influence over the workforce, are a sharp reminder of how the hopes of Labour councillors could be derailed as quickly as they had materialised.⁹⁹

To counteract the obstructions, UDCs sought alternatives to enact the social change which Labour councillors had been charged with implementing. As Daryl Leeworthy has demonstrated, Labour-led UDCs looked to the Miners’ Welfare Fund, established by the

⁹⁴ Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, pp. 332-3.

⁹⁵ Robert McCloy, ‘Changes in Local Government’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 139.

⁹⁶ *ME*, 3 May 1919; *SWG*, 28 May 1919.

⁹⁷ *MG*, 17 January 1919; 29 August 1919; *ME*, 27 September 1919. See also Daryl Leeworthy, *Labour Country: Political Radicalism and Social Democracy in South Wales, 1831-1935* (Cardigan, 2018), pp. 326-7.

⁹⁸ *SWG*, 30 October 1925. The Abercarn scheme was estimated to cost £250,000, subsidised through a combination of government funds and by local council grants to cover expenditure on roads and sewerage. The scheme for over 600 new houses was also supported by the Llanover estate, with 384 houses erected on a site near Treowen village and 220 constructed in Llanfach in Abercarn itself.

⁹⁹ *ME*, 17 May 1919; 24 May 1919. The stand-off between the Ebbw Vale UDC and Frederick Mills of the Ebbw Vale Company throughout 1919 is a stark example of roadblocks Labour-led councils faced. Mills refused to co-operate fully with the Labour councillors on the local UDC, leading John Gale, a member of the Council’s Housing Committee to accuse the managing director of blockading any agreement on the local housing scheme. Considering the delay in the erection of the first houses as part of the Council’s scheme in the district until 1920, it was a fairly accurate appraisal of the situation in Ebbw Vale.

Coalition Government in 1920, to expand the amenities available to coalfield communities, from playing fields and swimming pools, to miners' institutes and public halls.¹⁰⁰ While the recreational focus was intentionally designed to 'inculcate democracy as wide as possible', hopes for consistent subsidisation for more expensive schemes were felled by the inconsistent approval of funds under the Addison Act and the following swing of the 'Geddes Axe' after 1921.¹⁰¹ For example, Tredegar UDC's attempts to apply for over £8,000 in governmental subsidies from the Ministry of Health and Housing in September 1919, proved arduous and mostly ineffectual.¹⁰² The continual setbacks, protracted negotiations and unsatisfactory response of the Ministry infuriated the local TLC and Tredegar Combine lodge, with Labour councillors disparaging the 'Government Red Tape' that ultimately prevented the launch of the housing scheme until October 1920.¹⁰³ Labour's outlook in Tredegar revealed a wider hunger to respond to the introduction of mass democracy but putting those ambitions into practice initially proved to be problematic and fraught with complications.

In this isolating atmosphere, collaboration between districts was also becoming an essential component of local government. In February 1922, Abertillery UDC requested a special conference of the district councils inside the remit of the BBOG to corroborate local schemes to relieve the growing levels of unemployment in the union. The plea to work together proved to be effective and convincing. Nantyglo & Blaina, Ebbw Vale, Tredegar and Bedwellty agreed to the proposals of co-operation put forward by Councillors T.J. Davies and J. Snellgrove, the leading members of the Abertillery delegation present.¹⁰⁴ This alliance continued outside of the council chamber, through the work of William Harris and the Western Valleys Miners' Council and also in relation to other pressing local problems. As the conference that congregated in the autumn of 1926 outlined, collaboration between different Labour communities in the county would be extended to wider issues such as infant welfare, education and the administration of poor relief.¹⁰⁵ Labour in each of the three constituencies therefore sought to respond to the shattering of aspirations, firstly accepting the restrictions of local government and, secondly, adapting its plans to the perilous post-war realities of government policy and inadequate funding.

¹⁰⁰ Leeworthy, *Labour Country*, pp. 269-73.

¹⁰¹ Leeworthy, *Labour Country*, p. 272; Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds, *Nye: The Political Life of Aneurin Bevan* (London; New York, 2016), p. 42.

¹⁰² GA: Tredegar UDC Minute Books, Minutes of General Meeting, 9 September 1919, A350/M/30.

¹⁰³ *ME*, 13 March 1920; 10 July 1920; 17 July; 28 August 1920; 2 October 1920; 9 October 1920.

¹⁰⁴ *ME*, 18 February 1922.

¹⁰⁵ *CWM*, 4:11, November 1926.

Nevertheless, the scourge of unemployment curtailed most council projects and led to an alteration in emphasis. Attention shifted to devising and executing achievable employment schemes to counteract the unrelenting increase in people out of work. As the pressure intensified, the ambitious housing plans were often curtailed. By 1924, the County Medical Officer was forced to report to the MCC that, 'The original housing schemes are not likely to be attained under the present economic conditions'.¹⁰⁶ Regardless of the councillors' best intentions, the immensity of the task at hand led to bitter frustration. The exasperation was evident in the words of Councillor Albert Burrows when he confessed that the Ebbw Vale UDC had 'come to the end of our tether' with the lack of governmental assistance to fund the roll-out of unemployment schemes in the Ebbw Fawr. In the evidence of successive council meetings of other Labour controlled UDCs in the Sirhowy and Rhymney valleys, the exasperation boiled over. Claims of a 'rift in the lute' between 'Moderates' and 'Extremists' in the labour movement were printed in the *Merthyr Express*. Labour councillors were subsequently criticised for an inability to translate promises into practice.¹⁰⁷ As Robert McCloy has demonstrated, Labour guardians on the BBOG also faced a 'collision' with Westminster in other areas of local jurisdiction, particularly rates of relief.¹⁰⁸ This was one of many quarrels between Labour representatives and the Ministry of Health, as the administration of the Poor Law became an increasingly inadequate 'anachronism' in terms of supplying those in need with appropriate relief.¹⁰⁹ As tensions flared outside the district councils in particular, not just over the mounting problem of unemployment but housing and living conditions, Labour representatives struggled to enact the reforms they had once envisioned possible in such exacting parameters.

Despite the comparable hurdles faced across North West Monmouthshire, there were stark disparities in the fate of the Labour-led councils. The 1922 local elections saw the loss of Labour control in Bedwellty, Ebbw Vale, Mynyddislwyn, Rhymney and Tredegar UDCs. Labour also had to come to terms with the loss of the MCC, an even more significant setback to its local position.¹¹⁰ The Labour councillors that survived in each area are also revealing, particularly in the UDCs. Representatives considered being of a more moderate disposition,

¹⁰⁶ GA: Monmouthshire County Council Health Committee Records, Public Health Report, 1924, C/HC/R2/17.

¹⁰⁷ *ME*, 6 August 1921; 21 January 1922; *SWG*, 18 February 1921; 5 May 1922.

¹⁰⁸ McCloy, 'Changes in Local Government', p. 134.

¹⁰⁹ Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The Bedwellty Board of Guardians and the Default Act of 1927', *Llafur*, 2:4 (1979), p. 65, p. 67.

¹¹⁰ *ME*, 11 March 1922; 8 April 1922; *SWG*, 7 April 1922; Williams, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government', pp. 142-3.

such as Harris in Pontllanfraith and Sam Filer in Georgetown were part of the Labour minorities returned in Mynyddislwyn and Tredegar respectively. More outspoken alternatives such as Sidney Jones, the CLC lecturer from Blackwood and David Griffiths, the secretary of the Tredegar Combine lodge were largely rejected.¹¹¹ In Ebbw Vale, the more fractious organisational structure saw established representatives such as David Evans, John Gale and Albert Burrows lose their positions, and an admittedly sizeable Labour minority take shape comprising of an assortment of returning councillors and debutants, particularly from the rebellious locality of Cwm.¹¹² In contrast, in all of the Abertillery districts, mining men such as T. H. Lytton in Cwmtillery and David Hayward in the Central Ward of Nantyglo & Blaina UDC, continued to be returned with sizeable majorities, if not returned unopposed.¹¹³

Perhaps this disparity can be best explained by the divergent Labour cultures of each constituency. While areas such as Ebbw Vale, Tredegar and Bedwellty were only beginning to forge a more resilient relationship between workers and the institutions of organised labour,¹¹⁴ these bonds were already welded tightly together in the pocket communities of Abertillery through the mining lodges and branches of the local co-operative society. When the despair of rising unemployment caused the more embryonic Labour traditions of the Rhymney and Sirhowy valley to buckle in 1922, the stability of the radical Labour culture emanating from Nantyglo to Abercarn ensured continued local government control. This was undoubtedly a testing time for all concerned. Even though the situation was largely salvaged three years later in the 1925 local government elections, the tight margins remained in place to limit the capabilities of all returning Labour majorities, on the MCC and the UDCs. In these initial years, the learning curve was steep and often remorseless, but the severity of the climb hinged on Labour's trajectory in each locality, as much as the wider context of social deprivation and unemployment that consumed the coalfield.

Between localities, there were also differing answers to the issue of incorporating new members and, in particular, women voters, into the democratic process. In Abertillery, for example, a nucleus of women's political activity had already been formed before the war.

¹¹¹ *WM*, 5 April 1922; *ME*, 8 April 1922; GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of the BDLP, 10 June 1922. Harris actually reported that the results were merely 'satisfactory' and better than expected considering he had been 'badly hit' in New Tredegar. In Tredegar itself, one of the few exceptions to the rule, and not for the last time, would be a twenty-five year old Aneurin Bevan in the same Georgetown Ward as Filer.

¹¹² *ME*, 8 April 1922.

¹¹³ *WM*, 5 April 1922; *SWG*, 7 April 1922.

¹¹⁴ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 346-7.

This was achieved through the proactive branch of the WLL formed initially in 1910, under the stewardship of co-founders and subsequent branch secretaries Mrs. Davies and Ethel Barker. An unrelenting dedication was reflected in the work of individual members, from the creation of a school clinic to an ‘open-air school’ in conjunction with Labour councillors on the local UDC. WLL members also were soon able to make electoral gains, with early incursions onto the BBOG in April 1913.¹¹⁵ As Pamela Graves has shown, branches of the WLL, ILP, and Women’s Co-operative Guild gave women an arena to mould their own ‘political sensibilities around the needs and interests of women of their class.’¹¹⁶ The Labour Party constitution devised in 1918, which ensured full party membership for women and rebranded the WLL branches as Labour Party Women’s Sections, extended the momentum in the Ebbw Fach.

Women’s Sections helped prepare women for public life and party responsibilities in relation to the newly formed divisional party structures. Operating within the party machine, women members were able to, as Stephanie Ward has argued, negotiate between political and domestic identities to create an activist persona or ‘self’.¹¹⁷ This included engaging in a range of activities that extended beyond the stereotypical fundraising personas to include canvassing work and the rallying of mass demonstrations.¹¹⁸ Organisational and personal oratorical development was combined with limited, but by no means insignificant, opportunities in local government. This pursuit translated into active participation for local women members in consultation with various UDC committees for housing, pensions and food distribution, eventual election to bodies such as the BBOG, and, in the exceptional case

¹¹⁵ *Labour Leader*, 10 March 1911; 8 March 1912; 1 May 1913; *Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser (AC)*, 12 June 1914; *Pioneer*, 11 September 1918. See also Christine Collette, *For Labour and For Women: The Women’s Labour League, 1906-1918* (Manchester, 1989), p. 205; Ursula Masson, “‘Political conditions in Wales are quite different...’: Party Politics and Votes for Women in Wales, 1912-15”, *Women’s History Review*, 9:2 (2000), p. 381. The WLL was reformed once more in the town in 1911.

¹¹⁶ Pamela Graves, ‘An Experiment in Women-Centred Socialism: Labour Women in Britain’ in Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (eds.), *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1998), p. 207.

¹¹⁷ Stephanie Ward, ‘Labour Activism and Political Self in Inter-War Working-Class Women’s Politics’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 30:1 (2019), pp. 29-52. See also Neil Evans and Dot Jones, “‘To Help Forward the Great Work of Humanity’: Women in the Labour Party in Wales’ in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 215-40; Lowri Newman, “‘Providing an Opportunity to Exercise their Energies’: The Role of the Labour Women’s Sections in Shaping Political Identities, South Wales, 1918-1939’ in Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?* (London, 2010), pp. 29-44.

¹¹⁸ Ward, ‘Labour Activism’, p. 32.

of Beatrice Green, the direct election to the Executive Committee of the Abertillery Divisional Labour Party.¹¹⁹

The tireless dedication of Labour women's organisers, especially Elizabeth Andrews in South Wales,¹²⁰ would also inspire local activists such as Frances Handy to follow in her footsteps in promoting issues facing working-class women in the coalfields. In 'The Women's Page' section of the *Colliery Worker's Magazine*, for example, Handy shared a column with Andrews, and helped unveil the everyday connections between industry, politics and the hardships of women's lives in a coalfield environment. In her own words, she attempted to paint 'the daily picture before the Miners' wife, and the nightly vision of her dreams.'¹²¹ In her occasional yet telling contributions, Handy symbolised the emerging assertiveness of women members in the local labour movement that demanded to be heard. In Abertillery, it was a voice that was increasingly recognised and one which resounded through the Ebbw Fach.

In neighbouring constituencies, a more irregular response to mass democracy took shape. In the Sirhowy valley, the impetus for women's activism was generated, more broadly, by the formation of the divisional parties.¹²² In Bedwellty, women members such as M.A. Booth from Blackwood and Vivian Pugh from Aberbargoed were critical to the enforcement of the tenets of equal opportunity instilled in the BDLP constitution in 1918. Women's Sections were given an immediate priority, with branches founded in each of the urban districts in the constituency.¹²³ Bessie Owens, secretary of the Blackwood Women's Section was also made the first financial secretary for the BDLP and was immediately appointed as a

¹¹⁹ *The Woman's Leader (TWL)*, 1 May 1925; *SWG*, 10 April 1925; 21 October 1927. Lowri Newman, 'Green, Beatrice (1895-1927): Labour Party Activist' in Keith Gildart, David Howell and Neville Kirk (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 11* (Basingstoke; New York, 2003), p. 78; Sue Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926: A Gender and Social History of the General Strike and Miners' Lockout in South Wales* (Cardiff, 2010), p. 90. The first woman elected in the division as a Labour representative was Annie Elizabeth Adams in April 1925. She gained her place on the BBOG as the fourth and final Guardian for the North Ward and joined WCA members Elizabeth Emma Penn and Alice Smith, both 'Independent' candidates, as the first women to be elected to a local governing body in an Abertillery divisional district.

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Andrews, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: And Political Articles*, Hanno Classic Edition (Aberystwyth, 2006), pp. 21-4. Elizabeth Andrews (1882-1960) was the first woman organiser for the Labour Party in Wales. After her own political education through the ILP, Women's Co-operative Guild, and local suffrage societies, Andrews became a driving force for wider women's involvement in socialist politics in Wales, co-ordinating the creation of Women's Sections across the coalfield and advisory councils throughout the country. A constantly evolving conception of political engagement for women was critical to Andrews' broader outlook. In her own words, 'Socialism is dynamic; if it remains static, we shall lose all that we have gained.'

¹²¹ *CWM*, 1:2, February 1923.

¹²² Ryland Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009), p. 39, p. 175.

¹²³ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the BDLP Sub-Committee, 4 May 1918, D3784/1.

delegate for the Labour Party Women's Conference in October, suggesting an immediately progressive attitude to individual women members.¹²⁴ In localities such as Tredegar, an external spark was required and it was Andrews herself who provided it. After a powerful address delivered in February 1920, where the Labour Party organiser called on the women of Tredegar to become a focal point of local politics, a Women's Section was formed in the town almost immediately and included members such as Kathleen Vaughan, the inaugural president, chairwoman Addie Evans and Mary Conway, the treasurer and wife of Walter.¹²⁵ By May, the Women's Section could not only boast a healthy membership close to 60, but it was already making its presence felt more publicly, as displayed by its affiliation to the Tredegar TLC, the deputations made to the local UDC to secure positions for women on associated committees and the presence of members as part of the May Day processions in the town.¹²⁶

However, in both examples, without the precursor activities of groups such as the WLL to lay the groundwork, it was far more difficult for the Women's Sections in both Bedwellty and Tredegar to sustain their activities. As early as June 1920 in Bedwellty, William Harris was at pains to report that 'no efforts were being put forward...women's organisations were somewhat backward in the southern area [of the constituency]'.¹²⁷ By the following year, the situation was even more serious as the SWMF organiser confirmed 'special difficulties' in the Risca area with promoting the party's agenda to women constituents.¹²⁸ Further north, the relationship between men and women members was even more discordant. In Tredegar, Vaughan became the first woman to contest a council seat in the town during the Central Ward by-election of November 1920. Despite the significance of

¹²⁴ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the BDLP Conference of Labour Organisations in the Division, 7 September 1918; Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the BDLP, 29 September 1918, D3784/1; *TWL* 9 December 1921. Subsequent meetings urged the necessity 'of attending to the women's vote in the area' with an emphasis on inviting speakers such as Rose Davies and Elizabeth Andrews to the constituency. Charles Edwards also played a supporting role. In a public meeting organised by the Newport Women Citizens' Association on the subject of 'Women in Parliament', he stood alongside prospective parliamentary candidates, including Winifred Coombe Tenant, to promote 'the large part women were taking in public life'.

¹²⁵ *ME*, 14 February 1920. Kathleen Vaughan was also married to David John Vaughan, the local builder and Tredegar councillor. Each had begun political activity inside the Tredegar Liberal Association but by the end of 1920, both had switched their allegiances to the Labour Party. While Kathleen would continue to be a vocal presence in the town's Women's Section, David would go on to fight three unsuccessful election campaigns in the Bristol South constituency before finally entering Parliament for the Forest of Dean division in 1929.

¹²⁶ *ME* 8 May 1920; 29 May 1920; 30 October 1920; *WM*, 26 August 1920. See also Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 347-8

¹²⁷ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the BDLP, 6 June 1920, D3784/1.

¹²⁸ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the BDLP, 8 January 1921, D3784/1. Harris pointed towards underhand tactics from opposition parties in the Risca district when he alleged that there was 'evidence of measures being taken by the opposing forces among our women'.

appearing on the ballot paper, a comprehensive defeat provoked anger from Vaughan who criticised the ‘combination of forces’ against her campaign alongside her male colleagues in the divisional Labour Party for their ‘half-hearted’ support.¹²⁹ The relationship between Labour and the Woman’s Sections was therefore subject to significant local disparities that could radically alter the makeup and direction of the party between constituencies.

The rapidly worsening economic climate and the steady loss of industrial control would test these connections even further. The plight of all three constituencies was exacerbated as a result of the 1921 lockout, triggered by the end of state control of the mines. However, while these localities shared a broader commonality of experience and associated pressures, the divergence in Labour cultures characterised the responses of local communities during the lockout itself. In the Ebbw Vale division, miners’ leaders appealed for calm and moderation. Both Evan Davies and the visiting Frank Hodges, at this point general secretary of the MFGB, publicly emphasised the importance of control, in both a union and wider, industrial sense, in providing ‘a discipline which saved this country against internal disorganisation’. Hodges went further to call for a return to co-operation between owners and workers, receiving a rapturous approval from the delegates in attendance.¹³⁰ In Parliament, Davies reiterated a defence of the miners in his constituency but also a rapport with local coalowners, stating that ‘I am as friendly, and can work as harmoniously, with employers as any man in this country. I am on friendly and intimate terms with the managing director of the Ebbw Vale Company’.¹³¹ The attempt to appease eventually won over the local workforce, as well as the *Merthyr Express*, who praised Davies for his foresight:

¹²⁹ *WM*, 26 November 1920; *ME*, 13 November 1920; 4 December 1920. Vaughan mustered a respectable 385 votes but was comfortably defeated, losing to Edgar Jones, the ‘Independent’ candidate and former serviceman, by a majority of 471.

¹³⁰ *ME*, 26 March 1921.

¹³¹ *ME*, 26 March 1921; 16 April; 7 May 1921.

Surrounded as we are in Ebbw Vale by the revolutionary tendencies exhibited in the districts of Abertillery, Blaina, and Abercarn, where a senseless and wholly ridiculous attitude has been adopted...Ebbw Vale stands out as an example of moderation...no sign of any trouble, no idle street-corner agitators urging the crowd on; but at the head a number of level headed leaders, who fortunately can see a little further ahead than others.¹³²

However, while Davies appeared to be embracing the approach of Richards his predecessor, and by extension his fellow SWMF colleague Edwards in Bedwellty, the response of his constituency neighbour to the east mirrored the growing dissension of the workforce in the Ebbw Fach. Unlike the Ebbw Vale and Tredegar urban districts, boilermen, pumpsmen and safety men were withdrawn in the Abertillery, Abercarn, Nantyglo and Blaina areas for the majority of the three month stoppage.¹³³ When naval reinforcements were sent into the coalfield, resentment reached a boiling point, causing George Barker to raise the issue in Parliament in April. Barker's indignation reflected the utter desperation of the situation in his constituency and elsewhere across the coalfield.¹³⁴ He had already articulated the broader contempt of his constituents when he stated a week earlier at a miners' meeting that, 'Men must live and to say that they could live on the wage now offered was an insult to their intelligence.'¹³⁵ Barker's irate response to the following months of victimisation and growing unemployment that rippled through mining communities as a result of the lockout, implicitly emphasised the gap between Labour personalities in Monmouthshire, in terms of approach and response, that had already opened up by the collapse of the Triple Alliance in April 1921.

In a similar fashion to previous attempts through local government, the exigency of the situation provoked an alliance between communities. As entire workforces remained out

¹³² *ME*, 16 April 1921.

¹³³ Burge, 'Labour, Class and Conflict', p. 327.

¹³⁴ Hansard, Vol. 140, columns 1534-5, 18 April 1921. Barker's outrage can be seen in the line of questioning directed to Arthur Lee, the First Lord of the Admiralty, in the House of Commons on the 18 April; 'Is the right hon. and gallant Gentleman [Lee] aware that there has been no breach of the peace in Abertillery; that 250 of these men have been brought there; that they are marching about the streets with fixed bayonets; that they have two machine guns and a large quantity of ball cartridge; that these men were induced to go to Abertillery on being told that the place was on fire, and that the collieries were being destroyed; and, under the circumstances, will he order their withdrawal?'

¹³⁵ *ME*, 16 April 1921.

of work, and collieries were left silent and abandoned, the BBOG quickly became a target of protestation.¹³⁶ On 7 September 1921, an estimated 5,000 unemployed miners marched from Abertillery towards Blaina, Nantyglo and Brynmawr before heading south-west towards Beaufort, Ebbw Vale and the Tredegar workhouse. Headed by a brass band and a deputation of Labour leaders from each constituency, from William Harris to Councillor David Hayward of the Blaina UDC, the mass demonstration demanded a higher scale of relief and respite from the desperation the lockout had inflicted. As Hayward suggested, the communities were not going under without a struggle and clarified that, ‘Realising the Guardians were flesh of their flesh, they sought co-operation and assistance in this matter in relieving to some extent the need of the unemployed’.¹³⁷ A larger demonstration followed the next week with 8,000 miners descending on Tredegar workhouse.¹³⁸ However, the desperation and anxiety of the mining communities was not quelled. Labour guardians, including Walter Conway, failed to prevent the pitiful scale of relief from being re-affirmed in October.¹³⁹ In the process, the pain and anguish of these Labour communities was cemented, despite collective efforts to avert disaster.

In electoral terms, the opening salvos of industrial decline did not dent the position of the Labour Party in these constituencies, as opposition parties were sporadically organised across the three divisions and struggled to maintain a presence outside of elections. While local Conservative Associations tended to be relatively well organised, particularly in the Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale areas, the Liberal Party was particularly weak in North West Monmouthshire by the 1923 General Election. Writing for the *Merthyr Express*, the contributor ‘Catwg’ bemoaned the lack of any form of Liberal electoral machinery and the absence of an agent in Ebbw Vale, declaring that ‘The Liberal Five Hundred has been dead for years.’ A bleaker picture could be painted in Abertillery and in the Sirhowy and Rhymney valleys.¹⁴⁰ Both the Liberal Party and the Conservatives were restricted by the sheer scale and scope of Labour activity by the early 1920s. While the Labour experience was not uniform across the industrial valleys, the collective efforts of representatives to salvage the situation ensured an enduring form of party loyalty could be born out of the ashes of 1921.

¹³⁶ Andy Croll, ‘Poverty, Mass Unemployment and Welfare’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 208.

¹³⁷ *ME*, 10 September 1921.

¹³⁸ *ME*, 17 September 1921.

¹³⁹ *ME*, 17 September 1921, 8 October 1921.

¹⁴⁰ *WM*, 24 July 1922; *ME*, 7 January 1922; 18 November 1922; 17 November 1923; 1 December 1923; 8 December 1923.

However, as Richards and Brace had demonstrated, a respect for local sensibilities remained a critical component in the longevity of a Labour representative's career. In Abertillery, Barker resigned from his position on the MFGB Executive in 1921 in order to deal with the aftermath of the lockout, and in both written answers and parliamentary debates, he frequently raised national awareness of the perils of local communities he represented, particularly Nantyglo and Blaina where almost the entire combined community of 4,000 workers remained unemployed.¹⁴¹ His persistence on questions of unemployment, housing and poor law relief reaffirmed his understanding of the pressing needs of his constituents. By extension, his often straightforward re-election to Parliament signified the enduring faith placed in him by the Abertillery electorate. After the 1920 by-election, Barker was returned unopposed in every single election until his parliamentary retirement in 1929. While it has been claimed by Joyce Bellamy and John Saville that Barker's militancy was on the wane and had 'largely evaporated' when he stood down,¹⁴² the resolve shown by Barker in Parliament to continually and consistently represent the plight of his constituency points towards a controlled aggression based on a radical, yet stable, Labour politics that had now gained supremacy in Abertillery.

In Bedwellty, Charles Edwards secured further stability under the continuing banner of 'Lib-Lab' moderation. Unlike his Abertillery colleague he would face a fight during both the 1922 and 1923 General Elections. On both occasions, Edwards appealed to mining sympathies, by pledging to fight pernicious anti-trade union legislation in the House of Commons, and the demands of non-party organisations such as the local Temperance Party.¹⁴³ Edwards was rewarded with an increased majority in both contests, firstly against the Conservative Charles E. Bagram in 1922,¹⁴⁴ and then against the Liberal Party's William Henry Williams in 1923.¹⁴⁵ By 1924, Edwards had endured the worst of the threats to his parliamentary position. In true 'Lib-Lab' style, and as the first minority Labour Government

¹⁴¹ Hansard, Vol. 154, column 1736, 29 May 1922; Vol. 159, column 684, 29 November 1922; Vol. 175, column 1122, 1 July 1924.

¹⁴² Bellamy and Saville, 'Barker, George', p. 38.

¹⁴³ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the BDLP, 10 June 1922; Minutes of the Conference of the BDLP, 2 October 1922; Minutes of the Executive Meeting of the BDLP, 17 November 1923, D3784/1.

¹⁴⁴ *WM*, 17 November 1922. The full election result was as follows: Charles Edwards (Labour Party) – 17,270 votes (63.0%), Charles E. Bagram (Conservative Party) – 10,132 votes (37.0%). The majority was 7,138. The turnout was approximately 81.2%.

¹⁴⁵ *WM*, 23 November 1923. The full election result was as follows: Charles Edwards (Labour Party) – 17,564 votes (67.6%), William Henry Williams (Liberal Party) – 8,436 votes (32.4%). The majority was 9,128. The turnout was approximately 74.2%.

drew its first breath, he urged BDLP members of ‘the need for maintaining unity in our own ranks, while still maintaining the ideals of the movement.’¹⁴⁶ Much like Barker, he would not face any challenge in the following October.

Contrary to his fellow trade unionists, Evan Davies’ position grew increasingly untenable. After the disorder and chaos of 1921, his rhetoric lurched from conciliatory to outrage against the ‘tyrants’ of the Ebbw Vale Company, and the fabrications of the local press regarding his alleged poor attendance in Parliament.¹⁴⁷ Clearly, Davies no longer held the same respect for Frederick Mills and the Company that he had previously displayed in the House of Commons in 1921 but this was also partly a result of the growing rumours that the Conservatives were to stand against him in any future contest. Indeed, the balancing act between the more moderate tone of preceding years and the more aggressive attacks on the Ebbw Vale Company and the *Merthyr Express* was to be tested, firstly by the Conservative Morgan Morgan from London in the 1922 General Election and, secondly, against the County Councillor Cyrus G. Davies for the Liberal Party in 1923. In both contests, Davies was returned with sizeable majorities of 7,996 and 7,853 respectively.¹⁴⁸ However, the reinforced electoral security belied the seeds of doubt that had already begun to be sown.¹⁴⁹

While Davies had received public support from all corners during the election contests, especially the local TLCs, there were also growing concerns from the Labour Party about his competency and his absences from Parliament.¹⁵⁰ Reservations regarding Davies’ performance gained further credence in the subsequent six years of his time in Parliament. Worse still, he began to distance himself from the communities that that he had represented

¹⁴⁶ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the Executive Meeting of the BDLP, 23 February 1924, D3784/1.

¹⁴⁷ *ME*, 14 January 1922; 8 April 1922; 10 October 1922.

¹⁴⁸ *ME*, 18 November 1922; 8 December 1923. The full election result was as follows: 1922 General Election – Evan Davies (Labour Party) – 16,947 votes (65.4%), Morgan Morgan (Conservative Party) – 8,951 votes (34.6%). The turnout was approximately 78.2%.

1923 General Election – Evan Davies (Labour Party) – 16,492 votes (65.6%), Cyrus G. Davies (Liberal Party) – 8,639 votes (34.4%). The turnout was approximately 75.8%.

¹⁴⁹ *ME*, 4 November 1922. The Conservative candidate, Morgan Morgan in 1922, for example, pressed on the rising unemployment and starvation of the local communities in his campaign, asserting that, ‘They found when famine came to Ebbw Vale this modern Joseph [Davies] could not produce food for the suffering women and children.’

¹⁵⁰ *ME*, 4 November 1922; Jones, ‘Evan Davies’, p. 95. While his continuing ill-health may have continued to play a factor, Davies’ contributions nevertheless amounted to very little on behalf of his constituents. He spoke just seven times in the House of Commons and was dormant in terms of interventions until 1925. As early as 1923, Davies’ reputation had gone as far as to alert Gordon Lang, the previous Labour candidate for Monmouth, who wrote to E. T. John that, ‘We [Labour] may lose Ebbw Vale owing to Evan Davies’s shameful neglect of duties...It is a pity as the seat should be unassailable’.

since his time as miners' agent and sever the connections he had built with his constituents.¹⁵¹ This is exemplified in his response to the Marine Colliery disaster on the 1 March 1927. Instead of standing with the families of the 52 men and boys who tragically died in the underground explosion in Cwm, Davies stood with the visiting Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin on his trip to the locality, apologizing publicly for 'the work of a few irresponsible youths'.¹⁵² Rather than, in the words of Cook, elevate the 'tragedy and misery of the miners' existence' in the aftermath of the disaster,¹⁵³ Davies' peculiar aloofness severed the trust he had earned with local miners and also signified the tensions now inherent in Labour's political culture in the Ebbw Vale division.

There was therefore a glaring distinction between the acrimony building up against Davies in Ebbw Vale and the relative serenity maintained by Barker in Abertillery and Edwards in Bedwellty. In the former district, the slow pace of activity, coupled with the occupational diversity in Ebbw Vale itself, led to an embryonic Labour tradition still suffering from teething problems. In Abertillery, the early arrival of the co-operative society, ILP and working-class representation on the UDCs combined with the dominance of the mining majority to create an environment more responsive to inventive and combative Labour strategies. In Bedwellty, the blend of 'Lib-Lab' and socialist outlooks into an active divisional Labour Party ensured parallels with the successful blend created in the Ebbw Fach. These trends were magnified by varying approaches to the grasp and execution of local government power, alongside inconsistent responses to industrial collapse and the broadening enfranchisement of the working-class in North West Monmouthshire. Faced with the colossal pressures and demands of the post-war years, each locality responded to the 'Lib-Lab' legacy in disparate ways, ranging from reinforcement to rejection. The transition to the political was truly underway but it was by no means a smooth process and, by the mid-1920s, as Harris had feared, it was far from complete.

¹⁵¹ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 389.

¹⁵² Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p. 226. Smith has rather appropriately gauged the severity of the detachment demonstrated by Davies in this moment, arguing that, 'It was a stunningly insensitive thing to do and to do it in the very heartland of his political support was nigh incredible.'

¹⁵³ *WM*, 5 March 1927.

III. The Swing of the Pendulum – Expanding the Labour Tradition

The motivation of the Query Club, formed in Tredegar in 1922, was inherently simple, exemplified by the quizzical question mark badge of honour worn by its members. The secretive society, formed by the tirelessly ambitious Aneurin Bevan and a band of like-minded comrades, sought to challenge the supremacy of the TICC by gaining systematic control of almost all the auspices of local power, from the Tredegar Combine lodge to the committee of the town's Olympia Cinema. Indeed, in the recollections of Query Club member and close ally of Bevan, Oliver Powell, no stone was left unturned; 'we wanted to control the [Workmen's] institute, we wanted to control the Medical Aid, we wanted to control the hospital.'¹⁵⁴ There was a trace of millenarian belief in this collective crusade; first Tredegar and then the world. Remarkably, these lofty goals were largely achieved in the town over the next decade. Bevan typified the systematic seizure of local power. Before he ran successfully as a Labour Party candidate for the Ebbw Vale seat in 1929, he had not only been a district councillor, MCC representative, and served as chair of the Combine on multiple occasions, but he had also held a variety of other local positions, including chairman of the Miners' Welfare Committee, the County Omnibus Committee and the Unemployment Committee, to name but a few of his achievements in the town.¹⁵⁵

This was also not simply a case of the slow road towards eventual committee majorities but rather the complete overthrow of authorities already in power. On most occasions, as Powell later recounted in the case of the Tredegar Workmen's Institute, institutions were targeted through hostile takeovers and experienced individuals, such as the local Liberal and Institute librarian Charles Bowditch, were deposed with immediate effect:

¹⁵⁴ South Wales Miners Library (SWML): Interview of Oliver Powell, AUD/316; Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume 1: 1897-1945*, Main Edition (London, 2008), p. 50; Thomas-Symonds, *Nye*, pp. 38-9.

¹⁵⁵ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 354-5. Demont lists several other positions of note that Bevan managed to accrue, including representing Tredegar on the Western Valleys Sewerage Board and his time as a County School Governor.

I look back in retrospect and regret lots of the things which we did, because we removed old chaps who were infinitely better than us, who had served the institute from its almost inception, the beginning of the century like...we thought we knew better than they did, but I'm afraid that they were much better than us.¹⁵⁶

In the penitence of Powell's memories can be found an element of recognition for the experienced local leaders who had provided the institutional space for his own intellectual development. It was in the Institute's library, for example, that Bevan, Powell, Archie Lush, and other Query Club members had first exercised their insatiable thirst for knowledge, consuming the teachings of not only Karl Marx and Eugene V. Debs, but also Aldous Huxley and even Jack London. Soon, they would make the connection between these tomes, their own upbringings, and what they believed was required to rectify the fragmented Sirhowy society around them. As Bevan would write in *In Place of Fear*, 'The relevance of what we were reading to our own industrial and political experience had all the impact of a divine revelation. Everything fell in place. The dark places were lighted up and the difficult ways made easy'.¹⁵⁷ It is therefore no wonder, having begun the pursuit of knowledge in the safe haven of the Workmen's Institute, that Query Club members perceived the library as a primary target for control. It was a strategy welded to an inherent recognition of the auto-didactic traditions that had been as much a part of the outlook of Thomas Richards as it was of Walter Conway or of the Labour-led councils in utilising the Miners' Welfare Fund after 1920. The ability to translate the lessons of the past, and magnify them into concentrated and concerted social action, became the key to the Query Club's effectiveness in Tredegar, and the initial success of Aneurin Bevan himself.

It is important to note that Bevan and his colleagues engaged in each activity, from council meetings to benefit concerts, in the name of Labour politics. As Susan Demont argues in the case of Bevan specifically, 'on all these occasions Bevan was not present in an individual capacity, but as a representative of the Labour Movement.'¹⁵⁸ There was therefore a devotion shown to a locality which ran parallel to the commitments of their predecessors on

¹⁵⁶ SWML: Interview of Oliver Powell, AUD/316.

¹⁵⁷ Aneurin Bevan, *In Place of Fear* (London, 1952), p. 38.

¹⁵⁸ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 355.

the SWMF, the TLCs and in the divisional Labour Party branches. It is also significant that while the Query Club was unique in terms of the sheer scope of its achievements, the expansive perspective was not an isolated outlook in the context of the Monmouthshire coalfield. The learning curve was already in motion across the county. To mirror the description of Harold Finch, the parliamentary successor to Charles Edwards in Bedwellty, there were a ‘galaxy’ of personalities throughout the three constituencies who embarked on this dedicated quest, seeking to anchor a collective search for democratic transformation in the shared experiences of the assorted Monmouthshire valleys.¹⁵⁹

As a result, this was not mere emulation but an uneven evolution of practices that had begun with the initial ‘Lib-Lab’ interventions before the war. With varying degrees of success, and at inconsistent intervals after 1918, these individuals would redefine the meaning of Labour politics in a social sense, using an increasingly combative but quintessentially practical language to ensure that Labour became an essential component of everyday life in each constituency. The most successful proponents of this plan, specifically Bevan in Tredegar and George Daggar in Abertillery, would go on to deploy their approach beyond South Wales, in both the House of Commons and the Labour Government of Clement Attlee after the Second World War.¹⁶⁰ Transcending generational divides, this creative strategy was more alchemy than an exact science, experimentally uniting the established tenets of ‘Lib-Labism’, democratic socialism and even more radical ideologies. Rather than a clean break with the conciliatory bonds of the past, the outlook of these individuals eventually became more measured and receptive in attitude, combining a consideration of the industrial confines around them, and by extension the lessons passed down from union and parliamentary elders, with an increasingly refined awareness of social responsibility. In an incremental understanding of, and unwavering commitment to, the working-class communities of the Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale districts, the Labour project embarked upon by the class of Bevan, Daggar and others ensured a robust and entrenched political tradition in the process.

¹⁵⁹ Finch, *Memoirs*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume 2: 1945-1960*, Main Edition (London, 2008); Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, ‘Daggar, George (1879-1950)’ in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume 3* (London, 1976), p. 55. Bevan would of course go on to be appointed by Attlee as the Minister of Health in 1945, and oversee the foundation and opening of the National Health Service in July 1948. He was also briefly Minister of Labour and National Service in 1951 and would hold several positions in the shadow cabinet of Hugh Gaitskell, including Shadow Foreign Secretary and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. Daggar would become chairman of the Welsh Parliamentary Party during the Second World War and was also elected vice-chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1948.

Firstly, the industrial outlook of these individuals must be addressed. Almost universally, and akin to Richards, Edwards, Barker and other predecessors, the new leaders were born into households fully immersed in the trade union politics of the Monmouthshire coalfield. However, similar upbringings could lead to drastically different early careers depending on local conditions. George Daggar, for example, was clearly influenced by the victimization and imprisonment of his father Jesse, who had been incarcerated for his union activities in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Alongside his brother David, George would follow in his father's footsteps by climbing the union ladder before the war, quickly becoming vice-chairman of the No.5 lodge at Six Bells colliery. His increasing association with Ted Gill and Frank Hodges would eventually provide further opportunities for advancement, in the form of a SWMF scholarship to attend the CLC in 1911.¹⁶¹ It was clear even from the early stages of his career that Daggar was keen to tread the path taken by Gill, Barker and other Abertillery socialists.

In Tredegar almost a generation later, a young Nye Bevan was more rebellious in spirit. His early years are well-documented, largely due to the fascination his life has held for a succession of biographers, historians and politicians, from Vincent Brome to Michael Foot, Susan Demont, Dai Smith and Nick Thomas-Symonds.¹⁶² However, as opposed to the continuity represented by Daggar in Abertillery, Bevan's upbringing exemplified an underlying shift in Labour mentalities that would begin to evolve in the Sirhowy valley. Born in 1897 and raised in a Baptist household transitioning from the certainties of the Cymmrodorion to the socialism of the *Clarion* magazine delivered to the doorstep, Bevan embraced the teachings of independent thought he received from his father, David, and the lesson of 'the word and the moral' from his mother, Phoebe. Bevan worked briefly as a butcher's boy before joining his brother William at Ty Trist Colliery at the age of fourteen. His independence of mind grew in later adolescence, both at home and within the confines of the Tredegar Workmen's Institute, ultimately driving him forward towards industrial

¹⁶¹ NLW: W.H. Mainwaring Papers, Contract signed by students guaranteeing payment of rent, 12 April 1911, NLW MSS MAIING/26; *SWG*, 20 October 1950; Bellamy and Saville, 'Daggar, George', p. 54.

¹⁶² Vincent Brome, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography* (London, 1953); Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, pp. 15-42; John Campbell, *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of Socialism* (London, 1987); Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 181-249; Smith, *Aneurin Bevan*; Thomas-Symonds, *Nye*, pp. 15-30, p. 18. Bevan attended Sirhowy Elementary School but suffered torment at the hands of the school's headmaster, William Orchard. With little wish for more formal forms of instruction, or even the prospect of secondary school education, Bevan was still eager to learn away from the classroom, often dividing his time between the pit and the Tredegar Workmen's Institute.

action.¹⁶³ A succession of personal disputes with the TICC, at Ty-tryst, Bedwellty and Whitworth collieries, led him to the depths of Pochin, a pit with a piecemeal reputation.¹⁶⁴ Undeterred and defiant, Bevan soon gathered together allies willing to support him in his increasing outrage at the neglect displayed by the TICC to the pits in the Tredegar area. At the age of nineteen, he became chairman of the miners' lodge in 1916 and a year later, he was instrumental in the creation of the centralised Tredegar Combine lodge alongside chairman John Yandell and secretary R.E. Griffiths. As Demont has argued, the formation of the Combine acted as a demonstration of the emerging radicalisation of Tredegar during the latter stages of the war.¹⁶⁵ Bevan's own prominence in the Combine appeared to point in this direction and also exemplified the friction in industrial strategy between the Combine and those of the established leaders in the Sirhowy, such as Richards, Onions and Evan Davies.

Nevertheless, and despite his irritation at perceived complacency at the top of the SWMF, the centrality of unionism and principles of organisation which had been elevated by 'Mabon', Brace and Richards remained an industrial reality that Bevan could not, and would not, deny. More emphatically, neither would Daggar or other prospective leaders such as Sidney Jones in Blackwood. Ultimately, while strategies were inspired by the instructions of the URC and Noah Ablett, these individuals worked to protect the union edifice that the 'Lib-Labs' had constructed, rather than tear it down brick by brick. This is not to say that the boundaries were never questioned nor tested. Collisions between the Combine and Alfred Tallis of the Tredegar Company, between May and June 1918, became, by extension, an exhibition of how miners' attitudes towards the SWMF leadership on the Executive Committee could be wrought with discontent.¹⁶⁶ Bevan's own diverse involvement in the dispute, ranging from his missionary work in the Ogmere and Garw mining districts to his

¹⁶³ Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, pp. 16-20.

¹⁶⁴ Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁵ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 194.

¹⁶⁶ SWCC: Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 28 May 1918; 30 May 1918, SWCC/MND/NUM/3/1/1; *ME*, 1 June 1918; Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 198-213. Significant disputes erupted in the early summer of 1918 when Tallis, the general manager of the TICC, refused to meet representatives of the Combine to discuss the docking of miners' pay at Markham colliery. The initial strike brought out between 7,000-8,000 men and the principle of the action itself was supported by Alfred Onions, the incumbent Tredegar Valley miners' agent. However, the Combine subsequently refused to return to work before they were recognised by the TICC, rejecting the 'attitude taken up by the Executive Council' in the SWMF's attempts to settle the dispute, pending a meeting between Tallis and the men, represented by Yandell and Bevan. A series of sympathetic strikes ensued in Ebbw Vale, the Rhymney valley and further afield in the South Wales coalfield, involving up to 50,000 miners at its peak in late May. Pressured into a retreat after three weeks of escalating strike action, Tallis finally agreed to meet and recognise the Combine, signalling a clear victory for Bevan, Yandell and the rank and file.

declarations in favour of the miners' right to hold an unofficial Special Conference without the consent of the SWMF, was testament to the hostility the union leaders had engendered in this instance, by seemingly limiting the power of local miners to take their own course of action.¹⁶⁷ After one particular meeting during the dispute in June, SWMF representatives were left under no illusions of the capabilities of rank and file to challenge its leadership:

the "big guns" sent up by the Federation must have gone away with modified ideas of the men they have been trying to lead...It was a marvellous revelation of the growing power and ability of the rank and file and should give pause to those who are inclined to attach too much importance to the head and too little to those who follow.¹⁶⁸

Yet, and despite such observations from the *Merthyr Express*, the SWMF remained a revered institution. Election to the SWMF Executive Committee was still considered a key aspiration in the careers of these ambitious trade unionists. Daggar was rewarded for previous union work and took up a position on the Executive as early 1915, replacing his Abertillery colleague Gill in the process. In 1921, he succeeded Barker as the miners' agent for the Western Valleys district, defeating the secretary and sub-agent, Opton Purnell, after two ballots.¹⁶⁹ In his acceptance of agent responsibilities, Daggar appeared as the model candidate of the Ebbw Fach labour movement, a synthesis of the culture that had been assembled by his predecessors and contemporaries in the Abertillery constituency. It was a view that encapsulated his entire career in the eyes of his allies. As Len Roberts, fellow trade unionist and long term friend, suggested after Daggar's death 'He discharged his important trust faithfully and ably. His tastes were correct.'¹⁷⁰ Clearly, the principles of industrial organisation remained strongly guarded, even if the stance of individual leaders was criticised.

¹⁶⁷ *ME*, 1 June 1918; 22 June 1928.

¹⁶⁸ *ME*, 1 June 1918. During the strike, depositions from the SWMF Executive were sent to Tredegar and were consistently met with a hostile reception, as the Combine stood firm in its demands. The members of the SWMF Executive present at this particular meeting included Winstone, Hartshorn, Barker, Onions, Edwards and Frank Hodges.

¹⁶⁹ *SWG*, 8 April 1921. Daggar became miners' agent with 6,284 votes and a majority of 732 over Purnell.

¹⁷⁰ *WM*, 16 October 1950. Roberts was a member of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and became familiar with Daggar through his duties as secretary for the South Wales area.

For others, such as Sidney Jones, a place in the upper echelons of the union became an obsession. After numerous attempts, Jones, the Blackwood socialist, sought to once again achieve his 'life's ambition' of becoming a member of the SWMF Executive for the Tredegar Valley district in October 1924. His former CLC student Bevan, along with Combine member Sam Garland from Oakdale, stood in his way; friends had now become rivals. However, neither he nor Bevan were going to leave anything to chance. The 'democratic' election was marred by a significant deal of foul play on both sides and across neighbouring districts, as ballot boxes were stuffed with extra polling paper. For Bevan, it was not enough. The odds were firmly stacked in Jones' favour, having gained the allegiance of a collection of localities outside of Blackwood, including Llanover, Oakdale and Wyllie. Bevan could only rely on his native Tredegar for a similar level of support. Even without the duplicity, Sidney would have been the overwhelming victor. As Oliver Powell describes, 'we couldn't beat Oakdale, Sid Jones was always the winner, and that used to gall Bevan because he was never on the South Wales Executive'.¹⁷¹ Arguably, and despite the underhand tactics of both candidates, the episode highlighted the underlying respect for trade union frameworks and the continuing ambitions of Jones and Bevan to climb the industrial ladder. Both may have been critical of union leaders for their approach but there were industrial realities that budding leaders such as Bevan and Jones not only refused to reject but actively sought to participate in.

A willingness to embrace the wider auto-didactic culture of independent working-class education also ran parallel to union loyalties. From the work of Will Hewlett with the Workers' Democratic Educational League in the Ebbw Fach, or the CLC classes instructed by Sidney Jones in the Sirhowy, and the tutelage of Lewis Lewis in the name of the WEA in Blackwood and Bedwellty, enthusiasm began with the teachers themselves.¹⁷² As Harold Finch testifies, the 'radical ideas and intellectual capacity' of individuals such as Lewis could break down the barriers between competing educational organisations in order to provide opportunities for receptive localities. Most importantly, an allegiance to the CLC, WEA or other branches of the IWCE movement came a distant second to responding to the needs of localities.¹⁷³ Students were therefore aware of these responsibilities and sought to emulate the

¹⁷¹ SWML: Interview of Oliver Powell, AUD/316; *WM*, 4 October 1924. Jones won 4,724 votes compared to Bevan's 3,445 and Garland's 2,014.

¹⁷² Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-40* (Cardiff, 1993), pp. 114-5.

¹⁷³ Finch, *Memoirs*, p. 37.

level of commitment displayed by lecturers, forging a connection that cut through generational divides.

While the CLC quickly became a source of local aspiration across the Monmouthshire coalfield, its method of instruction provoked a range of critical reactions from students. Independence of thought often clashed with the dogma inescapably baked into the CLC curriculum. As early as 1912, Daggar was one of several students from South Wales to make a formal protest against the quality of teaching at the embryonic College and even appealed to Barker and the Western Valleys miners' district for an inquiry into the matter.¹⁷⁴ In his time at the CLC, Daggar questioned the structures around him, adopting the social critique of his socialist teachers in Abertillery. In contrast to Daggar's zeal for change, Bevan's brief two year stint at the re-opened college between 1919 and 1921 appears to have been marked by boredom and indifference. His apparent aversion to the daily routine, the lecture timetable and the curbing of extra-curricular activities outside of evening classes led him to disregard the rules, a habit that was not overlooked by W.W. Craik, the principal of the CLC at the time of his attendance.¹⁷⁵

Perhaps, though, it was Bevan and Daggar's inner tussles over how best to apply Marxian philosophy to their own specific local circumstances that explains their differing response to the CLC. As Dai Smith has argued, 'Some CLC students were comforted by life by being mentally situated in the clockwork universe of Dietzgen...Bevan preferred time-bombs and the dialectical gymnastics needed to cope with changing circumstances'.¹⁷⁶ Both Bevan and Daggar returned to their respective homes with the aim of assisting in improving and adapting, rather than condemning IWCE strategies. The former assisted the CLC tutorial classes of Sidney Jones on his return to Tredegar in 1921, while, in the same year, the latter accepted the role of lecturer for the Western Valleys Miners' Council. Daggar would teach the subjects of economics and industrial history at the local Tillery Institute until his election

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, pp. 86-7; Lewis, 'The Central Labour College', p. 229. Daggar, an early beneficiary of CLC education, received his scholarship in 1911, alongside Frank Hodges, eight years his junior. His petition against the standards of teaching was initially accepted but the presence of Ablett to hear the following appeal, in his role on the governing body of the college, ultimately led to a resolution against the student's claims.

¹⁷⁵ W.W. Craik, *The Central Labour College, 1909-29* (London, 1964), pp. 123-5; Thomas-Symonds, *Nye*, p. 33. Bevan received his scholarship alongside Sam Fisher from Nine Mile Point lodge. Craik implied that Bevan was the only 'problem child' of the class of 1919. In contrast, the most recent assessors, such as Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds, have suggested that Bevan's time at the college not only expanded his intellectual horizons but also improved his self-confidence, particularly in relation to his stammer and public speaking abilities.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, *Aneurin Bevan*, p. 205.

to Parliament in 1929.¹⁷⁷ Graduates of the IWCE movement therefore acknowledged that socialist principles were only effective if they could be applied at a grass roots level, not just theoretically discussed in Earl's Court classrooms.

In the process of securing varying degrees of influence in both industrial and educational terms, these emerging Labour figures still had to absorb a great deal of knowledge about their own local environments. Bevan is the quintessential example of the local education required and his erratic position in Tredegar society before his election as a district councillor in 1922 deserves additional attention here. Mere months before he left for London, he had been described by the *Merthyr Express* as 'a young man coming rapidly to the front'.¹⁷⁸ He had already served as vice-chairman and chairman of the Tredegar Combine, when he had shown an appetite and aptitude for taking on the management of the TICC, and had been a characteristically outspoken delegate on the town's TLC by the time the Tredegar Labour Party was formed in 1919.¹⁷⁹ However, his inability to enter the Tredegar UDC during the 1919 local government elections showed that he still had battlegrounds left to conquer.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, in these formative years, Bevan did not always demonstrate an understanding that the message of his mentor, Walter Conway, that 'If you can't say it, you don't know it', also applied to knowing his audience.¹⁸¹

The young rebel's attitude to the war caused particular controversy. His burning desire to fight his own battles at home rather than on the Western Front was evident in his successful attempt to resist military service, while his attempts to disassociate Labour from the war of 'predatory international capitalism' caused resentment among the discharged soldiers who returned to the town in 1919.¹⁸² At one meeting of the Tredegar Combine in June, Bevan refused to associate himself with any resolutions in favour of the peace treaties,

¹⁷⁷ Thomas-Symonds, *Nye*, p. 33; *WM*, 16 October 1950; *SWG* 5 September 1919; 20 October 1950. Alongside his duties on the local UDC, Daggar was also vice-president of the Abertillery Education Committee after the war.

¹⁷⁸ *ME*, 5 April 1919.

¹⁷⁹ *ME*, 15 December 1917; 6 April 1918; 31 May 1919; Smith, *Aneurin Bevan*, pp. 198-9.

¹⁸⁰ *ME*, 12 April 1919. Bevan lost to Rowland G. Davies, the candidate for the Labour and the Discharged Soldiers, in the West Ward district.

¹⁸¹ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 187.

¹⁸² Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 216-23; Smith, *Aneurin Bevan*, p. 200. Demont points towards the growing reputation of Bevan in the Tredegar labour movement as the critical reason for his successful avoidance of conscription. This assessment conflicts with the interpretation of others such as Dai Smith who argues that Bevan's ability to provide medical certification for nystagmus, a visual condition which impacts balance and co-ordination, may have decided the matter. Both agree that Bevan's commitment to union activism was at the heart of his protestations against being called up.

prompting cries of ‘Sit down Bolshevik’ from a number of discharged soldiers in the crowd. Unable to control the audience, Bevan dismissed the hecklers as ‘outsiders’ before standing down and abandoning the meeting altogether.¹⁸³ At the following meeting of the Tredegar TLC, Bevan called on all Labour representatives to take no part in arranging peace celebrations. His resolution was voted down and despite his efforts to reopen the debate and appeal for unity as the key to fighting the TICC, the irate responses to his interjection showed that he did not yet control the Labour platform in Tredegar.¹⁸⁴ His failed attempt to unseat Griffiths as Combine chairman, after the 1921 lockout, also seemed to confirm his relegation to the periphery of the local labour movement. It was clear that Bevan had become a revered figure of a different kind, one of the minority ‘band of Leninites’, the spokesman for the ‘extreme section’ in Tredegar society.¹⁸⁵

Plunged into the uncertain waters of unemployment himself in 1921, Bevan subsequently struggled to regain the trust and respect of the local labour movement. His name is glaringly absent in the newspaper reports of the TLC meetings arranged to discuss rising unemployment in the Sirhowy valley after the 1921 lockout. Ultimately, Bevan was forced to swallow his pride in order to seek relief for his comrades in the Tredegar Combine and CLC classes.¹⁸⁶ In the light of his momentary exile and his own experience of being out of work, it is little wonder that in the winter of 1921, Bevan sought alternative ways to aid his own family and the wider Tredegar community during one of its darkest moments. Alongside others, including Harold Finch in Bedwellty, he represented his fellow miners in unemployment cases before the Tredegar Employment Committee. While conducting a larger

¹⁸³ *ME*, 7 June 1919. Before leaving, Bevan declared that, ‘The discharged soldiers have earned the gratitude of a good many...but in this meeting they have earned the scorn of a good many more.’ On his decision to depart, the meeting was declared null and void. According to the *Merthyr Express*, it ‘melted away without any more business being done.’

¹⁸⁴ *ME*, 14 June 1919. Bevan’s initial interjection sparked a heated argument, with Walter Onions, Rowland G. Davies and the discharged soldiers and sailors present threatening secession if Bevan’s trouble-making persisted. Bevan refused to yield, attacking the Tredegar Councillor and secretary of the Tredegar Combine, David Griffiths, for ‘shouting with the rabble’ at the previous Combine meeting. He also accused the discharged soldiers of conspiring to ‘smash up’ the previous gathering. He warned against the suppression of free speech, and the dangers of ‘mobocracy’, but ultimately failed to win over a majority of delegates. Only Walter Conway and E. H. Moon, a fellow Combine member and guardian for the BBOG for the West Ward, defended Bevan’s position.

¹⁸⁵ *ME*, 6 August 1921.

¹⁸⁶ *ME*, 3 September 1921. Bevan continued to assist the CLC classes in the Sirhowy valley at this time but it is clear that his influence was faltering. In a meeting of the Tredegar TLC in September, it was confirmed that, ‘the C.L.C. members had considered the question of running Sunday concerts for this purpose, but he regretted that they were outcasts and they sought the assistance of the more staid members of the Trades Council to ensure the success of the movement.’

number of these, Bevan began to reshape his broader dedication to the people of the town.¹⁸⁷ His experience of failure led him to re-evaluate his stance on the continuing Labour traditions of the Sirhowy valley and adapt his approach in respect of more moderate cultures.

This is not to say that Bevan had lost any of his zeal for a battle, even with colleagues in the local labour movement. His role in leading the demonstrations on the Tredegar workhouse in September 1921, and his condemnation of the guardians for their lack of assistance, infuriated the Labour controlled BBOG, who dismissed him as ‘a chatter boy from college insulting the Board’.¹⁸⁸ If he deemed an unconventional method would be beneficial, then he was also not afraid to test it out. This explains both the part he played in the creation of the Query Club and the broader scope of his targets after 1922. His convictions remained the same, but were reinforced by the realisation of the scale of destruction industrial decline was wreaking on the lives of miners and loved ones around him.

In response to these depressed conditions, close friends and colleagues were already beginning to move elsewhere. David Hayward, described by Bevan as ‘one of the best of finest generation of workers that Britain has ever produced’, had already chosen to leave Blaina for Australia and would never return.¹⁸⁹ Others, including Jim Minton, the SWMF delegate and ILP member, organised contingents from Blaina and Abertillery to raise awareness of the plight of industrial communities, as part of the initial post-war hunger marches to London in August 1922. Nevertheless, on returning home, Minton failed to find work and eventually moved to Toronto in 1923.¹⁹⁰ In the Sirhowy valley, the situation was equally bleak. Even Bevan briefly contemplated migrating to South America, although, as Michael Foot noted, ‘Above all, he could not wish to escape the struggle’.¹⁹¹ For those leaders that remained, their goal was not only to transform the world around them but also to

¹⁸⁷ Hansard, Vol. 260, columns 632-3, 26 November 1931. Bevan was characteristically not afraid to discuss his own experience of unemployment. In one subsequent Commons debate on the regulations of unemployment insurance or transitional payments, Bevan responded to the heckles and jibes of the opposite benches by asserting that, ‘I shall stick to my own past and I am not ashamed of it...It would be a disaster and it would be a disservice to the House if the feelings of those men were not allowed to find an echo within these walls.’ See also Finch, *Memoirs*, pp. 60-1.

¹⁸⁸ *ME*, 8 October 1921.

¹⁸⁹ Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, pp. 44-5. See also SWML: Interview of Walter Powell, AUD/215.

¹⁹⁰ SWML: Interview of Jim Minton, AUD/301; *South Wales Argus (SWA)*, 4 November 1922; 6 December 1922; Peter Kingsford, *The Hunger Marches in Britain, 1920-1939* (London, 1982), pp. 32-72, pp. 47-8; Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester, 2013), p. 39. Minton would return to Wales in 1925. Still blacklisted, and forced to find work in Devon and Torquay, it would be eight years before he would find employment locally, installing the pit head baths at Navigation pit in Crumlin.

¹⁹¹ Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, p.45.

do so in the name of those equally capable who had been forced to move to more welcoming pastures.¹⁹² However, the method of upheaval had to be expanded and become all-encompassing rather than factional. Through an education on the ground, Bevan had quickly begun to understand, much like his 'Lib-Lab' predecessors had had to do, that collective unity and solidarity in the labour movement had to be practised, as well as preached.

In all three constituencies, the question of the most effective machinery for political change was also resurrected due to the arrival of the Communist Party (CPGB) in South Wales. The influence of Wal Hannington in areas such as Blaina and Abertillery, especially during the 1922 hunger march, also testified to the emergence of the Communists in the region, especially in the Ebbw Fach.¹⁹³ Indeed, in the aftermath of the CPGB's foundation in late July 1920, Abertillery was the only branch out of the thirteen formed in Wales to reside in Monmouthshire. The district branch was organised by the prominent Will Hewlett, original member of the Communist Unity Group and subsequently the CPGB's Executive Committee. Hewlett saw the creation of the wider CPGB as the crowning glory of his comrades' work, as well as his own endeavours in Abertillery. Alongside other founding members of the town's branch, including Len Chivers, Jack Jones and Tom Gale, the self-proclaimed revolutionary was, by this point, a staunch opponent of any affiliation to the Labour Party, hoping that 'any thought... would have been turned down in no uncertain manner. I fail to synchronise the contradiction, i.e., to the affiliation to the Second and the Third International'.¹⁹⁴ The shock that surrounded his death in Russia in July 1921 did not deter the CPGB from briefly increasing its presence in the Ebbw Fach by June 1922, although a sharp decline in membership had set in elsewhere in South Wales before the end of the year.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, p. 45. In Aneurin's own recollections, his father's subsequent death from pneumoconiosis in 1925, and the utter contempt he held for the TICC in paying no compensation to the Bevan household under the Workmen's Compensation Acts, was further confirmation that his convictions were correct and he was exactly where he needed to be.

¹⁹³ SWML: Interview of Jim Minton, AUD/301.

¹⁹⁴ SWML: Interview of Leo Price, AUD/250; Communist Party of Great Britain, *Communist Unity Convention Official Report* (London, 1920), p. 2; *The Communist*, 5 August 1920; *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 21 August 1920. In his impressions of the formation of the party, Hewlett went on to triumphantly declare that, 'I have looked forward, worked, and waited for the day when the British workers would assemble for an honest effort to form a real, live revolutionary Communist Party, that would be broad enough to take within its constitution all the revolutionary elements from the Orkney Islands to the West of Wales. I say that Party was born on July 31st, 1920... Long live the British Communist Party! Long live the World's Socialist Soviet Republic!'

¹⁹⁵ SWML: Interview of Jake Brookes, AUD/308; Leeworthy, *Labour Country*, pp. 230-1; Douglas Jones, 'The Communist Party of Great Britain and the National Question in Wales, 1920-1991' (PhD, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2013), p. 24.

Worse still, by 1923, the anti-affiliation roots of the branch resulted in marginalisation from the wider labour movement in the county. This initial crisis became a persistent one and was not unique to Monmouthshire. As Andrew Thorpe has indicated, CPGB membership remained ‘stubbornly low’ in South Wales, outside of the Rhondda valley, and only recovered during the 1926 lockout.¹⁹⁶ Instead of encroachment, inconsistent infiltration, and dissension over accommodating Labour as part of a ‘united front’ policy characterised the first difficult decade of the CPGB apart from localities such as Abertillery, Blaina, Nantyglo, and later Bedwas after the struggle of 1926. Indeed, the election of Gale to the MCC in 1925 was more indicative of individual loyalties than a sign of emerging Communist support in the Monmouthshire coalfield.¹⁹⁷

Of course, the pattern of political affiliation was often dependent on the relationship between individual, community and party. While Communist sympathies began to spread slowly to the Sirhowy valley, most effectively through the Miners’ Minority Movement (MMM) formed in January 1924, the initial lack of importance placed on democratic or parliamentary representation worked to limit the CPGB’s appeal in the county.¹⁹⁸ Even though ordinary miners, and even allies now part of the SWMF and MFGB hierarchy such as A.J. Cook and S.O. Davies, were willing to work with the MMM, the sectarianism associated with the CPGB led to emerging miners’ leaders committing to the Labour Party as the ‘vehicle for the achievement of political change.’¹⁹⁹ Had they chosen the alternative, they would have become isolated. Within ten months of the MMM’s formation, the NEC’s proposals to reject affiliation to the CPGB, and to disbar Communists from standing as Labour candidates, were emphatically passed at the Labour Party Conference in October

¹⁹⁶ Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester; New York, 2000), pp. 94-105; Andrew Thorpe, ‘The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945’, *The Historical Journal*, 43:3 (Sep., 2000), p. 791; Jones, ‘The Communist Party of Great Britain’, p. 31. During the lockout in June 1926, the South Wales district party committee recorded an increase of 250 members, taking its total membership to 2,300. However, the Communist Party found it very difficult to retain such numbers and even lost more than it had gained in the summer months, recording a depletion of 300 members by February 1927.

¹⁹⁷ SWML: Interview of Tom Gale, AUD/49; Interview of Leo Price; AUD/250; Jones, ‘The Communist Party of Great Britain’, p. 30.

¹⁹⁸ SWML: Interview of Len Jeffreys, AUD/271; Interview of Len Jeffreys, AUD/272. Jeffreys was originally from Cross Keys and worked in both Risca and Nine Mile Point collieries. He was a member of the MMM ‘from its formation’ and was actively involved in the creation of the Cross Keys Communist Party branch in 1924. He moved to Cardiff after the 1926 lockout, before becoming the Communist Party organiser for the area in the early 1930s.

¹⁹⁹ Demont, ‘Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan’, pp. 313-4, p. 315; Paul Davies, ‘The Making of A. J. Cook: His Development Within the South Wales Labour Movement, 1900-1924’, *Llafur*, 2:3 (1978), p. 54. In September 1922, Daggar signed a manifesto that demanded affiliation to the Red International of Labour Unions, alongside A.J. Cook, S.O. Davies and Noah Ablett. See also Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, pp. 77-8.

1924.²⁰⁰ This also explains the subsequent rejection of all forms of affiliation with the Communists by divisional Labour Parties and TLCs in areas such as Bedwellty and Bedwas by 1927.²⁰¹ There was therefore a strong belief that the accumulation of a mass movement through parliamentary democracy, electoral politics and the party of Ramsay MacDonald, rather than the doctrinaire separation of the CPGB, was the only way to secure socialist power in the Monmouthshire coalfield.

The commitment to parliamentary means did not preclude disagreement with and dissension towards Labour's stance nationally, especially if the hesitancy of policy makers stood in the way of improving the wellbeing of local communities. One of the most striking discrepancies between the central Labour Party and grass root outlooks surrounded the problem of women's maternal health. As Kate Fisher and Pamela Graves have shown, Labour remained reluctant to draw specific policy agendas along gendered lines at a national level, despite the developing egalitarian structures of the party and the broader issues of birth control provision.²⁰² However, in industrial areas such as Abertillery, where Labour was firmly in control and maternal and welfare issues were particularly acute, a rather different approach materialised. Labour Party members were increasingly prominent on the Committee for the newly opened Abertillery and District Hospital in September 1922. They included miners David Daggar, brother of George, and Ivor Griffiths, both of whom aimed to abolish the suffering and poor maternal health of women in the constituency. The Abertillery Committee for Constructive Birth Control was formed later in 1923, within months, the creation of a birth control clinic at the District Hospital became a key target.²⁰³

Daggar, in particular, campaigned for eighteen months, gaining support from five of the seven mines in Abertillery, members' of the Women's Section of the Abertillery Divisional Labour Party, and national campaigners such as Marie Stopes. Following a successful Hospital Committee vote in December 1924, and Stopes' direct intervention, the first birth control clinic in Britain was opened on the 15 June 1925 under the stewardship of

²⁰⁰ Thorpe, *The British Communist Party*, p. 79. A further resolution from the Sutton Divisional Labour Party was also passed which barred Communists from becoming Labour members.

²⁰¹ GA: BDLP Records, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the BDLP, 10 September 1927; 17 March 1928, D3784/1.

²⁰² Kate Fisher, "'Clearing Up Misconceptions': The Campaign to Set Up Birth Control Clinics in South Wales Between the Wars", *Welsh History Review*, 19:1 (1998), pp. 126-7; Pamela Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British-Working-Class Politics, 1918-39* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 84-98.

²⁰³ Margaret Douglas, 'Women, God and Birth Control: The First Hospital Birth Control Clinic, Abertillery 1925', *Llafur*, 6:4 (1995), pp. 111-2; Fisher, "'Clearing Up Misconceptions'", p. 108.

Nurse Naomi Jones.²⁰⁴ Unfortunately for Daggar, Jones, and Stopes, the clinic's existence was only fleeting and it was derailed by a series of attacks on it by the Abertillery Free Church Council the following winter, and then the disastrous impact of the 1926 lockout.²⁰⁵ Yet the clinic's brief lifespan was important in revealing the lengths Labour members were collectively willing to go to engage with issues of women's fertility in contrast to reluctant policy makers in the upper echelons of the party. The tenacity demonstrated by the Hospital Committee and supporting activists in the Abertillery Women's Section represented the scale of social responsibility which members of the Abertillery Labour Party now recognised was essential to its own political development.

The council chamber provided Labour with opportunities to serve coalfield society and redefine the relationship between the two. This was achieved not only where the party had already earned a majority, including the urban districts of the Abertillery division, but also in localities such as in Tredegar where it had a reduced presence. In the case of the latter, Bevan's work on behalf of his fellow unemployed resulted in him finally being returned to the Tredegar UDC. It was alongside only Sam Filer and David Griffiths from the previous Labour and ILP phalanx that had suffered heavy casualties in 1922. Up until 1925, Bevan, Filer and Griffiths were up against a significant 'Independent' majority and faced the test of trying to enact change from a position of collective weakness. However, it was here that Bevan in particular demonstrated an ability not only to co-operate with the Labour old guard, particularly Filer, but also to show an evolving propensity to learn from those more experienced in council affairs than he was.²⁰⁶ His education began through sitting on various committees, including housing, roads and improvement, and special works. Bevan quickly found his footing, voicing interpretations on council resolutions, using arguments based on evidence he had personally accumulated rather than relying solely on impassioned rhetoric. In doing so, he proved to be a formidable opponent of, and unrelenting irritant to, the

²⁰⁴ GA: Abertillery and District Hospital Minute Book, 1923-1925, D913/2; *SWG* 12 June 1925. Advertisements were placed in the *Gazette* regarding the opening of the new clinic. It was referred to as the 'People's Clinic for Birth Control and Social Welfare...Advice and instruction free to married women from 10 a.m. to 12.20 p.m. by qualified nurse'.

²⁰⁵ *SWG* 11 December 1925; 8 January 1926; 22 January 1926; 29 January 1926; 12 February 1926; Douglas, 'Women, God and Birth Control', pp. 119-21. As Margaret Douglas has suggested, the attacks from the Free Church Council, most notably from Reverend Ivor Evans, were enough to stigmatise the clinic and those women who sought appointments. Despite protestations from Stopes in response to the chapel rhetoric, the arrival of the 1926 lockout provided a further nail in the coffin of the clinic.

²⁰⁶ GA: Tredegar UDC Minute Books, Minutes of Annual Meeting, 25 April 1922, A350/M/31; *ME*, 8 April 1922, 29 July 1922. 'Independent' Councillor H.J.C. Shepard died suddenly in the summer of 1922, allowing former councillor and Tredegar Combine member William Allen to return to the chamber.

‘Independent’ councillors who sat opposite him in Bedwellty House.²⁰⁷ Labour’s reduced presence on the Tredegar UDC was therefore more effective than the party could ever have hoped for after the defeats of 1922. The narrative of council discussions was not only controlled in Labour’s favour but, rather more importantly, concessions were obtained from the weakest of numerical positions.²⁰⁸

Even on the occasions when his research-based strategy did not succeed, Bevan was inevitably quick to change tack by castigating the lack of ambition and sensitivity of his ‘Independent’ adversaries, especially the chairman of the UDC, D. W. Bowen and D. J. Jermine of the Tredegar Ratepayer’s Association. In one meeting of the Housing Committee in September 1925, Bevan condemned Jermine’s use of the phrase ‘working men’s dwellings’ to explain a new six-block housing scheme for that year, asserting that the proposed ‘cutting down of expenditure’ was unacceptable and that, ‘A rabbit warren house led to a rabbit warren life’.²⁰⁹ Other Labour councillors, including Filer, began to echo Bevan’s disgruntlement, pleading with the UDC to erect more suitable housing.²¹⁰ Bevan and Filer were unable to change the minds of the ‘Independent’ majority on this occasion but the impact of Bevan’s approach went beyond the motions passed in Bedwellty House. His attention to detail and resilience had gained the admiration of the Labour minority in the UDC, which now began to support his mix of evidential and combative styles. A reflexive process had therefore begun. Bevan was not only intrinsically influenced by his experience in local government but he also fundamentally altered the perspective of the Labour men around him on the Tredegar UDC. It was a rapport that would serve him well when Labour finally regained its majority in the local council in 1928.

The growing understanding exhibited by Bevan and the Daggar family in these years showed that they had finally struck an appropriate balance between principles and practice. The greatest test of this more assured and measured leadership came during the seven month

²⁰⁷ For an example see GA: Tredegar UDC Minutes Books, Minutes of General Meeting, 3 May 1922, A350/M/31. In his early years in opposition in particular, the line ‘Councillor A. Bevan voted against’ can almost be regarded as an official seal that council proceedings had taken place.

²⁰⁸ GA: Tredegar UDC Minute Books, Minutes of General Meeting, 21 December 1923, A350/M/32. Bevan deliberated an application from the Bedwellty UDC for permission to distribute water supplied to them by the Tredegar district outside of the Bedwellty district limits. He presented evidence that he had collected on his own venture to Blackwood to visit the chairman of the Bedwellty UDC, J.V. Lewis, and the Gas & Water manager for the neighbouring district. This led to Bevan concluding that, ‘the request...was in his opinion a money making proposition for that Council.’ Permission was subsequently denied and Bevan’s report was effectively adopted as the Tredegar Council’s position on the matter.

²⁰⁹ *ME*, 5 September 1925.

²¹⁰ GA: Tredegar UDC Minute Books, Minutes of General Meeting, 27 October 1925, A350/M/33.

lockout of 1926. Of course, it quickly became apparent that defeat in the dispute would have a potentially catastrophic impact on the strength of the SWMF and the resilience of mining communities; both were already precariously depleted as a result of continued mass unemployment. However, it was universally recognised by Labour's leadership that a line had to be drawn in the sand. As Councillor James Williams of the Abertillery UDC confessed, 'We have nothing to give away...A certain standard of life existed, and since 1921 it had been low enough.'²¹¹ As a member of the SWMF Executive and the district miners' agent, George Daggar shared Williams' convictions. In his defence of A.J. Cook and the MFGB's decision to reject the TUC's recommendation to end strike action, Daggar emphasised the need to stand firm and stay vigilant in the face of such a serious attack on the coalfield's communities. Both his anger and certainty of belief in the appropriateness of the MFGB's decision can be seen in his response to the derisory comments on Cook and the miners' unions of the *South Wales Gazette* contributor 'Federationalist':

He [Cook] is preferable to a lying, deceitfully subtle and ignorant scribe and that his attitude is more laudable than the Peck-sniffian attitude adopted by the Prime Minister of this country. We prefer Cook to a misinformed literary hireling or to a snivelling hypocrite.²¹²

In the next seven months, Daggar stood side by side with local SWMF and Labour colleagues, including Barker and Opton Purnell, in efforts to ease suffering in the Abertillery division.²¹³ As communal soup kitchens were organised and entire communities mobilised to face the struggle, other activists also took centre stage. No one in Abertillery was more effective, perhaps, than the campaigner Beatrice Green. As president of Monmouthshire Labour Women's Advisory Council, Green was influential in forming a Maternity Relief Committee to ensure the supply of food, milk and warm clothing to mothers. In July, she joined Elizabeth Andrews in organising fostering schemes for children in the districts most severely impacted. Her work for the *Labour Woman* also helped to raise awareness of the

²¹¹ *SWG*, 7 May 1926.

²¹² *SWG*, 9 July 1926; 23 July 1926.

²¹³ *SWG*, 14 May 1926; 6 August 1926. Daggar spoke alongside Barker and Purnell at strike demonstrations, including the procession of 1,500 men and women from the Tillery Institute on the 8 May. He also collaborated with all the existing machinery of the local labour movement, from the TLC to the divisional branch of the Women's Labour Party, to ensure conformity of message and support across the division.

struggle of the entire Abertillery community outside of South Wales.²¹⁴ Allied to these remarkable acts of ingenuity and perseverance were flashpoints of rancorous frustration. With the BBOG's loan debts swelling to an unprecedented £700,000, and scales of relief reaching an inordinately high level, the arrival of 'Circular 703' from the Ministry of Health, which instructed a weekly relief payment of only 12s. for a miners' wife and 4s. for every child, unsurprisingly provoked anger and disbelief.²¹⁵ Protest marches against the injustices of the new scale were quickly orchestrated. Local TLCs mandated the Abertillery and Blaina guardians to walk out of the BBOG and refuse to operate under the new restrictions.²¹⁶ There were also disturbances when news broke that officials and safety men were being employed in winding coal at the Cwmtillery and Rose Heyworth pits further down the valley. Hundreds of men and women gathered outside the collieries, demanding that the despatch of coal be stopped immediately. Daggar stood in the way of a violent conclusion to proceedings, announcing that no more coal would be raised in the next fourteen days and assuring the crowd that the coal raised was to maintain power and the electricity supply during the stoppage.²¹⁷ The limitations placed on these outbursts of tension highlighted the effectiveness of the collective response in preventing the complete collapse of local communities, as the summer of 1926 wore on.

In other divisions, the activities of individuals such as Bevan in Tredegar demonstrated a similar determination and also the changing mentality of local communities during the lockout. As chairman of the Tredegar Council of Action and the town's Relief Committee during the ordeal, Bevan held a position of considerable local power that even his opponents on the UDC begrudgingly accepted.²¹⁸ Fired by these additional responsibilities, Bevan quickly took the opportunity to serve his community. He assisted in food distribution

²¹⁴ Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926*, pp. 102-4; Newman, 'Green, Beatrice', pp. 77-8. Beatrice Green (1895-1927) was born in Abertillery and, unlike the rest of her close family, became acutely interested in local politics from an early age and during her time as a local Sunday School teacher. By the early 1920s, she was influential in organising the Abertillery and District Hospital Linen League and the Women's Section in the division. These formative experiences prepared Green for the ordeals which she directly addressed in 1926.

²¹⁵ Paul Jeremy, 'Life on Circular 703: The Crisis of Destitution in the South Wales Coalfield During the Lockout of 1926', *Llafur*, 2:2 (1977), p. 68.

²¹⁶ *SWG*, 23 July 1926; 6 August 1926. T.J. Davies led the exodus, labelling the new scale as 'a disgrace'.

²¹⁷ *SWG*, 30 July 1926. In response to allegations that had arisen that the safety men had been attacked with rocks and other missiles on the way home from work, Daggar arranged a further mass meeting at the Metropole Theatre where it was agreed that all selling and outcropping of coal should cease. On the 30 July, it was reported by the *South Wales Gazette* that twenty Cwmtillery officials were absent from work, a direct consequence of Daggar's efforts to prevent an escalation of violence.

²¹⁸ GA: Tredegar UDC Minute Books, Minutes of General Meeting, 8 May 1926, A350/M/34; *ME*, 26 June 1926.

and setting up communal feeding through soup kitchens in the town. He also successfully applied on behalf of the Relief Committee for council funding to organise activities such as summer carnivals to maintain morale in the community.²¹⁹ Clearly, Bevan revelled in the newfound control he had acquired but the lockout also reaffirmed his intensifying belief that dogma should never precede situational awareness. As a result, and unlike Daggar in the Ebbw Fach, Bevan deviated from the outlook of A.J. Cook and Arthur Horner's stance that negotiations had to be rejected. Instead, he moved towards the viewpoint of his predecessors in the Sirhowy, such as Tom Richards, that if they stayed the course, the bond between the union and the miners would be lost.²²⁰ Ultimately, Bevan represented Tredegar above all else and could not contemplate sacrificing what had already been won through the SWMF and Labour for the sake of an industrial victory that looked increasingly unlikely given the scale local exhaustion had reached by October 1926. To Bevan, the pursuit of 'ultimate victory' was not worth the absolute desolation of entire communities.²²¹

Bevan's stance was also shared by his fellow Executive Committee members from the Bedwellty division, including Sidney Jones.²²² Daggar also eventually accepted that the time had come to negotiate in Abertillery. His disappointment mirrored the dejection of the miners at breaking point in the Ebbw Fach districts, who had indicated an intention to return to work through a SWMF ballot on 30 November.²²³ As work gradually resumed on the 1 December, Bevan's worst fears were confirmed. The SWMF would slide towards decimation, as company unionism, and associated victimization and blacklisting of lodge officials, slowly sapped the energy of the Federation.²²⁴ The more immediate enforcement of the Board of Guardians Default Act on the BBOG, on the 5 February 1927, saw control of the board handed over to government commissioners and sweeping reductions in relief. The uproar over the instigation was palpable in the Bedwellty Union.²²⁵ Bevan's description of the 'ugly spirit' gathering in Tredegar and his condemnation of the commissioners, whom he branded

²¹⁹ GA: Tredegar UDC Minute Books, Minutes of General Meeting, 15 June 1926, A350/M/34.

²²⁰ John McIlroy, 'South Wales' in John McIlroy, Alan Campbell and Keith Gildart (eds.), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out: The Struggle for Dignity* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 152.

²²¹ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', p. 324.

²²² McIlroy, 'South Wales', pp. 143-4.

²²³ *SWG*, 26 November 1926; 3 December 1926. In Abertillery, only Rose Heyworth voted against a return to work (290 votes for a return and 360 votes against respectively). The overwhelming majority of miners in Cwmtillery, Six Bells, Gray and Tillery had resoundingly called for an end to the lockout, mirroring the pits in Blaina and the Western Valleys district as a whole.

²²⁴ *SWML*: Interview of Leo Price, AUD/250; Interview of Dai Dan Evans, AUD/264; Interview of P.J. Matthews, AUD/300; Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, pp. 312-44. Bedwas colliery, in the very south west tip of the county, became a focal point for the battle against company unionism that would rage on into the 1930s.

²²⁵ Burge, 'Labour, Class and Conflict', pp. 331-2; Williams, 'The Bedwellty Board of Guardians', p. 65.

as ‘the new race of robbers’, briefly aligned him with the observations of the Ebbw Vale MP Evan Davies, who had condemned the ‘savage and brutal’ events unfolding in his own community.²²⁶ Even so, the BBOG’s fate was yet another illustration of the dire consequences for the labour movement if it could not reclaim democratic power. For Bevan, the eventual capitulation of 1926 was not *the* turning point towards a parliamentary pursuit of power. Instead it was ‘like watching a film unfold that I had already seen made’,²²⁷ which reinforced his conceptions of leadership and the necessity of his actions in creating an inclusive and socially dynamic culture in Tredegar.

Having dedicated themselves to communities in such turbulent circumstances, the most prominent of this new group of Labour leaders were rewarded for their diligence. The pinnacle of recognition remained election to Parliament but even here pathways differed as a result of local allegiances. In Abertillery, there were no significant hurdles for George Daggar to overcome. Serving as both lecturer and miners’ agent had allowed him to build and preserve relationships of mutual respect with the industrial communities of the Western Valleys district and the miners of Abertillery, Blaina and Nantyglo.²²⁸ As George Barker had experienced before him, the almost ritualistic practice of selecting a miners’ agent to become the next Labour candidate for the constituency had been set in stone as an electoral tradition. It was rather unsurprising, and perhaps in some way inevitable, that Daggar would therefore be selected to replace the retiring Barker in 1929. Daggar not only found support from Barker, Purnell and even the visiting A.J. Cook during the spring and the ensuing election campaign, but he also received assistance from the fringes of the labour movement in the constituency. The Abertillery Communist Party had grown in stature as a result of its influence during the 1926 lockout but had also begun to accept a supporting role in the Labour network, demonstrated by a gradual encroachment onto the local TLC and the public endorsement of Daggar by Marjorie Pollitt who visited the constituency as part of the May Day demonstrations in 1929.²²⁹ Supported by a wider left-wing agglomeration than had been

²²⁶ *SWG*, 13 May 1927; *WM*, 15 June 1927; Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, pp. 80-1.

²²⁷ Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, p. 46.

²²⁸ *SWG*, 3 May 1929. At an election meeting in support of Daggar at the Ebenezer Lecture Hall on the 29 May, the support from other urban districts can be seen clearly by the presence of speakers such as W. J. Owen from Blaina.

²²⁹ SWML: Interview of Jake Brookes, AUD/308; *SWG*, 22 July 1927; 27 January 1928; 29 March 1929; 3 May 1929; 10 May 1929. Abertillery’s Communist branch had previously nominated the South Wales CPGB organiser, Jock R. Wilson, as a candidate to succeed George Barker. It was a clear attempt ‘to permeate Labour organisations from within’. Regardless of the strong support in some lodges including Rose Heyworth, Wilson was barred from competing by the town’s TLC on the grounds that the CPGB were not affiliated to the Labour

anticipated, Daggar was able to counter the restored Liberal Party platform represented by candidate Walter Meredith. Even the public backing of Lloyd George at a meeting attended by Meredith and 40,000 supporters in nearby Brynmawr, could not dent the confidence of the overwhelming majority of the local labour movement that Daggar was the most able candidate. The Abertillery Conservative Association, which had very little local presence, was also drowned in the tidal wave that carried the Labour candidate to electoral victory.²³⁰ Daggar amassed 20,175 votes with a majority of 11,750.²³¹ To the men and women of the constituency, he was the undoubted champion of his community.

Aneurin Bevan was also emphatically elected to Parliament at the 1929 General Election, representing Tredegar and the wider Ebbw Vale division. The 1926 lockout had shown that Bevan was no longer on the fringes of Tredegar politics. His dedication, and strategic awareness of what was needed to reinforce the connection between Labour politics and the wider community over the previous ten years, had far outweighed the contribution of Evan Davies, the sitting Labour MP. Public recognition of Bevan's service to Tredegar and even further afield in Ebbw Vale and the Rhymney, was confirmed by his securing of three key appointments: firstly as chair of the Ebbw Vale Divisional Labour Party in 1923, then as councillor for the MCC in 1928, and finally his nomination as Labour candidate following a ballot by district members of the SWMF.²³² Bevan's election at the expense of the incumbent, a rare example of deselection in Labour's interwar history, has not escaped controversy, asserted most scathingly and immediately by Davies, and admitted apologetically by his closest allies, including Archie Lush.²³³ While Bevan's parliamentary desires at this time also

Party. By 1929, and with a steady depletion in members after the lockout of 1926, it appears that the Communists finally accepted an auxiliary position and began to channel their efforts into assisting Daggar as the parliamentary election loomed.

²³⁰ *SWG* 26 April 1929; 3 May 1929. According to local press reports, several of Chapman-Walker's election meetings were interrupted and then abandoned as a result of heckling and further disorder. It was reported by the *South Wales Gazette* that the interventions were largely made by the alleged socialist presence at the gatherings.

²³¹ *SWG*, 7 June 1929. The full election result was as follows: George Daggar (Labour Party) – 20,175 votes (64.5%), Reynold Meredith (Liberal Party) – 8,425 votes (26.9%), Peter Chapman-Walker (Conservative Party) – 2,697 votes (8.6%). The turnout was approximately 82.4%.

²³² Thomas-Symonds, *Nye*, p. 39; Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, p. 66, p. 83. Jones, 'Evan Davies', pp. 96-7.

²³³ *WM*, 8 May 1929; 9 May 1929; 10 May 1929; 11 May 1929; 14 May 1929; SWML: Interview of Oliver Powell, AUD/316; Interview of Archie Lush, AUD/338; Jones, 'Evan Davies', pp. 96-7; Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 387-93; Thomas-Symonds, *Nye*, p. 47-8. In a series of vicious and scathing attacks on the SWMF and its leaders published in the *Morning Post*, and synthesised in the *Western Mail*, Davies warned his former constituents of the 'loud-mouthed orator' and the spread of 'anti-social teaching now imparted in large towns and industrial centres...put forward as "advanced" political thought.' It was, without doubt, an unashamedly embittered response to Bevan and the tactics of his supporters in the Ebbw Vale division. Thomas-Symonds also alludes to a letter sent by Archie Lush to Michael Foot after the publication of the latter's two-volume biography in which Lush refers to the deselection of Davies as 'our Watergate'.

remain unclear, what cannot be denied is the growing capabilities of the now 31 year-old and the ever-increasing list of responsibilities that made his suitability for Parliament almost indisputable.²³⁴ Bevan had rapidly taken command of the MCC the previous year, when it was once again under Labour control, and he now sought to replicate his own unique blend of rationality and blazing rhetoric during the election campaign of 1929.²³⁵ He largely focused his attacks on Lloyd George's 'drummer boy' revival and the continuing struggle for the nationalisation of the coal mines.²³⁶ Bevan's victory over the Liberal candidate, William Griffiths, and the Conservative Mark Brace, son of William, with a majority of 11,964 votes, was a triumph for informed imagination.²³⁷ His persistence over the course of the decade, through victory and defeat, and his creativity in both speech and action, testify to his own incredible personal development and the harder task he faced in winning over his own locality within the Ebbw Vale constituency. In 1929, he reaped the rewards of the energies he and Query Club members had expended in Tredegar since 1922.

There were therefore three dominant strands in the Labour tradition in the three constituencies of Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale, which intersected with each other after 1918. Labour's development in each constituency reveals the underlying variation in political identity that could materialise across the coalfield, an identity that was refracted by distinct and somewhat disparate industrial environments and modified by personality, place and local power dynamics. Yet, it was the combination of these competing arguments, forged in the miners' lodges, trades councils and council chambers, and tested in the fires of industrial disputes and political debates, that ensured the relationship between the Labour Party and the industrial working-class communities of North West Monmouthshire was secured in the most challenging of circumstances. Both Bevan and Daggar saw Parliament as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The goals were not only to represent their constituents and transmit their outcries from afar into the Commons, but also to ease the hurt

²³⁴ Demont, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan', pp. 354-5.

²³⁵ *ME*, 10 March 1928; 14 April 1928; 21 April 1928. Bevan became a member of the MCC a month before he was returned to the Tredegar UDC in 1928, defeating D. J. Jermine, the 'Independent' and longstanding chairman of the Tredegar Chamber of Trade by 727 votes to 590. In the first meeting of the MCC after the elections, Bevan wasted no time in resetting and replacing the standard committee system and proposing pre-prepared membership lists of each committee to ensure majority Labour representation of nine to one on each.

²³⁶ *WM*, 22 April 1929; *ME*, 4 May 1929; 11 May 1929; 31 May 1929; 8 June 1929.

²³⁷ *ME*, 31 May 1929. The full election result was as follows: Aneurin Bevan (Labour Party) – 20,088 votes (60.3%), Will Griffiths (Liberal Party) – 8,924 votes (26.8%), Mark Brace (Conservative Party) – 4,287 votes (12.9%). The turnout was approximately 85.9%.

and hardship of the people through constitutional means and tactile solutions, at both a national and local level.

In the case of the latter objective, the two men had demonstrated they could enhance and reinvigorate the Labour culture of their predecessors and mould often conflicting approaches into a stable and self-replicating Labour tradition. These leaders were great pupils after all. Each had synthesised the guidelines that working-class leaders had already established in the coalfield, and were continuing to spread in the example of Charles Edwards in nearby Bedwellty. Ultimately, a symbiotic relationship was fortified through an amalgamation of identities. Indeed, in the words of José Enrique Rodó, the Uruguayan essayist and a major influence on Bevan's political philosophy, 'Cada uno de nosotros es, sucesivamente, no *uno*, sino *muchos*. Y estas personalidades sucesivas, que emergen las unas de las otras, suelen ofrecer entre si los más raros y asombrosos contrastes.' ('Each one of us is, successively, not *one*, but *many*. And these successive personalities, which emerge from each other, often offer each other the rarest and most amazing contrasts.').²³⁸

²³⁸ José Enrique Rodó, *Motivos de Proteo*, Second Edition (Valencia, 1918), p. 2.

Chapter 3

On the Fringes of a Tradition - The Liberal Apparition and the Case of Pontypool

At the first annual meeting of the Blaenavon Labour Club in February 1925, William Oakley and Howell D. Bowden opened with some reminiscences of the headway that the labour movement had made in the Eastern Valleys miners' districts. Oakley, a steelworker and member of the Blaenavon UDC, retold the tale of the initial propaganda work he had been a part of in the area, in order to promote W.L. Cook. Oakley had assisted Cook in a successful campaign which had seen the secretary of the local miners' lodge become the first Labour Party representative on the MCC for the Central Ward of the North Monmouthshire constituency in 1910.¹ In turn, Bowden, who had been a Labour Party agent for the old division before the war, compared these initial, fleeting successes with the current position of the Pontypool constituency, a seat now represented by Labour in the House of Commons and bolstered by an effervescent local labour organisation on the ground. Indeed, Bowden suggested that it was fitting of the turnaround that the first Labour Club in the county would be opened in the mining district of Blaenavon, a locality which had long been known as 'the Rock of Gibraltar of Liberalism' but was finally the home of the Labour Party in the Pontypool division.²

Nevertheless, embedded in Bowden's assertion is also a sense of relief at the notion that the Liberal edifice had been scaled, but only as a result of a more strenuous expedition than elsewhere in Monmouthshire. It is a surprising declaration when weighed against the successive Liberal Party defeats in Pontypool since 1918 and counterbalanced by its comparative organisational absence in the adjacent Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale

¹ *Western Mail*, 25 May 1917; *Free Press of Monmouthshire (FPM)*, 6 February 1925. William Lewis Cook (1876-1951) was a checkweigher at Milfroen Hill Colliery before becoming miners' agent for the Eastern Valley district and early member of both the SWMF Executive Committee and Coal Conciliation Board. He was elected to Blaenavon UDC in 1904, and remained on the council until after the war. After graduating with honours in sociology and economics at Ruskin College in 1907, and in his role as a founding member of the South Wales Plebs League in 1909, Cook was instrumental in spreading the embryonic socialist message to the eastern valleys, mainly through support for both the URC and the CLC movements.

² *FPM*, 6 February 1925. *The Blaenavon Labour Club* was originally opened in June 1924. Bowden would go on to be elected as a member of the MCC in 1928.

constituencies.³ The revision of seats led to a Pontypool division entirely comprised of urban districts and an almost immediate rebuttal of the Liberal pre-war electoral hegemony in the county.⁴ Indeed, the collapse of the former Chancellor Reginald McKenna in 1918 ultimately represented the beginning of the end of Liberal dominance, not just in South Wales, but also in the halls of Westminster. This embarrassment was part of a wider, emerging schizophrenia for Liberalism within British politics as supporters of Asquith were left ravaged by the Coalition onslaught and sympathetic party followers of Lloyd George remained in power but not as a majority government, overtaken as they had been by the Conservative cohort led by Andrew Bonar Law. Even after the fall of Lloyd George in October 1922, and the following attempts to reunify and regroup, the Liberal Party would never regain the command that they wielded in the Edwardian era. In the eastern valleys, the extinguishing of Liberal Party control appeared to follow the pattern set in the rest of the coalfield.⁵ While there would be a Liberal challenger in almost every electoral contest up until 1935, with the 1924 General Election the sole exception, each candidate would depart the Pontypool constituency empty-handed.

Through each possible lens of the microscope, the first decade of the interwar period was a problematic and exasperating time for Liberalism as a political force. Ultimately, it proved to be an increasingly fatal one. The Liberal Party's demise, and its relationship to the ascendancy of Labour, has played an essential role in the writing of British and Welsh political history. Through the work of Trevor Wilson, Chris Cook and Michael Freeden, the agency of the Liberal Party and its ability to react to the post-war environment has been repeatedly questioned, with the reunification between Asquith and Lloyd George in November 1923, and the subsequent programmes set in motion by the Liberal Summer School movement, depicted as aberrations in a sea of Liberal apathy which characterised the party after the end of the Great War.⁶ In a South Wales context, the passing of Welsh disestablishment in 1919 has conventionally been seen as the final curtain call for Liberalism

³ See Chapter 2, p. 97.

⁴ See Map of Monmouthshire's Constituency and District Boundaries, p. ix. After 1918, the Pontypool constituency consisted of the urban districts of Blaenavon, Pontypool and Cwmbran and included the UDCs in Abersychan, Blaenavon, Llanfrechfa Upper, Llantarnam, Panteg and Pontypool.

⁵ Chris Cook, 'Wales and the General Election of 1923', *Welsh History Review*, 4:4 (1969), p. 394; Stephen Meredith, 'A "Strange Death" Foretold (Or the Not So "Strange Death" of Liberal Wales): Liberal Decline, the Labour Ascendancy and Electoral Politics in South Wales, 1922-1924', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 7 (2012), p. 36.

⁶ Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935* (London, 1966); Chris Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922-1929* (London, 1975); Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914-1939* (Oxford, 1986).

in the region. As Kenneth Morgan has maintained, it was Labour's acute emphasis on class politics and post-war reconstruction which now took centre stage.⁷

However, the Liberal decline was neither inevitable in relation to Labour's evolution nor straightforward in its eventual manifestation. Indeed, the belatedness of the Labour Club's inauguration in Blaenavon, allied with Bowden's ad hoc rhetoric, point towards a rather different mentality, one where the Liberals remained firmly entrenched in the mind-set of its opponents even as late as 1925. If such a presence was no longer reflected in terms of parliamentary representation, then the Liberal Party's existence persevered in forms which still impacted local political life. This included sustained interventions in local government, and also through the Liberals' continuing drive to jumpstart party membership and engagement, exemplified by the efforts of women's branches and the Young Liberals movement. Using the Pontypool constituency as an example, it is argued here that the Liberal Party could still impact the political culture of Labour's electoral strongholds, even as it encountered debilitating internal and external issues of its own.

As a result of the Liberal heritage in the eastern valleys, the catastrophic defeat of Reginald McKenna was destructive yet not terminal, and Liberal branches in Cwmbran, Pontnewynydd and Pontypool remained, to use Bowden's phraseology, conscious 'Gibraltars of Liberalism'. Such active branches contrasted with the moribund Liberal organisations elsewhere in the coalfield.⁸ The presence of Liberal councillors also helped maintain 'Independent' control in the majority of urban district councils in the constituency, preventing Labour from making the sweeping gains that they secured elsewhere in 1919 and 1925.⁹ Pontypool remained the most contested electoral territory for all three major political parties in industrial Monmouthshire. Most notably, in the 1923 General Election, the Liberal Party came agonisingly close to regaining the Pontypool seat. It would be the closest the Liberals would come to regaining a mining seat in South Wales in the entire interwar period.

Without any electoral revival, an analysis of the Liberals cannot possibly be a narrative of resurgence. The prospects of grass roots Liberalism during the interwar period

⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 6 (1973), pp. 288-312.

⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Twilight of Welsh Liberalism: Lloyd George and the "Wee Frees", 1918-35', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22:4 (May, 1968), pp. 391-2; Cook, 'Wales and the General Election of 1923', pp. 388-9.

⁹ Chris Williams, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government, 1919-1939' in Deian Hopkin, Duncan Tanner and Chris Williams (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales: 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 141.

remained tethered to the deficiencies of the party's leadership.¹⁰ As a consequence, the Liberal Party in the division was beset with similar afflictions to other Liberal Associations across Britain after 1918. Indifference, inconsistency, disunion, and poor decision making were all problems that the Pontypool Liberals eventually failed to counteract. Ultimately, the Labour Party still managed to become the dominant electoral force in the constituency, paving the way for future representatives such as Arthur Jenkins, Granville West, and Leo Abse, to renew this tradition over several generations beyond the interwar years and after the Second World War.¹¹ However, up until 1929, the Liberal Party was still an essential part of the equation, most significantly in its interactions with opposition parties and its lasting influence on the culture of the constituency's politics, at least more so than has previously been considered.

It is therefore important to pause and acknowledge that the transition from culture to tradition is an undertaking that is shaped not just by successful parties such as Labour which rose to the post-war challenge but by those that struggled to cope with the changing political environment such as the Liberals. As a result, this chapter will work against the grain of labour historiography and focus on the latter, a party on the wane yet not a party ignored. It will initially explore the loss of the Pontypool seat during 1918 and how Reginald McKenna represented the misguided intransigence of an immediate post-war Liberalism in microcosm. The period up to the 1923 General Election will then be focused on to demonstrate how the Liberal Party attempted to regain momentum, with mixed results, and how this impacted Labour's control of the constituency. Finally, it will concentrate on the troubled reunification of the party and local responses to Lloyd George's programmes, from *The Land and the Nation* and *Towns and the Land* in 1925 to *Britain's Industrial Future* in 1928, to illustrate how the Liberal Party stuttered and failed to build upon the position it had salvaged after the ejection of McKenna. Ultimately it will be argued that even in industrial areas of Britain, the

¹⁰ Wilson, *The Downfall*, p. 344.

¹¹ *Daily Herald (DH)*, 26 April 1946. Arthur Jenkins (1884-1946) was influential in both the creation and continuation of the Labour tradition in Pontypool. Originally a miner in the Viponds colliery in Abersychan, Jenkins was selected by his fellow miners in the Eastern Valleys district to be recipient of a Ruskin College scholarship. During his time in Oxford, he participated in the formation of the Plebs League and on return to Monmouthshire, he continued as a member of the ILP and as secretary of the Pontypool TLC. After the war, he succeeded James Winstone as miners' agent for the Eastern Valleys district in 1921 and served on both the Abersychan UDC and MCC. He became chairman of the latter in 1932. Two years later, he was elected as vice-president of the SWMF, and, in 1935, he would enter Parliament as Griffiths' successor as MP for Pontypool, serving the constituency until his death in 1946.

Liberals must be regarded not as a post-war puzzle already solved but as a perpetual influence on political traditions even in the midst of defeat.

I. Evaporating Control – The Last Days of Reginald McKenna

Initially, the shockwaves of Reginald McKenna's exit from high office in December 1916 did not translate into local Liberal despondency in Pontypool. The initial press reaction insisted on a determined defence of Asquith and McKenna. Less than three weeks after the formation of the Lloyd George Coalition Government, the Pontypool based *Free Press of Monmouthshire* included a copy of an article entitled, 'An Appreciation of Mr McKenna', from the *Daily Chronicle*, the London Liberal periodical. The Pontypool representative was depicted as a man of definitive convictions and a statesman of great foresight.¹² The North Monmouthshire Liberal Association also showed no sign of switching its allegiances. While local branches had been largely dormant during the war, the announcement of McKenna's resignation from the Exchequer awoke Liberal sympathies in the division. While this did not lead to open hostility to Lloyd George, an overriding support for Asquith prevailed. At a meeting of the NMLA Executive, a resolution of confidence was moved in favour of both Asquith and McKenna. The MP, who had travelled to his constituency to gauge the local mood, thanked the NMLA for its continuing support and urged his party colleagues to 'refrain from any express of opinion' on his resignation in order to maintain a focus on the war effort.¹³

McKenna therefore tried to steady the ship and postpone potential discord inside the local Liberal Association. He was aided by the intermittent state of the NMLA which, thanks to his reassurance, returned to hibernation until 1918. In the House of Commons, McKenna also restrained from commenting on the Prime Minister's conduct in replacing Asquith, much to the disappointment of leading Labour members such as Philip Snowden, who publicly

¹² *FPM*, 22 December 1916. See also J.M. McEwen, 'Lloyd George's Acquisition of the *Daily Chronicle* in 1918', *Journal of British Studies*, 22:1 (Autumn, 1982), p.134. McKenna had actually been approached by Robert Donald, the editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, to purchase the publication and prevent it from falling into the hands of Lloyd George. The newspaper remained supportive of Asquith until its acquisition by the Prime Minister later in 1918.

¹³ *FPM*, 29 December 1916; *Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser (AC)*, 29 December 1916. In his next address to the NMLA, McKenna also refused to discuss the apparent internecine divisions. He hypothesised that bickering would only serve to distract from the work of the Coalition Government which would be the major priority until the war had been concluded. This did not prevent McKenna from referring to Asquith as 'the great exponent of the national determination' in his speech.

questioned the courage and conviction of the former Chancellor.¹⁴ Despite his promise to seek re-election in Pontypool, McKenna did not escape further internal criticism. At the first annual meeting of the newly revised Pontypool Liberal Association in May 1918, the party secretary and agent, Rhys Stephens, was forced to admit in his report that complaints had surfaced that ‘Mr McKenna had not visited the constituency more frequently’. These concerns coincided with a mixed outlook for the Liberal network in the reformatted division, as Stephens contrasted the welcome creation of a Women’s Liberal Association in the area with the loss of ‘old stalwart’ districts such as Abergavenny that had been redistributed to the neighbouring Monmouth constituency to the east. The reshuffle was seen as disruptive to the relationships built up with Abergavenny and rural communities on the fringes of the town of Pontypool. Worse still, the disastrous consequences of these constituency changes for future election prospects were already being considered.¹⁵ McKenna heeded Stephens’ warning, returning to Pontypool to address the PLA Executive in July 1918. He once again emphatically denied any retirement plans and welcomed the forecast that an early general election was looming in order ‘to vitalise the House of Commons.’¹⁶ Nevertheless, doubts remained about McKenna’s commitment to the Pontypool division, the uncertainties of potentially campaigning against both Labour and the Conservatives, and the capability of the Liberals to switch from latency to enthusiasm when required. The apprehensive attitude of Stephens now characterised the widespread outlook of PLA members in the final few months of the war.

Stephens was correct to harbour concerns, especially in relation to the Labour opposition in the eastern valleys. Across the constituency, there were indications of mounting action in favour of both political and industrial issues associated with the labour movement in the last two years of the war. The ILP had survived early assaults over patriotism and were gaining further momentum, re-establishing its Blaenavon branch in 1916.¹⁷ The teachings of Ablett were also beginning to have an impact on areas such as Abersychan, inspiring young

¹⁴ Hansard, Vol. 106, columns 231-70, 14 May 1918.

¹⁵ *FPM*, 14 June 1918. Stephens’ uncertain outlook also contained criticisms of opposition parties for breaking the wartime truce and using ‘subtle means to bring their claims before the electors.’ It is likely that Stephens was referring to the Labour Party in this instance, which had made significant headway in the eastern valleys during the war.

¹⁶ *Llangollen Advertiser and Merionethshire Journal*, 26 July 1918.

¹⁷ *Labour Leader*, 11 May 1916; 3 August 1916; 5 October 1916. The renewed level of enthusiasm, increasingly directed against the actions of the Asquith Coalition Government, was significant enough to attract Ramsay MacDonald to the constituency in late July. In a series of speeches, on the position of the ILP during the war, MacDonald, who had been forced to resign his leadership of the Labour Party in 1914 due to his stance against the war, nevertheless attracted an audience of 2,000 people at the Pavilion Theatre in Pontnewynydd.

miners such as Will Coldrick to exercise their energies on behalf of the local Labour Party. Others such as William Henry Williams were animated by the arrival of the Plebs League in districts such as Pontypool, leading to an early affiliation with the ILP, and later an allegiance to the Communist Party.¹⁸ Elsewhere, the miners' lodge in Blaenavon was one of the few across South Wales to be represented at the Swansea Conference of the British Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Delegates in support of the Russian Revolution of February 1917.¹⁹ TLCs were increasingly vocal in their hostility to the appointment of tradesmen on the FCCs, leading to demonstrations in Abersychan, Panteg and Pontnewynydd in the early winter of 1918.²⁰ Considering McKenna's former responsibilities as chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Food Supplies, during his time as Home Secretary up until 1915, his association with the rationing issue gave even greater resonance to local remonstrations against the composition of the FCCs.²¹ Such developments also pointed towards the changing political mentality of these industrial communities, away from the Liberal Party and closer towards the mind set of James Winstone and his allies in the local Labour Party, such as deputy miners' agent Arthur Jenkins, and party agents Zachariah Andrews and Howell D. Bowden.

For Labour, the pessimism of 1906, when the SWMF had steered away from supporting a candidate in the North Monmouthshire constituency, was now a distant memory.²² At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the North Monmouthshire Labour Party in January 1917, to be revised as the Pontypool Divisional Labour Party (PDLP) the following year, initial plans were made to appoint a candidate for the next election that

¹⁸ South Wales Miners Library (SWML), Interview of Will Coldrick, AUD/339; Interview of William Henry Williams, AUD/290. As Coldrick summarised in a similar vein to Aneurin Bevan in Tredegar, 'if you couldn't make the Labour Party the instrument, then you may as well give up'.

¹⁹ David Egan, 'The Swansea Conference of the British Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Delegates, July 1917: Reactions to the Russian Revolution of February, 1917, and the Anti-War Movement in South Wales', *Llafur*, 1:4 (1975), pp. 12-37.

²⁰ *AC*, 7 September 1917; *FPM*, 25 January 1918; 1 February 1918. The threat of strike action by the local workforce in support of the demonstrators was prevented by an intervention from W.L. Cook at a public meeting in Blaenavon, who denounced any down-tools policy in relation to the committees. Strike action was therefore averted.

²¹ L. Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War*, New Edition (Abingdon; New York, 2014), pp. 21-50. McKenna was not a member of the reformatted Ministry of Food, but the independence of the FCCs and the lack of governmental control in their constitution stemmed from Coalition Government perceptions, both under Asquith and Lloyd George, that there needed to be greater frugality in terms of working-class expenditure on food during the war.

²² *South Wales Gazette (SWG)*, 12 January 1906; *South Wales Daily News (SWDN)*, 25 January 1906. The decision of the SWMF was testament to the strength of the Liberal position in the old North Monmouthshire constituency and the strength of McKenna's public persona before the outbreak of conflict in 1914.

reflected the diversity of occupations represented in the local labour movement.²³ Labour's choice was Tom Griffiths, the Neath born, Ruskin educated, organising secretary of the Steel Smelters Association in South Wales since 1900, and the divisional officer for the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) during the war.²⁴ According to Bowden, the Pontypool divisional agent in 1918, Griffiths was 'not a great orator, but a charming raconteur, extremely well-informed in everything pertaining to the growth of the Trade Union and Labour Movements.'²⁵ It was perhaps this knowledge and his scathing criticism of McKenna's time in the Treasury, specifically for the lack of increased pay and larger pensions for those soldiers and sailors who had served in the war, which encouraged the PDLP to restate its support for Griffiths in 1918.²⁶ His responsibilities as a Sunday school teacher, and deacon at the Bethel Methodist Chapel in Neath, also gave hope that he would appeal to the remaining nonconformist majority in areas such as Blaenavon and Pontypool. Nevertheless, any assessment of Griffiths' prospects must be tempered by the muted perceptions of the PDLP itself regarding a breakthrough. In a stark contrast to the uncontested Abertillery and Ebbw Vale divisions in 1918, there was less certainty that Griffiths would succeed in the eastern valleys.²⁷ There was still a distinct sense that McKenna's dominance would prove a sizeable advantage for the Liberals. Hope, rather than expectations, characterised any PDLP response to the upcoming election contest.

However, it was the impact of Labour's emergence on the PLA and McKenna himself that was perhaps more significant. Indeed, if Labour was tentatively optimistic, then the Liberal incumbent was increasingly anxious. Anticipating that an election was imminent, and that Lloyd George would seek a continuation of the Coalition Government rather than a reunification of the Liberal Party, the Pontypool MP underwent a complete reversal in perspective to the one he espoused to the PLA in the summer. Attending the local Blaenavon Eisteddfod in the week before the Armistice declaration, McKenna professed that,

²³ *Cambria Daily Leader (CDL)*, 1 January 1917. Representatives were present from Abersychan, Blaenavon, Cwmbran, Pontnewydd, Pontypool, Talywain and Varteg, and from the major unions of the SWMF, ISTC and NUR.

²⁴ *South Wales Daily Post (SWDP)*, 5 March 1900; *Cambrian (CA)*, 17 December 1909; *The Times*, 8 February 1955. Thomas Griffiths (1867-1955) also served on the Neath Town Council before his political career in Pontypool. After victory in the constituency in 1918, he would retain the seat until his retirement from Parliament in 1935.

²⁵ *FPM*, 11 February 1955. Bowden reflected on Griffiths' career, as part of the late MP's obituary in 1955. Griffiths also contributed to the ISTC journal, *Man and Metal*, during his time as Labour representative of Pontypool. See Gwent Archives (GA): Iron and Steel Trades Confederation Records, *Man and Metal: The Journal of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation*, D3417/2/1-6.

²⁶ *FPM*, 15 November 1918.

²⁷ See Chapter 2, p. 75.

‘everybody in the country almost without exception was opposed to an election at the present time.’²⁸ Questions had also begun to surface at a local level over McKenna’s muted position on the Coalition since his departure, despite his attempt to appease the PLA in 1916. While it is difficult to quantify the dissent due to the lack of surviving constituency party records, those sceptical of the Pontypool representative were beginning to make their misgivings known through the printed press. Writing into the *Western Mail*, ‘Pontypool Radical’, for example, described the precarious situation that McKenna could face if he continued to run independent of government support:

Many of us Liberals in the Pontypool Division think it high time the right hon. gentleman “declared” himself...The issue is extremely simple. Is Mr. McKenna prepared to support Mr. Lloyd George and the Coalition definitely and straight all along the line...If Mr. McKenna cannot, many of us cannot support him.²⁹

Of course, considering the mutual distrust of each other, it was inconceivable that Lloyd George would offer McKenna the endorsement of the ‘coupon’. Rather than appease such disquiet, McKenna quickly denied that he would be standing in support of the Coalition.³⁰ His decision opened the door for the Pontypool Conservative and Unionist Association (PCUA) to find a candidate that would garner support from the Prime Minister as a Coalition Unionist. Leonard Llewellyn, the general manager of the Cambrian Combine, appeared an obvious choice. Llewellyn was a well-known and somewhat notorious figure in the South Wales coalfield, not least for his hostile response to the Tonypandy Riots and the Cambrian Combine disputes of 1910 and 1911. He had also been head of the Raw Materials Department in Lloyd George’s Ministry of Munitions since June 1915.³¹ At a meeting of the PCUA in late November, Llewellyn gladly accepted the invitation to stand against McKenna and a Coalition Committee was formed to support his candidature.³² Messages of recommendation from Lloyd George and the Minister for Reconstruction, Christopher

²⁸ *AC*, 8 November 1918.

²⁹ *WM*, 18 November 1918.

³⁰ *WM*, 20 November 1918.

³¹ Dai Smith, ‘Tonypandy 1910: Definitions of Community’, *Past and Present*, 87 (May, 1980), pp. 158-184; Travis L. Crosby, *The Unknown David Lloyd George: A Statesman in Conflict* (London; New York, 2014), p. 196.

³² *WM*, 25 November 1918.

Addison, were quickly published in the *Western Mail*. In this very public declaration of interest in the Pontypool contest, the former made his desire to see McKenna falter abundantly clear:

I sincerely hope you [Llewellyn] will be returned to support the Coalition Government, as I feel your knowledge of the coal, iron, and metal trades of the country, as well as your commercial and departmental experience would be of inestimable value...in you I am satisfied the Government will receive every support.³³

In many ways this message was aimed at McKenna as much at Llewellyn and supporters of the Coalition in Pontypool. The bitter feud between Lloyd George and McKenna also began to be re-examined in the South Wales press, with some publications asserting that the contest in Pontypool would become ‘the chief centre of interest’ in the coalfield.³⁴ In this potentially perilous atmosphere, it is understandable why McKenna treated initiation of the election with such cynicism and disdain. The late November entry of the Conservative Party candidate into the prospective election campaign would have worried him as much as the Labour advance, if not more so.

As the election began in earnest in the last week of November 1918, the problems caused by McKenna’s increasing lack of commitment became apparent. In the opening of his campaign, McKenna reiterated his distaste for ‘a confused, chaotic Election’ that had been called by a Coalition Government that lacked philosophy and which unjustly excluded the majority of the soldiers fighting on the Western Front. However, in attempting to explain his stance in greater detail, he struggled to separate himself completely from the Coalition he stood against, proclaiming that, ‘If a Coalitionist Government...carries out Liberal policy based upon Liberal principles then I am a Coalitionist; but if its policy and principles are Conservative than I am not.’ In aiming for clarity, McKenna had stumbled into ambiguity. He had also aroused anger from several attendees when he refused to retract a previous assertion that Tom Griffiths was running on behalf of the ILP, rather than the Labour Party. When a

³³ *WM*, 25 November 1918.

³⁴ *FPM*, 29 November 1918; *Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser*, 6 December 1918; *The Globe*, 13 December 1918. . As a result of Lloyd George’s backing, London based newspapers also now placed the Liberal representative in the list of members under threat, along with former Asquith allies Charles Hobhouse and Herbert Samuel.

vote of confidence in McKenna was called for by J.J. Harmston, the chair of the meeting and local magistrate, it was ‘strongly dissented to by the opposition’ and took a second vote to be carried.³⁵ Even at this early stage, the Liberal MP was struggling to win over his audience and firmly differentiate his ideological stance away from his opponents on both sides.³⁶

An even more decisive factor in deciding McKenna’s fate was the Liberal inability to respond to the reversal in post-war voter priorities. On paper, the PLA sought to present a rather nebulous conception of social reform combined with a return to the economic outlook of Cobden and Bright. McKenna and his supporters deployed this strategy by requesting a ‘resumption of Liberal principles’, in the form of civil and religious equality, international peace through a League of Nations, and the alleviation of high prices through free trade. The PLA also emphasised an immediate need for reconstruction including ‘A fair minimum wage in all trades’, ‘the provision of better housing under a national scheme’, and finally, ‘the preservation of the health of the nation.’³⁷ However, the war had ensured that social and welfare reform issues that had been secondary in ideological conceptions of Liberalism before the war would now become concerns that defined electoral outcomes. Representatives such as McKenna, who had previously emphasised a balance between frugality and free trade, were ill-suited to lead the charge for post-war reconstruction after 1918, especially when competing against the Labour Party for the same ideological space.³⁸ Both the PDLP and the PCUA were successful in disseminating party leaflets across the division that associated the Liberal MP with votes against the Eight Hours Bill, a 5s. minimum wage, and a refusal to increase pension rates during his spell as Chancellor.³⁹ The vague social

³⁵ *FPM*, 29 November 1918; 6 December 1918. At the next meeting of the Panteg branch of the ISTC on the 1 December, a resolution was passed in ‘emphatic protest’ against McKenna’s allegations and confirmed that Griffiths was indeed running under the auspices of the PDLP. McKenna subsequently provided a public apology and quickly dropped the claim.

³⁶ *FPM*, 29 November 1918. At subsequent meetings in Garndiffaith, McKenna faced a further barrage of questions on the issue of revising old age pensions, nationalisation of industry. In order to assuage the situation, he claimed to be ‘at one with the greater part of the Labour Party manifesto’. This brought great amusement from the audience, with one heckler advising McKenna to ‘join the Labour Party’ if this was the case.

³⁷ *FPM*, 6 December 1918.

³⁸ Iain Sharpe, ‘The Myth of “New Liberalism”’: Continuity and Change in Liberal Politics, 1889-1914’, *Journal of Liberal History*, 81 (Winter, 2013), p. 17.

³⁹ *FPM*, 29 November 1918; 6 December 1918; *WM*, 4 December 1918; Martin Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier Among Statesman 1863-1916* (London, 2008), p. 154. Writing into the *Free Press*, ‘E. Chard’ who described himself as ‘a McKenna supporter up to the present’ exemplified the detachment that was taking place. After criticising the sitting MP for making excuses for not increasing pensions for the elderly, disabled soldiers and war widows, he delivered a damning assessment of McKenna’s prospects, declaring that, ‘I fear that unless Mr McKenna makes a more sympathetic and democratic view of the situation, we shall hear his valedictory address on the day the poll is declared.’

conceptions that characterised PLA election rhetoric, and McKenna's inability to give detailed responses in relation to industrial and social issues, left him increasingly disconnected from the electorate that had shown faith in him over the last twenty-three years.

At every turn, McKenna's past as a statesman was coming back to haunt the PLA. Even Pamela McKenna was forced to 'clear the air of any false charges', and concede the severity of the challenge her husband now faced, at successive meetings of the Pontypool Liberal Women's Association.⁴⁰ Outside of local Liberal organisations, McKenna's controversial treatment of the suffrage movement was also rearing its head. Both of his opponents, particularly the Coalitionist Llewellyn, seized the initiative to condemn the 'Cat and Mouse' Act, a policy deemed inexcusable not only by previous suffrage campaigners in the constituency, but also by the new women voters of Pontypool.⁴¹ McKenna's response was once again guarded, insisting that Lloyd George had also supported the legislation and to condemn the Act was to also denounce the Prime Minister.⁴² The words of former Lord Chancellor Stanley Buckmaster in defence of McKenna, his old colleague, at a meeting of women electors in Pontnewynydd, was a momentary respite in what was increasingly a problematic defence of McKenna's actions in Westminster.⁴³

It was, however, the personal rivalry that persisted with Lloyd George which would prove the most detrimental to Liberal fortunes in the eastern valleys. The intervention of Margaret Lloyd George, as part of her tour of South Wales to drum up support for the Prime Minister, hammered away at McKenna's hopes of retaining the seat. In successive meetings that attracted large audiences in both Blaenavon and Pontypool, Margaret urged women electors to back her husband by voting for Llewellyn, suggesting that the Coalition candidate had the desired 'conviction' that was lacking in his opponents.⁴⁴ In reality, it was unlikely that a Conservative, even with the backing of Lloyd George's Government, would succeed in a constituency that had not voted with the party since 1880 and was also witnessing an emerging Labour Party. It was even less likely given the lack of groundwork laid by the

⁴⁰ *FPM*, 6 December 1918.

⁴¹ See *Votes for Women*, 5 July 1912; *The Suffragette*, 8 November 1912; 11 July 1913; 27 June 1913. During his time as Home Secretary before the war, McKenna had received particular scorn for his handling of suffrage demonstrations and his role in the passing of anti-suffrage legislation, most notably in the case of the 1913 Prisoners Act. More commonly known as the 'Cat and Mouse Act', this allowed for the early release of activists on hunger strike and the re-imprisonment of campaigners once their health was restored. As a result, McKenna was already a figure deeply resented, in relation to the suffrage movement, before 1918.

⁴² *WM*, 13 December 1918.

⁴³ *FPM*, 13 December 1918.

⁴⁴ *WM* 11 December 1918; *FPM*, 13 December 1918.

PCUA before the contest. Perhaps the compulsion to interfere was more preventative than progressive. As constituents went to the polls on the 14 December, and the collieries from Blaenserchan to Tirpentwys lay idle adding to the ‘buzz and excitement’ that surrounded the contest, both McKenna and Llewellyn claimed victory, with the latter admitting that the defeat of the Liberal candidate would be a victory in itself. Up against an adversary and local Conservative organisation with explicitly obstructionist motivations, the Liberal’s claim to have held the seat papered over the cracks of anxiety that had characterised the PLA’s approach to the entire campaign.

In Labour’s corner, Griffiths believed his party would poll well but was nevertheless cautious in his prediction, stating to one reporter that he was ‘far from being disheartened at the prospect in front of them.’⁴⁵ He had underestimated the impact a third party would have in improving Labour’s prospects and splitting the previously solid Liberal vote. As the declaration was read aloud at Pontypool Town Hall on the 28 December, there was a great surprise and shock at the outcome. Tom Griffiths was confirmed victorious by a majority of 1,417 votes, completing Labour’s domination in industrial Monmouthshire in the process. McKenna was placed in an ignominious third and last place, gaining only 28% of the vote.⁴⁶ While Griffiths received congratulations from McKenna, Llewellyn proclaimed his own form of ‘moral victory’ in displacing the Liberal candidate.⁴⁷ As expected, the Liberals did not take too kindly to such open assertions about the true intentions behind Llewellyn’s campaign. In an irate retort, James Eckersley, the chairman of the Pontypool Liberal Club, responded by sending a telegram to Lloyd George, outlining his frustration at the Prime Minister for his intrusion into the contest: ‘Congratulations on success of your pitifully mean tactics here. McKenna loses his seat but keeps his soul. What about yours?’⁴⁸

Eckersley’s reaction to the defeat highlights the divide that had now materialised between Lloyd George and Liberal Party organisations at a grass roots level in Pontypool. Such embittered resentment also revealed the problems that the party had thus far been unable to reconcile. The Liberal Party had been dormant for too long in the constituency and

⁴⁵ *FPM*, 20 December 1918.

⁴⁶ *FPM*, 3 January 1919. The full election result was as follows: Thomas Griffiths (Labour Party) – 8,438 votes (39.0%), Leonard Llewellyn (Coalition Unionist) – 7,021 votes (32.5%), Reginald McKenna (Liberal Party) – 6,160 votes (28.5%). The turnout was approximately 72.1%.

⁴⁷ *FPM*, 3 January 1919. The *Free Press* also reported that ‘satisfaction was expressed’ by the Coalition Government that, ‘the object for which the candidate and his supporters set out had been achieved in the defeat of Mr McKenna, as an opponent of Lloyd George.’

⁴⁸ *WM*, 30 December 1918.

had suffered the consequences. McKenna's rhetorical failings had also been badly exposed. He may have remained committed to Liberal principles, but his portrayal of the amendments required to improve post-war society appeared tentative at best and vacuous at worst. In his struggle to disown the Liberal Coalitionists, the ambiguity of his position in the post-war political environment had become a Gordian knot for the Liberals in Pontypool. Perhaps, as Martin Farr had suggested, McKenna had become tired of politics altogether. He certainly stood as a jaded and forlorn figure, tired of the machinations of his rivals and a shadow of the energetic Griffiths who had entered Parliament in 1895.⁴⁹ He was not the only one to be punished for hesitation and an allegiance to Asquith. He joined the martyrs of Walter Runciman, Herbert Samuel, John Simon and even his former Prime Minister, in exiting Parliament in 1918, memorialised as 'the men who helped carry on the old Liberal cause'.⁵⁰ However, the relinquishing of the Pontypool seat was not purely the result of one man's failings. All was not lost but the shock of McKenna's defeat was seismic in its proportions. The PLA had personified the confused state of Liberalism in miniature in 1918. Too slow to rouse itself from the self-imposed wartime inertia, it had awoken as a network caught between the Edwardian politics of peace, retrenchment and reform, and the more aggressive, detailed and socially aware agenda that was now demanded by the wider electorate. As a result, it had surrendered a position of strength for one of relentless insecurity. It was now up to the Liberals to regroup, regather a sense of composure and ensure that abject dejection did not mutate into organisational extinction.

II. The Liberal Roadblock and the Challenge to Labour

If the 1918 General Election can be deemed 'the crucial event in destroying the political viability of the Liberal party',⁵¹ it is tempting to see the capitulation of Reginald McKenna in Pontypool as verification for such an interpretation. However, through the ensuing turbulence during the Coalition years and up until the preventable inactivity that followed the 1923 General Election, the PLA did not only remain intact but retained a

⁴⁹ Martin Farr, 'Reginald McKenna as Chancellor of the Exchequer 1915-1916' (PhD, University of Glasgow, 1998), p. 246.

⁵⁰ *CDL*, 30 December 1918. Farr, 'Reginald McKenna', pp. 246-52. Of the five, McKenna was the only one who failed to return to Parliament, taking up the role of director of the Midland Bank in 1919.

⁵¹ George L. Bernstein, 'Yorkshire Liberalism During the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 32:1 (1989), p. 129.

substantial influence on the constituency's political development. In the process, it limited the Labour Party's grasp of key areas of local control, most importantly in council terms. Such resilience even came close to providing a fleeting electoral resurrection in 1923, although it is important to stress that Tom Griffiths retained his seat throughout this period. Nevertheless, it will be argued here that Liberalism in Pontypool was durable despite its electoral failings. The following analysis will therefore counter the conventional narrative of unbroken decay in industrial regions, perpetuated in previous examinations of Liberalism,⁵² and argue that, despite its ensuing inconsistencies, the Liberal Party endured in the eastern valleys with a regularity of presence not identifiable in neighbouring coalfield constituencies.

Firstly, the PLA sought an uncomfortable yet necessary re-evaluation. A post-mortem of the 1918 Election began in earnest in April 1919, with several diagnoses being put forward for McKenna's defeat. At the annual meeting of the PLA, the chairman C.H. Badman, suggested the loss was a result of underlying 'indifference' that had taken hold during the war when the NMLA had respected the party truce. Rhys Stephens, who had decided to retire from his role as secretary of the PLA at the meeting, also shared Badman's sentiments, warning that, 'The year had been remarkable for the apathy...shown by Liberals'. The most consistent criticism, however, rested with the imprecise rhetoric that had been adopted during the campaign. Stephens also called for a more aggressive and transparent approach to the local party's allegiances, in light of the continuation of Lloyd George's Coalition:

The true test of Liberalism, however, was during the period of adverse circumstances and he [Stephens] was confident, as Sir John Simon had said, that it would not be very long before all who were prepared to prove their Liberalism would have to declare themselves.⁵³

The mention of Simon suggested a continuing loyalty to the Asquith tradition, as Eckersley's telegram to Lloyd George had also alluded to in the aftermath of the election. Nevertheless, the PLA's stubborn allegiance to Asquith created significant challenges. Liberal Associations risked getting caught in the crossfire between the warring Lloyd George and Asquith factions that now threatened to tear the party apart internally. Official

⁵² Morgan, 'The New Liberalism', pp. 304-8; Russell Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties in Wales* (Cardiff, 2014), pp. 71-88.

⁵³ *FPM*, 4 April 1919.

Liberalism in Wales remained under the Lloyd George banner.⁵⁴ While Coalition Liberalism may have been weak as a local organisational force across Britain, twenty out of the twenty-one successful Liberal representatives in Wales had either accepted or received the ‘coupon’ from Lloyd George and Bonar Law.⁵⁵ In response to the intimations of the PLA hierarchy, it was also reported that Liberal members supportive of the Prime Minister were beginning to desert to the Conservatives.⁵⁶ To commit to Asquith therefore incurred the risk of regional isolation and, worse still, the defection of local members to the Conservative Party.

However, Lloyd George did not command the entire Liberal Party mechanism. The Asquith camp was reinforced by the control of party finances and a largely sympathetic Liberal press.⁵⁷ Efforts by the Coalition Premier to procure publications and proliferate his own, such as the *Lloyd George Liberal Magazine*, were essentially responses to his lack of control in this regard.⁵⁸ As a result, constituency branches could retain independence without incurring the penalty of further separation from broader party frameworks. In any case, there is little evidence to suggest that the PLA was in consistent, or even sporadic, contact with Abingdon Street headquarters. Constituency Liberal Associations often resented external involvement and guarded their own individuality closely. Party agents were often tasked with the responsibilities of strategy and methodology in their respective divisions.⁵⁹ In this sense, the individualism of broader party ideology was immortalised at source, as the activism of each local agent could make or break the appeal of the Liberals on the ground. Pontypool was no exception in this regard and Stephens, along with his successors Francis Gurney and A.J.H. Lee, began to lay the foundations for the Liberal continuance. In the case of Pontypool, organisation was a critical area for improvement. In the twilight of his fourteen year career as the divisional agent, Stephens still held a modicum of ambition, and after the formation of a subsidiary branch of the PLA in the town in March 1919, he expressed the

⁵⁴ Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals*, p. 39. Indeed, under the watchful eye of Viscount of St. Davids and trusted Lloyd George ally, J. Wynford Philipps, Asquith’s adherents were initially prevented from selection to the Welsh National Liberal Council after the war.

⁵⁵ Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Liberals in Coalition, 1916-1922’, *Journal of Liberal History*, 72 (Autumn, 2011), p. 34.

⁵⁶ *WM*, 24 May 1920.

⁵⁷ Morgan, ‘Liberals in Coalition’, p. 34.

⁵⁸ Bristol University Special Collections and Archives (BUSCA): Liberal Printed Materials, *Lloyd George Liberal Magazine*, 1:1, October 1920, DM668/3; *Lloyd George Liberal Magazine, Welsh Edition*, 1:2, November 1920. As the quotation from Lloyd George on the front cover of the November 1920 edition stresses, ‘This is one of those rare epochs when events are in the making – when personal sectarian, partisan considerations are to be sunk for dominating purpose.’

⁵⁹ Sian Jones, ‘The Political Dynamics of North East Wales, With Special Reference to the Liberal Party’ (PhD, University of North Wales, Bangor, 2003), pp. 62-3.

need for the Liberal movement to be in closer contact with constituency voters. On his recommendation, similar branches were set up in Blaenavon and Cwmbran in the following months.⁶⁰ In his initial determination to be proactive, Stephens urged the PLA to remain vigilant amidst the chaotic struggle between Lloyd George and Asquith.

Independence from national directives also came with its own caveats, including the ongoing responsibility of self-financing that had been common practice since 1906.⁶¹ Financial complications were a perennial source of anxiety for constituency parties and a worry from which the PLA could not escape. It was recognised that even though it had ensured a credit balance throughout the previous election and up to the spring of 1919, the PLA would cease to exist in the constituency without new sources of income and fundraising. Several schemes were subsequently put into effect to counteract an impending decline. A propaganda campaign was initiated with early subscriptions amounting to £500 collected by early April, aided by the £50 donation of the defeated Reginald McKenna.⁶² Social gatherings such as fetes were organised in the summer months, becoming a staple of local social life in subsequent years, and Liberal Clubs in Pontypool, Blaenavon, and Pontnewynydd, continued to arrange billiard tournaments and other functions in order to maintain the morale of existing members and ensure consistent contributions.⁶³ In the autumn, a national lecture series maintained the Liberal public presence, with John Simon, Donald Maclean, Wedgwood Benn and Ernest Brown all invited to speak in the constituency.⁶⁴ These exertions aided a partial reawakening of Liberalism in the constituency after the protracted wartime coma. While it may not have resulted in a full scale revival, the actions of the PLA point towards an active attempt to resurrect Liberal fortunes.

Imperative to this revitalisation was the part played by the local Women's Liberal Associations (WLAs). Ursula Masson has suggested that the energy of the WLAs had already proven to be 'the greatest electoral asset' in spells of administrative struggle before 1914.⁶⁵ In the post-war context of wider enfranchisement and the collapse of the party in electoral

⁶⁰ *FPM*, 7 March 1919; 4 April 1919.

⁶¹ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North East Wales', p. 62.

⁶² *FPM*, 4 April 1919.

⁶³ *FPM*, 11 July 1919; 12 March 1920.

⁶⁴ *WM*, 20 November 1919; *FPM*, 9 October 1920. In October 1920, Benn would return to the division, imploring that 'the lamp of freedom' continue to be burned in the name of the Liberal Party.

⁶⁵ Ursula Masson, *For Women for Wales and For Liberalism': Women in Liberal Politics in Wales, 1880-1914* (Cardiff, 2010), p. 181. See also Gavin Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster: Grass-roots Liberalism in England, 1910-1929' (PhD, University of Leicester, 2013), pp. 43-7.

terms, the WLAs took on even greater responsibility and were seen by the central machinery of the Liberal Party as an increasingly important organisational component.⁶⁶ In Pontypool, the WLAs had already received praise from the PLA for their promotion of Liberal values during the election contest in 1918 and they resumed efforts to stimulate support for the Liberal Party after McKenna's defeat.⁶⁷ Activities remained social in nature, including fund-raising events such as garden parties, soirees and musical performances, which ran in conjunction with addresses from potential electoral candidates or visiting speakers.⁶⁸ The gendered nature of women's positions in the constituency's Liberal Party framework is also confirmed by the continuing dominance of men on the PLA's Executive Committee. There was little movement in this regard up to 1929. In spite of these limitations, the WLAs were essential in demonstrating the ongoing Liberal presence in the eastern valleys, unlike the majority of moribund WLA branches elsewhere in the coalfield,⁶⁹ and branches acted as vibrant nodal points for the party where political and social conceptions of post-war Liberalism intersected with one another.

Despite its best attempts, the partial recovery of the PLA appeared sedate and tame when weighed against the mounting presence of the PDLP in the constituency, the diligence of the newly elected Tom Griffiths, and the guiding influence of local TLCs. Nevertheless, further Labour encroachment was a more delicate and prolonged procedure after the war, which took into account the Liberal traditions of the eastern valleys. Labour's appeal for democratic socialism was stressed consistently by Griffiths at public meetings, as he insisted on parliamentary transformation rather than a 'bloody revolution'.⁷⁰ Admittedly, Griffiths' assertions did not prevent the local labour movement from sympathising with the more militant articulations of industrial-political dissent promoted in nearby coalfield localities. For example, in response to stoppages of the TICC collieries in July 1919, demonstrations, 'to protest against the violation of Labour war aims and the military intervention in Russia', were held under the auspices of the PDLP. On the 25 July, a procession, largely consisting of workers from the Abersychan and Griffithstown lodges, marched to the Pontypool Recreation

⁶⁶ BUSCA: Liberal Printed Materials, *Liberal Agent*, January 1921, DM668/3. In the January 1921 edition of the *Liberal Agent*, for example, women's groups were considered vital in attracting new voters and maintaining order at a grass roots level.

⁶⁷ *FPM*, 14 June 1918; 4 April 1919.

⁶⁸ *FPM*, 16 May 1919; 12 March 1920; 16 January 1923.

⁶⁹ Ryland Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009), pp. 264-5.

⁷⁰ *FPM*, 4 April 1919. In his speech to Griffithstown members, the Labour MP elaborated further, insisting that, 'The only machinery which the workers could capture at present was the political machinery...he did not want to see the destruction of life which had occurred in Russia and other countries.'

Grounds to hear the speech of James Winstone who warned, ‘the corrupt Coalition coupon Government to keep their hands off Russia’.⁷¹ Such a display of hostility to the situation in Russia contrasted with the more measured message of Griffiths in the spring. However, the differing degrees of response did not necessarily represent discord but rather the ability of local leaders, of both Labour’s political and industrial wings, to harness a range of ideological outlooks into an increasingly well-structured and unified rhetorical force in the constituency.

The 1919 local elections pointed towards the success of Labour’s oratorical choreography. Winstone led the charge during the March and April campaigns and demonstrated his ability to combine emotive aspiration with Labour Party policy. In Pontypool, he discussed the miners’ programme he represented as SWMF president, skilfully dissecting the profits of local coal companies, such as Partridge, Jones & Company Limited to demand significant reductions in the cost of living, nationalisation of the mines and a prevention of mining accidents.⁷² He was also influential in constructing the ten point programme of Labour candidates in the division, which included greater accommodation for local schools to avoid overcrowding, the extension of school clinics to improve child healthcare, and the amalgamation of urban authorities to limit bureaucracy. Most importantly, a causal link between local government authority, post-war reconstruction and collective ideology was established, stressing that, ‘individual interests must give place to community interests’.⁷³ In calling for a council majority that reflected the ‘interests...of the mass of the people’, Labour’s approach to local government in Pontypool signified a concerted attack on the individualism espoused by the Liberal-dominated UDCs in the division before the war.

Labour’s blend of ambition and detail diverged from the statements of ‘Independent’ Liberal candidates in local districts as appeals rested almost solely upon previous council and education committee experience. The Aberdare colliery examiner and Liberal William Morgan Llewellyn, for example, pointed towards his fifteen years as part of the Pontypool UDC and his chairmanship of the town’s Technical Education Committee as justification for his election to the MCC. Others such as John Rosie, the Pontypool draper and magistrate, pointed towards a similar litany of past council involvement. An ephemeral appreciation of the issues of the Pontypool working-class did little to improve the chances of those

⁷¹ *FPM*, 25 July 1919.

⁷² *FPM*, 7 March 1919.

⁷³ *FPM*, 7 March 1919.

candidates backed by the PLA.⁷⁴ The MCC results pointed towards Liberal candidates being punished for such indifference. Both Llewellyn and Rosie were unsuccessful in the Pontypool and Pontnewynydd South contests respectively, with the solicitor David Evans being the only Liberal gain in Llantarnam. Elsewhere, Labour candidates were being returned in large numbers with seven candidates successful in contested areas, including Winstone in Pontnewynydd South.⁷⁵ The labour movement in the eastern valleys had therefore played a significant role in Labour's maiden attainment of MCC control. Successful candidates such as Tom Evans, the checkweigher elected in the Pontnewynydd South Ward, seized the moment to declare a more momentous break with tradition, and 'a definite challenge to the capitalistic class', in Pontypool.⁷⁶ Labour's belief matched the buoyancy displayed in the MCC contests and contrasted starkly with the staid and tired appeal of Liberal incumbents swiftly trounced in 1919.

However, if the MCC results of March 1919 had solidified Labour's position in the constituency, then the following disappointments of the UDC and PBOG campaigns in April represented a perplexing and almost immediate setback. Unlike in the Abertillery, Bedwellty and Ebbw Vale constituencies,⁷⁷ the Labour Party failed to gain a control of the bulk of UDCs in the division, as 'Independent' majorities persisted in Blaenavon, Llanfrechfa Upper, Llantarnam, Pontypool and Panteg. Only in Abersychan did Labour make any major inroads, where a greater mining influence was successful in making its presence felt, through the deputy miners' agent Arthur Jenkins, checkweighman W.C. Watkins and the colliers David Coldrick, G.A. Edwards and W.G. Harris. Labour also failed to grasp the opportunity of attaining a PBOG majority, as candidates were outgunned by a collection of individuals largely sympathetic to the Liberals and Conservatives.⁷⁸ Paradoxically, it seemed that Liberal candidates, such as the architect and surveyor David Clifford Udell on the Pontypool UDC, or the grocer T.W. Ruther in Blaenavon, had been rewarded for building and maintaining working relationships with other 'Independent' representatives on respective local councils.

⁷⁴ *FPM*, 14 March 1919. In Llewellyn's address printed in the *Free Press*, a single line celebrated 'the increasing acknowledgement of the rights of Labour' and sympathised with the worker's fight for greater equality.

⁷⁵ *FPM*, 14 March 1919. A further three candidates were returned in the uncontested districts of Abersychan North, Blaenavon Central and Blaenavon East. The only significant disappointment came in Blaenavon West, where the surface worker Arthur Evans was defeated by the general manager of the Blaenavon Works, John Hunt Lones.

⁷⁶ *FPM*, 21 March 1919.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 2, pp. 86-7.

⁷⁸ *FPM*, 11 April 1919.

Very few Liberal gains had been made and the immobility was less conducive to any rejuvenation of the party's local position.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, and unlike the MCC elections, a combination of anti-Labour sympathies had led to a paradoxical stability for the Liberal Party. As a result of the holding pattern, Labour had also been shut out, preventing the party from gaining the same levels of local government experience earned by Labour councillors in the Sirhowy and Ebbw valleys. The PLA may have desired greater control, but the Liberals had helped maintain an 'Independent' foothold in the UDCs of Pontypool, and stemmed the flow towards Labour as a result.

The early interwar years had therefore been a turbulent and inconsistent affair for the Pontypool Liberals. Pressing questions also remained, in relation to the tenuous message that was being disseminated by the local Association, especially in relation to the burning industrial issues that were intensifying during this period. As a result of the lack of local party records, it is difficult to ascertain the complete timeline of policy discussions within the PLA during this period, but local newspaper material can provide some coherence on the direction the Association was steering towards. In most scenarios, the PLA continued to dwell in familiar waters while promoting issues that became unifying forces across the country in the Coalition years.⁸⁰ For example, visiting Liberal speakers such as Wedgwood Benn insisted on a sustained promotion of free trade in order to 'strengthen the bonds of the Empire and tighten the ties with other democracies'.⁸¹ As expressed by the prominent Baptist minister Richard Rees, an advocacy of the League of Nations as an international 'covenant' for liberty and freedom also became a central theme of the local party's programme.⁸²

Continuing to support Asquith, the PLA also expressed its consistent dissatisfaction with the Coalition Government, most notably for its lack of principles and its reactionary approach to the economy and foreign policy. Indeed, Lloyd George's intrusion in Ireland was equated with the German occupation of Belgium in 1914 by the visiting Benn at a PLA meeting in October 1920.⁸³ The Pontypool Liberals had therefore chosen a side, as Rhys Stephens had anticipated in 1919. Yet the finite nature of these policies, represented by the resolution of Welsh disestablishment in March 1920, and the Anglo-Irish Treaty that

⁷⁹ *FPM*, 11 April 1919. Indeed, as the *Free Press* noted in its summary of the UDC results, Liberals candidates were left disappointed as Conservative candidates were 'able to steer clear of defeat'.

⁸⁰ Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster', pp. 140-4.

⁸¹ *FPM*, 2 April 1920.

⁸² *FPM*, 9 October 1920.

⁸³ *FPM*, 9 October 1920.

followed in December 1921, reminded the PLA of the need for a more robust and extensive set of policies that would draw in new voters and re-establish severed connections with the mining workforce in the constituency.

By the spring of 1921, and after months of indecision, the PLA Executive Committee finally recognised the need for a greater clarity in terms of policy. In its annual report, it declared that, ‘the time has come when the economic and industrial policy of the Liberal party should be reformulated to meet the needs of the present day’. However, there is little indication in the report of the kind of reformation the Committee wished to see instigated, or the details that this new direction entailed, except for a denouncement of nationalisation in all forms and a vague demand for ‘a practical industrial policy stating the Liberal Party’s alternatives to Communism’. Indeed, the report actually emphasised the overlap between the Liberal and Labour programmes on issues such as foreign policy, devolution, land reform and women’s questions and, in contradiction to its opening statement of intent, returned to an encouragement of Gladstonian tenets:

Your Committee advocates for a return to power of the great Liberal Party, who will work for the end of wars...for a reasonable frugality in our national expenditure; for the defence of Free Trade and a sound currency...and a carrying out in detail in Parliamentary work of the great and fundamental principals [sic] of Liberalism – Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform.⁸⁴

The clash between old and new outlooks evident in the 1921 annual report also plagued the PLA in its decision-making practices, especially in relation to prospective parliamentary candidates. Between 1920 and 1922, a prolonged process of finding a worthy candidate was set in motion by McKenna’s eventual confirmation that he would indeed be leaving the world of electoral politics to join the Midland Bank. Several individuals were considered, including Thomas Artemus Jones, the Denbighshire journalist and former Cymru Fydd promoter. Jones’ conception of Liberalism at this time rested on the renewal of individualism and the creation of a classless society. In Pontypool, he saw the opportunity to continue the tradition put in place by William Harcourt and McKenna, and carry on a Liberal

⁸⁴ *FPM*, 8 April 1921.

commitment to ‘personal freedom, personal property and personal enterprise.’⁸⁵ Jones was considered one of the favourites to replace McKenna, but ultimately lost out to Robert Lowden Connell, the Liverpool ship-owner and member of the Industrial Christian Fellowship.⁸⁶ In his acceptance of the Liberal candidature, Connell mirrored Jones’ affinity for McKenna and in subsequent speeches in the constituency he attempted to elaborate on the 1921 report in order to win over the moderate Labour vote. This amounted to an appeal for industrial co-operation, increased mechanisation in the mining industry and the essentiality of competition in improving the welfare of the country. These concepts were hardly original, and undoubtedly provocative to the Pontypool mining communities, especially when Connell made it abundantly clear that this plan would require sacrifice on their part.⁸⁷ In the wake of rising unemployment and the mounting acrimony between employers and employed after the 1921 lockout, the ineptitude of Connell inevitably failed to quell the ferment, let alone encourage an exodus from the Labour ranks. A reluctance to take a new path away from McKenna and an incomplete industrial policy, bordering on the ill-considered, potentially left the Liberal candidate, and by extension the PLA, in electoral limbo.

Intriguingly though, the fragilities of the PLA and its representatives, at least rhetorically, were not translated into local government elections, where the Liberals made a more meaningful claim for recovery in 1922. The struggles of Labour-led councils across the South Wales coalfield did not lead to sweeping changes in the MCC and UDC contests in Pontypool as the tradition of ‘Independent’ control proved largely impenetrable.⁸⁸ Liberal stalwarts such as Stephens in Pontnewynydd South, and Ruther in Blaenavon Central, aided a fightback in contests for the MCC, contributing to the relinquishing of Labour’s overall control. Checkweigher William George in Panteg was the sole Labour candidate returned in the ten contested district wards in the division as notable Labour figures, such as Arthur Jenkins and a young William Coldrick, were displaced. In his assessment, Labour agent

⁸⁵ *FPM*, 7 May 1920.

⁸⁶ Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *Dog-collar Democracy: The Industrial Christian Fellowship, 1919-1929* (London; Basingstoke, 1982), p. 28

⁸⁷ *FPM*, 24 March 1922; 7 April 1922. In one misguided instance, Connell called on the miners to lower their expectations, asserting that, ‘I know myself that you colliers have to take less money through want of efficiency in management...you won’t have an industrial solution until you bring about such a state of things’.

⁸⁸ Williams, ‘Labour and the Challenge of Local Government’, p. 145.

Howell D. Bowden lamented that, 'It would be futile to deny that the hopes of Labourites in the Pontypool Division have received a check.'⁸⁹

Admittedly, the Liberals were not alone in instigating this reversal. Conversely, one of the most significant results in March 1922 came in conjunction with the loss of Liberal candidate John Rosie in the Pontypool district, as Nellie Gower, the Conservative magistrate and increasingly influential member of the PCUA, gained the distinction of being the first woman to be elected to the MCC.⁹⁰ Elsewhere, it seemed a far more promising result for the Liberals than that of 1919. In the UDC contests the next month, Liberal councillors maintained their positions once more, and even assisted in a push back in areas such as Abersychan and Blaenavon. Stephens, Udell and Thomas Titley were also returned as Guardians as the Liberals began to encroach onto the PBOG territories represented by the Conservatives.⁹¹ Conversely, rhetorical continuity correlated with positive results for the PLA in local government and partially explains the lack of internal resolution between revised policies and the message of peace, retrenchment and reform. In reality, the success of the Liberal cohort highlighted the complex position the PLA was now in. In the short term, the gains made in April 1922 must surely have appeared as further signs of renewal and reclamation, but the Liberals were stuck in a contradictory position, maintaining an outlook which ensured a prolonged presence in the council chamber but one which did not necessarily guarantee further gains elsewhere.

Parliamentary contests provided a far sterner test of Liberal credentials, particularly when the national context had unfavourable ramifications. As the Coalition Government collapsed in on itself in late October 1922, the PCUA sought to fight the ensuing election campaign as an independent force, adopting the Pontnewydd born businessman Thomas G. Jones as its candidate and ensuring a three way fight with Griffiths and Connell for the Pontypool constituency. This was one of only several complications the PLA faced. Nationally, the Liberals remained divided, and local resentment aimed at Lloyd George's actions over the past six years had not disappeared, despite Connell's public satisfaction that the majority of PLA members were allegedly reunifying under a single party banner.⁹² The renewed association of Lloyd George with the Liberal cause also had added side effects in

⁸⁹ *FPM*, 10 March 1922; 18 March 1922.

⁹⁰ *WM*, 31 March 1922.

⁹¹ *FPM*, 7 April 1922.

⁹² *FPM*, 20 October 1922.

Pontypool, especially after Reginald McKenna's well-publicised backing of Bonar Law as Prime Minister in 1922. The latter's appearance on the Conservative platform in London sent shockwaves through the Pontypool electorate, forcing Connell to make a feeble attempt to paint McKenna's intervention as a defence of 'peace and retrenchment', and enabling both Griffiths and Jones to attack the position of Liberalism in wider British politics as dispensable.⁹³

The inadequacies of the Liberal programme, especially in industrial terms, served to reinforce this growing perception that the party now resided on the political periphery and were out of touch with the working-class majority in constituencies such as Pontypool.⁹⁴ Even though Connell elaborated on the PLA agenda, he continued to paint Labour Party policies such as the capital levy as 'extreme measures' that were too costly and impossible to instigate in a time when taxation had reached its limits. His campaign offered little else outside of a demand for uninterrupted free trade, and the prevention of waste and extravagance.⁹⁵ In his commitment to lowering taxation, promoting thrift and defending the conciliatory relationship between employers and employed, Connell also shared an inadvertent similarity with the rhetoric and propaganda put forward by the PCUA. With Griffiths eager to emphasise the similarities between Liberal and Conservative candidates,⁹⁶ Connell once again showed a lack of perception. In an interview with the *Free Press*, he claimed that owners and workers shared common characteristics and that he stood 'to bring Capital and Labour together in co-operative partnership'.⁹⁷ Connell's misjudgement of the industrial-political situation sealed the Liberal Party's fate. Even the late arrival of the fallen Prime Minister Lloyd George into the constituency could not salvage the situation.⁹⁸ Tom Griffiths returned to Parliament with 10,778 votes, almost 2,000 more than he had secured in

⁹³ *WM*, 25 October 1922; *FPM*, 27 October 1922. As Griffiths asserted at his re-adoption meeting, 'Mr. Lloyd George and his caravan were now in the wilderness. Mr. McKenna, as Sir Donald McLean [sic] put it, had given a ticket to the Conservatives.' In the aftermath of the election, Connell admitted that McKenna's decision was detrimental to the Liberal cause in Pontypool. Symbolically, the portrait of McKenna that hung in the Pontypool Liberal Club was removed in 1923.

⁹⁴ Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster', pp. 146-7.

⁹⁵ *FPM*, 3 November 1922; *South Wales Argus (SWA)*, 13 November 1922.

⁹⁶ *FPM*, 3 November 1922. Griffiths illustrated the alleged resemblance between Jones and Connell when he stated at one election meeting that, 'His calling himself a Liberal or a Tory does not alter the fact that he is an employer.'

⁹⁷ *FPM*, 14 November 1922.

⁹⁸ *SWA*, 15 November 1922. Even Lloyd George refused to disparage Tom Griffiths on his whistle-stop tour of South Wales on the eve of the 1922 General Election, encouraging the Pontypool electorate to 'choose a man to uphold your banner, who will fight on the side of progress...Vote straight for anyone who goes for progress, and who is against reaction and revolution.'

1918. Once again, the Liberal candidate had been pushed into third place by Thomas Jones and the Conservatives.⁹⁹

The PLA, and Connell himself, had therefore demonstrated a lack of understanding in an appeal to the mining majority in Pontypool. In his post-election speech, Connell recognised that reclamation had always been a tall order, when he faced ‘on the one hand socialism and on the other the Party of reaction’, but also stressed the belief in the course that he and the PLA had taken, declaring that, ‘I am certain that the Liberal ideal, the solution of the industrial problem, has impressed the community’.¹⁰⁰ Whether the purpose of this statement was a rallying cry for post-election activity, or to boost the morale of those campaigners left dejected by the result, it was clearly an inaccurate portrayal of the scale of the climb the PLA still faced. A greater understanding of the revised political environment, and the differences in strategy required between local government and parliamentary contests needed to be ascertained if the Liberals were to take the next step in regaining the constituency.

It should be pointed out that despite some glaring blind spots, and regardless of the party’s dissatisfaction with the result in 1922 the lessons that *had* been learnt in the Coalition years would serve the Liberals well in Pontypool. In stark contrast to other Liberal Associations in the industrial landscape of the county, particularly in Abertillery and Bedwellty,¹⁰¹ the PLA not only held on before the following 1923 General Election but also continued to expand its operations. Connell toured the local Liberal branches in the early winter months. He proposed an educative campaign as a way of emulating the activism of young Labour Party campaigners in the constituency, witnessed most recently during the 1922 contest. In this sense, the appearance of several branches of the League of Young Liberals in the division during this time is an extension of the aspiration to debate the ideological underpinnings of the Liberal movement and determine a path forward in the post-war environment.¹⁰² Social events, prepared by local WLA branches, were also continued into 1923, increasingly aimed at mining districts, such as Abersychan and the Varteg, in order

⁹⁹ *FPM*, 17 November 1922. The full election result was as follows: Thomas Griffiths (Labour Party) – 11,198 votes (40.6%), Thomas G. Jones (Conservative Party) – 8,654 votes (31.4%), Robert L. Connell (Liberal Party) – 7,733 votes (28.0%). The turnout was approximately 85.0%.

¹⁰⁰ *FPM*, 17 November 1922.

¹⁰¹ *South Wales News*, 14 November 1923; *WM*, 19 November 1923. See also National Library of Wales (NLW): Welsh Political Ephemera Collection, Local Liberal Associations Records, 1913-1938 NLW MSS EPHEMERA A1/11.

¹⁰² *FPM*, 12 January 1923; 23 March 1923; *WM*, 5 September 1923.

to spread the Liberal message into Labour dominated areas.¹⁰³ It was therefore resolve rather than resignation that characterised the Liberal response to the disappointment of November 1922.

The gradual transition from partial reunion to official re-unification of the Liberal Party at a national level in 1923 also heightened the PLA's optimism. Coinciding with the gradual reconciliation, the return of Coalitionist Liberals into the divisional party fold bolstered hopes of a brighter future.¹⁰⁴ More importantly, the settlement between Lloyd George and Asquith, which materialised in January and was rubberstamped in November, soon forced local Labour leaders to take stock. For Arthur Jenkins, the Eastern Valleys miners' agent who had replaced Winstone after his death in 1921, the intermittent ceasefire was a manufactured ruse, most certainly, but one which necessitated a reaction from the Labour ranks:

the divided Liberal Party of three weeks ago has changed from the practice of annihilating each other by "Kilkenny cat" practices to that of ostensible united action. From 1916 up to a fortnight ago Messrs Asquith and D. Lloyd George have been at daggers drawn. Now there is peace between the warriors. So be it!¹⁰⁵

In the spring months, local TLCs instigated an assault on the power of the 'Independent' run councils and local Ratepayers' Association, signalling a response to Jenkins' public concerns. Hostilities centred on the proposed postponement until 1933 of the Eastern Valleys Sewerage Scheme, which Labour representatives advocated, and the callousness of the PBOG in reducing miners' unemployment relief in March 1923. Labour's arguments insisted on the pressing priorities of expanding housing schemes in the eastern valleys and demonstrated an attack on indifference, aimed primarily at the 'Independent' majorities on the UDCs and PBOG which tended to 'blot out the essentials' and had previously been criticised by Jenkins and the PDLP for overlooking the needs of communities in the division.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *FPM*, 19 January 1923; 26 January 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *FPM*, 10 November 1922; Wilson, *The Downfall*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁵ *FPM*, 2 February 1923.

¹⁰⁶ *FPM*, 2 March 1923; 9 March 1923; 16 March 1923.

The TLC campaign was also a warning against complacency for the Pontypool labour movement, unsettled by the renewal of the Lloyd George-Asquith partnership.¹⁰⁷ H.D. Bowden, the divisional party agent confirmed the disquiet regarding the persistence of the Liberal threat in the constituency. He accused the PLA of spending exorbitant amounts of money in the division as part of ‘a campaign of wealth’ to reclaim the seat. Bowden’s allegations belied the PDLP’s unease that the Liberals had not been extinguished as they had elsewhere in the coalfield. Labour’s reservations also served to lift the spirits of Pontypool Liberals, not least those of William Barker. The incumbent PLA president publicly revelled in Bowden’s contentions, sensing a degree of discontent in the Labour camp.¹⁰⁸ Even though the previous election had proven the healthy position of Labour in the constituency, the public sparring matches cast an insightful eye on the competing political mentalities beginning to evolve in Pontypool. The vision of a more concerted Liberal return certainly sparked a reaction in the local labour movement which served to keep the PDLP prepared and on its guard.

There were other developments that would serve to give the Liberals in Pontypool a greater chance of success in the subsequent 1923 General Election. Stanley Baldwin’s sudden shift to protectionism split the Conservative Party, causing widespread exasperation, and carelessly allowing the Liberals to unify under the banner of free trade.¹⁰⁹ In Pontypool, the PCUA’s frustration with Baldwin’s pro-tariff stance partially explains the decision not to field a candidate in the division.¹¹⁰ However, as the campaign got underway, rumours began to circulate that a ‘tacit arrangement’ had been agreed between the PCUA and PLA to run a single anti-socialist Liberal candidate against the residing MP.¹¹¹ Rather than deny the insinuations of Griffiths that the rumours were indeed reality, PLA members openly acknowledged the agreement. At the opening of the Liberal campaign, Benjamin Nicholas, the Pontypool magistrate, commended the PCUA for standing down, claiming that Conservatives ‘were absolutely with the Liberals in their efforts to defeat the Socialistic doctrine’. After Connell’s decision to step down, newly adopted candidate, S.J. Robins also

¹⁰⁷ *FPM*, 23 March 1923. It is no coincidence that a rising influx of socialist missionaries were witnessed and recorded in the local press, including the Revd. Ben F. Wilson, the American socialist lecturer. In a speech to a large audience at the Crane Street Cinema in Pontypool, Wilson rallied against the continuing political control of ‘the old men’ and the need for ‘the great masses of the people to awaken’ to the unemployment crisis.

¹⁰⁸ *FPM*, 16 November 1923.

¹⁰⁹ Cook, ‘Wales and the General Election of 1923’, p. 390; Freeman, ‘Beyond Westminster’, p. 158.

¹¹⁰ *FPM*, 20 November 1923; 27 November 1923. It was the first time since 1884 that a Conservative candidate had been absent from the ballot paper in Pontypool.

¹¹¹ *FPM*, 23 November 1923.

welcomed Conservative support for the Liberals in Pontypool, declaring that, ‘Liberals and Conservatives are as one in this campaign against Socialism.’¹¹² While the need for the PLA to engage in pacts of this nature raises questions about the true strength of Liberalism in the division, there can be no doubting that the removal of Conservative opposition gave the Liberal Party a tangible fighting chance against Labour in Pontypool.

With the Conservatives taking up a supporting role, and the PLA standing on a firmly anti-socialist platform, the previous Liberal sympathies for the Labour programme evaporated. Robins advocated an agenda even more virulently antagonistic to ‘Socialistic proposals’ than those of McKenna and Connell had been. In almost every one of his election addresses, the Labour policies of nationalisation and the capital levy were discredited in detail as a ‘menace to the country’ as a result of their perceived impracticality and alleged deleterious impact on the British economy.¹¹³ Key to this denunciation was the deployment of international examples, such as the financial losses of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railways in Canada, or the state-owned railroads of Queensland in Australia, in order to demonstrate the frailties of socialist economic principles. Robins connected this global outlook with the issues of free trade, unemployment and social depravity, stating that, ‘There could be no radical improvement in the conditions of the people until the world was knit closer together, and only when the Liberal policy of settlement in Europe and reopening of trade relations with Russia was an accomplished fact.’¹¹⁴ Peace, retrenchment and reform therefore remained on the agenda but it was wrapped in a more pointed and critical attack on the Labour Party and socialism as a practical ideology.

In a straight fight with the PDLP, Robins’ anti-socialism may have appeared as negative campaigning but in comparison to previous contests, it was more aggressive and, in turn, impactful. Nevertheless, the Liberals still faced a shrewd opponent. Griffiths cleverly retaliated to depict Robins’ change in tone as a revelation of the Liberals’ true colours, of a party which had more in common with the hollow promises of the Conservatives rather than the demands of the labour movement.¹¹⁵ Whether Robins’ strategy would be successful in the

¹¹² *FPM*, 23 November 1923. Robins, the Penarth minister and former private secretary to the Canadian Prime Minister, had contested the Drake constituency in Plymouth at the previous election. In Pontypool, he replaced Connell who had unexpectedly decided to step down from his duties earlier in the year to contest the Waterloo division in Lancashire.

¹¹³ *FPM*, 30 November 1923.

¹¹⁴ *FPM*, 30 November 1923; 4 December 1923.

¹¹⁵ *FPM*, 30 November 1923; 4 December 1923.

long term is also debatable. As Martin Pugh has argued, the anti-socialist rhetoric and the ‘stance of impartiality’ on industrial questions contained in the party’s agenda before 1924 proved to be ‘instrumental...in severing the Liberal Party from its traditional working-class base’.¹¹⁶ Yet in the immediate electoral context, in a straight fight locally, and with Labour now posing a potent threat nationally, the calculated and combative gamble espoused by Robins and Liberal members seemed a logical alternative for the PLA to explore. Coupled with the centrist position adopted in the national party’s manifesto,¹¹⁷ the Liberals could present themselves as a clear alternative to Griffiths in Pontypool. In its more open hostility to Labour, the PLA had finally differentiated itself.

In the ensuing campaign, it appeared that the message was well received in Pontypool. Robins’ speeches attracted large audiences in localities such as Blaenavon, Cwmbran, Hafodyrynys and Pantygasseg. Sensing potential victory, speakers such as Alfred Mond, the Swansea West MP, flocked to the constituency to speak on Robins’ behalf.¹¹⁸ Robins had at least done enough to ensure the contest was a close-run affair, as the declaration of the result on 7 December proved. It was reported by the *Free Press* that the duel between Griffiths and Robins rested on ‘a balancing off of odd voters’.¹¹⁹ In the end, it was Labour who prevailed for the third time since 1918. Griffiths acquired 50.6% of the vote, an increase of just over 10% from 1922. In front of thousands of constituents outside Pontypool Town Hall, and to the tune of ‘The Red Flag’ and ‘Poor Cock Robin’ sung by his supporters, the Labour representative declared it his most triumphant victory and the nature of the straight fight had demonstrated the great progress made by the PDLP in the district. In a subsequent tour to congratulate the MP on his return to Parliament, Councillor W. Jones of the Blaenavon UDC exclaimed that the Liberal loss was a terminal blow, and ‘there was to be no resurrection.’¹²⁰

Yet, amidst the claims of a knockout blow, the 1923 campaign had in fact proven the resolve of the PLA, even in defeat. Robins may have been left frustrated but he had come

¹¹⁶ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939* (Oxford, 1982), p. 258.

¹¹⁷ *WM*, 4 December 1923; Freeman, ‘Beyond Westminster’, p. 160.

¹¹⁸ *FPM*, 30 November 1923; 4 December 1923. Mond would go on to lose his seat in Parliament. He was defeated in Swansea by the Labour Party’s Howel Samuel.

¹¹⁹ *FPM*, 11 December 1923. The local reporter for the *Free Press* suggested that the race was ‘kneck-and-kneck’ to such an extent that as votes were counted in the Concert Room of Pontypool Town Hall, both candidates and party agents resigned themselves to defeat in separate interviews to the newspaper.

¹²⁰ *FPM*, 11 December 1923. The full election result was as follows: Thomas Griffiths (Labour Party) – 13,770 votes (50.6%), S.J. Robins (Liberal Party) – 13,444 votes (49.4%). The turnout was approximately 81.6%.

within 326 votes of salvaging Liberal control in the constituency. It had taken a set of beneficial circumstances for him to get this close, but ultimately, his campaign had highlighted the continuation of party sympathies in the division, inconsistently kept alive after the successive failures of 1918 and 1922. The Liberals had at least begun to regroup and pick themselves up from the traumas of previous years, proving in the loss of 1923 that they remained a credible political force in Pontypool. At this precise moment in time, it would seem that if determination could be preserved, and a progressive and detailed programme could be developed that matched the hostile tone of the most recent campaign, then the Liberals stood a legitimate chance of rivalling Labour on the fringes of the South Wales coalfield.

III. Lloyd George's False Dawn

Despite the claims his PDLP colleagues, Tom Griffiths expressed apprehension in his broader assessment of the 1923 Election. As neither the Conservatives nor Labour had done enough to command a parliamentary majority, he predicted 'another election would be forced upon the country within the next three or four months...keep the home fires burning.'¹²¹ If this proved to be accurate, then there would also be further opportunity for a concerted Liberal fightback in Pontypool. At a Young Liberals' rally in January 1924, optimism filled the air as National League chairman Frank Crane Thornborough insisted 'Liberalism had been re-vitalised' in the constituency and across the country.¹²² Yet, through a combination of poor decisions and relative misfortune, Thornborough's affirmation was to be short-lived. Over the next five years, an attempted revival under Lloyd George's unified leadership would raise several opportunities that were not grasped by the PLA. The Liberal's evolving national programme, increasingly inspired by the Liberal Summer School movement, energised the local organisation but only in fits and starts.¹²³ By 1927, most branches and WLAs in the constituency lay dormant, only to be animated by the Liberals' wider resurgence in 1928. The result of the 1929 General Election contest in Pontypool would reaffirm Labour's dominance in the constituency and consign the Liberals to the political margins once and for all. It is therefore imperative to explore this litany of loose ends in order to demonstrate the increasing

¹²¹ *FPM*, 11 December 1923.

¹²² *FPM*, 18 January 1924. Thornborough had also run for the Liberal Party in the Morpeth by-election the previous year. He had failed to overcome the challenge of Robert Smillie, founder of the ILP.

¹²³ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North East Wales', pp. 137-8.

intermittency of the Liberal Party at a local level, its over-reliance on national policy rather than a significant expansion of constituency organisation, and its overdue yet ineffectual attempts to salvage the situation at the end of the decade.

To begin with, the slow road towards hibernation in 1927 needs appropriate examination. 1924 was a critical moment in this regard. The confidence exuded at the Young Liberals' rally was tempered by Asquith's decision to assist the formation of the first Labour Government later in the same month. At first, and in accordance with the broad understanding of other constituency associations across Britain, there was an acknowledgement of the role the Liberal Party could play in keeping the MacDonald Premiership in check.¹²⁴ This was reflected by Robins, in several public meetings organised in the early months of 1924. The prospective candidate consistently reminded his audience of a determination to fight socialism 'to the last ditch' but he also conceded that it was important that the Liberals held the balance of power, even if it meant allowing the Labour Party to hold office.¹²⁵ The perception was that MacDonald's cabinet was too divided for the Labour Government to last long beyond the summer, and the Liberals' attempts to ensure order would be seen as a responsible intervention in a fast approaching election in the constituency.

The PLA's position, reflected by Robins on his tour of the constituency, was a grave misjudgement, especially in light of the contradictory anti-socialist message perpetuated by the Liberals in 1923. Not only could accusations of hypocrisy be thrown at the party by supporters of Labour and the Conservatives, but the Liberals were now open to the charge of their own adherents of allowing a socialist government to form through piecemeal acceptance.¹²⁶ Paradoxically, and as Matthew Worley has also noted, the inability of a minority Labour administration to make radical changes, particularly in relation to public ownership and taxation, may have also put to rest the public fears of extravagant socialist expenditure.¹²⁷ MacDonald's support of free trade, for example, went further to altering public perceptions in favour of Labour policy. Coupled with the Conservative Party's

¹²⁴ Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster', p. 163.

¹²⁵ *FPM*, 18 January 1924. At one meeting at the Tabernacle Lecture Hall, Robins reassured local supporters of the need for the party to be composed in its parliamentary approach, stating that, 'so long as the Liberals are there, and are able to keep them [Labour] there doing nothing rash, they could have very easy minds.'

¹²⁶ Michael Bentley, 'The Liberal Response to Socialism, 1918-29' in K.D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain* (London, 1974), p. 55.

¹²⁷ Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars*, Paperback Edition (London, 2008), p. 79. Worley even suggests that Philip Snowden's moderation in particular, 'may have done much to convince many Liberals that Labour was now the standard bearer of its treasured ideals.'

decision to drop the protectionist position espoused by Baldwin at the previous election, pressure began to mount on the Liberal Party to construct a fresh appeal that would counteract the encroachment of opposing parties into established policy territory.¹²⁸

In Pontypool, the impact of these developments had a calamitous effect on the PLA's position. A shift away from the anti-socialism of the previous election inadvertently assisted in the rejuvenation of the PCUA, who painted the Liberal Party as the instrument of a socialist government which had conceded its oppositional responsibilities in favour of allowing MacDonald to stay in office. Visiting Conservative members, such as R.J. Pugsley from Cardiff, began to openly question the legitimacy of the Liberal Party as a political force at local meetings of the Pontypool Constitutional Club, declaring the fight now rested with 'the experience and sound doctrine of Conservatism' and 'the sentimentalism and sectional appeal of the Socialists'.¹²⁹ PCUA members concurred, agreeing that there was no place for the Liberals in this new context, and the organisation began to reorganise in order to make a challenge to Labour in the upcoming election.

PCUA preparations were swift and significant for the short term prospects of its Liberal opponents. Lionel Beaumont Thomas, the former deputy chairman of the Richard Thomas & Co. Company and member of Herefordshire County Council, was chosen as a prospective parliamentary candidate in April.¹³⁰ A revised programme was also quickly adopted, proposing the growth of imperialism and favouring free trade principles. A further expansion of the party's framework in the division was also put into motion, signalled with the formation of a branch of the JIL in Pontypool.¹³¹ The official entry of the Communist Party into Pontypool in 1924, and the rather public divisions it engendered inside the local TLCs also gave the PCUA further ammunition to perpetuate the Conservative-Labour dichotomy. At times, this involved collaboration with the Liberals, as emphasised in anti-socialist meetings held in the division. Yet it was the Conservatives, often through the work of members such as Godfrey S. Jones, president of the PCUA, and MCC Councillor Nellie Gower, who now led proceedings rather than its momentary Liberal allies.¹³² Indeed, PLA

¹²⁸ Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster', pp. 167-8.

¹²⁹ *WM*, 1 February 1924; *FPM*, 4 April 1924.

¹³⁰ *WM*, 29 April 1924.

¹³¹ *FPM*, 25 July 1924; *WM*, 23 October 1925; *WM*, 12 May 1928. Pontypool became an enclave of JIL organisation with resident W.G. Powell becoming the chairman of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Federation of the Junior Imperial League.

¹³² *FPM*, 11 March 1924; 14 March 1924; *WM*, 10 September 1924.

interventions in such displays seemed cursory at best. In its negligence, the Liberals had inexplicably encouraged the Conservatives to re-enter Pontypool politics and, in turn, made it incredibly unlikely that they would emulate, or even improve upon, the promising result in November 1923.

Scuppered by further complications, the Liberals backed themselves into a problematic corner. It was reported in the *Western Mail* that financial issues had begun to undermine the PLA, which disrupted the re-adoption of Robins or choosing a new candidate. As a result, it appears that the Liberals calculated they were not in position to take on Tom Griffiths in the current circumstances or at least that they were incapable of competing in another three way contest. It was also speculated that the PLA had considered the need to honour ‘the tacit understanding of reciprocation’ that had benefitted Robins’ campaign in 1923, allowing Beaumont Thomas a straight fight with Griffiths in 1924.¹³³ Even though such an act does not correspond with the intentions Robins expressed earlier, sentiments in favour of the decision to back Thomas were clearly strong enough by the autumn to push the Liberals towards pulling out of a rematch with Labour. Regardless of the reasoning, conceding the momentum previously accrued in 1923 was a disastrous move for the local Liberal movement to insist on. In its hesitancy and in the midst of potential financial turbulence, the PLA had allowed the Conservatives an opportunity to become the chief antagonist to the Labour Party in the constituency. The demotion had been abrupt and largely self-inflicted.

Successive decisions revealed that the PLA had resorted to a stance of damaging submission. Labour Party advertisements in the local press encouraged local Liberal supporters to vote for Griffiths, quoting the Liberal London newspaper the *Daily News* in its decree that, ‘the danger of Socialism is much less than the danger of reaction.’¹³⁴ In contrast, the PCUA distributed appeals aimed at Liberal voters, utilising Asquith’s warning of the ‘Common Danger’ of socialism to the old order of political parties.¹³⁵ Liberal leaders in Pontypool soon made their positions known. In a futile attempt to appear consistent, most sided with the PCUA. In light of early disruption to the PCUA campaign, where the interference of an alleged ‘Socialist and Communist minority’ had led to the abandonment of Beaumont Thomas’ visit to Abersychan, a meeting of 1,500 people assembled in Pontypool

¹³³ *WM*, 10 October 1924; 13 October 1924; *FPM*, 17 October 1924; 24 October 1924.

¹³⁴ *Daily News*, 11 October 1924; *FPM*, 24 October 1924.

¹³⁵ *FPM*, 24 October 1924.

to proclaim support for the Conservative candidate. Members of the PLA Executive Committee such as D.C. Udell stood on the platform with PCUA leaders such as Godfrey Jones and the town magistrate, Edgar Probyn. In his speech, Udell, the self-proclaimed 'Die-hard old Radical', accepted that he now found himself in an uneasy alliance but that Liberals must place partisanship aside in order to safeguard the principles of constitutionalism and religious liberty against the 'harvest of ruin' sown by the socialists in the constituency.¹³⁶ Udell's acknowledgement reveals just how much ground the PLA had ceded to both the Labour Party and the PCUA in the space of a few short months. The Liberal Party had not only failed to address the problems it faced in terms of its rhetorical position in constituency politics, but it had acquiesced at precisely the point it could not afford to stand still.

Walking into the wilderness with a whimper, the PLA's decision allowed Labour to maintain a firm grip on the constituency. Up against a Conservative opponent undone by the PCUA's own inactivity since 1918, Tom Griffiths was victorious with an increased 52.6% share of the vote.¹³⁷ In the aftermath of such a self-inflicted blow, a renewed attempt at Liberal organisation in the constituency was required. Initially, the PLA seemed to recognise the belated exigency of the moment. Leading members of the Association's Executive Committee, such as A.E. Jones, were present at collaborative meetings of Monmouthshire Liberals held in Newport in order to reenergise and restructure the Liberals across the county.¹³⁸ The Young Liberals were also identified as a crucial element in keeping the PLA alive in the constituency. As early as February 1925, the Pontypool Divisional Council of the National League of Young Liberals confirmed that eight branches of the movement were already active in the constituency and lectures from resident and visiting speakers were organised on a weekly basis in urban districts such as Cwmbran, Garndiffaith and Pontnewynydd.¹³⁹ These Young Liberal gatherings were almost always overtly political in

¹³⁶ *FPM*, 24 October 1924.

¹³⁷ *WM*, 31 October 1924. The full election result was as follows: Thomas Griffiths (Labour Party) – 15,378 votes (52.6%), Lionel Beaumont Thomas (Conservative Party) – 13,831 votes (47.4%). The turnout was approximately 84.5%.

¹³⁷ *FPM*, 31 October 1924.

¹³⁸ *WM*, 15 December 1924; *WM*, 31 January 1925; *FPM*, 23 January 1925; 24 April 1925. See also Paul Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party 1910-1931* 2nd Edition (London; New York, 1995), p. 54. Constituency delegates were also present at the Liberal convention held in London in January 1925, where a £1,000,000 fighting fund was introduced and unanimously accepted in order to make the party self-sufficient in its finances and constituency organisation.

¹³⁹ *FPM*, 9 January 1925; 23 January 1925; 30 January 1925; 13 February 1925.

terms of discussion and message and, as a result, these meetings were to be one of the very few consistencies for the local Liberal movement after 1924.¹⁴⁰

The forces of Liberalism were also perpetuated through non-party organisations that were beginning to appear in the division. A Rotary Club had been set up in Pontypool town in May 1924 and served to transmit Liberal principles more clearly after the acquiescence witnessed during the election campaign.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, even though Liberal ideology was being disseminated through revised channels, the PLA's position remained fragile, highlighted further by the losses to Labour in the MCC contests in March 1925. Both Blaenavon wards previously retaken were given up to Labour once more. Elsewhere, Arthur Jenkins in Abersychan and William Coldrick in Pontnewynydd North pressed home the advantage achieved by Labour in Monmouthshire who retook overall control of the MCC.¹⁴² In the UDC elections in April, Labour came agonisingly close to gaining a working majority with sympathetic co-operative councillors in Abersychan. A stalemate ensued with the 'Independents' and the representatives of the Ratepayers' Association.¹⁴³ Even so, such fine margins in mining districts, and the losses in the MCC contests the previous month, demonstrated the intensifying apathy of voters towards the Liberals in the constituency and anticipated the lethargy from party members that was to follow. The activities of the Young Liberals in the winter months gave way to a hibernation during the summer and increasingly constituency branches seemed to be running out of steam. It was therefore questionable whether the reconsiderations of 1925 had created any meaningful impact and were instead a case of keeping up appearances. More so than ever, the Liberals in Pontypool needed fresh inspiration, either internally or externally.

The spark for renovation in the constituency arrived in the shape of national policy directives such as the *Coal and Power* report published in April 1924 and, in particular, Lloyd George's land campaign that began in September 1925, ending with the publication of *The Land and the Nation* or the 'Green Book' and the *Towns and the Land* or 'Brown Book'

¹⁴⁰ *FPM*, 20 February 1925. In one such address, given by James Owen from Panteg, the 'tyranny of Toryism' was paralleled with 'the menace of Socialism'. Owen's answer to the dichotomy was the individual liberty represented by the Liberal Party.

¹⁴¹ *FPM*, 2 January 1925; 15 May 1925. According to the Rotary branch president, the Pontypool grocer Norman Richards, in denouncing class divisions in the constituency, 'the broadcasting of Rotary ideals would do an immense amount of good towards nullifying the insidious propaganda...and thus assist in stemming the tide of the gospel of hatred'.

¹⁴² *FPM*, 6 March 1925.

¹⁴³ *FPM*, 10 April 1925.

on the 9 October and 24 November 1925 respectively. While the land proposals in particular caused a significant degree of controversy for the obligatory stance on the state's control of the soil,¹⁴⁴ in industrial constituencies such as Pontypool, the implication of these policy directives was more of a spur to awaken the local movement from its slumber. Indeed, it is testament to the stagnation of the activities of the PLA that, despite previous Asquithian allegiances, local members were increasingly receptive to Lloyd George's attempts to seize control of the Liberal Party. During the land campaign, supporters of the former Prime Minister were sent into the constituencies to mobilize support for both reports and revivify Liberal organisations. In Pontypool, T.J. Macnamara, the former Minister for Labour in the Lloyd George Coalition Government, made a notable appearance at a Liberal rally in the town. In an extensive speech, he recommended the new land policies as a way to solve the wider ills of society:

Take the problem of the land. Here, too, the reuniting of the forces of progress is vital if anything effective is to be done. Land Reform is an essential precedent to the thorough treatment of most of the social shortcomings of our times.¹⁴⁵

Macnamara therefore depicted the Lloyd George land campaign as a starting point for a distinct Liberal programme that would bring back voters lost in the preceding years and reunite the factions that persisted inside the party.¹⁴⁶ It was clear that the policy shift had stirred the local movement as further enthusiastic rallies were held in Cwmbran and Pontnewynydd in favour of the party's revised industrial and rural strategy. In the latter well-attended meeting, the proposals outlined in the *Coal and Power* report, including state ownership of mining royalties, the founding of permanent welfare funds and the formation of a National Mining Council were also praised by Harry West, the Blaenavon-born Liberal

¹⁴⁴ *The Land and the Nation: Rural Report of the Liberal Land Committee, 1923-25* (London, 1925), p. 299; Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster', pp. 193-5; John Graham Jones, 'The "Land and the Nation" and Wales', *Journal of Liberal History*, 81 (Winter 2013), pp. 26-36. As Freeman and Jones have both contended, a combination of anxiety about potential nationalisation and the imposition of the policy through the newly formed Land and Nation League rather than a democratic vote of the National Liberal Federation, led to a hostile reaction in constituency associations, especially in rural areas across Britain.

¹⁴⁵ *FPM*, 18 September 1925.

¹⁴⁶ *FPM*, 18 September 1925. Macnamara's speech was praised by the pro-Liberal *Free Press* as 'a re-incarnation of Liberalism' and a 'clarion call' to the PLA to translate rhetoric into action.

campaigner, as an ‘equitable and statesmanlike solution’ to the issues of the coal industry.¹⁴⁷ It was a measure of the impact of Macnamara’s intrusion, and the activities that the new policies stimulated, that Tom Griffiths was forced to return to his constituency and address the situation. During October, the Labour MP embarked on his own local campaign, warning his constituents of the dangers of switching political allegiances and advising them, ‘not to accept the advice of Dr. Macnamara to remain slaves in Egyptian bondage, and darkness under the Pharaoh of capitalism’.¹⁴⁸ It was clear from the return of Griffiths to Pontypool that the policy revisions made by the Liberal Party were enough to provoke a response from Labour and rekindle political debate in the constituency.

Finally bolstered by a divergent industrial strategy, there were also signs that the Liberals were preparing to test the allegiances of the more moderate miners in the constituency. A Liberal Trade Union was created in Blaenavon in October 1925, under the auspices of the National Liberal Trades Union Association. A committee of twelve was established and meetings were held throughout the autumn with delegates representing the steel smelters, railwaymen, colliery examiners and teachers all in consistent attendance.¹⁴⁹ The arrival of the union was not an isolated incident but part of a national response to the growing conflict within the labour movement in the mid-1920s. As Sian Jones has argued, the existence of these organisations pointed towards the continuing belief of the party in ‘collective bargaining’ and confirms the concerted efforts of the Liberals to regain the ground lost to Labour in industrial constituencies.¹⁵⁰ It is unclear whether the Liberal Trade Union remained active during the 1926 lockout, and there is little evidence to suggest its existence was anything more than fleeting.¹⁵¹ However, its formation was yet another sign of how the PLA were receptive to, and even more reliant upon, broader initiatives from the wider Liberal Party for stimulus and motivation.

Once again though, the wider industrial and political context was to severely limit any revitalisation of Liberalism in Pontypool. The General Strike of May 1926 prompted the final skirmish between Asquith and Lloyd George further afield. Liberal branches across Britain

¹⁴⁷ *FPM*, 25 September 1925; 16 October 1925. West went on to suggest the policies represented the return of ‘stern Radicalism’ into Liberal Party calculations, signifying the positive response to Lloyd George’s strategy on the ground in Pontypool.

¹⁴⁸ *FPM*, 16 October 1925.

¹⁴⁹ *FPM*, 9 October 1925; 13 November 1925.

¹⁵⁰ Jones, ‘The Political Dynamics of North East Wales’, pp. 132-3.

¹⁵¹ *WM*, 20 September 1926; 1 November 1926.

became disenchanted with the return of squabbles between party leaders, with the majority refusing to take sides or even condemn Lloyd George for his decision to support negotiations between the miners and the Baldwin Government.¹⁵² Unable to respond to the more immediate industrial situation, the PLA remained silent throughout the ensuing lockout that engulfed the mining and urban districts in the constituency, most strikingly in Abersychan and Blaenavon.¹⁵³ Perhaps it was the path of least resistance in the context of intensifying demonstrations against connected public bodies in the division. The PBOG, for example, which still included a sizeable collective of Liberal members such as Rhys Stephens and Mary Udell, would provoke incandescent fury for its decision to discontinue relief entirely to the families of the miners during the height of the lockout in July. In the midst of the suffering, the miners' agent Arthur Jenkins labelled such a refusal as 'inhuman' and an illegal act. While it did not go as far to concur with Jenkins' condemnation, the severity of the action taken by the guardians forced the Ministry of Health to issue a letter to the PBOG insisting that further consideration should be taken before the resolution came into operation.¹⁵⁴ Protests were organised by the miners of the eastern valleys in order to combat the 'Neglect of Duty' displayed by the PBOG, coinciding with the demonstrations at the Quarry Level Colliery which saw Jenkins arrested and eventually imprisoned for riotous assembly and inciting violence.¹⁵⁵

This was not to be the last display of defiance against the PBOG. In November 1926 it decided to scrap all outdoor relief to the miners. After a march of 500 protestors had descended on the PBOG offices, the Ministry of Health stepped in once again, eventually forcing the Guardians to relent and reintroduce the meagre 5s. scale for miners' wives and 2s. scale for children. The undoubted cruelty of the PBOG was beyond comparison in the coalfield. As David James Davies has maintained, only the Carmarthen and Llandeilo Boards came close in the ruthlessness shown to the unemployed during the lockout.¹⁵⁶ It was therefore unsurprising that the PLA resorted to silence, considering the outrage expressed by the local labour movement against Liberal Party members. The PBOG had already inflicted enough damage on the reputation of non-Labour representatives in the division. Any further

¹⁵² Wilson, *The Downfall*, pp. 355-9; Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster', p. 188. The renewed infighting culminated in Asquith's retirement in October 1926.

¹⁵³ SWML: Interview of Ernest Lewis, AUD/313; Interview of W. H. Taylor, AUD/323.

¹⁵⁴ *FPM*, 6 August 1926.

¹⁵⁵ *FPM*, 3 September 1926.

¹⁵⁶ David James Davies, 'Guardians of the Needy Found Wanting: A Study in Social Division during the Industrial Crisis of 1926', *The Carmarthenshire Historian*, 19 (1982), p. 55.

attack on the Labour Party would undo the initial work of the Liberals in rebuilding bridges with local mining communities. In the wake of such trauma, and the self-imposed inertia, the PLA slipped back into a state of disarray. In the early summer of 1927, it was reported that the majority of branches and WLAs were ‘practically disbanded’ and the Liberal movement was in a state of exhaustion.¹⁵⁷

External impulses were required once more to jump-start local activism. Lloyd George’s effective take-over as leader of the party, which saw an advancement of reorganisation and strategic planning for the next election, delivered a much-needed stimulus.¹⁵⁸ At first, this was achieved on a regional basis with bodies set up to oversee spending in each constituency. In the county, the Monmouthshire Liberal Council was constituted in Newport in May 1927, with the PLA’s A.E. Jones voted in as Treasurer.¹⁵⁹ Constituency organisations were reconstituted, election agents were appointed and new parliamentary candidates were adopted as soon as was possible. In Pontypool, the PLA appointed C.B. Rowe Evans as its new secretary and agent, and adopted Geoffrey Crawshay, a direct descendant of the Merthyr ironmasters, as its chosen candidate for the next election.¹⁶⁰

With these basic requirements met, an additional push was made to galvanise the local movement into action. At a meeting of the Monmouthshire Liberal Council held in Pontypool in January, Raymond Jones, the secretary of the national Liberal Fighting Fund Committee, gave an address on ‘Methods of raising money for constituency associations’.¹⁶¹ Following Jones’ lead, ‘mass attack’ campaigns were carried out, as they were in other constituencies across Britain, with a succession of meetings organised by the PLA and branches of the Young Liberals in the constituency, particularly at Cwmbran, Garndiffaith and Griffithstown.¹⁶² By the spring of 1928, it was claimed by the Liberal Association that party gatherings, in both political and social forms, amounted to approximately sixty events per

¹⁵⁷ *FPM*, 27 April 1928.

¹⁵⁸ Freeman, ‘Beyond Westminster’, p. 190.

¹⁵⁹ *FPM*, 27 May 1927.

¹⁶⁰ *WM*, 21 July 1927; *WM*, 9 November 1954. Crawshay was also a committed member of the Gorsedd and the president of the London Welsh rugby club. It was his involvement in the Liberal Summer School movement however, which tipped the scales in favour of his selection by the PLA in 1927.

¹⁶¹ *FPM*, 20 January 1928.

¹⁶² *FPM*, 6 January 1928; 13 January 1928; 9 March 1928. For evidence of these ‘mass attack’ campaigns in other constituencies, see Freeman, ‘Beyond Westminster’, pp. 190-1.

month.¹⁶³ For the first time since 1923, there was ample evidence of a concerted and prolonged effort to revive Liberal prospects in the constituency.

Additional confirmation of the growing momentum was provided at the annual meeting of the PLA in April 1928. Indeed, Rowe Evans' report made good reading for the Liberals in showing the progress made since the decay of the summer of 1927. An active branch association was reported in each of the six urban districts in the constituency, along with nine branches of the WLA and six branches of the Young Liberal League. While it was recorded that some of the propaganda schemes had been less successful, particularly in the poor return of subscription cards, there was optimism that the house-to-house canvassing methods that had been introduced as part of the 'mass attack' campaigns over the past six months would provide meaningful results.¹⁶⁴

The ambitions raised by Rowe Evans pointed towards a new goal for the PLA, in remaining consistent in its undertakings in the constituency throughout 1928 and beyond. Crawshay concurred with this intent, declaring that there would be no "close season" for politics, so far as the Liberal Party are concerned' and that propaganda work would not be shelved for the summer as it had been in the past.¹⁶⁵ The PLA consequently accelerated its campaign and sought to compete with both Labour and the Conservatives in terms of social operations in the division.¹⁶⁶ Crawshay also remained energetic, as shown by his attendance at Liberal socials held in the division in July, and his visits to the Liberal Summer School in Aberystwyth.¹⁶⁷ Belated persistence on the part of both PLA and candidate laid the foundations for a more spirited and enterprising Liberal movement in Pontypool by the end of 1928.

A developing set of industrial policies would also aid the Liberal appeal to the constituency. The party's inquiry into widespread industrial issues, entitled *Britain's Industrial Future* had received particular local attention in the *Free Press* when it was

¹⁶³ *FPM*, 27 April 1928.

¹⁶⁴ *FPM*, 27 April 1928.

¹⁶⁵ *FPM*, 18 May 1928.

¹⁶⁶ *FPM*, 22 June 1928. In June, and in response to a similar event organised by the PCUA in May, a two day long Liberal bazaar was held in Crane Street in Pontypool town and opened by the address of Megan Lloyd George, attracting a significant attendance in the process. Lloyd George commended the PLA and the WLA branches, in particular, for their organisational efforts.

¹⁶⁷ *FPM*, 20 July 1928; 10 August 1928; 31 August 1928; 14 September 1928; 21 September 1928.

originally published in February 1928.¹⁶⁸ The eventual distillation of the report in the form of the ‘Yellow Book’ provided the materials for a workable election programme and was hastily latched upon by the PLA, with unemployment rapidly becoming the crux of its public rhetoric in the constituency. The grass roots reception became important in portraying the Liberal programme as a practical set of policies, and presenting Lloyd George as a forward-thinking leader with a renewed purpose of returning to government.¹⁶⁹ In turn, the Liberal leader’s policy pledges were praised by local PLA members, demonstrating that the distrust once harboured towards him within the local associations had been put to one side. After so many years of isolation, a reciprocal and manageable relationship between the party’s Abingdon headquarters and constituencies such as Pontypool had been initiated.

As Lloyd George launched the Liberal manifesto under the slogan of *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, committing to ‘attack’ the issue ‘in the same spirit as the emergencies of the war’, the confidence of the PLA was heightened leading into the 1929 General Election.¹⁷⁰ As the long-expected campaign opened in April, it was clear that Pontypool remained a contested electoral area. In support of Crawshay, Herbert Samuel opened his tour of South Wales at a large open air meeting in Pontypool town and stressed that the Liberal proposals were achievable: ‘The work is there waiting to be done. The men are there waiting to be employed. The money is there waiting to be invested.’¹⁷¹ In reply, Herbert Morrison, the chairman of the Labour Party, travelled to Pontypool, reminding local audiences that it was Lloyd George and the Coalition who had created the queue for employment in the first instance and that the electorate should remember that the Liberals were no more than an ‘unmitigated nuisance’ in the fight against Baldwinite Conservatism.¹⁷² Unperturbed, Crawshay depicted Morrison’s attacks as confirmation of the challenge the Liberals were now posing to the Labour Party in the constituency:

¹⁶⁸ *Britain’s Industrial Future: Report of the Liberal Industries Inquiry, 1928* (London, 1928); *FPM*, 10 February 1928.

¹⁶⁹ *FPM*, 1 March 1929. As Crawshay insisted at a meeting in Abersychan, ‘unemployment transcended all others in importance. It was a vital economic issue....to provide work for the unemployed was wise expenditure’. In a subsequent meeting in Cwmbarn, Crawshay extended his evaluation of party policy to an appraisal of Lloyd George as ‘a man of vision and power’ who had created plans for ‘real work’ that was both sustainable and would provide individual security.

¹⁷⁰ *We Can Conquer Unemployment: Mr Lloyd George’s Pledge* (London, 1929), pp. 3-22.

¹⁷¹ *WM*, 16 April 1929; *FPM*, 19 April 1929.

¹⁷² *FPM*, 19 April 1929; 10 May 1929. Tom Griffiths seconded this view in subsequent addresses, contending that the Liberals and the Conservatives remained ‘in the same industrial camp’ and describing Lloyd George as ‘a very superficial and ignorant man.’

The Liberal cause was making progress in the division and the country. The proof of that was to be found in the fact that the other Parties were beginning to decry the Party and their policy...By such methods they would place Captain Crawshay at the head of the poll on May 30th.¹⁷³

Crawshay was correct in his reference to the role of the community, but in many ways, the underlying trends of the electoral system were to work against the Liberal candidate once more. The PCUA had decided to enter the fray, this time choosing Gwilym Rowlands, the Rhondda councillor and the ‘driving force’ of the Unionist Labour Movement in Glamorgan. It should be pointed out that Rowlands faced an even greater challenge than the Liberals, as the spectre of 1926 still loomed large over the Conservative campaign.¹⁷⁴ Tensions were exacerbated by the visit of the Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain, who received a hostile reception on his arrival in Pontypool. Rowlands himself acknowledged that he was the ‘outsider’ in the fight for the seat but, crucially, his consistent denouncement of Liberal industrial policy served to hinder support for Crawshay.¹⁷⁵ Even with the improvements made to Liberal organisation and policy, another three way contest would likely lead to Griffiths holding the seat. This reality was a direct result of the Liberals’ inconsistencies since 1918. In effect, the Labour vote had now become fortified against opposition attacks. Griffiths received over 17,000 votes, the largest majority of his tenure as Pontypool MP. Rowlands lost his deposit, but even if his share was combined with the Liberal vote, the forces opposing Labour had fallen short by 1,038 votes.¹⁷⁶ Crawshay had polled relatively well in comparison to previous three way contests but it was not enough. Evidently, the Labour Party’s grasp on the constituency had become impregnable.

The decade therefore ended as it had begun for the Liberals in Pontypool. Lloyd George’s last meaningful shot at returning to power had ended in yet more party

¹⁷³ *FPM*, 17 May 1929.

¹⁷⁴ National Library of Wales (NLW): City of Cardiff Conservative Association Records, Glamorgan Unionist Labour Committee Minute Book, 1918-1930, NLW MSS CARCON/31; Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), p. 269.

¹⁷⁵ *FPM*, 17 May 1929; 24 May 1929. Indeed, Rowlands’ assessment that the election remained a straight fight at a national level between Conservatism and socialism, a point also stipulated by Griffiths on the Labour platform, created unwanted complications for the PLA, who had sought to emphasise that Lloyd George was ready to govern once again.

¹⁷⁶ *FPM*, 7 June 1929. The full election result was as follows: Thomas Griffiths (Labour Party) – 17,805 votes (51.5%), Geoffrey Crawshay (Liberal Party) – 12,581 votes (36.4%), Gwilym Rowlands (Conservative Party) – 4,188 votes (12.1%). The turnout was approximately 84.6%.

disenchantment and by 1931, as Trevor Wilson has demonstrated, the Liberals had returned to division, dissension and discontent.¹⁷⁷ In Pontypool, the Liberal malaise would now begin in earnest. The 1929 Election would be the last time the party would field a candidate under a unified banner until 1950. In every election contest since the conclusion of the Great War, they failed to recapture the seat. What the Liberals lacked, in direct contrast to Labour and the Conservatives, was a fundamental consistency. The party had been ill-prepared for the shock of defeat in 1918 but, in an even more damaging oversight, had taken too long to realise that the process of adaptation to the post-war political environment would require the blend of both organisational prowess and a resolute set of policies that would have allowed the Liberals to be nimble and fleet of foot in constituencies such as Pontypool. Between 1919 and 1923, the PLA had been organised sporadically and only utilised an applicable programme, based on detailed policies rather than ephemeral Edwardian principles, at inopportune moments. When blending both facets could have provided a more tangible evolution, the PLA could not provide such substance. When these two essential ingredients were eventually combined between 1928 and 1929, the tri-partite nature of the contest prevented the PLA from delivering the necessary results. The transition in mind-set and mentality had arrived too late and at the wrong time. As pondered by the Liberal economist John Maynard Keynes less than a decade later, ‘The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones’.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, for all of its faults, the Liberals had provided the sternest challenge to Labour in Pontypool, and helped shape the interwar political tradition of the eastern valleys even in dejection and defeat. They continued as active organisers and participants in the increasingly social aspects of political participation during the 1920s and, through the WLAs and Young Liberals, provided alternative pathways to the auxiliary movements of opposition parties. They remained the thorn in Labour’s side in the MCC and PBOG, and as a result gave the UDCs in the constituency a moderate and, at times, draconian complexion. At its strongest, the PLA had also forced both Labour and Conservative opponents to address the residual Liberal allegiances in the communities of the division, shaping the lines of engagement between each party in the process. The significance of the Liberal Party in Pontypool therefore transcended its failures at the ballot box. The future certainly looked bleak but a troubled yet important legacy had been guaranteed, even in ultimate defeat.

¹⁷⁷ Wilson, *The Downfall*, p. 379.

¹⁷⁸ John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London, 1935), p. viii.

Chapter 4

A Lonely Tradition - The Conservative Bulwark and the Case of Monmouth

In the aftermath of the 1929 General Election, an informal review of the Conservative Party's performance in Wales was published in the *Western Mail*. Written by the Rhondda West candidate, Wilfred A. Pritchard, better known as 'Treorchy' by his party colleagues, the account foreshadows the transition from hope to dejection that the election represented for the Conservatives in Wales. On the eve of the vote, a 'convivial' gathering of candidates, described by Pritchard as 'the Band of Hope', epitomised the underlying optimism of the party in Wales, where all 36 constituencies were to be contested. According to the Rhondda hopeful, there was still a realisation that the Conservatives were 'embarking upon perilous adventures' but being in uncharted territory did not deter them from 'attacking the most formidable of the enemy's strongholds.' His colleagues concurred. As William Cope, MP for the Llandaff and Barry division, suggested, 'we are contesting every seat in Wales and in Monmouthshire. Who will now dare assert that the age of miracles is past?'¹

It would be the Welsh electorate that would provide an unequivocal answer to Cope's rhetorical question. Pritchard's *Western Mail* review quickly moved on to contrast the jovial encounter with the humiliation of meeting the solitary Welsh Conservative representative after the election in Westminster. Both Pritchard and Cope had been defeated by Labour rivals, as had a further 33 Conservative candidates across the country. For the former, who decided to honour the pledge to travel to London, this was not an occasion worthy of celebration. It was instead a solemn pilgrimage to console the sole survivor of the disastrous election result. The MP for Monmouth, Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker, most commonly referred to by his middle name, welcomed 'Treorchy' in a similarly sombre fashion:

¹ *Western Mail (WM)*, 7 June 1929.

‘I can now fully enter into the feelings of the prophet Elijah when he sat in abject sadness under the juniper tree and reflected that he alone of the faithful had been left...Talk about the memorable feat of the noble Six Hundred who rode into the Valley of Death, I venture to say that our little band of Conservative candidates who so heroically stormed the Socialist strongholds in South Wales and the entrenched Liberal fastnesses in North Wales have displayed like courage in the face of the most tremendous odds. They carried the old flag with them right into the camp of the enemy...and I alone,’ he murmured afresh, “am left of the heroic little band”.²

Pessimistic references to Tennyson and the Books of Kings aside, Forestier-Walker’s isolation was indeed an electoral reality after 1929. He was now surrounded by the Labour Party, which had not only maintained its position in the industrial strongholds of Abertillery, Bedwellty, Ebbw Vale and Pontypool to the west, but had also made gains in the Brecon and Radnorshire seat to the north, Newport to the south-west and even the Forest of Dean division across the border. Even the Liberal Party had contributed to the perception of remoteness with the victory of Frank Owens in the Hereford seat, which bordered the north-eastern fringes of the Monmouth constituency. It is therefore unsurprising that the Conservative MP felt so enclosed. Forestier-Walker would struggle to shake this sense of claustrophobia even in the more comfortable surroundings of his Monmouth constituency. In a further interview with the *South Wales Argus* after his solitary success in June 1929, the Conservative representative once again cut a lonely figure, proclaiming that he had become ‘the last of the Mohicans’ for the party in Wales.³

However, Forestier-Walker’s misery belies his own role in the creation of a surprisingly robust Conservative tradition in the constituency of Monmouth that had proven it could withstand the most comprehensive of defeats.⁴ It was a tradition cultivated in paradoxical circumstances, distinctly at odds with surrounding constituencies on both sides of the border between England and Wales, and the closely guarded partition between the

² *WM*, 7 June 1929.

³ *South Wales Weekly Argus (SWWA)*, 8 June 1929.

⁴ It would not be until the 1997 General Election, when the Conservative Party failed to win a single seat in Wales, that the disappointment of 1929 would be surpassed.

industrial and rural communities in the county. In contrast to the rest of Monmouthshire, a rather divergent culture had emerged in the predominantly rural hinterland by 1929. Monmouth, as a constituency, had been refashioned into a Conservative dominion supported by a powerful triumvirate of Farmers' Union, Anglican Church and landed aristocracy, and promoted through Women's Associations, WIs and JIL branches.⁵ The combination of these influences, combined with the relative lack of effective opposition from both Labour and the Liberal party, guaranteed that Monmouth remained a Welsh electoral outlier long after 1929. Forestier-Walker's poetic illustrations of his solemn mood may have pointed towards the wider disappointment of the party after Stanley Baldwin's defeat in 1929, but all was not lost in his own division, as an enclave of Conservatism was steadfastly defended.

As this particular political tradition has survived to the present day equivalent of the Monmouth constituency, it would seem imperative that the perceived peculiarities associated with Conservatism in Wales are brought into focus. Yet studies of the Conservative Party, its culture, and associated ideologies, remain an exceptional and contentious undertaking in a Welsh context. The research of Felix Aubel has proposed a preliminary understanding of both the inescapable electoral disappointments of the Conservatives in Wales but also its underlying consistency and persistence in restricted parameters since the 1880s.⁶ Geraint Thomas has also made inroads with a nuanced approach which observes the need to examine the Conservative Party in interwar South Wales through its regional strategies and juxtaposed against the claims of anti-Welsh sentiment propagated by both Labour and the Liberal Party.⁷ Sam Blaxland's work on post-Second World War Conservatism in Wales also points towards further areas of potential research in an interwar context, such as the struggle between conceptions of 'Welshness' and 'Britishness' in the party's ideology, an issue particularly prescient in relation to border constituencies such as Monmouth, and the role of women in party structures and associated institutions.⁸ While these examples point towards the potential

⁵ See Map of Monmouthshire's Constituency and District Boundaries, p. ix. After 1918, the Monmouth constituency was the largest division in the county geographically, including the municipal boroughs of Abergavenny and Monmouth, the urban districts of Caerleon, Chepstow and Usk, and the rural districts of Abergavenny, Chepstow, Magor, Monmouth, Pontypool and St Mellons.

⁶ Felix Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaptation' (PhD, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1995); Felix Aubel, 'The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1935' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 96-110.

⁷ Geraint Thomas, 'The Conservative Party and Welsh Politics in the Inter-War Years', *The English Historical Review*, 128:533 (August, 2013), pp. 877-912.

⁸ Sam Blaxland, 'A Swinging Party? The Need for a History of the Conservative in Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 9 (2014), pp. 1-10; Sam Blaxland, 'Women in the Organisation of the Conservative Party in Wales, 1945-1979', *Women's History Review*, 28:2 (2019), pp. 236-56.

for a fresh dynamic in Welsh history, and also outline how local and regional studies are imperative to the evolution of wider research into British political history in the process, a widespread response to these interventions has been slow to emerge. This is a fundamental and ongoing concern, especially when the crucial investigations of how Conservatism found purchase in both urban and rural localities, from historians such as Nick Mansfield, arrived at almost twenty-five years ago and more recent warnings of academic neglect have been issued, most notably from Stuart Ball.⁹

In order to build on these studies and expand our knowledge of how the party operated in the first era of mass democracy, the Conservative Party needs to be examined in relation to both local political networks and wider national structures, and also in conjunction with its associated allies and rivals. Constituencies such as Monmouth became vitally important to the prospects of the Conservatives during the interwar period. Outside of its strongholds in South East England, seats held by the party in the periphery were imbued with strategic and ideological significance. Controlling these fringe areas had the potential to prevent the further acceleration of Labour's electoral momentum and Conservative resistance would give potential credence to the 'One Nation' claims espoused most emphatically by Baldwin after the end of the Coalition in 1922.¹⁰ Considering that the MUA became the major operational headquarters for party members across the county after 1918, an analysis of its development and strategy is also critical to an understanding of how the Conservative Party responded to the expansion of the franchise, and eventually universal suffrage, through a multiplying number of grass roots organisations for both male and female members.¹¹ Finally, an understanding of traditions previously overlooked can be contrasted with the often limited and ultimately futile attempts of political opponents to challenge the local Conservative hegemony. By analysing the Conservatives in Monmouth, and doing so directly alongside its adversaries in the industrial divisions of the county, this chapter will therefore demonstrate how political cultures were re-vitalised by their close proximity to adjacent and conflicting traditions, and not solely through a sense of party culture and identity.

⁹ Nick Mansfield, 'Agricultural Trades Unionism in Shropshire, 1900-1930' (PhD, University of Wolverhampton, 1997), pp. 169-207; Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), p. 7. See also Nick Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930* (Aldershot, 2001).

¹⁰ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 5 December 1924. See also Andrew J. Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin, Heresthetics and the Realignment of British Politics', *British Journal of Political Science*, 35:3 (July, 2005), p. 439.

¹¹ Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 50:4 (Dec., 2007), p. 892.

This chapter will investigate the path from Forestier-Walker's victory in 1918 to the rubber stamping of the Conservative tradition in Monmouth in 1929. It will analyse how the party negotiated a revised set of relationships with rural institutions, whilst simultaneously utilising the independence, afforded by the presence of Coalition Government, to reflect more effectively the conflicting identities of its constituents. It will then explore how the MCUA also altered its outlook and discourse to accommodate the expanding electorate through the local Conservative Women's Associations and related groups such as the JIL. Running parallel with this approach, the extent to which the nature of the rhetoric put forward by Forestier-Walker equated to the dominant Baldwinite message of the 1920s will also be evaluated. Finally, the attempts of both the Labour Party and Liberal Party to encroach on the Conservative Party's electoral dominance will be assessed. It will ultimately be argued that the failures of rival parties to challenge effectively, combined with the groundwork already implemented by the MCUA, led to the sealing of a political tradition for the Conservatives in Monmouth.

I. Building an Alliance

Speaking at a NFU meeting of the Abergavenny and Pandy members in December 1917, S.T. Griffin, chairman of the county branch, reinforced the belief that, 'The interests of the agricultural labourer and the tenant farmer are bound up together, and it is necessary that there should be good feeling between them'. Clearly, the arrival of the rival labourer's union, the NALRWU, which had been urged on by Labour organisers such as William Harris, had dictated a response.¹² In an attempt to appease disgruntled labourers over the incessant food shortages during 1917, Griffin stressed that the national executive of the NFU were holding emergency meetings to respond to the suffering. His performance, and the message of unity repeated at successive branch meetings over the final twelve months of the war, was enough for local NFU members to encourage Griffin to run as parliamentary candidate for Monmouth in both the farmer's and labourer's interests.¹³

However, to the surprise of the NFU members, Griffin declined to stand at the General Election of 1918, leaving local farmers with a straightforward choice between

¹² *SWWA*, 3 February 1917.

¹³ *Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser (AC)*, 7 December 1917; *WM*, 28 November 1918.

Forestier-Walker and his Liberal opponent, the landowner and agriculturalist Hubert Martineau.¹⁴ Both candidates were sympathetic to the Coalition, and even though the rural districts of the county had previously been represented by the Liberal Ivor Herbert, some resentment was now raised by local constituents that Forestier-Walker, who resided in Rhiwderin, and who had previously been defeated in the South Monmouthshire constituency on two occasions during 1910, would suddenly be challenged by ‘an outsider’ from Holyport.¹⁵ Forestier-Walker also received an unintentional helping hand, when it was decided by both Liberal and Conservative headquarters that the two challengers would not receive the official support of Lloyd George or Bonar Law.¹⁶ With both candidates supportive of the Coalition yet unable to claim the ‘coupon’, the localism perpetuated by Forestier-Walker provided him with a clear initial advantage during the campaign.

Nevertheless, it was to be the verdict of the farmers that would help decide the clash of the self-proclaimed Coalitionists. An approval from the NFU would help guarantee critical support from the influential farming community, as well as a large number of agricultural workers in the constituency, unwilling to risk their occupations by voting against their employers. Ominously though, there was clearly work to be done to convince the union, which contained members in its ranks who were sensitive to both the Liberal Party and the Conservatives. Indeed, it was noted by the *Abergavenny Chronicle* in the opening weeks of the contest that the decision of local branches in the division ‘had not yet been settled’, and that disagreements lingered in the county branch of the NFU over which candidate to support.¹⁷ At a critical meeting of the Abergavenny members, Forestier-Walker made his move. When asked to stand by the programme of the NFU’s national executive and to support the farmer’s manifesto independent of party policy, he wholeheartedly agreed to sign the declaration. Martineau refused to make the same concessions and immediately found

¹⁴ National Library of Wales (NLW): MCAU Records, Minutes of Special Meeting of the South Monmouthshire Conservative Association, 21 November 1918, NLW MSS MONION/1. Forestier-Walker was unanimously accepted as a Conservative Party candidate.

¹⁵ *WM*, 11 November 1918; *AC*, 22 November 1918; 6 December 1918. As the former Conservative County Councillor John Owen March claimed during the election campaign in December, Forestier-Walker had a ‘strong claim to the seat’ due to his record of service on the St Mellons RDC, and his work as chairman of the health and education committees on the MCC. The Conservative candidate had been a part of both council committees since 1907.

¹⁶ *WM*, 4 December 1918; 12 December 1918. *Manchester Evening News*, 6 December 1918. While Forestier-Walker was inaccurately referred to as the ‘Unionist Coalition’ candidate in some press reports, there was no official Coalition candidate. This did not prevent Lloyd George from attempting to counteract the decision. His wife Margaret visited the Monmouth constituency on her tour of South Wales in early December, and spoke on behalf of Martineau.

¹⁷ *AC*, 22 November 1918.

himself on the back foot. As a result, Forestier-Walker's promise to the farming community was decisive.

In light of Martineau's rejection, Monmouthshire's NFU branches decided to motion almost universally in favour of the Conservative Party. As summarised by the secretary of the county organisation, Homfray Davies, 'they [the NFU] had to forget all about politics', and ensure the farmer's interest was represented in the House of Commons.¹⁸ At subsequent NFU branch meetings in Usk and Trelleck, the enthusiasm for Forestier-Walker appeared to have been vindicated, as he pressed for further leasehold enfranchisement, the acquisition of land 'on fair and equitable terms' and improved housing for labourers in the small holdings across the constituency. While Martineau found favour with labourers and NALRWU members in areas such as Shirenewton, who praised him for standing up to the 'tyranny' of the farmers and their high prices, the damage had already been inflicted.¹⁹ With the backing of the NFU, Forestier-Walker would make his way to Parliament at the third attempt, defeating the Liberal by a majority of 2,975.²⁰

Whether or not he intended to maintain his promise to the branches of the NFU, Forestier-Walker established his commitment to agricultural questions both in the House of Commons and as the Welsh representative on the Forestry Commission formed in November 1919.²¹ In Monmouth, the new Conservative MP had revealed an aptitude for forming integral relationships with rural bodies of influence, even if it resulted in his independence from the policies of the Coalition Government he supported. Of course, Forestier-Walker's familial connections, as a cousin of Lord Tredegar, gave him an even greater security in this regard but, as previous failures had testified, this was not a guarantee of electoral victory. Neither was the breakthrough the work of Forestier-Walker alone. His agreement with the farmers, and the continued connection between the MCUA and the NFU branches after 1918, hinted at the attempt to build a 'conservative ideological hegemony', based not solely on 'ancient loyalties, a sense of place and surviving paternalism', but also an expanded rapport

¹⁸ *WM*, 4 December 1918.

¹⁹ *WM*, 5 December 1918; 10 December 1918; 12 December 1918; *SWWA*, 14 December 1918. The NALRWU had hoped to nominate the treasurer of the Monmouth branch, Tom Higdon, as a candidate but without any effective Labour Party apparatus for support, they reneged and decided to back Martineau.

²⁰ *Cambria Daily Leader (CDL)*, 28 December 1918. The full election result was as follows: Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker (Conservative Party) – 9,164 votes (59.7%), Herbert Martineau (Liberal Party) – 6,189 votes (40.3%). The turnout was approximately 55.7%.

²¹ *WM*, 11 November 1919; Hansard, Vol. 122, columns 1143-4, 9 December 1919. See also *Welsh Outlook (WO)*, 10:7, July 1923.

with rural organisations built in the aftermath of war and franchise reform.²² The determination to build a sustainable political culture was initially to be co-ordinated around a specific set of alliances. The relationship with the NFU secured in December 1918 was merely the beginning of this plan. For the MCUA as a collective, these foundations were all important in building upon both the historic and present relationships between the party and the surrounding localities defined by their commitment to agriculture and the Anglican Church. The Conservative tradition in the constituency was therefore not simply a result of passive deference made more potent by the redistribution of seats in the county, but was instead acquired through the rallying of partnerships already rooted in Monmouthshire's rural society and matched by an astute response to the independence gifted to the party by Lloyd George's Coalition Government.

Expanding the support network was also a process of renewal as well as rejuvenation. A survey of the composition of the reformatted MCUA reveals the enduring influence of the landed families in the hierarchy of local Conservative politics. The residing president of the organisation remained Courtenay Morgan, Lord Tredegar and the third Baron of the estate. Alongside Forestier-Walker as vice president stood Lord Raglan Fitzroy Somerset, as well as J. C. Hanbury and Lady Llangattock, Georgiana Rolls.²³ Often perceived to be indifferent to local politics, these representatives of Monmouthshire's landed estates did not merely fill ceremonial MCUA positions but were active participants in the cultivation and maintenance of a Conservative culture in the county's rural districts. Indeed, the most prominent of them exercised a considerable control. Lord Tredegar, for example, had not only been defeated as a Unionist candidate in South Monmouthshire in 1906, but had also engaged in a number of different activities with organisations either associated with, or sympathetic to, the Conservative Party itself. He presented himself as a public benefactor and active patron of the Church of Wales in the county. After the end of the war, he became the inaugural president of the Welsh Council of the Comrades of the Great War (CGW), an ancillary of the pressure group formed nationally across Britain in August 1917 which campaigned for the rights of ex-service men and women on issues such as pensions and rehabilitation. The Welsh Council

²² Mansfield, 'Agricultural Trade Unionism', p. 220. See also Nick Mansfield, 'Farmworkers and Local Conservatism in South-West Shropshire, 1916-23' in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public Since the 1880s* (London, 2002), pp. 36-57.

²³ NLW: MCUA Records, Minutes of Annual Meeting of the Monmouth Unionist Association, 9 February 1921, NLW MSS MONION/1.

subsequently sought to supervise the growing number of branches across Wales, including in areas such as Monmouth and Newport.²⁴

The Raglan and Llangattock figureheads also played similar roles which went beyond the symbolic stereotype of patron. Somerset had been a justice of the peace since 1909 and would become a member of the MCC in 1928, gaining re-election without setback until 1949.²⁵ Georgiana Rolls was also a recognised philanthropist and social activist. Up until her death in 1923, she remained the president of the Monmouthshire branch of the British Red Cross Society and, in the process, was actively engaged in the establishment of Voluntary Aid Detachments in the county.²⁶ The close connection between the MCUA and the landed estates helped fortify the position of Conservatism in the rural constituency. The economic and financial values associated with the party were also reinforced by the presence of some of the most powerful industrialists in the shire on the general committee of the MCUA, including John Wyndham Beynon, William Lysaght and Leonard Llewellyn.²⁷ A combination of landed and industrial interests therefore characterised the bedrock of Conservative organisation in Monmouth.

The collation of these local power structures, allied to the agreement with the NFU, was important in the context of the growing momentum of the rural trade unions in the region between 1919 and 1920. The renamed branches of the former NALRWU, reconstituted as offshoots of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW), were outperforming the NFU in terms of spread and membership in villages such as Catsash, St Arvans and Portskewett. The alternative Workers' Union, forcefully endorsed by Sidney Box, was also making its voice heard against the oppression of the farmers and the gentry in the northern districts surrounding Abergavenny.²⁸ Flashpoints further afield pointed towards a potentially unified struggle, as the threat of strike action over wage demands in Glamorgan threatened to

²⁴ *WM*, 26 July 1919; 4 May 1934.

²⁵ Dean A. Miller, 'Somerset, Fitzroy Richard, Fourth Baron Raglan (1885-1964)' in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 51* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 588-9.

²⁶ *WM*, 3 April 1923; Robin Jones, *The History of the Red Cross in Monmouthshire (Gwent) 1910-1918* (Pontypool, 1988), p. 12.

²⁷ NLW: MCUA Records, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Monmouth Unionist Association, 9 February 1921, NLW MSS MONION/1.

²⁸ *Monmouthshire Weekly Post (MWP)*, 1 February 1919; 8 February 1919; David Pretty, *The Rural Revolt The Rural Revolt that Failed: Farm Workers' Unions in Wales, 1889-1950* (Cardiff, 1989), pp. 133-7. Eighteen NUAW branches were recorded across Glamorgan and Monmouthshire by the end of 1918. Sidney Box (1873-1958), who had formed an agricultural workers' union in his native Herefordshire before the war, was at this point supportive of the ILP and Labour Party, having stood for the latter in the Hereford division during the 1918 General Election.

spill over into Monmouthshire in 1920. However, provocation did not lead to widespread demonstrations of discontent. As David Pretty has contended, a 'high-paying tradition' was maintained by both the Agricultural Wages Board and the Glamorgan and Monmouth District Wages Committee, reaching a peak in the summer of 1920 which discouraged strike action. Indeed, it appeared that neither the NUAW or the NFU 'had the stomach' to embark on further escalation.²⁹ It would also be inaccurate to suggest that the agricultural communities in the county had been entirely swept up in the campaign for unionism. As one heckler illustrated at a Workers' Union meeting in Grosmont, the rhetoric of 'class hatred' voiced by Box was not welcomed by 'a law-biding and contented people'.³⁰ Clearly, not everyone was convinced that the agricultural unions would bring a return to prosperity in Monmouth.

While the contentment of the protestors was not to last, an element of misfortune ensured that the rural unions did not go on to convert the promise demonstrated after 1917 into a sustained presence in rural Monmouthshire. As the national economic position worsened in 1921, the Agricultural Wages Board was disbanded. Subsidies and price guarantees on oats and wheat, previously provided by the Coalition, were reversed, leading to a cut in wage bills by farm holders. The scourge of rising rural unemployment was to follow.³¹ The NUAW, and the Workers' Union in particular, were in a position to fight localised battles but not an all-out war. Without the Wages Board, they could not cope with the added reliance on agricultural unions to provide collective relief and support. Membership plummeted as a consequence and branches rapidly declined, much to the regret of campaigners such as A.W. Pittman and Box.³² Worse still for these leaders, the NFU remained intact and emboldened by the plight of the opposing labour unions. As a result, the Conservative influence over the agricultural labourers was in a position to be restored on the land and at the ballot box, through the influence of both farmer and parliamentarian alike.

Conservative Party influence on everyday life was also bolstered by the maintenance of the Anglicanism in rural districts and the persistent ties between the Church and the gentry in the Monmouthshire countryside. It was of course no coincidence that the decision to split the Llandaff diocese and create a new Monmouth bishopric took place at Lord Tredegar's

²⁹ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, p. 135.

³⁰ *Monmouthshire Beacon (MB)*, 6 August 1920.

³¹ Ian Pincombe, 'The Rural Economy' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 117.

³² Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, pp. 150-8.

estate office in January 1921. Indeed, it was on the motion of Morgan, and seconded by William Curre, member of the MCC and MCUA Executive Committee from Chepstow, that the initial decision was made to secure the position of the Church in the county.³³ Forestier-Walker was also a key part of this consolidation, and not only in relation to his local Graig Parish Council near Rhiwderin. Indeed, he had already been heavily involved in the early post-war restructuring of the Church in his first year in Parliament. As noted in the *Welsh Outlook* in November 1919, the fledgling MP ‘took a most prominent part...in connection with the secret diplomacy over the Welsh Church situation’ before official disestablishment. Forestier-Walker was rewarded for his prior service by being selected as a Welsh Church commissioner in October, a position he would hold until his death in 1934.³⁴

The MCUA influence was therefore at the centre of this religious restructuring, both in rural areas of the county and across Wales. In return, the Church ensured the protection of a top-down rhetoric and stifling social control long perpetuated by representatives of the landed estates and the Conservative Party since the nineteenth century. While Matthew Cragoe has argued that the institution was largely depoliticised in other rural regions in ‘fin-de-siecle’ Wales, most strikingly Carmarthenshire, the muted paternalism of the clergy and the preservation of a revised yet familiar organisational structure after the war intimated the desire to maintain a network which was largely convivial to Conservatism and its return at the ballot box.³⁵ The pattern was not unique to rural Monmouthshire itself but this restoration resonated across the agricultural landscape. Under the command of the demanding Charles Green, the first bishop of Monmouth, and the following redistribution of six new deaneries in Abergavenny, Chepstow, Monmouth, Magor, Raglan and Usk, the pyramidal religious arrangement that had existed for generations was once again enshrined through the pro-cathedral at St Woolos and beyond into the revised network of parishes. It has also been suggested by Jeremy Morris in relation to the interwar period that ‘Anglicanism in Monmouthshire struggled to shake off its elitist reputation.’³⁶ Perhaps though, it was not so much a struggle as an implicit strategy on the part of both Bishop Green and the sympathetic

³³ *WM*, 2 February 1921; 4 January 1922.

³⁴ *WO*, 6:11, November 1919; *Western Daily Press*, 19 October 1921.

³⁵ Matthew Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 240-6.

³⁶ Jeremy Morris, ‘Religion’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 249.

leaders of the MCUA to maintain a social stratum and the inculcation of a specific set of mores which benefitted both parties.

The creation of expedient ‘ententes’, fastened to the resurrection of old alliances, gave rise to an assertive Conservative Party in Monmouth. The result was an embryonic, yet incisive, political culture which was idiosyncratic in relation to neighbouring constituencies and the industrial divisions to the west. This rapid recovery was even more striking when seen in light of the disquiet inside the party as a whole. It was already clear that Conservative Party leaders had grown increasingly wary of the compromise required of its representatives in Parliament as part of the Coalition Government and how this might impact constituency branches. While party leaders, including Austen Chamberlain, publicly encouraged a ‘spirit of compromise’ between Lloyd George and the Conservative rear-guard at the Conservative Party Conference in June 1920, it was also noted by several onlookers, including the reporter for the *Western Mail* that, ‘Some anxiety was expressed...as to the preservation of the distinctive position of the party.’³⁷ These muted suspicions gradually developed into more rounded objections to the Coalition from, as Kenneth O. Morgan has described, the ‘Die-Hards’ such as Andrew Bonar Law, George Younger and their allies on the parliamentary backbenches. Early hostilities rested on the foreign policy agenda of Lloyd George but quickly mutated into discontent over Addison’s domestic programme and ‘extravagant’ public expenditure. More alarmingly, local Conservative Associations also began to voice concerns about the lack of direction, accelerated by the Anti-Waste movement of Lord Rothermere in 1921.³⁸

However, there was a lack of consistency across Britain in terms of the revolt against Coalitionism, and the relationship with Lloyd George could be utilised as well as disparaged. In Monmouth, without the tangible attachment to Lloyd George through the ‘coupon’, Forestier-Walker was able to both empathise with the Coalition and remain largely untouched by its severest detractors after 1918. This did not prevent some external disapproval, but his fluid position in Parliament allowed him to confidently address the small number of critics. After recording his support for the Coalition budget in Parliament in 1920, and being included on a list of ‘Wasters’ in the Northcliffe press, the Conservative MP addressed the

³⁷ *WM*, 11 June 1920.

³⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922*, Reprinted Edition (Oxford, 1986), pp. 236-54; Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 43-9.

issues at hand at a meeting of the Abergavenny Women's Association. In his address, Forestier-Walker attempted to portray himself as an informed and responsible representative who had been persuaded by the evidence, rather than a member of either the 'pro' or 'anti' faction emerging in the party:

It was a very different thing to sit in the House of Commons and hearing the facts and the arguments, to come to a decision. He [Forestier-Walker] should like to see anyone appearing on a platform and suggest that houses were not needed... What would people have said if there had been no arrangement to convey food into different districts? They would have criticised the Government for not being prepared. If the critics had been in the position of hearing the facts as he was, he was convinced that any commonsense man would have voted as he did.³⁹

There was therefore a relative autonomy afforded to Forestier-Walker after 1918 and he used the freedom to his advantage. In this context, the Conservative representative and the MCUA also manufactured a persona which was sensitive to the conflicting identities contained in Monmouth and appeased local demands. Two issues ensured the hurried creation of this public position. The first erupted in the summer of 1921. Monmouthshire's exclusion from the Sunday Closing Act was once again placed on the parliamentary agenda, with the introduction of a potential Bill seeking to extend legislation to include the county after the dissolution of the Liquor Control Board. Local indications pointed towards a hostile reception, though surveys were by no means comprehensive. In July, the *Free Press of Monmouthshire* polled its readers on the matter and received an overwhelming response against the extension, with only 78 votes in favour compared to 5,166 opposed. Considering the readership of the newspaper centred on Pontypool, Abergavenny and the north-east rural districts, the small-scale nature of the poll could not possibly reflect the views of the majority. A larger county-wide petition, containing 77,554 signatories rejecting the inclusion of Monmouthshire in the Act, was delivered to Parliament but faced similar issues of scope.⁴⁰

³⁹ *WM*, 7 December 1920.

⁴⁰ *Free Press of Monmouthshire (FPM)*, 22 July 1921; 29 July 1921; 12 August 1921; *South Wales Argus (SWA)*, 29 July 1921; 2 August 1921; 6 August 1921.

However, polling did serve a purpose in hinting at, in a rather limited and unsubtle fashion, the tensions still residing underneath the surface of Monmouthshire society, those which the MCUA needed to echo in its response.

As a result of the lack of clarity, Forestier-Walker initially erred on the side of caution. He tentatively called for a more widespread response to the proposed extension Bill and hesitantly suggested that he was in favour of ‘decent restrictions, but of nothing like Sunday Closing’. Gradually, however, he rejected the disparity in legislation between Monmouthshire and England across the border, and moved an amendment to the legislation to strike Monmouthshire from the proposals, contending in one parliamentary debate that, ‘The People in that county were conceited enough to think they were as good as Englishmen and desired the same treatment’. With his views increasingly transparent and pressure on him from the Monmouthshire Licensed Victuallers’ Association to stand opposed, he voted against the Bill in the House of Commons, although the ‘Ayes’ would still win by 190 votes to 81.⁴¹ In his own personal tussle with the issue, and his final judgement, Forestier-Walker had internalised the disparity of opinion openly expressed in his home county.

Forestier-Walker’s stance appeared to place him in line with the anglicised contingent on the periphery of the division on the Wales-England border. However, as Chris Williams has discussed, support for, or against, the principle of Sunday closing often transcended questions of national identity and being on either side of the divide did not necessarily define an individual being in either the ‘pro-Welsh’ or ‘pro-English’ camp.⁴² Monmouth’s MP was no exception. In fact, he personified this paradox with his approach to the second issue he needed to negotiate soon after his election, namely support for devolution in Wales. Self-government had continued to be discussed during the war and found its most united form through the Whitsuntide Llandrindod Conference in June 1919. Indeed on this issue he joined forces with fellow Conservative figures from across Wales such as Amos Child Kirk, the Lord Mayor of Cardiff, radical Liberals such as E.T. John and Llewellyn Williams, and prominent members of the labour movement such as James Winstone and R. T. Jones, secretary of the North Wales Quarrymen’s Union. Together, they unanimously passed a resolution in advocacy of ‘A comprehensive measure of autonomy for Wales, including Monmouthshire, and...that such autonomy should take the form of a Parliament in Wales’.

⁴¹ *WM*, 23 July 1921; 27 July 1921; 28 July 1921; 9 August 1921.

⁴² Chris Williams, ‘Who Talks of My Nation?’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), p. 344.

With a mix of delight and relief, the *Welsh Outlook* asserted that, ‘Self-government has ceased to be a party question, and has become a national issue... a living issue on which Wales is determined and united.’ An Executive Committee was subsequently formed to create a Wales and Monmouth Home Rule Association and to co-ordinate publicising of the issue in public life, with Forestier-Walker as chairman.⁴³

Subsequent opportunities to promote these demands to Parliament arrived with the 1919 Speaker’s Conference in October 1919. The success of Sinn Fein and the demise of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the 1918 General Election had also led to a sustained consideration of the benefits of federal governance in the Celtic fringe of Britain. In 1919, a Speaker’s Conference was organised in order to consider not only federal devolution to England, Scotland and Ireland but also whether this form of Home Rule could be applied to Wales.⁴⁴ Two structures were put forward, one based on the creation of transitional Grand Councils for each nation represented at Westminster, and the other centred on an immediate strategy for Home Rule along federal lines. Forestier-Walker unequivocally supported the latter federalised scheme. He was the only MP from Wales to vote for this alternative.⁴⁵

The Conference produced a perplexing picture of a parliamentary impasse on the subject of British federalism. The resulting report reflected this indecision and failed to satisfy those Welsh representatives such as E.T. John and Forestier-Walker who had also attended the Llandrindod gathering. Nevertheless, the latter remained undeterred in his core support of the demands at hand. Writing in the *Welsh Outlook* in the aftermath of the Conference, he admitted disappointment at the limited options discussed during the proceedings but also outlined the practical benefits of ‘subordinate legislatures’ in England, Scotland and Wales for reducing the workload of Parliament. It was asserted that such responsibility could be extended to ensure the post-war domestic recovery.⁴⁶ Forestier-Walker’s commitment in this regard was also significant from a local perspective. Indeed, as he proclaimed in 1921, any future decision in favour of Home Rule for Wales would need to include the county of Monmouthshire, and, by extension, his own constituency.⁴⁷ Forestier-

⁴³ *WO*, 6:7, July 1919.

⁴⁴ David Melding, *Will Britain Survive Beyond 2020?* (Cardiff, 2009), p. 196.

⁴⁵ Melding, *Will Britain Survive*, pp. 196-7; Mark Drakeford, ‘Devolution and the Welfare State: The Case of Wales’ in Gideon Calder, Jeremy Gass and Kirsten Merrill-Glover (eds.), *Changing Directions of the British Welfare State* (Cardiff, 2012), p. 178.

⁴⁶ *WO*, 7:8, August 1920.

⁴⁷ *WM*, 26 August 1921.

Walker's sensibility on the issue of Sunday Closing, and his contradictory individualism on the subject of Welsh devolution, therefore demonstrated his capacity to manoeuvre effectively in the context of growing dissatisfaction with the Coalition, and also highlighted his increased understanding of the divergent mentalities of his constituents.

As collaboration with other like-minded representatives from opposition parties became possible through the prism of federal self-governance, it was also clear that the Conservative Party network in Wales also needed to be strengthened. A party framework that brought together branches from across the nation was required. In October 1921, the Wales and Monmouthshire National Conservative Council was established for this very purpose. Provincial activities would not be superseded but instead 'harmonised' under this new body, seemingly enabling both national and local party leaders to address 'Welsh national feeling on questions of political importance' and 'to reap the full benefit of Welsh national sentiment'. The inaugural meeting of the Council in the following December invited the presidents, chairmen, vice-chairmen, treasurers and secretaries of each of the four Welsh provinces alongside representatives of Unionist organisations in each of the 36 constituencies across Wales. 392 members and an 117-strong Executive Committee were elected and the presidency of the Council would be rotated between the provinces.⁴⁸ The development was welcomed by party organisations across Wales, including the MCUA.

In reality, the MCUA were far more prepared and structured than the majority of Conservative Associations in Wales. They had regrouped and crafted the partnerships that would safeguard the seat in the likely event of the Coalition's collapse. An opportunity to demonstrate the renewed strength arrived in the form of the 1922 General Election. At a well-attended meeting of the MCUA in Newport, including delegates from Goytre to Chepstow, Lord Tredegar declared in his opening address that while he had once been a 'strong Coalitionist' the time had come for the party to provide 'a stable government and bring about the tranquillity of the nation.' Forestier-Walker was unanimously re-adopted as the Conservative candidate for Monmouth as the party celebrated its reclaimed independence.⁴⁹ The self-assurance was more than just ceremonial as the MP would be returned without a contest. Labour decided to step down just before nomination day and even the Abergavenny

⁴⁸ *WM*, 19 October 1921; 21 November 1921; Aubel, 'The Conservatives in Wales', p. 104. The initial meeting was held on the 8 December 1921. It was chaired by Robert Windsor-Clive, the Earl of Plymouth, and Austen Chamberlain, the leader of the Conservative Party.

⁴⁹ *SWA*, 1 November 1922.

Liberal Association, after finding no individual willing to stand, was forced to admit that ‘They had found their Member, Mr. Forestier-Walker, very useful’.⁵⁰ The Conservative hold on the constituency already appeared to be both powerful and pervasive.

Nevertheless, there was still work to do. The lack of a fight in 1922 did not mask the fact that a further concentration of activity was required to ensure electoral continuity, particularly in relation to party structures and in the MCUA’s appeal to the broader rural electorate. Forestier-Walker was certainly not content with the ease of his election. Amidst the frivolities of a party social organised by the Chepstow Women’s Association, he implored the local branch to ‘perfect their organisation...the next time our opponents might not give us a walk-over’.⁵¹ With the subsequent death of Bonar Law, and the appointment of Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister in May 1923, a revised rhetoric would also be advanced by the MCUA which respected the party’s new direction alongside the persistent demands of Monmouth constituents. It is these critical functions that would define the next phase of the MCUA’s interwar adaptation.

II. Fortifying the Stronghold

On rising to the platform to address the Abertillery Women’s Unionist Association in January 1928, Alice Forestier-Walker, the president of the corresponding Association in Monmouth, urged her audience to heed the lessons of the Bible, instructing the crowd that had congregated in the town’s Conservative Club that ‘Our Saviour taught class love, and not class hatred, but we never hear a word about class love.’ It was a message reciprocated by her husband in Monmouth and transmitted by Baldwin on the stump across Britain. In thanking Alice for her rousing speech the Abertillery Association’s chairwoman, Mrs. William Jones, lamented the lack of organisation in her own constituency where there was no equivalent body for male members and no party agent active in the Ebbw Fach valley. Jones and her colleagues agreed that they needed ‘a missionary’ to oversee the spread of Conservative sympathies into her own community.⁵² The contrasting fortunes of the two Women’s

⁵⁰ *WM*, 4 November 1922; *SWA*, 6 November 1922.

⁵¹ *WM*, 24 November 1922.

⁵² *South Wales Gazette (SWG)*, 6 January 1928. Alice Forestier-Walker (1866-1950), was already a leading Conservative organiser and activist in the Monmouth division, serving as president of the Monmouth Women’s Unionist Association throughout the entirety of the 1920s.

Associations therefore represented both the improved prospects for the MCUA in the rural districts of the county and the strength of the Labour tradition to the west which had been successful in sapping the energy of the receding minority of Conservative Party adherents in the Monmouthshire coalfield.

In response, Alice dissuaded the Abertillery contingent from giving up hope, reassuring them that ‘They had Goliath against them, but if they had faith and were enthusiastic it was extraordinary what they could do.’⁵³ It was no surprise that Alice transmitted such encouragement in the midst of hopelessness. Using Monmouth as a template for expanded operations, albeit radically dissimilar in its topography and composition to the Abertillery division, the challenges of collaboration in an industrial environment must have appeared to her unlikely but not insurmountable. Indeed, Alice’s efforts in Monmouth alongside her fellow women activists had seen a significant swathe of political activity across the constituency through the Women’s Associations, WIs, and JIL branches. The successful spread of these organisations underlined the execution of a fruitful plan almost ten years in the making. The determination of the Monmouth Women’s Unionist Association prompted the MCUA as a whole to respond to the demands of new women members, the wider electorate, and the next generation of voters. Therefore, the Conservative Party in rural Monmouthshire did not rely solely on the relationships that they had already fostered. On the contrary, they actively sought to broaden the boundaries of this network, based on the opportunity to entice a wider audience, both working-class and middle-class, through an articulation of a rebranded political philosophy.

More broadly, the need to create sustainable institutions in response to mass democracy was recognised early by Conservative Party leaders. Initially, the Women’s Unionist Organisation (WUO) was formed in 1918 to shape a manageable system of local, regional and national women’s groups. As a result of the work of talented strategists such as Caroline Bridgeman, Gwendolen Guinness and Marjorie Maxse, the WUO quickly assisted a proliferation of women’s organisations across England and Wales. By April 1921, there were 1,340 Women’s Associations already formed and within three years this had grown to 4,067 branches. By the close of the decade, there was an estimated total membership of

⁵³ *SWG*, 6 January 1928.

approximately 1,000,000.⁵⁴ Opposition parties failed to match this unrelenting pace, instigated by the WUO. As Neal McCrillis has noted, the increase in Conservative Women's Associations compared favourably with the spread of both the Liberal Women's Associations under the umbrella of the Women's National Liberal Federation and the Women's Sections of the Labour Party.⁵⁵ In constituencies, the Women's Associations were critical to the perseverance of Conservatism locally. Members were important driving forces during elections through increasingly intensive canvassing strategies and the distribution of material such as pamphlets, periodicals and party literature that increasingly addressed women voters directly.⁵⁶ Branches were also crucial in embedding Conservative ideology into everyday life through social activities for both members and the wider populace, from summer garden parties to raffles and whist drives.⁵⁷ It was through the Women's Associations that the Conservative Party found its most willing and indispensable participants at a grass roots level.

Between 1918 and 1929, the women members of the MCUA answered the call put forward by the WUO. In 1921, there were already nine Women's Associations in existence in the constituency.⁵⁸ Such an early adoption rate ensured that the registration of new members was maintained even during the difficult Coalition years. After 1922, there was a concentrated effort to accelerate this expansion. In 1924, the MCUA secretary and party agent, I.C. Vincent, claimed that the dawn of a more prosperous era for the Conservatives had been signalled by the formation of twenty new Women's Associations. Total women's membership steadily rose to approximately 5,000 in 1926. By 1929, it was recorded in the MCUA annual report that 50 of the 54 polling districts in Monmouth had at least one women's branch or a joint men's and women's organisation. In Abergavenny alone, there

⁵⁴ Neal McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus, 1998), p. 46.

⁵⁵ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party*, pp. 46-7. McCrillis noted that there were 919 Liberal Party Women's Associations active at the peak of the Women's Liberal Federation in 1926, with approximately 88,000 members. Labour's Women Sections numbered 1,867 in total with a much higher membership of 250,000. This still did not equate to the approximated membership of the WUO.

⁵⁶ David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 5:2 (1994), p. 132.

⁵⁷ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party*, p. 57.

⁵⁸ NLW: MCUA Records, 1929 Annual Report of the Monmouth Conservative and Unionist Association, NLW MSS MONION/1. According to a comparison with the party's development by 1929, branches were formed in Abergavenny, Bassaleg, Caerleon, Chepstow, Goytre, Grosmont, Llanfoist, Monmouth, and Usk respectively in 1921.

were five separate Women's Associations.⁵⁹ Rural areas of Monmouthshire therefore witnessed an outpouring of organisation that was both far-reaching and all-encompassing.

The multiplication of Women's Associations was a direct result of the hard work of organisers including Alice Forestier-Walker, Mrs Foster Stedman from Machen and Mrs. J. Wilkie from Rogerstone. As male counterparts in the MCUA acknowledged, such endeavours guaranteed both 'the social and political side' of the Conservative Party at a local level. One fete, for example, prepared by Alice Forestier-Walker and a select committee of MCUA women members in the summer of 1924, was held at Tredegar House in Newport and attracted 2,500 people.⁶⁰ This dynamic participation often contrasted with the lethargy of the male members of the MCUA. Even Vincent was forced to concede at the annual meeting of the divisional organisation in March 1926 that, 'the women have taken such an active part, [that] the men have more or less allowed their Branches to become quiescent until an Election is imminent.' The MCUA Executive Committee, rather menacingly, hoped that this 'mistake' would be 'speedily remedied'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, in outshining the men to such a degree, the women activists in Monmouth had begun to create an environment that openly and enthusiastically encouraged constituents to take part in local political and social activities.

Supplementary non-party organisations also assisted in the regularisation of everyday political life, a process which favoured Conservative control in rural districts such as Abergavenny and Usk. With the Primrose League in general decline in the county after the war, the vacuum was filled by the Women's Institutes, originally created in 1915, but which were to emerge more forcefully during the 1920s. As early as May 1920, nine WIs were recorded as operational in Monmouthshire, with Abergavenny acting as fulcrum for this 'movement of utility'.⁶² Just over eight months later, 'great strides' had been made with at least sixteen WIs recorded as operational in the constituency with a total membership of 1,000. A County Federation was subsequently established by prominent members such as

⁵⁹ *MB*, 15 October 1924; 3 March 1926; NLW: MCUA Records, 1929 Annual Report of the Monmouth Conservative and Unionist Association, NLW MSS MONION/1; Monmouth Women's Unionist Association Records, 1929, NLW MSS MONION/4. The only parishes to not have their own branch were Cwmyoy, Matherne, Newchurch and Trostrey respectively.

⁶⁰ *MB*, 15 October 1924. See also NLW: MCUA Records, Programme of the London outing of the Monmouth Unionist Association, 12 April 1928, NLW MSS MONION/21.

⁶¹ *MB*, 3 March 1926.

⁶² *WM*, 5 May 1920.

Edith Jackson and Lady Mather-Jackson. At its foundation meeting, the motivations of the WI were clearly outlined:

The movement provides the means for the members meeting together in social intercourse and enjoyment, to exchange ideas and received instruction in handicraft work, and in all kinds of useful subjects.⁶³

The WIs were not as openly political as the Primrose League branches, but the instigation of the movement certainly proved a useful addition for the Conservatives in interwar Monmouth. The monthly meetings of these ‘self-governing village-based’ bodies may have had a primary educational goal but this did not preclude discussions on civic duty and democracy from becoming ingrained in the branches that sprang up across the countryside. As Helen McCarthy has contended, the aim of the WI was ‘not only to deepen women’s understanding of the local agricultural economies to which they belonged, but...to extend rural women’s political influence’.⁶⁴ Attendees were therefore pushed to gain for themselves an understanding of the workings of the rural district councils and to eventually stand for election to these local governing bodies. In the process, the unwritten ambitions of the WIs aligned with the work of the Women’s Associations in Monmouth. Working in tandem, at least unofficially, the introduction of the Institutes propagated a broader political commitment from the rural electorate, one which was consistently congenial, if not directly to the Conservative Party, then certainly to a specific way of life perceived to be threatened by opponents of Conservatism.

Party periodicals, such as *Home and Politics*, also aided the appeal of Women’s Associations and the WIs. Originally the women’s edition of *Popular View*, this monthly magazine began production as a separate publication in June 1923 and was increasingly popular over the decade, with annual circulation across Britain rising from 100,000 in January 1925 to 2,500,000 by the end of 1929. While estimates were artificial to an extent, as the magazine was often ordered in bulk by local Conservative Associations, the rise in circulation was enough to regularly outshine other associated publications such as *The Man*

⁶³ *WM*, 24 February 1921. The county-wide organisation was rebranded as the Gwent Federation of Women’s Institutes in the late 1920s. See Gwent Archives (GA): Gwent Federation of Women’s Institutes Executive Minute Books, 1929-1932, D3258/1.

⁶⁴ McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics’, p. 894.

in the Street by the end of the 1920s.⁶⁵ The popularity of *Home and Politics* stemmed from several important features of the penny periodical. Firstly, it was easily localised. Associations were able to insert local news and advertisements for party events in local districts. This was not instigated in all constituencies but an inclination to rebrand often indicated the divisions where the party was at its most dynamic. In Monmouthshire, the publication, which reported a modest local circulation of approximately 3,000 for its earliest releases, was repackaged as the *Monmouthshire Opinion* in July 1925. Containing prefaces from Leolin Forestier-Walker and Marian Whitehead, the incumbent chairwoman of the Monmouth Women's Association, the localised version was welcomed as an indication of the strength of Conservative Party support in Monmouth and served as an inspiration for stronger connections between party branches. Whitehead, in particular, outlined her pride in belonging to 'one of the largest and most active women's organisations in the whole country'. In subsequent editions, a local news section was also regularly included, containing details of upcoming activities from dances in Llangwm, musical performances by the Usk Jazz Band, and even Empire Day celebrations in rural villages such as Nash.⁶⁶ In localised form, and with guidance on the affairs of rural Monmouth continuing in later issues, the additional utilitarian objectives of the periodical help explain its enduring popularity.

Secondly, the magazine balanced instructive articles on party policy and electioneering from national figures such as Stanley and Lucy Baldwin, Conservative figures outside of Wales and WUO organisers, with household advice incorporating 'apolitical' features seen as vital to appealing to the female majority.⁶⁷ The latter subject certainly appeared to be as important, if not more so, as the promotion of the civic and public responsibilities of women in the pages of the *Monmouthshire Opinion*. This theme corresponded with the Baldwinite pitch to the married woman which was based on, as Stuart Ball has described, the 'cross-class values' of the family and the household rather than the

⁶⁵ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party*, pp. 49-50; Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty', p. 132.

⁶⁶ NLW: Monmouthshire Opinion, Vol. 1: 1925-1926, July 1925, NLW YX2 MON. See also Monmouthshire Opinion, Vol: 2, 1928-1929, NLW YX2 MON. Once again, the work of Alice Forestier-Walker was highlighted as central to the creation of this regular monthly programme.

⁶⁷ David Thackeray, 'From Prudent Housewife to Empire Shopper: Party Appeals to the Female Voter, 1918-1928' in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), p. 39; David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the Challenge of Mass Politics in Early Twentieth Century England* (Manchester, 2013).

confrontational image of the workplace.⁶⁸ Recurring columns such as ‘To Help the Housewife’ and ‘Our Empire – Housewives and Empire’ endorsed an ethos of imperative domesticity to readers of the magazine.⁶⁹ Yet, while Ball’s assessment is accurate in relation to the original *Home and Politics*, in the Monmouthshire variant of the publication, the emphasis on the private sphere was equalised by the stressed importance placed upon the undertakings of local women activists. The tussle between these two elements in the localised format suggested the additional importance placed on the Women’s Associations as early as 1925, and even more definitively by the General Election of 1929. In the *Monmouthshire Opinion*, the ongoing integration of women members was mixed more evenly with the appeal to the household duties of new women voters. Localism therefore provoked a significant refinement of traditional Conservative attitudes to women in the interwar period.

Alongside the sustained invitation to women voters, the broader call to the newly enfranchised must also not be overlooked. Through the systematic distribution of populist party pamphlets and leaflets, dramatic productions or ‘Plays for Patriots’, and other magazines such as *The Man in the Street*, the Conservative Party was far from sluggish when it came to seeking the validation of the wider electorate. As Jon Lawrence has also demonstrated, this was part of a broader ideological change in the party’s approach, in its move away from the treatment of ‘the working class’ as a homogenous mass to ‘working classes’ each with distinctive and varied sensibilities that could be targeted with specific propaganda material related to the Baldwinite agenda.⁷⁰ In connection with this aim, procurement of the ex-serviceman vote was also considered essential and like-minded organisations became an object of further local infiltration after the war. The fledgling British Legion was a primary target in this regard. Founded in 1920, the Legion lobbied successive British Governments on issues of demobilisation, war pensions and unemployment and gained a following of 300,000 members in Britain by the end of the decade. While born out of an explicit concern over partisanship, with strict rules enforced over open party

⁶⁸ Stuart Ball, ‘The Conservative Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), p. 33.

⁶⁹ NLW: Monmouthshire Opinion, May 1929, NLW YX2 MON.

⁷⁰ Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford; New York, 2009), p. 119. See also David Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s’, *The English Historical Review*, 111:440 (Feb., 1996), pp. 75-6.

allegiances, Legion branches were similar to the WIs in that they implicitly fostered an outlook which was conducive to Conservative Party support.⁷¹

In Monmouthshire, the British Legion found its most willing support in the two constituencies with the strongest Conservative presence, namely in Monmouth and Newport. There was only minor support elsewhere, in the urban districts of Blaina, Abertillery and Pontypool, as both the Labour Party and wider trade union movement regarded the Legion with suspicion. The Monmouth branch was arguably the strongest in the county, founded in 1923 and including local MCUA members such as the chairman Major A. Reade, former solicitor J. T. Vizard and the local Mayor and 'Independent' Councillor for Monmouth RDC, J. Douglas Smith.⁷² The patriotic tone of the branch ran parallel with the MCUA's imperial emphasis on the British Empire and support of the monarchy. As Reade declared at a civic reception in 1928, organised for the visit of C.F. Crossfield, national chairman of the British Legion, 'the foundation stone of their organisation was loyalty to the Crown and to the Constitution.'⁷³ While British Legion branches could occasionally tend towards support for Labour Party representatives, as noted by Helen McCarthy in the case of towns such as Bury,⁷⁴ the composition and intonation of the Monmouth branch was further evidence of imbedded pro-Conservative sympathies and further confirmation of the ambitions of the MCUA to extend its reach to a broader coalition of voters.

The focus of the Conservative grass roots expansion also pointed towards the teaching of future generations. The Junior Imperial League gained an increasing popularity after 1918, with 2,000 branches and between 200,000-300,000 members by 1929. Akin to the Women's Associations, the JIL was comfortably the largest party youth movement in Britain, compared with the small number of Labour Party Youth Sections, which numbered less than 200 by the end of the decade. Designed to instil imperial and constitutional principles within the next generation through organised events such as debating groups and lectures from visiting speakers, the youthful exuberance of members was also utilised in the canvassing and distribution of party literature in constituencies.⁷⁵ Near the Monmouth division, there were early outposts in Abertillery, Pontypool and Llanelly across the Brecknock border. More

⁷¹ McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics', p. 895, p. 902.

⁷² *MB*, 21 November 1924; *WM*, 7 November 1925; *SWG*, 18 February 1927. Smith was also chairman of the Monmouth Constitutional Club formed in 1924.

⁷³ *WM*, 21 February 1928.

⁷⁴ McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics', p. 905.

⁷⁵ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party*, p. 83.

robust branches appeared in Monmouth and Newport by 1925. The former was designed ‘to create a practical interest in political work and organisation amongst the young men and women of the Empire’.⁷⁶ It is therefore evident that the MCUA had attempted to respond quickly to the wider party insistence on a concerted educational strategy.

Collaboration between men and women members was also being nurtured through the JIL. While Women’s Associations were often attributed as the driving force for the assembly of the JILs on the ground, in Monmouth the establishment of local branches was secured through joint discussions between organising committees comprising of both men and women members of the MCUA. The configuration of the committees typified an effective coordination of response from local Women’s Association, with the election of Miss Lovett of Ganarew as inaugural president, but also included prominent male members such as Leolin Forestier-Walker, the local magistrate Horace Bailey and the Reverend R.J.B. Lewis. There was equal representation of two men and two women from the respective Men’s and Women’s Associations, alongside the five girls and five boys that constituted the JIL Committee.⁷⁷ The synchronisation of both sections of the MCUA through this framework allowed the movement to flourish in Monmouth, sustaining a considerable presence in the town and encouraging the creation of neighbouring branches in areas such as Chepstow.⁷⁸ More importantly, working hand in hand allowed the Conservative Party in Monmouth to pass on its message effectively to its youngest adherents in the constituency.

The combination of these practices provided the Conservatives with an even firmer foothold in constituencies such as Monmouth, and aligned perfectly with the genial persona of Stanley Baldwin as Conservative Party leader after 1923. The depth and nature of activity, designed to break down the social divisions across the countryside, was the living embodiment of Baldwinite Conservatism which rested on the attempt to ease class tensions, allegedly fuelled by the rise of the Labour Party, and, in the words of Ball, ‘a much larger popular congregation of both sexes’.⁷⁹ Baldwin himself was also acutely aware of the need to educate the newly enfranchised and to introduce voters to democratic ideals that the right to vote entailed. Indeed, as Philip Williamson has argued, ‘His [Baldwin’s] real power lay in the

⁷⁶ *WM*, 16 June 1923; *FPM*, 25 July 1924; *WM*, 6 March 1925; *SWG*, 3 August 1928.

⁷⁷ *WM*, 13 March 1925.

⁷⁸ *WM*, 10 September 1925.

⁷⁹ Stuart Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organization’ in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), p. 264.

roles of teacher and moralist...in his creation of a public personality able to sustain those roles.' Baldwin's approach therefore emphasised perceived 'English' traditions, such as civility and the commonality of class experiences in an attempt to promote social cohesion and pacify socialism without protracted hostility.⁸⁰

The marked deviation from previous leaders such as Chamberlain and Bonar Law also brought with it complications. Conservative representatives now had to find a more succinct equilibrium between local concerns and towing the new party line. The balancing act became a mutual process negotiated between MPs, local members and the Conservative Party as a whole. The importance of acclimatising to the Baldwinite brand was heightened for representatives in isolated constituencies such as Monmouth, surrounded as they were by an emerging Labour tradition to the east, and with the added incentive of capitalising on broader middle-class doubts over the electability of the Liberal Party in the mid-1920s. Baldwin also understood that the present and future success of the Conservative Party rested on these satellite divisions outside of party strongholds where Labour's advance could be kept in check and the Liberal return could be denied, leaving the Conservatives as the exclusive anti-socialist voice on the ground.⁸¹ Local leaders such as Forestier-Walker therefore set out to become intermediaries between Baldwin and the country at large.

Admittedly, the task was a demanding one, for two main reasons. Primarily, the exercise of emulation proved to be an inconsistent procedure, dependent on individual personalities and the localities they represented. In Monmouth, Forestier-Walker aimed for a composite approach which appeased the party hierarchy and the local electorate. His language was often pliable, depending on the fluctuating economic conditions and the electoral fortunes of his own party. In the case of free trade versus tariff reform, the issue which defined early Baldwinite inconsistencies, particularly in 1923, the MP had already set out his stall, emphasising the connection between post-war reconstruction and the revival of trade during the 1922 General Election campaign. Profligacy was to be avoided through the reinvigoration of the Empire, the traditional party objective of lowering taxation and also through a deliberately vague form of 'Rigid Economy'.⁸²

⁸⁰ Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin', pp. 435-9; Philip Williamson, "'Safety First": Baldwin, the Conservative Party, and the 1929 General Election', *The Historical Journal*, 25:2 (June, 1982), p. 387-8.

⁸¹ Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin', p. 439.

⁸² Bristol University Special Collections and Archives (BUSCA): British Election Addresses, 1922, DM668/2/1; *SWA*, 25 November 1922.

The lack of definition allowed Forestier-Walker to swing between an open support of protection during the disastrous 1923 General Election which saw Baldwin defeated nationally by Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Party, and a post-election return to the advocacy of free trade after 1924. For instance, writing in the *Monmouthshire Opinion* in the summer of 1925, Forestier Walker demanded that 'every facility [must be] given for the improvement of our inter-Empire trade' but also explicitly aligned this request with the Baldwinite claim of 'peace and prosperity'. In essence, this was a more categorical alignment with the principles of free trade.⁸³ Forestier-Walker therefore retained a form of independence while employing an emerging precision in his public oratory which underscored his relationship with both the Conservative Party in Westminster and his constituents.

Secondly, the emphasis on 'Englishness' did not preclude Welsh constituencies such as Monmouth from an engagement with Baldwinite rhetoric, but its close proximity to the South Wales coalfield ensured that a complete adherence to the message of class harmony and consensus was unrealistic. As party leader, and especially as Prime Minister after 1924, Baldwin was able to stress consistently the need for co-operation between capital and labour in order to 'prevent the class war becoming a reality'.⁸⁴ In this context, the defeat of the miners during the 1926 lockout and the introduction of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act in July 1927, were each portrayed by the Conservative Government as a triumph of industrial common-sense and the spur for further negotiations. In tethering industrial conciliation with the fate of British democracy, Baldwin could also not afford to be aggressive in his rhetoric towards the unions.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the specific circumstances of Monmouth as a constituency, with its close proximity to industrial districts in the Monmouthshire coalfield, necessitated a response that was more openly antagonistic to the trade unions. A critical example of the contrast with Baldwin's harmonious message can be found in Forestier-Walker's hostile attitude to the SWMF. As early as 1924, in an address to the annual meeting of the MCUA in Newport, he aggressively asserted that the 'fire-eating gentleman' A.J. Cook and other extremists had captured the Federation machinery in the coalfield and were manufacturing a weapon of intimidation and coercion which threatened to paralyse communities and industry in tow. In conclusion, Forestier-Walker called for the SWMF to be 'cleansed' whilst advising his fellow

⁸³ *SWA*, 29 November 1923; NLW: Monmouthshire Opinion, Vol. 1: 1925-1926, July 1925, NLW YX2 MON.

⁸⁴ Williamson, "Safety First", p. 388.

⁸⁵ Williamson, "Safety First", pp. 388-91.

Conservative colleagues to continue working for constitutionalism in response to the dangerous socialist threat.⁸⁶ In a similar address to the annual meeting of the MCUA in September 1926, during the lockout, Forestier-Walker combined forces with Lord Tredegar to deliver a 'Red Letter' warning to local party members. While the latter emphasised the role of great responsibility placed on every Conservative in the constituency to counter the perceived 'communist threat', Forestier-Walker went further to claim that the unions engaged in strike action were undermining the British Empire and profoundly ruining the trade prospects of the country.⁸⁷ Such warnings, while cloaked in the wider, 'one-nation' language which Baldwin and Conservative leaders perpetuated, were more effective in guarding the MCUA against complacency. More significantly, they also signalled an attempt by Forestier-Walker and his allies to define their own brand of local Conservatism.

The conversion to the post-Coalition era was therefore troublesome and arduous. The Conservatives had returned to power in Westminster but maintaining control across the country was the ultimate test of the party's capabilities to reform its structures, its message and its presence on the ground. Nevertheless, the MCUA had once again risen to the challenge. Whether it was implementing fresh tactics through the pages of the *Monmouthshire Opinion*, the graft of Women's Associations in organising and co-ordinating embryonic party bodies at the grass roots, or the infusion of ideology through favourable non-party groups, the Conservative Party had become even more firmly entrenched in Monmouthshire's rural society. In this sense, the ability of Forestier-Walker to modulate his message was a refreshing bonus rather than a panacea for party problems. The synthesis of effective planning and execution, alongside the acumen of local leadership, from both men and women, would transform Monmouth into an increasingly impenetrable Conservative fortress, one which their opponents would find impossible to infiltrate.

⁸⁶ *MB*, 15 October 1924.

⁸⁷ *WM*, 9 July 1926; *SWA*, 30 September 1926. Courtenay Morgan had been included on the honours list in 1926. The title of Viscount Tredegar was revived as a result.

III. Falling to Goliath

Having previously conceded territory to Forestier-Walker, the Monmouth Liberal Association decided to step back into the fray in 1923. The previous year, the Liberals had baulked at the chance to face the Conservatives. As Ivor Herbert, the president of the constituency organisation, had declared in June 1922, Monmouth's Liberals had been dutifully inactive in order to respect the Tory representative who had been favourable towards the Coalition Government.⁸⁸ However, the age of appeasement was now over. At an 'enthusiastic gathering' of the MLA in Newport, the Liberals finally decided to do battle with the MCUA. Their choice of candidate, Morgan Griffith, revealed the seriousness of the MLA's intentions. As a nonconformist deacon of Monserah Chapel in Llanvihangel, representative of the Raglan district on the MCC and influential member of the Abergavenny branch of the NFU, Griffith represented a stern challenge to the previous relationship fostered between Forestier-Walker and the Farmer's Union.⁸⁹ Clearly, he had been chosen to test this critical plank of past Conservative control. In his election address, the call to the farming fraternity was made abundantly clear:

I have been connected with the Farming Industry from my early manhood and have resided for the past thirty-seven years in your District, during which time I have been closely associated with all Schemes and Organisations tending to promote the interests of Agriculture and those engaged in it.⁹⁰

In his support for the localisation of projects for the reclamation of waste lands and the instigation of afforestation in barren areas, Griffith also appeared to put forward solutions, if only limited in scope, for the rise in rural unemployment for 'land workers' in October 1921, which had swept through the countryside after the removal of governmental control. As the 'Voice against Protection' in Monmouth, and in light of Baldwin's deviation towards tariffs, the Liberal candidate was able to present a clear alternative to the Conservatives in terms of policy and philosophy. As Sian Jones has also highlighted, such a position was commonplace for Liberal candidates across rural Wales and Britain as a whole during 1923,

⁸⁸ *WM*, 8 June 1922.

⁸⁹ *SWA*, 22 November 1923.

⁹⁰ *WM*, 29 November 1923.

and provided a modicum of hope for the party.⁹¹ As both Lloyd George and Asquith reiterated a fondness for free trade on the national stage, and the potential for reunion of the party briefly galvanised local organisations and candidates alike, an enthusiasm not seen since before the war was rekindled in the Liberal ranks.⁹² Griffith was equally buoyant. After visiting polling stations from Brangwyn to Tintern, he even received the implied backing of the Labour Party in the Chepstow and Severn Tunnel districts.⁹³ As in neighbouring divisions such as Pontypool, it was now a case of translating optimism into a sustainable Liberal vote.

The expectancy was to be short-lived, as the MLA paid the price for its inactivity since 1918. In contrast, the growth of the Conservative Party in the division would pay dividends and assist Forestier-Walker in a potentially precarious contest. Able to point towards his previous responsibilities in Parliament and representation of the constituency, and equally adept at traversing the subject of tariff reform as a means of dealing with the ‘national emergency’ of unemployment, the sitting Conservative MP was re-elected and, remarkably considering the circumstances, with an increased majority of 4,210.⁹⁴ While this would not be the final confrontation during the 1920s, the Liberal resurgence had proved to be only skin-deep. In contrast the Conservative resistance was steadfast and its local control multifaceted. Quintessentially, the MLA’s return represented the steep climb opposing parties now faced in rural Monmouth.

The Labour Party faced an even sterner test than the Liberals. Early signs of Labour activity emerged through the local auspices of the NUAW, when branches considered fielding candidates at the 1919 local council elections. As concerns over the quality of rural housing and the lack of communications and transport links in the countryside were discussed in the most active NUAW groups, such as the Shirenewton and Portskewett branches, subsequent inroads were made. Two NUR-backed candidates, A.W. Pittman in Caerwent and the Reverend W.H. Williams in Magor defeated ‘Independent’ candidates to become Labour representatives on the MCC in March. Admittedly, there was no advance in the rural district

⁹¹ *SWA*, 23 November 1923; 1 December 1923; Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, p. 150; Sian Jones, ‘The Political Dynamics of North East Wales, With Special Reference to the Liberal Party’ (PhD, University of North Wales, Bangor, 2003), pp. 81-2.

⁹² See Chapter 3, pp. 150-1.

⁹³ *The Times*, 15 November 1923; 29 November 1923; *SWA*, 6 December 1923. Like other Liberal candidates in the constituencies, Griffiths received a telegram from Asquith wishing him luck and good fortune during the campaign.

⁹⁴ *SWA*, 20 November 1923; 6 December 1923. The full election result was as follows: Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker (Conservative Party) – 12,697 votes (59.9%), Morgan Griffith (Liberal Party) – 8,487 votes (40.1%). The turnout was approximately 70.9%.

contests in the following April, as NUAW members failed to enter targeted RDCs such as Chepstow.⁹⁵ Yet, the election of Pittman and Williams can be seen as the first step in a more explicitly political direction. As David Pretty has demonstrated, nascent Labour Party branches began to sprout up from the ground in the villages of Caerwent, Trelech and Catbrook, and even the town of Chepstow, with much of the initial organisational work stemming from Pittman and the irreplaceable William Harris.⁹⁶ The latter was once more pivotal to the creation of Labour branches as well as the foundation of a constituency party. At a meeting of delegates from Abergavenny, Monmouth, Pontypool rural district, Caldicot, Caerwent, Caerleon, Bassaleg, St Mellons and Castleton, the Monmouth Divisional Labour Party (MDLP) was officially created in December 1919. In his address to the Labour congregation, Harris called for members to follow the example set by the movement in the rest of the county:

it was up to the Monmouth division to wipe out the stain on the map, and at the next election send back a solid phalanx of Labour to parliament from the administrative county.⁹⁷

In the following months, the MDLP attempted to follow up Harris' words with action. In January 1920, it decided to contest the Monmouth seat at the next election. Gordon Lang, the Congregationalist minister from Monmouth was chosen and immediately began a tour of the county with Sidney Box of the Workers' Union and the NUR organising secretary A. J. Williams.⁹⁸ However, the appearance of Labour was soon met with suspicion that grew into outright hostility. Unsurprisingly, it was the NFU that led the antipathetic response to the MDLP and, by extension, the Labour control of the MCC. At first, the leaders of the union, including S.T. Griffin, were wary of the potential arrival of socialism into the countryside but open to affording Labour a degree of early latitude.⁹⁹ Others were less welcoming. At a subsequent meeting of the Monmouthshire Chamber of Agriculture, the passing of the

⁹⁵ *SWWA*, 22 February 1919; 8 March 1919; 22 March 1919; 12 April 1919; 19 April 1919.

⁹⁶ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, p. 142.

⁹⁷ *SWA*, 14 December 1919. Mr Pridmore from Chepstow was elected as the first president of the MDLP.

⁹⁸ *WM*, 20 January 1920; 29 March 1920; *MWP*, 10 July 1920. Gordon Lang (1893-1981) was educated at Monmouth Grammar School before entering the nonconformist ministry. Remaining active in politics, Lang would go on to be elected as Labour MP for Oldham between 1929 and 1931, and for the Stalybridge and Hyde division between 1945 and 1951.

⁹⁹ *WM*, 27 September 1920. At a meeting of the Llanthony branch in September, Griffin addressed the appointment of a majority of Labour councillors to the MCC's Agricultural Committee. He claimed that his 'experience of Labour men was that they were always willing to learn' and expressed optimism that an amicable relationship between farmers and the MCC could be developed.

Agriculture Act through the House of Commons provoked a stinging attack on the Labour representatives that now controlled the MCC agricultural committee. After resolving that the Bill would not be sufficient to increase agricultural production across the county, a further verbal warning to the MCC was issued:

this Chamber wishes again to record its disapproval of the interests of the agricultural community in the county of Monmouth being placed in the hands of a committee of a majority of persons unidentified with the agricultural industry.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, the willingness of Labour to engage in rural politics was met with considerable resistance. This was of course not an isolated struggle. As Clare Griffiths has demonstrated, while Labour at a national level was acutely aware of the benefits of expanding the socialist appeal into the ‘heterogeneous communities’ of the suburbs and the countryside, the presence of Labour in rural Wales was marginal at best in the early post-war period, with the exception of the Anglesey, Brecon and Radnorshire, and Caernarvonshire constituencies. In the industrially dominated world of South Wales, even the most animated organisers such as Harris were continuously thwarted by the ambivalence of the SWMF Executive, who saw no benefit in diverting the union’s immediate attention away from the coalfield where battles were being waged and won.¹⁰¹ With the subsequent retreat of the rural revolt and the corresponding stability of the NFU in 1921, most of the nascent energy of the labourers was also contained. As a result, the potential for growth faded with the abandonment of NUAW branches and the Workers’ Union groups.¹⁰²

By the winter of 1922, almost all of Labour’s early momentum had evaporated. The situation was made worse by the decision of Lang to step down as the MDLP’s prospective candidate. Interviewed on the campaign trail by Monmouth’s correspondent for the *Western Mail*, Lang explained ‘the difficulty of the organisation’ in the division and that if improvements were not made immediately, he would consider departing to assist those Labour branches fighting difficult battles elsewhere. The implication was that the travails

¹⁰⁰ *WM*, 22 November 1920.

¹⁰¹ Clare V.J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007), p. 318, p. 329.

¹⁰² Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed*, pp. 158-60.

faced by Ramsay MacDonald in Aberavon could be overcome, and the rural fights could not. Lang subsequently retired from the MDLP three weeks before polling day for the 1922 General Election.¹⁰³ Labour found it 'impossible' to find another nominee at such short notice. It was therefore forced to default on the promises made in January 1920. The unopposed return of Forestier-Walker was met with despair in the Labour ranks but in reality was symptomatic of a local party that had run out of steam.

A year later, Labour also declined to run a candidate during the 1923 General Election. While all was not lost, any advance would require fresh impetus. This was clear in the build-up to the parliamentary contest of 1924. With the Liberals unlikely to enter, Labour could not afford to lose any more ground, even with the Ramsay MacDonald Government providing the MUA with an opportunity to construct a distinctly anti-socialist platform. However, the local Labour Party was in such a weakened state that it was left to the Monmouthshire Federation of Trades and Labour Councils to arrange the campaign for the division. Monmouth was targeted as early as April by the leaders of the county-wide organisation, including Lewis Lewis of the BDLP and officials from Abertillery, Abersychan and New Tredegar. On the plea of T. H. Edwards, the MDLP secretary from Bassaleg, it was decided that Labour Councils from Panteg, Pontypool, Blaenavon, Rogerstone and other sympathetic districts would take part in propaganda and organisational arrangements for the election in the rural constituency.¹⁰⁴ Several potential candidates were considered including the Ruskin College graduate and transport worker Jack Price from Chepstow, and the Newport NUR chairman, Charles Powell from Ebbw Vale.¹⁰⁵ However, the decision was made to select a seasoned candidate from outside the county who could compensate for the lack of Labour organisation in the division. Luke Bateman, the NUR and ILP member who had come agonisingly close to prising the Bristol East seat from the Liberal Party in 1922, was subsequently chosen as the ideal import. Bateman was an able orator but, initially, even he struggled to grasp the hazardous position the MDLP found itself in. At an early campaign meeting, he readily declared his respect for his 'friend' Forestier-Walker and went on to discuss how Labour had 'inherited the sins of their predecessors' and needed more time to affect the change required to improve British society.¹⁰⁶ It was clear that Bateman had been

¹⁰³ *WM*, 26 October 1922; 30 October 1922.

¹⁰⁴ *FPM*, 4 April 1924.

¹⁰⁵ *WM*, 29 May 1924;

¹⁰⁶ *SWA*, 22 October 1924. Bateman lost to the National Liberal candidate, Jeremy Morris, in Bristol East by the slender margin of 151 votes.

selected in order to help defend Labour's record in government rather than attack the Conservative stronghold in Monmouth.

Labour's momentary recovery was halted by the late intervention of the Liberals. Forestier-Walker received a succession of public recommendations from his Liberal rivals. The most significant arrived from the MLA's president Ivor Herbert, who in a letter printed in the *Monmouthshire Beacon* deplored the appearance of 'an eleventh-hour Socialist' and insisted on all 'true Liberals' to vote for the Conservative Party in the division. With Forestier-Walker able to rely upon the MCUA network to spread the message of disdain for MacDonald's Government, the calmness of his campaign contrasted with the frenetic nature of Bateman's late attempt to counter the apathy of the agricultural community towards the Labour Party.¹⁰⁷ There were ultimately too many fires for Bateman alone to extinguish. Encumbered with a local party that required assistance from the coalfield, and up against an experienced opponent, the Labour candidate was beaten emphatically, gaining a mere 28.2% of the vote.¹⁰⁸ If the lessons were not learnt from Bateman's sobering defeat, and quickly, then the MDLP would find itself in an irrecoverable position.

By the end of 1924, the Conservatives had therefore deflected the early impositions of both Labour and the Liberals, but the threat had not yet been fully dispelled. In fact, 1925 proved to be a more challenging year for the MCUA and for Forestier-Walker in particular. An initial shock came in March, when control of the MCC was lost to Labour once again. Even more astonishingly, Forestier Walker was defeated in the Rogerstone district. The Monmouth MP had been the presiding chairman of the MCC in 1924 but had succumbed to D. J. Vaughan, the former Tredegar builder who had been elected to represent Labour on the County Council. While Forestier-Walker bemoaned the 'apathy' of the ratepayers during the local election, the warning signs were immediately addressed in the local, pro-Conservative, press. As one correspondent in the *Monmouthshire Beacon* admitted, the MCC results 'would be folly to ignore...it behoves local Conservatives to be ever on the watch'.¹⁰⁹ Forestier-Walker would return to the MCC in 1928, but the shockwave of his defeat in 1925

¹⁰⁷ *MB*, 17 October 1924; 24 October 1924. Indeed, the 'frenzied scenes' at party meetings, recorded by the local press, exposed the lack of organisation and groundwork achieved by the MDLP since 1922.

¹⁰⁸ *MB*, 31 October 1924. The full election result was as follows: Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker (Conservative Party) – 16,510 votes (71.8%), Luke Bateman (Labour Party) – 6,469 votes (28.2%). The turnout was approximately 74.1%.

¹⁰⁹ *SWG*, 6 March 1925; *MB*, 6 March 1925.

reverberated across the shire. After years of disappointment, there was suddenly a revitalised sense of possibility and hope for the Conservative Party's opponents.

Importantly, Forestier-Walker's loss in Rogerstone encouraged the MDLP to improve its once beleaguered position in Monmouth. Charles Powell had already been employed as a the first Labour Party divisional agent in Monmouth in March 1925 and party socials now began to be arranged after the RDC elections in April. The local Labour Party was given a further boost by Bateman's decision to seek re-election in Monmouth as early as September. The candidate immediately urged MDLP members to summon up the energy and put in place an effective organisation in the constituency.¹¹⁰ However, over the next three years, Bateman's provocation was not heeded. Even in 1928, the MDLP still looked to the Monmouthshire Federation of Trades and Labour Councils and other divisional branches in the county for guidance. Membership remained non-existent and volunteers to help sustain the party in Monmouth were a rarity.¹¹¹ As indifference once again eroded any signs of encouragement, the remaining remnants of the MDLP would be punished for the lethargy exhibited before 1929.

In a rural context, it was the Liberals who would prove to be more threatening to the Conservatives' dominance. In both their involvement on the Monmouthshire Chamber of Agriculture, or in assisting the formation of Monmouth's LNU branch alongside MCA members, Liberal stalwarts such as Ivor Herbert continued to influence rural political life in the constituency. The appointment of the Devon preacher and party organiser, as divisional agent, Thomas Hopwell, in April 1925 signalled the intent of the MLA to rediscover its composure in the constituency.¹¹² Bolstered by a seemingly unified national party with a developing range of policies aimed at rural communities, the MLA appeared to be in a good position to capitalise on the momentum set forth by *The Land and the Nation* in 1925, and even more directly than in nearby Liberal Associations in the urban divisions of Newport and Pontypool.

However, it was precisely these same land policies that served to undermine the Liberal movement in Monmouth at this crucial time. Unlike the PLA hierarchy who

¹¹⁰ *MB*, 27 March 1925; *Daily Herald (DH)*, 21 September 1925; *Bath Chronicle*, 26 September 1926.

¹¹¹ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt the Failed*, p. 180.

¹¹² *MB*, 6 March 1925; 13 March 1925; 4 April 1925; *FPM*, 24 April 1925. The Monmouth LNU contained both MCA members such as Mr. and Mrs. Horace Bailey and Liberals such as the nonconformist minister and lecturer A. H. Sayers.

welcomed the directives,¹¹³ MLA leaders were infuriated by the drastic proposals. Herbert, in particular, expressed fury at the direction taken. To the elder statesman of Monmouthshire Liberalism, the new policies ‘had nothing to do with agriculture’ and would result in ‘upsetting everything that had existed up-to-date in regard to land tenure.’¹¹⁴ At a crucial time, fissures began to open up within the MLA in 1926. Herbert’s interpretation clashed with the prospective candidate for the constituency, Elias Wynne Cemlyn Jones. As a result of the tension surrounding the publication of the *Land and the Nation*, Jones felt enough pressure from MLA members to withdraw his candidature from any upcoming election. While denying that Herbert’s re-election as president in July was the cause of his own resignation, it was clear that the fractious atmosphere in the MLA, directly caused by Lloyd George’s policies, had ultimately been a significant factor in Jones’ decision.¹¹⁵ H. Meyrick Williams, who would become secretary of the Monmouthshire Liberal Council in 1927, also hinted at the continuing pressure at a MLA meeting in August:

We as a Liberal Association are out for unity in the Liberal party, and feel that can be best secured by not having regard to one item in the Liberal programme.¹¹⁶

The divisions over the land issue would remain even when Jones was eventually replaced as divisional candidate by R.C. Williams, the Swansea teacher and chairman of the Welsh Council for the League of Young Liberals.¹¹⁷ Even in the opening of the Liberal campaign during the General Election in May 1929, the lack of emphasis on agricultural policy was glaring in its omission. As Williams and his allies attempted to shift the focus on to the party’s domestic manifesto, the national crisis of unemployment, and even the issue of electoral reform, *The Land and the Nation* was nowhere to be seen in both print and speech. The Liberal candidate may have claimed in an election address in the *South Wales Argus* that

¹¹³ See Chapter 3, pp. 159-61.

¹¹⁴ *WM*, 16 February 1926.

¹¹⁵ *WM*, 31 August 1926; *SWG*, 1 July 1927. Jones was the former private secretary to the Liberal MP for Anglesey, Ellis Griffith. While attempts were made to downplay his rejection of the invitation to represent the MLA, Jones’ decision to accept the candidacy of the Brynmawr Liberal Association, and contest the Brecon and Radnorshire seat in 1927, hinted more directly at a clash of personalities that had prematurely severed his connection with the Liberals in Monmouth.

¹¹⁶ *WM*, 31 August 1926.

¹¹⁷ *WM*, 26 April 1928; 5 February 1929.

the party was akin to David preparing to slay Goliath, but, in reality, it had no stone loaded in its sling.¹¹⁸

These complications were compounded by the emergence of a tri-party contest in 1929. As Forestier-Walker defended his own party, claiming that the Baldwin Government was successfully conquering unemployment, he also promised to safeguard agriculture through the introduction of several new policies, from reducing land rates to extending rural telephone communications. In a corresponding election address, it was obviously no coincidence that the Conservative agricultural agenda was the one theme outlined in the most detail.¹¹⁹ The decision of Bateman to intervene on behalf of the MDLP was also critical in complicating the Liberal picture. The Labour candidate consistently questioned Lloyd George's ability to solve unemployment, declaring the Liberal policy outlined in the 'Yellow Book' as 'mere bunkum'. Crucially, as a result, attention was diverted from the Conservative campaign and Forestier-Walker. In this sense, MLA members were right to be concerned that, 'the Tory nominee may succeed through Socialist intervention'.¹²⁰

Disquiet turned into eventuality as the predictions of the MLA proved accurate. Unlike his fellow Welsh Conservative candidates, Leolin Forestier-Walker was returned with almost 50% of the vote in a three-way fight. His majority had been increased to 7,771 and the Liberal and Labour vote share was split almost evenly.¹²¹ In truth, the increasingly strong majorities had been won on the ground through party organisation between elections and were sealed by the incompetence of the MCUA's adversaries. The fact that Forestier-Walker was the only MP for the party in Wales by the end of decade is testament to the strength of Conservatism at a local level in Monmouth. In some ways, the isolation had also worked to the MCUA's advantage. As the defenders of the party in the county, not just the division, Conservative party members could not afford to be satisfied with the network they had initially secured and would continue to reinforce it. Proficiency at the polls was merely a manifestation of this attentiveness and determination. The result was a beacon of

¹¹⁸ *SWA*, 23 May 1929.

¹¹⁹ *SWA*, 23 May 1929.

¹²⁰ *SWA*, 14 May 1929; 23 May 1929; *WM*, 30 May 1929.

¹²¹ *WM*, 1 June 1929; NLW: MCUA Records, 1929 Annual Report of the Monmouth Conservative and Unionist Association, NLW MSS MONION/1. The full election result was as follows: Charles Leolin Forestier-Walker (Conservative Party) – 16,353 votes (49.3%), R. C. Williams (Liberal Party) – 8,582 votes (25.8%), Luke Bateman (Labour Party) – 8,268 votes (24.9%). The turnout was 78.9%.

Conservatism in an increasingly antagonistic electoral region for the party that would remain
lit until 1966.

Chapter 5

New Democracies and Swinging Cultures - The Case of Newport

Originally formed in May 1918, the Newport Women Citizens' Association (NWCA) played an increasingly vocal role in framing the town's post-war political culture. As part of the attempt by the town's branch of the Women's Suffrage Society to bring together pre-existing women's groups under a single umbrella body, the organisation began to construct firm foundations. In August, the journal of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, *The Common Cause* reported that the membership of the Newport branch was stable at 200. This figure was reiterated at following meetings held in the town and, after the organisation re-affiliated to the rebranded NUSEC in July 1919, the number of active members was claimed to have increased to around 600.¹ Despite its claim to be a 'non-political body', the WCAs broader aims of promoting education on national, social and civil issues and fostering a refined sense of citizenship for women ensured that it attracted individuals who also had party allegiances. It attracted the continued and committed support, not only of local suffrage campaigners such as Mabel Vivian, the headmistress of Newport Intermediate School and the next chairwoman of the NWCA Committee, but also of members of political parties such as the local Conservative Party organiser Lillian Muller. Ultimately, and as Joanne Smith and Beth Jenkins have also demonstrated in relation to the Cardiff branch, the NWCA acted as a pressure group that served to empower a wider cohort of women in the town, encouraging a redefinition of political involvement along gendered lines as it developed after the summer of 1918.²

The NWCA promoted its aims through a variety of avenues, chiefly the public meeting, with lectures from resident and visiting speakers on broad topics such as 'Home and Citizenship' and 'Women as Guardians', the dissemination of information on equality and using the vote through the Women Citizens' Bureau found on Newport's High Street and its

¹ *Common Cause* (CC), 2 August 1918; 11 July 1919; *The Woman's Leader* (TWL), 28 October 1921.

² Joanne Smith, 'From Suffrage to Citizenship: The Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association in Comparative Perspective, 1921-1939', *Llafur*, 11:4 (2015), pp. 26-42. Beth Jenkins, 'Women's Professional Employment in Wales 1880-1939' (PhD, Cardiff University, 2016), p. 125.

admittedly limited attempts to contest local wards for the annual municipal elections. Indeed, Marianne Middleton Simmonds, the inaugural president of the NWCA and former Mayoress of the town, became the first woman candidate for Newport's County Borough Council (NCBC) when she unsuccessfully contested the Maindee ward in 1919.³ Notwithstanding such setbacks, the NWCA persevered and continued to campaign for equality legislation in Parliament and consult the NCBC on issues such as housing, clean milk supplies, and the role of women in public life. It would also build a robust relationship with other emerging WCA branches across the region, particularly in Cardiff.⁴

Yet, it was the role of the NWCA in providing a space for debate and shaping the electoral landscape, particularly during the October 1922 by-election in Newport, that truly confirmed its status as an integral force in the political culture of the constituency. The NWCA had already proven its organisational prowess by holding in May that year a 'successful' conference, attended by WCA branches from across South Wales and the west of England. As election campaigns began in earnest in October, each party candidate recognised the need to acknowledge the NWCA as a central forum where the voice of women voters in Newport could be heard and understood. It was therefore agreed internally by each of the three party associations in the constituency to attend, on 13 October, a mass meeting of 'women citizens'. Each parliamentary candidate, representing Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties, addressed the gathering and responded to questions from the audience.⁵ Barbara Foxley, the second woman to be appointed Professor of Education at the University College of South Wales and president of the Cardiff branch of the WCA, chaired the meeting and took the opportunity to remind the crowd of WCA's intentions and its potential to unite new voters in a greater knowledge of democracy and civic activity:

³ *Western Mail (WM)*, 11 April 1919; *CC*, 11 July 1919; *TWL*, 30 April 1920. Also, see Map of Monmouthshire's Constituency and District Boundaries, p. ix. After 1918, the Newport constituency consisted solely of the Newport County Borough area. The NCBC, unlike the UDCs and RDCs, held annual elections.

⁴ *CC*, 16 January 1920; *TWL*, 21 May 1920; 29 July 1921; Smith, 'From Suffrage to Citizenship', p. 32.

⁵ *TWL*, 2 June 1922; 13 October 1922.

the Women Citizens' Association was not a political organisation but existed to bind together those women who desired to use the power which the vote had conferred upon them, and to be educated in the great problems upon which women were committed now, as they had never been in the past. The Association included members of all parties, and they strove to educate themselves in the vital affairs of the nation.⁶

Even by its standards, however, this NWCA meeting was unprecedented in the context of local electoral politics. The large attendance, the composition of the newly enfranchised audience and the general excitement that it generated across the town appeared to confirm the prominence of non-party organisations in Newport and the evolving dynamics of electioneering in the town. The local press certainly considered this debate as a unique occasion, arranged by, and designed for, Newport's women constituents. According to the pro-Liberal *South Wales Argus*, 'Never in the history of any Parliamentary election in Newport has there been such a meeting'.⁷ Each of the three male candidates who had put forward their parties' case concurred. In his speech summarised by the *Argus*, the Liberal Party's Lyndon Moore echoed the notion of exceptional circumstances when he declared:

Women electors! It is no figure of speech to say that whatever the men may say, or do, or decide, the issue of the election lies largely in your hands...Newport occupied a unique position, and they were supposed to be able to show the trend of political events in the country.⁸

Moore was correct in his prediction, both in terms of the importance of the women voters in Newport and the immediate implications of the 1922 by-election on the direction of British politics. The decisive role played by the shock victory of the Conservative Party's Reginald Clarry in the demise of the Coalition Government cannot be denied. However, the intervention of the NWCA, and the equal footing of the candidates at the meeting, also

⁶ *South Wales Argus (SWA)*, 14 October 1922. The succession as NWCA president of Simmonds by Mrs. Peter Wright, the political activist and wife of the first Labour Mayor of Newport, in 1920, had already appeared to confirm the cross-party claims espoused by Foxley two years later.

⁷ *SWA*, 14 October 1922.

⁸ *SWA*, 14 October 1922.

highlights Newport's wider significance as an anomalous political arena in the context of South Wales politics. By the end of the decade, the constituency had been represented in Parliament by all three major political parties and organisations such as the NWCA remained active and healthy throughout the 1920s.⁹ Its electoral volatility has been largely overlooked in Welsh and British political analyses, apart from Duncan Tanner's invaluable research on the Newport Labour Party.¹⁰ Even in John Ramsden's analysis of the 1922 contest, with its accurate assessment that this was 'a general election fought in one constituency only', ultimately Newport is designated as a simplified symbol of the 'marginal political nation'. In sum, factors including responses to the Coalition Government, local industrial and class structures, and the individual political identities of the candidates are overshadowed by the tactical considerations of the town's electorate in a post-war British context whose first priority was the defeat of the Labour Party. The contest itself is boiled down to a case of immediate voter expectations over who was more likely to win between the Conservatives and the Liberal Party, and entrenched anti-socialist sentiment. The constituency's inconsistent political development, in terms of both party and non-party cultures, are consequently underplayed in Ramsden's account.¹¹

In microcosm, the 1922 by-election is more significant as a gauge of political trends that were already in motion in Monmouthshire. As the domination of the Liberal Party dissolved more gradually here than elsewhere in the county,¹² the adaptation became more acute in this contested setting, more so than even the coalfield or Monmouth constituency where the pattern of electoral control was established after 1918. In Newport, revisions were often a case of expansion without the security or guarantee of electoral success. The cosmopolitanism and class structure of the urban division created an even more fractured politics, where each party struggled to seize outright control. This necessitated specific strategies that were both responsive to national directives and respectful of the discrete

⁹ *TWL*, 20 December 1929. In a meeting of the South Wales Area Group of Women Citizens' Associations held in the town in November 1929, the NWCA's continuing vitality was confirmed alongside other key branches in South Wales, including Abertillery, Ebbw Vale and Cardiff. Indeed, local members such as the NCBC Councillor Ethel Poole were congratulated for their endeavours in creating a persistent niche for the NWCA in the town's political culture.

¹⁰ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge 1990), pp. 229-47; Duncan Tanner, *Newport Labour Party: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm Edition of Newport Labour Party Records* (Wakefield, 2000), pp. 1-5; Duncan Tanner, 'Gender, Civic Culture and Politics in South Wales: Explaining Labour Municipal Policy, 1918-39' in Matthew Worley (ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 174-5.

¹¹ John Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election and the Fall of the Coalition', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London, 1973), p. 26, p. 41.

¹² See Chapter 1, p. 38; Chapter 3, pp. 128-37.

undercurrents and socio-economic structure of the town itself. Party cultures were not always comparable with those across the shire, especially in the case of Labour, as the fragmented political terrain in the town provoked organisational and rhetorical innovation.¹³ Ultimately, the local party-political power struggle became the fulcrum on which the vibrancy of political cultures in the town rested, and also allowed non-party organisations, such as the NWCA, to break through and compete for the same ground as party colleagues.¹⁴

This chapter will therefore examine the creation and evolution of this swing seat culture in the first decade of the interwar period. Firstly, it will outline this disputed territory and explore the ways in which Newport became a political battleground where all three parties were strong, faced bespoke challenges of their own, and co-existed with an emerging collection of non-party groupings. The 1922 by-election will then be discussed in order to demonstrate how it characterised the dexterity of each political party in the first era of mass democracy. Finally, it will chart responses to the consequences of the by-election, including the eventual successes of the Conservative Party in maintaining electoral control together with the quiet accumulation of Labour support that culminated in its victory during the 1929 General Election. The chapter will argue that these transformations resulted in a pliable tradition disparate from the industrial and rural frontiers in Monmouthshire, one forged by the direct interactions between oppositional parties and voluntary organisations.

I. Contested Terrain

There were non-party precursors to the NWCA that signalled the political winds of change even before the end of the war. A sense of animosity was in the air as the newly formed Newport branch of the Comrades of the Great War congregated in the town in January 1918. The CGW was strictly non-partisan in its outlook, as outlined by Colonel Ivor Bowen in his speech to the gathering. The aversion to partisanship was seen as being essential to the group's identity and independence, its very existence contingent on being 'free from political party.' Yet, much like the WCAs, this did not preclude Bowen from an attempt to encroach into political territory. As he acknowledged during his opening address to

¹³ Tanner, *Newport Labour Party*, p. 1.

¹⁴ Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 50:4 (Dec., 2007), pp. 891-912.

the CGW meeting, once the war had ceased, ‘it would be a calamity to go back to the old party system’.¹⁵ Further still, the CGW’s aims were explicitly political, with its promotion of veterans’ issues and improvements through parliamentary legislation. The fielding of CGW candidates during local government elections across Monmouthshire in 1919 and 1922 indicated the evolution of these aims into attempts to seek democratic representation. Due to the nature of its formation, created as an alternative to the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers (NFDDSS), the CGW was considered largely right wing in its outlook. The makeup of its broader leadership, which included officers and MPs such as Conservative Wilfred Ashley, secretary of the Anti-Socialist Union, confirmed such estimations.¹⁶ However, in Newport, the CGW also gained the backing of a broader political conglomeration, including Ivor Herbert, who presided over the initial public meeting. Contrary to Bowen’s claims, the party political underpinnings of the group in Newport were varied and pervasive, serving to highlight the bonds between established and fledgling agents of political change in the town.

Nevertheless, the CGW was far from alone in its claim to represent the demobilised soldiers of Newport. The NFDDSS was also well supported in the town and led by the Liberal William Henry Williams, the prospective Coalition candidate for Bedwellty in 1918. On hearing the Comrades were planning to assemble, members of the competing NFDDSS had also decided to attend and were present in ‘strong force’ at the January meeting. There had already been tension between the two organisations since the CGW’s formation in August 1917.¹⁷ In Newport, it would turn into outright condemnation at the meeting five months later. Questions were directed towards Herbert and Bowen as the meeting progressed, with members of the audience criticising the collection of Conservative representatives present, all of whom were supporters of the CGW, for voting in favour of wounded and discharged soldiers having to serve again. As one NFDDSS supporter bitterly complained, ‘They have taken men discharged from wounds and sent them out again. That is one reason why the two societies are fighting.’¹⁸

¹⁵ *SWA*, 18 January 1918.

¹⁶ Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921-1939* (Westport, 2005), pp. 12-3.

¹⁷ Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy*, p. 12-3.

¹⁸ *WM*, 17 January 1918. *SWA*, 18 January 1918.

In the ensuing tussle, however, it was the CGW that began to take centre stage. When the Prime Minister visited Newport in August 1918, it was the Comrade's fete in Shaftesbury Park that he decided to address. Presided over by the CGW's Captain Cunynghame, described as 'commandant of the Newport branch', Lloyd George heaped praise on the organisation for 'a most enthusiastic reception' and confirmed that he was glad that 'a great comradeship' had been formed in the town. Promoters of the fete included not only Herbert, but William Brace on behalf of the miners, and Conservative Councillor Cyrus T. Clissit who was chairman of the CGW organising committee.¹⁹ In contrast, by the end of the year, the NFDDSS in Newport appeared outgunned and outmanoeuvred. Williams resigned the presidency of the Newport branch, indicating the need for drastic changes in the machinery of the local organisation which 'through no fault of the committee of the general body of members, had degenerated.'²⁰ The divergence in the early trajectories of the CGW and NFDDSS in Newport indicated the fluidity of connections and relationships between activists involved in constituency politics. The experience was replicated in different voluntary and non-party organisations, on issues such as licensing, international peace and the identity of the county. In the constituency of Newport, the three major political parties would also operate in relation to this disputed territory, each reconstructing a platform of their own.

Nevertheless, the result of the 1918 General Election did little to suggest that this multiplication of non-party bodies would transform electoral traditions instantaneously. Unlike the five other constituencies in Monmouthshire, the town did not abandon its commitment to the Liberal Party immediately, as Lewis Haslam was returned over the Labour Party's J.W. Bowen and the Independent candidate Bertie Pardoe-Thomas.²¹ The result was partly due to the direction that the Newport Liberal Association had decided to pursue in the light of Lloyd George's decision to maintain the Coalition after the war. Haslam had already held the now defunct Monmouth Boroughs seat since 1906 but he had also been a keen supporter of Lloyd George. Haslam regarded the Prime Minister as a statesman of 'courage and tact', an assessment he maintained during Lloyd George's time in Downing Street after the war.²²

¹⁹ *WM*, 12 August 1918.

²⁰ *WM*, 31 December 1918.

²¹ *SWA*, 30 December 1918. The full election result was as follows: Lewis Haslam (Coalition Liberal) – 14,080 votes (56.4%), J.W. Bowen (Labour Party) – 10,234 votes (41.0%), Bertie Pardoe-Thomas (Independent) – 647 votes (2.6%). Haslam's majority was 3,846. The turnout was approximately 62.2%.

²² *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 13 March 1908.

Equally, it is important to stress that Haslam believed that the Coalition, independent of its leader, had become a vital mechanism for national unity and post-war reconstruction. At his adoption meeting in late November 1918, he insisted that ‘The great need of the hour is unity...for the next few years we may put aside the old Party methods – which make for the extreme delay’. Haslam therefore wedded the potent electoral concept of national stability to the need for urgent social reconstruction, and stressed that the Coalition was the only route towards achieving this goal.²³ Of course, Haslam’s approach, ‘irrespective of party or creed’, was in line with other ‘coupon’ candidates across Britain and, paradoxically, in stark contrast to the stance of Liberal Associations in neighbouring coalfield districts such as Pontypool which ultimately rested on Asquithian allegiances.²⁴ However, in both scenarios, it was a case of accepting the realities of the Liberals’ position in a specific local environment. Lloyd George had the backing of not only the experienced Haslam but also other influential local Liberal figureheads, most crucially Abraham Garrod Thomas, the chairman and president of the NLA. Thomas mirrored Haslam’s appeal for cohesion in front of the local Liberal Thousand, exclaiming that, ‘We had shown ourselves great in war, and...we should prove equally great in peace.’²⁵ At this precise moment it would have been almost unthinkable that any party member would counter Garrod Thomas’ authority and object to Haslam’s selection, as the sitting MP.

Underneath the surface, and akin to the PLA in the coalfield, there were signs though that the NLA’s success in 1918 was papering over the cracks of fundamental divisions in the local party over support for the Coalition. As dissent threatened to boil over in Pontypool,²⁶ the discord was largely kept at bay in Newport by members such as T. H. Mordey and NCBC Councillor George Boots. Nevertheless, there was not a total absence of internal disagreement. While most members indicated a support for Lloyd George, isolated voices signified that the NLA was not unanimously pro-Coalition. Doubts over partnering with former Conservative foes remained, while concerns were forcibly raised during the process of Haslam’s selection. H. P. Davies, member of the Newport Chamber of Commerce, questioned Haslam’s position of unbridled support for the Prime Minister, and raised fears

²³ *SWA*, 23 November 1918. As Haslam went on to explain at the NLA meeting, ‘The sectional things we might do...the national things we must do – and there is no time to fight each other’.

²⁴ Bristol University Special Collections and Archives (BUSCA): British Election Addresses, 1918, DM668/2/1. See also Roy Douglas, ‘The Background to the “Coupon” Election Arrangements’, *The English Historical Review*, 86:339 (1971), pp. 318-36.

²⁵ *SWA*, 23 November 1918.

²⁶ See Chapter 3, p. 132.

about the large Conservative presence alongside Lloyd George, alongside the alleged ‘ruthless corruption’ that had been hidden away by the wartime Coalition. Davies confirmed he could not support Haslam, which caused a modicum of disgruntlement amongst fellow Liberals. W. E. Robertson, a Liberal councillor for the Maindee ward, bitterly resented Davies’ distrust and recommended that he ‘ought to vote for Ramsay MacDonald.’²⁷ Others struggled to hide their disdain for the Liberal predicament. Worried about any perceived abandonment of principles simply in order to remain in power, leading NLA member Herbert Greenland wrote in a letter to the *Argus* that ‘I am not pained, but angry, and indignant that leading Newport Liberals should so tamely acquiesce in such a monstrous position.’ Clearly aware of the tensions that were threatening the NLA and Liberal Associations elsewhere in the county, Greenland declared that the election, regardless of the result, threatened to ‘render the Liberal Party in twain.’²⁸ The fundamental fissures of post-war Liberal politics were therefore apparent in Newport, even if the Coalitionists had seized the initiative.

Internally, the NLA’s judgement was also clouded by its ambivalence to the expanded electorate. After Haslam’s victory, there was very little appetite for organisational reform. Unlike in Pontypool, where limited attempts were made to galvanise a Liberal fightback, electoral success in Newport fostered a sense of complacency and a lasting commitment to the rationalist view of administration that centred on rhetorical appeals to principles through legislation, rather than a dependence on mass organisation and extra-parliamentary activity.²⁹ This attitude was effective in dealing with the limited Edwardian electorate before the war but with the extension of the franchise came fresh challenges, ones which the NLA negligently refused to engage with. There was no professional party agent after 1918, despite the fact that the party secretary, T.S. Gower, had run the Liberal campaign that year. By the 1922 by-election, seven out of the nine local electoral wards had no Liberal committees and most were only revived just before the contest in October.³⁰

Nevertheless, the class composition of the town appeared to give the Liberal Party some inbuilt advantages. While the concentration of heavy industry in the dockland wards and at the Lysaght Orb steelworks attracted a significant working-class population to

²⁷ *SWA*, 23 November 1918.

²⁸ *SWA*, 26 November 1918.

²⁹ H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin and J. A. Kay, ‘The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party’, *The English Historical Review*, 91:361 (Oct., 1976), p. 743.

³⁰ *Cambria Daily Leader (CDL)*, 25 June 1918; Ramsden, ‘The Newport By-Election’, p. 33.

Newport, the middle-class presence in the town, in both its trading and commercial districts, remained significant.³¹ The Liberal doctrines of robust individualism, independence and self-help, chapel values that long outlasted the chapels, were continued and preserved by this middle-class cohort and not just within the confines of the NLA. As Duncan Tanner has argued, ‘Liberal allegiances were not based on a crude form of social control...this respect was again based on shared principles; it was not an uncritical deference.’³² Even so, the hierarchy of the NLA, dominated by Garrod Thomas, Gower and Greenland, was a symbol of the socio-political contract that remained intact after the war. The attitude to the expanded electorate may have been outdated, but the prevalence of the Liberal nonconformist creed gave the NLA a little breathing space in the immediate post-war political environment.

Haslam’s ‘coupon’ status also gave the Liberals a further chance to recharge, with the Newport Conservative Association (NCA) deciding to allow the Liberals a clear run at the seat. However, it was made abundantly clear by the NCA’s chairman, John Wyndham Beynon, that the quid pro quo would be temporary, that ‘at the end of the Coalition there would be a Conservative candidate for Newport.’³³ The thinly veiled threat was clearly an attempt to appease the local, ‘die-hard’, Conservatives who distrusted Lloyd George even more so than the Coalition Conservative representatives in Westminster.³⁴ That the NCA could afford to step down in the first place was also a fundamental indication of the party’s local strength. Beynon himself encapsulated this Conservative control in the numerous positions he held in the town.³⁵ His presence, alongside other prominent employers such as William Lysaght,³⁶ fostered forms of economic dependence and social conservatism in equal measure. The paternalistic power exercised by these industrialists had a direct impact on the voting intentions of occupational groups such as steelworkers and dockers in the town.

³¹ Tanner, *Newport Labour Party*, p. 1.

³² Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, p. 229.

³³ *WM*, 29 November 1918.

³⁴ Ramsden, ‘The Newport By-Election’, p. 23.

³⁵ *WM*, 11 March 1920. John Wyndham Beynon (1864-1944) was born in Castleton and became one of the most prominent coal owners in South Wales. He was the manager of several local colliery companies, from the EVSICC to the Newport-Abercarn Black Vein Steam Coal Company, and was elected as chairman of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association in March 1920. The industrialisation was also a long-serving member of the MCC, chairman of the Newport Harbour Commissioners and had been the High Sheriff of Monmouthshire in the concluding years of the war.

³⁶ *WM*, 28 April 1945. William Royse Lysaght (1858-1945) was a steel manufacturer from Tidenham in Gloucestershire. He worked alongside his uncle John, the founder of the iron and steel company John Lysaght and Co., before becoming manager of the Swan Garden ironworks in Wolverhampton in the late 1870s. He helped his uncle develop a new sheet-rolling plant in Newport, which was to become the Orb steelworks established in 1898. William went on to become chairman and managing director of the Lysaght Company. He was also High Sheriff of Monmouthshire before Beynon in 1915, and a local justice of the peace.

Without the presence of the SWMF, or even a united trade union movement outside of the coalfield constituencies, a deferential relationship between employers and workers was able to develop even after the war.³⁷ The strength of local Conservatism therefore lay in its accumulation of positions of power in the constituency and its potential to accrue a surprising proportion of the working-class vote in Newport.

In municipal politics, Conservative councillors were also adept at utilising the party's local strength and translating it into action in local government. NCBC representatives such as Clissit and William Augustus Linton were highly skilled in presenting themselves as simultaneously progressive and reluctant to give any ground to Labour which had made little headway in the annual elections before the war. Not even Peter Wright's selection as Mayor in October 1919 would shift the emphasis in Labour's favour.³⁸ In the ensuing debates on the most pressing social issues, such as housing, the Conservatives controlled the chamber. In a particularly hostile clash in September 1922, Labour councillors supported a resolution proposed by William Cadogan for an immediate application to the Ministry of Health for the erection of 500 additional houses to combat 'the serious shortage of houses in the borough' and the persistent problems of overcrowding in the town. While Linton and other Conservatives such as Frank Bastick accused the Labour representatives of 'socialising' the housing question, Clissit acknowledged that concerns over housing were undeniable. As a result, an amended resolution was passed, agreeing to explore *both* public and private options of construction. In their ability to stall the Labour agenda and aggravate the policy proposals of opponents, the Conservative councillors in Newport were efficient and consistent in their demonstration of local political control.

In its campaigning techniques, the NCA were also proficient in gaining the support of voters through both conventional and alternative methods. The established convention of canvassing the network of Constitutional Clubs to gauge and stimulate working-class support was still utilised after the war, even if national party organisers were now viewing the tradition as archaic and imprecise. David Jarvis has also suggested that this form of party mobilization had become increasingly moribund as the 'Con Clubs' had become almost

³⁷ Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, p. 229.

³⁸ *WM*, 29 October 1919. Peter Wright (1867-1934), the former wrestler and president of the branch of the National Sailors and Firemen's Union in the town, had been a NCBC councillor since his successful election in the Alexandra Ward in 1905. Despite his and his colleagues' continued efforts after the war, Labour would fail to gain an outright majority on the town council in the inter-war period.

entirely social in character and function.³⁹ Yet, in confined urban constituencies such as Newport, the ‘Con Clubs’ were still a primary electoral asset for the Conservatives, in terms of maintaining a tight-knit network of nodal points, throughout the town, that were sympathetic to the NCA and the wider Conservative movement. Local NCA members, such as the solicitors Louis Hornby and T. Baker Jones, remained key figures on Club Committees and therefore sustained the relationship between the party and the social life of the working majority in Newport. Alongside this method, the Conservative Party was increasingly aware of the need to appeal to new voters as a result of the arrival of mass democracy. The formation of local Women’s Associations in wards such as Maindee, and the distribution of magazines such as *Popular View* and *Home and Politics* in the town, began to emphasise the intrinsic relationship between politics and everyday life and aimed to integrate potential women supporters into the expanded political ecosystem of Newport.⁴⁰ Constituents were therefore made aware of social gatherings and community activities organised by the party across the county, symbolising the commitment of the NCA to the reconfigured electorate. The party therefore employed both customary and pioneering methods to ensure its local influence remained resolute and applicable to a variety of different audiences.

Cross-pollination with sympathetic organisations also suggested the flexibility of the Conservatives in allowing members to participate in non-party ventures. In certain scenarios, this reciprocity, in relation to non-party political activity, was achieved in collaboration with local Liberals. The most striking example of this is the emerging popularity of the town’s branch of the Rotary Club after its formation in the spring of 1920.⁴¹ As part of a global network of luncheon clubs that encouraged philanthropic work and the upholding of ethical standards in local business ventures, it is unsurprising considering the occupational and class structure of the urban area that the Newport Rotary Club attracted such an initially strong membership. Under the presidency of Louis Hornby by 1922, the branch had enticed around 125 local businessmen and professionals to join, placing it in ‘Category B’ of the internal Rotary structure as one of the ‘leading clubs in Britain’. In the same year, 43 luncheon meetings, lectures and special functions were organised attracting an average attendance of

³⁹ David Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s’, *The English Historical Review*, 111:440 (Feb., 1996), p. 71.

⁴⁰ Neal McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus, 1998), pp. 48-52.

⁴¹ *WM*, 8 March 1920.

65% of branch members, the highest annual rate according to the inter-club competition that was held across the United Kingdom.⁴²

The composition of the Newport branch and its organising committee also highlights the battle for the middle-class vote in the constituency. Alongside Hornby and fellow Conservative members such as F. P. Horden, were Liberals such as the vice-president, A. W. Heard, and even individuals with Labour loyalties such as the Reverend W. H. Williams, the honorary secretary from Magor. Liberal Party representatives were also invited to speak at Rotary Club socials, including sitting MP Lewis Haslam. In an address in October 1920, he was already confident enough to assert that ‘the rotary idea seemed to him to be very valuable. Let Britons now submerge their little differences and consider the immense problems requiring solutions.’⁴³ Of course, the Rotary Clubs worked explicitly outside of the party network, encouraging a specific type of civic engagement free of partisan identification, but its connection to the wider middle-class political culture of Newport was inescapable. As Ross McKibbin has contended, the bourgeois attitude to civic life that was promoted by branches of Rotary International led to the inculcation of conservative values.⁴⁴ However, the Rotary Clubs’ interest in industrial welfare helped display, in the words of McCarthy, ‘the traditional middle-class genius for social leadership’, both in the leaders’ strong commitment to community work, and their public concern for local social issues such as working conditions and housing.⁴⁵ The Newport Rotary Club therefore had a wider significance, not only in showing cross-party collaboration was possible, but also in promoting the need for greater understanding between local employers and the town’s workforce.

The political truce between the Liberals and Conservatives did not last long and neither was it particularly robust. A single flashpoint in relation to the Licensing Bill passed in July 1921 revealed to the NCA that Haslam would ultimately refuse to represent its interests. The local Conservatives voiced their resentment of the proposed extension of Sunday closing to Monmouthshire, standing with Forestier-Walker and MCUA colleagues in Monmouth.⁴⁶ Linton, the NCBC councillor and magistrate who had succeeded Wright as the town’s Mayor the previous year, justified local dissension on the grounds of personal

⁴² *SWA*, 30 September 1922; Gwent Archives (GA): The Newport Year Book (Newport, 1923), D975/8.

⁴³ *Western Daily Press*, 18 September 1920; *WM*, 12 October 1920; 2 February 1921.

⁴⁴ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), p. 279.

⁴⁵ McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics’, pp. 903-4.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 4, pp. 180-1.

freedom. In an interview with the *Western Mail* he maintained that, 'The closing of public houses on Sundays was an interference with the liberty of the public for which I do not see any demand.' He found public support from the party's agent in Ebbw Vale, C. E. Rake, and County Councillor and chairman of the Monmouthshire Licensed Victuallers' Association, Ebenezer Bennett.⁴⁷ Outside of the Conservative Party, Linton's message resonated with constituents in Newport where mass protests took place against the Bill.⁴⁸ While these attempts were ultimately futile, as the Bill was approved and passed into law in August, it had not gone unnoticed by Linton and the NCA that Haslam had supported its passage in Westminster. After all, Haslam was an advocate of temperance, and had Liberal allies in the local Free Church Council and the Newport Sunday School Union. Haslam's stance on the issue was the confirmation that the NCA required to withdraw its support and seek a candidate for a future election in the constituency.⁴⁹ Considering its local and county connections, and its sustained role in the political fabric of Newport, it was no surprise that the NCA decided to prepare for a contest with Haslam after August 1921.

The Labour Party was also readying an assault of its own before the 1922 by-election, but it had already faced significant challenges to assert itself in Newport before and after the war. The occupational variation in the town appeared to be less conducive to a Labour victory at the polls, as evidenced by the defeat of James Winstone on behalf of the LRC in the Monmouth Boroughs contest in 1906.⁵⁰ This is not to say that Labour tried to work against this diversity. On the contrary, at the first meeting of the Newport and District Labour Party (NLP) in September 1912, delegates representing insurance agents, bakers, boilermakers, book trades, bricklayers, carpenters, clerks, co-operators, dockers, engineers, gas workers and general labourers were all present.⁵¹ By 1914, the embryonic organisation had also voted in favour of collaboration and joint action with the town's branch of the ILP and the local TLC.⁵² An early willingness to embrace a diverse set of occupational groups, and to lean on the established representative bodies of the labour movement, eventually led to an amalgamation with the Newport TLC in April 1918 and reflected the shift in psychology of

⁴⁷ *WM*, 21 July 1921.

⁴⁸ *SWA*, 29 July 1921; 2 August 1921; 6 August 1921.

⁴⁹ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 24.

⁵⁰ Tanner, *Newport Labour Party*, p. 3. Tanner suggests that Winstone relied heavily on the Newport branch of the National Railwaymen's Union but this was not enough to overturn the working-class support for Haslam and the Liberal Party.

⁵¹ Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives (CUSCA): NLP Records, Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Newport and District Labour Party, 12 September 1912, MFilm 013/1.

⁵² CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 26 March 1914, MFilm 013/1.

the NLP towards an increasingly collaborative outlook.⁵³ After all, Labour could not rely on the vocal support of the SWMF, whose priorities lay to the north and the west. Furthermore, while some local union branches offered financial sustenance, the NLP's membership base was either too small to stimulate wider activity or was not as actively involved in the town's political frameworks when compared to other industrial communities in the county and the wider coalfield.⁵⁴

In the face of occupational diversity and union ambivalence, the NLP therefore sought to combat these shortcomings by expanding its base outside of affiliated unionism. As early as September 1918, and as increasingly advised to do so by William Harris, the party welcomed 121 new individual members to the fray, 66 men and 55 women. The Newport Women's Section was also reconstituted and its representation on the NLP's Executive Committee was increased to three members, including the chairwoman Mrs. Wyatt, the secretary Mrs. Williams and the longstanding activist Margaret Meggitt. A clear agenda to field a Labour candidate at the next parliamentary contest was also outlined.⁵⁵ The NLP therefore welcomed the tenets of the 1918 constitution even more energetically than their fellow comrades did in the Monmouthshire valleys.

In their deliberation of candidates in 1918, the NLP also demonstrated an additional readiness to look further afield for inspiration, even if residual pro-war attitudes caused internal concessions. Local candidates such as the carpenter W. J. Davies and the NUR's W. J. Griffiths were rejected in favour of Clifford Allen, the Newport born yet London based leader of the ILP, and John William Bowen, the Swansea trade unionist and chairman of both the Postmen's Federation and subsequently reformed Union of Post-Office Workers.⁵⁶ Allen's objection to the war, and his leadership of the No-Conscription Fellowship during the conflict created potential complications for the NLP. His inclusion on the list at least indicated a stable ILP presence in the Labour ranks but one that was not strong enough to

⁵³ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Joint Meeting between the Newport Trades Council and Newport and District Labour Party, 4 April 1918, MFilm 013/1. The new body was officially declared as the Labour Representative Committee of the Newport Trades & Labour Council, but was more commonly referred to as the Newport Labour Party after 1918.

⁵⁴ Tanner, *Newport Labour Party*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 9 September 1918; Minutes of Individual Members, 24 September 1918, MFilm 013/1.

⁵⁶ *WM*, 1 August 1916; CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 19 October 1918. Fred Bramley, the assistant general secretary of the TUC, was also considered but later stood in the Plymouth Devonport constituency.

overrule the local TLC's concerns surrounding the selection of the conscientious objector.⁵⁷ Bowen was certainly perceived to be a safer choice. He had proven his credibility as an organiser of the Postmen's Federation at a national level and his familiarity with the labour movement in South Wales appeased the delegates on the TLC. His performance in 1918, which contributed to the Labour Party receiving 41% of the vote, gave the NLP further vindication that the correct decision had been made.⁵⁸ Through careful deliberation, some of the pieces required for a future breakthrough were therefore falling into place for the NLP by 1919.

In the intervening years before the 1922 by-election, the NLP endeavoured to present a dichotomy between its own message and the anti-socialist rhetoric of its Liberal and Conservative opponents. In the process, it demonstrated an understanding of the specific political environment of Newport and Labour's ability to represent a subtle socialist message without the socialist label. The annual municipal elections for the NCBC provided ample opportunities to practice this routine. In November 1919, the NLP felt confident enough to field seven candidates, one for each of the contested wards in the division, and the party's manifesto rested solely on a commitment to reconstruction. References to socialism were side-lined in favour of a pragmatic five point plan concentrating on health, housing, water provision, education and electricity. By accentuating Labour's commitment to improving public welfare and encouraging wider participation in public meetings or, as the manifesto put it, to 'take an interest in the conduct of the town and your own citizenship', the NLP presented itself as a responsible organisation that was driven by a desire to improve the lives and wellbeing of the people of Newport rather than the ideological dogmas propagated and stigmatised by its political opponents.⁵⁹ Steady rewards followed as Labour gained four seats during the 1919 NCBC elections, although the party remained considerably short of a council majority.⁶⁰ A similar technique was used in subsequent campaigns such as the unsuccessful

⁵⁷ *WM*, 17 August 1914; Arthur Marwick, *Clifford Allen: Open Conspirator* (Edinburgh; London, 1964), p. 51, p. 73. The Newport TLC had consistently been supportive of the war effort since 1914. It was in fact Peter Wright who denied the conflict was defined by the opposition between capital and labour. Instead, in an address to the TLC in the summer of 1914, the NCBC councillor characterised the war as a tussle between 'democracy and autocracy.'

⁵⁸ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 2 January 1919, MFilm 013/1.

⁵⁹ CUSCA: NLP Records, Newport Labour Party Manifesto, 1919 Municipal Elections, 1 November 1919, MFilm 013/1.

⁶⁰ *WM*, 26 November 1919.

fight against the construction of Talybont waterworks in the spring of 1920.⁶¹ A deliberate focus on health, welfare and social problems, underscored by an unspoken element of caution, characterised the NLP's public approach and its early post-war development.

National issues also infused Labour's agenda with a broader scope and helped generate local action. Foreign policy was of particular interest to the NLP as the Russian Civil War intensified in 1920. In March, Labour delegates representing 10,000 organised workers in the town passed three resolutions, calling on both the British and French Governments to 'establish immediately full diplomatic relations with the Russian Soviet Government'. They also 'emphatically' protested against the actions taken by Poland in its invasion of Russian territory and the perceived role of the Allies in blockading the Soviets. In its condemnations and its support of the Russian state, the NLP revealed a radical articulation of how it perceived national Labour Party policy and its own status as part of the wider labour movement:

as an integral part of the British Labour Movement, the Party [NLP] will use every means, as well as its influence, with the future Labour Government to bring about the repudiation of any commitments entered into between the British and Polish Government at the expense of Russia.⁶²

As tensions intensified in the late summer, the British labour movement decided to act. The NLP's representatives were at the forefront of the campaign. A national Council of Action was hastily agreed, set up after the joint resolution on the 9 August between the Labour Party, Parliamentary Labour Party and TUC. The accord signified the intentions of all to work together in order to prevent the British Government from assisting in the Russo-Polish conflict and potentially engineering a further war between the Allied Powers and the Soviets in the process. The threat of strike action, coupled with *Herald* interviews with both Lloyd George and Russian delegates in London a few days later, dissuaded the Prime Minister from further escalation and the Coalition Government decided to advocate a peace

⁶¹ CUSCA: NLP Records, Newport Labour Party Pamphlet, Talybont Water Scheme, January 1920; *WM*, 16 January 1920. Labour's hostility to the scheme rested on the onerous rise in rents and rates as a result of local Water Board borrowing. NLP leaders denounced these decisions as 'vicious finance'. Peter Wright, now Labour Mayor, echoed these suspicions at a public meeting in the town several weeks after the party pamphlets had been distributed.

⁶² CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 11 March 1920, MFilm 013/1.

settlement between Russia and Poland.⁶³ Despite apparent success, the battle was not over and the Council's efforts persisted. At a following special conference in Westminster, delegates reinforced the resolution that 'the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war'. Bowen stood alongside the Labour Party leader William Adamson on the platform at Central Hall and sounded the alarm for party members across Britain to make a decisive display of unity in the face of a potential renewal of conflict:

And now comes the test – the test for us as to whether we are going to say that the Government shall not commit us to war against our will...The time has passed for theorising, for academic discussions at Conference, and British Labour, in common with French and Irish Labour if we desire it, has to declare that Labour will fight for peace.⁶⁴

Bowen wrote the official report of the special conference for the Council and also began to propagandise the organisation in several subsequent contributions to *The Post*, the national publication of his own Union of Post-Office Workers.⁶⁵ His role at the centre of this initiative motivated local Labour members in Newport to act accordingly. The Newport Council of Action was one of approximately 350 similar bodies that were to work in conjunction with the national Council as local 'centres of information' and to prepare for any potential strike action.⁶⁶ They were also designed to guard against local political complacency. Special conferences were planned to promote the issue to NLP members. Demonstrations and open-air meetings were led by leading figures in the NLP, such as G. J. Clarke, the incumbent party chairman Francis H. Ayers and the NCBC Councillors Frank Humphries and Frank Quick.⁶⁷ However, as with fellow Councils across Britain, the Newport branch struggled to maintain momentum after the Government's public declaration of non-intervention. By the end of August, attendance at special conferences had declined despite the continuing support of various local trade unions, particularly the Amalgamated Society of

⁶³ Stephen White, 'Labour's Council of Action 1920', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9:4 (Oct., 1974), p. 102.

⁶⁴ Warwick Digital Collections (WDC): Council of Action, Report of the Special Conference on Labour and the Russian-Polish War, 13 August 1920, MSS 36/R30/23. Bowen was a co-opted member of the Council officially representing the Union of Post-Office Workers.

⁶⁵ *The Post*, 21 August 1920.

⁶⁶ WDC: Council of Action Pamphlet: Form Your Councils of Action, 17 August 1920, MSS 292/947/1/29.

⁶⁷ CUSCA: NLP Records, Newport Council of Action Leaflet, August 1920; Minutes of Council of Action meeting 16 August 1920, MFilm 013/1.

Engineers and the NUR.⁶⁸ In similar vein, Home Office intelligence reported that the movement was losing momentum by September.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Bowen's influence and the response of the NLP highlight the breadth of the Labour programme in localities such as Newport, alongside the ability of local members to mobilise around specific national issues.

The Newport Labour Party was therefore shaping an identity of its own. At the same time, it was facing problems that would stunt its growth in the constituency. Apathy had already begun to set in, as highlighted by the poor turnout at May Day demonstrations in 1920.⁷⁰ In this sense, the decision to form a Council of Action may also have been a way to regain lost ground. The relationship between delegates and party representatives on the NCBC was tested for the first time in December 1920, when several Labour councillors were criticised for their attendance at the banquet of the new Conservative Mayor, William August Linton. At one rather heated meeting of delegates, it was suggested that any public presence at such events contradicted the NLP's policies on expenditure and municipal welfare and an amended motion was passed requesting all Labour representatives to reject any invitations to similar events in the future.⁷¹

A different kind of distrust was also displayed towards the NWCA in the following year. With preparations for the 1921 municipal elections already underway, the group had written to the NLP asking for NWCA members 'with Labour views' to be considered as candidates. Almost immediately, the request was seen as an impingement on Labour's authority and it was resolved that the incumbent NLP secretary and agent, James Henry Edwards, respond to the NWCA suggesting that the proposed method of selection was contrary to party rules and would be ruled unacceptable.⁷² This response is not surprising considering the Labour Party's suspicious attitude towards these voluntary bodies. WCAs and other non-party organisations were often accused of diluting individual commitment to the party's cause and representing 'the fig-leaf for middle-class anti-socialism.'⁷³ In Newport, the

⁶⁸ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Special Conference of the Council of Action. 21 August 1920, MFilm 013/1.

⁶⁹ White, 'Labour's Council of Action', p. 121.

⁷⁰ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 6 May 1920, MFilm 013/1.

⁷¹ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 2 December 1920, MFilm 013/1.

⁷² CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 11 July 1921, MFilm 013/1.

⁷³ *TWL*, 23 February 1923; McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Association and Democratic Politics', p. 893; June Hannam, 'Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 77 (Spring 2010), pp. 74-5. In many ways, the NLP's reaction to the NWCA was courteous in comparison to Labour's response elsewhere in the county. In Abertillery, for example, the visiting women's organiser Marion Phillips voiced concerns about diverting

NLP's stubborn reservations came at a cost of preventing improved equality of opportunity, both for women members and representatives of associated women's guilds. In March 1922, for example, when the increased representation of the NUR women's guild on the Executive Committee was raised, it was swiftly and abrasively rejected.⁷⁴ There were therefore limits to the NLP's appeal alongside self-imposed barriers and rigidities in terms of approach that hampered the bond between Labour and its most recently acquired members in Newport.

The NLP was ultimately a party still in its infancy. Strides had been made but an element of uncertainty about its electability remained, further highlighted by its failure to gain a majority on the NCBC before the following parliamentary contest of 1922. Nevertheless, in its struggle to make an emphatic breakthrough, Labour had exposed the tensions in Newport's political landscape that enabled three active local parties to root themselves into local society, and allowed a multiplying network of public non-party bodies to rapidly take shape. This melting pot of parties and voluntary organisations forged an energetic political culture in the town that may not have had the impact of effecting immediate electoral change but would slowly lay the groundwork for a shift in allegiances that would materialise firstly in the by-election of 1922 and following contests during the 1920s.

II. Coalitions and Conflicted Identities

On 12 September 1922, Newport's Coalition MP Lewis Haslam died of a duodenal ulcer. His obituary in the *South Wales Argus* praised his relentless effort as a parliamentarian since 1906 and mapped out the attributes that the Garrod Thomas' owned newspaper believed had made him an ideal representative for Newport. Chief among them were, 'His sound common-sense, his great business experience, and his aptitude for coming to the heart of things'.⁷⁵ Haslam's death could not have come at a worse time for Lloyd George, whose relationship with the Conservatives had rapidly deteriorated over Ireland and had now

attention away from the work of the Abertillery Labour Party and local TLC and explicitly discouraged 'Labour Women' from supporting the WCA branch or other associated non-party organisations in the district such as the British Legion.

⁷⁴ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 21 March 1922, MFilm 013/1. A motion resolved that the guilds in question were 'only entitled to one representative, & that in future they must send their nominations & the General Committee decide who the representatives should be.'

⁷⁵ *SWA*, 16 September 1922; 23 September 1922; *The Times*, 16 September 1922.

reached breaking point as a result of the Chanak crisis which had broken out in August. Even by the Prime Minister's perceived standards of underhand manoeuvring, his recklessness in threatening force and his failure to consult with Chamberlain and other members of the Cabinet had alarmed the political classes in Westminster and pushed the Conservatives towards the brink of an exit from the Coalition.⁷⁶ The sense of friction was echoed at a constituency level. In Newport, updates on the 'Far East Crisis' ran daily in the columns of the *Argus*, alongside updates on the state of the relationship between Lloyd George and the Conservative backbenchers who were now contemplating his downfall.⁷⁷ The break-up of the Coalition Government was now a matter of when not if. As a consequence, the Newport by-election would be inescapably connected to the fate of Lloyd George's Premiership. However, it will be argued in this section that while the contest was the final nail in the coffin for the Coalition, and certainly had the issue of the Prime Minister's leadership and competency as its starting point, the by-election was essential in reinforcing the pluralism of the Newport melting pot. These trends included the rhetorical failures of the NLA, the incomplete development of the Labour Party in the town, and the importance of the newly enfranchised voters in deciding the result.

In the constituency, the Conservatives had already decided to distance themselves from the Liberals before Haslam's death. In June 1922, the NCA officially adopted businessman Reginald Clarry as the prospective representative in Parliament. Originally from Cardiff, Clarry was the former manager of Swansea Gasworks, Duffryn Steel and Tin-plate Works, and had also acquired experience in local government representing the Sketty ward on Glamorgan County Council. He was a self-proclaimed 'die-hard' Conservative who had grown increasingly suspicious of, and hostile to, the idea of a Coalition Government. In his speech to the meeting of over 300 members of the NCA in June, he declared that the partnership with the Liberals had been a sham, one that had been laid bare by the subsequent actions of Coalition MPs in abandoning Conservative sympathies in Parliament and in the constituencies. The Conservative Party 'had sunk its identity in the Coalition', he asserted, and it was now time to raise it from the depths.⁷⁸ Clarry was pinpointing the rising resentment of local Conservatives towards Haslam that had intensified since the debates over Sunday closing the previous year. Clarry reiterated the same stance in the following tours of the

⁷⁶ Michael Kinnear, *The Fall of Lloyd George: the Political Crisis of 1922* (London, 1973), pp. 5-19.

⁷⁷ *SWA*, 1 September 1922.

⁷⁸ *Monmouthshire Beacon (MB)*, 2 June 1922.

Constitutional Clubs in Newport during 1922, helping to set up a groundswell of antipathy towards the sitting MP in the town.⁷⁹

Clarry's broader message, that combined a rejection of prohibition, support for the loyalists in Ireland and the rolling back of 'unnecessary Government departments', was successful in uniting his fellow anti-Coalitionists with the defenders of Austen Chamberlain's pro-Coalition stance in the constituency. This level of unison highlighted the contrast between the mood of grass roots associations and that of the party in Westminster which, despite the mounting pressure from the backbenches to act, remained unable to make a definitive decision until the result of the by-election had been declared. Indecision at a national level was mirrored by Clarry's status as an official party candidate rather than an Independent Conservative. Indeed, a hamstrung Chamberlain became increasingly aware that his position as party leader would be in jeopardy if he deliberately exiled Clarry, especially after he received additional backing from the Tredegar estate and more broadly from the 'Free Conservatives' wing of the party. Chamberlain therefore decided to extend to Clarry the muted approval of party headquarters.⁸⁰ Paradoxically, autonomy gave the NCA's chosen candidate an opportunity. In line with the argument of Jeremy Smith, Clarry would put forward a rallying cry that would pre-empt the modifications of Baldwin, of a 'party in an orthodox, financially-prudent, small-state and predominantly middle-class garb'.⁸¹ Crucially, as it did in nearby Monmouth, the impetus for change in 1922 also came from the ground up.

Once the campaign opened in full at the beginning of October, Clarry directed these themes at the Newport electorate. As an official candidate, he initially sought to distance himself from Lloyd George, claiming that 'the maladministration of the present Government, or its continuance, could not be justified.'⁸² This standpoint complemented his desire for a return to Disraelian 'clear-cut party politics' and the unity of the party across Britain. In particular, he suggested the time was right for a strong Conservative government based on the immediate development of overseas trade by reducing expenditure and institutional bureaucracy. However, the central pillar of Clarry's rhetoric rested on his appeal to the working-class citizens of Newport.⁸³ He focused on established local issues that had already

⁷⁹ *WM*, 6 June 1922.

⁸⁰ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 25.

⁸¹ Jeremy Smith, *The Taming of Democracy: The Conservative Party, 1880-1924* (Cardiff, 1997), p. 76.

⁸² *South Wales Weekly Argus (SWSA)*, 7 October 1922.

⁸³ *SWSA*, 7 October 1922.

gained support among voters in the town such as Sunday closing and the extension of the Licensing Bill.⁸⁴ He also reminded the resident workforce of the paternal relationship between employers and employed that had been promoted by Beynon and Lysaght before him, and used his own experience in management as a guide:

He [Clarry] had been a worker all his life...That gave him the advantage of being able to appreciate the industrial workers' position right from the foundation....with regard to practical industry and commerce, that his experience outweighed the whole lot on the Labour platform put together (Applause).⁸⁵

In addition, Clarry's appeal was consistently anti-socialist in tone and texture, designed to dissuade both working-class and middle-class voters from turning to Labour. For ammunition, he used the immediate context of the industrial disputes in the Monmouthshire coalfield. As an ongoing strike in Ebbw Vale provided the backdrop to the contest, Clarry attempted to link the actions of the trade unions to the perceived damage to local enterprise caused by clashes in the coalfield. He directly blamed the Labour Party, claiming it was increasingly dominated by the same quorum of anarchists and extremists that had taken hold of the SWMF.⁸⁶ Despite the inaccuracy of these accusations, playing on the fears of the Newport voters was an abiding aspect of the Conservative campaign and undoubtedly an effective one. It gave the NCA a significant amount of underlying momentum going into polling day.

In contrast to the Conservative cohesion, the fallibilities that already characterised the NLA hampered the Liberal campaign in Newport. Divisions between supporters of Asquith and Lloyd George intensified after the 1918 General Election, and as the reputation of the latter worsened. As a result, the NLA was caught in a problematic position, especially as local momentum gathered in favour of Asquith. Further insight into the issues at stake can be gained from the competition for the candidacy following Haslam's death. Members of both camps were considered, from Garrod Thomas to Lady Rhondda. The former was deemed first choice but his previous support of the Coalition may have deterred members and even Garrod

⁸⁴ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', pp. 35-6.

⁸⁵ *SWA*, 7 October 1922.

⁸⁶ *SWA*, 12 October 1922.

Thomas himself from following up on his intention to stand.⁸⁷ Instead, a compromise choice was made in the form of William Lyndon Moore, the district coroner, local solicitor and former president of the town's Chamber of Commerce, who was adopted unanimously by the NLA Executive and by the Liberal Thousand in late September.⁸⁸ With concession came hesitancy. It appears that Moore was uncertain about his decision to stand, which concerned some members even before his adoption and delayed the opening of election proceedings. In an attempt to counteract the uncertainty, Moore was depicted in the *Argus* as 'an apostle of conciliation'. In his understanding of the town and its institutions, it was claimed he had the opportunity to close the rifts between local supporters of Lloyd George and Asquith, and as an 'old-world Liberal', his commitment to the adage of peace, retrenchment and reform was seen as a way to 'unite all sections in the Liberal Party'.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, his selection can be seen as an implicit confirmation that the NLA was choosing to ignore, rather than heal, old wounds.

The Liberals also prioritised steering away from most discussions on the Coalition. As a result of the inescapable party tensions, this ensured unity was maintained in the ranks before polling day, but at the expense of alienating voters who were increasingly antipathetic to Lloyd George. Instead, Moore regularly emphasised the Edwardian tenets of pre-war Liberalism, claiming to be a true Liberal who supported party harmony over sectionalism. In the opening week of the contest, he categorically rejected any allegiance to individual party leaders.⁹⁰ He stuck to promoting staple party issues, from free trade to temperance and equal opportunities in education. The open aversion to the Coalition left him open to accusations of ambiguity, particularly from J.W. Bowen and the Labour campaign. To combat this, Moore firstly accentuated his own local identity as a resident of Newport, juxtaposed against the Swansea origins of his opponents, in order to make clear that only he understood the mentality of the local electorate. He also sought to label his opponents as outsiders who could never understand the town's culture and its 'requirements'.⁹¹ Secondly, he highlighted his

⁸⁷ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 30.

⁸⁸ *SWA*, 29 September 1922.

⁸⁹ *SWA*, 29 September 1922; *SWWA*, 30 September 1922; Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 30.

⁹⁰ *SWA*, 29 September 1922. At his adoption meeting on 28 September, Moore stated that, 'I am neither a "pro" nor an "anti"...I am not a revolving tee-totem, nor a whirling dervish. I intend to keep my face in one direction, and that is the direction in which Liberal progress marches.'

⁹¹ *SWA*, 29 September 1922; *SWWA*, 7 October 1922. At another campaign meeting at Maindee Workingmen's Liberal Institute, Moore used the entrenched rugby rivalry between Newport and Swansea to demonstrate his awareness of, and affinity with, local cultural distinctions. He signalled his admiration for fellow Liberal George Boots, the Newport forward and former Welsh rugby international, and suggested he was looking forward to the

long held support of the suffrage movement in an attempt to gain the crucial women's vote. At a gathering of the local WLA, Moore outlined his deep commitment to women's suffrage, an issue which he had supported for decades. This was seemingly reciprocated by the women present. As one member, Mrs. Tom Jones, suggested, 'Women ought to remember that Mr. Moore had always been a friend of women... He was their supporter when they were fighting in the days of the old Suffrage Society.'⁹²

Nonetheless, the Liberal machine still rested on a fragile return to stale Edwardian rhetoric, a flaw it shared with fellow party associations across the county. Even the appeal to women was portrayed in outdated terms of advocating 'social salvation' and preserving the role of 'the builder and protectress of the home' in maintaining liberty, peace and prosperity.⁹³ Despite his efforts, Moore's platform also remained tethered to wider public concerns over the Coalition, and was ultimately propped up by a local organisation still torn between two national leaders. As Ramsden has argued, the predicament of the NLA's position, and the unambitious nature of Moore's response, differed strikingly from the belligerent and energetic tone promoted by the Conservatives in Newport.⁹⁴ The result was a Liberal campaign that raised issues but no solutions, that expressed values but no strategy, and that struggled to deal with the combined threat of both Labour and Conservative challengers. Indeed, as the contest progressed, Moore spent far more energy on outlining criticisms of his opponents than on an outline of his own beliefs, in so doing underlining the lack of substance that often typified his addresses. As he declared at one election meeting, 'he stood in this fight for Newport against Swansea, for the principles of Liberalism (as he interpreted them), and against the extravagance of socialist and Communist Labour.'⁹⁵ Outside of these guiding principles, Moore seemed to stand for little else.

The anti-socialist stance of both the NLA and NCA also demonstrated the concerns of both opponents over the growing momentum of Labour in the division. As a result of their opponent's complex relationship with the Coalition Government, the NLP was in a relatively stable position before the by-election. Indeed, the promising second-place finish in 1918, and

upcoming derby against Swansea. The blend of sport and politics was taken further, when he declared that, 'Gentleman, we have a ground record to keep. We have held it for 17 years. Swansea has always been a formidable opponent.'

⁹² *SWA*, 6 October 1922.

⁹³ *SWA*, 4 October 1922.

⁹⁴ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 30.

⁹⁵ *SWA*, 12 October 1922.

the advances made by the NLP up to 1922, added to wider party ambitions that a seismic victory could be accomplished. Preparations for an election had been underway since the installation of the former Durham miner William Best Lewcock as local party agent in September 1921. Over the next year, the party drew up schemes for ‘perfecting Ward organisation’, greater promotion through mass canvassing techniques, and the distribution of party publications and pro-Labour newspapers, such as the *Labour Organizer* and *Daily Herald*.⁹⁶ The perceived success of the May Day celebrations in 1922 also inspired a renewed sense of optimism. The NLP had confronted the previous indifference to party demonstrations by organising a ‘vigorous open-air propaganda campaign’ which dwarfed previous attempts in scope and subsequent support from local members.⁹⁷ The NLP combined this expansion of electoral activity with a level of continuity in its selection of Bowen as the Labour candidate for the next election.⁹⁸ The NLP was therefore mobilising for the battles ahead, and was better prepared than they had been in 1918.

Labour’s agenda emphasised the continuing need for improvements in public welfare. In Bowen’s first public meeting, he focused strongly on issues such as overcrowding and the lack of new housing, problems that the NLP had been agitating for since the municipal elections of 1919.⁹⁹ However, an emphasis on class was also present and persisted throughout the campaign. In a gathering at St. Stephen’s Church Institute, Bowen called on the dockers, railwaymen and general workers to back him as the only candidate sympathetic to their industrial struggles, proclaiming that, ‘the policy of the Labour Party, was to secure for the produce of wealth, either by hand or brain, a fair share of the fruits of their Labour’.¹⁰⁰ The NLP also recognised the need to take the initiative by attempting to tie both the Liberals and Conservatives to the Coalition partnership. Bowen addressed the issue through the themes of the post-war peace treaties and public suspicions surrounding the financial debt caused by the

⁹⁶ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting 22 August 1921; 19 September 1921; Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 29 May 1922, MFilm 013/1. Lewcock had previously been educated at Ruskin College. As a result of his objection to the war on religious grounds, he struggled to gain employment, becoming a Labour Party agent for the Stroud area before moving to Newport in 1921 with his wife Constance Mary and his three children. After his time in Monmouthshire, William migrated to York, becoming the regional organiser for the Labour Party in the north-east of England.

⁹⁷ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 23 May 1922, MFilm 013/1. As part of the campaign, two mass meetings ran weekly throughout the summer months in the predominantly working-class wards of the town, such as Crindau and Maindee.

⁹⁸ *SWWA*, 30 September 1922.

⁹⁹ *SWA*, 4 October 1922.

¹⁰⁰ *SWA*, 5 October 1922.

war. In effect, he contended that regardless of his opponents' position, they would still be supporters of the Coalition by association.¹⁰¹

To assist Bowen, the NLP also attracted a plethora of notable Labour figures to speak on behalf of the candidate, from the Pontypridd MP T.I. Mardy Jones to the Labour Party women's organisers Elizabeth Andrews and Marion Phillips.¹⁰² Speakers from outside Wales were also invited to stand alongside Bowen at mass meetings and address national issues. The arrival of Arthur Henderson, the architect of the 1918 party constitution and current Chief Whip for Labour in Parliament, was certainly the most consequential of these visits to the town. At a Labour gathering on the eve of polling day, Henderson warned against the 'old Camberwell bogey of Bolshevism' and insisted that the persistent anti-socialist message of Labour's opponents must be counteracted beyond the by-election. Henderson alleged that such inflammatory bombast was deliberately intended to divert attention away from the Coalition's blunders and maintained that the prime opportunity to punish both Liberals and Conservatives responsible for the post-war governmental failings lay in the hands of the Newport voter.¹⁰³ In his study of the by-election, John Ramsden has asserted that the presence of these Labour leaders did not add anything that was original to the local contest in Newport, suggesting that, 'only Labour used its sledgehammers to crack walnuts'.¹⁰⁴ However, this interpretation misses the integral relationship being constructed between the constituencies and the external Labour Party beyond Monmouthshire. The appearance of MPs, organisers and party leaders from far and wide was not simply an excessive electoral strategy but instead a spur for continuing activism, an encouragement to the NLP that they were heading in the right direction. It was Henderson's reassurance that would resonate in the NLP's perseverance in 1922 and beyond.

There was therefore a genuine belief inside the NLP that Labour could succeed in Newport, even in a tri-partite contest. Such confidence even bordered on the hyperbolic. Speaking at a party meeting on the 16 October, Bowen declared that his opponents were in a state of despair and desperation, that 'They were both down and out.'¹⁰⁵ Even if this claim was accurate in relation to the NLA, the expectations of Labour victory need to be tempered

¹⁰¹ *SWA*, 5 October 1922.

¹⁰² *SWA*, 14 October 1922.

¹⁰³ *SWA*, 14 October 1922.

¹⁰⁴ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ *SWA*, 17 October 1922.

with a dose of electoral reality. While Labour could openly attack both Moore and Clarry for their parties' association with Lloyd George and the Coalition, both of Bowen's opponents could counter-punch with a powerful anti-socialist appeal that was pervasive, and fuelled the doubts of the wider Newport electorate. Undoubtedly, Labour had momentum in the constituency, but it is arguable whether or not it was tangible enough to overthrow decades of Liberal and Conservative allegiances, at least in the early 1920s.

The gathering of the NWCA on the 13 October therefore proved to be the meeting point of three competing, and competitive, party machines.¹⁰⁶ It also implied that each party made direct attempts to adapt its message to the expanded electorate. One by one, Bowen, Moore and Clarry were each asked to give statements and answer questions from the floor. Bowen supported legislation in favour of the provision of clean milk, the disarmament of nations and the co-operation of men and women in the trade unions. Moore advocated greater equality between men and women, calling on Newport's women voters to determine the result of the election and maintain the spirit of Liberalism in the town. Finally, Clarry praised the 'special outlook' that women possessed before suggesting they had a responsibility to educate themselves on the failures of the Coalition and the need for a return to 'clear-cut honest party politics'. While Moore and Bowen emphasised domestic issues linked to the home, Clarry continued to explore themes that he had discussed with the broader Newport electorate, including 'rigid economy', support for ex-servicemen and their families and repealing the income and property qualifications on old-age pensions.¹⁰⁷

A strict party policy message that was similar for both men and women voters may well have been a significant factor in Clarry's subsequent triumph, which saw him record a surprising victory in the by-election contest by a majority of 2,090 votes.¹⁰⁸ Certainly, Clarry believed the NWCA meeting had been pivotal to his success. In a post-election *Argus* interview, he attributed his victory to the support of Newport's women voters, proclaiming that, 'The ladies were treated, so far as I am concerned, as the equals of men... They have been studying the political situation, and do not confine their attention merely to domestic affairs and sex legislation.'¹⁰⁹ Also key was the NCA's achievement in maintaining the

¹⁰⁶ See beginning of Chapter 5, pp. 206-7.

¹⁰⁷ *TWL*, 13 October 1922; *SWA*, 14 October 1922.

¹⁰⁸ *SWA*, 19 October 1922. The full election result was as follows: Reginald Clarry (Conservative Party) – 13,515 votes (40.0%), J. W. Bowen (Labour Party) – 11,425 votes (33.8%), William Lyndon Moore (Liberal Party) – 8,841 votes (26.2%). The turnout was approximately 79.2%.

¹⁰⁹ *SWA*, 20 October 1922.

working-class vote in the industrial wards dominated by local Conservative employers. With his focus on the expansion of trade, Clarry also secured a strong support from the entrepreneurs and businessmen in the town.¹¹⁰ In contrast, the NLP appeared to have failed to translate organisational promise into electoral progress. Taken in isolation, the result which saw Bowen come second with 11,425 votes was a significant blow both locally and for Labour leaders in Westminster. It was Ramsay MacDonald who delivered the most scathing post-mortem, declaring that:

The Newport failure is a heaven-sent warning against compromising attempts to sneak into victory. I wish that some good man that was in the fight would tell its story, so that its lesson may save us from any more of its kind. It is not the failure at Newport that casts any discredit on anyone; it is the fight itself.¹¹¹

However, the actual result of the by-election obscured the advances Labour had made in Newport by 1922. In a constituency that was more middle-class in its social composition and more diverse in its occupational makeup, the Labour Party was on course to be relatively successful. It was just a stretch too far to expect success at this moment in time. In a tri-party contest and a significantly higher turnout than 1918, Labour had gained more votes than they had ever previously achieved in the area. In the following General Election a month later, they unsurprisingly finished second to Clarry once again, but gained a noteworthy 45.7% of the vote.¹¹² Arguably, the most significant failure in 1922 lay with the NLA. Moore had been pushed into third place out of three contestants and had gained only 26.2% of the vote, less than half of the proportion Haslam had gained in 1918. The defeat was so disastrous for the NLA that they did not even field a candidate for the General Election in November.¹¹³ Far from an anti-socialist backlash, the 1922 by-election was far more of a deterrent to Liberal prospects in Newport.

¹¹⁰ Ramsden, 'The Newport By-Election', p. 36.

¹¹¹ *Forward*, 28 October 1922.

¹¹² *WM*, 16 November 1922. The full election result was as follows: Reginald Clarry (Conservative Party) – 19,019 votes (54.3%), J. W. Bowen (Labour Party) – 16,000 votes (45.7%). The turnout was approximately 82.1%.

¹¹³ *SWA*, 3 November 1922. Moore refused to run in another three cornered contest. Unable to find another viable candidate the NLA withdrew from the Election.

Of course, the contest had wider implications. Clarry's victory triggered the end of the Coalition Government and paved the way for an election which would see the balance of British politics tilt towards the Conservative Party. In Newport, it was arguably the first and last time all three major political parties fought against each other on equal footing and when each had a relatively realistic chance of winning. At the contest's end, two parties were left standing with the reigning Liberals deposed and in a critical condition. The struggle had also revealed which party was ready to adjust and which was unable to amend its methods. In many ways, the immediate post-war years in Newport symbolised the exceptional transformations that were taking shape as a result of greater enfranchisement, expanded democracy and wider political participation of both men and women since 1918. Yet, the by-election did not represent a culmination of these developments. Rather it was the first opportunity to gauge the successes and failures of the process of incomplete acculturation. It was the clearest demonstration so far of which parties and organisations were best positioned to take advantage of the altered post-war political landscape.

III. Playing the Long Game

Writing after the 1922 General Election, the former NLP chairman Francis H. Ayers felt compelled to provide an explanation for Labour's recent failures. The loss of two parliamentary contests in quick succession, compounded by the results for Labour in the town's municipal contests in early November, appeared to leave the NLP in a precarious position. On its behalf, Ayers insisted on a public diagnosis.¹¹⁴ Choosing to write into the *Argus*, he lamented that a 'bad feeling had been engendered' between all political parties in the town, caused by unsavoury language on the platform and the unwelcome coercion of external influences, particularly members of the Church, which led to an electorate that was 'less politically interested or informed'.¹¹⁵ Evidently an accumulation of fears born out of defeat, the letter revealed a residual restlessness at the perceived apathy of the working-class voters in Newport, the increasing breadth of the town's political ecosystem and the troubling

¹¹⁴ *SWA*, 2 November 1922; *WM*, 16 November 1922. While Councillors Frank Quick and Philip Thomas retained the support of the Crindau and Alexandra Ward seats respectively, there were shock defeats for Thomas O'Brien in the Central Ward, and F.J. Humphries in the Victoria Ward, the latter placing a close second to the Liberal George Boots.

¹¹⁵ *SWA*, 20 November 1922. Ayers would elaborate on this final point, arguing that, 'When institutions claiming to be non political are found in the thick of the fray...then decent people may be excused for thinking it is time we got back to a state of sanity.'

implications of the co-existence between parties and non-party organisations for Labour's future in the constituency.

Nevertheless, as the pace of transformation accelerated after 1922, there was little time to dwell on Ayers' apprehension. While some of the uncertainty may have been justified in relation to the strength of local Conservative opposition, his assessment contained very few solutions. To overcome the issues at stake, the NLP needed to be proactive in its outlook and receptive to the complexities already embedded in the town's fractured political landscape. As the Newport electorate continued to expand, especially after the introduction of universal enfranchisement in 1928, a pervasive sensitivity to the extended franchise also became an increasingly important responsibility. As confirmed in its annual report published in January 1923, the NLP recognised the need to move on from the doubts raised during the contests of 1922. This included the elaboration of revised techniques to Newport voters and a reconstituted effort to promote equality for its individual members.¹¹⁶ The picture for the NLP at this time was therefore not characterised by a loss of hope but a renewed fortitude. For there were opportunities hidden amongst the setbacks that Ayers' assessment failed to acknowledge.

Labour's opponents faced a daunting task of their own. In the case of the Liberals, only a 'little phalanx' of adherents remained from the defeat of 1922. The NLA members were left to fend for themselves as the Asquith and Lloyd George factionalism tore the party apart. Desertion and abandonment of the NLA followed, with a depleted membership and distressed hierarchy before the General Election of 1923.¹¹⁷ Even the Conservatives, in a position of strength after Reginald Clarry's triumph, would face questions. Indeed, the narrow result of the 1923 campaign proved that there was very little room for laxity. As the NCA held socials in anticipation of another election contest, Clarry was forced to support Stanley Baldwin's decision to head to the polls over tariff reform.¹¹⁸ His defence enticed the Liberals to awaken from their self-induced slumber. With Newport's continuing dependence on overseas trade, the NLA decided to import a candidate who was hostile to protectionism

¹¹⁶ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Annual Meeting, 26 January 1922; Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 29 November 1922, MFilm 013/1; Newport Reference Library (NRL): NLP Annual Reports and Balance Sheets, 1922 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW. The NLP elected C.W. Alford as its new president in January 1922. Alford was the secretary of the Fitters, Blacksmith and Coppersmiths branch of the Great Western Railway company in the town.

¹¹⁷ *SWA*, 8 November 1923.

¹¹⁸ *SWA*, 9 November 1923.

and present a clear choice between Liberals and Conservatives in the town. It selected Captain Harry Davies, the Liberal representative of the Cathays Ward on Cardiff City Council, who at his adoption meeting in Newport described free trade as ‘an institution’. In support of Davies, the NLA devised the slogan of ‘Newport and Free Trade’, in an attempt to remind the electorate of the historic connections between the town, commerce and the laissez-faire doctrines promoted by the Liberal Party that had created such economic prosperity since the 1840s. In doing so, the NLA rebranded itself as the ‘Newport Party’.¹¹⁹ Baldwin’s protectionist agenda had therefore backfired in Newport, simultaneously creating an arduous task for the NCA and briefly reigniting the Liberal cause in the town.

Labour also set out to take advantage of the potential Conservative misjudgement. Once again represented by J.W. Bowen, the NLP saw an opportunity to attract a broader coalition of voters. Bowen’s appearance alongside Davies on the platform of the Newport League of Nations Union exemplified Labour’s attempts to draw in the Liberal middle-class vote. Labour’s own recognition of the LNU, and the appearance of political opponents on the same stage, was welcomed as a sign of political maturity and wider support for international peace by branch members such as the Rev. D. Hickey, the treasurer D.D. John and even Abraham Garrod Thomas.¹²⁰ These appearances were counterbalanced by a sense of realism. Even Bowen accepted that the Labour Party could not rely on the Liberal vote in Newport and needed to retain its focus on ‘getting at the individual, and placing our points of view before him.’¹²¹

The result of Labour’s initial introspection was the creation of original party publications, particularly the first election editions of the *Labour Searchlight*. Disseminated through systematic mass canvassing operations, the *Searchlight* allowed the NLP to put forward its case directly to households in Newport, and connect its activities on the NCBC to the work of other divisional Labour parties across Britain.¹²² In exemplifying the national Labour network, Labour was able to present itself as part of a well-oiled political machine. The production of other propaganda material was also accelerated, including pamphlets and leaflets which relentlessly attacked the chaos caused by the hesitancy of the Bonar Law and Baldwin Governments to deal with pressing industrial and social problems, which had been

¹¹⁹ *SWA*, 5 November 1923; 9 November 1923; 24 November 1923; 27 November 1923.

¹²⁰ *SWA*, 28 November 1923. Hickey was also a long-serving member of the Newport Board of Guardians.

¹²¹ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of the General Committee Meeting, 3 October 1923. MFilm 013/2.

¹²² NRL: *Labour Searchlight*, October 1923, M160 328 NEW.

exposed since the 1922 contests. The NLP's line of attack was scathingly encapsulated by Bowen in the party pamphlets disseminated to local voters during the campaign:

Only a year ago "Tranquillity" was said to be the paramount need of the country generally to enable industry to revive...The Conservative Government has failed ignominiously. Their weak, vacillating foreign policy and their muddling futilities in dealing with the unemployment question, condemn them as ineffective and unreliable.¹²³

Nevertheless, it was tariff reform that remained the pivotal issue in Newport. Initially, the Conservative grip appeared to be loosening. As both Davies and Bowen organised anti-protection rallies, Clarry struggled to find support for the instigation of tariffs as a long term economic strategy. Aided by Garrod Thomas and the following editorials printed in the *Argus*, the widespread disapproval of protectionism was rallied in favour of Davies and the NLA.¹²⁴ Lloyd George's whistle-stop appearance on behalf of Davies also raised expectations of a Conservative defeat.¹²⁵ Yet, in reality, the Liberal intervention was likely to result in precisely the opposite. The election had been favourable in terms of the issues debated, but it had done little to revive the NLA as an effective organisational machine. In the aftermath of the result, members continued to question their commitment to the cause and defections to the NCA became increasingly commonplace in the following winter months.¹²⁶ However, the very presence of the Liberals during the campaign, in sharing the same anti-protectionist space as Labour, had limited the prospects of Bowen and the NLP and paved the way for the Conservatives to hold on to the seat. As a result, Clarry was returned to Parliament by a slender margin of 324 votes.¹²⁷ The 1923 campaign was therefore both a wake-up call for the Conservatives and a symbol of further frustration for Labour.

¹²³ NRL: Newport Labour Party, Election Pamphlet, November 1923, M160 328 NEW.

¹²⁴ *SWA*, 29 November 1923; 1 December 1923; 3 December 1923.

¹²⁵ *SWA*, 4 December 1923.

¹²⁶ *WM*, 4 February 1924. Even for the most loyal of members, such as W.E. Robertson, the Liberal Party was beyond saving in Newport. The former vice-president of the NLA crossed the council chamber of the NCBC to become a Conservative representative and NCA member. His defection was emblematic of the spent Liberal force that would re-enter hibernation and awaken only to assist the Conservatives during the General Election of October 1924.

¹²⁷ *WM*, 6 December 1923; *SWA*, 6 December 1923; 7 December 1923; 8 December 1923. The full election result was as follows: Reginald Clarry (Conservative Party) – 14,424 votes (39.5%), J. W. Bowen (Labour Party) – 14,100 votes (38.6%), Harry Davies (Liberal Party) – 8,015 votes (21.9%). The turnout was 85.2%.

Crucially, it was not the NLA, increasingly spiralling out of control, which sought to respond after the election campaign. Instead, it was Labour and the Conservatives, both ahead of the Liberals in the polls, who began to pull away and reconstruct a revised political habitat of their own. The NCA quickly abandoned the protectionist pledges waged during 1923, and began to restructure an even more vigorous anti-socialist platform based on an expanded relationship with the middle-class Liberal vote. Ramsay MacDonald's minority Labour Government aided this pursuit. At successive party meetings, the rhetoric of 'old England and the old British Empire' was blended with the 'disruption, separation, and pulling down' of socialism. The message was so effective that it attracted prominent Liberals to appear on the Conservative platform in Newport, such as the former Hertfordshire and Islington candidate, Edwin Robert Spiers and the visiting leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords, Edward Grey. The latter urged the remaining remnants of the NLA and the acting chairman Herbert Greenland, to 'fight against extremists' in the spirit of Liberalism.¹²⁸ Prominent local Liberals followed suit during the 1924 General Election, with public recommendations in favour of Reginald Clarry arriving from Garrod Thomas and Ivor Herbert.

Combined with an onslaught on Labour as 'the champion of Russia', the full weight of a unified anti-socialist force came to bear on the Newport electorate. As the town's correspondent in the *Western Mail* asserted during the campaign, 'The Liberals...have been flocking to the Conservative cause on this occasion.'¹²⁹ In such a hostile environment, Bowen stood little chance of persuading a similar proportion of the Liberal vote to back him, as he had done in 1923. Forlorn attempts to explain the benefits of trading with Russia were washed away by a torrent of anti-socialist animosity. Clarry was once again returned in October 1924, restoring a 2,163 majority for the NCA. Bowen received some form of consolation with a sizeable 18,000 votes, the largest received by Labour in its short twelve year history in the town.¹³⁰ The damage had clearly not been self-inflicted. Unlike the Liberals in 1923, Clarry and the NCA capitalised on an opposition party in Government and utilised national issues to strengthen their position at a local level in Newport.

¹²⁸ *SWA*, 22 October 1924; 23 October 1924. In spite of the advice offered by Grey, the NLA would not congregate to assess the state of Liberal affairs in Newport until December.

¹²⁹ *WM*, 29 October 1924.

¹³⁰ *SWA*, 30 October 1924. The full election result was as follows: Reginald Clarry (Conservative Party) – 20,426 votes (52.8%), J. W. Bowen (Labour Party) – 18,263 votes (47.2%). The turnout was 85.7%.

The effective rhetoric and groundswell of support the NCA received also underlined the gains it had made with new women voters in the town. The zenith of this support was reached in October 1924 and was a result of alliances built through both party networks and local voluntary organisations. The Conservative voice was not only heard most clearly in the Women's Association branches in the town but also in the local NWCA meetings that persisted after 1922. Prominent branch members such as Mrs. Earle Marsh and Lillian Muller, both vice-presidents of the NWCA and keen Conservative Party organisers, were able to divide their attention between the suffrage campaign and the openly political fight against the NLP.¹³¹ Conservative activists in these non-party branches also worked in tandem with fellow women members to organise anti-socialist demonstrations designed to appeal to the newly enfranchised members of the Newport electorate, with guest speakers from Cardiff and Swansea. At one meeting at the beginning of the 1924 election, Cardiff's first woman councillor, Rhoda Parker, was invited to give an address outlining the two-fold objectives of the rallies promoted by the NCA:

The Conservatives were going to rouse public opinion against the Socialists to such an extent that they would not be able to stand or sit...However, there were still many women who supported the Socialists, knowing that they were the party which was leading the country downhill.¹³²

Parker's evaluation was also accurate in its estimation of socialist support amongst women voters. Even though the NCA message cut through during the election, it was indeed the case that Labour was acquiring a larger support base of its own, centred on new women members. An example of its mobilisation can be illustrated by the multiplying number of social gatherings and day trips organised for members. One excursion, from Newport to Wembley in July 1924, for example, attracted 2,000 local women members to take part. While the *Western Mail* noted the role of Bowen in organising the outings,¹³³ such an emphasis underrepresented the increasingly substantial role played by women members themselves, both in arranging associated party events and energising the NLP as a whole. It

¹³¹ *TWL*, 15 June 1923; 22 April 1927. Muller would remain as vice-president until her departure from Newport in the spring of 1927. She was a remarkably active figure in the local political arenas of Newport, both through the WCA and the party's Women's Associations in Newport.

¹³² *SWA*, 8 October 1924.

¹³³ *WM*, 13 July 1924.

had already been recorded by the NLP Executive Committee in 1923 that organisation by the local Women's Section had been 'very successful' regardless of the electoral defeat.¹³⁴ By December 1924, individual women membership had reached 1,100, eclipsing the 460 men who were active in the NLP. Amidst concerns about the waning interest of the Men's Section, it was noted that the women members were 'one of the chief driving forces of the Party...from a propaganda, educational and financial point of view.'¹³⁵

An acknowledgement of this personal industry from members of the Women's Section was forthcoming, with the election of six women representatives on the NLP Executive Committee throughout the 1920s. As Duncan Tanner has argued, these new members, including Constance Lewcock, 'exercised considerable influence' and effected meaningful local policy change.¹³⁶ Delegations, increasingly comprised of one male and one female member, were sent to national party conferences and subsequently mandated for policies promoted by women members including the increase of family allowances and the raising of the school leaving age. Local activists also exerted their influence across the wider county, such as Mrs. M.C. Thomas, secretary of the Monmouthshire Labour Women's Advisory Council.¹³⁷ Increasingly, the rigidity of the party once exhibited towards its women members before the 1922 by-election was relaxed. The evolution of these sensibilities was a direct consequence of the hard work of individuals in the Women's Section of the NLP.

Labour women candidates also began to put themselves forward for the annual NCBC elections. This included Gwenllian Walton, Guardian for the Maindee Ward and energetic member of the Newport Labour Women's branch, and Lewcock herself. A former Women's Social and Political Union activist and ILP campaigner, the latter would go on to become vice-president of the NLP. Writing in the *Searchlight* before the 1923 municipal contest, Lewcock stressed the age of male-dominated politics on the NCBC was 'rapidly passing away' and, in terms of the NLP's past focus on living conditions, maternity and child welfare and appropriate accommodation, that 'it was now possible for women to choose

¹³⁴ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 1 June 1923, MFilm 013/2.

¹³⁵ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 21 November 1924, MFilm 013/2; NRL: NLP 1924 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW.

¹³⁶ For an example, see the reports of G. J. Clarke and Mrs Leveson in CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 19 November 1926, MFilm 013/2; Tanner, *Newport Labour Party*, p. 4.

¹³⁷ *South Wales Gazette (SWG)*, 26 September 1924.

Councillors who know from their own experience what women want'.¹³⁸ While Walton, and initially Constance, failed to attain a place on the NCBC, other Labour women candidates were more successful. M. A. Jones, would gain election to the NCBC as early as 1924, and hold her position for successive terms until 1926. Lewcock herself would eventually enter the chamber in 1925 and served as a Labour councillor until 1933.¹³⁹ Both the individual achievements and council service of Jones and Lewcock personified the resolve of women members to affect structural transformation, both in relation to their own party and the wider political landscape of Newport.

Crucially, the tenacity of Labour's women members in Newport prevented the NLP sliding into a state of despondency. Spurred on by their membership, the NLP redoubled its efforts in the constituency and began to consider alternative methods of political education and engagement. Mock parliaments were organised by individual Men's Sections in late 1924 and National Council of Labour Colleges classes were considered on several occasions by the Executive Committee after affiliation to the Council in early 1925.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, although experimentation created the grounds for success, progress was not guaranteed and there were ensuing disappointments. The *Searchlight* was expanded into a weekly newspaper in light of the defeat of 1924 yet despite initial promise and popularity in ward organisations, circulation and advertising revenue proved 'increasingly difficult to maintain' and the trial-run was partially terminated.¹⁴¹ The party publication would reappear in 'Election Edition' form during the annual municipal elections later in the 1920s, and the 1929 election campaign, but it was a far cry from the hopes of serialising the *Searchlight* envisioned by NLP members in 1924.

While activities such as socials, dances and annualised trips outside Wales continued, other ventures proved more promising. A 'happy relationship' had been nurtured with the Newport Labour Hall in Pill by 1925 and was subsequently well funded by local party

¹³⁸ NRL: *Labour Searchlight*, October 1923. M160 328 NEW. Lewcock also worked as an unpaid secretary and speaker for her husband William, the local party agent and secretary.

¹³⁹ NRL: *Labour Searchlight*, Election Edition, November 1925; Election Edition, November 1928. M160 328 NEW; *WM*, 31 October 1928; 13 November 1929; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 11 November 1980.

¹⁴⁰ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 16 December 1924; Minutes of Executive Committee, 26 January 1925; Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 5 June 1925; Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 8 November 1926. MFilm 013/2. A WEA class was also considered briefly but was ultimately declined.

¹⁴¹ NRL: NLP 1925 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW. See also CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee, 7 February 1926, MFilm 013/2. Discussions ensued in order to 'revivify' the weekly *Searchlight* but financial obligations were considered a significant hurdle.

activists. The premises would act as a base of operations and a facility for various functions such as Christmas and Derby draws and whist drives.¹⁴² In order to extend its social purpose, and connect party activities more directly with branch organisations in the town's wards, additional premises were secured and opened as Labour Clubs such as the 'Lawn' in Maindee and Crindau House. These acquisitions, coupled with a plethora of organised public meetings and social functions organised by Men's and Women's Sections alike, allowed the NLP to compensate for the loss of J.W. Bowen, who in 1925 declined the chance to represent Labour once more in Newport at the next election. Indeed, the party's dynamism allowed his replacement, the Glasgow City councillor and ISTC organiser James Walker, the chance to acclimatise to the local party network and quickly build a rapport with both members and constituents.¹⁴³ The NLP's community focus also paid dividends in terms of its relative financial health during this time, which continued even during the 1926 lockout.¹⁴⁴ While the impact on the Newport branch is not comparable to the examples of the union lodges or divisional Labour parties in industrial constituencies in the county, these activities, and the donations they attracted, ensured that the NLP was able to weather the storm that struck the labour movement more severely in the Monmouthshire coalfield.¹⁴⁵ More importantly, without a breakthrough at the ballot box, Labour had demonstrated in its commitment to its members and its social responsibilities that the local party agenda dedicated to housing, health and welfare was more than just mere oratory.

It is important to acknowledge that the NCA also placed significant importance on these social undertakings. However, outside of the steady distribution of party publications including *Home and Politics* and *The Man in the Street*, and the events organised by the Women's Association branches, including similar outings to London, it could not replicate the same concentration of party activity as the NLP. Instead, attention centred on the advancement of Conservative values through the education of the party's youth wing. Indeed the JIL was described as a 'well-founded' organisation with a presence in every ward of the

¹⁴² NRL: NLP 1924 Annual Report; 1925 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW.

¹⁴³ NRL: NLP 1925 Annual Report; 1926 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW; CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Annual meeting, 28 January 1927, MFilm 013/2.

¹⁴⁴ *WM*, 1 July 1926; NRL: NLP 1926 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW. See also GA: The Newport Year Book, 1926 (Newport, 1926), D975/11.

¹⁴⁵ CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of General Committee Meeting, 26 August 1927, MFilm 013/2; NRL: NLP 1927 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW. See also South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC): Newport Trades and Labour Council and Labour Party Records, SWCC/MNA/POL/14. Indeed, the individual membership of the local branch not only recovered after the uneasy summer months of 1926 but began to show signs of 'considerable increase' by December 1927. The NLP Executive attributed the promising sustainability to the strong bond between 'the members of the Labour Clubs and the Labour Party' in Newport.

town by January 1926. The emergence of the Young Britons movement provoked an additional response in February with the creation of ‘a central institution for the junior Conservative organisations of the town’. At its opening, the responsibility rested on Clarry to emphasise the importance of associating ‘social duties’ with ‘party activities’ so that Baldwinite ideals may be inculcated at a grass roots level:

Such duties, we may add, are not only enjoined by civic and philanthropic ideals, but are congenial to Conservative principles, which teach an extended reliance on personal effort and on a voluntary association of effort, and which teach also that public agencies...should not become substitutes for voluntary organisation and effort.¹⁴⁶

Clarry’s words were tinged with the NCA’s concerns that Labour’s public strength was growing. Evidence of the NLP’s increasing popularity can be seen in the response to a visit by A.J. Cook, whose speech at a mass meeting in the town in April 1927 attracted an audience of 1,100. Cook’s entrance appeared to signal a more radical influence in the upper echelons of the NLP itself, suspicions that were echoed with the internal struggles over the selection of the new NLP president, Frank Wadge. The local NUR delegate had already been forced to deny he had Communist sympathies following earlier incidents during his time in the Weymouth Labour Party.¹⁴⁷ The sense of concern found its way into the pages of the pro-Conservative press, with the *Western Mail* proclaiming that, as a result of Wadge’s presidency, ‘There is a grim reality about the Socialist menace in Newport’.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, such fears were a deflection from the gains being made by the NLP, both publicly and electorally. With the success of William Casey in the Liswerry Ward by-election in November 1927, fourteen Labour councillors now resided on the municipal council. By the

¹⁴⁶ *WM*, 24 December 1925; 11 January 1926; 5 February 1926. Symbolically, the premises for the new headquarters was the former Newport Liberal Club which had closed for the second time in December 1925 due to ‘a lack of sufficient support’.

¹⁴⁷ *WM*, 29 January 1927; *Daily Herald (DH)*, 6 April 1927. Wadge had received criticism for his actions in his previous role as NUR delegate in Weymouth, where he had campaigned for the deselection of the Labour MP and NUR general secretary J.H. Thomas. In retaliation, Thomas travelled to Newport on news of Wadge’s potential selection as NLP president to warn local members of his previous actions at a mass meeting of railwaymen in the town. Thomas claimed that, ‘in acting as he did at Weymouth Mr. Wadge had put into effect certain instructions issued by the Communist Party of Great Britain.’ Wadge firmly denied the accusations and reiterated that he was not a member of the CPGB before his selection as NLP president.

¹⁴⁸ *WM*, 22 October 1927.

end of the decade, the NLP annual report recorded a 'stalemate' for the first time on the NCBC with no overall majority for either Labour or 'Independents'.¹⁴⁹ In the war of attrition waged in Newport, the tide finally appeared to have turned.

Labour's endurance was rewarded in the 1929 General Election contest. In contrast to 1923 and 1924, this time the NLP was aided by Liberal interference. The NLA was in no way adequately prepared for the fight ahead. Beyond annual meetings and the occasional rally organised by the local WLA, the Liberals only began to reorganise effectively in the summer of 1928. Even at this point, the reach of the organisation was severely limited. At a Liberal Party fete held in July, Sam Cohen, the prospective Liberal candidate for the division, pleaded with the attendees in order to stimulate 'a better organisation in the town.' The Cambridge law graduate had only been selected by the Newport Liberal Thousand the previous month but could already foresee the inadequacies of the NLA machinery.¹⁵⁰ Contrary to what had occurred in the Pontypool division, there had been little in the way of a determined attempt to resurrect the Liberal Party in Newport. Crucially though, and unlike its stance in 1924, the local party was firmly against 'the mediocre, futile and inept' Baldwin Government, and in May 1929 it served to take away critical votes from Reginald Clarry. The *South Wales Argus*, jubilant at the party's return to electoral campaigning, provided a critical platform for pro-Liberal propaganda and printed successive editorials in favour of Cohen.¹⁵¹ By ensuring that the focus was Baldwin's leadership and not the anti-socialist rhetoric of previous campaigns, the Liberal Party's intrusion favoured the NLP.

Ultimately, however it was the impressive groundwork the Labour Party had laid in the town since 1922 that decided the 1929 contest. With the further extension of the franchise in 1928, Labour's renewed focus on women voters was reiterated in the briefly resuscitated *Searchlight*. The most striking appeals emanated from women members. In particular, Ava Walker not only advocated the election of her husband to Parliament but also welcomed 'the accession of a large number of New Voters to Electoral Roll in Newport, an extension of the franchise...made inevitable by the constant presence and persistence of the Labour Party.' Walker went on to demand housing improvements and the recognition of health and welfare as rights to be protected by the state, urging that 'These things CAN BE when the women of

¹⁴⁹ NRL: 1927 Annual Report; 1928 Annual Report; 1929 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW. Former mayor and longstanding Labour Councillor Peter Wright was also elevated to the Alderman bench in 1928.

¹⁵⁰ *WM*, 11 October 1927; 30 June 1928; 13 July 1928.

¹⁵¹ *SWA*, 11 May 1929; 15 May 1929.

our country are determined that they SHALL BE.’¹⁵² James Walker repeated these convictions at a mass meeting of the NWCA in May. While Clarry struggled to defend the record of his party in Government against the attacks of Cohen and the Liberal Party, the Labour candidate delivered a clear message to the newly enfranchised, that of a party that had always stood for equal franchise and distribution of opportunities and which now stood to improve the social and industrial conditions of households throughout Newport and across Britain:

Go into any of the big cities and you will find under
Conservative rule thousands of homes that the Medical
Officers of Health have said are unfit for human habitation; go
into hospitals and see there the wrecks that are being produced
under the conditions that your Conservative Government say is
the right thing for you...The Labour movement stood for the
alteration of such things.¹⁵³

Through his universal message, Walker went on to convert the momentum that the NLP had actively built up since 1924 into electoral victory. He became the first Labour Party representative for Newport, earning a majority over Clarry of just over 2,800 votes.¹⁵⁴ The belatedness of the victory and the endeavours it had taken to get to this point tempered any sense of euphoria. The relief of local party members was palpable in the annual report of the NLP in December when it was recorded that, ‘at last, Newport has been won for Labour...as a result of the hard work which has been put into the organisation of the Party by the men and women who have given their services in an ungrudging spirit for many years’.¹⁵⁵ With genuine expectations finally satisfied, the response to the result in the party ranks indicated just how far the NLP had come. While Labour’s control would only last for two years, the development of the NLP signalled the changing of the guard in the town. So too did the successive victories of their Conservative rivals. Both parties had recognised the need to evolve their organisation and outlooks in conjunction with both men and women members,

¹⁵² NRL: *Labour Searchlight*, May 1929, M160 328 NEW.

¹⁵³ *SWA*, 16 May 1929.

¹⁵⁴ *SWA*, 31 May 1929. The full election result was as follows: James Walker (Labour Party) – 18,653 votes (39.5%), Reginald Clarry (Conservative Party) – 15,841 votes (33.5%), Samuel I. Cohen (Liberal Party) – 12,735 votes (27.0%). The turnout was 83.8%.

¹⁵⁵ NRL: NLP 1929 Annual Report, M160 331.87 NEW. See also CUSCA: NLP Records, Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 4 June 1929, MFilm 013/2.

non-party organisations and the enlarged electorate. The capacity to initiate this process and modulate it in the face of adversity and multiple setbacks, particularly in the case of the NLP, set them apart from the once impregnable Liberal Party in the region. In stark contrast to what had occurred in the surrounding constituencies, there was no settled political tradition in Newport by 1929 but the transformations actively engaged in by Labour and the Conservatives alike had ensured that the town's political composition had been irreversibly recast.

Conclusion

The acclimation, reinvention and integration of political cultures characterised the first eleven years of mass democracy and helped define the major political traditions which prevailed in twentieth century Britain. In order to understand this pivotal transformation, it is important to acknowledge that there were distinctions of time, place and activity, both individual and collective, which gave localities their own specific sense of identity. Recognition of these variations necessitates a re-examination of the politics of the interwar period, one that stresses the reciprocal and relational process of creating and nurturing political traditions. It has been argued here that a focus on the county, as a unit of political study, is instructive in striking a balance between granular constituency and district detail focused upon by Tanner, Worley, Ball and Freeman,¹ and a concentration on regional and national developments previously addressed through the cross-party analyses of McKibbin.² This method has allowed for an encapsulation of the range and interconnectedness of political experiences in Monmouthshire between 1918 and 1929.

By looking at a border county with specific internal variegations of its own, this thesis has demonstrated that the transition from cultures to traditions was a continuously evolving process. Each tradition, indelibly etched into Monmouthshire's political landscape by 1929, was a coalescence of cultures which had gained initial form and function under the Liberal hegemony before 1914. Significantly, however, industrial-rural tensions in the county, exacerbated by war, the extension of the franchise in 1918 and 1928, and widespread socio-economic change, created a political environment where both party and non-party organisations were constantly adapting to their local surroundings and the revised demands of the electorate. As elucidated in chapter one, a major consequence of this evolution was the creation of a reciprocal political network where opposing parties co-existed with incongruent cultures in close proximity. In turn, these developments facilitated participation in local political activity that was increasingly widespread and normalised, and, most pervasively, created the conditions for an electoral fidelity that became ingrained in successive political

¹ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990); Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London, 2008), p. 2, pp. 19-74; Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 146-240; Gavin Freeman, 'Beyond Westminster: Grass-roots Liberalism in England, 1910-1929' (PhD, University of Leicester, 2013).

² Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998); Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010).

generations. Indeed the deleterious climate of the 1930s, and the following decades after the Second World War, intensified political traditions that were already strongly guarded.

Despite this longevity, the art of adaptation was demanding and difficult to accomplish in the immediate context of early interwar South Wales. Monmouthshire's political identity was multidimensional as differentiation developed inside traditions and not just between them. Even the Labour Party, the most successful proponent of the transition from political cultures to political traditions in Monmouthshire, had to adapt and respond to both internal and external challenges in order to make headway. As explained in chapter two, Labour's development between 1918 and 1929 acutely reflected the political diversity that was increasingly visible in the county. In its assortment of associated cultures and local distinctions, the rise of the party was not uniform. From the experimental socialism in areas such as Abertillery to the municipal approach of the NLP in Newport, there were multiple labourisms crafted across the county, each an extension of the character of the locality they were produced in. All of these cultures were joined together by shared occupations, socio-economic and industrial grievances, and assisted by an increasingly systemic and politically focused organisational matrix, from the TLCs to the divisional party branches. The result was a patchwork quilt of Labour traditions that was formed in the region, which was increasingly pervasive electorally, though not completely free of complications, and quintessentially heterogeneous in terms of its application on the ground.

Neither can this uneven assortment be collectively summarised as the victory of the radical voice over the moderate, or one faction over the other, as has previously been interpreted by Gwyn A. Williams and Kenneth O. Morgan,³ and reflected upon by other Welsh historians, from Peter Stead, Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, to Chris Williams and Andy Croll.⁴ This thesis is also a study of individuals, deliberating on personalities that have already been studied extensively and others that have been obscured but who were,

³ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp. 288-312; Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 233-40.

⁴ Peter Stead, 'Working-Class Leadership in South Wales 1900-1920', *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp. 329-53; Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980), pp. 1-13; Deian Hopkin, 'The Rise of Labour: Llanelli, 1890-1922' in Geraint H. Jenkins and J. Beverley Smith (eds.), *Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922* (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 161-82; Chris Williams, 'Democracy and Nationalism in Wales: The Lib-Lab Enigma' in Robert Stradling, Scott Newton and David Bates (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence: Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 107-31; Andy Croll, 'Mabon's Day: The Rise and Fall of a Lib-Lab Holiday in the South Wales Coalfield, 1888-1898', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 72 No. 1 (April 2007), pp. 50-67.

nevertheless, equally responsible for the progress of the Labour Party after 1918. Most of the people discussed do not fit neatly into accepted ideological camps. Individuals such as William Harris, Beatrice Green and even Aneurin Bevan, cannot be categorised easily in this way and to attempt to do so misses the point of the nuanced, balancing act they were trying to achieve. Overall, a respect for the tool-set handed down by earlier 'Lib-Lab' leaders, and an ability to reconfigure these instructions into a consideration of not just the ambitions of the wider labour movement, but an ever-growing list of political and social priorities in relation to the local circumstances of their own time, became the critical criteria for Labour's success in the county. In navigating this complex course, and implicitly valuing the political environment originally forged by Tom Richards and William Brace, rather than rejecting it outright, the actions of these individuals force a rethink of the relationship between leaders and led, and reveal how political traditions are an ongoing negotiation between past cultures and present responsibilities.

If the transition from cultures to traditions was conclusive by 1929, then it was certainly not inevitable. Interwar politics became defined by traditions that were not only constructed or reimagined but, as in the case of the Liberal Party, those which began to fade away. However, while the Liberals have traditionally been depicted in terms of a freefall in the analyses of Wilson, Cook and Freedon,⁵ the example of the party's erratic and inconsistent persistence in constituencies such as Pontypool point towards a sluggish slide that was actively resisted against, rather than determined by the adeptness of its rivals and the unfavourable political conditions for the party after the Great War. As elucidated in chapter three, and unlike other industrial districts in the county, the PLA in Pontypool had a lasting influence electorally and culturally, providing a genuine, if at times intermittent, challenge to the emergence of the Labour Party in the eastern valleys. There was ultimately disappointment as a result of poor choices and an absence of proactive strategies. The lack of an effective Lloyd George-Asquith axis also contrived to aggravate the rhetorical and organisational maladies the PLA failed to disentangle after the loss of the seat in 1918. Crucially, though, at no point did the weaknesses represent a foregone conclusion and the party's voice in Pontypool was never truly silenced before 1929. Instead, this thesis has presented the Liberals as an undoubtedly weakened force but one with an underappreciated

⁵ Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-35* (London, 1966); Chris Cook, 'Wales and the General Election of 1923', *Welsh History Review*, 4:4 (1969), pp. 387-95; Chris Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922-1929* (London, 1975), pp. 334-43; Michael Freedon, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914-1939* (Oxford, 1986).

level of political agency and determination on the ground to rectify the situation in industrial areas. A reappraisal of this nature also encourages the possibility of further comparative research into other industrial divisions across Britain, to investigate whether the party held on elsewhere, rather than vanished as previously anticipated.

It has also been a major contention of this thesis that an investigation of all major political parties in tandem is essential in an interwar context. While the demands of disparate constituencies ensured the creation of disparate traditions, these political machines were not only imbued with a sense of identity by the actions that they exercised, or the participation that they encouraged, but by opposing, neighbouring cultures that emboldened the creation of competing political customs and practices. The perseverance of Conservatism in the rural fringes of Monmouthshire is a significant example of the need to explore a wider spectrum of political experience, particularly in the milieu of South Wales.⁶ Chapter four reveals that the Conservatives achieved an increasingly secure political tradition in the Monmouth constituency, fostering a renewed set of alliances with old allies in the form of the landed estates and the Anglican Church, and new partners in the shape of the NFU, WIs and British Legion branches. By achieving a political expansion of its own, the Conservative Party in Monmouth also produced a largely impenetrable political environment for its opponents, analogous to the difficulties faced by the party in Labour-controlled industrial divisions in the shire. It has been argued here, that the perpetuity of the Conservatives in the Monmouthshire countryside, comparable with the Labour Party in the county's coalfield, demonstrates the persistence of non-Labour traditions in South Wales, once historiographically neglected, and proves that political traditions are not constructed in a vacuum but sculpted in relation to both corresponding and antagonistic ideologies.

These political traditions were therefore not only contiguous but interdependent. This provoked confrontation, both directly and indirectly. In the example of Newport, the influence of all three major political parties led to a meeting point and clash of competing political cultures. As evidenced in chapter five, this created a constituency with no set

⁶ See also Geraint Thomas, 'The Conservative Party and Welsh Politics in the Inter-War Years', *The English Historical Review*, 128:533 (August, 2013), pp. 877-912; Sam Blaxland, 'A Swinging Party? The Need for a History of the Conservative in Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 9 (2014), pp. 1-10; Sam Blaxland, 'Women in the Organisation of the Conservative Party in Wales, 1945-1979', *Women's History Review*, 28:2 (2019), pp. 236-56.

tradition, which swayed from initial Liberal influence to an ‘arms-race’ between Labour and the Conservatives. In this sense, and in critique of the interpretation of a typical swing seat implied by Ramsden,⁷ the division exemplified the political battleground of Monmouthshire in miniature between 1918 and 1929, and the political organisations, both party and non-party, which had reinvented themselves in order to respond to the challenges of interwar British politics. As it vacillated between the Conservatives and Labour by the early 1930s, and witnessed the emergence of dynamic and durable voluntary bodies such as the NWCA, Newport embodied the increasingly clear divisions and underlying diversity of the Monmouthshire melting pot.

Ultimately, this thesis stresses complexity in the construction of political traditions, and accentuates the interplay between them, in order to argue that interwar political culture was intrinsically multi-dimensional and inter-related. It also indicates that further comparative research of this nature, with a county-wide lens, is essential, in order to uncover a fundamentally broader political diversity in other border counties such as Brecon and Radnorshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, or even further afield in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. Indeed, in exploring the political landscape of Monmouthshire, the perspective of Dai Smith, of ‘a singular noun but a plural experience’,⁸ can now be applied to political identities, not only in a Welsh context, but in the case of local and county-centric equivalents across Britain in an interwar context.

⁷ John Ramsden, ‘The Newport By-Election and the Fall of the Coalition’ in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London, 1973), pp. 14-43.

⁸ Dai Smith, *Wales! Wales?* (London, 1984), p. 1.

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

- i. Manuscript Sources
- ii. Newspapers & Journals
- iii. Official Publications and Reports
- iv. Published Books and Pamphlets

2. Secondary Sources

- i. Reference Works
- ii. Published Works: Books and Articles
- iii. Unpublished Theses and Dissertations

1. PRIMARY SOURCES

i. Manuscript Sources

Bristol University Special Collections and Archives, Bristol

DM668/2/1 British Election Addresses.

DM668/3. Liberal Printed Materials.

Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives, Cardiff

MFilm 005 Archives of the British Labour Party.

MFilm 013 Newport Constituency Labour Party Records.

Uncatalogued George Barker Scrapbooks.

Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale

A110/M/22-36	Newport County Borough Council Minute Books, 1914-29.
A220/M/20-42	Bedwellty Urban District Council Minute Books, 1914-29.
A310/M/20-28	Abertillery Urban District Council Minute Books, 1914-29.
A350/M/26-36.	Tredegar Urban District Council Minute Books, 1914-29.
A433/M/17-30	Pontypool Urban District Council Minute Books, 1914-29.
A570/M/4-10	Monmouth Rural District Council Minute Books, 1914-29.
C/HC/R2/17	Monmouthshire County Council Health Committee Records, Public Health Report, 1924.
D3132/67	William Davies Papers: George Davies Diaries.
D3258/1	Gwent Federation of Women's Institutes Executive Minute Books, 1929-1932.
D3417/2/1-6	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation Records: Man and Metal: The Journal of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation.
D3784	Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party Records.
D845/9	National Union of Mineworkers (South Wales Area) Records.
D913/2	Abertillery and District Hospital Minute Book, 1923-1925.
D975/6	The Newport Year Book 1921 (Newport, 1921).
D975/8	The Newport Year Book 1923 (Newport, 1923).
D975/11	The Newport Year Book 1926 (Newport, 1926).

LSE Digital Library

PASSFIELD/1/1	Beatrice Webb's Diaries.
---------------	--------------------------

National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

NLW MSS PEARCE WD 1/24	Bert Pearce Papers (Welsh Communist Party), 1884-2002: New Era Union Men's Sunday Afternoon Class Minute Book 1916-19.
NLW MSS CARCON/31	City of Cardiff Conservative Association Records, Glamorgan Unionist Labour Committee Minute Book, 1918-1930.
NLW MSS ETJOHN	E.T. John Papers.
NLW MSS MONION	Monmouthshire Conservative & Unionist Association Records.
NLW YX2 MON	Monmouthshire Opinion, Vol: 1, 1925-1926.
NLW YX2 MON	Monmouthshire Opinion, Vol: 2, 1928-1929.
NLW MSS JAMTHS	James Griffiths Papers.
NLW MSS EPHEMERA	Welsh Political Ephemera Collection.
NLW MSS MAIING	W. H. Mainwaring Papers.

Newport Reference Library

M160 380 NEW	Newport Year Books, 1918-20, 1922-5, 1927-9.
M160 331.87 NEW	Newport Labour Party Annual Reports and Balance Sheets, 1922-29.
M160 328 NEW	Newport Labour Searchlight.

South Wales Miners Library, Swansea

Transcriptions of Interviews

AUD/49	Interview of Tom Gale.
--------	------------------------

AUD/90	Interview of James Griffiths.
AUD/215	Interview of Walter Powell.
AUD/250	Interview of Leo Price.
AUD/264	Interview of Dai Dan Evans.
AUD/271	Interview of Len Jeffreys.
AUD/272	Interview of Len Jeffreys,
AUD/290	Interview of William Henry Williams.
AUD/300	Interview of P.J. Matthews.
AUD/301	Interview of Jim Minton.
AUD/308	Interview of Jake Brookes.
AUD/312	Interview of Ernest Lewis.
AUD/313	Interview of Ernest Lewis.
AUD/316	Interview of Oliver Powell.
AUD/323	Interview of W.H. Taylor.
AUD/338	Interview of Archie Lush.
AUD/339	Interview of Will Coldrick.

Swansea University Archive, South Wales Coalfield Collection

SWCC/MNA/POL/8/1	Ebbw Vale Branch Iron and Steel Trades and Labour Council Records, Cashbook, 1899-1919.
SWCC:MNA/POL/14	Newport Trades and Labour Council and Labour Party.
SWCC:MNA/NUM/3/1/1-2.	South Wales Miners' Federation Minutes of Council Meetings, Annual and Special Conferences.

Warwick Digital Collections

MSS 292/947/1/29 Council of Action Pamphlet: Form Your Councils of Action,
17 August 1920.

MSS 36/R30/23 Council of Action, Report of the Special Conference on Labour
and the Russian-Polish War, 13 August 1920.

ii. Newspapers and Journals

Aberdare Leader

Abergavenny Chronicle and Monmouthshire Advertiser

Abergavenny Mail

Barry Herald

Bath Chronicle

Brecon and Radnorshire Express

Cambrian

Cambria Daily Leader

Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News

Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser

Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald

Chepstow Weekly Advertiser

Colliery Workers Magazine

Common Cause

County Observer and Monmouthshire Advertiser

Daily Mirror

Daily Herald

Daily News

Evening Express

Free Press of Monmouthshire

Forward

Glamorgan Free Press

Glamorgan Gazette

Herald of Wales and Monmouthshire Recorder

Hereford Times

Labour Leader

Llais Llafur

Llangollen Advertiser and Merionethshire Journal

Lloyd George Liberal Magazine, Welsh Edition

Manchester Evening News

Merthyr Express: West Monmouth Edition

Monmouth Guardian and Bargoed and Caerphilly Observer

Monmouthshire Beacon

Monmouthshire Merlin

Monmouthshire Weekly Post

Pioneer

Pontypridd Chronicle and Workman's News

Rhondda Leader

South Wales Argus

South Wales Echo

South Wales Daily News

South Wales Daily Post

South Wales Gazette

South Wales News

South Wales Weekly Argus

The Communist

The Globe

The Post

The Suffragette

The Times

The Woman's Leader

The Workers' Dreadnought

Votes for Women

Weekly Mail

Welsh Outlook

Western Daily Press

Western Mail

Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer

iii. Official Publications and Reports

Census of England and Wales 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931

Commission of Inquiry Into Industrial Unrest: No. 7 Division, Report of the Commissioners for Wales, Including Monmouthshire (London, 1917).

Hansard

Ministry of Health, *Report of South Wales Regional Survey Committee* (London, 1921).

Representation of the People Act, 1918

Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire, Vol. III: Evidence (London, 1896).

iv. Published Books and Pamphlets

Andrews, Elizabeth, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: And Political Articles*, Honno Classic Edition (Aberystwyth, 2006).

Barker, George, 'A Foreword' in Mark Starr, *A Worker Looks at History, Being Outlines of Industrial History Especially Written for CLC – Plebs Classes* (London, 1917), p. i.

Barker, George, 'Labour Views – Mr. George Barker, South Wales Miners' Federation' in Huntly Carter (ed.), *Industrial Reconstruction: A Symposium on the Situation After the War and How to Meet It* (New York, 1918), pp. 109-12.

Bevan, Aneurin, *In Place of Fear* (London, 1952).

Britain's Industrial Future: Report of the Liberal Industries Inquiry, 1928 (London, 1928).

Carter, Huntly, (ed.), *Industrial Reconstruction: A Symposium on the Situation After the War and How to Meet It* (New York, 1918).

Carter, Huntly 'Preface' in Huntly Carter (ed.), *Industrial Reconstruction: A Symposium on the Situation After the War and How to Meet It* (New York, 1918), pp. xi-v.

Communist Party of Great Britain, *Communist Unity Convention Official Report* (London, 1920).

Coxe, William, *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire: Volume One* (London, 1801).

Fenner Brockway, A. *Labour and Liberalism* (Manchester, 1913).

- Hando, Fred J. *The Pleasant Land of Gwent* (Newport, 1944).
- Hobhouse, L.T. *The World in Conflict* (London, 1915).
- Keynes, John Maynard, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London, 1935).
- Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction* (London, 1918).
- Liberal Party, *We Can Conquer Unemployment: Mr Lloyd George's Pledge* (London, 1929).
- MacCarthy, Desmond (ed.) *H. H. A. Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to a Friend, First Series 1915-1922* (London, 1933).
- MacDonald, Ramsay, *Socialism: Critical and Constructive* (London, 1921).
- Purdy, Frederick, *Return to Parliament of Owners of Land in England and Wales* (London, 1876).
- Richards, Frank, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, Library of Wales Edition (Cardigan, 2016).
- Rodó, José Enrique, *Motivos de Proteo*, Second Edition (Valencia, 1918).
- Starr, Mark, *A Worker Looks at History Being Outlines of Industrial History Especially Written for CLC – Plebs Classes* (London, 1917).
- The Land and the Nation: Rural Report of the Liberal Land Committee, 1923-25* (London, 1925).
- Thomas, Daniel Lleufer, *The Welsh Land Commission : A Digest of its Report* (London, 1896).
- Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miners' Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation*, Reprinted Edition (London, 1991).

2. SECONDARY SOURCES

i. Reference Works

Craig, Fred W. S. *Boundaries of Parliamentary Constituencies, 1885-1972* (Chichester, 1972).

Dictionary of Labour Biography

Jones, Beti (ed.), *Etholiadau'r Ganrif/Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (Talybont, 1999).

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Railings, Colin and Thrasher, Michael, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1999*, 6th Edition (Aldershot, 2000).

Who's Who in Wales, Third Edition (London, 1937).

ii. Published Works: Books and Articles

Adelman, Paul, *The Decline of the Liberal Party 1910-1931* 2nd Edition (London; New York, 1995).

Ambrose, Gwilym Prichard, *Monmouthshire County Council, 1888-1974* (Newport, 1974).

Anderson, Perry and Blackburn, Robin (eds.), *Towards Socialism* (New York, 1966).

Arnot, Robin Page, *South Wales Miners: A History of the South Wales Miners Federation 1898-1914* (London, 1967).

Aubel, Felix, 'The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1935' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 96-110.

Bagwell, P. S. 'The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-1922' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923* (Camden, 1971), pp. 96-128.

Ball, Alan R. *British Political Parties: The Emergence of a Modern Party System*, 2nd Ed. (London, 1987).

Ball, Stuart, 'Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organization' in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 261-314.

Ball, Stuart and Holliday, Ian (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public Since the 1880s* (London; Portland, 2002).

Ball, Stuart, Thorpe, Andrew and Worley, Matthew, 'Researching the Grass Roots: The Records of Constituency Level Political Parties in Five British Counties, 1918-40', *Archives*, 29:110 (2004), pp. 72-94.

Ball, Stuart, Thorpe, Andrew and Worley, Matthew, 'Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives: Constituency Party Members in Britain Between the Wars' in Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 7-32.

Ball, Stuart, 'The Legacy of Coalition: Fear and Loathing in Conservative Politics, 1922-1931', *Contemporary British History*, 25:1 (2011), pp. 65-82.

Ball, Stuart, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013).

Ball, Stuart, 'The Conservative Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 23-46.

Ball, Stuart, 'The Reform Act of 1918 – The Advent of Mass Democracy', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 1-22.

Barnett, L. Margaret, *British Food Policy During the First World War*, New Edition (Abingdon; New York, 2014).

Barr, Niall, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921-1939* (Westport, 2005).

Beddoe, Deirdre, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000).

- Ben Rees, D. *Chapels in the Valley: A Study in the Sociology of Welsh Nonconformity* (Liverpool, 1975), pp. 66-123.
- Bentley, Michael, 'The Liberal Response to Socialism, 1918-29' in K.D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain* (London, 1974), pp. 42-73.
- Bernstein, George L. 'Yorkshire Liberalism During the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 32:1 (1989), pp. 107-29.
- Bevir, Mark, 'The Labour Church Movement, 1891-1902', *Journal of British Studies*, 38:2 (April, 1999), pp. 217-45.
- Biagini, Eugenio F. and Reid, Alistair J. (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991).
- Biagini, Eugenio F. *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931* (Cambridge, 2002).
- Bingham, Adrian, 'Enfranchisement, Feminism and the Modern Woman: Debates in the British Popular Press, 1918-1939' in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 87-104.
- Black, Lawrence, "'What kind of people are you?' Labour, the People and the 'New Political History'" in John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam (eds.), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester; New York, 2003), pp. 23-38.
- Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn, *Towards Socialism* (New York, 1966).
- Blake, Robert, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858-1923* (London, 1955).
- Blake, Robert, *The Conservative Party From Peel to Thatcher*, New Ed. (London, 1985).
- Blaxland, Sam, 'A Swinging Party? The Need for a History of the Conservatives in Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 9 (2014), pp. 1-10.

- Blaxland, Sam, 'Women in the Organisation of the Conservative Party in Wales, 1945-1979', *Women's History Review*, 28:2 (2019), pp. 236-56.
- Bowen, Lloyd, 'Wales at Westminster: Parliament, Principality and Pressure Groups, 1542-1601', *Parliamentary History*, 22:2 (2003), pp. 107-20.
- Boyns, Trevor, 'The Coal Industry' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 34-58.
- Breitenbach, Esther, and Thane, Pat (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?* (London, 2010).
- Briggs, Asa and Saville, John (eds.), *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923* (Camden, 1971).
- Brome, Vincent, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography* (London, 1953).
- Brown, K.D. (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain* (London, 1974).
- Bruley, Sue, *The Women and Men of 1926: The General Strike and Miners' Lockout in South Wales* (Cardiff, 2010).
- Burge, Alun, 'Miners' Learning in the South Wales Coalfield 1900-1947', *Llafur*, 8:1 (2000), pp. 69-95.
- Burge, Alun, "'A Task Worthy of the Most Sincere Devotion and Application": The Co-operative Movement in South Wales and its History', *Welsh History Review*, 23: 4 (December, 2007), pp. 59-71.
- Burge, Alun, 'Labour, Class and Conflict' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 320-41.
- Butler, David, *The Electoral System in Britain Since 1918* (Oxford, 1963).
- Calder, Gideon, Gass, Jeremy and Merrill-Glover, Kirsten (eds.), *Changing Directions of the British Welfare State* (Cardiff, 2012).
- Callaghan, John, Fielding, Steven and Ludlam, Steve (eds.), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester, 2003).

- Campbell, Alan, Fishman, Nina and Howell, David (eds.) *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-1947* (Abingdon; New York, 1996).
- Campbell, John, *Nye Bevan and the Mirage of Socialism* (London, 1987).
- Charmley, Gerard, 'Parliamentary Representation' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 301-19.
- Chilton, Stephen, 'Defining Political Culture', *The Western Political Quarterly*, 41:3 (Sep., 1988), pp. 419-45.
- Clark, Arthur, *The Story of Monmouthshire, Vol. 2: From the Civil War to Present Times* (Monmouth, 1979).
- Clarke, P.F. *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).
- Clarke, P.F. 'The Electoral Position of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1914', *The English Historical Review*, 90:357 (Oct., 1975), pp. 828-836.
- Clinton, Alan, *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain, 1900-40* (Manchester, 1977).
- Coates, David and Panitch, Leo, , 'The Continuing Relevance of the Milibandian Perspective' in John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam (eds.), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester; New York, 2003), pp. 71-85.
- Cole, G.D.H. *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948).
- Collette, Christine, *For Labour and For Women: The Women's Labour League, 1906-1918* (Manchester, 1989).
- Cook, Chris, 'Wales and the General Election of 1923', *Welsh History Review*, 4:4 (1969), pp. 387-95.
- Cook, Chris and Ramsden, John (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London, 1973).
- Cook, Chris, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain; 1922-1929* (London, 1975).
- Cook, Chris, *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-1984* (London, 1984).

Cowling, Maurice, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (London, 1971).

Cragoe, Matthew, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996).

Craik, W. W. *The Central Labour College, 1909-29* (London, 1964).

Croll, Andy, “‘People’s Remembrancers’ in a Post-modern Age: Contemplating the Non-crisis of Welsh Labour History’, *Llafur*, 8:1 (2000), pp. 5-17.

Croll, Andy, ‘Mabon’s Day: The Rise and Fall of a Lib-Lab Holiday in the South Wales Coalfield, 1888-1898’, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 72 No. 1 (April 2007), pp. 50-67.

Croll, Andy, ‘Poverty, Mass Unemployment and Welfare’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 207-27.

Crosby, Travis L. *The Unknown David Lloyd George: A Statesman in Conflict* (London; New York, 2014).

Curtis, Ben, ‘Manufacturing, Communications and Commerce’ in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 75-101.

DalGLISH, N.D. ‘A “difficult and somewhat thankless task”: Politics, Religion and the Education Bill of 1908’, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 31:1 (1999), pp. 19-35.

Dangerfield, George, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York, 1961).

Davies, David James, ‘Guardians of the Needy Found Wanting: A Study in Social Division during the Industrial Crisis of 1926’, *The Carmarthenshire Historian*, 19 (1982), pp. 54-69.

Davies, Leonard Twiston, *Men of Monmouthshire* (Cardiff, 1933).

Davies, Paul, ‘The Making of A. J. Cook: His Development Within the South Wales Labour Movement, 1900-1924’, *Llafur*, 2:3 (1978), pp. 43-63.

Davies, Paul, *A. J. Cook* (Manchester, 1987).

- Dawson, Michael, 'Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall 1910-1931: The Old-Time Religion', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 425-37.
- Deacon, Russell, 'The Slow Death of Liberal Wales – 1906-1979', *Journal of Liberal History*, 49 (Winter, 2005), pp. 12-23.
- Deacon, Russell, 'Welsh Women Liberals', *Journal of Liberal History*, 71 (Summer, 2011), pp. 38-43.
- Deacon, Russell, *The Welsh Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties in Wales* (Cardiff, 2014).
- Douglas, Margaret, 'Women, God and Birth Control: The First Hospital Birth Control Clinic, Abertillery 1925', *Llafur*, 6:4 (1995), pp. 110-22.
- Douglas, Roy, 'The Background to the "Coupon" Election Arrangements', *The English Historical Review*, 86:339 (1971), pp. 318-36.
- Drakeford, Mark, 'Devolution and the Welfare State: The Case of Wales' in Gideon Calder, Jeremy Gass and Kirsten Merrill-Glover (eds.), *Changing Directions of the British Welfare State* (Cardiff, 2012), pp. 177-93.
- Edwards, Ness, *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation* (London, 1938).
- Egan, David, 'The Swansea Conference of the British Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Delegates, July 1917: Reactions to the Russian Revolution of February, 1917, and the Anti-War Movement in South Wales', *Llafur*, 1:4 (1975), pp. 12-37.
- Egan, David, 'The Unofficial Reform Committee and the Miners' Next Step: Documents from the W. H. Mainwaring Papers', *Llafur*, 2:3 (1978), pp. 64-80.
- Egan, David, 'Noah Ablett 1883-1935', *Llafur*, 4:3 (1986), pp. 19-30.
- Egan, David, *Coal Society: A History of the South Wales Mining Valleys 1840-1980* (Llandysul, 1987).
- Eirug, Aled, *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales 1914-1918* (Cardiff, 2018).
- Elliott, John, *The Industrial Development of the Ebbw Valleys 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2004).

Elliott, John, 'The Iron and Steel Industry' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 73-86.

Elliott, John and Deenan, Colin, 'Iron, Steel and Aluminium' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 59-74.

Evans, E.W. *Mabon: A Study in Trade Union Leadership* (Cardiff, 1959).

Evans, E.W. 'Mabon and trade unionism in the South Wales coalfield' in Goronwy Alun Hughes (ed.), *Men of No Property: Historical Studies of Welsh Trade Unions* (Caerwys, 1971), pp. 51-8.

Evans, John, 'Early Industrial Development' in Madeleine Gray and Prys Morgan (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 3, The Making of Monmouthshire, 1536-1780* (Cardiff, 2009), pp. 352-80.

Evans, Neil and Jones, Dot, "'To Help Forward the Great Work of Humanity": Women in the Labour Party in Wales' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 215-40.

Farr, Martin, *Reginald McKenna: Financier Among Statesmen, 1863-1916* (London, 2008).

Farr, Martin, 'The Impact of the 1918 Reform Act on the House of Commons', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 133-49.

Finch, Harold, *Memoirs of a Bedwellty M.P.* (Risca; Newport, 1972).

Fisher, Kate, "'Clearing Up Misconceptions": The Campaign to Set Up Birth Control Clinics in South Wales Between the Wars', *Welsh History Review*, 19:1 (1998), pp. 103-29.

Foot, Michael, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume 1: 1897-1945, Main Edition* (London, 2008).

Foot, Michael *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume 2: 1945-1960, Main Edition* (London, 2008).

Fox, Alan, 'Aneurin Bevan, Poet Politician Who Targeted Power', *Gwent Local History*, 83 (1997), pp. 51-6.

- Francis, Hywel and Smith, Dai, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980).
- Francis, Martin, and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996).
- Freedon, Michael, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914-1939* (Oxford, 1986).
- Freeman, Gavin, 'The Decline of the Liberal Party in the Heart of England: The Liberals in Leicestershire, 1914-1924', *Historical Research*, 89 (2016), pp. 531-49.
- Freeman, Gavin, 'The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act', *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 47-63.
- Gilbert, David, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields 1850-1926* (Oxford, 1992).
- Gottlieb, Julie V. and Toye, Richard (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013).
- Graves, Pamela, *Labour Women: Women in British-Working-Class Politics, 1918-39* (Cambridge, 1994).
- Graves, Pamela, 'An Experiment in Women-Centred Socialism: Labour Women in Britain' in Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (eds.), *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 180-214.
- Gray, Madeleine and Morgan, Prys (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 3, The Making of Monmouthshire, 1536-1780* (Cardiff, 2009).
- Gray-Jones, Arthur, *A History of Ebbw Vale* (Risca, 1971).
- Griffiths, Clare V. J. *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain, 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007).
- Griffiths, Robert, *S. O. Davies – A Socialist Faith* (Llandysul, 1983).
- Gruber, Helmut and Graves, Pamela (eds.), *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women: Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1998).

Hannam, June and Hunt, Karen, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London; New York, 2002).

Hannam, June, 'Women as Paid Organizers and Propagandists for the British Labour Party Between the Wars', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 77 (2010), pp. 69-88.

Harris, Jose, 'Labour's Political and Social Thought' in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge; New York, 2001), pp. 8-45.

Hart, Michael, 'The Liberals, the War, and the Franchise', *The English Historical Review*, 97:385 (Oct., 1982), pp. 820-32.

Hilton, Matthew and McKay, James (eds.), *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society* (Oxford, 2011).

Hobsbawm, Eric, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?' in Francis Mulhern and Martin Jacques (eds.), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London, 1981), pp. 1-19.

Hopkin, Deian, 'The Rise of Labour: Llanelli, 1890-1922' in Geraint H. Jenkins and J. Beverley Smith (eds.), *Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922* (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 161-82.

Hopkin, Deian, 'The Rise of Labour in Wales 1890-1914', *Llafur*, 6:4 (1994), pp. 120-41.

Hopkin, Deian, Tanner, Duncan and Williams, Chris (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales: 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000).

Hopkins, Tony, 'In Search of Monmouthshire, 1536-1972', *Gwent Local History*, 70 (1991), pp. 35-46.

Hopkins, Tony, 'In Search of Monmouthshire, 1536-1972', *Gwent Local History*, 71 (1992), pp. 3-14.

Howell, David, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977).

Howell, David, 'Editorial', *Labour History Review*, 60:1 (1995), p. 2.

Hunt, Karen, 'The Local and the Everyday: Inter War Women's Politics', *The Local Historian*, 42 (2012), pp. 266-279.

James, Arnold J. and Thomas, John E. *Wales at Westminster: A History of the Parliamentary Representation of Wales, 1800-1979* (Llandysul, 1981).

- Jarvis, David, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 5:2 (1994), pp. 129-52.
- Jarvis, David, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', *The English Historical Review*, 111:440 (Feb., 1996), pp. 59-84.
- Jarvis, David, 'The Shaping of a Conservative Electoral Hegemony, 1918-1939' in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain Since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 131-52.
- Jenkins, Geraint H. *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains 1801-1911* (Cardiff, 2000).
- Jeremy, Paul, 'Life on Circular 703: The Crisis of Destitution in the South Wales Coalfield During the Lockout of 1926', *Llafur*, 2:2 (1977), pp. 65-75.
- John, Angela (ed.), *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, New Edition (Cardiff, 2011).
- John, Angela, *Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan, 2013).
- John, Angela, *Rocking the Boat: Welsh Women who Championed Equality* (Cardigan, 2019).
- Johnes, Martin, 'For Class and Nation: Dominant Trends in the Historiography of Twentieth Century Wales', *History Compass*, 8:11 (2010), pp. 1257-74.
- Jones, Bill, 'The Coal Industry' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 87-111.
- Jones, David J.V. *The Last Rising: The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985).
- Jones, Ieuan Gwynedd, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981).
- Jones, John Graham, 'Evan Davies and Ebbw Vale', *Llafur*, 3:3 (1982), pp. 93-9.
- Jones, John Graham, 'Wales and the "New Socialism", 1926-1929', *Welsh History Review*, 11:2 (Dec., 1982), pp. 173-199.

- Jones, John Graham, 'Welsh Politics Between the Wars: The Personnel of Labour', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1983), pp. 164-83.
- Jones, John Graham, 'The "Land and the Nation" and Wales', *Journal of Liberal History*, 81 (Winter 2013), pp. 26-36.
- Jones, Rhian E. 'Symbol, Ritual and Popular Protest in Early Nineteenth Century Wales: The Scotch Cattle Rebranded', *Welsh History Review*, 26:1 (2012), pp. 34-57.
- Jones, Robin, *The History of the Red Cross in Monmouthshire (Gwent) 1910-1918* (Pontypool, 1988).
- Joyce, Patrick, 'Refabricating Labour History; or, From Labour History to the History of Labour', *Labour History Review*, 62:2 (1997), pp. 147-52.
- Kingsford, Peter, *The Hunger Marches in Britain, 1920-1939* (London, 1982).
- Kinnear, Michael, *The Fall of Lloyd George: the Political Crisis of 1922* (London, 1973).
- Law, Cheryl, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement, 1918-28* (London, 1997).
- Lawrence, Jon, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', *The English Historical Review*, 108: 428 (July, 1993), pp. 629-52.
- Lawrence, Jon and Taylor, Miles (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain Since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997).
- Lawrence, Jon, 'The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War', *Past and Present*, 190 (Feb., 2006), pp. 185-216.
- Lawrence, Jon, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford; New York, 2009).
- Lawrence, Jon, 'The Culture of Elections in Modern Britain', *History*, 96:324 (2011), pp. 459-76.
- Leeworthy, Daryl, *Labour Country: Political Radicalism and Social Democracy in South Wales, 1831-1935* (Cardigan, 2018).
- Lewis, Harry, 'Monmouthshire and the Welsh Language Censuses 1901 to 1971', *Gwent Local History*, 48 (1980), pp. 18-24.

Lewis, Richard, 'The South Wales Miners and the Ruskin College Strike of 1909', *Llafur* 2:1 (1976), pp. 57-72.

Lewis, Richard, 'The Central Labour College: Its Decline and Fall, 1919-29', *Welsh History Review*, 12:2 (December, 1984), pp. 225-245.

Lewis, Richard, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-40* (Cardiff, 1993).

Lewis, Richard, 'Political Culture and Ideology' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 86-109.

Lloyd, John, *The Early History of the South Wales Iron Works, 1760 to 1840* (London, 1906).

Lloyd-Jones, Naomi, and Scull, Margaret (eds.), *Four Nation Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (Dis)united Kingdom?* (London, 2018).

MacDonald, Catriona, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland: Paisley Politics, 1885-1924* (East Linton, 2000).

Mansfield, Nick, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism, 1900-1930* (Aldershot, 2001).

Mansfield, Nick, 'Farmworkers and Local Workers in South-west Shropshire, 1916-23' in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public Since the 1880s* (London, 2002), pp. 36-57.

Mansfield, Nick, 'Paternalistic Consumer Co-operatives in Rural England, 1870-1930', *Rural History*, 23:2 (2012), pp. 205-11.

Marwick, Arthur, *Clifford Allen: Open Conspirator* (Edinburgh; London, 1964).

Marwick, Arthur, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967* (London, 1968).

Masson, Ursula, "'Political conditions in Wales are quite different...': Party Politics and Votes for Women in Wales, 1912-15", *Women's History Review*, 9:2 (2000), pp. 369-88.

Masson, Ursula, *'For Women for Wales and For Liberalism': Women in Liberal Politics in Wales, 1880-1914* (Cardiff, 2010).

Matthew, H. C. G., McKibbin, Ross and Kay, J. A. 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *The English Historical Review*, 91:361 (Oct., 1976), pp. 723-52.

Matthews, Ioan, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', *Llafur*, 6:1 (1992), pp. 96-104.

May, Eddie, 'Charles Stanton and the Limits to "Patriotic" Labour', *Welsh History Review*, 18:3 (1997), pp. 483-508.

May, Eddie, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 62-82.

McCarthy, Helen, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 50:4 (Dec., 2007), pp. 891-912.

McCarthy, Helen, 'Associational Voluntarism in Interwar Britain' in Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 47-68.

McCarthy, Helen, 'Whose Democracy? Histories of British Political Culture Between the Wars', *The Historical Journal*, 55:1 (2012), pp. 221-38.

McCloy, Robert, 'Changes in Local Government' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 126-56.

McCrillis, Neal R. *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus, 1998).

McEwen, J.M. 'Lloyd George's Acquisition of the *Daily Chronicle* in 1918', *Journal of British Studies*, 22:1 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 127-44.

McIlroy, John, Campbell, Alan and Gildart, Keith (eds.), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out: The Struggle for Dignity* (Cardiff, 2004).

McIlroy, John, 'South Wales' in John McIlroy, Alan Campbell and Keith Gildart (eds.), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out: The Struggle for Dignity* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 139-56.

McKenna, Stephen, *Reginald McKenna 1863-1943* (London, 1948).

McKibbin, Ross, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924* (London, 1974).

- McKibbin, Ross, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990).
- McKibbin, Ross, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998).
- McKibbin, Ross, *Parties and People: England, 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010).
- Melding, David, *Will Britain Survive Beyond 2020?* (Cardiff, 2009).
- Meredith, Stephen, 'A "Strange Death" Foretold (Or the Not So "Strange Death" of Liberal Wales): Liberal Decline, the Labour Ascendancy and Electoral Politics in South Wales, 1922-1924', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 18-37.
- Meynell, Hildamarie, 'The Stockholm Conference of 1917', *International Review of Social History*, 5:2 (Aug., 1960), pp. 202-25.
- Middlemas, Keith and Barnes, John, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London, 1969).
- Miliband, Ralph, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (London, 1961).
- Millward, E. G. 'Industrialisation Did Not Save the Welsh Language', *Welsh Nation*, 7 (July, 1960), p. 4.
- Morgan, Kenneth O. 'Twilight of Welsh Liberalism: Lloyd George and the "Wee Frees", 1918-35', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22:4 (May, 1968), pp. 389-405.
- Morgan, Kenneth O. 'The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: The Welsh Experience, 1885-1929', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 6 (1973), pp. 288-312.
- Morgan, Kenneth O. *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981).
- Morgan, Kenneth O. *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922*, Reprinted Edition (Oxford, 1986).
- Morgan, Kenneth O. *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922*, Paperback Edition (Cardiff, 1991).
- Morgan, Kenneth O. 'Liberals in Coalition, 1916-1922', *Journal of Liberal History*, 72 (Autumn, 2011), pp. 32-7.
- Morgan, Trevor, *Monmouthshire Education* (Cwmbran, 1988).

Mór-O'Brien, Anthony, 'Patriotism on Trial: The Strike of the South Wales Miners, July 1915', *Welsh History Review*, 12:1 (1984), pp. 76-104.

Morris, Jeremy, 'Religion' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 241-56.

Mulhern, Francis and Jacques, Martin (eds.), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London, 1981).

Navickas, Katrina, 'What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain', *Social History*, 36:2 (2011), pp. 192-204.

Newman, Lowri, "'Providing an Opportunity to Exercise their Energies": The Role of the Labour Women's Sections in Shaping Political Identities, South Wales, 1918-1939' in Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (eds.), *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?* (London, 2010), pp. 29-44.

O'Leary, Paul, *Immigration and Integration: The Irish in Wales, 1798-1922* (Cardiff, 2000).

O'Leary, Paul, *Claiming the Streets: Processions and Urban Culture in South Wales c.1830-1880* (Cardiff, 2012).

Pelling, Henry, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (London, 1961).

Pincombe, Ian, 'The Rural Economy' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 102-25.

Pretty, David A. *The Rural Revolt that Failed: Farm Workers' Unions in Wales, 1889-1950* (Cardiff, 1989).

Pretty, David A. 'Women and Trade Unionism in Welsh Rural Society', *Llafur*, 5:3 (1990), pp. 5-13.

Price, Richard, 'The Future of British Labour History', *International Review of Social History*, 36:2 (1991), pp. 249-60.

Pryce, W.T.R. 'Population and Language' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 157-87.

Pugh, Martin, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939* (Oxford, 1982).

- Pugh, Martin, *The Tories and the People 1830-1935* (Oxford, 1985).
- Pugh, Martin, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (Basingstoke, 1992).
- Radice, Lisane, *Beatrice and Sidney Webb: Fabian Socialists* (London, 1984).
- Ramsden, John, 'The Newport By-Election and the Fall of the Coalition' in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London, 1973), pp. 14-43.
- Ramsden, John, *A History of the Conservative Party: The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940* (London, 1995).
- Rees, William, 'The Union of England and Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1937), pp. 27-100.
- Savage, Mike, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1987).
- Savage, Mike, 'The Rise of the Labour Party in Local Perspective', *The Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 10:1 (1990), pp. 1-15.
- Seldon, Anthony and Ball, Stuart (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994).
- Sharpe, Iain, 'The Myth of "New Liberalism": Continuity and Change in Liberal Politics, 1889-1914', *Journal of Liberal History*, 81 (Winter, 2013), pp. 16-24.
- Shepherd, John, 'Labour and Parliament: the Lib-Labs. as the First Working-class MPs, 1885-1906' in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 187-213.
- Smith, Dai, 'Tonyandy 1910: Definitions of Community', *Past and Present*, 87 (May, 1980), pp. 158-184.
- Smith, Dai, *Wales! Wales?* (London, 1984).
- Smith, Dai, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1993).
- Smith, Harold L. (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Cheltenham, 1990).

Smith, Harold L. 'British Feminism in the 1920s' in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Cheltenham, 1990), pp. 47-65.

Smith, Harold L. *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign, 1866-1928*, Rev. 2nd Ed. (London; New York, 2013).

Smith, Jeremy, *The Taming of Democracy: The Conservative Party, 1880-1924* (Cardiff, 1997).

Smith, Joanne, 'From Suffrage to Citizenship: The Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association in Comparative Perspective, 1921-1939', *Llafur*, 11:4 (2015), pp. 26-42.

Stead, Peter, 'Vernon Hartshorn: Miners' Agent and Cabinet Minister', *Glamorgan Historian*, 6 (1969), pp. 83-94.

Stead, Peter, 'Working-Class Leadership in South Wales 1900-1920', *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp. 329-53.

Stead, Peter, 'The Language of Edwardian Politics' in Dai Smith (ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales, 1780-1980* (London, 1980), pp. 148-65.

Stead, Peter, 'Establishing a Heartland – The Labour Party in Wales' in K. D. Brown (ed.), *The First Labour Party, 1906-1914* (London, 1985), pp. 64-88.

Stedman Jones, Gareth, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983).

Steinmetz, Willibald and Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard, 'The Political as Communicative Space in History: The Bielefeld Approach' in Willibald Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Hotley and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Writing Political History* (Frankfurt; New York, 2013), pp. 11-36.

Steinmetz, Willibald, Gilcher-Hotley, Ingrid and Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard (eds.), *Writing Political History* (Frankfurt; New York, 2013).

Stradling, Robert, Newton, Scott and Bates, David (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence: Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe* (Cardiff, 1997).

Strong, Peter, 'The First World War' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 1-16.

Studdert-Kennedy, Gerald, *Dog-collar Democracy: The Industrial Christian Fellowship, 1919-1929* (London; Basingstoke, 1982).

Tanner, Duncan, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990).

Tanner, Duncan, Thane, Pate and Tiratsoo, Nick (eds.), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge; New York, 2000).

Tanner, Duncan, *Newport Labour Party: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm Edition of Newport Labour Party Records* (Wakefield, 2000).

Tanner, Duncan, Williams, Chris and Hopkin, Deian (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales* (Cardiff, 2000).

Tanner, Duncan, 'The Pattern of Labour Politics, 1918-1939' in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 113-39.

Tanner, Duncan, 'Gender, Civic Culture and Politics in South Wales: Explaining Labour Municipal Policy, 1918-39' in Matthew Worley (ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 170-93.

Tasker, W. W. *Tredegar and Abergavenny Railway and Branches* (Poole, 1986).

Taylor, Andrew, 'Speaking to Democracy: The Conservative Party and Mass Opinion from the 1920s to the 1950s' in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public Since the 1880s* (London, 2002), pp. 78-99.

Taylor, Andrew, 'Stanley Baldwin, Heresthetics and the Realignment of British Politics', *British Journal of Political Science*, 35:3 (July, 2005), pp. 429-63.

Thackeray, David, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the Challenge of Mass Politics in Early Twentieth Century England* (Manchester, 2013).

Thackeray, David, 'From Prudent Housewife to Empire Shopper: Party Appeals to the Female Voter, 1918-1928' in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 37-53.

Thane, Pat, 'What Difference Did the Vote Make?' in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 253-88.

Thane, Pat, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918-1939' in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 54-69.

Thomas, Brinley, 'A Cauldron of Rebirth: Population and the Welsh Language in the Nineteenth Century', *Welsh Historical Review*, 13:4 (Dec., 1987), pp. 418-437.

Thomas, Geraint, 'The Conservative Party and Welsh Politics in the Inter-War Years', *The English Historical Review*, 128:533 (August, 2013), pp. 877-913.

Thomas-Symonds, Nicklaus, *Nye: The Political Life of Aneurin Bevan* (London, 2014).

Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester; New York, 2000).

Thorpe, Andrew, 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945', *The Historical Journal*, 43:3 (Sep., 2000), pp. 777-800.

Thorpe, Andrew, 'Reasons for "Progressive" Disunity: Labour and Liberal politics in Britain, 1918-45', *Socialist History*, 27 (2005), pp. 21-42.

Thorpe, Andrew, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 3rd Ed. (Basingstoke, 2008).

Thorpe, Andrew, 'Labour Leaders and the Liberals, 1906-1924', *Cercles*, 21 (2011), pp. 39-54.

Turnbull, Robert, *Climbing Mount Sinai: Noah Ablett 1883-1935* (London, 2017).

Velde, Henk te, 'The Opening Up of Political History' in Willibald Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Hotley and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Writing Political History* (Frankfurt; New York, 2013), pp. 383-96.

Vickers, Amanda (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001).

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

Wallace, Ryland, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009).

- Ward, Stephanie, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The Means Test and Protest in 1930s South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester, 2013).
- Ward, Stephanie, 'Labour Activism and Political Self in Inter-War Working-Class Women's Politics', *Twentieth Century British History*, 30:1 (2019), pp. 29-52.
- White, Stephen, 'Labour's Council of Action 1920', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9:4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 99-122.
- Wilks, Ivor, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839: Class Struggle as Armed Struggle* (London, 1984).
- Williams, Charlotte, Evans, Neil and O'Leary, Paul (eds.), *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved Wales*, New Edition (Cardiff, 2015).
- Williams, Chris, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society 1885-1951* (Cardiff, 1996).
- Williams, Chris, "'The hope of the British proletariat": The South Wales Miners, 1910-1947' in Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and David Howell (eds.), *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-1947* (Abingdon; New York, 1996), pp. 121-44.
- Williams, Chris, 'Democracy and Nationalism in Wales: The Lib-Lab Enigma' in Robert Stradling, Scott Newton and David Bates (eds.), *Conflict and Coexistence: Nationalism and Democracy in Modern Europe* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 107-31.
- Williams, Chris, 'The Odyssey of Frank Hodges', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 5 (1998), pp. 110-30.
- Williams, Chris, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government, 1919-1939' in Deian Hopkin, Duncan Tanner and Chris Williams (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales: 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 140-65.
- Williams, Chris, "'Decorous and creditable": The Irish in Newport' in Paul O'Leary (ed.), *The Irish in Wales* (Liverpool, 2004), pp. 54-82.
- Williams, Chris and Williams, Sian Rhiannon (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011).

Williams, Chris, 'The Question of Monmouthshire' in Chris Williams and Sian Rhiannon Williams (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 348-60.

Williams, Chris and Croll, Andy (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013).

Williams, Chris, 'Who Talks of My Nation?' in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds.), *The Gwent County History: Volume 5, The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 342-62.

Williams, Chris, 'Cartooning the Rise of Labour, 1900-21' in Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (eds.), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885-1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester, 2015), pp. 67-97.

Williams, Chris and Edwards, Andrews (eds.), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885-1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester, 2015).

Williams, Gwyn A. *When was Wales?: A History of the Welsh* (Harmondsworth, 1985).

Williams, Gwyn A. , *The Merthyr Rising*, Reprinted Edition (Cardiff, 1988).

Williams, L.J. *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics: Volume 1* (Cardiff, 1985).

Williams, Raymond, *Border Country*, Readers Union Edition (London, 1962).

Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973).

Williams, Raymond, 'The Social Significance of 1926', *Llafur*, 2:2 (1977), pp. 5-8.

Williams, Raymond, *The Fight for Manod* (London, 1979).

Williams, Sian Rhiannon, 'The Bedwellty Board of Guardians and the Default Act of 1927', *Llafur*, 2:4 (1979), pp. 65-77.

Williams, Sian Rhiannon, 'Welsh in the Valleys of Gwent', *Planet*, 51 (1985), pp. 112-8.

Williams, Sian Rhiannon, *Oes y Byd i'r Iaith Gymraeg: Y Gymraeg yn Ardal Ddiwydiannol Sir Fynwy yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Cardiff, 1992).

Williamson, Philip, “‘Safety First’: Baldwin, the Conservative Party, and the 1929 General Election”, *The Historical Journal*, 25:2 (Jun., 1982), pp. 385-409.

Williamson, Philip, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999).

Wilson, Trevor, ‘The Coupon and the British General Election of 1918’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 36:1 (Mar., 1964), pp. 28-42.

Wilson, Trevor, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935* (London, 1966).

Winter, J. M. ‘Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party’, *Historical Journal*, 15:4 (1972), pp. 753-73.

Woodhouse, M. G. ‘Mines for the Nation or Mines for the Miners? Alternative Perspectives on Industrial Democracy, 1919-1921’, *Llafur*, 2:3 (1978), pp. 92-109.

Worley, Matthew, ‘Building the Party: Labour Party Activism in Five British Counties Between the Wars’, *Labour History Review*, 70:1 (April 2005), pp. 73-95.

Worley, Matthew, ‘Introduction: Labour’s Grass Roots’ in Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 1-6.

Worley, Matthew (ed.), *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-1945* (Aldershot, 2005).

Worley, Matthew, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars*, Paperback Edition (London, 2008).

Worley, Matthew, *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Farnham, 2009).

Wrigley, Chris, ‘The Labour Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, 37:1 (2018), pp. 64-80.

Wright, Martin, *Wales and Socialism: Political Culture and National Identity Before the Great War* (Cardiff, 2016).

Young, G. M. *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952).

iii. Unpublished Theses and Dissertations

Adams, Anthony John, 'Working Class Organisation, Industrial Relations and the Labour Unrest 1914-1921' (PhD, University of Leicester, 1988).

Aubel, Felix, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaption' (PhD, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1995).

Bates, Jonathan, 'The Conservative Party in the Constituencies, 1918-1939' (D. Phil, Oxford University, 1994).

Davies, John Gwyn, 'Industrial Society in Monmouthshire 1750-1851' (PhD, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1980).

Demont, Susan, 'Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan: A Society and its Political Articulation 1890-1929' (PhD, Cardiff University, 1990).

Farr, Martin, 'Reginald McKenna as Chancellor of the Exchequer 1915-1916' (PhD, University of Glasgow, 1998).

Freeman, Gavin, 'Beyond Westminster: Grass-roots Liberalism in England, 1910-1929', (PhD, University of Leicester, 2013).

Jenkins, Beth, 'Women's Professional Employment in Wales 1880-1939' (PhD, Cardiff University, 2016).

Jones, Douglas, 'The Communist Party of Great Britain and the National Question in Wales, 1920-1991' (PhD, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2013).

Jones, Sian, 'The Political Dynamics of North East Wales, With Special Reference to the Liberal Party' (PhD, University of North Wales, Bangor, 2003).

Mansfield, Nick, 'Agricultural Trades Unionism in Shropshire, 1900-1930' (PhD, University of Wolverhampton, 1997).

May, Eddie, 'A Question of Control: Social and Industrial Relations in the South Wales Coalfield and the Crisis of Post-war Reconstruction, 1914-1921' (PhD, University of Wales, Cardiff, 1995).

McCarry, T. J. 'Labour and Society in Swansea, 1887-1918' (PhD, University of Wales, Swansea, 1987).

Preston, Catherine, 'Geology, Visualization and the 1893 Hauliers' Strike: An Interdisciplinary Exploration' (PhD, Cardiff University, 2010).

Purvis, Martin, 'Nineteenth Century Co-operative Retailing in England and Wales: A Geographical Approach' (D. Phil, Oxford University, 1987).

Watkins, John, 'Thomas Richards: Trade Unionist and Politician' (MA, University of Glamorgan, 2005).

Williams, Thomas Wyn, 'The Conservative Party in North-East Wales, 1906-1924' (PhD, University of Liverpool, 2008).