

## From Certainty to Searching: The Impact of 1979 on Welsh Identity

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### Introduction

In 1979, the Welsh people rejected devolution in a referendum held, somewhat ironically, on St. David's Day, the Welsh equivalent of St. Patrick's Day. The depth of the rejection of devolution – 80% of those who participated voted 'no' – shook the section of Welsh society that had actively campaigned for cultural protection, Home Rule and independence within Britain.<sup>2</sup> One nationalist, Hywel Teifi Edwards, argued that the nationalists' previous understanding of what it meant to be Welsh had been found wanting by the Welsh people themselves.<sup>3</sup> The Welsh response to this 'no' vote stretched wider than those who had actively campaigned for a change in the Welsh political situation, however. Prior to 1979, those who actively supported the Welsh nationalist cause and advocated for the political recognition of a Welsh identity were a small group, primarily limited to the minority party of *Plaid Cymru*. Over the ensuing decade, a wider variety of Welsh people, consisting largely of academics but also of politicians, members of *Plaid Cymru*,<sup>4</sup> public servants, and other members of the educated Welsh, participated in the reshaping of the concept of national identity within Wales. Most of these people were stung into action through a mixture of shock at the depth of the popular rejection of devolution, or through concern over the impact of Thatcherism on Wales and Welsh society and culture.

### Approaches to identity after 1979

After the rejection of devolution and the perceived rejection of traditional Welsh language and culture, *Plaid Cymru* and the wider group of Welsh people began to re-examine the 1970s approaches to Welsh identity. The section of the Welsh population actively involved in this process was quite wide and united only by their interest in Wales as a nation and a people. Even those who could be classified as nationalists varied substantially in their understanding of what that classification meant. *Plaid Cymru* under Gwynfor Evans maintained a very narrow definition, requiring a deep commitment to the Welsh language, to Welsh traditional culture, to Welsh Home Rule, and to a militant rejection of English-language Welsh culture and the existent relationship between Wales and England. Much of the conflict between this idea of Welsh identity and the reality of the lived Welsh experience, however, only became apparent after the rejection of devolution. It became

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<sup>2</sup> G.H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.297.

<sup>3</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 1994), p.677.

<sup>4</sup> *Plaid Cymru* is the nationalist party of Wales. A direct translation of their name is 'Party of Wales.'

necessary for those concerned about the devolution result to attempt to grasp the way in which the Welsh people viewed these concepts. For the purposes of this analysis, this disparate group of people will be referred to as the nationalist-inclined Welsh intelligentsia. All were educated, thoughtful participants in the debate evident in the 1970s and the 1980s and played a major role in the effort to grasp the shape of a modern Wales and Welshness. While a part of this debate occurred within the public arena, on television, radio and in the newspapers, much of it made its way into three Welsh English-language journals. The three journals in which this group of people published most of the English-language debate were *Planet*, the *New Welsh Review*, and *Contemporary Wales*.

The debate evident in *Planet*, *Contemporary Wales*, the *New Welsh Review*, and the relevant policy pamphlets, and *Plaid Cymru* manifestoes throughout the 1970s focused on the need for the rebalancing of the Welsh-English relationship to allow for the protection and continued development of Welsh culture and society. Forced Union with England in Britain was increasingly being perceived by the Welsh intelligentsia as limiting the construction of Welsh political, cultural and economic identities. The Welsh intelligentsia were not, however, united over the way in which the Union was problematic for these areas, or how it should be corrected.

### **Treaties of unity and Welsh identity**

One form of correction was suggested by Tom Nairn, who argued that the development of Welsh and Scottish political and cultural identities was laying the groundwork for the revision of the treaties of Union.<sup>5</sup> Raymond Williams picked up on Tom Nairn's argument, pointing out that without this revision of the Treaties and, therefore, of the historical relationship between Wales and England, Welsh political identity in particular would not be able to reach its full potential.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the colonial nature of the relationship forced much of Welsh political and economic expression into line with that of England. Brian Davies argued that this imposed an artificial divide between the Welsh working class who were the most closely associated with the modern British economy and, therefore, the English language, and the more non-British Welsh nationalism of *Plaid Cymru*.<sup>7</sup> This disassociation of the grass-roots population from its version of Welsh identity hindered *Plaid Cymru's* efforts to alter the politically colonial relationship or to further develop Welsh political identity. For Bobi Jones, this divide within Welsh society was only reinforced by

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Nairn, 'Scotland and Wales: Notes on nationalist pre-history', *Planet* 34 (1976), pp.1-11.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, 2003. *Who speaks for Wales? Nation, culture and identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.186-203.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Davies, 'Towards a new synthesis', *Planet* 37, 8 (1977), pp.56-59.

the fact that English economic and political dominance had resulted in a Welsh inferiority complex regarding their language and culture.<sup>8</sup> The 1970s Welsh intelligentsia were united in their belief that the historical shape of the political Welsh-English relationship was no longer functioning to the benefit of the Welsh people and needed to be revised.

None of these members of the Welsh intelligentsia considered the possibility that Wales was not, in fact moving automatically towards regaining its political identity as a devolved country. All of the authors argued that changes would occur to the relationship between Wales and England – needed to occur in order to redress the political imbalance between Wales and England. The ‘no’ vote in the 1979 devolution referendum came as a serious shock for many among the Welsh intelligentsia. Indeed, the analysis of the reasons for the unexpected rejection of devolution is still on-going.<sup>9</sup>

One immediate result of the popular rejection of devolution was a temporary cessation of the debate over the nature of the Welsh-English political relationship. When the journals recommenced publication in the mid-1980s, the debate that also reappeared had shifted gears in response to the substantial Welsh swings towards the Conservative Party in the 1979 and 1983 general elections. Welsh voters appeared to be rejecting the radical Welsh past, expressed through voting for the Liberal and Labour parties, shifting into a voting pattern very similar to that of England. When this shift was combined with the rejection of devolution, it appeared almost a final confirmation of the disappearance of a distinctive form of Welsh political expression. Assimilation into England seemed to be reducing Wales to a region rather than a nation. Even the increased participation in direct action groups aimed to protect Welsh interests was interpreted by some members of the Welsh intelligentsia as evidence of the continuation of the historical process of Welsh political assimilation into Britain.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, Welsh political identity would be limited to that of a ‘sturdy dwarf’ who must exist beneath the dominant British culture and prove unable to grow beyond that position.<sup>11</sup>

The debate over the meaning of the rejection of devolution and the increased Welsh Conservative vote evolved into a reconsideration of the roles and natures of the political parties within Wales. During the 1970s, the inability of the British political parties to cater adequately for Wales had been an accepted fact amongst the nationalist-inclined Welsh intelligentsia. By the late 1980s, after nearly a decade of Conservative government, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Bobi Jones, ‘I’m Your Boy’, *Planet* 42 (1978), pp.3-5.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Edwards and Duncan Tanner, ‘Defining or dividing the nation? Opinion polls, Welsh identity and devolution, 1966-1979’, *Contemporary Wales* 18, 1 (2006), pp.54-71.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Madgwick, ‘Radical Wales lost to moderation?’ *Planet* 59 (1986), pp.37-39.

<sup>11</sup> Madgwick, ‘Radical Wales’, p.37.

steady rejection of its 1970s projection of Welsh political identity, *Plaid Cymru* itself had been forced to come to terms with its popular rejection in 1979 and at repeated General Elections. Under Dafydd Wigley and later Dafydd Elis Thomas, *Plaid Cymru* attempted to adapt themselves to the apparent reality of a people who accepted the shape of the union between England and Wales.<sup>12</sup> For some Welsh nationalists, however, *Plaid Cymru's* efforts to represent the Welsh nation as it was rather than as it should be, undermined the Party's ability to defend the Welsh language and the integrity of the Welsh language heartlands.<sup>13</sup> Without the distinctive Welsh language heartlands, the Welsh claim for a separate political identity was dangerously undermined. Without a base in traditional, Welsh-speaking Welshness, Thomas argued that *Plaid Cymru* would be inhibited from building a nation able to distinguish itself from England. Anglo-Welsh culture was not well enough defined or strong enough to withstand pressure from English culture.<sup>14</sup> The popular rejection of devolution and the ideas that accompanied it was not sufficient cause to abandon those ideas.

Yet the argument also went in the other direction. Geraint Morgan raised the question of the Welshness of the Welsh branch of the Conservative Party, pointing out that not only had they passed legislation that was beneficial to Wales but that, on occasion, they were more in touch with the Welsh people than either *Plaid Cymru* or the Labour Party.<sup>15</sup> This had been evidenced by Conservative opposition to devolution in 1979 in favour of a stronger Home Office – an institution created by the Conservative Party itself. Morgan did conclude that, despite these occasional achievements, the Conservative lack of sympathy with the Welsh nationalist aspirations prevented them from being truly Welsh.<sup>16</sup> Prior to the 1980s, however, the mere consideration of the Welshness of the Conservative Party would have seemed irrelevant in a society dominated by Labour and renowned for its rejection of the Anglicised Conservative Party. Yet by the mid 1980s, the question could be asked, indicating a growing openness to the consideration of the validity of Welsh identities outside of the traditional one. A section of the Welsh intelligentsia, including the leaders of *Plaid Cymru*, were becoming more consciously appreciative of what it meant to be practically as well as traditionally Welsh.

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<sup>12</sup> Laura McAllister, *Plaid Cymru: The Emergence of a Political Party* (Bridgend: Seren, 1981), pp.72-83.

<sup>13</sup> Ned Thomas, 'Can Plaid Cymru survive until 1994?' *Planet* 70 (1988), pp.3-10.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, 'Can Plaid Cymru survive until 1994?', pp.6-8.

<sup>15</sup> Geraint Morgan, 'How Welsh are the Welsh Conservatives?', *Planet* 54 (1985/1986), pp. 60-64.

<sup>16</sup> Morgan, 'How Welsh are the Welsh Conservatives?', pp.60-64.

### Attitudes in the 1980s

Thatcherism and the evolution of political expression in Wales, as well as the economic-triggered disassociation from Westminster politics, encouraged the Welsh intelligentsia into questioning the structure and shape, and even the continued existence of a Welsh expression of political identity. This questioning was shaped, however, by the rejection of devolution. The confidence of the 1970s is notably lacking in the 1980s journal articles, and the effort to come to terms with the reality of the political situation quite different from 1970s focus on what would or needed to occur in the Welsh future. By the end of the 1980s, the Welsh intelligentsia were searching not only for the political meaning of Wales, but for ways in which Wales could find a political identity without reliance on the groundwork of *Plaid Cymru* or traditional Welshness. The political relationship between Wales and England in Britain had been opened to new analysis by the devolution referendum and shaped by the experience of Thatcherism.

The Welsh people's attitude towards culture in Wales, as expressed in the 1979 referendum, would also take the Welsh intelligentsia by surprise. Up until 1979, the bulk of the interested intelligentsia focused on the use of the Welsh and English languages within Wales and on the relative positions and status of the two languages. By the end of the decade, the intelligentsia were expressing increased interest in breaking the deadlock between the two linguistic expressions of Wales and Welshness. Yet when these articles are compared with a later Public Policy Pamphlet,<sup>17</sup> what is striking is the complete lack of awareness on the behalf of the Welsh intelligentsia that the majority of the Welsh population was approaching the issues of cultural identity and language from a very different perspective. 76% of the Welsh people surveyed by researchers from the University of Strathclyde did not associate a Welsh identity with either the Welsh language or any form of nationalism.<sup>18</sup> Welsh identity could viably be expressed through the English language and within Britain. The 1979 devolution referendum forced the awareness of this difference into full view. *Plaid Cymru* had been the main supporter of devolution and, with Labour internally divided over its own proposal, had run the majority of the 'yes' campaign. Correspondingly, *Plaid Cymru's* understanding of Welsh cultural identity had been attached to the concept of devolution, sparking fears amongst the English-speaking Welsh of a country dominated by the minority Welsh-speakers (and vice versa) and of the reinforcing of a north-south divide. *Plaid Cymru's* understanding of Welsh identity was, therefore, one

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<sup>17</sup> Denis Balsom, Peter Madgwick & Denis Van Mechelen, *The Political Consequences of Welsh Identity* (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, 1982), p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Balsom, Madgwick & Van Mechelen, *The Political Consequences of Welsh Identity*, p.2, fig.1.

of the points rejected by 80% of those who voted in 1979. With this popular disavowal of traditional Welshness, the Welsh intelligentsia were forced to become more open to acknowledging the reality and validity of an English-speaking Welsh identity. Many of the arguments that had been used by the intelligentsia and *Plaid Cymru* to problematise the latter identity now found themselves being problematised in turn.

In the 1970s, however, the discussion of Welsh culture amongst the intelligentsia focused on the need to strengthen Welsh culture and the problems that appeared inherent to the emergence of a unified culture. The lack of a common experiential ground for the construction of a Welsh identity was, as with the issue of political identity and independence, based firmly in Welsh history. English was, and is, the language of the dominant nation, of the conquerors, but economic and political participation in Britain required, and still does, the ability to speak and work in English. By 1971, only 21% of the population above the age of three were able to speak Welsh.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, the central question for the Welsh intelligentsia of the 1970s was whether or not it was possible for the English language, the language of necessity and of conquest, to express a Welsh identity. The status of the Welsh language, particularly in terms of its position relative to English, was central to this question.

### **The question of language**

*Plaid Cymru* and *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* represented one approach to this issue. Both groups denied the validity of an English-speaking Welsh culture, relegating Welsh literature written in English to England and regional English culture. Hence, *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg's* proposed to divide Wales along the linguistic North-South boundary.<sup>20</sup> Traditional Welshness needed to be protected from the ravages of the English and their language, an argument that revealed the antagonism and lack of sympathy between those committed to either language-culture in Wales.<sup>21</sup> Some of the intelligentsia, however, responded to this antagonism by refusing to deny the validity of either language within Welsh culture, arguing instead that both deserved equal respect. Where mutual respect was not given, resentment, dislike and division was the result, damaging Wales further.<sup>22</sup> A similar result occurred when Welsh-learners were rejected by established Welsh-speakers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Balsom, Madgwick & Van Mechelen, *The Political Consequences of Welsh Identity*, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Ned Thomas, 'Socialism and the two-Wales model', *Planet* 14 (1972), pp.3-9.

<sup>21</sup> See also Roger Tanner's response to *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg's* proposal; Roger Tanner, 'National identity and the one-Wales model', *Planet* 17 (1973), pp. 31-34.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Nisbet, 'After the Eisteddfod', *Planet* 14 (1972), pp.10-12.

<sup>23</sup> J.P. Brown, J.P., 'Welcoming the Welsh learner', *Planet* 7 (1971), pp. 39-41.

Antagonism between the two groups would not contribute to the emergence of a strong Welsh identity. Towards the end of the decade, Raymond Williams took this approach to its logical conclusion. His two essays 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' (1979) and 'The Welsh Trilogy and *The Volunteers*' (1979) presented Welsh literature of both languages as emergent from Welsh experience.<sup>24</sup> The language used was part of that experience. English-language literature could be just as nationalist as that written in Welsh, as the spate of anti-investiture writing in the early 1970s had illustrated. For Raymond Williams, the problem was not the presence of the English language, but the nature of the umbrella state of Britain, a state that embodied the colonial baggage of conquest and dominance in the English language. Raymond Williams was, however, quite a bit ahead of his time in shifting the locus away from the actual language to the baggage that language brought with it. Prior to his essays, similar examination had been limited to the baggage brought by Welsh history. For Bobi Jones<sup>25</sup> and Tecwyn Lloyd<sup>26</sup>, the solution to the division in Welsh cultural identity lay more in understanding the historical way in which the Welsh inferiority complex had emerged and how it had shaped the Welsh people's attitudes towards their culture and identity. Language itself was not the central problem, rather the historical apportioning of value to Welsh and English was. But regardless of the approach, the Welsh intelligentsia believed that the balance between Wales and England in Britain needed to be adjusted psychologically as well as politically.

During the 1980s, this concern over language and the question of whether Welsh identity could be expressed through English evolved into a growing acceptance of the validity of the English-language Welsh culture and identity. Being Welsh became more important than the language used to express that identity. This was evident in a trio of articles on the rejection of English-language Welsh literature. Peter MacDonald Smith argued that such literature was shaped by the authors' Welshness, regardless of language, and expressed a commitment towards both Welsh literature and culture that equalled that of the Welsh-language equivalents<sup>27</sup>. G.O.Jones challenged two other questions that had, in the 1970s, been used to discredit English-language Welsh culture:

...are the Welsh people who do not speak Welsh 'truly' Welsh  
[and] are Welsh writers who write in English and choose their own

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture and Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2003), pp.99-136.

<sup>25</sup> Bobi Jones, 'The roots of Welsh inferiority', *Planet* 22 (1974), pp.53-72; Jones, 'I'm Your Boy', pp.55-72,

<sup>26</sup> Tecwyn Lloyd, 'Wales – see England', *Planet* 34 (1976), pp.36-47.

<sup>27</sup> Peter MacDonald Smith, 'The making of the Anglo-Welsh tradition (1)', *New Welsh Review* 1,1 (1988), pp.61-64; Smith, 'A tale of two literatures: The periodicals and the Anglo-Welsh tradition (2)', *New Welsh Review* 1, 2 (1988), pp.68-70; Smith, 'Poetry, politics and the use of English: The periodicals and the Anglo-Welsh tradition (3)', *New Welsh Review* 1, 3, pp.63-67.

themes Anglo-Welsh even if they do not write about Wales, or 'truly' Anglo-Welsh if they do not write about the 'colonial predicament' of Wales?<sup>28</sup>

He pointed out that to deny a Welsh identity to four-fifths of the population because they did not speak Welsh, or to impose limits on literature not found anywhere else, defied logic.<sup>29</sup> This logical deficiency was not a new discovery, but the rejection of traditional Welshness along with devolution forced the intelligentsia to respond by challenging the artificial boundaries imposed by traditional Welshness on identity within Wales. The tendency of Welsh nationalists to position a valid Welsh identity and culture in opposition to that of England and Britain was also being questioned. English was no longer necessarily problematic. The English-speaking Welsh had made their point in 1979.

This did not mean, however, that the Welsh intelligentsia's concern over the state of the Welsh language vanished or even declined. In fact, in the wake of the 1979 referendum, the Welsh intelligentsia's approach to general cultural identity had become both more practical and more searching, challenging the more idealistic and nationalist boundaries that had previously defined Welshness. No definitive answers were outlined in any of the above articles, but all were more open to a wider understanding of Welsh identity than was evident in the 1970s. That this widening appeared to be accompanied by the growth of confidence in the equality of Welsh and Welsh-language culture with that across the border in England is a development that reflects another impact of Thatcherism on the Welsh people. Through the forced self-reliance of Thatcherism, the Welsh confidence in themselves and their abilities increased slowly but steadily.

### **The Welsh economy**

A similar increase in self-confidence would emerge in the economic arena in the 1980s, something that was notably lacking amongst the Welsh population by the 1979 devolution referendum. The 1970s were economically difficult, particularly in contrast with the 1950s and 1960s but it was, at least in part, concern over Britain's relative decline that cast the biggest shadow across the economic scene. It is, however, important to recognise that the import of the economic developments of the early 1970s – the entry into the EC, the floating of the pound sterling, the gradual rise of inflation – were not fully grasped until late in the decade. Thus, the Welsh economic position could seem strong enough for

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<sup>28</sup> G.O.Jones, 'Wales, Welsh...' *New Welsh Review* 1,1 (1988), p.60.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, 'Wales, Welsh...', pp.56-60.



independence in the early 1970s and still receive a popular and resounding rejection at the 1979 devolution referendum.

The focus of the debate over the economic relationship was, again, on the colonial nature of the Welsh economy. Arguments regarding capitalism, imperialism and the political concept of the underdeveloped nation all found expression.<sup>30</sup> Yet again, the dominance of England was identified as a problem, preventing the Welsh development of the foundations of a self-sustaining economy. Britain, built to foster the economic prowess of an Empire centred on England, was increasingly being seen as, at best, semi-functional in the modern world. This questioning of the existing economic structure of Britain was not limited to Wales. The English and Scottish peoples were also searching for new ways of defining the economic identity of Britain. In all three countries, the European Community became a steadily more attractive option. Prior to British entry into the EC in 1973, *Plaid Cymru* offered a solution to the problems that had emerged from the colonial and imperial economic relationship in the form of a Britain consisting of free trade zones with interdependent economies (c.1966-1970). In this new Britain, entry into the EC would be renegotiated in order to prevent the dominance of English issues stunting Welsh growth and activity within and through the European organisation.<sup>31</sup> Again, the nature and structure of the British relationship was identified as the primary issue, rather than the mere existence of the relationship.

Not all of the Welsh intelligentsia participating in the 1970s debate accepted the feasibility of *Plaid Cymru's* alternative British structure. The concept of a colonial or in any way exploitative economic relationship between England and Wales was, in fact, a controversial claim. A large section of the Welsh intelligentsia challenged the applicability of the concepts of exploitation and intentional misuse of Welsh economic resources. One member, economist John Lovering, denied *Plaid Cymru's* assertion that Wales was economically self-sufficient and therefore able to function outside of Britain.<sup>32</sup> This approach to the Welsh economy was more practical and less idealistic than that of *Plaid Cymru*, accepting the reality of 700 years of steadily consolidated economic integration. It was certainly the argument that resonated with the Welsh people, as was illustrated by their rejection of *Plaid Cymru's* alternative in the 1979 devolution referendum. Much of the

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<sup>30</sup> See Brian Davies, 'Towards a new synthesis', *Planet* 37, 8 (1977), pp.56-59 and Graham Day, 'Underdeveloped Wales', *Planet* 45, 6 (1978), pp.104-107 for arguments regarding Wales as an undeveloped nation.

<sup>31</sup> *Plaid Cymru, Action for Wales. General Election Manifesto* (Bangor: Elwyn Roberts, c.1966-1970).

<sup>32</sup> John Lovering, 'The theory of the internal colony', *Planet* 45, 6 (1978), pp.89-96; Lovering, 'The theory of the "internal colony" and the political economy of Wales', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 10, 3 (1978), p.55-67.

resentment of the Welsh economic ties to England apparent in *Plaid Cymru's* approach was, ultimately, historical. They were protesting against ties enforced through conquest and involuntary union, rather than chosen and participated in on an equal basis. The Welsh people were more concerned about the economic problems that were unpleasantly apparent by 1979, and saw their safest economic future within Britain.

By the end of the 1980s, the issue of Welsh economic independence from a colonial relationship had vanished, destroyed by the 1979 devolution referendum and the experience of Thatcherism. The majority of the Welsh intelligentsia were united in their concern over the negative impact of Thatcherist economic policies on the Welsh economy and society. Thatcherism, by its very nature, ignored the society within which the economy functioned, something that was perceived by the Welsh intelligentsia as contributing to the destruction of a distinctive Welsh economic society. This was particularly the case regarding the coal-mining communities of South Wales.<sup>33</sup> Most of the Welsh intelligentsia were united in the belief that economic competitiveness should be tempered by an assessment of the needs of the community.<sup>34</sup> This was particularly necessary as the closure of the mines and steel refineries signalled the end of a century-old community and way of life, and resulted in the inability of those left behind to see a future for themselves or their children.<sup>35</sup> The failure of the Conservative government to develop Welsh infrastructure and foster replacement industries in the South exacerbated the problematic economic and social situation.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the 1980s, it was clear that the Welsh intelligentsia blamed Thatcher's economic and social policies for the poor state of the Welsh economy and the extremely high unemployment rates in the old coal-mining areas. Yet none of the articles rejected the Welsh ties to the British economy. The protests were in relation to the policies that were emerging from Westminster, and many of their concerns were shared by English regional intelligentsia.

Thatcherism did, however, have one positive effect on the Welsh perception of their economy, if not on their economy in and of itself. Thatcher's withdrawal of the level of state aid previously available to Wales forced the Welsh realisation that the Welsh were not

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<sup>33</sup> Please see Kenneth D. George & Lynn Mainwaring (1987: 7-37), Victoria Wass & Lynn Mainwaring (1989: 161-185), Marilyn Thomas (1991: 45-66) and Hywel Francis & Gareth Rees (1989: 41-71) for arguments regarding the social impact of Thatcher's economic policies.

<sup>34</sup> Marilyn Thomas, 'Colliery closure and the miner's experience of redundancy', *Contemporary Wales* 4 (1991), pp.45-66; Hywel Francis and Gareth Rees, 'No surrender in the valleys: The 1984-85 miners' strike in South Wales', *Llafur* 5, 2 (1989), pp. 41-71.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, 'Colliery closure', pp.45-66; Francis and Rees, 'No surrender in the valleys', pp.41-71.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth D. George and Lynn Mainwaring, 'The Welsh economy in the 1980s,' *Contemporary Wales* 1 (1987), pp.7-37.

actually economically reliant on British government hand-outs.<sup>37</sup> Thatcherite economic decentralisation developed Welsh state machinery and Welsh self-confidence in their ability to guide and develop their own economy. The Conservative Party had propagated ‘...an ideology of Welsh success...’<sup>38</sup> and had encouraged the popular realisation that ‘...an interventionist Welsh state can accomplish more for them than a dependence inherent in a centralist British Labourism’.<sup>39</sup> This increase of self-confidence was also visible in the change in the Welsh intelligentsia’s approach to Welsh cultural identity and contributed towards the shift regarding devolution in the later 1980s.

*Plaid Cymru’s* approach to the Welsh-English relationship during the 1970s contributed to rejection of devolution in 1979. This approach had been supported by the bulk of the nationalist-inclined Welsh intelligentsia who had argued that Wales was crippled politically, culturally and economically by the dominance of England. Labour’s devolution proposal was, in itself, quite controversial, due to its limited nature, the potential dissolution of the British Unions, and *Plaid Cymru’s* insistence on basing the need for devolution on cultural rather than economic grounds.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the arguments over devolution did little to reassure the general public in Wales that devolution would be beneficial, politically, economically or culturally. The arguments against the proposal were far more convincing, touching on the fears of the Welsh populace of the domination of one group or the other, of an ineffective, expensive and democratically unsound addition to the tiers of government, and of the Welsh inability to prosper in a devolved state. This success was evident in that of the 58.3% of the Welsh electorate who voted, 956 330 voted against the proposal, with 243 048 in favour.<sup>41</sup> All eight counties returned a ‘no’ vote.<sup>42</sup> The Welsh people were far more concerned about the potential problems with devolution and the dangers of being exposed to the ongoing industrial unrest without the protection of the British state than they were about the limiting factors of the union with England in Britain.

The experience of the 1980s and Thatcherism, however, would begin to change the public perception of devolution. More than that, however, it altered the intelligentsia’s motivations for altering the union between Wales and England. Devolution became an alteration to an unacceptable form of government, not the potential prelude to the

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<sup>37</sup> John Osmond, ‘Dreaded devolution...back on the agenda’, *Planet* 65 (1987), pp.116-117.

<sup>38</sup> Emyr W. Williams, ‘The state without the people’, *Planet* 69 (1988), pp.19-24.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, ‘The state without the people’, p.23.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.398-399; Ned Thomas, ‘Two cheers for devolution’, *Planet* 47 (1979), pp.2-3; Vincent Kane & Enoch Powell, ‘Devolution and self-determination’, *Planet* 24/25 (1974), pp.39-46.

<sup>41</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.677.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.677.

dissolution of Britain. In the light of the effects of Thatcherism within Wales, such an argument appeared more relevant to the general public than the more nationalist and culturally and linguistically defensive arguments of the 1970s. In fact, the rejection of devolution in 1979 began to be understood on these grounds. According to Charlotte H. Aull, Welsh nationalism was associated with the encroachment of state bureaucracy on local government and the economy.<sup>43</sup> Neither had been particularly under threat in 1979. What had been rejected in the referendum was, therefore, not devolution, but the potential legitimisation of the political existence of Wales.<sup>44</sup> This approach was reiterated in the late 1980s by Hefin, underlining the importance of the Welsh experience of Thatcherism for the revitalising of a more practical form of devolution.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the economic decentralisation favoured by the Thatcher government had developed Welsh self-confidence in their ability to guide and develop their own economy.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the increasing marginalisation of local government in favour of Thatcherite political centralisation brought that section of the Welsh population onto the side of the devolutionists for the first time.<sup>47</sup> Thatcherism, then, played a major role in the return of devolution to the Welsh political agenda in the late 1980s, as well as shaping the Welsh intelligentsia's understanding of the rejection of devolution in 1979. Her politics and economics forced the Welsh intelligentsia and the Welsh people to reconsider the viability of the structure of Britain. The Welsh-English relationship had become negotiable again, albeit from a very different perspective.

## Conclusion

Over the 1980s, the majority of the Welsh intelligentsia who participated in this debate over Wales, Welshness and the Welsh-English relationship shifted towards this widening of the boundaries that had previously surrounded these three concepts. In 1979, the Welsh people had made it clear that they did not wish to participate in the nationalist understandings of these areas, and did not wish their identity to be limited by the language they spoke. The shock of this response is still evident in the modern analyses of the rejection of devolution. Yet this shock forced the Welsh intelligentsia into reconsidering their understanding of Wales, Welshness and the Welsh-English relationship. English-language Welsh culture became a more acceptable version of Welsh culture, as did the identity that was associated

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<sup>43</sup> Charlotte H. Aull, 'Nationalism after the referendum', *Planet*, 49/50 (1980), pp.64-70.

<sup>44</sup> Aull, 'Nationalism after the referendum', pp.64-70.

<sup>45</sup> Hefin Williams, 'Talking about the referendum', *Planet* 72 (1988/1989), pp.71-80.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, 'The state without the people', pp.19-24.

<sup>47</sup> Osmund, 'Dreaded devolution', pp.116-117.

with it. Wales began to be positioned less against England and more in the light of its own values, achievements and potential. Both the economic and political relationships between Wales and England became open to more pragmatic negotiation. All of this meant that the gap between the general public's understanding of Wales, Welshness and the Welsh-English relationship and that of the Welsh intelligentsia began to narrow. This, in turn, was reflected in the public support of devolution in 1997.

The articles in *Planet, Contemporary Wales* and the *New Welsh Review* offer unique insight into how the intelligentsia's approach to Wales, Welshness and the Welsh-English relationship altered and developed in the wake of the 1979 devolution referendum. The debate that occurred and the changes in the understanding of these areas are highly significant for understanding modern Wales and its identity. The rejection of devolution in 1979 was the catalyst for this re-evaluation, one that was shaped by the experiences of the 1980s.