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ANALOGUE IN A DIGITAL AGE? Welsh Labour's Organisation in post-Devolved Wales, 1999-2009

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Introduction

If we were to look at the political equivalent of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Welsh section for most of the last century would in all probability read "For Wales see Labour," with Labour's successes in Wales so long lasting and comprehensive that, "it was possible to confuse Welsh politics with the politics of the Labour Party in Wales."[1] Labour Party management issues were, for example, considered to be of far more consequence to modelling the Welsh devolution settlement, than the influence of external actors, both in 1998 and 2006,[2] the latter resulting in the creation of the infamously byzantine legislative system of legislative competence orders (LCOs) and Measures as a party compromise.[3] With all the critical debates on devolution held within the Welsh Labour Party, it is little wonder that Wyn Jones has described the constitutional architecture of Welsh Devolution as a testament to the dominance of Labour in Welsh public life.[4]

McAllister's thesis

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[1] Morgan, K. and G. Mungham. (2000). *Redesigning Democracy: The Making of the Welsh Assembly*, Seren: Bridgend, p.69

[2] Wyn Jones, R. and R. Scully. (2008b). Welsh Devolution: The End of the Beginning or the Beginning of ...?, in, Alan Trench ed., *The State of the Nations 2008,* Imprint Academic: Exeter, p.68; Morgan and Mungham 2000, p. 36

[3] Wyn Jones and Scully 2008b, p.64

[4] Wyn Jones, R. (2011). *The Constitutional Design of Welsh Devolution: A Critical Biography,* unpublished, p.37

Hegemony, however, has not been without cost. The political scientist, Ian McAllister writing in 1980 argued that hegemony has had stark organisational consequences for the Labour Party in Wales.[5] His argument is quite simple: electoral dominance removes the necessary 'profit motive' as it were, for parties to maintain an effective organisation. After all why bother when success/failure is guaranteed for the hegemonic party and opposition respectively.[6]

Applying this theory to Wales, McAllister argued that Welsh Labour possessed a weak and dwindling organisation, with success walking hand in hand with an ever decreasing and less participatory membership.[7] As McAllister says, "any party achieving consistent electoral success, seemingly without having to mobilise a large electoral machine, will have difficulty in recruiting new members or sustaining any political interest among existing members."[8] Welsh Labour's electoral monopoly has, therefore, reduced the incentives for people to join or members to participate and resulted in a hollowed out organisation.[9]

However, this is not the end of the story. A consequence of this internal organisational malaise was a reliance on external assistance-namely the trade unions for much of Welsh Labour's history.[10] As McAllister documents, there has been a strong dependency culture with Welsh Labour dependent on the Unions for assistance financially,

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[5] McAllister, I. (1980). The Labour Party in Wales: The Dynamics of One-Partyism, *Llafur*, 3, p. 79
[6] McAllister 1980, p. 79
[7] McAllister 1980, pp.79-81
[8] McAllister 1980, p.81
[9] McAllister 1980, p.81
[10] McAllister 1980, p.82

organisationally and in terms of mobilising voters.[11] To summarise McAllister's thesis: Welsh Labour's electoral dominance has resulted in a withered, hollowed out organisation which has suffered from declining levels of both membership and member participation and is dependent on outside support to operate effectively.[12]

Welsh Labour post-Devolution: Analogue in a Digital Age

The purpose of this article is to assess Welsh Labour's organisational adaptation to devolution, in doing so it shall argue that a) Welsh Labour organisationally has been largely unfit for purpose, and b) such organisational failure was rooted in the party's historic hegemony. In forwarding this argument, it agrees with McAllister's thesis and argues for the existence of a concept we will call a 'hegemony hangover,' a concept that essentially refers to the residual effects of hegemony (in Welsh Labour's case the organisational legacy of electoral hegemony) to argue that the successes of the past left Welsh Labour under-equipped for devolution. To assess whether Welsh Labour has organisationally been fit for purpose, this article uses a checklist made up of overlapping intellectual, electoral and organisational challenges that devolution has posed in this period.

Firstly, the electoral challenges that devolution has posed Labour. The creation of a wholly Welsh electoral and political sphere with devolution has brought with it new dynamics, in particular how parties appeal to electors has, for the period 1999-2009 at least, been significantly altered. The semi-proportional nature of the additional member

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[11] McAllister 1980, p.82
[12] McAllister 1980, pp.79-92

system (AMS) used for Assembly elections and the broader dynamics of this new

devolved context have made it easier for the other parties to compete and challenge

Labour. In addition, the weak nature of Welsh media and the absence of the air war[13]

present at UK General Elections have provided a greater onus and burden on the Welsh

parties to get out their vote. Secondly, Welsh devolution has brought with it the need for

parties to develop policies in a way that simply wasn't required pre-devolution. This has

therefore created a need for a sufficiently developed policy capacity amongst Welsh

parties. Thirdly, the intellectual and electoral challenges outlined above, have therefore

brought greater pressures on party organisation in Wales, in particular on resources

and therefore the self-sufficiency of these bodies.[14]

Devolution has, therefore, brought a new political context and new challenges for Welsh

political parties, including Welsh Labour Party. This article will argue that on each of the

points listed in the checklist above, Welsh Labour was found wanting during the first

decade of devolution 1999-2009. At the heart of this failure will be the impact of

hegemony on Welsh Labour's organisation; locally, nationally and ideationally.

Welsh Labour on the Ground

Labour has dominated Welsh politics for a nearly a century, an electoral hegemony that

as mentioned earlier has blurred the boundaries between the Welsh Labour Party and

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[13] By air war, this article is referring to the role of the media during an election campaign, ranging from the format of Prime Ministerial debates or in the endorsement of a specific party by a newspaper.
[14] This checklist is informed by the challenges identified in Wyn Jones, R. and R Scully. (2008a). The End of One Partyism? Party Politics in Wales in the Second Decade of Devolution, *Contemporary Wales*, Vol. 21, University of Wales Press: Cardiff, pp. 211-214

Welsh political life, yet has at the same time paradoxically been a source of weakness within the party's organisation. In particular, the electoral might of Welsh labour has acted as smokescreen for their organisational frailties, even in constituencies that have historically been their heartlands.[15]

Welsh Labour's membership figures in particular have been a long running sore, with the strenuous efforts made over the years by Welsh and London officials to boost membership regularly resulting in failure.[16] For example, the national agent, A.L. Williams in 1952 noted that, "the national average per constituency party throughout the whole country is 1,426-in Wales it is only 1,110 and out of 36 constituencies 17 have a membership of less than a 1,000."[17] The result was a situation that clearly fits McAllister's thesis of electoral dominance disincentivising participation. Power in local parties in many areas of Wales was concentrated in the hands of "a small, but dedicated group of diligent individuals, agents or councillors."[18] These oligarchies were, according to McAllister, ruthlessly self-enforcing oligarchies, with their defining tendency a jealous guarding of power, often at the expense of building membership and participation levels.[19]

Hegemony, however, also bred inertia, with little incentive for local parties in Labour heartlands to maintain effective and active organisations, resulting in further

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[15] Morgan, K. (2000). Power and Glory: War and Reconstruction 1939-1951, in, Tanner, D. Williams, C. and D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, UWP: Cardiff, 2000, p. 172; Walling, A. (2000). The Structure of Power in Labour Wales 1951-1964, in, Tanner, D., Williams, C. and D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, UWP: Cardiff, pp. 203-204
[16] McAllister 1980, p.81
[17] Williams quoted in McAllister 1980, p.81
[18] Walling 2000, p.206
[19] McAllister 1980, p.81

stagnation.[20] As Morgan and Mungham claim, it was often in the strongest electoral

regions for Labour in Wales that their membership was weakest, a situation that by

1963 had become so embarrassing for the party that they stopped publishing

membership figures.[21] Fortunately (or perhaps not), later surveys were still able to shed

light on Welsh Labour's membership failure, with the revelation that, if a 1977 survey

was accurate, "only 12 per cent of Welsh CLPs had a membership exceeding the

statutory minimum of 1,000 necessary to affiliate."[22] This decline of Welsh Labour's

membership and activism was widely perceived to have continued during the period

1999-2009[23] as data from the 2010 leadership election starkly shows.[24] According to

these figures, the estimated number of Labour members in Wales is 11,160, a

substantial decline for the Labour Party in Wales.

Year	Total Membership
1945	31421
1946	37119
1947	32066
1949	39666
1950	43621
1951	39834
1952	27822
1953	42935
1955	37712

[20] Walling 2000, p. 212
[21] Morgan and Mungham 2000, p.75
[22] McAllister 1980, p.81
[23] Lewis, T. (2007). *Winning for Wales: Remaking the Welsh Labour Movement for Government*, Wales 20:20, pp.7-10; Wyn Jones and Scully 2008a, p.212
[24] Labour Party. (2010a). Votes by CLP: 2010 Leadership Election, http://www2.labour.org.uk/leadership-clps (accessed: 7th October 2010)

1960	36456	
1963	41895	25
2010	11160	

Of course, membership decline should not be considered an exclusively Welsh Labour

phenomenon, indeed party membership in general has been falling in countries across

the world.[26] Yet this should not lead to the significance of these figures to be

disregarded.

This was not just because the 2010 estimates would see the worst membership figures

on record for Welsh Labour since 1929, but because such decline came from what was

historically considered a comparatively low base.[27] Labour in Wales have traditionally

fared worse in their members to votes ratio than in London and even the South East of

England.[28] Furthermore, so significant was the malaise in Welsh Labour membership,

that if the 2010 estimates were accurate, no CLP would have met the old 1000 member

minimum affiliation level mentioned earlier, a steep drop from a 1977 membership

survey which suggested at least twelve percent of Welsh CLPs had at least a thousand

members, and that forty seven percent had 750-1000 members.[29] In 2010 it appeared

that no Welsh CLPs could claim even 500 members.

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[25] Data from Tanner, C., Williams, C. and D. Hopkin. (2000). Appendix III: Labour Party Membership
Statistics 1928-1955, in, Tanner, D., Williams, C. and D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, UWP: Cardiff, 303; McAllister 1980, p.88; Labour Party 2010a [online]

[26] Whiteley, P. (2009). *Is the Party Over?: The Decline of Party Activism and
Membership across the Democratic World*, PSA Paper, p. 28

[27] Tanner, D. (2000a). Facing the New Challenge: Labour and Politics 1970-2000, in Tanner, D., Williams,
C. and D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, UWP: Cardiff, p. 259

[28] P. Seyd and P. Whiteley. (1992). *Labour's Grassroots: The Politics of Party Membership*, Clarendon Press:
Oxford, pp.28-29

[29] Martin, C. and D. Martin. (1977). The Decline of Labour Party Membership, *The Political Quarterly,* 48
(4), p. 463; McAllister 1980, p.81

However, membership decline was just one aspect of a broader organisational decline within Welsh Labour. As Jeff Jones, the former leader of Bridgend Council, wrote in the wake of their disappointing 2008 results (the party was left with overall control of just two councils):

> In many parts of Wales the party is a shell and has been for years. Party organisation is almost non-existent and campaigning often consists of pushing a leaflet through the door the week before the Election Day. Many councillors don't hold surgeries, don't issue newsletters and never appear in the local press... Welsh society is changing and has been for the last 30 years. It's only the older generation who will vote Labour come hell and high water... very few young people are joining the party [30]

Even Cymdeithas Clewdyn, a short lived internal party group that sought to revive Welsh Labour in Y Fro[31], endorsed this vision of Welsh Labour as an increasingly hollow, residual organisation in many parts of Wales, claiming that Welsh Labour Party in much of the "Fro" was plagued by low membership and was electorally unfit for purpose.[32] With the detachment of CLPs from communities at the heart of both Jones' and Cymdeithas Cledwyn's critiques,[33] hegemony, again appears to be prominent in

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[30] Jones, J. (5th May 2008). Commenting on, Luke Akehurst, What happened in Wales?, Luke's Blog, http://lukeakehurst.blogspot.com/2008/05/what-happened-in-wales.html (accessed 10th July 2010)
[31] While there is a lack of firm definition, "Y Fro" is generally used in relation to the Welsh speaking heartlands of North West and Mid and West Wales (examples of its usage can be seen in: Aitchison, J. and H. Carter. (1991). Rural Wales and the Welsh Language, *Rural History* 2(1), pp.61-79; Balsom, D., 1985. The Three-Wales Model. In: Osmond, J. (Ed.), The National Question Again. Gomer, Llandysul). For the record Cymdeithas Cledwyn defined "Y Fro" as "the seats in the western half of Wales with a high proportion of Welsh speakers" (Cymdeithas Cledwyn. (2008). *The Fro: Winning votes in Welsh-speaking Wales*, Cymdeithas Cledwyn, p. 6).
[32] Cymdeithas Cledwyn 2008, p.14
[33] Jones May 5th 2008 [online]; Cymdeithas Cledwyn 2008, p. 14

explaining this disjuncture, through the earlier mentioned traditional oligarchical and insular mindset that dominated many CLPs.[34]

In particular, while Labour in Y Fro lacked the same foundations and pre-eminence than in the party's Valleys bastions, Cymdeithas Cledwyn suggested that a similar pattern of detachment and decline had developed there.[35] The report noted, for example, the success of Plaid Cymru in sweeping aside a 'shaky Labour establishment' in North West Wales in the 1970s. Furthermore, it cited the example of Llanelli, in Mid and West Wales, as a CLP that, despite decades of electoral dominance at Parliamentary elections, was "living off past glories."[36]

It is worth noting that Welsh Labour's difficulties were intensified by the impact of deindustrialisation.. Traditionally many CLPs relied upon Unions as a way to counter low membership and activism and remain grounded in their localities through the support structures and core bloc of support provided by union members in the heavy industries and to remain in touch with their localities.[37] Deindustrialisation has therefore had a significant role in the state of organisational detachment between many Welsh CLPs and their local communities.[38]

Despite the impact of deindustrialisation, it was once again complacency that appears to account for much of Welsh Labour's weakness, historically and during the period 1999,

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[34] Walling 2000, p.206; McAllister 1980, p.81
[35] Cymdeithas Cledwyn 2008, p.14
[36] As above
[37] Laffin, M., Taylor, G, and A. Thomas. (2004). Devolution and Party Organisation: The Case of the Wales Labour Party, *Contemporary Wales,* 16(4), p.4; McAllister 1980, p. 82

[38] Tanner 2000a, p. 83

2009. As the-now Welsh Labour Government Minister, Huw Lewis, noted in a Wales 20:

20 Pamphlet in comments on the party's heartlands:

> Rarely now do you hear 'we're all Labour here' when you knock on a house with
> more than one generation living there-assumptions can no longer be made about
> 'Labour areas.[39]

Such comments about the role of assumptions in Welsh Labour campaigning add

credence to the hegemony hangover/complacency thesis, particularly when one also

considers the words of a veteran Welsh Labour MP about the need (or absence of such)

after the party's 2007 performance:

> We held on in the marginals we lost before. We dropped votes where there were
> large majorities and it did not matter"*[40]*

This je nais regrette rien attitude seems to be the very sort of assumption taking and

complacency that Lewis acknowledges and warns against.[41] Furthermore this shows just

how salient McAllister's thesis remained in the first decade of devolution, urgency only

felt in marginals where the party's stranglehold was less secure.[42] Indeed, Peter Hain

(ironically) made this precise argument in 2008 when he admitted that losing power

locally in Bridgend forced the party to re-engage and campaign locally.[43]

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[39] Lewis 2007, p. 7
[40] Email correspondence between anonymous MP and author 2011.
[41] Lewis 2007, p.7
[42] McAllister 1980, p.79
[43] Hain, P. (19th May 2008). Hain calls for radical changes within Welsh Labour, *Western Mail*, http://www.[online].co.uk/news/welsh-politics/welsh-politics-news/2008/05/19/hain-calls-for-radical-change-within-welsh-labour-91466-20929368/ (accessed 24th December 2010)
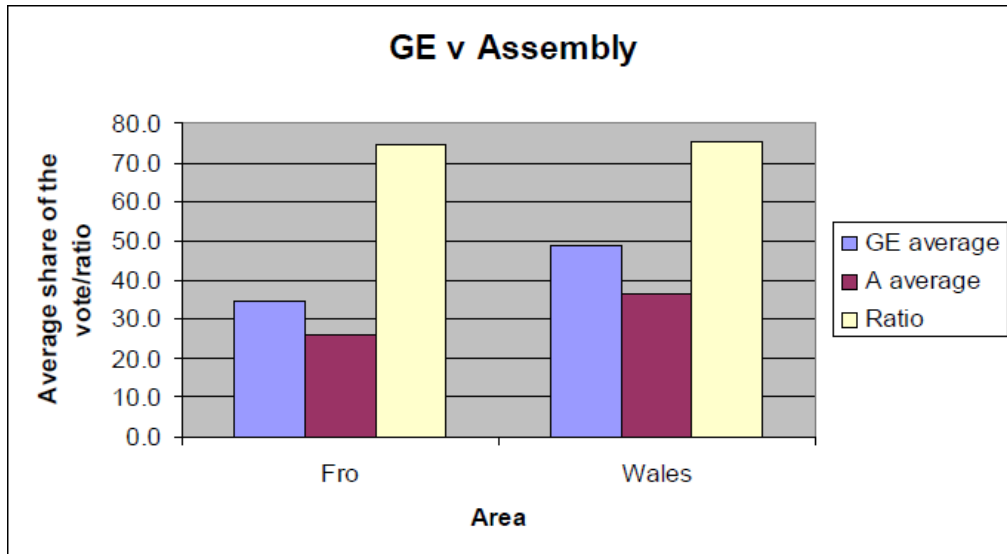
Electoral Mobilisation

One critical barometer of a party's strength organisationally on the ground (intertwined with the issues of complacency, detachment and decline outlined above) is electoral mobilisation. This is something that is especially significant given the added emphasis placed on CLP's organisational effectiveness by deindustrialisation, the media deficit and devolution in Wales.

Welsh Labour traditionally relied upon heavy industry, not just for activists, expertise and infrastructural assistance via the Trades Unions, but for core blocs of electoral support.[44] As the previous sections mentioned, the processes of deindustrialisation since the 1970s, and especially during the 1979-1997 Conservative administrations, were critical for Welsh Labour, decimating groups which had historically provided staunch support, and impacting directly on many CLPs which had historically depended on union support due to their low membership and activist levels.[45]

[44] Tanner 2000, pp. 266 and 283
[45] Same as above

GE v Assembly

Alongside the impact of deindustrialisation we also have the issue of the nature of media coverage for devolved elections. Unlike the Westminster 'air war', the small and dwindling Welsh media has resulted in voter mobilisation being far more dependent on and therefore reflective of local organisational capacities.[47] As the graph above shows, there was a substantial gulf in Welsh Labour's average share of the vote in Westminster and Assembly elections, indicating that, alongside the structural barriers to higher Assembly turnout placed by the fragile Welsh media, Welsh Labour's mobilisational abilities leave much to be desired. As Osmond's analysis of the 2007 election in *Crossing the Rubicon* shows, Welsh Labour's vote fell in 39 out of 40 constituencies, with 11 of the 15 ultra-marginals (seats where the incumbent party's majority is under 2,000) in 2011 under Labour incumbency.[48]

Part of the problem for Welsh Labour at Assembly elections was greater electoral competition, with devolution resulting in rivals, such as the Tories and especially Plaid,

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[46] Data from Cymdeithas Cledwyn 2008, p.11

[47] Interview with a Welsh Labour MP 19th July 2010; interview with former Welsh Government Special Advisor and current Welsh Government Minister 24th September 2010

[48] Osmond, J. (2007). *Crossing the Rubicon: Coalition Politics Welsh Style*, IWA: Cardiff, 2007, pp.1-3

more palatable and relevant than they would be at the Westminster arena (Curtice 2000:23 and Wyn Jones and Scully 2008a: 212-213). Added to this, during the first decade of devolution with Labour Government in Whitehall and in the Bay, the old Welsh Labour resource of proclaiming itself Wales' national champion fighting against a Tory dominated UK political scene was rendered outdated and insufficient (Wyn Jones and Scully 2008a: 214-216).

Furthermore the semi-proportional electoral system (AMS) used at Assembly elections made politics in Wales more competitive than it had been for over half a century, requiring Welsh Labour to not only make a more effective appeal to Welsh voters, but also boast a more effective electoral mobilising organisation (Wyn Jones and Scully 2008b: 71 and a:212). Instead, as even one senior Welsh Government Minister has admitted, Labour clung to a core vote strategy[49] that may preach to the converted, but did little to broaden the party's appeal.[50] Unsurprisingly then, the electoral results of the period 1999-2009 were historically poor for Welsh Labour. Furthermore, the difficulty the party encountered in casting a new and more relevant appeal and the core vote strategy adopted in this period reflected not only a conservative mindset within the Labour Party in Wales, but a limited grassroots organisation. Both of which were products of the intellectual and organisational malaise that had afflicted the party as a consequences of its hegemony.[51]

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[49] Interview with former Welsh Government Special Advisor and current Welsh Government Minister 24th September 2010
[50] Wyn Jones and Scully 2008b, p.71
[51] Wyn Jones and Scully 2008a, pp.213-214

For example, while the disastrous results in heartland seats in 1999 were largely considered to be protests at Labour's internal leadership machinations,[52] the damage inflicted was compounded by the fact that the organisational malaise of many Welsh CLPs had rendered them organisationally unfit for mobilising voters or to effectively defeat a strong challenger.[53] Indeed, the rise of the Liberal Democrats in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney between 2005 and 2010, was seen by one local correspondent as a consequence of an ineffectual CLP being out-muscled by a spirited local Liberal Democrat organisation and in particular the local Liberal Democrat candidate at Westminster and Assembly elections, Amy Kitcher.[54]

To finish this point on electoral mobilisation and the hegemony hangover in this area, it is worth noting that where Labour has bucked the trend in recent years and got its vote out was most noticeably been in areas that where defeats had shaken CLPs into actions, for example the earlier mentioned Bridgend case (where the loss of the council in 2004 led the party to achieve one of the few good results for Labour in 2008 by re-engaging and local campaigning) and in the Rhondda where the CLP veered from the disaster of witnessing Plaid winning the seat in 1999, to becoming the third largest CLP in Wales and the largest outside of Cardiff.[55] This volte-face in electoral and organizational fortunes has been further confirmed by the fact that Rhondda Cynon Taff was just one of the two councils Labour controls outright in Wales after the 2008 council elections.

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[52] Broughton, D. (2002). *A New Welsh Electoral Profile?: the Welsh voters at the polls 1997-1999*, Welsh Governance Centre Paper, 15
[53] Tanner 2000a, p.293
[54] Elniff-Larsen, A. (12th June 2010). If it's Merthyr, is it still Labour?, Click-on- Wales: The Institute of Welsh Affairs, http://www.clickonwales.org/2010/06/if-it%E2%80%99s-merthyr-is-it-still-labour/ (accessed 28th July 2010)
[55] Labour Party 2010a [Online]

Welsh Labour in Central Office

Another prime example of Welsh Labour's organisational underdevelopment in this period can be found by looking at the Party in Central Office. Despite already being established during the 1920s and 30s as the dominant political force in Wales, it took until 1947 for a Welsh Labour organisation to even exist.[56] Prior to this, separate organisations had existed in the North and South of Wales. However, the dominant of those two, the South Wales Regional Council of Labour had itself only been established in 1937, and then arguably only because of the challenge from the Communist party in the Rhondda.[57] Similarly the party's organisational modernisation in the 1960s can be seen primarily as a forced development, with the rise of Plaid Cymru, in particular its victory in Carmarthen in 1966 and its creditable performances in South Wales by-elections in Rhondda West (1967) and Caerphilly (1968), acting as a catalyst for Labour to adopt internal organisational reform.[58]

The culture of lethargy within the party can also be seen in the party's reliance upon individuals to drive its organisation, for example the Welsh Party's leadership and the role of Emrys Jones in the 1960s in building a more assertive Labour Party in Wales.[59] When Jones retired in the late 1970s, however, "the party organisation reverted to type and became a pedestrian branch-office once again,"[60] an indictment of the lethargic internal culture that will become more familiar to us throughout the rest of this article.

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[56] Morgan and Mungham 2000, p.89

[57] As above, p.72

[58] For the full details of Labour's organisational modernisation in the 1960s see Tanner, D. (2000). Facing the New Challenge: Labour and Politics 1970-2000, in Tanner, D., C. Williams and D. Hopkin (Eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, UWP: Cardiff, pp.264-293

[59] Morgan and Mungham 2000, p.91

[60] As above

Self-sufficiency, Autonomy, Professionalism

If devolution has raised serious questions about Welsh Labour's organisation, most noticeably about the extent to which it is a substantively autonomous and effective organisation, answers will only be found by understanding the dynamics of the Welsh Labour's relationship with the party at the UK level.

Wales has long been treated as a regional branch of the national party, with the central party historically reluctant to promote regional distinctiveness and often accused by the Welsh party of neglect.[61] The success of Labour in Wales has, therefore, arguably created a culture of complacency, not just in Wales, but also in London, with little effort from London to help the party in Wales develop. This centralist outlook is at the heart of the complex relationship between the party in Wales and the National HQ in London, one in which centralism and complacency have often walked hand in hand, at the expense of an efficient Welsh organisation.[62]

The role of candidate selection displays these inter-organisational dynamics, whilst formally autonomous over candidate selection, Welsh Labour's selection procedures are importantly shaped by guidelines set down by the National Executive Committee in London.[63] This interplay between centre and periphery came to the fore in the twinning procedure used for the 1999 Assembly elections, while there was considerable Welsh

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[61] As above, pp. 92, 175 and 178
[62] Morgan and Mungham 2000, p.92
[63] Labour Party. (2010b). *The Labour Party Rulebook 2010*, p. 29; Russell, M., Mackay, F. and L. McAllister. (2002). Women's Representation in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales: Party Dynamics for Achieving Critical Mass, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 8 (2), p. 69

agency involved, in the form of figures such the two female MEPs (Glenys Kinnock and Eluned Morgan), Anita Gale etc., the adoption of twinning was heavily influenced by the UK Party.[64]

In particular, as Jones has emphasized, the UK Labour Party was determined to drive through the policy as part of Blair's modernisation agenda,[65] a resolve that manifested itself in the private and public lobbying efforts of the then UK Labour General Secretary, Tom Sawyers, and figures such as John Prescott, most notably through their appearance at 1998 Welsh Labour Conference 'entrusted' to approve the policy.[66]

So whilst it was the Welsh Party that formally adopted twinning, the agenda and framework were established by the UK Labour Party and NEC,[67] highlighting the centre's reluctance to cede full responsibility to the Welsh Labour Party and thus helping to stunt its development as an autonomous organisation.

More evidence of these dynamics and their organisational consequences for Welsh Labour is found in the field of policymaking. Arguably this is where Welsh Labour has been considered to be most distinctive from the UK Party, specifically through the Clear Red Water agenda.[68] This saw PFI initiatives rejected in Wales, alongside the abolition of prescription charges, putting down a clear marker between Welsh Labour and the

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[64] Russell et al. 2002, p.58

[65] Jones, J B (2000) Labour Pains, in Jones, J. B. and Balsom, D. (eds.) The Road to the National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, p. 201

[66] Russell et al. 2002, pp.58-59; Jones 2000, p.201

[67] Russell et al. 2002, p. 69; Bradbury, J., Bennie, L., Denver, D. and J.Mitchell. (2000). Devolution, Parties and New Politics: Candidate Selection for the 1999 National Assembly Elections, *Contemporary Wales*, Vol 13, p. 161

[68] Taylor, G. (2003). Labour, in, Osmond, J. and J. B. Jones. (eds.), *Birth of Welsh Democracy: The First Term of the National Assembly for Wales*, Institute of Welsh Affairs and Welsh Governance Centre: Cardiff, pp.173-174

marketization and managerialism of New Labour.[69] However, even here there were

definite boundaries for Welsh Labour as despite this apparent policy autonomy in

Wales, as one figure heavily involved in Welsh Labour policy claims Welsh Labour's

policy agenda was, in effect, limited by party management concerns; namely avoiding

policies that would be reported as attacks on New Labour.[70]

All these cases reflect the significant contribution made by the central party relations in

undermining Welsh Labour's autonomy and development. A lack of development that

can be summed up by the fact that despite devolution, this period saw no de jure

separate leader of Welsh Labour (although the Leader of the Assembly Labour Team is

de-facto leader of the Welsh party), no separate formalised existence for Welsh Labour

or even long term registration as a separate accounting unit with the Electoral

Commission (although it was registered briefly) and the continued sole accountability

of Welsh Labour staff to the NEC in London.[71]

Once again it appears that hegemony has bred a damaging complacency for Welsh

Labour, albeit this time in terms of the UK Party's attitudes towards the Welsh

organisation. The most damning indictment of the central party's attitudes comes from

one party official who, allegedly, claimed that Wales was a, "safe and sleepy political

backwater, so it didn't matter about the calibre of the party's staff."[72] Welsh Labour's

dominance, from this perspective, would appear to have resulted in officials within the

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[69] See above

[70] Interview with former Welsh Government Special Advisor and current Welsh Government Minister 24th September 2010

[71] Morgan and Mungham 2000, p.92

[72] Anonymous Party Official quoted in Morgan and Mungham 2000, p. 92

central party taking future success for granted (crucially echoing the sentiments

expressed earlier by the anonymous MP that corresponded with the author via email),

with little incentive to facilitate organisational development of the party in Wales.

Certainly, the Welsh Labour Party has never been a self-sufficient organisation, with the

party's earlier mentioned reliance on unions replaced post-deindustrialisation by a

dependency on handouts from the central party.[73] With the party's income, even in the

period 1999-2009, entirely reliant upon the generosity and financial wellbeing of the

party at London,[74] it is unsurprising Lewis has argued that the consequence has been to

handicap the organisational development of Welsh Labour and with resources provided

on the Westminster, not Welsh, election cycle, resulting in a "boom and bust" approach

to staffing, the party's ability to compete effectively has been hindered.[75]

This lack of self-sufficiency appears to have significant impacted on the party's

professionalism, which can be seen most starkly in the example of the 2007 election.

Amidst a resource crunch and unhelpful funding cycles, Welsh Labour could only afford

three full-time staff members in 2007 and were unable to fund the sort of campaigns

essential to hold on in marginals.[76] Indeed, the 2007 Assembly Election saw the party

outspent in Wales for the first time, by Plaid Cymru, according to spending figures

released by the Electoral Commission:

Party	(£) 2007

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[73] Lewis 2007: 9-10
[74] Lewis 2007: 9-10
[75] As above
[76] Lewis 2007, pp. 6 and 9-10 and author's interview with a Welsh Government Minister, 24th September 2010

Labour Party	**254,447**
Plaid Cymru	**261,286**
Total	**515,733**

[77]

Fundamentally the failure to build a self-sufficient party in Wales had serious

consequences during the 1999-2009 years, with financial underdevelopment being

starkly exposed in the light of the economic problems facing the party in London.

Returning to 2007 where Welsh Labour suffered their worst result under devolution,

this lack of self-sufficiency meant that whereas, as one senior Welsh Labour insider

says, every bit of Plaid signage was "new and fresh for that election," Labour was

reduced to recycling old posters.[78] With few resources to spare, the result was a

campaign where volunteers dominated and a party of government had to rely on a

skeletal staff.[79]

Organisational Culture

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[77] Electoral Commission. (6th December 2007). New figures reveal spending by parties at Welsh Assembly elections, Electoral Commission Website, http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/news-and-media/news-releases/electoral-commission-media-centre/news-releases-campaigns/new-figures-reveal-spending-by-parties-at-welsh-assembly-elections?SQ_DESIGN_NAME=search_clean (accessed 22nd February 2011). Despite being outspent by Plaid Cymru, Labour continued to poll more votes on both the constituency (32.2% to Plaid's 22.4%) and regional list ballots (29.6% to 21%). Furthermore, it remained comfortably the single largest party in the National Assembly for Wales with 26 Assembly Members to Plaid's 15.
[78] Interview with former Welsh Government Special Advisor and current Welsh Government Minister 24th September 2010
[79] Lewis 2007, pp. 9-10 and interview with former Welsh Government Special Advisor and current Welsh Government Minister 24th September 2010

A) Centralisation

Policy Making

The policy process within Welsh Labour in this decade revolved around two core institutions: the Welsh Policy Forum and the Welsh Joint Policy Committee, both of which were established as a result of the adoption of the *Partnership in Power* model, used by the UK Labour Party during this period, by Welsh Labour.[80] The two bodies worked like this:

Welsh Policy Forum (WPF)-based on the National Policy Forum at the UK level, this forum was driven by policy commissions and the Welsh Joint Policy Committee. The WPF oversaw the policy development process and consisted of representatives from CLPs and affiliated organisations.

Welsh Joint Policy Committee (WJPC)-'the effective policy making body of the party' (Laffin et al. 2004:11), the WJPC was responsible for agreeing policy documents following consultation outside of the manifesto cycle (2003: 11). The WJPC's membership consisted of the Chair of the WPF, three Vice Chairs (one from each of the following: Welsh PLP, NALP and WLGA Labour Group), four CLP representatives (elected by CLP representatives to WPF), four affiliated organizations representatives (elected by affiliated organization representatives to WPF), four Welsh Assembly Government Ministers (the First Minister and 3 others), the Secretary of State for Wales

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[80] Lafffin et al. 2004, pp. 10-11

and the Wales Office Junior Minister, two WEC representatives and one National Policy

Forum Wales Rep (elected by representatives to the NPF)[81]

While the WPF formally provided wider representation for activists in policy making, it

became a common complaint during the decade 1999-2009 that Welsh Labour's policy

mechanisms in reality favoured the party elite.[82] In particular, significant policy control

lies in the hands of party chiefs charged with writing the manifesto. Laffin et al. highlight

the 2003 campaign, for example, where the 10 key Welsh Labour election pledges were

not discussed by the WPF.[83] Furthermore Lewis has argued that the policy process,

while more open than in the past, is still in effect elite driven, to the detriment of party

members and even MPs (2007: 20-23), highlighting the experience of the 2007

manifesto process where the 'radical set of priorities which were agreed (via the

WPF)...were sadly lost in the final document' (Lewis 2007: 20).

Allegations of manifesto chiefs bypassing the policy process are, unsurprisingly,

rejected by a senior figure involved in writing the 2003 and 2007 manifestos. Although

his protestation that manifesto writers, *'have to have some **latitude** to introduce some*

ideas at the final stage that are consistent with the rest of the manifesto, but may not have

been through the same process'[84] can be seen as an acknowledgement of the discretion

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[81] Powys, B. (24th November 2009). No rush, lads, *Betsan's Blog*-BBC Online, 24th November 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/betsanpowys/2009/11/no_rush_lads.html (accessed 9th March 2011)

[82] Laffin et al. 2004, pp. 8 and 11-12; Lewis 2007, pp.20-21. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is a charge applicable to political parties across the United Kingdom (see for example: Bradbury and Laffin. (2006). British Statewide Parties and Multilevel Politics, *Publius*, pp.135-152 and Evans, E. and Sanderson-Nash, E. (2011) From sandals to suits: Professionalization, coalition and the Liberal Democrats. British Journal of Politics and International Relations 13(4), pp. 459–473

[83] Lafffin et al. 2004, p.12

[84] Emphasis added interview with former Welsh Government Special Advisor and current Welsh Government Minister 24th September 2010

and power in the hands of the Welsh Labour elite, who are able to shape significant elements of the manifesto outside of the party's democratic processes.

For one figure interviewed this linked directly to their belief in the importance of key individuals within Welsh Labour. Speaking from personal experience about the adoption of the party's policy on devolution (when he was a WEC member), he argued that the policy was driven through by a troika of Ron Davies, Rhodri Morgan and Peter Hain with the majority of activists willing to follow what these individuals decided.[85] The clear red water policy agenda can be seen as following in this elite-led policy tradition, according to this interviewee, with the policy resting on two key individuals; Rhodri Morgan and Mark Drakeford.[86]

Candidate Selection

Centralisation has, perhaps infamously, also played an instrumental role in Welsh Labour's selection process during this period. From the outset of devolution in 1999, the selection procedure came under considerable fire, with allegations that the party was freezing out 'Old Labour' candidates in favour of those who fitted the 'New Labour' bill.[87] Furthermore, for those who were well connected, but had been unsuccessful, the appeals committee saw many such candidates rather dubiously approved on appeal.[88]

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[85] Interview with Welsh political commentator and former WEC member, 31st August 2010
[86] See above
[87] Taylor 2003, pp.166-167
[88] Morgan and Mungham 2000, pp.154-156

Indeed Alun Michael was a fine example of a candidate being imposed as a result of their status.[89] As Jones documents, Michael's position as the lead candidate on the Mid and West Wales list was fiercely resisted by many local Labour members, with the Welsh Executive having to centrally impose him.[90] Certainly while the framework for candidate selection procedures had been considerably shaped and coordinated by the centre at NEC level,[91] the autonomy that did exist appears to have been used by the Welsh party elite, in that instance, to privilege the well connected.[92]

The centralising tendencies of Welsh Labour elites were also apparent in the 2003 selection, through the use of all-women shortlists. The party chose to adopt these shortlists for half of the most winnable seats and when no local party voluntarily adopted them, the Welsh party made the final choices of affected seats.[93] For Laffin et al, the effects of elite control have been clear; they have further undermined active participation within the party by reducing the influence (and as such a key pillar of the incentive structure) of activists, thus further exacerbating the membership and organisational problems facing Welsh Labour.[94]

B) Complacency

Having already discussed the impact of what we've described as a 'hegemony hangover' on the party on the ground, it is not surprising that nationally, Welsh Labour can be

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[89] Jones 2000, p.209
[90] See above
[91] Bradbury et al 2000, p,161; Russell et al 2002, p.69
[92] Morgan and Mungham 2000: 154-156
[93] Russell et al 2002, pp.73-74
[94] Laffin et al. 2004, p.14

seen to have suffered from a culture of complacency during the first decade of devolution.[95] This culture can be seen most evidently in terms of what McAllister called a state of organisational conservatism, with an unwillingness to critically assess the party's internal failings.[96] As briefly mentioned earlier, the staggered (and limited) development of the Labour Party in Wales has largely been driven not by free choice, but by external shocks. It appears, therefore, that the party's electoral dominance, especially in heartland seats, has resulted in what Wyn Jones calls a 'sense of entitlement,' in particular that the Welsh electorate will continue to support them, almost unconditionally.[97]

The tone of Huw Lewis' pamphlets and articles following the 2007 election, certainly suggests there are good grounds for such a critique. His warnings of potential defeats and indeed the danger of a 'sleepwalk to a very real loss,' are damning indictments of a party culture of complacency and lethargy,[98] with Welsh Labour accused of being in denial about the new dynamics of devolved politics.[99]

Indeed, one prime example of this reticence to critically analyse the party's internal failings can be seen in the wake of the 1999 election, tellingly many in the party chose 'conveniently' to blame the way in which Alun Michael had been selected, rather than address the party in Wales' problems.[100] Indeed, following the 2009 European election

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[95] Wyn Jones, R. (9th June 2009). Quoted in Shipton, M. 'We are now fighting for the very existence of Welsh Labour,' *Western Mail* [online], http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/we-now-fighting-very-existence-2099028 (accessed: 1st January 2010)
[96] McAllister 1980, p.87
[97] Wyn Jones quoted in Shipton 9th June 2009 [online]
[98] Lewis 2007, pp.6 and 11
[99] Wyn Jones and Scully 2008, pp.76-77
[100] Lafffin et al. 2004, p.5

results (where Labour were beaten by the Conservatives for the first time), the party leadership again sought to use external factors as excuses for electoral decline, rather than look at what is wrong with Welsh Labour itself.[101] Perhaps even more damning, the few attempts at injecting intellectual rigour into Welsh Labour, the Wales 20:20 and Cymdeithas Cledwyn think tanks, both appeared to have been consigned to oblivion. Little wonder, then, that the *Western Mail* responded to a party report calling for reform, to bemoan the lack of intellectual life within the party nationally in Wales.[102]

The Party on Paper: Welsh Labour and Policy

As this article has argued, electoral hegemony has significant organisational consequences for the dominant party. It should be little wonder then, that alongside organisational withering, One Partyism in Wales arguably resulted in an intellectual malaise within Welsh Labour.[103] This intellectual withering is emphasized by Davies and Williams, who have argued that electoral dominance has resulted in increasing levels of conservatism in Welsh Labour, with those in power preoccupied with entrenching the status quo.[104] Such a picture of an increasingly visionless, conservative organisation echoes Gwyn Alf Williams' claim that Welsh Labour had descended into an oligarchical, career driven organisation and McAllister's argument that hegemony breeds organisational conservatism.[105]

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[101] Shipton June 9th 2009 [online]

[102] Western Mail Editorial, (27th June 2008). Comment: Labour has a general, not just a local problem, *Western Mail*, p.18

[103] Wyn Jones and Scully 2008a, p.214

[104] Davies, N. and D.Williams. (2009). *Clear Red Water: Welsh Devolution and Socialist Politics*, Francis Boutle: London, p.34

[105] Williams, G. (1991). *When Was Wales?*, Penguin Books: London, pp.288-289; McAllister 1980, p.87

Certainly this intellectual deficit appears evident in Welsh Labour's policy process and policies during the first decade of devolution. In particular, this hegemony hangover could be seen directly in terms of policy capability. With both the level of preparation made for devolution policy-wise by Welsh Labour and the resulting policies reserved for substantial criticism by one leading commentator on Welsh affairs, who is also well versed in Welsh Labour's internal politics, for being so inadequate that it became one of the party's "key weaknesses" during the first decade of devolution.[106]

This lack of preparation forms part of what this political commentator and former WEC member has described as a weak intellectual period for the party in Wales, something that is particularly evident in the party's manifestos during these years, with the 1999 manifesto, in particular, highlighted as being neither substantive nor imaginative.[107] Even Welsh Labour's keynote Clear Red Water strategy led to accusations that Welsh Labour lacked radicalism and being underequipped policy wise, with an alleged reliance on 'distributing cash, rather than distributing ideas.'[108]

Certainly this picture of unimaginative Welsh Labour policies is further captured by Holtham's analysis of the Welsh Assembly's record on public services.[109] His argument

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[106] Interview with Welsh political commentator and former WEC member, 31st August 2010
[107] Interview with Welsh political commentator and former WEC member, 31st August 2010
[108] Osmond, J. (2004), in A.Trench (Ed.), *Has Devolution Made a Difference? State of the Nations 2004*, Imprint Academic: London, 43 p.53; interview with Welsh political commentator and former WEC member, 31st August 2010
[109] Holtham, H. (18th February 2011). Public Services in Wales, *Western Mail* [online], http://www.walesonline.co.uk/business-in-wales/columnists/gerry-holtham/2011/02/18/gerry-holtham-public-services-in-wales-91466-28193663/2/ (accessed 22nd February 2011)

that there has been a tendency to take what he calls "the soft options" during the first decade of devolution led him to raise questions about a culture of complacency and inadequacy and as such can be seen as a clear criticism of Welsh Labour due to their position as the only party to have been permanently in the devolved Government, either alone (briefly between 1999-2000 and again between 2003-2007) or as the lead coalition partner, in the first decade of devolution.

Aside from intellectual abeyance, hegemony's impact is also seen in the highly centralised policy process in the Welsh party (as was detailed earlier). The policy process in Welsh Labour could be seen as highly oligarchical, with one senior figure involved in Welsh politics emphasising the power of key individuals in shaping the direction of the party.[110] Something that should perhaps be unsurprising given that a dependence on key individuals has been a constant theme throughout Welsh Labour's history, whether it was the role of Morgan and Drakeford in shaping Clear Red Water or Ron Davies and Peter Hain in moving Welsh Labour behind devolution in the early to mid-nineties.[111]

However, rather than just a simple dependency on key individuals, the power of the party elite was further strengthened by significantly centralised policy mechanisms.[112] As we argued earlier, Welsh Labour's policy process post-Devolution has arguably resulted in manifesto chiefs being empowered at the expense of the party rank and file, who have allegedly have been overridden and sidelined.[113]   Little wonder then, that

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[110] Interview with Welsh political commentator and former WEC member, 31st August 2010
[111] Interview with Welsh political commentator and former WEC member, 31st August 2010; Morgan and Mungham 2000, p.91
[112] Lafffin et al. 2004, pp.8 and 11-12
[113] Lewis 2007: 20-21

Osmond argues that on the policy front, Welsh Labour has been defined by the importance of the party's elite rather than the grass roots.[114] As Laffin et al note, the result has been to further surround power at the centre, part of what they identify as an elite led process of marginalisation, with activists feeling little incentive to engage in this top-down dominated process.[115]

During the first decade of devolution it appears that Welsh Labour has suffered from what President Bush Senior famously called the 'the vision thing' or what has been more critically described as an "intellectual atrophy."[116] An intellectual malaise that, once again, appears to be deeply rooted in the party's hegemonic past, through the dynamics of careerism and conservatism.

Conclusion

Whilst the formation of the Coalition Government in 2010 has enabled Welsh Labour to rebound rapidly from their poor results in 2007, with a strong performance in 2011, albeit not winning a majority, and at the 2012 council elections, this should not lead us, or the Welsh Labour party, to forget the very real failings both organisationally and ideationally evident during the first decade of devolution. Devolution has quite clearly created a far more challenging environment for Welsh Labour. The use of a semi-proportional electoral system and the different electoral context has made it easier for

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[114] Osmond 2004, p.53
[115] Lafffin et al. 2004, p.14
[116] Wyn Jones and Scully 2008a, p.214

rival parties to compete and to be counted in terms of representation. In the first decade of devolution these demands exposed the intellectual, organisational withering of Welsh Labour, a malaise that was deeply rooted in the party's historic dominance.

During the period 1999-2009, the results of such exposure were unsurprising, with Welsh Labour's electoral performance, particularly in the devolved arena, at historically low levels,[117] coming a hitherto unthinkable second to the Conservatives in the 2009 European Elections and after 2007 finding eight previously considered safe seats reduced to marginals.[118] Welsh Labour's poor response to the challenges posed by devolution between 1999-2009 was, this article argues, a result of a "hegemony hangover," the symptoms of which were organisational and intellectual underdevelopment. Ill-equipped for devolution, in this period Welsh Labour in this period truly were an analogue party in a digital age.

Appendix: 2010 Labour Leadership Election Welsh CLP data

Aberavon CLP	367
Aberconwy CLP	168
Alyn and Deeside CLP	305
Arfon CLP	154
Blaenau Gwent CLP	310
Brecon and Radnorshire CLP	220
Bridgend CLP	288

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[117] Cymdeithas Cledwyn 2000, p.11 and Osmond 2007, pp.1-3
[118] Balsom, D. (2005), *The Wales Yearbook 2006*, Francis Balsom Associates: Aberystwyth, pp.43-160; Osmond 2007, p.2

Caerphilly CLP	315
Cardiff Central CLP	324
Cardiff North CLP	408
Cardiff South and Penarth CLP	375
Cardiff West CLP	454
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr CLP	203
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire CLP	207
Ceredigion CLP	146
Clwyd South CLP	252
Clwyd West CLP	161
Cynon Valley CLP	309
Delyn CLP	269
Dwyfor Meirionnydd CLP	89
Gower CLP	383
Islwyn CLP	275
Llanelli CLP	276
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney CLP	317
Monmouth CLP	329
Montgomeryshire CLP	86
Neath CLP	391
Newport East CLP	250
Newport West CLP	346
Ogmore CLP	359
Pontypridd CLP	333
Preseli Pembrokeshire CLP	188
Rhondda CLP	404
Swansea East CLP	212

Swansea West CLP	325
Torfaen CLP	359
Vale of Clwyd CLP	261
Vale of Glamorgan CLP	373
Wrexham CLP	209
Ynys Mon CLP	160
Total membership	11160

(Taken from Labour Party 2010a [online])