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### **Welsh Nationalism and the Challenge of 'Inclusive' Politics**

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## Welsh Nationalism and the Challenge of 'Inclusive' Politics

### *Introduction*

Welsh nationalism has been in existence for over a century and a half but throughout this period only a small minority of the population of Wales have supported the organisations spawned by nationalist social movements. In 1999, however, the nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, made an electoral breakthrough that established Plaid<sup>1</sup> as the leading opposition party in Wales and a likely governing party when the second elections to the new National Assembly are held in 2003. In this paper we examine the circumstances of this breakthrough and the effects of electoral success on Plaid with special reference to the new brand of 'inclusive' politics that the Assembly has introduced to Wales.

In the 1997 British general election all four of Plaid Cymru's sitting MPs held their seats and the party secured 9.9 per cent of the Welsh vote, a gain of 1.0 per cent on 1992. As ever, Plaid's core support was located in the north and west of Wales where they won three of their four parliamentary seats. Welsh nationalism has always found its most fertile ground in the north and west where a higher proportion of the population speak Welsh<sup>2</sup>. These are also the more sparsely populated and less urbanised parts of Wales that did not experience the heavy industrialisation which affected the south and east from the nineteenth century onwards. The slow growth in Plaid's support over the years had been concentrated in the north and west and occasional swings to Plaid in the depressed mining valleys of the South (Roberts, 1999) could easily be seen as the only feasible protest vote where the Labour Party was normally returned with overwhelming majorities. This familiar pattern has been over-turned in a very short space of time as a result of the devolution of power by the UK Government to a new National Assembly for Wales (the Assembly has executive powers in a variety of areas but no power to make primary legislation or raise taxes).

Plaid's success in the first Assembly elections in May 1999 astounded many and could accurately be called 'a revolution in Welsh politics' (Jones and Trystan, 1999). The party leader called it a '*daeargryn tawel*' (a quiet earthquake). Plaid polled just 4.9 per cent less than the winning party, won a total of 30.6 per cent of the vote, and formed the official opposition to the Wales Labour Party in the Assembly. Increased support outside the traditional north west heartlands of Plaid was central to this success<sup>3</sup>, which was repeated in both the local government and subsequent European elections. As Trystan and Wyn Jones (1999:27) noted, 'patterns of political allegiance ... appear to be shifting in response to the new context of post-devolution politics'. Some of the greatest gains were made in the predominantly English-speaking valleys in the south east of the country where swings of over thirty per cent from the Wales Labour Party to Plaid were typical. Despite having the highest percentage of Welsh-born inhabitants<sup>4</sup>, this is an area traditionally suspicious of Plaid Cymru's close associations with the Welsh language. The Party's success was not restricted to these areas, however, and similar huge gains were evident in other unlikely constituencies (notably the Vale of Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire, both over 30 per cent).

Recent opinion polls suggest that this level of support was maintained throughout the first year of the new Assembly but the same polls suggest that the electorate is very

specific about the circumstances under which it will switch support to Plaid. There has been little if any change since 1997 in the level of support for Plaid when voters are polled about elections to the UK parliament (Balsom, 2000). Apparently the quiet earthquake only applies to elections to local government, the European Parliament and, of course, the National Assembly. Plaid has become a mainstream party in Wales but Welsh voters still consider it marginal to Westminster. Nevertheless Plaid now has considerable influence over politics in Wales. With seventeen (out of sixty) seats in the Assembly, Plaid was able to precipitate the resignation of Alun Michael, the Labour Party's initial choice as First Secretary, and may well participate in some form of coalition government before the Assembly's first term is over. This situation may well serve as a springboard for Plaid to over take the Labour Party as the majority party after the next election in 2003. Party officials certainly believe so: 'Wales needs a Plaid Cymru government in our National Assembly. We *can* achieve that in three years time...'<sup>5</sup>.

Devolution has changed the electoral fortunes of Plaid for several reasons. As the gap between the party's support in Cardiff and Westminster elections shows, the creation of a new tier of government has given Plaid the opportunity to compete for votes in a new kind of election, one in which being for, and of, Wales is no longer seen as a side issue or distraction. Here Plaid's national identification and preoccupation is converted into a distinct advantage. Plaid also profits because those who are enthusiastic about devolution, or actually hostile to it, are likely to vote for Plaid's opponents and, thus far, these voters have been much less likely to bother to vote in Assembly elections than Plaid supporters have<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, even in the first elections to the Assembly, voters may well have guessed that Plaid now had a more realistic chance of influencing some decisions or even accessing power and a vote for Plaid was less likely to be seen as a wasted vote. Finally, the fact of devolution has also perhaps increased the vote for Plaid because for some voters the support of a UK government for limited home rule has helped to legitimise Plaid's aim of greater self-government.

What will be the effect of the breakthrough that devolution has made possible on Plaid Cymru and the wider social movement that gave birth to the party? The new opportunities to increase support and access power have brought to light something of a paradox since the success of nationalism outside its heartlands threatens to change the movement. Observers, including Government ministers (Hain, 1999), are aware of the challenge facing Welsh nationalism. In essence, the challenge consists of turning Plaid into an all-Wales party rather than one which is exclusively preoccupied with the priorities of Welsh-speakers in the rural north and west (Fevre, Borland and Denney, 1997). The characteristics of the nationalist project in Wales in past decades have not endeared Plaid Cymru to the wider electorate (Giggs and Pattie, 1992a and 1992b). In particular there was widespread suspicion of the effect of Plaid and the nationalist movement more generally on the conduct of local authority employment, education and housing policies, policies that that seemed to legitimate social closure in favour of middle-class Welsh speakers (Borland, Fevre and Denney, 1992; Fevre, Denney and Borland, 1997; Fevre, Borland, and Denney, 1999).

The reputation of nationalism in Wales, including Plaid Cymru, has been of an exclusive social movement interested in monopolising resources for its core supporters

and in narrow, almost sectarian, issues (see for example, Hobsbawm, 1995). These concerns have traditionally had very little appeal outside the north and west, but as we have seen, Plaid has won votes in the south and east to get to its current, strong electoral position. There is therefore *prima facie* evidence that Plaid has begun to make some of the changes which are needed to broaden the party's appeal. Some of these changes will be mentioned here, but the key issue this paper is intended to address is a much more specific test for Plaid and the social movement that spawned it. Our primary interest is in the way Plaid has responded to the attempt to introduce a new style of politics along with the devolved institutions of governance in Wales.

According to the leading architect of Welsh devolution, 'an essential foundation stone' of the whole project to devolve government in Wales has been *inclusiveness*, or a willingness to 'share ideas, talk to others, to include those with common objectives in the pursuit and exercise of power', where 'others' may be defined by 'ethnicity, language, politics, religion or whatever' (R. Davies, 1999:7). Indeed inclusiveness was written into the White Paper 'A Voice for Wales/ Papur Gwyn:Llais dros Gymru,' (Great Britain, London, Stationery Office. Cm3718, 1998):

- 3.1 The Government is committed to establishing a new, more *inclusive* and participative democracy in Britain. Its proposals for a Welsh Assembly reflect these aims. An Assembly - which will work in partnership with local authorities and other public bodies in Wales, with the voluntary sector, with central government in Whitehall and with European institutions – will be at the heart of that new democracy. (p.15 emphasis added)
- 3.2 Representing all the people of Wales
- 3.3 In particular, the Government attaches great importance to equal opportunities for all – including women, members of the ethnic minorities and disabled people. It believes that greater participation by women is essential to the health of our democracy. The government also urges all political parties offering candidates for election to the Assembly to have this in mind in their internal candidate selection processes (p.24)

These principles were then enshrined in the Government of Wales Act which brought the Assembly into being, for example, clauses 48 and 120 of the Government of Wales Act state, *inter alia*, that the Assembly functions should conform to the principle of equality of opportunity for all (Great Britain, 1998b; 32, v, 120, i). Section 120 of the Government of Wales Act states that

the Assembly shall make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all a people'

This is a duty binding on the entire 60 member government body and one that is the specific remit of the pioneering 11-strong standing Committee on Equality of Opportunity that ensures the mainstreaming of equality into all the executives' policies<sup>7</sup>.

At first glance the attempt to create a new inclusive form of governance and politics in Wales would seem to pose a significant, and very specific, challenge to a party born of a social movement which has had the reputation for being exclusive. Indeed the *raison d'être* of that social movement often appeared to be the vehement defence of a language group and its culture and it might be difficult to imagine how such a movement could respond positively to the idea of inclusiveness. In fact Plaid, at least,

has made the effort to adapt to the new politics and their success in doing so goes some way to explain the transformation of Plaid Cymru into an all-Wales party which hopes to garner still more support in the south and east.

Later in this paper we will explain how Plaid has adapted to the idea of inclusiveness in the way the party prepared for the Assembly (for example in the way candidates were selected) and in the way they have developed their relations with civil society once the Assembly began to function. We will pay particular attention to the way Plaid has dealt with the three groups which were considered to be the most urgently in need of inclusion in the political process when devolution was planned and implemented: women, members of the ethnic minorities and disabled people. These groups are especially interesting in this context because it would seem to be obvious to even the most casual observer that they will have very different priorities to those we usually associate with Plaid Cymru. The findings we present are drawn from ongoing research which focuses on the National Assembly's strategies and mechanisms to include these three 'minority' groups (see Chaney *et al.*, forthcoming, 2001), and on the way in which these excluded groups have experienced the preamble to devolution and the first two years of the Assembly.<sup>8</sup> Using a variety of qualitative methods, we are working closely with the managers of minority organisations, for example in the period May 1999 to March 2000 we completed over two hundred interviews spanning eighty five separate organisations. We also talked to all the civil servants involved in equal opportunities in the Assembly and a third of the Assembly Members (AMs) and we are monitoring and recording all relevant media output and observing all aspects of the work of the Assembly and its committees which bear on the inclusiveness agenda. Before we present the main results of our research we will briefly describe the way in which Plaid Cymru began the process of transforming itself into a party which might, in the near future, be electable as the party of government in Wales.

### ***From Y Blaid to The Party of Wales***

Together with Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg, the cultural nationalist organisation concerned with the protection and promotion of the Welsh language (and with which it shares an overlap in membership), Plaid Cymru has been the most successful organisation produced by Welsh nationalism. Christiansen (1995) identifies a number of phases in the party's long journey from the political periphery to the mainstream. Founded by the poet and playwright Saunders Lewis in 1925, Plaid was primarily concerned with the defence of the Welsh language. Despite fielding its first Parliamentary candidate in the General Election of 1929, the party preferred direct action to further its cultural ambitions and it remained on the political periphery in Wales. During the second, post-war, phase the Party came to terms with the bilingual reality of a rapidly changing Welsh society, broadened its aims in pursuit of self determination and sought representation in the British Parliament. This period saw the Party's first MP elected in 1966 when Plaid received 4.3 per cent of the popular vote. Electoral support almost doubled to 8.1 per cent in 1979 and two MPs were elected. The third phase in the Party's history was one of re-focusing following the overwhelming defeat of the first devolution referendum campaign in 1979 when just 11 per cent voted for the government's devolution proposals.

During the 1980s Plaid has moved away from some of its earlier radical policies,

reinventing itself as a decentralist left-wing nationalist party (see for example Davies, 1997). The ideologies of Plaid Cymru, and of the language-activist organisation Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg, took on some of the trappings of internationalism and libertarian socialism but their reputation outside the heartlands of their support remained as exclusive organisations which had a narrow base and were interested in closure and the monopolisation of resources. This impression was reinforced by the activities of some of the more extremist fringe organisations which engaged in a series of more or less violent direct action campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the more populous industrial south and east of Wales, where a much lower proportion of the population were fluent in Welsh, the nationalists had little appeal. Their rhetoric might have been left of centre but their policy priorities remained enhanced status for the Welsh language and higher spending in rural areas with a ban on developments that would endanger Welsh culture. There were specific campaigns for Welsh-medium education, a Welsh Language Act giving the language legal status in Wales, and against Anglicisation - in the form of holiday homes (from the 1970s) and against immigration from England (in the 1980s) - which it was feared was destroying the character and culture of small Welsh-speaking settlements. All of this had limited appeal in the south and east where Anglicisation had happened long ago and the most pressing issues concerned the effects of de-industrialisation as traditional industries declined and/or were privatised (Fevre, 1989).

The influence of Plaid Cymru on the re-shaping of Wales in the last century is disproportionate to the modest electoral support that it has traditionally received but the impact of Plaid on the ground has always been more noticeable in the north and west. There Plaid control of local authorities led to extensive Welsh-medium public education and priority for Welsh-speakers in public appointments. There has been some expansion of Welsh-medium education from a low base in the south and east (C.A. Davies, 1990) but what people knew of the nationalist policies in local government reinforced their impression of an exclusive social movement that wanted to keep non-Welsh speakers out of the Welsh speaking areas at all costs, and to handicap those who came in when competing for qualifications, jobs or other resources like houses. To the extent that they cared about wider issues, Plaid and the other nationalist organisations were preoccupied with the legislative status of the Welsh language, and funding for the language and for rural areas, rather than with the social dislocation and poverty caused by de-industrialisation.

In the 1980s there were some inside the main nationalist organisations, especially those supporting Dafydd Elis Thomas during his time as leader of Plaid Cymru, that tried to change this perception and to present Plaid as a party for all the citizens of Wales. At this time particular emphasis was put on the presentation of Plaid as a pro-European party which wanted Wales to take its seat along with all the other small nations at the European table. The emphasis on self-government within the European Union (rather than separation from England) was intended to transform Plaid's reputation as the political arm of a fringe movement. Efforts were made to persuade voters that this movement was not exclusive and that Plaid wished to represent all who lived and worked in Wales. This attempt to shift the agenda met with mixed success. It was always opposed by many traditionalists in the party and indeed it was this wing of the party that gained ascendancy when Dafydd Wigley took over the leadership from

Dafydd Elis Thomas.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1990s Plaid Cymru took new initiatives to widen its support: the party began trying to court the vote of non-Welsh speakers by selecting candidates who could not speak Welsh and by pointing out the number of Plaid members who could not speak Welsh (sometimes claimed to be the majority). This was the beginning of a process in which Plaid began to reinvent the notion of who its members and activists were but it predates the time at which devolution became a realistic proposition once more and there is a sense in which this reinvention was not a *fundamental* change for Plaid. Over recent years Plaid has been highly skilled in the use of ambiguity to achieve such apparent transformation. Christiansen (1995:56) notes the Party's 'ability ... to give up key parts of its programme and strategy in order to reform while appearing not to have given anything up'. In this case, reinventing the profile of Plaid members and activists for electoral purposes need not be part of a fundamental reform since non-Welsh speakers can always learn the language later, or at least their children can. In any case the party could tell itself that these new recruits (and the voters they might deliver) could have, or might soon learn to have, exactly the same agenda as before: enhanced status for the language, public spending in rural areas and so on.

Such skilful manoeuvres would become harder to execute if Plaid courted the votes of people who were not simply waiting to be educated about what mattered in Wales. Such voters might already have firm agendas of their own which they expected the political party that received their vote to pursue. Yet when Plaid picked up working class votes in the Valleys (as described by Adamson, 1991 and Roberts, 1994) there was little real chance that Plaid would be put to the test of taking on the new priorities (and compromising with their traditional interests) because they did not receive enough votes to get a substantial hold on power in local government. In the meantime the old (language and rurality) policies favoured by their core support could be pursued in the council chambers of the north and west and in Parliament with the Welsh Language Bill. But when plans for devolution were reactivated for the first time since 1979 Plaid was immediately faced with the challenge of inclusiveness and the possibility that it might now have to make space in its ranks for different groups and different priorities. In the first instance Plaid was faced with a hard decision about whether to extend its co-operation to other parties and civic groups campaigning in favour of the devolution proposals of the New Labour Government elected in 1997.

The first tentative sings of 'inclusiveness' appeared in the civic alliance of the 'Yes for Wales' referendum campaign. Its roots can be traced to groups such as the Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities that grew up in response to the hardships of the 1984 Miners' Strike (Andrews, 1999: 47). Here, as in the referendum campaign, traditional political rivalries had been re-thought. The debate as to whether Plaid Cymru should join the inclusive politics of a cross-party campaign to persuade the electorate to back the government's devolution proposals exposed generational tensions within the party. Many older members had bitter memories of the cross-party campaigning in the failed 1979 referendum and the party's leadership feared that a further rejection of devolution by the electorate 'could be seriously damaging, even terminal, to Plaid' (Andrews, 1999:115). Following an intense debate within the Party, Plaid eventually joined the campaign in July 1997, just three months ahead of the vote. Initial fears were allayed when voters backed the devolution proposals (albeit by a narrow margin) but

the fact that most Welsh-speakers voted for devolution, while most English-speakers did not, starkly underlined the future electoral challenge for Plaid Cymru. English monoglots, and particularly English-born residents of Wales who make up nearly one in three of the population, were unenthused by, or indeed hostile to, the idea of devolution (Evans and Trystan, 1999; Fevre, *et al*, 1999).

Following the referendum the Secretary of State for Wales sought to pursue the inclusive agenda by establishing the National Assembly Advisory Group (NAAG). It was comprised of 'a wide range of fields, including the four main political parties in Wales, the "Yes" and "No" [referendum] campaigns, business, local government, trade unions, equal opportunities and the voluntary sector'. It had the remit to provide guidance to the Standing Orders Commission, advise the Secretary of State, and 'to produce recommendations on which consensus has been established and which contribute to the establishment of an Assembly' (NAAG, 1998:4). The Advisory Group took evidence from individuals and organisations from across Wales and its final recommendations were inclusiveness distilled (and were 'endorsed almost in their entirety', Bryant, 1998:1). The final report stated the group's aim was 'to produce recommendations ...[that are]... democratic, effective, efficient, and inclusive', 'the themes of democracy, openness, inclusiveness, and participation, balanced with efficient and effective decision-making were strongly endorsed by the consultation responses'. The report concluded, 'that vigorous debate, across a range of political parties and outside interests, leading to clear decision-making, will be an essential and healthy part of the Assembly's proceedings. Otherwise the opportunity for an inclusive, co-operative approach to developing and implementing policies will be lost' (NAAG, 1998:7).

Plaid's commitment to an inclusive approach was formalised by their co-operation with NAAG. Working in co-operation with other groups, Plaid's input to the NAAG consultations resulted in the unique legal *duty* placed on the Assembly to promote equality of opportunity in all its work. Plaid's Spokesperson on Social Inclusion and Equality of Opportunity (Helen Mary Jones<sup>10</sup>) noted 'our National Assembly is the first elected body in Europe that has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, and I have to say as an individual it is very odd to see one's words appearing in a ... statute, but I did draft that clause'<sup>11</sup>. Another Plaid member involved in the consultations on creating an inclusive Assembly welcomed the fact that such issues 'for the first time were very high profile...' although he was critical of the final recommendation's omission of 'a reasonable timescale...to implement those ideas'.

In a further attempt to reach out to non-Welsh speaking voters, and following an intense debate at its annual conference in September 1998, Plaid Cymru voted to append an English translation to its name, becoming 'Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales'. Although not perhaps the most radical of the changes considered, given that it could be seen simply as a translation of the original name, this symbolic change could be presented as part of the effort to make space for those different groups whose votes Plaid now sought. Building on this change and the cross party co-operation of the previous year, Plaid's election manifesto expressed the Party's aim of achieving a 'new style of politics'. The election manifesto envisioned a 'new' Wales founded on inclusive policies based on notions of citizenship and equality of opportunity. It emphasised 'the rights of *all* citizens in Wales ... [to foster] a people who are alive to their democratic responsibilities and to their rights as individuals and communities'. During the campaign



Plaid Cymru wholeheartedly adopted the rather inchoate vision of 'inclusive' politics promoted by the Wales Labour Party. Leading figures spoke of 'making sure that the Assembly is totally inclusive... that nobody feels a second class citizen, whether you speak Welsh, whether you speak English, that we should be working together in a spirit of inclusiveness'.<sup>12</sup>

Plaid's subscription to 'inclusiveness', along with its attempt to bridge the linguistic divide, coincided with the party's electoral breakthrough. As a prominent Party member noted, 'for sure ... we are willing to co-operate to ensure the success of the Assembly. And that is *why* so many people supported us in this campaign'.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the fact that Plaid Cymru's electoral success meant that the Wales Labour Party did not hold an overall majority in the National Assembly was presented as an ideal platform for a 'new' inclusive politics in Wales: 'these are the sorts of results we would have wished for .... we must work together from the outset'.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Plaid Cymru and Inclusive Politics***

We now turn to the results of our research into Plaid's engagement with those aspects of the new inclusive Welsh politics which are intended to encourage the participation of the previously excluded groups: women, black and ethnic minorities, and disabled people. Women have traditionally been marginalized both in Welsh society in general and in politics in particular (Rees, 1999): throughout its history the country has returned just seven women MPs to the British Parliament. The first Assembly elections saw women comprise 42 per cent of AMs however within this breakthrough uneven progress was made by the main political parties. Rather less evidence of change could be found in the way the other 'minority' groups were represented in the first Assembly elections. Although people from a Black or ethnic background comprise just over 1 per cent<sup>15</sup> of the three million people resident in Wales, they are mainly resident in the country's southern urban belt where they comprise 20 per cent or more of local communities. The failure of the political parties to nominate a single Black candidate in winnable seats caused widespread dismay (see for example, Mader, 1999), as did the absence of a disabled Assembly Member in a society where disabled people<sup>16</sup> are members of 57 per cent of families (John, 1998).

### ***Plaid's Membership and Policies***

As noted above, the party's election manifesto placed 'inclusiveness' centre stage. It spoke of the Assembly's 'crucial statutory responsibility to promote ... equal opportunities' leading to 'action in all policy areas.'. It stated '[w]e ... will prioritise support for ... equal opportunities', and spoke of 'a multi-pronged approach to job creation, .... appraised by ... equal opportunities criteria'. Economic development was to be planned by 'promoting equal opportunities and participation by women, the disabled, and ethnic initiatives' with 'specific support to women and ethnic minority entrepreneurs'<sup>17</sup>. Plaid's comprehensive commitment to the needs of disabled people was presaged in a detailed outline of their policies for people with learning difficulties<sup>18</sup> and fully developed in their Manifesto. At its first annual conference after the establishment of the National Assembly, the party 'reaffirmed' its 'commitment to social justice and to the promotion of equality of opportunity for every citizen of Wales'.

There is less certainty about the level of acceptance that the 'inclusive' agenda amongst Plaid's rank and file membership. however. One key woman informant within Plaid Cymru thought that the

'constructive drive in policy-making is coming from outside the Plaid heartlands at the moment ... I do think that as Plaid gains power that people need to ... be thinking *who* do they actually represent, *what* values do they represent? ... as a Party we are still on a huge learning curve... people like Cynog [Dafis, the Party's Policy Development Officer] are taking things like the policy development on board. Now that needs to filter-down to make sure that everybody ... understands ... You are bound to have conflicts really.'

In fact inclusiveness is a contested concept within the party. A number of committed leading figures on the party's National Executive Committee are carrying forward elements of an inclusive agenda based on equality of opportunity and citizen's rights but, according to the respondent just quoted, 'it is the constituency party that is the main decision-making body and that sends representatives to the National Council ... now I think that equal opportunities is very patchy in terms of where it is targeted at the moment'. Such issues are seen as central to the future direction of Plaid and their importance is reflected in the current review of the party's constitution which follows on from a drive intended to, 'increase our membership on a very considerable scale ... [for] we must attract people from all corners of our country, and of all kinds of backgrounds, so that we ... reflect fully through our membership the diverse nature of contemporary Wales. *We must do that*' (Dafis, 1999).

The role of women in the party has led to bitter internal debates, threatened resignations and boycotts (McAllister, 1999). The failure of Plaid's membership to reflect the wider population was acknowledged by the party's leader after it attracted criticism in the Assembly election campaign:

'No sadly that's true ... we regard everybody living in Wales as full and equal citizens whatever their language, creed, colour or place of origin is ... I think there is a challenge here for us as a party, perhaps, to be more proactive to get more members in from all the ethnic groups, who will then be in a position to put their names forward as candidates. Enough of that hasn't been done in the past. But there is another consideration, that is to make sure that the institution itself does develop in a way that encourages people to want to be there. With regard to women, the hours which the Assembly sits is one that's conducive for women to be there (sic), the facilities such as crèches, and that sort of thing are available there. The Assembly has a lot of work to do to earn the respect of people in all sorts of minorities, and hopefully in four years time we'll have a very much better balance between all the groups in those standings ...'<sup>19</sup>

When interviewed, Plaid's new Assembly Members pointed to the leadership's initiative in creating a specific shadow cabinet brief for social inclusion and equality of opportunity as evidence of its commitment to inclusiveness. Women AMs spoke of their 'responsibility [as women] to act as role models' and one said 'I would like women to think, well look, if she can do it - and she's ordinary, I can do it'. Early in the life of the new governing body there was a feeling that the increased number of elected women in the Party was indeed creating a new style of politics within Plaid and beyond; one based on mutual support and respect. The same AM noted 'yes, I feel there is a sort of

... sisterhood thing, definitely’.

Six of the party’s seventeen AMs are women but, in contrast to the formal mechanisms adopted by the Wales Labour Party, this was achieved by a pragmatic approach of placing women in winnable regional ‘list’ seats selected by proportional representation. Plaid’s front bench described the situation within the context of past failings:

‘Plaid Cymru is the only political party in Westminster ... that does not have a woman MP, and it was something that we weren’t proud of, so we are quite determined when the Assembly election came that we wouldn’t have an equal number of men and women candidates as such, *but* we would certainly have an equal number of men and women in winnable seats, so we made it perfectly clear that if there weren’t sufficient women selected in the first-past-the-post seats, that we’d select women then on the top of the regional lists and what will happen when the elections are held on 6<sup>th</sup> May, it’ll be roughly proportional - half men - half women, not exactly, but probably far more ... there is certainly a glass ceiling. There are many talented women out there who are not really getting into public life as they should - and Plaid Cymru has made a significant contribution to that in its selections.’<sup>20</sup>

This positive action highlighted the difficulties and challenges facing the Party, for the traditionalist patriarchy in rural branches consistently fails to select women candidates.<sup>21</sup> As former Plaid candidate McAllister (1999:15) noted, feminism is, ‘construed as an alien, foreign influence within many local branches, and here some of the more mainstream feminist ideas such as equal representation make little progress’ (also see C.A. Davies, 1994, 1996, 1999). One woman who was a Plaid AM explained, ‘we’ve got a membership that’s sort of 50:50, but it’s the men that make it...oh anyone can apply, but I mean it just does not result in women winning the seats.’ The key informant already quoted added,

‘the actual membership is fairly representative of society .... the actual *active* membership is a different thing, you know the people that make decisions ... [they’re]... usually councillors, and they’re generally men... I wouldn’t say that its 50:50 when it comes to the decision-making and the people that participate ... 75 per cent of those that attend the *rhanbarth* [regional] meetings, which are the decision-making bodies, are men.’

Such problems underpin the recent failure of Plaid, despite strong contenders<sup>22</sup>, to select women candidates to fight for its four Westminster seats in the British Parliament when dual mandate representatives are obliged to relinquish their London seats. The key informant, a leading woman in the party, noted

‘one of the things that was used against me was the fact “oh she’s a feminist” and that seemed to have actually scared people, now considering that Plaid, some of the philosophy and principles of Plaid is social justice, I found that incredible that people [within the Party] were threatened by feminism... that actually brought home to me the work that needs to be done in terms of political education and thinking of the role of women’.

This modest progress compares with the Party’s failure to field any Black or ethnic minority candidates, and just two disabled candidates. The absence of a disabled AM in

the Assembly was acknowledged as an acute problem and in order to address this failure a Plaid AM felt 'we really need to listen to disabled people'. One of the Party's disabled candidates stated that attention needs to be paid to why so few disabled people join the Party, and to understand 'what the barriers are' and fight 'the institutionalised discrimination that exists within that sort of party political structure'. The feeling was that amongst the minority groups in Plaid (and the other parties), women had fared rather better than disabled people or the black and ethnic minorities. As the disabled candidate explained, there were 'traditionalists' inside the party who feel that disabled people 'aren't *able* to take up those sort of places' and 'if they really want to talk about inclusion they will have to look at positive action around race and disability as they have done around gender'. One Plaid AM noted the problems in respect of encouraging Black members:

'Plaid finds it quite difficult...particularly for the people from ethnic communities, Plaid Cymru is not a party they would obviously sort of think of associating themselves with ... because we are so much a *Welsh* party ... [however] in some communities there is the beginning of a response'

Such a view seems to substantiate some of the fears of the black and ethnic minorities about the nature of prevalent constructions of Welshness (Williams, 1999). As one interviewee from a minority organisation emphasised, I am 'a *Welsh* Black woman'.

The evidence from Plaid's membership might suggest that the party has failed to prioritise an inclusive approach to *managing itself*. Although gender has widely been regarded as the 'winner' in the equality debate within the party, it has ignored the recommendations of its own Commission on Gender Balance (1993-5), and recent calls by senior party figures to have women represent Plaid in Westminster. Charlotte Davies (1999) considered that the failure to sustain progress on gender equality was due to key feminist activists leaving the Party while the 'women who remained ... placed their nationalism on a par with, or ahead of, their feminism' (C.A. Davies, 1999:101). It is evident Plaid Cymru is experiencing an period of internal debate in which the relevance and meaning of the concept of 'inclusiveness' is being contested within the Party. For a fuller understanding it is necessary to examine how Plaid's efforts in this regard are perceived by the three key minorities groups outside the Party. In the next section it might be useful to bear in mind that these groups are especially interesting in this context because they have such different priorities to those we usually associate with Plaid Cymru. In this section we will begin to gauge the extent to which these groups think Plaid has made progress in adopting these priorities.

### *The views of 'minority' groups*

Devolution of government to Wales has generally raised expectations amongst disabled people. As one campaigner noted, 'in the long term they have an incredible opportunity to do some good some good and create an inclusive society'. Such an opportunity is based on 'the Assembly, hopefully, interpreting disability legislation in a more user-friendly way than has been done on a UK-wide basis'.

Disabled people's groups have responded positively to Plaid's approach to disability issues. One manager singled out the comprehensive nature of its policies: 'Plaid Cymru were the only ones that had a detailed sense of what was needed, which is interesting, because I didn't necessarily see myself as a Plaid Cymru supporter'. The party was

seen as both proactive and outspoken on disability by one of the leading campaigners for disabled people:

'Plaid were the most vociferous in their verbal support and in fact ran a number of days in their [election] campaign on disability issues, [and] concentrated specifically on that in their media campaign for whole days<sup>23</sup>, which is something the other parties didn't do ... Plaid is the only party that has invited us back in to work with the Assembly Members they've got, to develop their own party policies in terms of their activities in the Assembly itself and the subject committees ... they actually came to us.'

Another respondent spoke of the Party being, 'very interested and keen to pursue work with us' and one director told us 'it's very clear that Plaid [of all the Parties] are *very tuned in*, - community responsive, *very, very clear* ... [they] are different'.

Disabled people's groups pointed to the key role of individuals in advancing Plaid's disability agenda: 'it's undoubtedly down to personal commitment but what the hell, you know, someone's got to open the door and we'll go in'. Local disability groups in both the north and south of Wales highlighted the role of the party's President, Dafydd Wigley:

'disability is one of his major areas of interest so I suppose we've got an open door there really ... he, we, went through ... issues ... like the Assembly adopting a social model of disability ... and he was very supportive and obviously from his point of view he put us in touch with who, in terms of his own party, who were the relevant people on which committees that we needed to be in contact with and some things that he's offered to take-up, like for example, will there be an appointment of a disability equality officer to work alongside the race equality officer in the equal opportunities office. So things like that he said he would take action on, so we *were* pleased about that.'

Another described Plaid's response as

'very positive. I was at a meeting regarding an individual the other day, and Dafydd [Wigley] was totally spot-on really.... I certainly know that they're interested in what we're doing.... I can say that it *is* positive as far as Dafydd Wigley is concerned.'

Another manager listed a number of their recent events that leading figures in Plaid had attended and concluded, 'we've got *very good* relationships... they always turn up to our functions... it *really is* quite a good relationship .... they do actually pay attention to us ...'. Elsewhere the Party's support for organisations supporting those with learning difficulties is evident:

'Mr. Dafis , Plaid Cymru - our local AM, he's very involved with everything that we do, I mean for example he gets a copy of my annual report and we keep him abreast of all the information, I mean like for example, about six months ago the local authority threatened to cut Social Services who were funding a lot of the voluntary sector projects .... Mr. Dafis was very supportive and we fought a campaign and we didn't have any trouble at the end of the day, which we were very pleased about.'

The role of committed individuals within the Party is seen as the key to disabled people's rights being advanced and one campaigner pointed out that people are 'very lucky' because of prominent equality campaigners in the Party becoming AMs 'so that

equality won't be allowed to be sidelined at all'.

Plaid, like the other political parties, face a tough challenge to rebuild the confidence of the Black and ethnic minority communities in Wales. One campaigner had concluded that 'as far as I am concerned the National Assembly for Wales isn't going to be meaningful to Black people *at all*'. Others reflected wider anger: 'it's been disillusioning and disappointing, "Welsh" appears to mean simply middle class white Welsh, and if you look at most of the candidates that have come through they seem to fit that bill'; another added, 'Its a disgrace, a total disgrace'. Another respondent felt that the new political structure gave her *no* representation, 'I do not feel that there is anyone within the Assembly at this moment in time, that can represent my views and opinions and understand where I am coming from as a ... Black person'.

Plaid's failure to field a single black candidate was extremely damaging to the standing of the party amongst some of the electorate. As one activist noted, 'from the black and Asian point of view they were *not in the frame*'. The early indications suggest that Plaid failed both before and during the election campaign. Their lack of basic record keeping and recruitment programmes was highlighted: 'they're not even aware if they have [Black people] in the membership' and that there was 'no programme to encourage members from the Black and Asian community to come forward'. One activist noted the centrality of identity to the problems of perception and communication Plaid face in this respect:

'a lot of people from Plaid - I can't remember his name - but he was insulting. He was, and people said at the meeting, "I've never been so insulted by a politician or anyone in my life". He was saying yes, *in the future*. I mean he showed his lack, his ignorance of different communities, of other people and he didn't say anything positive. He didn't give any indication that they were going to do anything at all, he was saying obviously we want to be inclusive, if you, er, you know, they defined it that if you live in Wales you know, you're a member of the constituency and of the nation and so you know we'll be happy to have you but, we're not going out to do anything.'

Such perceptions of Plaid are of course extremely germane to the current discussion since they suggest the party has not always been able to carry through to the point at which it can even begin to discover that the groups it is now courting have very different priorities to those we usually associate with Plaid Cymru.

After this disastrous start there is evidence that Plaid is gradually being considered as a party worthy of future support by some members of the Black and ethnic communities. As the representative of one ethnic minority community organisation explained, 'I feel that Plaid Cymru is the party that actually gets left out because of the *perception* of being nationalist, but I personally feel that because they are a party of Wales and they... should make a greater inroad into the community' [italics added]. There is a suggestion from some of the black and ethnic minority respondents that the term 'nationalist' is a barrier to engagement, and that in their view, it is no longer wholly appropriate:

'but I know, when I've spoken to a lot of Black and ethnic minority individuals they are very wary of Plaid Cymru, because Plaid Cymru to a lot of people are seen as being a nationalist party - which it is, isn't it? But it's, how can I say ... It was very much a nationalist party *perhaps prior to these last elections*, that's

how it was perceived by a lot of people, I should say ... and a lot of people from black and ethnic minority communities feel that Plaid, if Plaid was elected to the government - so they run Wales , they'll bring a lot of legislation to promote the Welsh language.' [italics added]

There is an irony here in that the attitude of senior Plaid figures is that language is itself an equal opportunities issue<sup>24</sup> yet it is hindering the Party's programme of equality towards ethnic groups. The issue of the Welsh language amongst ethnic communities where English is often the second language, would appear more problematic than amongst other sectors of the Welsh population (also see Gorard *et al*, 1997) as the respondent just quoted explained:

'but what they feel, is that, maybe, they'll be penalised as a result of not speaking Welsh - one. Two, looking, being different by their ethnicity, and whether this would have ramifications for them in the sense that their marginalisation [that exists] already, might be [made] greater.'

Once again, the personal expertise and commitment of certain Plaid AMs was highlighted as a positive factor by leading campaigners for example, ' I am hopeful .... people like Helen [Mary Jones] from Llanelli ... you know, [who] have worked in the equality field before and will bring their equality experience to the Welsh Assembly'. Other respondents from the Black and ethnic communities pointed to Plaid as a potential platform for those that are disillusioned with the Wales Labour Party:

'he invited me to come and meet him in the House of Commons to devise means by which Plaid Cymru could get black and Asian people to come and join them. But our people are still reluctant you see. We've got to have support to go ... that was the only thing that I have been drumming to our people for the last two years, we cannot change anything unless we're part of the process. The law allows you to contest elections as an Independent, you *don't* go in the Labour Party, there are other parties representing a very wide share of opinion in Wales. We must encourage our young people to start joining in.'

In fact Plaid have initiated a number of meetings with key individuals and racial equality organisations in Wales. A leading figure spoke of ' being reassured by ... Dafydd Wigley that they are anxious to ensure that this, er, these issues *are* addressed'. One director noted, 'we've had reasonable discussions with Plaid Cymru... and in all fairness I think that Plaid Cymru have taken up the challenge very seriously'. And in this respect the Party of Wales's work is ongoing according to one of the key informants best placed to give an overview of a fast-changing situation:

'immediately after the elections he wrote to say look, okay this is where we're at at the moment. I would like you to meet with Karl Davies [Plaid's Chief Executive] to see how we take things forward. So it was on that basis that we pick up the work with Plaid ... Plaid Cymru - that work has already begun, erm, a series of meetings have already been scheduled between ourselves and Plaid. I had a meeting with their Chief Exec. Karl Davies ... from that meeting we agreed a set of actions, and a subsequent meeting has taken place. Now what's going to happen is that there's going to be a planning group pulled together who'll then be able to thrash out the practicalities .... so it's not a question of saying it's a good idea - let's see what happens, - *it's already started to happen.*'

The political geography of Wales is against Plaid fielding Black candidates, for the majority of the ethnic communities lie in the urban areas where Plaid thus far has had little electoral success. The key informant continued:

'this is my, er, disappointment in Wales is that because Black and minority ethnic people are densely populated in the areas of settlement which runs from the south east - Newport to the south west - Swansea, that's it, that the greatest span of population, that reaches its maximum point in Cardiff, it's disappointing because there's not much scope out of that geographical area, and I really think that we have to be honest with ourselves - there isn't ... So basically, when you're talking about political inclusivity and equality of opportunity, I think that we have to be honest with ourselves and realise that yes there is the opportunity to participate, but within that opportunity to participate, in order to be effective there has to be a zoning of targets to areas.'

Plaid currently lacks the local branch infrastructure to support such a targeted approach in ethnic communities.

Interestingly, the widespread feelings of betrayal and disillusionment aimed at political parties in the ethnic communities have improved Plaid's standing amongst some of our respondents from black and ethnic minority organisations. The key informant explained why this might be the case:

'I think that people will tend to see them as a bit more credible - and what they've done to me, by their commitment, is actually they've been very positive ... with Plaid, see, their asset is that they've never engaged with Black and minority ethnic communities or individuals, so that we can take them on board and we can foster and develop good practices, whereas other political parties have had dealings with Black and minority ethnic communities and they have had their own ways with dealing and interacting with Black and minority ethnic communities, and to me, to a certain extent that is a liability, or a shortfall with them. For the way they've acted in the past hasn't been successful at all, but with Plaid, there's greater scope because they're new to the process, and hopefully as a result of that we can develop innovative and positive ways forward'.

Such views are not expressed amongst respondents in women organisations because in this area Plaid, in common with all the other political parties, has a well-known, and sometimes documented, history of neglect.

Generally, the view of women's organisations has been positive towards devolution and its potential to address women's issues. Such optimism centred on the opportunity for 'giving women a sense of empowerment and making them feel that they can be empowered because of the Assembly' and another respondent added 'I have a high expectation that it could drive the agenda in a very positive way ...'. The prevailing view was typified by one manager: 'my own attitude is one of high hopes, that we have a chance to make a difference to some of the things that need to be addressed in Wales, I think that so many groups have high hopes ....'. Indeed, there is a widespread feeling that, of the three 'minority' groups, women were least convinced that Plaid have fully addressed their marginalization. Once again, Plaid's commitment to the Welsh language emerges as a barrier. The prioritisation of the language and the struggle for



greater levels of self government was seen as limiting progress:

'I dunno ... they're diverted by the language issues aren't they? And the "power in Wales" sort of issues and so on, and the broader issue I suppose they can't, I dunno, it's er, ... I'm a little uneasy about that, I feel that, um, you know, it's difficult for them to try to maintain their profile of being a leading party in Wales and to try to increase their representation, but, er, these other issues I think for some of them are secondary'

The recent failure of the Party to select a particular women candidate for Westminster elections also worried another: '...that was a big disappointment.... I think they would have done themselves no harm whatsoever by er, you know, supporting her candidacy, because you know it's forward thinking, progressive, it's a new fresh image'. This respondent went on to describe how the lack of progress is believed to be a consequence of the traditionalist culture of the Plaid heartlands:

'... they're rather more, you know, they take a rather more stereotypical type view of um, life in Wales, society and the economy et cetera ... I mean I think with Plaid, um, you know you've got to look at the man at the top really. Dafydd Wigley is a traditionalist .... that's his background, his generation, partly the area he comes from, you know, it's um, it's a different ball game up here in north west Wales'

This failing was the cause of worries about the potential of Plaid to undo progress made towards greater equality that it is felt has come with devolution:

'I mean my - , I suppose, y'know my only concern really is that in the long term is that if this Party [Wales Labour Party] doesn't get in next time, and I think that it is by no means certain that they will, um, if Plaid [Cymru] get in I'm not sure that we are going to see, y'know, the same level of support for these sorts of issues'

These views may be seen within the context of a male-dominated party machine. As Davies concludes, 'men who belong to ethnic nationalist movements may see feminist demands as an undesirable complication in their movements for national autonomy' (C.A. Davies, 1999:107), but others see evidence of change.

One manager referred to the Party's expedient use of the 'list' seats: 'I think that was *extremely helpful* and I think that that definitely signals something'. Speaking from the perspective of women in business, another was encouraged, 'particularly with Plaid Cymru ... having more women actually being [Assembly] members now.... who are more likely to pursue women's issues'. Another manager in one of Wales's major employers spoke of her very positive reaction to 'Plaid Cymru talking around childcare arrangements and things like that, suddenly ... [these] become more important [in the political agenda]'. Referring to the expertise of a leading Plaid AM on equality issues she added 'I know some individuals who have been successful [in becoming AMs] extremely well, I know where their values lie, and I know that it's not just glibly said, it is something that they work hard to promote, and [they] do actively provide that role model'.

A policy officer of a women's organisation explained that

'we are starting to develop very good relationships, kind of mutual relations, very supportive of [name of a leading women's organisation] and that's, y'know, really good.... ..Plaid Cymru, I'd say Plaid Cymru we have far more support [from them] not being, kind of swayed in any way, but Plaid Cymru - Dafydd Wigley has

always supported us - I mean they were just brilliant about that and they did come back and say "this is really interesting, this is really good"....'

Another respondent from a woman's organisation said that Plaid AMs were her 'initial point of contact' with the Assembly. Elsewhere the Party's role in the Assembly was seen as a model by new women's groups, '...for example Plaid Cymru I thought were very heartening and if we could do something similar for women and you know have the odd chair of the odd committee that would be a very good start'. Others have faith in Plaid and other AMs based on close co-operation during both the NAAG and referendum collaborations:

'a lot of those women [AMs] are women that I have worked with in different capacities over many years, and I know that they are the type of people that *will* influence, *will* make change, *will* give us transparency. I feel confident that that's going to happen. I think, you know, that *it can't do anything but happen*, you know, because you can only look at what they are.'

Another added, 'I'm sure they're going to be very good champions for ... equality in general within the Assembly'.

### *Discussion*

Our findings revealed contrasts and contradictions in views amongst the three 'minority' groups the party must engage with if this part of Plaid's new inclusive agenda is to amount to anything. Respondents representing disabled people and those from an ethnic background now appear to acknowledge the serious attempt that the Party is making to develop links with these groups. Interviewees revealed varying levels of readiness to put aside its past failings and engage with the party. Paradoxically these two groups felt that it was on gender equality that Plaid had made greatest progress, yet the women's groups interviewed displayed the greatest level of scepticism over Plaid's attitude and commitment to policies of importance to women. It is clear from our early analysis of views both inside the party and amongst minority groups that, despite encouraging signs, Plaid Cymru has a long way to go in its attempts to fully reconcile the concept of inclusiveness with its nationalist reputation. Indeed it may be that some of the good will directed towards Plaid from the minorities only arises because they have had so little contact with the party in the past that there is no history of disappointment to sour the present atmosphere of expectation. Inside the party there are signs that the possibility of a contradiction between nationalism and inclusiveness is also exercising traditional Plaid supporters.

At least so far as many AMs, party strategists, and the party leadership are concerned, Plaid is now strongly committed to a concern for the rights of all the citizens of Wales underpinned by notions of equality (and also to a willingness to engage in co-operation with the other parties in establishing the practices and procedures of the new government body - see Chaney and Fevre, forthcoming, 2002). Examination of its membership, particularly its elected representatives, shows that variable progress has been made on the ground. Positive action in candidate selection for seats elected by proportional representation has resulted in greater numbers of women candidates. In the case of ethnic minorities and disabled people there is evidence of a concerted attempt to address the earlier failings of the party. Ironically, however, whilst women have made the most progress amongst elected representatives, many in the party feel

that much work is still to be done to overcome prejudice against women holding office in the party.

Plaid Cymru is engaged in a serious attempt to adapt to inclusive politics so far as its relations with the organisations representing women, black and ethnic minorities and disabled people are concerned. Indeed Plaid played a key role in putting the White Paper's original intentions on equal opportunities into practice. Although many of our respondents inside and outside the party recognised that these were early days in the transformation of the party's traditional attitudes and practices, there was general agreement that real progress had been made. But beneath the overlay of positive comment and encouragement it is easy to detect anxieties about the reaction of the traditional core support of Plaid Cymru to this mooted transformation. Some of our respondents appeared to suggest that the grass roots of the party had not yet become fully aware of it, while others were aware of the new criteria of inclusiveness and were dragging their heels, even engaging in a rear-guard action. As other of our respondents said, such conflicts were perhaps 'inevitable' but the worst may yet be to come.

It is fair to say that, thus far, resistance to change within Plaid Cymru has been motivated by a wish to conserve the party's traditional aims. There has not yet been a major set piece conflict between the modernisers and the traditionalists when the new desiderata of inclusiveness, or the needs and priorities of the new groups which Plaid aims to embrace, have come into open conflict with a traditional Plaid policy. A hint of what the future might hold can be gleaned from the considerable disquiet expressed by Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg about the non-use of Welsh in Assembly proceedings.<sup>25</sup> Indeed it was on the use of the language that Plaid's inclusive turn might have foundered in the early months of the new devolved institution.

That the Welsh language presented the greatest challenge to Plaid Cymru in any of its attempts to reform its policies and practices has long been evident and conflict surfaced in the cross-party consultations for setting up the new Assembly (NAAG). Against a background of general consensus that the new government would operate on a bilingual basis, Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg complained that the proposed arrangements did not give equal status to Welsh.<sup>26</sup> Plaid Cymru and Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg have worked and campaigned closely together over decades however Plaid's failure to respond to all of the Cymdeithas demands on this issue led commentators to conclude that, 'Plaid Cymru, for their part, have played down their traditional association with language activism'.<sup>27</sup> After its monitoring of the first seven months of the Assembly, the precise statistical breakdown provided by Cymdeithas revealed that leading Plaid figures were only using the language for between two-thirds and three-quarters of their contributions, thus questioning Plaid Assembly Members' commitment to the use of the language in the process of government. Indeed one Plaid AM has spoken of her disappointment that those AMs whose first language is Welsh are not using the language as much as they might in the Assembly.<sup>28</sup>

Again, just eight months into the life of the devolved government, a perceived failure of Plaid Cymru to adopt its traditional stance as defender of the language exposed further divisions both *within* the Party *and* with Cymdeithas.<sup>29</sup> The cause of this new controversy was Carmarthenshire Council's failure to stipulate that its new Director of Education should be a Welsh speaker. When the job was advertised there was no mention that the ability to speak Welsh would be an advantage (this is unusual for such

an appointment: Fevre, Borland and Denney, 1997). Carmarthenshire has more Welsh speakers than any other county in Wales, with 89,000 people (54.6 per cent of the population) able to speak the language. The council is led by a Plaid Cymru/Independent coalition, and the ruling group on the council had been criticised by the opposition Labour group over the content of the advertisement and the fact that the advertisement only appeared in papers published outside of Wales. The row threatened to break up the delicate coalition that ruled the authority<sup>30</sup> and revealed divisions between Plaid Cymru AMs and between the party and Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg over the use of language qualifications in important local authority appointments.<sup>31</sup>

The ideological stretch Plaid is attempting must often perplex its traditional allies and supporters. In the case of the Welsh language the situation is exacerbated by the fact that, along with the wider nationalist movement, Plaid has long argued that its policies on the language are underpinned by concerns for social justice and equal opportunities. Plaid, Cymdeithas and other nationalist organisations have argued that part of the reason for passing legislation, and introducing policies, to protect and enhance the status of Welsh was to diminish direct and indirect discrimination against Welsh speakers. Plaid may soon find that its new equal opportunities objectives, derived from taking on board the concerns of women, black and ethnic minorities and disabled people, cannot be made to sit comfortably with the older logic of equal treatment and equal opportunities for Welsh-speakers in Wales.

### **Conclusions**

Clearly Plaid Cymru made an impressive electoral breakthrough in 1999 and we would agree that this depended in part on Plaid successfully reaching out to voters beyond its core support. To make this a permanent achievement Plaid may have to detach itself from the narrow concerns of Welsh-speakers in north and west Wales which have for so long characterised Welsh nationalism, and perhaps even detach itself from nationalism altogether (this is certainly what the party leadership attempted to do in advance of the first Assembly elections when they denied Plaid had ever sought political independence from the UK<sup>32</sup>). Just how well supported the current transformation might be inside Plaid is sometimes difficult to tell. There have been some signs of fringe disaffection including attempts to found splinter organisations<sup>33</sup> but there has as yet been no open conflict between the party leadership and professionals who broadly support the shift to inclusiveness and the ordinary members who may not. On the other hand, the genuine commitment to inclusiveness within Plaid may be quite uneven, even amongst the elite. Several respondents from the minority organisations dealing with Plaid thought that the evidence of such a transformation was the work of a handful of individuals, and often just of two or three politicians at the very top of the party.

Although Plaid contributed to the process that put devolution back on the agenda after 1979 (Evans and Trystan, 1999:113), it is clear that the party profited from the electoral opportunities created by the new Assembly because the new Labour Government elected in 1997 decided to pursue its manifesto promise of devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The second half of this paper has also shown how Plaid has responded to another opportunity that came to Plaid by way of the

Labour Party, the opportunity to broaden the appeal of the party by engaging in inclusive politics. Thus far Plaid seems to have taken full advantage of the chance to become an inclusive party but, as they make further progress, the dangers of internal conflict and splits over inclusiveness will increase.

Devolution poses new problems for Plaid as well as constituting their greatest ever opportunity to break through to become an all-Wales party (and perhaps the party of government in Wales). It does this because if they are to grasp the opportunity Plaid must also seriously change itself, not just its rhetoric but also its character and its objectives. There is an added element in this game because devolution is not simply the medium in which Plaid swims, it also introduces a new dimension because devolution in Wales was imagined in a particular manner, a manner which, at least at first glance, would seem to create serious problems for a party with something of a reputation for closure and exclusion. The idea of inclusiveness was promoted for various reasons by the architects of devolution and indeed one of these reasons might well have been to challenge Plaid in this way. If so, the transformation of Plaid Cymru might be counted as one of the success stories of devolution (so successful that Plaid can seriously compete to be the governing party), but Plaid Cymru have reached a pivotal point in the party's history. Growing electoral support and the challenges that this brings see the Party pursuing programmes to make its membership more representative and its constitution more suited to the further challenges ahead. The key test for the Party in a complex and rapidly evolving system of governance is whether the implementation a new inclusive agenda can continue to underpin a dramatic rise in electoral support in a country where contested notions of national identity have undermined attempts at securing 'self- government' for centuries.

For seventy five years Plaid has simply had to represent the political interests of a relatively small portion of Welsh society, essentially a status group with strong links to one corner of Wales (Fevre, Borland and Denney, 1997). For one hundred and fifty years nationalism has found minimal support outside the north and west but this has now changed, and may change still more. Obviously the effects on Welsh society - and on relations with the rest of the UK - may be far-reaching but there is also plenty to ponder on in terms of the effect on Plaid and the broader social movement that produced it. The Welsh-speaking status group, with its own narrow interests, remains. There is bound to be a tension between these interests and the political needs of Plaid as power gets closer; and what of the broader movement? There is no obvious reason why Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg or the smaller organisations in the movement should need to dilute their message to appeal in the South and East. They do not depend on votes and, although they now have the Assembly to focus on, there is no obvious reason why devolution should change their style of single-issue lobbying, activism and direct action. If Plaid continues to seriously reinvent itself it may find that, like many a political force before it, it will become at least semi-detached from the social movement that formed it.

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<sup>1</sup> We will use this contraction of the party's name but readers should note that the common contraction in Welsh is *y Blaid*.

<sup>2</sup> The 1991 census records the following percentage of persons aged 3 years and over speaking Welsh in the Plaid's NW heartlands: Arfon 76.6%, Dwyfor 71.5%, Meirionydd 75.4%, Ynys Môn 67.7%. (OPCS, 1993 – '1991 County Report – Gwynedd – Part One'. Table M, p.26.).

<sup>3</sup> See the Centre for Research in to Elections and Social Trends (CREST) Welsh Election Study Data held at Oxford University, <http://www.crest.ox.ac.uk>

<sup>4</sup> Percentage of residents born in Wales: Cynon Valley 91%, Merthyr Tydfil 92%, Ogwr 84.8, Rhondda 93.8%, Rhymney Valley 90%, and Taff-Ely 87.7%. (OPCS, 1993 – '1991 County Report – Mid Glamorgan – Part One'. Table M, p.26.). By way of contrast the figures for NW Wales were: Dwyfor 71.5%, Meirionydd 64.3%, and Ynys Môn 67.7% (OPCS, 1993 – '1991 County Report – Gwynedd – Part One'. Table M, p.26.)

<sup>5</sup> Plaid Cymru (2000) *Saint David's Day Appeal Letter to Members*.

<sup>6</sup> In his commentary on the devolution referendum O'Leary (1998) pointed out that large *numbers* voted for devolution in the south and east even though the majority who voted were against devolution. In the first Assembly elections many of those who had opposed devolution in the south and east stayed at home while a proportion of those who had supported devolution turned out to help Plaid Cymru win some famous victories.

<sup>7</sup> For further details on inclusive governance and politics see Chaney and Fevre (forthcoming, 2001) which also discusses the relationship of this new political concept to existing ideas like the Third Way, Associative and Deliberative Democracy and Neo-Corporatism..

<sup>8</sup> We gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Board of Celtic Studies of the University of Wales.

<sup>9</sup> Who later gave up his seat (to move to the House of Lords) and subsequently took over the Welsh Language Board which was established by the Welsh Language Act. He was



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subsequently installed as the Presiding Officer in the new Assembly (the rough equivalent of the Speaker of the House of Commons).

<sup>10</sup> Herself the former deputy director of the Equal Opportunities Commission, Wales. Together with the party leader, Dafydd Wigley, Helen Mary Jones has been a key figure in the Plaid response to inclusiveness.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Mary Jones, Plaid Cymru Annual Conference, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Dafydd Wigley, *'Election Call'*, BBC Wales, 30.04.1999

<sup>13</sup> Ieuan Wyn Jones, *'Vote '99 – The Debate'*, BBC Wales, 20.04.1999.

<sup>14</sup> Dafydd Iwan, *Etholiad '99*, Sianel Pedwar Cymru [S4C], 7.05.99

<sup>15</sup> 0.16 per cent Chinese Welsh; Indian and Pakistani Welsh 0.4 per cent (Betts, 1994:25), the Irish comprise 0.73 per cent of the south Wales valleys (Rees, 1999:23).

<sup>16</sup> Viz. falling within the definition of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995. 'Disability' is defined 'a person has a disability for the purposes of this Act if he (sic) has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his (sic) ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. See also the Disability Discrimination (Meaning of Disability) Regulations 1996 (SI No 1455).

<sup>17</sup> Section 6.7.

<sup>18</sup> See SCOVO (1999) 'The Assembly, The Strategy, The Future', *Llais*, 52, 3-8.

<sup>19</sup> Dafydd Wigley, *Vote '99*, BBC Wales, 5.05.1999.

<sup>20</sup> Ieuan Wyn Jones, *'Vote '99 - The Debate'*, BBC Wales, 20.04.99

<sup>21</sup> See for example, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif: Welsh Elections 1885- 1997*, Beti Jones, Y Lolfa,

<sup>22</sup> See for example, BBC Online, Tuesday, 7 December, 1999, 14:23 GMT *'Plaid picks Wigley's successor'*. Also; Speed, N., 'Westminster beckons New Women', *Western Mail*, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1999, p.9.

<sup>23</sup> For example the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Dafydd Elis Thomas, "a dw'n gobeithio fyddwn ni'n gweld y pwynt yn glyn a rhwyng Cymraeg a Saesneg fel cwestiwn cyfle cyfartal" ["and I'm hopeful that we will see the situation with regard to speaking English and Welsh like an equal opportunities issue"] - *Etholiad '99*, S4C, 19.04.99.

<sup>25</sup> see for eg. Betts, C. 'English speech translation into Welsh is a must, says expert', *Western Mail*, 10.10.1998; see also Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (1998) *Agenda ar gyfer Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru/ Agenda for the National Assembly*, Cardiff, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.; see also; 'Dirywiad yn y defnydd o'r Gymraeg yn y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol/ Decline in the use of Welsh at the National Assembly', Press release 25-01-2000, <http://www.cymdeithas.com/cartref.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (1999) *'Yn Arwain o'r Gadair/ Leading from the Chair'*, Cardiff, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.

<sup>27</sup> *'Welsh Language Demands Grow'*, BBC ONLINE Wednesday, April 21, 1999 published at 12:49 GMT 13:49 UK. See also, Clark, R., 'Elis-Thomas slaps down Welsh speaker for outburst', *Western Mail* 07.10.98., : '... Lord Elis-Thomas who has raised hackles in the past by declaring the language battle over ... [declared] "I don't want any arguments about the language re-surfacing in the National Assembly. I hope we will never see a situation where the language is a political matter". Dafydd Morgan Lewis of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg responded, "Its complete nonsense, ... he sees his job as pulling Welsh out of politics. I would say that the language is the most important political subject in Wales".

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<sup>28</sup> Elin Jones AM, Plaid Cymru Ceredigion, *Cwmni Hon*, Siannel Pedwar Cymru, S4C, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2000.

<sup>29</sup> *Wythnos Gwilym Owen*, BBC Radio Cymru, 06.02.2000.

<sup>30</sup> BBC ONLINE: Tuesday, 23 November, 1999, 16:51 GMT: *Language Row Over Education Chief*.

<sup>31</sup> Extracts from Ffred Francis Llefarydd Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg ar y rhaglen 'Wythnos Gwilym Owen' Radio Cymru (*Ffred Francis spokesman of the Welsh Language Society on the programme 'Gwilym Owen's Week' on Radio Cymru - 'Radio Wales' 07.02.2000*) give a flavour of these divisions:

FfF: "... mae e'n cael ei dweud, y dimensiwn newydd y tro yma yw siom bod y cenedlaetholwyr heb weld angenion yr iaith Gymraeg..." (*It has been said that the new dimension this time is disappointment that the nationalists have not seen the needs of the Welsh language...*)

"Yn y polisiau yn hytrach nag y personaethau dylai fod y diddordeb - yr unig berniadaeth 'd'yn ni'n rhoi ar Plaid Cymru yn ei polisi yr iaith yw eu fallai bod nhw wedi bod rhy yn cwmws strategiaeth y Bwrdd yr Iaith sy'n edrych yn unig ar y penodiadau sy'n dod i gystylltiad ar cyhoedd, a ddim yn edrych ar y sefydliadau beth yw yr iaith fewnol.[sef yr iaith weinyddyddol]..." (*The interest should have been in the policies rather than the personalities - the only criticism that we make of Plaid Cymru is with regard to their language policy where perhaps they have followed the line of the Welsh Language Board too slavishly - this has focused solely on the appointments that have come to public attention and not on the internal institutional use of the language [i.e. as an administrative language in the council].*)

"Dw'r arweiniad wedi dod yn y maes yma [gan Plaid Cymru], um, fel rhydym ni disgwyl ar hyn o bryd. Nag ydy" (*In this matter we have not had the leadership that we would expect of Plaid Cymru. No.*)

Gwilym Owen: "... un o aelodau y Cynulliad o Plaid Cymru (sic) ' [wedi] galwch chi yn 'naif' ac yn ddi-profiad ac yn pobl braidd yn dwp am alw am ymddiswyddiad y prifweithredwr Sir Gaerfyrddin yn ddiweddar 'ma' [... recently one of the Plaid Cymru Assembly Members has called you [Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg] naive, inexperienced, and rather foolish to call for the resignation of the Chief Executive of Carmarthenshire County Council].

Fred Francis: "wel, byddwn ni'n dweud bod yn Aelod dan sylw Helen Mary yn angywir yn ei dadansoddiad ei aseisiad o'r sefyllfa 'na' [Well we would say that the Assembly Member in question, Helen Mary [Jones] is incorrect in her analysis and assessment of this situation]

FfF: "synnu mae'n siwr mae pobol [yn teimlo] oherwydd i bod nhw yn disgwyl llawr gwell gan Plaid Cymru gan bod ei record nhw ... yn well 'na plaidiau eraill' [I'm sure that people feel surprised because they expect a lot better from Plaid Cymru given their record in these [language] matters... which is better than the other parties].

<sup>32</sup> Dafydd Wigley, 'Waterfront', Harlech Television Wales, 2.05.99. See also, Wigley, D. 'Talk of Independence is Misleading', *The Western Mail*, 22.04.1999, p.9.

<sup>33</sup> BBC 'Mae plaid wleidyddol newydd - Cymru Unedig - wedi cael ei lansio mewn tafarn yng Nghaernarfon' (New political party launched in Caernarfon pub') BBC Arlein / BBC Online: NEWYDDION | 11/01/00 19:22:11 GMT. BBC BBC News Online | NEWYDDION | Sefydlu

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plaid newydd arall Ffurfiwyd Cymru Annibynnol gan tua 30 o gefnogwyr yn Senedd-dy Glyndwr ym Machynlleth ddydd Sadwrn. 30/01/00 18:34:51 GMT. See also - Speed, N., 'Plaid Dismisses Rival Nationalists', *Western Mail*, 07.01.2000