

## **CHARLES BUTT STANTON, 1873–1946**

Charles Butt Stanton was born at Aberaman in the Cynon Valley on 7 April 1873, the son of Thomas and Harriet Stanton. After his education at Aberaman British School, he obtained his first job as a page boy in a Bridgend household, then later returned home to work in a local colliery. An incident during the Hauliers' Strike of 1893<sup>1</sup> brought him to public notice when it was alleged that he fired a gun during a clash between miners and the police. Arrested and tried, he was found guilty of possessing an unlicensed gun and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Prison did not cool his spirit and he played an active part in the South Wales miners' strike of 1898. This strike failed, but one of its results was the founding in the same year of the South Wales Miners' Federation (S.W.M.F.), in which the seven district unions came together (by 1914 the S.W.M.F. had a membership of 200,000). In the following year, 1899, it affiliated with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, which had been founded at Newport in 1888. As its name suggests, it was a federation of district unions. In 1893, only 45,000 of the 120,000 miners belonged to affiliated unions: Northumberland Miners did not join until 1907, with Durham following in 1908, by which time there was a total membership of 600,000.

Soon after the 1898 strike, Stanton went to London and found work as a docker, taking an active role in the London dock strike in the same year. He did not stay long in London but returned to Aberdare and was elected Miners' Agent for Aberdare by a large majority in 1899, on the death of agent David Morgan (Dai o'r Nant). In this role he became involved in activities linked with the Cambrian Combine Strike of 1910, which led to the Tonypanydy Riots<sup>2</sup> and the sending of policemen (including mounted detachments) from London and the other South Wales forces, together with soldiers of the Devonshire Regiment, the West Riding Regiment and the Munster Rifles, and of the 8th Hussars. At the same time there were strikes and riots in Stanton's domain, the neighbouring Cynon Valley:

The simultaneous and almost equally intense strike and riots in the Aberdare Valley has as their immediate cause the ending of the men's customary privilege of having blocks of wood for firewood from the colliery's timber-yard. The issue of control, albeit on a small scale and about 'work' matters was at

stake; certainly the matter of control, in the wider social sense, was in the minds of the most ardent opponents and proponents of the men.<sup>3</sup>

Stanton 'threatened the owners with "fighting brigades" of miners in retaliation for the violence of the coal owners and the police.'<sup>4</sup> The new generation of more militant miners' leaders were already angry at the failure of their elders to take a more aggressive attitude to the troubles, and the *Merthyr Express* of 17 October 1909 contained a report of a speech by Stanton in which he called on these older leaders like William Brace, the first Vice-President of the S.W.M.F.,<sup>5</sup> Thomas Richards, the first Secretary,<sup>6</sup> and especially William Abraham (Mabon), the first President<sup>7</sup> to 'move on or move out'. All three men were elected to parliament as Lib-Lab MPs., who took the Liberal Whip at first, until this was banned by the Labour Party. The first two were elected with Liberal support, whilst Mabon fought his first election in 1885 as a Working-Man's candidate against the official Liberal candidate, Frederick Lewis Davis, the Ferndale coal owner, but thereafter received Liberal backing.

During this first decade of the twentieth century, Stanton had not confined his activities to the South Wales Miners' Federation. A self-declared 'revolutionary socialist believing in the class war', he became the first Secretary of the Aberdare Socialist Society in 1890 and was an active member of the I.L.P.,<sup>8</sup> later serving as South Wales President. He also served on Aberdare Urban District Council, 1903–1908. However, not everything went Stanton's way. In the general election of December 1910 he was Labour candidate for East Glamorgan but failed to secure the endorsement of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (M.F.G.B.), which was given to the successful Liberal candidate, Allen Clement Edwards, who had made several stands in favour of trade unions.

In 1911 Stanton had been elected to the executive of the M.F.G.B., but he lost his seat in the following year when the old leader, William Brace, came an easy top, with Vernon Hartshorn<sup>9</sup> of Maesteg and George Barker<sup>10</sup> of Abertillery taking the other places. Stanton was out! His speeches in 1915 suggest clearly that these two rejections affected the events which followed. On 13 April 1912, the journal *Justice* published an interview which Stanton had given to the French newspaper *L'Humanité*, where he made known his opposition to the *Miners' Next Step* and to syndicalism in general. He expressed his regret that Tom Mann was in support of

these ideas. This marks a break with his past: he had for a time been adviser to the National Democratic League, founded in 1900, of which Tom Mann was full-time organiser.

Two years later came the Great War: Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 25 July 1914; on 1 August Germany declared war on Russia and on France on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, with Britain declaring war on Germany on the 4<sup>th</sup>. The war, which was to convulse Europe and most of the rest of the world, brought about dramatic changes in attitudes as most people on both sides took up strong jingoistic positions. These included the near-revolutionary Charlie Stanton, who at once abandoned his red flag for the red-white-and blue of the Union Jack.

On 2 August, two days before the war began, Keir Hardie,<sup>11</sup> the Labour M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil, attended a peace rally in London, where there were clear signs of patriotic enthusiasm at the prospect of conflict. Two days after the outbreak of hostilities he came to Aberdare, then part of his constituency and a centre of socialist activity, to address another peace rally, confident of a supportive audience this time, in view of the apparent response of local miners to the conflict. A sea-change in opinion had been brought about in the days between those two meetings by the German invasion of Belgium, releasing a wave of extreme patriotism even in the mining valleys. The first hint of trouble came when Stanton, the advertised chairman of the meeting, announced that he wanted nothing to do with it. His reasons received lengthy publicity in both the *Western Mail* and the *Aberdare Leader* the next day. The *Merthyr Express* of 7 August quoted him thus:

I kept away from the meeting because I was opposed to holding anything of the kind at such an inopportune time. Whilst I am as much in favour as anyone of using our power as workmen by means of an international understanding to prevent war and make it impossible, yet in the circumstances as they are, I could not do it. I sent to tell Mr. Hardie the reason why I could not preside at the meeting. I pointed out that such a course was inadvisable, and that at such a moment as this, I felt that, although a Socialist, I was a Britisher, and that it would only lead to the most harmful results to our movement to take part in what appears to be an anti-British and unpatriotic climb-down to the German Emperor. I have a brother and friend right in the front line of our first defence,

and I would be no party in allowing them to be kicked about like tinpots and made targets by a people who have toasted and drunk to a day of open warfare with England. That day has now come and I hope Germany will have cause to remember that, however much we may quarrel in times of peace, there comes a time when a man realizes that he must play a man's part for his country, and this I will most certainly do at any cost.

Do you think that I kept away from the meeting last night for fear of being booed? I am not afraid of being booed. I have stood that on behalf of my opinions on numberless occasions, and will have to face the ordeal again very likely. Just now, however, I want to stand up for all who will help to maintain the international respect paid to our reputation as Britishers. In times of distress and trouble I stand in with my country. We are in the throes of a gigantic war, and therefore our solemn duty is to be patriotic and strain every nerve to emerge out of it with credit to the history of our past as Britishers.”

The meeting went ahead without Stanton but as soon as Hardie began to speak he had to face a barrage of patriotic songs and hostile protests. Hardie attempted to express his horror that Britain was defending czarist rule in Russia and to attack the Conservative press for poisonous pro-war propaganda, but after twenty minutes he had to give up, and left the hall for the railway station with a police escort. He spoke to a Merthyr friend of his new understanding of the sufferings of Christ in Gethsemane. Just over a year later, on 2 September 1915, Hardie died, utterly exhausted and an old man at 59, probably shattered by the rejection of his lifelong stand for peace.

The Parliamentary Borough of Merthyr Tydfil, created in 1885 and also known as Merthyr Boroughs, included Aberdare, and was a two-member constituency. The other member since 1910 was the Liberal, Edgar Rees Jones<sup>12</sup>. A by-election was called for the vacant Merthyr Boroughs seat on 25 November 1915. It was believed at the time that the electorates in Merthyr Tydfil and the Aberdare valley were of roughly equal size. The official Labour choice to succeed Keir Hardie was James Winstone, J.P., (1863–1921), who started work at a brickworks at the age of eight. Two years later he moved to the Risca United Colliery but was sacked for union activities. After serving as a checkweighman he became miners' agent for The Eastern Valley in 1901, was elected Vice-President of the South Wales Miners'

Federation in 1912, and President in 1920. He had been Chairman of the Urban District Councils of both Risca and Abersychan and was elected to Monmouthshire County Council in 1906 (Alderman 1919, Chairman 1920). He died at a London Hospital after being taken ill at strike negotiations, and according to the *Times* 25,000 people attended his funeral. Four by-elections had already been held in Wales since the outbreak of war and, in each case, the candidate of the former member's party had been returned unopposed in accordance with the electoral truce agreed at the outbreak of hostilities: it could be assumed therefore that the Labour Party candidate to succeed Keir Hardie would be returned unopposed. On 17 November, the *Western Mail* published an official statement by Arthur Henderson, M.P.,<sup>13</sup> secretary of the Labour Party, which stated that:

The candidature of Mr. Winstone has been promoted in accordance with the usual conditions imposed by the constitution of the Labour Party, and has received the sanction of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the National Executive of the Labour Party. His candidature was approved by both the South Wales Miners' Federation and the local conference, representative practically of every organisation in the constituency. Accordingly, other parties have intimated their intention of observing the obligations of the party truce.

Charlie Stanton had other ideas, announcing that he would stand as an Independent Labour candidate on a patriotic, win-the-war platform, and it was clear that he was determined to win. In an early interview, he commented:

My many years' work in the Labour movement has convinced me that there is no graver internal political danger to this country than the ubiquitous intrigues of the Independent Labour Party. People outside the Labour movement do not recognise how this particularly small section – many of them no Labour men at all in the true sense of this term – have got the machinery of political Labour into their hands and are deliberately intriguing and agitating inside the Unions and Trade Councils to obstruct the work of recruiting and of national defence. However, I shall go to the poll and, in order that there shall be no mistake about this, and that the returning officer's fees may be ready on time, I am today taking out a bill of sale on my household furniture.

It is impossible to tell how far this was a genuine sacrificial act for a great cause on the part of the 'British candidate', but it seems more than likely that adequate financial backing was received. Stanton continued:

However, standing on a National platform, and respecting, as I am, the political truce, I am considering not only the opinion of Labour men but of all sections of the community. And hence I do not hesitate to say that my candidature is national in the truest sense of the term. Surely, it is obvious that the success of Mr. Winstone, which is unthinkable, would be a message of discouragement to our soldiers in the field, and would instil dismay into the minds of our French friends, who now perfectly understand, thanks to the patriotic missions of Mr. John Hodge, M.P.,<sup>14</sup> and Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P.,<sup>15</sup> to France, how sinister is the influence of the Independent Labour Party in this country.<sup>16</sup>

Though officially the Liberal and Conservative parties were not involved in the election, they played an active part in the Stanton campaign on the ground. In a letter to Victor Fisher,<sup>17</sup> Stanton's election agent, which appeared in the *Western Mail* on 23 November, T. Artemus Jones,<sup>18</sup> who had been adopted as prospective Liberal candidate before the outbreak of war, wrote:

The rumour you refer to, namely, that the 'official' candidate must receive the support of all the great parties has no foundation in fact, and you are at perfect liberty to use my name in contradicting it ... Such a contest as is being waged in Merthyr is outside the terms of the party truce because it is essentially a domestic difference among the members of one party and neither of the other parties in the State has any sort of right to interfere either with the one section or the other.

This opening paragraph presents the writer as a neutral legal mind setting out a purely objective case, but Artemus Jones continues:

There is only one issue, one duty before the people. So long as the war lasts and the party truce continues, there are neither Tories nor Radicals nor Socialists in the party sense. That issue is the war and that duty is the vigorous prosecution of the war. I do not envy the man who can gaze at the brutal murder of Serbs through the spectacles of the party politician. As I have

said before, neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives are concerned in their political organisations with the dispute between Mr. Stanton and the Independent Labour Party. In their capacity as citizens, however, they have the right to form their own judgement at this supreme hour in the fortunes of the country with regard to the support they must give the government.

The Merthyr Boroughs situation was not as simple as that. From the outset of the campaign, Winstone had declared his support for the war effort. He had a son serving in France and he himself was active in recruiting campaigns. The *Western Mail* of 20 November reported that: 'Mr. Winstone has stated that he is at one with the present Coalition Government in its policy of bringing the war to a speedy and successful termination.' On the matter of conscription, he declared: 'I am opposed to conscription of any kind and will do my utmost to prevent it coming into force, because I think that it would create such dissensions as might prove disastrous to winning the war.'<sup>19</sup>

Such details did not bother Charlie Stanton, who now applied the tactics he had used as a socialist revolutionary miners' agent in Aberdare in his campaign as the Pro-War Labour candidate. His nationalist speeches contained the same militant and uncompromising tone as he had previously employed to advance the class struggle. Members of the local Conservative and Liberal Parties were active in his support and he received the endorsement of the Socialist National Defence Committee. At a meeting at Aberdare's Market Hall on 22 November, his agent, Victor Fisher, told the audience of almost three thousand that:

the contest was not a party one. It was not even a contest between Mr. Stanton and Mr. Winstone, but a contest between everything they understood as British and the Independent Labour Party. (Applause). Robbed of all verbiage and pretence, Mr. Winstone was the worthy standard-bearer of the particular principles of which Mr. Ramsay Macdonald was the incarnation. (Loud applause).

The speech closed:

with a stirring appeal to the electors of Merthyr Boroughs should see to it that the result of the election would be a message of encouragement to the boys in

the trenches and not one of joy to Germany, of which Mr. Ramsay Macdonald<sup>20</sup> was such a professed friend.

Stanton himself was received with:

rounds of applause and cries of "Good Old Charlie" '. He said he had nothing to cry over, although his one-time friends would fain leave him, as the Germans had left some people with nothing but their eyes to weep with. He was not weeping yet. (Laughter). He had fought for the miners consistently for sixteen years, and had never shirked his duties. His declaration that he was a Britisher had brought upon him the condemnation of some people but he had always contended that the country that was good enough to live in was good enough to fight for. (Loud applause)... As a National candidate, he was determined to co-operate with the Government in the prosecution of the war to a successful conclusion.<sup>21</sup>

During the campaign the Patriotic candidate called on the electors of Merthyr Boroughs to confront 'the Hun' and defeat the 'brutish butchers of Berlin'. He described Winstone as 'unpatriotic and seditious'.

As has been noted, Winstone himself was no pacifist but a keen supporter of the war effort. One of his sons was serving in France and another had just volunteered. He himself addressed recruiting meetings. That was soon forgotten and what was remembered was his being a member of the I.L.P. To make things worse Ramsay Macdonald and Fred Jowett,<sup>22</sup> both anti-war, appeared on his election platforms. The fact that other pro-war Labour figures appeared on his platforms meant little. At his first election meeting, held at Cwmbach, Aberdare, Winstone had to respond to his opponent's accusation that he was 'a friend of the Germans'. Throughout the campaign he had to be constantly on the defensive:

As for the war, I have done and will do what I can to get my country safely through the present crisis but, surely, it is not expected of me that I should give a pledge blindly to support the Government in everything it may propose. I will at all times stand by the national honour. I will never shirk my duty to my country whatever it may be. As an old Volunteer I am not even afraid to face the Germans if necessary. I detest war, but from the beginning of the war I have held that we must get through it successfully and as quickly as possible.



I detest the doctrine of force but I will fight myself rather than let my country go under. I am profoundly convinced that every male and female should give their best service to the Empire ... It has been said that I have done something against recruiting. I give that the most emphatic denial. I challenge proof to the contrary. What greater loyalty can a man show than to give his own sons for the fighting line? If there is any meaning in a coalition government it is to secure unity for one set purpose. The purpose of the present Coalition Government is to bring the war, by a voluntary system of military service, to a speedy and successful termination. In this I am at one with them. I am not in favour of a patched-up peace. This must be the last war. I will not be a party under any circumstance to making peace whilst a German foot remains on French or Belgian soil. Although I do not favour the conquest of territory, I agreed that the Germans should be made to pay to the utmost farthing for their inhuman and diabolical conduct of the war.

On his platform at Abercynon he was supported by the Revd. George Neighbour,<sup>23</sup> J. J. Jones of Cwmgors and James Holmes.<sup>24</sup> The Revd. George Neighbour also spoke at Mountain Ash on the same evening, where the main speaker was William Brace,<sup>25</sup> Labour M.P. for South Glamorgan, 1906–18, a Lib-Lab by conviction, and Under Secretary for Home Affairs at this time; clearly an important asset to the Winstone campaign.

A hint of what lay behind Stanton's decision to make his crusader stand comes from a speech on 23 November at Aberdare. He launched a bitter attack on the ILP:

Being in fighting form, Mr. Stanton did rub it in to the I.L.P. members who, he said, had so engineered the recent ballot as to make it an absolute swindle. It was for that swindle and cheat that he was determined to have fairplay by means of an electoral ballot, and he revelled in the fact that the campaign enabled him to assail those who had not only made his life unbearable, but who had also exerted themselves to the utmost to put on the road. "They are not fit to be spared," he repeated, in his final reference to the I.L.P. and Mr. James Winstone.<sup>26</sup>

He continued his attack at an open-air meeting outside Merthyr Town Hall on the following evening, declaring that Winstone had no right to be in the constituency at all as his name had been presented to the M.F.G.B. as the prospective candidate for

North Monmouthshire. He added significantly, 'I might have been President of the Federation now and not Mr. Winstone, if I had not spoken out, but I did speak out, with the result that I was howled down.' He told the crowd that electing his opponent would send a disheartening message to the boys in France and one of encouragement to the Germans. The choice was simply between a pro-German and a true Britisher.

Patriotism carried the day, giving Stanton a majority of over four thousand in a low poll. In some respects this seems a strange result in view of the prevailing mood of social unrest and a growing opposition to the war itself, which saw an increase in I.L.P. membership. In analysing the result the *Western Mail* of 27 November stated that:

a higher percentage of pollable voters than had been anticipated took part in the ballot. It is a fair assumption that the I.L.P. voted almost to a man. It is also taken for granted that the Baptists in the constituency were solidly for Mr. Winstone, who is a faithful member of their denomination. On these premises, the leaders of the political parties base two or three definite conclusions. One is that the Independent Labour Party in the constituency is much over-rated ... The working men of Merthyr Boroughs are not, in fact, as Socialistic in their views as the associations of the late Mr. Keir Hardie with the constituency may have led many to believe.

The newspaper went on to suggest that:

Another conclusion is that the members of the Miners' Federation must either have divided their votes fairly evenly between Mr. Stanton and Mr. Winstone or absented themselves in goodly numbers rather than go contrary to their own final domestic ballot. It is only on these grounds that the smallness of Mr. Winstone's poll can be explained.

It went on to draw attention to the absence of the leaders of the S.W.M.F. from the campaign, that is apart from William Brace. The other principal leaders, Thomas Richards, M.P.,<sup>27</sup> Alfred Onions,<sup>28</sup> Vernon Hartshorn,<sup>29</sup> George Barker<sup>30</sup> and Frank Hodges<sup>31</sup> were on a deputation visiting France, but no message of support from them was received by the official miners' and Labour candidate. The only S.W.M.F. officials who appeared were John Williams, the agent for Merthyr, and Mark

Harcombe.<sup>32</sup> The only other mineworker speakers on the Winstone platform came from coalfields in Scotland and Durham.

In his victory speech, Stanton continued his personal attacks on his opponent after stressing his patriotic Britisher stance. He declared his support for every step taken by the Asquith Coalition government to bring about a British victory. Winstone opposed the use of conscription whilst his party leader, Ramsay Macdonald, avoided any reference to the subject. He pointed out that at least two official Labour speakers on Winstone's platform distinguished between the mainline Labour view of conscription and that of the I.L.P., stating that the former would back conscription if the measure were approved by an overwhelming majority.

Winstone was unable to reply – the vigorous campaigning of the past week or so had robbed him of his voice. His agent, Tom Mardy-Jones,<sup>33</sup> stood alongside him and spoke on his behalf, as reported by the ever-present *Western Mail*:

Mr. Winstone has lost his voice during the last two or three hours entirely, and he has asked me as his agent to thank all his supporters for the splendid way in which they have helped him. I want to say here this morning, on behalf of Mr. James Winstone, that he is the victim of vile slander. (Cries of 'Shame,' 'Withdraw,' and 'Chuck him out,' and cheers from the I.L.P.-ites). Stanton owes his victory to a campaign of intrigue and falsehood. (Cries of 'Shame,' and 'Act the man, Mardy.') Mr. Winstone went through this election with clean hands, and when the war is over, Winstone will yet come into his own, and Merthyr Boroughs will be won back for Labour as it has been lost today. The spirit of Henry Richard and Keir Hardie – (cheers and boos) – lives in Merthyr Boroughs today, and on behalf of Mr. Winstone, I thank you.

When he had recovered some voice, Winstone said to a *Western Mail* reporter that:

Through a series of cross-currents I have been repulsed, but I bear myself like a man. I have fought a clean fight, and I wish I could say the same of my opponent ... I sincerely hope that the 6,000 votes recorded for me are not pro-German. I sometimes think that men who give real services are not appreciated. I go back to my own people who will be glad to receive me. One thing I would like to make clear. I have not, as stated by my opponent, run

under the auspices of the Independent Labour party, nor would I ever be a party to using money for any such purposes...

Stanton commented later that: 'At least it is a message of good cheer to the boys in the trenches and certainly a set-back to the pro-German faction.' At Aberdare that evening he was greeted by the town band playing *See the Conquering Hero Comes*. He told the enthusiastic crowd that:

He was proud of being a native of the Boroughs who had not been disqualified from being a prophet in his own country. (Cheers) As a Britisher it had been impossible for him to hang on to his job and his opponents discovered that they had thrown him into another job. (Laughter and applause) ... He trusted to give an account of himself to their credit as electors and to his opponents' shame.

The same issue of the *Western Mail* carried a brief but revealing article on the new M.P.:

Born at Aberaman 42 years ago, Mr. C. B. Stanton has had an eventful career. He worked at the Aberaman Pit before he was appointed miners' agent about sixteen years ago in succession to the late Mr. David Morgan. He was in London [working as a docker] when the miners of the Aberdare District invited him to become their leader, and he soon became known as a member of the 'extreme' section of miners' agents in South Wales. At that time he was the idol of the Socialists, but experience modified his views, and his whilom friends of the I.L.P. began to turn their backs upon him. The final rupture occurred some weeks ago.

Stanton's maiden speech in the House of Commons continued his bellicose arguments for all-out war as well his attacks on Winstone and his supporters: 'If Merthyr Tydfil, the stronghold of the Independent Labour party, utters its mandate in such clarion terms, be sure the whole country, saving a handful of cranks or notoriety-hunters is united.' It is thought that Stanton's election served as an encouragement to the government to introduce its conscription bill a few weeks later, on 6 January 1916.

With the encouragement of conservative figures like the imperialist Viscount Milner,<sup>34</sup> Stanton and Ben Tillett<sup>35</sup> among others founded the British Workers' National League in March 1916 (with Stanton as a vice-president), as successor to the Socialist National Defence League, which broke away from the British Socialist Party in April 1915. In 1917 the word 'National' was dropped. The League played a major part in breaking up the meetings of people campaigning for peace whilst the Anti-Socialist Union had been busy organising patriotic rallies throughout south Wales for more than six months. Stanton himself played the 'patriot' at the Cory Hall, Cardiff, on 11 November 1916, after the Home Secretary refused a request to ban such meetings because an underground movement would be more dangerous. A large audience came to the meeting and the chair was taken by none other than James Winstone, Stanton's opponent in the by-election, with Ramsay Macdonald and J. H. Thomas<sup>36</sup> among the speakers. H. Y. Peters, of the Anti-Socialist Union,<sup>37</sup> who entered the hall using a press card, passed information to his colleague Tom Bubb outside, where a large and noisy crowd of seamen and others led by the Ferndale Brass Band had gathered. Bubb told the crowd that the peace agitators within were insulting the memory of his hero son, who gave his life at Mons. At this the crowd forced the doors of the hall and burst in, led by a man carrying a Union Jack. Fights broke out and the meeting had to be abandoned. Stanton denied many charges that it was he who carried the flag but he was certainly the leader of the patriotic mob, whilst another eyewitness declared that he carried and used a large hooked walking-stick.

When the National Council for Civil Liberties decided to reconvene the peace meeting at Merthyr Tydfil on 9 December 1916, many local people, including the town's two M.P.s, Stanton, and the Coalition-Liberal Edgar Rees Jones (who tried to get Keir Hardie's peace writings banned in 1915), asked the Home Secretary to ban it. The request was refused, but a ban was placed on the running of a special 'Union Jack' train from Cardiff. Stanton was asked to use his influence to deprive the meeting of publicity by ignoring it. Despite this, a mass meeting was held two days before the peace meeting's date, where a resolution was carried, giving unanimous support to the waging of war to victory, and this was followed by the enthusiastic singing of 'God save the King'. The peace meeting took place at the Merthyr rink

without disturbance, attended by 578 delegates, whose admission tickets were scrutinised by a host of stewards. This meeting closed with the singing of the 'Red Flag'. For the rest of the war Stanton continued to promote the patriotic cause and his personal popularity grew.

Major electoral changes were in place in time for the 'Khaki Election'<sup>38</sup> of November 1918. Universal male suffrage was introduced, with votes for women over 30 with the appropriate property status. The two-member seat of Merthyr Tydfil gave place to a parliamentary borough with two seats, Merthyr and Aberdare. At Merthyr Sir Edgar Rees Jones, standing as a Coalition Liberal, defeated James Winstone, standing again as Labour candidate, by 1,445 votes (5.4%).

At Aberdare Stanton received the Coalition's coupon, when he stood for the National Democratic and Labour Party. The N.D.P. was the British Workers' League under a new name, fighting 28 seats, of which it won nine, in the 1918 election. It claimed to be a patriotic working-class party supporting the Coalition government which had won the war. In December 1921 it returned to being the British Workers' League and abandoned electoral activity. Then in 1925 it became the Empire Citizens' League, but disappeared from the scene within a few years. The Coalition candidate had one opponent, the Revd. Thomas Evan Nicholas,<sup>39</sup> who stood as a Labour and Pacifist candidate. This election revealed that Parliament had not mellowed Stanton. His campaign opened at a packed Workmen's Institute, Mountain Ash, where he told his audience that the peace terms to be agreed should at all points reflect the great sacrifices made in order to achieve victory. He denounced his opponent as one who did nothing to defeat the enemy but now wished to speak about the peace. He described the opponents of the Coalition as having a Soviet-style programme, aiming at destruction and yet claiming to be the friends of the workers. The election was concerned with two things: (1) gaining satisfactory terms for the Allies in the peace settlement and (2) whether the country was to drift into Bolshevism. He attacked T. E. Nicholas, to whom he referred as 'the I.L.Peer', for suggesting that the workers of Germany should not be burdened with the cost of reparations. Had not those workers

been as jubilant in the hour of victory as the ex-Kaiser and his Junkers? Every bit of it. It was imperative to be just before one could afford to be generous;

and no other conception should be taken of the German will for leniency. If a Coalition Government were necessary to bring us to the point of victory, surely it is quite as necessary to see that we reap the fruits of our victory.

This was greeted with loud applause.

Clearly he was embittered by the death in France in 1917 of his son Clifford, who had earlier been mentioned in despatches. He now demanded that 'the filthy murderous Hun' be made to pay for the war and that 'all aliens be expelled'.

Stanton polled the highest N.D.P. vote and had a landslide victory, with a majority of 16,595 (57.2%) over his opponent. His patriotic stand and his services to the Coalition were rewarded in 1920, when he was awarded a C.B.E. and was made a J.P. for Glamorgan. He served as a governor of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth and the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff.

With the disappearance of the N.D.P. label, its sitting M.Ps. became the candidates of Lloyd George's National Liberal Party<sup>40</sup> in 1922, Stanton among them. The euphoria felt in 1918 had given place to a realisation of the slaughter inflicted in the particular horror of the 'war to end wars'. The promise of a 'land fit for heroes' had become meaningless as the post-war economic slump led to anger and resentment and as unemployment grew. The National Liberal campaign in the Aberdare constituency opened on the Robert Town Square, Ynysybwl on the evening of Saturday, 11 November, where a huge crowd had gathered. It must have looked like a repeat of 1918 until hostile parts of the crowd made their presence felt. Stanton was asked about his poor attendance at the House of Commons. In response he declared that the salary of £400 was insufficient for him to run two homes, whilst Labour M.P.s received subsidies which brought their earnings up to £750 and in some cases to £1,000. Though this could well have been the case, it would have sounded like a fortune not only to the unemployed but also to men earning half that amount or less. For the same reason he could not pay the expenses of supporting speakers and had to fight a lone battle against 'the Red Wolves, Bolshies and especially the I.L.P-ites, whom they would find on their committees, councils and Co-operative Societies, sneaking their way to undermine the various institutions and organisations for their own selfish ends.' Labour, he stated, was unfit to govern,

with the exception of John Clynes and a few other individuals. Whilst he had fought for the rights of ex-servicemen, they had been engaged in a class war which could never succeed.

Two nights later, a very large and supportive crowd gathered at Victoria Square, Aberdare, for an eve-of-poll National Liberal rally. The candidate arrived, suffering from a sore throat (like that suffered by his opponent in the 1915 by-election) but he was compelled to speak. After outlining his own policies he turned his attention to his erstwhile comrades, denouncing what he saw as the abuse of Federation money for 'alien purposes' (financial support for Labour candidates). This brought some response from the 'Reds' in his audience. He took credit for ensuring that members of the armed forces received two weeks' leave at Christmas and then read a letter of support from David Lloyd George in which the Prime Minister praised his ceaseless devotion to his duties as an M.P. for the benefit of all the people:

I hope Aberdare Valley will again return you at the head of the poll. I have always admired and appreciated your patriotic attitude during the war and afterwards, and your zeal for the welfare of the labouring classes.

Meanwhile, the new Labour candidate, George Henry Hall, had been busy too. At his final meeting at Mountain Ash he addressed 6,000 people, where he stated that Stanton's record showed him up as a parliamentary failure, whose 'number was up'. He prophesied that polling day would bring one of the greatest Labour victories ever seen in the constituency.

The new party was thrashed at the poll. In Wales, it lost two seats to the Conservatives and nine to Labour, who had a clean sweep of the mining constituencies. The Labour candidate, George Henry Hall, had a comfortable majority of 5,217 (14.4%). In 1928 Stanton joined the Liberal Party.

The ex-M.P. was out of a job. He settled at Hampstead, where he took over an old inn, built on the site of the house of essayist Richard Steele. The walls of the saloon bar were decorated with pictures of Welsh scenes painted by Stanton himself, often from memory. He is said to have been a voracious reader. His own publications included *Facts for Federationists* and *Facts for Miners*. He described himself as a 'lecturer and social reformer' but is known to have worked as a violinist. He also



became a film actor, with roles as clergymen (including the Archbishop of Canterbury), aristocrats and as an English butler.

In 1893 he had married Alice Maud Thomas of Aberdare. One son, Clifford, was killed in France, as has been noted. Charles Butt Stanton died in London on 6 December 1946, survived by his widow and son Frank, who had been a captain in the Sherwood Foresters. His funeral was held at Golders Green Crematorium on 10 December. He left £437 in his will.

The Reverend Ivor T Rees, Swansea

## APPENDIX ONE

### ELECTIONS

#### EAST GLAMORGAN, December 1910

Allan Clement Davies (Lib)	9,088	47.0%
Frank Hill Gaskell (Con)	5,603	28.9%
Charles Butt Stanton (Lab)	<u>4,675</u>	<u>24.1%</u>
Liberal Majority	3,485	18.1%

#### MERTHYR TYDFIL By-Election, 25 November, 1915

Charles Butt Stanton (Ind.Lib)	10,286	62.8%
James Winstone (Lab)	<u>6,080</u>	<u>37.2%</u>
Ind.Lib. Gain	4,206	25.6%

#### ABERDARE 1918

Charles Butt Stanton (Co.NDP)	22,824	78.6%
Revd. Thomas Evan Nicholas (Lab)	<u>6,229</u>	<u>21.4%</u>
Coalition NDP Majority	16,595	57.2%

#### ABERDARE 1922

George Henry Hall (Lab)	20,704	57.2%
Charles Butt Stanton (Nat.Lib)	<u>15,487</u>	<u>42.8%</u>
Labour Gain	5,217	14.4%

## Further Reading

For information on successful and unsuccessful parliamentary candidates in Wales, see Ivor Thomas Rees, *Welsh Hustings 1885–2004* (Llandybie, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Hauliers were the miners who worked underground with the horses who pulled the drams of coal back to the pit bottom.

<sup>2</sup> Gwyn Evans & David Maddox, *The Tonypany Riots 1910–1911* (Plymouth, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Hywel Francis & David Smith, *The Fed* (London, 1980), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales, the Re-birth of a Nation, 1880–1980* (Oxford, 1981), 148.

<sup>5</sup> Rt. Hon. William Brace (1865–1947). Baptist lay preacher. Miners' Agent. First Vice-President, S.W.M.F.; President, 1912. Labour M.P. for South Glamorgan, 1906–18; Abertillery, 1918–20. Took Liberal Whip at first & served as Vice-President, Welsh National Liberal Federation. Under-Secretary, Home Affairs, 1915–18. Privy Councillor, 1916. Chief Labour Adviser, Department of Mines, 1920–28.

<sup>6</sup> Rt. Hon. Thomas Richards (1858–1931). Miner. Welsh Congregationalist. Labour M.P., West Monmouthshire, 1904–18; Ebbw Vale, 1918–20. General Secretary & President, S.W.M.F.; President, M.F.G.B. Took Liberal Whip, 1904–09. Chairman, Parliamentary Labour Party, 1918–20. Took active part in recruiting during Great War.

<sup>7</sup> Rt.Hon. William Abraham (1842–1922). Born Cwmafan. Calvinistic Methodist Elder. Mine door boy at 10. Agent, Loughor District, 1872. Agent, Cambrian Miners' Association, 1877. First President, South Wales Miners' Federation, 1898–1912. Labour M.P. for Rhondda, 1885–1918, Rhondda West, 1918–20.

<sup>8</sup> I.L.P.: The Independent Labour Party, a Marxist-Socialist Party founded at Bradford in 1893, with Keir Hardie as its first chairman. There had been calls for an independent workers' party in previous years, supported by Robert Blatchford's *The Clarion*. Three working men successfully contested the 1892 election, without Liberal support, sometimes with Liberal opposition: Keir Hardie (West Ham South), John Burns (Battersea) and Havelock Wilson (Middlesborough). The formation of the party was inevitable. The I.L.P. was affiliated to the Labour Party, 1906–32. It was finally dissolved in 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Rt. Hon. Vernon Hartshorn, O.B.E. (1872–1931). Miners' Agent, Maesteg. Vice-President, S.W.M.F. (resigned 1920 because of Bolshevism). Chair, South Wales Conscientious Objectors' tribunal, 1915–18. Labour candidate, Mid-Glamorgan, March & December 1910. M.P. Ogmore, 1918–. Paymaster General, 1924. Lord Privy Seal (with responsibility for Unemployment), 1930.

<sup>10</sup> George Barker (1858–1936). Soldier, 1876–83. Miner, 1883. Miners' Agent, Western Valleys, 1908. Labour M.P. for Abertillery, 1920–29.

<sup>11</sup> James Keir Hardie (1856–1915). Born Lanarkshire. Messenger boy at 13. Organiser, Ayrshire Miners, 1880. 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary, Scottish Miners' Federation, 1880. Founder member, I.L.P. Editor and journalist. Labour M.P. for Mid-Lanarkshire, 1892–95; Merthyr Tydfil, 1900–1915.

<sup>12</sup> Sir Edgar Rees Jones, K.B.E. (1878–1962). Born Aberaman, son of Baptist minister. Barrister. Liberal M.P. for Merthyr Boroughs, 1910–18; Merthyr, 1918–22; candidate for Gower, 1931. Strong supporter of the Coalition and of conscription.

<sup>13</sup> Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson (1863–1935). Born Glasgow. Methodist. Apprentice at 12. Branch Secretary, Iron Founders Union. M.P.: Barnard Castle, 1903–18; Widnes, B/E. 1919–22; Newcastle upon Tyne East B/E. 1923–23; Burnley, B/E 1924–31; Clay Cross, B/E. 1933–. Leader of the Labour Party, 1908–10, 1914–17, 1931–32. President of the Board of Education, 1915–16; Paymaster General, 1916; Minister without Portfolio, 1916–18; Home Secretary, 1924; Foreign Secretary, 1929–31. Nobel Peace Prize, 1934.

<sup>14</sup> Rt. Hon. John Hodge (1855–1937). Born Ayrshire. Iron worker. Labour candidate, Gower, 1900. M.P., 1908–Gorton, 1903–23. Minister of Labour, 1916–17; Minister of Pensions, 1917–19.

<sup>15</sup> Rt. Hon. George Henry Roberts (1868–1928). M.P. for Norwich 1906–23. Printer. Government Whip, 1915; Parliamentary Secretary, Board of Trade, 1916–17; Minister of Labour, 1917–19; Minister of Food Control, 1919–20. Stood as Coalition Labour, 1918; National Liberal, 1922. Defeated as a Conservative, 1923.

<sup>16</sup> *Western Mail*, 17 November 1915.

<sup>17</sup> F. Victor Fisher (1870–1954), son of Hungarian father and English mother. Born London. Educated privately and Paris. Journalist and banker in Paris, then a journalist at Manchester. Opposed the Boer War. Secretary, National Democratic League. Moved to Fabian Society and then the Social Democratic Federation. Bitterly

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opposed to pacifism. Secretary, National Defence League and British Workers' League. Coalition N.D.P. candidate for Stourbridge, 1918; Conservative candidate for West Ham, Stratford, 1923.

<sup>18</sup> Sir Thomas Artemus Jones (1871–1943). Knighted 1931, KC 1919. Journalist. Barrister, Middle Temple, 1901. County Court Judge 1930. Campaigned for the right to speak Welsh in Court. Liberal candidate for Macclesfield, 1922, Swansea East, 1923, Keighley by-election 1925. Autobiography, *Without My Wig*.

<sup>19</sup> *Western Mail*, 19 November 1915.

<sup>20</sup> Rt. Hon. James Ramsay Macdonald (1866–1937). Labour M.P. Leicester, 1906–18; Aberavon, 1922–29; Seaham Harbour, 1929–31, National Labour 1931–35; Scottish Universities, 1936. Labour parliamentary leader, 1910–14 (resigned at outbreak of war), 1922–. Leader of the Opposition, 1922–23, 1924–29; Prime Minister, 1923–24, 1929–35 (& Foreign Secretary, 1922–23); Lord President of the Council, 1936.

<sup>21</sup> *Western Mail*, 24 November 1915.

<sup>22</sup> Rt. Hon. Frederick William Jowett (1864–1944). Born Bradford. Mill worker at 8. Christian Socialists. Labour M.P. for West Bradford 1906–18; opposed conscription. M.P. Bradford East 1922–24, 1929–31. First Commissioner of Works, 1924.

<sup>23</sup> The Revd. George Neighbour was the minister of Nazareth Baptist Church who, in 1907, addressed the Rhondda miners on Christianity and Socialism. When he refused his deacons' request that he sign a document promising not to preach Socialism, he was dismissed. He founded the Brotherhood Church, which was refused the cheap coal supplied to other chapels by Nixon's Colliery at the behest of other valley chapels.

<sup>26</sup> *Western Mail*, 24 November 1915.

<sup>28</sup> Alfred Onions (1858–1927). Miner. Miners' Agent, Rhymney Valley, 1898. Treasurer, S.W.M.F. 1898. Labour M.P. Caerphilly, 1918–.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Hodges (1887–1947). Miner at Abertillery at 14. Methodist (converted by Evan Roberts). Student at Ruskin College, Oxford. Miners' Agent 1913. Secretary, M.F.G.B. 1919–24. Labour M.P. for Lichfield 1923–26. First Lord of the Admiralty, 1924. Member, Central Electricity Board, 1926.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Harcombe (born 1873). Secretary, Cambrian Combine Strikers, 1910. Rhondda Urban District Councillor, 1911 (Chairman, 1922–23). A power in the Rhondda Labour Party and the community. The author recalls his speeches as Chairman of Governors at Rhondda County Boys' School, Porth.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Isaac Mardy Jones (1881–1970). Educated, Ruskin College. Miner, 1893. Miners' Agent, 1907. Labour M.P. for Pontypridd, 1920–1931. Resigned seat 1931 on being found guilty of misusing travel warrant by giving it to his wife. Speaker and others begged him to "get off his high horse" and apologise but he refused "on principle". Contested by-election as Independent Labour but lost. Author & lecturer.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred Milner (1854–1925), 1<sup>st</sup> Baron, 1901, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount, 1902. Under-Secretary, Egypt, at Cairo 1889–93; Chairman, Board of Inland Revenue, 1892–97; High Commissioner for Southern Africa and Governor of the Cape Province, 1897–1905; central role in the defeat of the Boers. Member of War Cabinet, 1915–18; Secretary of State for War, 1917–18; Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1918–21. Chief Author of the Balfour Declaration, 1917. Liberal candidate for Harrow, 1885, he later joined the Conservatives. Described himself as a "British race patriot".

<sup>35</sup> Ben Tillett (1860–1941): left-wing agitator & trade unionist; Labour candidate for Swansea Town, January 1910; contested other seats, 1892 & 1906. Pro-War Labour M.P. for Salford North, 1918 by-election; Labour M.P., Salford North, 1918–24, 1929–31.

<sup>36</sup> Rt. Hon. James Henry Thomas (1874–1949). Born Newport, Gwent. Railway worker at 12. Official, Amalgamated Society of Railway Workers, 1913. General Secretary, N.U.R. 1917–31. Labour M.P. for Derby, 1910–31; National Labour 1931–36. Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1924. Lord Privy Seal (Employment) 1929–30. Secretary of State for the Dominions, 1930–35 and for the Colonies, 1931. Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1935–36. Forced to resign from politics May 1936, after dropping hints regarding the Budget to stock exchange speculators.

<sup>37</sup> Anti-Socialist Union, whose propaganda stressed that socialism was a threat to the 'British' way of life and that socialist doctrine was undemocratic, un-Christian, anti-monarchy, anti-capitalist and opposed to individual freedoms and individual reward. Founded 1908. Opposed the social reforms of the Liberal governments of Sir

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Henry Campbell-Bannerman and H. H. Asquith. Wound up in 1948, when it handed its assets to the Economic League.

<sup>38</sup> Khaki Election – the name given to a general election held during or immediately after a war, especially one in which the war has an effect on how people vote. The first so-called was that of 1901 after the Boer War.

<sup>39</sup> The Revd. Thomas Evan Nicholas (1879–1971), known as T. E. Nicholas or Niclas o'r Glais. Welsh Congregational Minister. Dentist at Aberystwyth, 1918. Gave the address at Keir Hardie's funeral. Organised a farm workers' union in Cardiganshire. Founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920. Poet. Imprisoned under Defence of the Realm Act, 1940, under trumped-up charges.

<sup>40</sup> When Lloyd George succeeded H. H. Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916, the latter and his supporters went into opposition. Members of Lloyd George's group stood as Coalition Liberals but were expelled from the National Liberal Federation in 1920, thus forcing Lloyd George to set up a separate organisation, which took the name National Liberals, 53 of whom were elected in 1922.