

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN TWENTIETH CENTURY WALES*

This is the first lecture in the Welsh Political Archive series which is devoted entirely to women and politics. That is not surprising for all sorts of reasons, not least because the political history of women in Wales is very much in its infancy. Welsh women's history is itself a very young subject and within that field, politics has tended to lag behind. Ten years ago, perhaps even five years ago, I doubt that I would have had sufficient material to address even such a loosely-defined topic as this. The fact that I am able to do so is thanks largely to the work of a number of scholars on which I am able to draw, notably Ursula Masson, Laura McAllister, Dot Jones, Neil Evans, Charlotte Aull Davies, Angela John, Christine Chapman, Julia Edwards, Lowri Newman and Avril Rolph amongst others.

However, let me make it quite clear, there are still huge gaps in our knowledge of women's involvement in Welsh politics and a great deal of research has yet to be done.

My title this evening is 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales'.

Under that broad heading, I am going to concentrate on the theme of women's representation in national politics. I shall be examining the pre-First World War campaign for women's suffrage in Wales, then charting women's electoral progress, or, more accurately, distinct lack of progress, in parliamentary elections throughout the twentieth century and, finally, I shall look at the role of positive actions in elections both to the Westminster Parliament and to the National Assembly for Wales. For the earlier parts of this lecture I am going to be drawing on my book *Out of the Shadows: a History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales*.¹

The Women's Suffrage Campaign

The campaign for women's suffrage really began to take off in Wales from 1907 onwards. Up to that point, women in Britain had very limited voting rights and equally limited opportunities to stand for election. From 1894, women ratepayers were allowed to vote in and stand for parish and district council elections and in 1907 to stand as candidates in County Council Elections.

It was one thing to allow women to vote for and sit on parish councils, but quite another to allow them to vote for, let alone take a seat in, the mother of all parliaments at Westminster, the very hub of the British Empire. The only way women could ever gain the parliamentary franchise

was for parliament itself, the very body which was excluding them, to pass legislation granting this right to them. It was to be a long, hard job persuading parliament to do so.

The years 1900-14 marked the pinnacle of activity in the struggle for the parliamentary vote. In particular, women pinned their hopes on the Liberal government, elected with a massive majority in 1906, but time after time their hopes were dashed.² In fact, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that it was unfortunate that the suffrage campaigners in Wales came up against a Liberal government. Given the passion with which Liberalism was embraced in Wales and the veneration of Welsh Liberal heroes, especially Lloyd George, the fact that the women dared to challenge him on his home ground partly accounts for the nastier episodes of violence against them. By 1912, after the failure of a number of Conciliation Bills (attempts to find a compromise solution to enfranchise some women), disillusionment with the Liberals was complete. The militants, no longer able to contain their frustration, went on the rampage with a spectacular campaign of law-breaking. Moderate suffragists in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which had previously been strictly non-party, reacted by forming an electoral pact with the Labour Party, though interestingly the south Wales NUWSS branches were opposed to this because they did not trust the miners' leaders.³

There were three main groupings of suffrage campaigners in Britain, all of which were active in varying degrees in Wales.

The largest group, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), founded in 1897 and led by Mrs Millicent Fawcett, was dedicated to achieving the vote by constitutional means. The NUWSS worked steadily to achieve its end, writing to and personally lobbying MPs, holding public meetings and organizing debates. It was all solid grass roots work. The first NUWSS branch in Wales was set up in Llandudno in 1907. In 1908, the Cardiff and District Women's Suffrage Society, which was affiliated to the NUWSS, was established as the first branch in south Wales. By 1913, the *Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* (1913) listed some twenty-eight NUWSS local societies in Wales. These were Abergavenny, Aberystwyth, Bangor (plus a branch at Llanfairfechan), Bargoed and District, Bethesda and District, Bridgend, Cardiff and District (plus a branch at Penarth), Carmarthen, Caernarfon (plus a branch at Pen-y-Groes), Colwyn Bay, Criccieth, Dolgellau, Farmers District, Kidwelly and Ferryside, Lampeter, Llandudno, Llanelli, Llangollen, Merionethshire, Merthyr and District, Penmaenmawr, Pontypridd, Pwllheli, Rhondda Fach, Rhyl and District and Swansea.⁴ Even as this list stands, it

is impressive but it is likely to be an underestimate. The absence of such places as Aberdare and Neath, both of which had active groups, from the *Suffrage Annual* list reinforces this suspicion. It is difficult to reconstruct a complete register of groups partly because some branches were affiliated with other larger societies and subsumed into them. However, the above list shows clearly that Wales was no back-water when it came to votes for women. In fact, by the eve of the First World War, Cardiff was the largest women's suffrage society outside of London, a position which it sought to maintain in rivalry with Glasgow.

Secondly the 'suffragettes', the militants, had a Welsh presence. The militant wing of the suffrage movement, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903 and led by the charismatic Emmeline Pankhurst, was above all a brilliant publicity machine co-ordinating 'outrages' which ensured wide press coverage and thrust 'Votes for Women' to the forefront of public debate. Its members were prepared to smash plate-glass windows, blow up pillar boxes, cut telegraph wires, attack places of male recreation such as cricket pavilions, golf-courses and boat-houses, and leap out from concealed places to confront surprised cabinet ministers. They were ready to pay the price of imprisonment and even to endure the horrors of force feeding. Margaret Haig Mackworth, later Lady Rhondda (1883-1958), who set up the Newport branch of the WSPU, broke every taboo of her class - selling the organization's newspaper, *Votes for Women*, on Newport High Street; speaking on public platforms including that of Merthyr Liberal Club, where she was pelted with herrings and tomatoes; jumping on the running-board of Prime Minister Asquith's car and blowing up a pillar box on Risca Road, Newport in 1913. For this last act she was imprisoned and went on hunger-strike.

The WSPU was not strong in Wales with only a handful of branches - in Newport, Pontypool and Griffithstown, Cardiff and Barry in 1913 - but its activities grabbed the headlines. Wales, however, was to play centre stage in the militant years of 1912 and 1913 because it was the home of prominent members of the government and attracted suffragettes from outside. In June 1912 a London suffragette leapt out before the home secretary and North Monmouthshire MP Reginald McKenna, who was accompanying the king and queen on a visit to Llandaff cathedral. But it was Lloyd George, chancellor of the exchequer, who drew English suffragettes like a magnet. They challenged the great man in the Liberal heartland, confronting him at Caernarfon, Wrexham and Llanystumdwy in 1912.

Welsh women were also members of a whole range of other suffrage organizations. The Women's Freedom League (WFL), the third of the major organizations, was the strongest group in Swansea and in 1913 also had branches in Aberdare, Barry, Cardiff and Montgomery.⁵

There were *at least* thirty-seven branches of the various suffrage societies, according to the *Suffrage Annual*, and in reality probably many more, but – and this is a highly relevant point to make in the Welsh Political Archive Lecture – the records of only a handful of these societies survive. All we have left are papers of five societies – Bangor, Cardiff, Carmarthen and Llangollen NUWSS and Swansea WFL. It was the realization of just how many historical records concerning women's lives have been lost that led me, together with other Welsh women historians, to set up Archif Menywod Cymru/The Women's Archive of Wales, an organization which aims to rescue the lost sources of our history. AMC/WAW does very important work not only in rescuing older sources and ensuring that the same fate does not befall contemporary records, but also in promoting the history of women in Wales. It deserves wide support.⁶

But who were the suffrage campaigners active in Wales in the run up to the First World War? I have no doubt that the movement was largely middle class. There were working class activists like Elizabeth Andrews and Rose Davies in the south Wales valleys and the Women's Labour League and the Women's Co-operative Guild also supported the cause, but in Wales, there were no large industries employing women and, therefore, no opportunity for working women to organize. As for the working man's wife, with her large family and heavy domestic load, she certainly had no time to attend public meetings or sit on committees.

One striking feature in Wales is the role played by educated women, particularly the teachers and head teachers. It was that new generation of intermediate and secondary school heads who were the main standard bearers of the revolution – Miss Collin in Cardiff, Miss Phipps and Miss Neal in Swansea, and Miss Holme in Carmarthen. All of these women were English-born and their prominence in the movement, taken together with suffragettes from England making sorties into north Wales to confront Lloyd George, would seem to confirm the idea mooted by contemporary Welsh opponents of women's suffrage, that the movement was an alien one, foisted on Wales by English women. This was emphatically not the case. Suffrage literature was produced in Welsh, and prominent Welsh writers in both Welsh and English supported the cause: Cranogwen, Moelona (Elizabeth Mary Owen) and Allen Raine (born Anne Adaliza Evans) all wrote in its favour. Welsh women were prominent in the struggle, notably Amy Dillwyn,

Margaret Haig Thomas and Sybil Haig Thomas. A great deal of work needs to be done to establish local membership of groups, a task rendered somewhat difficult by the convention of describing women by their husbands' names. Sybil Haig Thomas, for example, is invariably listed as Mrs D. A. Thomas. There are plenty of Davieses, Evanses, Jenkinses, Joneses and Thomases on the Cardiff subscription lists. It is worth digging behind these to find the women. For example, Mrs Edgar Jones, long-serving secretary to the Barry committee, was Annie Gwen Jones, a Welsh speaker, Aberystwyth graduate and a former governess in Hughesovska. She was also the mother of my head mistress, Miss Gwyneth Vaughan Jones of Barry County Grammar School for Girls, and I remember seeing this tiny, old lady on her frequent visits to the school when I was a young pupil.

The first step towards the enfranchisement of women in parliamentary elections came with the partial victory of 1918. On 6 February 1918, the Representation of the People Act, enfranchising most women over thirty, became law. Women had to wait a further ten years to get the vote on the same terms as men: the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 established parity of voting rights by enabling women to vote at the age of twenty-one. Ironically, and indeed anomalously, the 1918 Act also allowed women aged twenty-one and over to stand as parliamentary candidates and to take their seats as MPs. So I should now like to concentrate on women's attempts to be elected to parliament from Welsh seats from 1918 onwards.

Inter-war elections

Before I look at the historical record of women's attempts to win parliamentary seats, I need to clarify one point. Women have long been and still are the majority sex in Wales and yet they have been excluded from, and grossly under-represented on, elected bodies. Is this important? Do women need to be represented by women? My answer to both questions is 'Yes'. The case for women's equal political representation can be argued firstly, in terms of the justice of numerical parity with men; secondly, in terms of women's impact on the content of public policies to reflect the different lived experiences of women compared to men; and thirdly because, although women (like men) are not an homogeneous group with a single set of beliefs and priorities, what unifies women is that they are marginalized and excluded from the centres of power and public affairs.

The main obstacle throughout the whole of the period from 1918 to the present day in women getting elected to parliament is the selection process by constituency parties.

The general election of December 1918 was the first in which women were able to stand.⁷ Seventeen women candidates stood throughout Britain, but only one in Wales - fifty-five year old Professor Millicent MacKenzie, Cardiff's first woman professor of education (1904-15) and an active member of the Cardiff Women's Suffrage Society: she stood unsuccessfully for the University of Wales seat as the Labour candidate. The general elections which came thick and fast in 1922, 1923 and 1924 saw only five candidatures by women in Wales. The numbers of women candidates selected to stand in Wales was consistently low - one in 1918 out of a total of seventeen women candidates for the whole of Britain, three in 1922 out of thirty-three, one in 1923 out of thirty-four, and one in 1924 out of forty-one. It was extremely difficult for women to win selection for parliamentary seats, and when they were selected, it was usually in seats which were regarded by the party organizations as forlorn hopes - thus for example young Conservative women were allowed to stand in south Wales Labour strongholds.

Perhaps because of the difficulty of getting selected for Welsh seats, some Welsh women and women with strong Welsh connections, stood in constituencies outside Wales. Emily Phipps, former Swansea headmistress and leading feminist, stood in Chelsea for the Labour Party in 1918; backed by the Federation of Women Teachers, of which she was president, she ran an all women campaign with a female election agent and campaign manager. Winifred Coombe Tennant, 'Mam o Nedd', a leading feminist and eisteddfodic figure, contested the Forest of Dean for the Liberals in 1922. She was also the first British woman delegate to the League of Nations.

The 1929 election saw the great turning point for the hopes of Welsh women with the election of Megan Lloyd George, as Liberal MP for Anglesey. Megan Lloyd George (1902-66), the youngest child of David and Dame Margaret Lloyd George, had grown up in the heart of the political world, living from the age of six to fourteen at no. 11 Downing Street and then moving to no. 10. She was a lively, intelligent and fun loving woman, who was politically committed to a radical social agenda and she was also an ardent nationalist. Her abilities were evident, but there can be no doubt that without her father's intervention she would never have been selected as Liberal candidate for the safe seat of Anglesey. Both within and outside parliament she was a powerful and scintillating public speaker and, as a chic and attractive young woman, just twenty-seven years old at the time of her first election, she was very much in the public eye. In the inter-war years she campaigned against fascism, working with the Welsh Ambulance Fund for Republican Spain and the Save the Bilbao Children Movement. Closer to home she worked to improve rural housing, to cut unemployment and she supported women's rights.

Also in 1929 another Welsh woman was elected to parliament but for an English seat. Edith Picton Turbevill of Ewenny had stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate in North Islington in 1922 and in Stroud in 1924, before winning the Conservative stronghold of the Wrekin Division of Shropshire in 1929 and becoming the first south Walian woman MP. She was a devout and caring woman, whose great interest was the church: she spent much of her life campaigning for women's admission to the ministry and priesthood. As an MP, she gained wide respect through her parliamentary bill, the Sentence of Death (Expectant Mothers) Bill, which became law in 1931 and banned the barbaric practice of sentencing pregnant women to death. Her parliamentary career was, however, short lived and she lost her seat in 1931, following Ramsay MacDonald's formation of the National Government.

Interestingly, Scottish feminist historians lament the fact that only eight women MPs were returned from Scotland between 1918 and 1939. The comparable figure for Wales was just one.

There was one other political institution in which women sought representation in the inter-war years. The House of Lords was an entirely male stronghold, where peeresses were not permitted to take their seats. Margaret, Lady Rhondda challenged this in a high profile campaign, and in 1922 it looked as though she had won when the Committee of Privileges recommended that her claim should be accepted. But a piece of skulduggery by the Lord Chancellor led to the rescinding of this decision and, despite her continued efforts, women were not admitted to the House of Lords until 1958, the very year in which Lady Rhondda died.

The Post-war Years

The 1950s marked the nadir of British feminism. In fact, what passed for 'feminism' then - not that the word was widely used in this period - was a woolly set of aspirations based on women's 'special values', namely the promotion of world peace, democracy, good citizenship and partnership within marriage. The aim of the earlier generation of feminists to win equal rights was written off as old-fashioned, aggressive and irrelevant. As the old campaigners in Wales died off - Mary Collin in 1955, Lady Rhondda and Professor Barbara Foxley in 1958, and Edith Picton-Turvevill in 1960 - there was no one to take their place. In terms of Welsh feminism, there was a vacuum between the end of the war and the early 1970s, when the Women's Liberation Movement, the second feminist wave of the twentieth century, burst onto the scene.

The pioneers would have been disappointed at the slow progress of Welsh women in parliament. Megan Lloyd George held Anglesey from 1929 to 1951 as an independent-minded Liberal. In the 1950s, she campaigned actively for a Parliament for Wales and re-gained her place at Westminster when, standing for Labour, she won Carmarthen in a by-election in 1957. She held the seat in three further elections until her death in 1966.

Eirene Lloyd Jones (1909-99), was another daughter of a famous political father, Thomas Jones, former deputy secretary to the Cabinet. She was brought up with an extraordinary range of political contacts: Lady Astor threw for her her twenty-first birthday party at her stately home of Cliveden. She stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate for Flintshire in 1945. In 1950, however, now married, Eirene White was elected for East Flintshire, which she held until 1970, before going to the House of Lords. Hers was a long and distinguished parliamentary career.

Also in 1950, another Welsh woman was elected as a Labour MP. Unlike Megan Lloyd George or Eirene White, she was not the daughter of a famous man. Dorothy Rees (née Jones) (1898-1987), was a docker's daughter, who had won a scholarship to Barry County School and then trained as a teacher at the local training college. She was elected as MP for Barry in a three-cornered fight in 1950. She had been elected to Glamorgan County Council in 1934 and, though sadly she lost her parliamentary seat in a straight fight with the Conservatives in 1951, she returned to Glamorgan County Council. She was a great advocate of the education of girls, and Glamorgan benefited from her experience. Her victory in 1950 meant that for a period of just over one year (1950-51) Wales had had three women MPs.

But after the defeat of Dorothy Rees in 1951, and the death of Lady Megan in 1966, by the late 1960s Wales once again only had one woman MP. And when in 1970 Eirene White stepped down from her seat in East Flintshire and went to the House of Lords, Wales once again had not a single woman MP. This situation – with no woman representing a Welsh seat - lasted for fourteen years from 1970 to 1984. Interestingly, this state of affairs does not appear to have been regarded as problematic in Wales. It was considered 'the natural order' of things. The journalist and broadcaster Beata Lipman was unusual in pointing this up so trenchantly. Writing in 1972, she said:

In politics the situation is bathetic: Labour without a single woman Member of the House representing Wales, the Blair feebly forming a woman's committee to try and repair huge gaping omissions. Both Tory and Labour are well beyond their first, able suffragettes who decided that the only way to have a

career was to give up children or a husband; it seems to me that the feminist position in both parties has been steadily eroding ever since, in Wales at any rate.⁸

Looking back at the 1970s and 1980s from the standpoint of the present day, it is clear that things were about to change and this process was accelerated by several key factors. These include firstly, economic change which transformed Wales from an industrial to a post industrial economy and led to a rapid increase in women's participation in the workforce; secondly, the emergence of a new feminist movement in the Women's Liberation Movement, which was at its strongest in the south but had a widespread presence in Wales; and thirdly the involvement of women in a range of other activities - often single issue causes such as Cymdeithas Yr Iaith, the Peace Movement and Greenham Common in the first half of the 1980s and the Miners' Strike of 1984-85. All of these factors resulted in the increased politicization of women.

It is against this changing backdrop that Ann Clwyd won a by-election in the Cynon Valley in 1984. She was the *first* woman (and indeed *the last to date*) to be selected for a safe Labour seat. From 1984 to 1997, Ann Clwyd remained the sole female representative from Wales in the House of Commons: in those years she was, in effect, MP for women in Wales.

Two further factors and their interaction were to bring about change, albeit slowly, i.e. developments within the women's movement taken together with the reaction of political parties in Wales to successive Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997. In its early days the radical, anti-establishment Women's Liberation Movement had not placed a high priority on the representation of women in government, either local or national. From the late 1970s, however, things began to change as feminists sought a political base in both Plaid Cymru and the Labour Party and, at the same time, the apparently unassailable position of the Tory Government, winning victory after victory under Margaret Thatcher, made these parties more open to women's ideas in an attempt to broaden their appeal. In Plaid Cymru, feminists from south-east Wales transformed the role of the party's women's section and secured extra representation on its working party from 1981-86.⁹ In the Labour Party too, women's sections grew. But none of this resulted in the increased representation of women at Westminster. Male-dominated selection committees in all parties simply did not select women.

Selection to winnable seats is the central issue, and in the final section of this lecture I shall look briefly at special measures to increase the number of women representatives both in the

Westminster Parliament and in the National Assembly. But before turning to the special measures, it is worth noting that women have a far better record in being selected and elected to the European Parliament, perhaps because all political parties have regarded Strasbourg as less important than Westminster. In the first European Election of 1979 two of the four Welsh seats were won by women. Beata Brookes won the North Wales seat in 1979 for the Conservatives and held it until 1989. Ann Clwyd served her apprenticeship in Strasbourg, where she sat as MEP for Mid and West Wales 1979-84. In later years Glenys Kinnock has been MEP for South Wales East and Eluned Morgan for Mid and West Wales since 1994. Jill Evans, one of Plaid Cymru's first two MEPs, was first elected in 1999.

Special measures to increase the number of women representatives at Westminster and in the National Assembly

The General Election 1997

Although women were doing relatively well in elections to the European Parliament, the situation at Westminster remained dire - with just one Welsh woman MP in place from 1984 to 1997. Nor could women take any hope from the thought that this situation would correct itself over time. The evolutionary approach works grindingly slowly. It has been calculated with regard to the representation of women from all parts of the United Kingdom in parliament, that since the numbers of women MPs increased from 2.9 per cent in 1979 to 6.2 per cent in 1987, it would take another 175 years for women to achieve parity of representation with men in the House of Commons.

Clearly there was a need for some sort of short term special measures to manipulate the selection process and to speed up the business of ensuring that Welsh MPs became more representative of the constituents they served.¹⁰

It was not until 1997 that a significant advance came, when the Labour Party introduced All-Women Shortlists (AWSs) in half the party's winnable and safe seats in the United Kingdom. But before this process was completed, it was successfully challenged by the Leeds Labour Party in 1996 as unlawful positive discrimination and halted. Whilst positive action is legal, positive discrimination is illegal. Positive action means taking action to promote equally well-qualified candidates from disadvantaged and under-represented groups above candidates from the dominant group. Positive discrimination, on the other hand, seeks to promote people who are perceived as disadvantaged *regardless of formal qualifications for the job*. Nevertheless, AWSs

enabled Labour to increase its representation in Wales in the 1997 general election from one woman MP to four, with the election of Julie Morgan in Cardiff North, Jackie Lawrence in Preseli and Betty Williams in Conwy. Of the three new members, none won a seat which was previously held by Labour – two were taken from the Conservatives, and Preseli was a new constituency. While this increase was dramatic, in 1997 women still only held four out of forty Welsh parliamentary seats.

The other political parties put no such special measures in place and no women won seats, though Plaid had published the report of its Gender Balance Commission in 1995 and, according to Laura McAllister, many Plaid members actually believed that the Party was officially committed to achieving gender balance in its elected representation when in fact it was not.¹¹

National Assembly of Wales Election 1999

The creation of the National Assembly of Wales, a brand new body, offered a fresh start and an opportunity to make the Assembly truly representative of the people of Wales. So, how did the political parties respond to this in the first election to the National Assembly of Wales held in 1999?

Labour's response was crucial. Labour, as the biggest party in Wales and the party expected to win most seats, would have most impact on the gender balance of the Assembly. Labour, despite a great deal of opposition, introduced the policy of twinning i.e. the forty Constituency Labour Parties were sorted into twenty matched pairs - matching for similarities of size of population, geographical proximity and above all 'winnability' by the party. There was a great deal of antagonism to this particularly in the Valleys, where some pairings had to be imposed and the women candidates were subject to threats, but the results of this policy were spectacular.

Labour won twenty-eight seats. Fifteen (53 per cent) were won by women candidates, which does show that at the very least voters do not discriminate against women candidates. All of these fifteen were won in the constituencies by the first-past-the-post system.

As for the other parties, women in Plaid Cymru argued for positive action, but in the end failed to win a twinning agreement. However, the party officially resolved to use the regional lists to improve gender balance and employed a zipping approach – placing women as first, third and fifth on the list. Two Plaid Cymru women won constituency seats, and the zipping approach

ensured a further four women AMs. Thus women accounted for 35 per cent of Plaid's elected representatives. The Liberal Democrats had no mechanism in place but managed to get three women elected out of six AMs. The Conservatives, who selected their candidates 'strictly on merit' and had no measures in place to ensure gender balance, did not get a single woman elected.

The net result of this was that in the new Assembly twenty-four women were elected out of a total of sixty AMs, i.e. 40 per cent. This result put Wales second in the world ranking for gender parity in national assemblies and parliaments behind Sweden's 1998 result of 42.7 per cent. In addition to this, women were appointed to fill half the seats in Wales's first cabinet.¹²

Overnight – the night of 11th-12th May 1999 - the political profile of Wales changed dramatically.

The General Election 2001

The next major election to take place was the 2001 General Election to the Westminster Parliament. Would it build on the progress of 1997 General Election and the 1999 National Assembly election in terms of female representation? The answer was a resounding 'No'.

In 2001 no special measures were put in place in the Labour Party, or indeed any of the other parties, and once again the Labour selection process reverted to its traditional patriarchal pattern of male selection. Ten sitting Welsh members stood down in that election – seven Labour, one Liberal and two Plaid Cymru. This was a clear chance for the three political parties to select women candidates in winnable seats, but no woman was selected and male candidates were chosen in all ten constituencies. No extra Welsh women MPs were elected.

National Assembly of Wales Election 2003

What strategies, if any, did the political parties adopt to ensure that women increased their representation further in the 2003 Assembly election?

The Labour Party did not use twinning this time around. In fact, some seven Labour sitting women AMs, who had been selected in 1999 in the twinning process, reported to Edwards and Chapman,¹³ that they had experienced 'dirty tricks' in the reselection process and four of these seven had to fight off a campaign to unseat them. As Edwards and Chapman note, 'In stark contrast to their male counterparts, these sitting women AMs in the Labour Party had to work extremely hard to ensure that they were not unfairly deselected...'.¹⁴

In the sixteen constituency seats where there was no sitting Labour AM, five constituencies selected their candidate from an All-Women Shortlist, which by then had been legalized by the Sex Discrimination (Election of Candidates) Act 2002. (Only one of these five constituencies had voluntarily opted for a WAS, whilst the other four had AWSs thrust upon them and accepted them grudgingly). In 2003, Labour therefore fielded twenty-two women and eighteen men in the constituency seats.

Plaid Cymru, did *consider* a number of positive actions in the constituency seats, but eventually did not act on this. In fact, Plaid had thirty-four male constituency candidates and just six female. However it achieved balance on the regional lists, fielding fifteen male and fifteen female candidates, and women were placed at the top of each of the five regional lists. The Liberal Democrats claim to ensure that 'at least one third of seats in any list will be made up of either sex'.¹⁵ I presume this means a third will be women but, apart from this, the Party did not take any positive steps to promote women candidates. They put forward twenty-seven male and thirteen female candidates in the constituency seats and fifteen men but only six women on the regional lists. But they did have women in first place in three regions. The Conservative Party, which had no women AMs in 1999, appeared to have learned little in the interval. In total it put forward seventy-one men and eight women.

Turning to the results of the 2003 election, the outcome, in terms of the history of gender balance in Welsh elections, marks a new high point.

Labour is represented by eleven men and nineteen women in the constituency seats: it holds no regional seats. Plaid Cymru has four men and one woman in the constituency seats: in the regional seats it has two men and five women, giving an overall balance of six male and six female AMs. The Liberal Democrats have three male and three female AMs and the Conservatives have nine male and two female AMs.

We should let it sink in that Wales - a country which throughout the twentieth century had a truly appalling record of female representation - now tops the world league table with 50 per cent of women in our National Assembly. The Assembly Government Cabinet has a majority of female members.

There has been a revolution in Welsh politics.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would say that the historical record of the lack of women on elected bodies in Wales eloquently makes the case for positive action. Such positive actions, where they have been deployed, have brought about dramatic change. Without them, I fear the old patriarchal system of male selection would have continued in perpetuity.

But there is no room for complacency. Welsh women's continued gross under-representation in Westminster represents a real democratic deficit, and there are no guarantees that even the lowly figure of four women MPs will be maintained without further rounds of positive action.

Devolution has given Wales the chance of a fresh start. Positive actions – twinning, zipping and AWSs - are paying dividends in rectifying the old imbalance. Clearly, there is still uneasiness and resentment in some areas to these changes, but I have no doubt that such mechanisms are necessary and will continue to be so in the short term in order to give the culture that much needed kick in the right direction.

Deirdre Beddoe

Barry

* The text of the eighteenth annual lecture of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, delivered at Y Drwm, NLW, 5 November 2004

I am very grateful to Christine Chapman A.M. for her help in making material available to me on women's experiences of exclusion in Welsh politics and on special measures to increase women's representation

1. Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).
2. For an overview of the activities of suffrage campaigners in Wales, see N. Evans and K. Cook, ' "The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band"?: the women's suffrage movement in Wales, 1890-1918', in A.V. John, (ed.), *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 159-88.
3. For a detailed account of the opposition of south Wales branches of the NUWSS to the electoral pact with the Labour Party, see Ursula Masson, 'Divided loyalties: women's suffrage and party politics in south Wales, 1912-1915', *Llafur* 7, nos. 3 and 4 (1998-99), 113-26. See also Ursula Masson, ' "Political conditions in Wales are quite different": party politics and votes for women in Wales 1912-15', *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000), 369-88.

4. *The Suffragette Annual and Women's Who's Who* (London: Stanley Paul and Co., 1913).
5. On the activities of the Women's Freedom League in Swansea, see Ursula Masson, 'Votes for women; the campaign in Swansea', *Minerva: the Transactions of the Royal Institute of South Wales*, no. 1 (1993), 34-39.
6. For information on Archif Menywod Cymru/The Women's Archive of Wales, including details on how to join the organization, see the web site www.womensarchivewales.org.
7. For a complete record of women's candidatures in twentieth-century Welsh parliamentary elections, see Beti Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif / Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 1999). See also Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967).
8. B. Lipman, 'Diary of a Welsh Liberationist', *Planet* 15 (1973), 33-36.
9. Charlotte Aull Davies, 'Women, nationalism and feminism', in Jane Aaron *et al.* (eds.), *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 247-51. Laura McAllister, *Plaid Cymru: the Emergence of a Political Party* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001).
10. In the section on special measures in this lecture I have drawn primarily on Julia Edwards and Christine Chapman, 'Women's political representation in Wales: waving or drowning', *Contemporary Politics*, 6, no. 4 (2000), 367-81, and Julia Edwards and Christine Chapman, 'Women's political representation in the National Assembly for Wales', *Contemporary Politics* 9, no. 4 (2003), 397-414.
11. Laura McAllister, *op. cit.*, 200.
12. Christine Chapman, 'Breaking the mould: women's experiences of exclusion and change in Welsh Labour politics' (University of Wales, unpublished M.Phil dissertation, 2001), 156.
13. Edwards and Chapman, *op.cit.* (2003), 400.
14. *Ibid.*, 401.
15. *Ibid.*, 405-06.