

## **Mabon ap Gwynfor address to the All Wales Peace Festival**

22nd September 2007

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"I had an interview with the BBC during the week and the researcher asked me what was the point in organizing a Peace Festival. Furthermore, what was the point of organizing it in Caernarfon? That is, what difference can a fairly small festival in a fairly small town, in a fairly small country with no power, make? Why bother?

On one hand, I can see her point – we're not going to pass any new laws here today. It's only Parliament at Westminster that has the right to change the laws of our country (even with the Assembly able to draft some acts, it has to receive the OK from London before it becomes law. We can sort of say that the people of Wales are not yet adults and we have to have Mum and Dad's permission before using the telephone, but that's another matter).

But the researcher's question reflects our time, that is, if there is no obvious visible result today, we are wasting our time and it's not worth doing. So what is the point of getting together here today? Can a small collection of individuals in a small corner of the world without self-government nor the ability to decide for itself make any difference?

The recent history of our nation and people shows clearly that there is not only a purpose but that it is possible to make a difference – sometimes a small difference, at other times a great difference. We are the mustard seeds.

Wales has a long and proud tradition of peace and has contributed on an international level to ensure peace between nations.

The Peace Society was established in London in 1816 with the aim of completely abolishing war. The first secretary was a Welshman named Evan Rees. The Society existed for 120 years and the secretaries for nearly 100 of those years were Welshmen.

The most notable of these and possibly Wales' most notable peace activist during that century was Henry Richard, from Tregaron – the Peace Apostle. Henry Richard was a minister in Old Kent Road, London, from 1835 – 1850. In 1853 he and two of his colleagues established the Morning Star, and he was the first editor and the first secretary of the Society of Voluntary Schools in Wales. Richard was appointed secretary of the Peace Movement in 1850. He was a key person in organizing the World Wide Peace Congresses in Brussels in 1848, Paris 1849, Frankfurt 1850 and London 1851. In the Brussels meeting Richard and his friend Elihu Burritt decided on a radical theme – that disarmament is necessary to ensure peace! And this back in 1848! In the Paris meeting Victor Hugo presented his dream about the United States of Europe with the vote displacing the bullet and the bomb. As a result of these meetings there was a real discussion in the media regarding disarmament and against militarism. Henry Richard was leading the agenda and creating an international discussion.

Henry Richard became an MP for Merthyr Tudful in 1868 – and Merthyr has a proud history in this kind of thing because in 1900 the pacifist Keir Hardie was elected an MP for the constituency. In 1873 he managed to persuade Gladstone to accept a motion saying “it was a duty for His Majesty's Government to recommend a reduction in the armaments of Europe”. Although that specific campaign was not successful it shows he had the ability to lead the agenda in Westminster. One of his greatest successes as an MP was that the House of Commons accepted his motion.

“To command the home secretary to contact foreign powers in order to try and introduce further improvements to the international law and establish a permanent arbitration system”.

By now we have an United Nations Law Court.

He gave a motion condemning the inability of the House to make decisions on War and Peace. The motion lost by only six votes! It is only today, a hundred and fifty years later, that Gordon Brown is talking of transferring the decision regarding war and peace to the House of Commons and we all know of the terrible consequences that can be seen if a handful of people are allowed to make decisions of this kind - following Tony Blair's lies and the tragedy of Iraq.

He argued strongly against the idea of 'defensive war' and argued for disarmament. Therefore, although Henry Richard died in 1888 his arguments are as relevant to us as they were at the time.

There is another important name within the history of Welsh Pacifism and that is George M Ll Davies. In 1911 George Davies was a Vice-Captain with the Welsh Fusiliers but he was converted. By 1915 he was an assistant to Richard Roberts, another Welsh pacifist and the secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. His work was central in establishing many branches of the Fellowship of Reconciliation at this time, and he was responsible for their monthly magazine 'The Venturer'. He was imprisoned as a 'conshi' (conscientious objector) and spent much of his time in and out of prison during the First World War. When he was an MP for the University of Wales – the only Christian pacifist in the House of Commons - George M Ll Davies played a very important role bridging between Sinn Fein in Ireland and Lloyd George and the government of Britain. He appealed to Lady Isabel Aberdeen that the government stop their reprisals in Ireland. He succeeded in getting Lloyd George's government to discuss peace with de Valera.

After the First World War, he travelled to many European countries to see the devastation, campaigning at the same time to alleviate Germany's distress following the Versailles Treaty. His conciliation work gained international respect and admiration. Gandhi called for his help and he was part of the early reconciliation discussions between India and Britain.

Although Gwilym Davies was not a pacifist he sent a goodwill message from the children of Wales to the children of the world on a telegram in 1922, and along with Ifan ab Owen Edwards,

they established the 18th of May as the international goodwill day. Ever since, the children of Wales have been sending a message of goodwill to the children and the people of the world.

In 1934-5 the League of Nations Union organized a Peace Vote on disarmament. 34% were for the motion in Scotland, 37% in England; but in Wales there were 62% in favour.

And then there is Gwynfor Evans, Plaid Cymru's first MP elected in 1966. He also was a 'conshi' during the Second World War and for many years the secretary of the Pacifists of Wales. He worked tirelessly for peace and he was part of Michael Scott's group who went out to Vietnam during that war to stand in protest under the bombs in Hanoi. They failed to gain entry into the country but his faith in peace and his belief in the folly of war meant he was willing to give up his own life in order to bring attention to the suffering of others.

I must also mention the role of Welsh women as peace activists – Annie Humphries, the first Secretary of the Pacifists of Wales; Marion Eames, the novelist; and also the women of Greenham Common - with Jill Evans, now an European Member of Parliament and chair of Wales CND! It was a group of women from Wales who first marched to Greenham Common saying that "We fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life" with the intention of challenging the decision of establishing a centre for 96 cruise bombs. They were refused a discussion, and consequently a peace camp was established there. This above all gave the anti nuclear campaign a new focus in the 80s at the height of the Cold War and the regime of Thatcher and Regan. A young Welsh woman, Helen Thomas, was killed there by one of the military vehicles. But the camp became a symbol of peace.

Many other pacifist played an important part in promoting peace here and abroad – DJ Williams, Waldo Williams, Dan Thomas, Lewis Valentine, SR and more.

Therefore, there is a purpose for a group of people to get together and discuss peace like this and one small corner of the world can make a great difference. As the Dalai Lama once said – if you believe that you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.

Some of you here today are veterans of the peace movement, and I salute you for the work that you have done.

These examples of our history, role models for us today, have made a difference. From humble beginnings, writing letters, discussions at small conferences, sharing ideas, and campaigning for world peace.

What these men and women have in common above all else is their faith in humanity, their hope, and their love for life.

Unfortunately for us, people are greedy – we want more. We want to become wealthier. But for one person to become richer, another must become poorer. That's the way that our capitalist society is structured. And it is the root cause of conflict today, and every conflict in history. If we want to stop these wars then there's one thing we can do as ordinary people – tell our governments that we've had enough, and that we've got enough. Do we NEED more? No. Do we WANT more – well that's up to us. Our consumerist greed feeds into the warmongers war efforts, and gives them what they deem to be 'legitimate democratic reasons' for killing and maiming, because while we may say we abhor war, we are getting richer as a consequence of it... so, we don't quite abhor it enough. How many people took to the streets last weekend to raise awareness about the atrocities in Darfur? How many people cued up outside a branch of Northern Rock on that same weekend? Now that's not an entirely fair criticism, I admit, but I think that you get the point.

Henry Richard believed that war was bad also because it ruined economies. Unfortunately today that is not necessarily the case for the aggressors, because war, as Naomi Klein has recently pointed out, is by-now a multi-billion pound industry. The modern jingoism is that we should

support the manufacturing of armaments because it creates employment and wealth. But at what cost? A prosthetic limbs developer in the US stated his support for the Iraq war because it meant that they could develop better and more advanced prosthetic limbs as a consequence to the injuries incurred by the soldiers! An intelligent politician told me some time ago that he wasn't a pacifist because one of the benefits of war was the massive technological advances that we have made! So, I should thank those countless millions that have died in the last hundred years for my mobile phone! I'm actually of the belief that the UN should prosecute all those involved in the chain for the manufacturing of arms when a person is killed or injured by a weapon that was designed to kill and injure. That would quickly bring home the truth about this evil industry.

What 'Peace' we have today is an uneasy peace. It is built on inequality and fear. Simply because there is no war between one nation and another doesn't necessarily mean that there is peace, because a few nations hold power through fear and threats. Only, as Henry Richard said, by unilateral disarmament will we get closer to true peace.

Campaigning for peace and reconciliation is a hard task. It's never ending, and more often than not it might seem without its rewards, and at times, as the biographies of the individuals I mentioned earlier will testify, it can be very lonely. Gordon Brown has looked at the newspaper articles and focus group reports and found that the war in Iraq is more unpopular now than ever before, and so he's preparing the ground for troop withdrawal. But Peace and reconciliation is more than the practice of writing policy on paper; its more than investing money into focus groups in certain marginal constituencies; it's a never ending, often unpopular, slog.

But let's never give up hope, because as I have mentioned, it is from these small meetings that we can make change happen.

Perhaps it is worth me concluding my comments with some of Henry Richard's words:

"Do not be swamped by the greatness of the task nor by the terrible obstacles in your way. The work you have undertaken is good work; you are supporting a cause which I know, on the basis

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of my deepest convictions, is on the side of truth, logic, justice, humanity, mankind, religion and  
I dare add, on the side of God””