Welsh Labour in power: ‘One Wales’ vs. ‘One Nation’?

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Here be dragons

As working people across Britain marched on May Day 2007, the Labour Party was in government in Wales, Scotland, London and Westminster. Five years on, only the Welsh Government remains under Labour control and, as First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM is the party’s most senior elected figure. Governing alone since the 2011 Assembly elections, the minority Welsh Labour government thus finds itself tasked with demonstrating what a Labour administration stands for as a viable alternative to the harsh and economically dangerous cuts of the Conservative-led Coalition Government at Westminster. It is in this light that Ed Miliband describes the Labour government in Wales as ‘charting a course’ for a future Westminster government and Ed Balls declares that ‘the UK can learn from what Carwyn Jones is doing in Wales’ (Williamson, 2013).

Yet strangely, like ancient mariners’ charts, today’s maps of British politics might as well read ‘here be dragons’ across the Principality for all that is widely known of Welsh politics. Whilst the forthcoming Scottish referendum leads to breathless commentary from politicians and columnists, mentions of Wales mainly arise as ricochets from adversarial sniping, such as David Cameron’s repeated attacks upon the Welsh NHS at PMQs, or Michael Gove’s insinuations that employees should view the GCSEs of Welsh pupils as of lesser worth than those set in England. In all such cases Wales exists not in and of itself, but as a point of reference (and warning) for English concerns; even discussions over devolving tax powers to the National Assembly are reported (see Wright, 2013) in terms of how ‘English people who relocate to Wales may get tax breaks’ (and what of the Welsh already living in Wales one hesitates to ask?).

This entirely negative, Tory-framed image of Labour Wales is an embarrassment. In only 14 years Wales has been transformed, constitutionally, from a country without a directly elected devolved body, to one with a National Assembly wielding primary legislative powers. In this newly enhanced governmental context, the Welsh Labour government is forging its own, different path to the neo-liberalism practiced at Westminster – much as it did under Rhodri Morgan during the periods of the Blair-Brown governments. Yet, since the economic crash, the ‘classic’ social democratic politics practiced by Labour in Wales has found itself closer to the party’s national leadership than it was – a step ahead of comrades in England even – and if Welsh Labour is indeed charting possible routes Miliband’s ‘One Nation’ agenda might follow, then it deserves greater attention.

The constitutional is political

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to identify and present several interesting elements of Welsh Labour politics which may provide insights into the wider issues the labour movement is grappling with as it struggles to return to power at Westminster. This includes
matters of social policy, ideology and rhetoric. It can only be a rough sketch and in selecting topics to discuss areas of very real significance are relegated to secondary concerns. Foremost among these is the issue of seemingly greatest interest to the Welsh Government itself, the ever changing constitutional settlement in Wales. Others have written in greater detail regarding this agenda than is possible here. Furthermore, whilst the future constitutional balance of the Union is important for all of Britain’s component parts, it is arguably of less salience to the issues broached in this article. Still, a brief catch up may be in order.

From 1998 to 2011 the National Assembly for Wales had only secondary legislative powers and none regarding tax and borrowing, curtailing its ability to institute major changes. With the unlocking, via referendum, of the primary legislative powers held in the Government of Wales Act 2006, this situation has changed and in November 2012 Royal Assent was given to the first ever Bill passed by the Assembly (notably, an Official Languages Bill giving equal status to the Welsh and English languages inside the Assembly). The ‘debate’ over devolving additional powers never stops, however, and focuses now upon the Silk Commission and its 2012 report advocating greater financial powers and responsibilities for the Welsh Government, as well as recent calls from Jones to devolve extensive additional powers over areas such as policing and the criminal justice system (Henry, 2013). While Jones’s ‘wish list’ appears, questionably, to have not been run past Labour’s Westminster leadership first, in the context of such vocal pressure for change Miliband, Balls et al. nevertheless need to pay attention to Wales as well as Scotland, apropos the future nature of the Union. What of more immediate and transferable policies, however?

Social democratic still

With regards to policy, Labour Wales demonstrates alternative routes in a number of key areas, though not all will appeal. In education, the ill-tempered parries between Leighton Andrews AM, the Welsh Government’s ever ambitious Minister for Education, and Michael Gove point to the two governments’ different approaches: Welsh Labour have rejected any two-tier system in secondary examinations. Gove’s back-tracking over scrapping GCSEs was a small vindication of this, yet Assembly plans to take direct control of schools away from local authorities speaks to continuing problems.

On jobs, meanwhile, recognising that leaving youth unemployment to the market in a liquidity crunch is folly, the Welsh Government have invested heavily in interventionist schemes such as Job Growth Wales, which aims to create 4,000 new jobs a year for young people and was recently praised by Ed Balls for showing the way forward on unemployment (Welsh Government, 2012). Other large scale investment includes ‘Superfast Cymru’, boosting the roll-out of high speed fibre broadband to 96 per cent of the population with the related aim of creating further jobs. Also hugely ambitious and symbolic is the decision to bring Cardiff Airport into public ownership after years of declining passenger numbers; as London dithers over Heathrow, the Welsh Government intends to sell the national airport as ‘Terminal 6’, opening up the South West for commuters and business. Devolution of borrowing powers should also liberate additional capital revenue for investment in infrastructure.

In each case Welsh Labour displays an overt recognition of the need for interventionist government to stimulate the economy with injections of public capital at the point at which private capital has dried up. In terms of debates at Westminster, however, one key policy area deserving particular attention is Labour’s management of the NHS in Wales.
Caring for Bevan’s baby: NHS Wales

Cameron, as noted, has repeatedly used PMQs to attack the NHS in Wales, arguing that people in the Principality are waiting longer for operations and accusing the Welsh government of cutting funding: ‘That is what you get if you get Labour: no money, no reform, no good health services.’ As Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt has continued this assault, batting back any criticisms of his policies of privatisation with claims Labour is cutting health in Wales. Welsh politics' low salience means that such rhetoric might well have negative ramifications for Labour's campaign to reclaim Westminster. Rather than confront the Prime Minister’s jibes at PMQs, however, Miliband tries to ignore them, leaving the task of refuting Coalition attacks to the Welsh Government. Yet to find a hearing in the mainstream political narrative the latter's argument are worth airing.

First, Welsh Labour point out that, despite the findings of the Holtham Commission in July 2010 that under the Barnett formula Wales was already being underfunded by £300 million a year, the Coalition is instituting huge cuts to the Welsh budget, which at £1.8 billion over the next four years – a 42.6 per cent real terms cut in the Welsh Assembly Government’s capital budget Labour claim – are deeper than those made to Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is within the context of these deep and disproportionately targeted cuts that the Welsh Government claims to have nevertheless safeguarded NHS funding and service provision in Wales, in contrast to Coalition claims they have cut funding. The situation is naturally more complex than either side would like to admit.

The Welsh government have in fact maintained the size of the NHS budget in Wales in cash terms. Under Labour, 43 per cent of the devolved budget is invested in health and social services, the £6.3 billion funding for the NHS in Wales making up the largest single portion of the Welsh Government budget. Furthermore, as Welsh Labour emphasise, direct comparisons of figures for Wales and England are in any case inaccurate because social care is not included in the figures in England, unlike in Wales where health and social care are in the same pot. This, they claim, provides the health budget in Wales with greater protection at a time when local councils in England are cutting back social care. Nevertheless, a policy of maintaining levels of health service investment in cash terms still amounts to a real terms cut in funding. While spending per head on health services over 2010 to 2012 was higher in Wales than in England, this advantage will have eroded and indeed reversed before 2015 (see National Audit Office, 2012). Before ceding to Cameron the narrative of Welsh Labour health ‘cuts’ versus Coalition safeguarding, however, the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority judged in December 2012 that NHS spending in England was also lower in real terms after the Coalition’s first two years in government than when Labour left office. Cuts to health service funding, Labour can thus truthfully point out, are far from a Welsh phenomenon.

On waiting times, the picture is also murky. This is mainly because the targets being judged are not like for like, allowing the figures to be spun in different ways. For one thing, Welsh NHS Trusts are not bound by the 18-week waiting target set in England. Wales’ summary statistics instead refer to its own 26 and 36-week measures. Furthermore, there seems to be confusion when comparing when waiting lists ‘start’; in Wales, they refer to the total time from referral by a GP or other medical practitioner for hospital treatment; in England, waiting times start on the day the hospital receives the referral letter, or when the first appointment is booked. So who is right? Perhaps, as the BBC concludes, ‘everyone and no-one’ (Davies, 2012)?
In the face of Tory attacks on the ‘unreformed’ Welsh health system a clearer answer is possible. From the earliest days of New Labour health ‘reforms’, Welsh Labour charted a different course, including setting their face against the use of the long discredited PFI mechanism in the NHS and the market derived competitive model of health service delivery adopted in England. As such, as well as having much smaller PFI obligations than other parts of the UK, Welsh Labour continues to assert their support for a publicly owned, publicly delivered health service in the face of what Jones describes as ‘a health service in England that is being wrecked and privatised’ (quoted in Powys, 2013). It is this classic Labour view of public sector delivery which the Tories are disparaging when they criticise a lack of ‘reform’.

Yet the popular case for Welsh Labour’s approach is supported by figures drawn from the National Survey for Wales in September 2012 which show 92 per cent of people satisfied with the care they received from their GP or family doctor at their last appointment at an NHS hospital (Welsh Government, 2013). The Tory narrative that NHS Wales is ‘unreformed’ is not meant for public consumption in Wales anyway; when polled by ICM in March 2012, the Welsh rejected the suggestion that Wales should copy Andrew Lansley’s infamous top-down institutional reforms to the English NHS by 4-1 (Withers, 2012). The rhetoric of ‘reform’ in this context is a dog-whistle for middle-England ears and Welsh Labour can easily hit back against claims regarding NHS spending by simply pointing out that, within their squeezed budget, precious health funding isn’t being wasted on implementing the Coalition’s deeply unpopular reforms, as it is in England.

So, does the Labour Party need to be ashamed of its stewardship of the NHS in Wales or should it, rather, learn lessons from it? There are numerous problems with health care in Wales: in a nation suffering from a particular legacy of ill health, the NHS is still recovering from a rash of ill-designed structural re-organisations under Rhodri Morgan’s administrations; mental health services are poor; and current ‘health reconfiguration’ plans, wherein specialist services would be transferred from district general hospitals, and centralised in fewer, larger hospitals, bring very real dangers, not least in the First Minister’s own constituency Bridgend, where threats posed to A&E services at the Princess of Wales hospital face considerable local anger. With regards to the Prime Minister’s repeated assaults upon the Welsh Labour government at PMQs, however, while true as Cameron claims that spending is down and waiting lists up in Wales, the situation is less stark in comparison with England, especially when viewed alongside the tragedy which is the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

The big idea?

Nevertheless, the sceptic looking from outside might still ask, what is the ‘big idea’, the ‘national plan’ the Welsh Government offers now it has primary law making powers? Shadow Secretary of State Owen Smith MP is clear:

our message is what it’s always been: we’re delivering a Labour government that’s seeking to govern in the interests of working people in Wales just as we always have done, and we’re looking to deliver measures which deliver as comprehensively and collectively and as equitably as we possibly can. … We are Labour. We are a Labour government in Wales, implementing Labour values and Labour policies. (Quote from author’s interview with Owen Smith, December 2012)

Understated, yes, but what’s not for Labour to like? Welsh Labour demonstrates that social democratic politics need not mean the sky falling in: far from perfect, it still shows
alternatives exist to the neo-liberalism of the past and present. But, while devolution has often been touted for its possibilities regarding cross-border policy learning, as I have argued elsewhere (Moon, 2012), the nation-specific ‘Clear Red Water’ rhetoric Welsh Labour previously used to justify its policy programme has made this harder than was necessary. More than this, however, if the Welsh example is to influence the direction of the British Labour manifesto, the rhetorical and ideological basis of the party’s approach is not unproblematic. What then can a ‘One Nation’ Labour Party learn from Welsh Labour in these regards?

‘One Wales’ Labour

It is worth at this stage stepping back in time to 2007. Then, having failed to win a majority of seats in that year’s National Assembly election – and faced with impossibly vacillating Liberal Democrats – the Welsh Labour Assembly Group found itself in coalition talks with the nationalists, Plaid Cymru. These resulted in a document entitled ‘One Wales’, setting out the basis for a red-green coalition. This included: a commitment, without qualification, to a referendum on further powers for the Assembly at or before the 2011 Welsh elections; a Convention looking at the case for further powers leading up to the referendum; an independent commission to review the Barnett formula through which Wales was allocated funding; and a commitment to consider devolving powers to Wales over criminal justice; and a new Welsh Language Act.

While supporters of the deal, especially in the party leadership, described it as one which would ‘deliver 100 per cent of Labour’s manifesto’ (Rhodri Morgan, in Davie, 2007) and ‘about parties of similar ideas working together’ (Edwina Hart AM, in Osmond, 2007, 33), more than any other recent political event – including the 1997 devolution referendum – there was a great deal of anger and opposition to the proposal across the party. The deal was thus attacked publicly for providing ‘an Assembly vehicle’ to transport ‘the separatists and cultural and political nationalists’ to ‘the gates of independence’ (Kim Howells MP, in Osmond, 2007, 8) whilst ignoring the ‘lack of any binding common philosophy between the two parties’ and taking away ‘the focus … from the real social justice issues that the people of Wales clearly want us to concern ourselves with over the next four years’ (Karen Sinclair AM, Ann Jones AM and Irene James AM, in BBC News, 2007).

Behind closed doors at the special party conference called to discuss and vote on the deal, the arguments of opponents were fiercer still (1). One North Walian CLP delegate described Plaid as a ‘racist’ party, telling members that it was ‘not alright to negotiate with a party because only part of it [i.e. the part in North Wales] seems racist’. A different delegate warned Southern comrades that ‘in North Wales, English speakers are second class citizens’ warning of ‘Wales becoming a greater Gwyneth’. Speaking to both cheers and laughter one MP loudly declared the agreement to be ‘a Trotskyist plot’ which amounted to ‘transitional demands’ aimed at delivering a nationalist agenda. A Women’s Forum member called upon delegates to ‘vote for your socialist principles, not for nationalist ones’.

Altogether, roughly three quarters of those who spoke at the conference did so in opposition to ‘One Wales’, with views split across all layers of the party. The result of the conference vote itself, however, was a resounding victory for supporters of the document, with a clear majority of both affiliates (96 per cent) and constituencies (61 per cent) voting for the deal, which passed with 78 per cent of the collated vote (notably there was no ‘block’ for MPs’ and AMs’ votes). This result had ultimately been a done deal before the special conference even opened. With the unions and delegate votes already decided
albeit not formally declared, members attended and spoke already aware that ‘One Wales’ would be agreed. What the party sanctioned platform offered, really, was the opportunity for opponents to vent – and as shown above, vent they did.

It is important to understand the depth of feeling which surrounded Labour entering into the ‘One Wales’ coalition because the argument surrounding this existential decision arguably marked the recent high point of an intra-party antagonism which has historically ebbed and flowed within the Labour Party in Wales. In vulgar terms, this antagonism amounts to what has been labelled at different times as a clash between ‘nationalist’ and ‘unionist’ tendencies (Morgan & Mungham, 2000) or ‘British’ and ‘Welsh’ tendencies (Shipton, 2007). Lazily equated by some with divergent ‘devolutionist’ and ‘devo-sceptic’ opinions (see for example Davies & Williams, 2009), this is a more fluid but no less significant distinction between – to draw upon Huw T. Edwards – those who ‘see the Labour Party through Welsh eyes’ and those ‘seeing Wales through Labour Party eyes’ (quoted in Ward, 2011, 70). In the debate today over ‘One Nation’ politics this is a significant division.

Arguably, moments of deep tension between these intra-party tendencies are anomalies (see Smith, 2012c); antagonisms have fizzled and crackled in the background, but only really burst to the surface once or twice: in the 1950s between Aneurin Bevan and those such as Megan Lloyd George and Cledwyn Hughes arguing for a Parliament for Wales; and in the great schism at the tail end of the 1970s where the charismatic opposition of Neil Kinnock, Leo Abse et al. trampled all over Michael Foot’s devolution plans. In these cases constitutional reform was intimately linked to questions of identity, with fears on both sides that change or stasis would irrevocably damage their preferred self-conceptions of the party and Wales – be that Welsh ‘culturalist’ or internationalist ‘Labourist’, say.

If nationalism in Wales was of a civic variety (as it is in Scotland), rather than cultural and linguistic (as it actually is), undoubtedly fewer within the labour movement would fear its influence. Yet, to a large extent such concerns have abated with devolution, as its gradual deepening and the accrual of further powers has passed by with only minimal grumbling around questions of ‘Welshness’. Even fears at the ‘Cymricisation’ of Wales’ civic space linked to an increasing emphasis on the promotion of and spending on the Welsh language – which the latest census shows is nevertheless in decline – has raised less than the odd yelp, even now as the Welsh Government debates enforcing new legal standards over the use of Cymraeg by public and private bodies. The abject failure of True Wales, the leading body arguing against further devolution of powers, to gain any traction – despite being in many regards a classic ‘old Labour’ Unionist grouping (albeit with Tory backing) – is emblematic of this.

The proposition embedded in ‘One Wales’ – of formally breaking bread with the hated nationalists – was thus the first and so far last truly seismic eruption of the aforementioned ideological rift post-devolution. What it ultimately signified was a general recognition of Welsh Labour’s evolution since 1998 into a particular type of soft-nationalist party (in the Assembly Group, at least). Welsh Labour went to war internally over ‘One Wales’, but following the cathartic moment offered by the special conference and subsequent ‘Yes’ vote, the conflict deflated once again, a victor, long since dominant, confirmed. Even before the titular coalition document, Welsh Labour was espousing what might be called a ‘One Wales’ identity politics, in so doing operating within a post-devolution ‘Welshminster Consensus’ around Cardiff Bay – largely forged by itself – within which the major parties, even to an extent the Tory Group, operate.
The ‘Welshminster consensus’

This Welshminster Consensus embodies: (i) soft-nationalist cultural politics and political rhetoric; (ii) devo-maximising constitutional reform; and (iii) a social democratic policy agenda. Amongst other things this consensus is the outcome of day-to-day working in a political community which is small and close. With only 60 AMs in Cardiff Bay – compared to 650 MPs at Westminster – the atmosphere is familiar and relaxed; first names are used in the Senedd chamber; and cross-party socialising amongst AMs, their staff, media, academics, lobbyists and civil servants in the Bay’s local pubs is regular and the norm. This more ‘intimate’ setting has been helped by an electoral system which makes coalition government and minority deals the rule; the Assembly was designed from the start to foster a politics which broke from the adversarial ‘Westminster model’.

That a Welsh nationalist viewpoint would exert a stronger influence upon the Labour Assembly Group than the Welsh Parliamentary Labour Party was thus in a sense to be an inevitable corollary of devolution; after all, whilst in Westminster the handful of nationalists are easily dismissed and ignored as ‘kooks and crazies’ by ‘big three’ parliamentarians, until 2011 Plaid Cymru AMs constituted the second largest group in the Assembly and from 2007 to 2011 were Labour’s coalition partners there. From within this cultural milieu, and recognising a general growth in Welsh identity amongst the population, Welsh Labour’s rhetoric has trumpeted the national particularity of a ‘small nation’ and people with ‘Welsh values’ and ‘Welsh attitudes’ which are very different to ‘the English way’ and thus make necessary specific ‘Made in Wales’ policy solutions to match (see Moon, 2012).

Its tanks placed firmly on the political ground its ‘One Wales’ coalition partner once controlled, Welsh Labour has sedimented its position as the ideological hegemon of post-devolution politics: every element in ‘One Wales’ which caused critics to denounce it as a nationalist Trojan horse – the focus on Barnett, powers and promoting Cymraeg – are now owned by Welsh Labour: they are basic points of Carwyn Jones’ political philosophy. The result, as Plaid Cymru leader Leanne Wood described, is a broadly soft-nationalist consensus:

> the Welsh nationalist agenda has progressed quite significantly since the setting up of devolution. What we’ve seen happening in Wales is that the British parties, the unionist parties, have taken on a lot of the policies that we’ve been advocating. We advocated the reform of the Barnett formula, measures to defend the Welsh language, for example, and the parties have come on board, on to our territory. There’s no difference between the parties on those issues. And the same goes for extending devolution, in terms of the referendum that we won last year. All parties are united around progressing that agenda. (Quoted in Sparrow, 2012)

This is the Welshminster Consensus within which a ‘One Wales’ Labour Party operates but also controls; and against Wood’s claims, it has arguably spiked Plaid’s guns: all of this is the legacy of one-party dominance in Wales – or ‘Labourland’ as it has been called in the past.

Where critics within Welsh Labour saw ‘One Wales’ as a route to Plaid’s advancement, the actual legacy has been Plaid’s decline to third party status – overtaken by the Conservatives – and the increasing relevance of the titular question of Syd Morgan and Alan Sandry’s insightful article (2011): ‘What is Plaid Cymru for?’ What Morgan and Sandry fear is that, just as Labour have become more culturally nationalist, so Plaid have been ‘gradually slipping into a UK devolutionary, Cardiff Bay, but Labour-led consensus’. After
all, if there are two social democratic, soft-nationalist parties in Wales, doesn’t one become surplus to requirements? Looking from across the border, what Ed Miliband might see in Wales is an example of a party which has managed to articulate an electorally successful social democratic politics via appeals to national solidarity and culture. In the current search for a ‘One Nation Labour’ politics, the appeal is clear.

‘One Nation Labour’ in Wales?

But a ‘One Wales’ political approach is symptomatic of a problem for Labour: how do you have ‘One Nation’ politics in a nation of nations like the UK? More than any other, Owen Smith has sought to square this seeming circle, addressing it across a number of intelligent articles. Indeed, the term ‘One Nation’ was deployed by Smith (2012a) in the *New Statesman* even before Miliband’s 2012 Conference speech, wherein he argued that:

> Welsh Labour’s success is both a product of the left and radical traditions of Wales and of a renewed sense of national mission. It is this fusion of progressive politics with national mission – this nation-building from the left – that Labour needs to understand and adopt across the UK.

Writing for the *Western Mail*, Smith (2012b) described how, yes, ‘modern Britain is a nation of nations, with traditions and culture, heritage and history, accents, dialects and even languages that divide us’ but argues that ‘there are as many things, more important things perhaps, that bind us together, that also make us One Nation’ as ‘[c]ommon values, cherished institutions and unifying experience … form a shared, British identity which is tolerant and inclusive, and embraced by the majority of people who live in these isles.’ A ‘One Nation’ politics would thus entail ‘[a]n approach that respects devolution and the distinctions which it reflects and responds to, but which also recognises the greater strength of our people when we pull together; across classes and countries, faiths and nations.’ Though Smith does not address it directly, the question of whom Labour’s ‘people’ are is the absolute key to the ‘One Nation’ debate at all national levels.

‘The people as the rest of us’

This is currently confused: on the one hand, there is talk of communities, treated as groups in the classic pluralist sense; on the other, party figures including the leader have invoked notions of not only British patriotism, but also English national identity meant to sit alongside Welsh and Scottish. However, defining ‘One Nation’ upon boundaries of national identity and nationalist identifiers is hazardous: Ed Miliband has already been accused of insensitivity in his call for mandatory English proficiency for public workers for his total failure to take on board the realities of Welsh language communities, especially in North West Wales (Henry, 2012). If the UK is a ‘nation of nations’ the danger is that the Labour Party/parties in Cardiff Bay and Westminster will appeal to different national ‘levels’ of this multi-layered construct.

The answer is to cleave, again, to socialist roots. If ‘One Nation’ politics are to mean something beyond the vague or the regressive, they have to be a call not to divisions between ‘national people(s)’ – be they ‘Welsh people’, ‘English people’ or ‘British people’ – but rather to the ‘people of the nation’ – that is, to ‘the people of Wales’, ‘the people of England’, ‘the people of Britain’ or – yes – even ‘the people of Europe’. The first articulation of the ‘people’ appeals to a demarcated grouping in which all those situated within the
national space are included – rich or poor, banker or jobseeker – with inside/outside divides mapped onto national borders, even where, as in the case of the UK, these split apart greater transcending peoples. Where appeals are made, however, to the second articulation of ‘the people’, the entity being referred to is not to everyone as a whole or a unity – all the Welsh, or all the British – but to that set of people left-wing thinker Jodi Dean calls ‘the people as the rest of us’: i.e. ‘those of us whose work, lives, and futures are expropriated, monetised, and speculated on for the financial enjoyment of the few’ (Dean, 2012, 69).

It is upon the shoulders of this ‘proletarianised’ figure – the 99 per cent, so to speak – which crosses national borders rather than obstinately resting upon them, that a One Nation Labour politics can find its feet in our nation of nations. This is the ideology which underpins such declarations as Ed Miliband’s, made at the 2012 Conference, that: ‘I don’t believe that solidarity stops at the border. I care as much about a young person unemployed in Motherwell as I do about a young person unemployed here in Manchester’ (Miliband, 2012). Embracing the ‘people as the rest of us’ reminds us that, whilst social democratic politics is our goal and a post-devolution Britain our playing field, the purpose of Labour is not to swallow, trumpet or fulfil nationalist agendas as Leanne Wood would have us think. As an active, interventionist government, Labour in Wales provides lessons the British party should attend to. The lesson from Wales is also, however, that even if it may win votes, political rhetoric which frames policies and ideology in nationalistic terms must be rejected, not embraced. The people of Labour’s ‘One Nation’ are inter-nationalist at all national levels: they are both international and inter-national. The populist message for the party to take is therefore simple: working people of the nation(s) unite as one!

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References


Note

1. These notes are based upon personal transcription of speeches at the event by the author.