

Cymdeithas Cledwyn

The Fro: Winning votes in Welsh-speaking Wales

June 2008

THE FRO: WINNING SUPPORT IN WELSH-SPEAKING WALES

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Executive Summary

An analysis of electoral data shows that Labour in the Fro declined from 1966-1992, with the decline accelerating after 1974. Since 1992 the party has staged a reasonable recovery, but it remains below the comparative performance in 1974. Opposition tactics to delegitimise Labour in the Fro have worked well due to a number of factors; because of language issues; because of social issues; because opposition parties have tried to portray Labour as urban-centric and Cardiff-centric.

Engagement and organisation

Labour in the Fro cannot rely only on motivating its working class supporters, it must constantly seek to expand its potential support.

It must seek candidates who reflect the character of the electorate, can be identified with by the electorate, and who are willing to build support over a number of elections. Labour in the Fro must reach out to civic society and build support. It should recruit at least two or three leading local personalities in each constituency to contribute to local community-based campaigns. In Llanelli, a different strategy focusing on hope and delivery on core electorate grounds will be needed. New technology should be utilised and young people targeted.

Rural policy

To counter perceptions of Labour as a party that only cares about the South and urban areas the party needs clear and flexible arrangements for policies that reflect the concerns of the rural West and North Wales.

Housing needs specific attention. Alongside policies to widen access to affordable housing, the Labour-led Welsh Assembly Government should introduce a competition to offer a substantial financial incentive to a company that can design an environmentally-friendly zero carbon home.

A strategy for re-invigorating seaside towns should be central to a tourism theme. Pilot projects, utilising EU Convergence Programme cash, should be mandated to create model sustainable communities to become carbon-neutral by 2015. Local businesses should be encouraged to commit to buying from local suppliers, partly feeding into a campaign focusing on high-quality, sustainable Welsh environmental tourism.

Labour in Wales should spearhead a fundamental re-think of the pattern and promotion of farming. More young people should be encouraged into the profession. As the Single Farm Payment offers real possibilities for diversification, farmers, who already have skills in the mechanical field, should be utilised in delivering the practical renewable technology required to meet the UK Government's renewables targets.

Encouraging community interaction is essential to maintain the social structure and cohesion of the Fro. Labour in Wales should lead an effort to utilise rural pubs, community and church buildings for promoting traditional culture. A pilot project involving 12 church halls, church centres or pubs, should utilise EU Convergence funding to provide training for volunteers in providing confidence building for the economically inactive.

Labour must listen to older people in the Fro; survey their opinions and encourage them to address their issues to the Commissioner for Older People. It should find ways of utilising the skills of the older generation, encouraging older people to become active citizens.

There must be recognition that there is a real issue among those living in rural areas where there is a high level of inward migration; people feel traditional communities are being diluted and traditional values eroded. Likewise, we must develop a strategy for inward migrants to the Fro and ensure mechanisms to address their concerns and encourage community participation.

Labour should promote a major transport overhaul to force bus companies to run unprofitable but socially valuable rural routes by adopting a proposal to tie bus contracts to those of the more profitable routes.

Labour must lead a policy agenda to enable the Fro to capitalise on the economic opportunities presented by social developments and advances in ICT. Priority must be given to ensuring speedy broadband connections. Rural businesses should be given support to organise through forums and associations. Universities and colleges should be encouraged to transfer expertise. Women and older people should be targeted for entrepreneurial support and the expertise and experience of inward migrants should be encouraged. EU Convergence funding should be used to develop sustainable outreach training programmes in the post-14 sector.

The Welsh Language

The changing national consensus regarding the Welsh language offers Labour a wonderful opportunity to engage people in a modern approach to language usage centring on community engagement. The focus must be on creating sustainable and lively communities where there are at least two languages. The Labour party must assert and emphasise all it has delivered for the language and acknowledge that it will not gain support among groups in the Fro without making a firm and active commitment to the language.

Analysis proves that Welsh is not a language of an 'elite', yet there remains a perception that it is so. This perception, together with the focus on legal means of promotion has led to a lack of confidence among 'everyday' Welsh speakers. Labour should reach out to these 'everyday' speakers by supporting

Welsh in sports, pubs and community activities. Less formal and simple Welsh, both written and orally, should be encouraged, particularly in the public sector.

Welsh should be seen as a language of right in parts of West Wales when, for example, dealing with old people in care homes. Bilingual juries should be a possibility in appropriate circumstances. We should move away from symbolic and expensive translations of complex documents. The money saved should be ring-fenced and diverted to organisations promoting Welsh at a grassroots level. More emphasis should be placed on ensuring active participation in communities by the Welsh Language Board. More accessible and less formal Welsh language programmes should be a condition of increased funding for S4C.

Labour should develop a strategy for Welsh language education and plan for its growth. The strategy should be driven by the Welsh Assembly in partnership with local government, reflecting the disparity and differences in the demand in different localities.

The Labour party should always translate its manifesto into Welsh, ensure part of its Web site is in Welsh, and should encourage MPs, AMs and MEPs to do the same. Consideration should be given to a central free volunteer translation service. Speakers at Welsh Labour conference should be encouraged to ensure at least part of their contribution is in Welsh and part of conference should be chaired in Welsh. Labour should always hold a meeting at the National Eisteddfod.

Introduction

In the 2007 Assembly election Labour lost every constituency seat in the 'Fro' (*the seats in the western half of Wales with a high proportion of Welsh speakers*) for the first time since 1922. **Does this represent a new break for the Labour Party; the culmination of a historical trend; or a new opportunity?**

The purpose of this report is to analyse the reasons why Labour has lost support in the West and to suggest what the Party should do in order to win back this vast area, which is essential if Labour is ever to hold overall control of the Assembly again.

Despite the disappointing performance across Wales in the recent local government elections, including in many 'heartland' Valleys seats, the remit of this document is to address specifically the issue of the Labour party's performance in the Fro. This report does not take into account the local government election results.

The following is a set of recommendations to be considered by the Welsh Executive Committee, Constituency Labour Parties and the Welsh Policy Forum.

PART 1

I The data

Studying the electoral behaviour of West Wales is difficult. There are no monthly, demographically balanced opinion polls going back 30 years. There are places where the Fro is prominent, but almost none where it is isolated.

The first section of this paper will examine the situation in eight seats in West Wales with reasonably high levels of Welsh-language use: Ynys Mon, Arfon, Aberconwy, Dwyfor Meirionnydd, Ceredigion, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr and Llanelli.

It will also look at their ancestor seats. The major boundary changes before the 2007, 1997, 1987 and 1974 elections make comparisons tricky but not impossible. In general the Fro has been represented by seats that periodically swapped bits with each other rather than swapped bits in and out.

The seats will be broken into three groups of seats, namely:

- **A55 cluster (Key: North): Arfon, Aberconwy and Ynys Mon and prior seats of Caernarfon, Conwy and Ynys Mon.**

Although each of these seats is fairly rural they also contain significant towns: Bangor, Conwy, Caernarfon, Holyhead, as well as access to the economic zone that stretches out from North-West England into North Wales.

- **Rural Wales (Key: Rural): Dwyfor Meirionnydd, Ceredigion and prior seats of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire, Meirionneth and Cardigan.**

Although each of these seats contain significant towns such as Blaenau Ffestiniog and Aberystwyth they are predominantly rural and do not have easy access to the economic zones to their North or South. Indeed traditionally the railways ran east into the Midlands.

- **Llanelli-Carmarthen (Key: South): Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Llanelli and prior seats Carmarthen and Llanelli.**

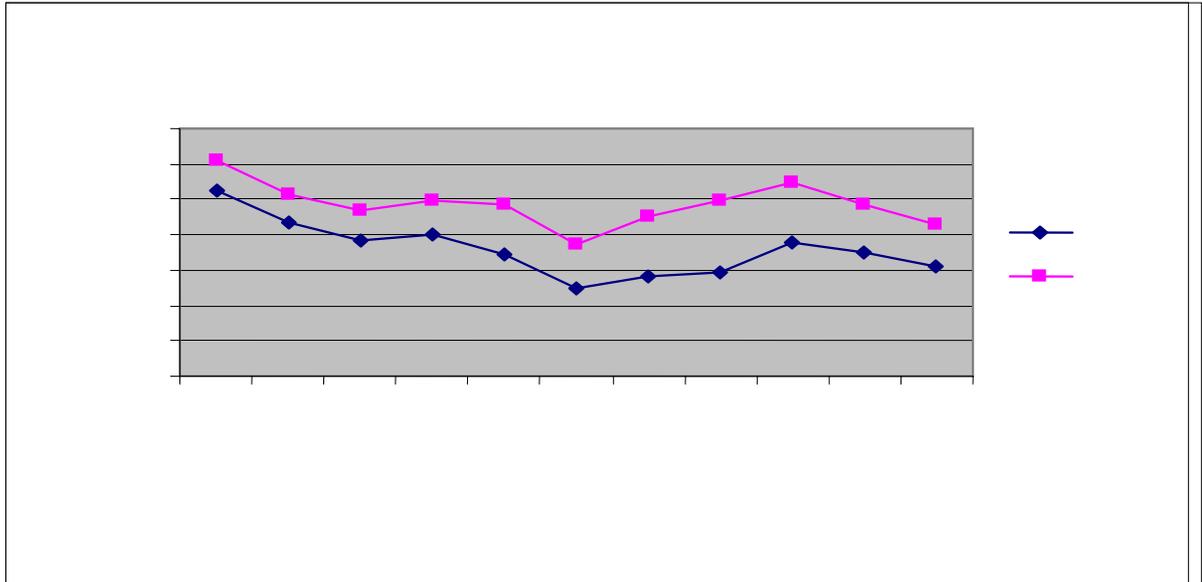
Although these seats contain significant rural elements they also have extensive industrial and post-industrial areas and are connected to the economic zone that used to run through the South Wales Valleys and is now increasingly focused on the M4 corridor.

This division is subjective and could be challenged. It is meant to deal with the fact that not all Welsh-speaking seats are the same.

Another problem with studying such a small number of seats is that the rise and fall of personal votes can distort the figures.

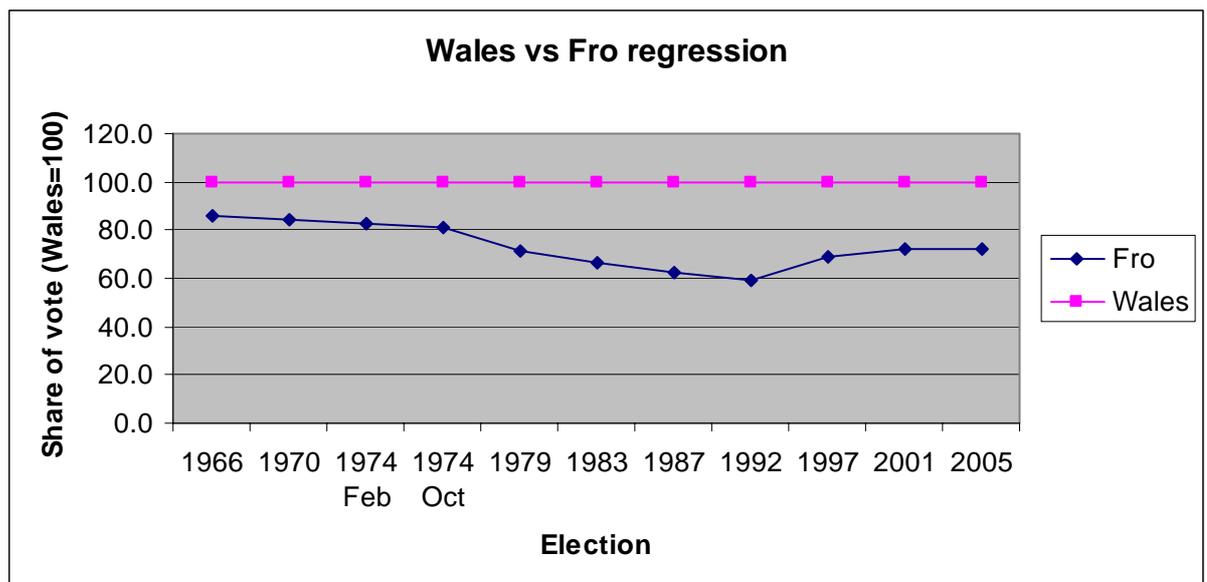
The historical trend (General Elections only)

Graph 1 shows the relative performance of Labour in Wales generally and the Fro in the General Elections between 1966 and 2005.



(Graph 1)

Graph 2 shows performance in the Fro *compared* to performance in the rest of Wales by taking out the all-Wales swing.

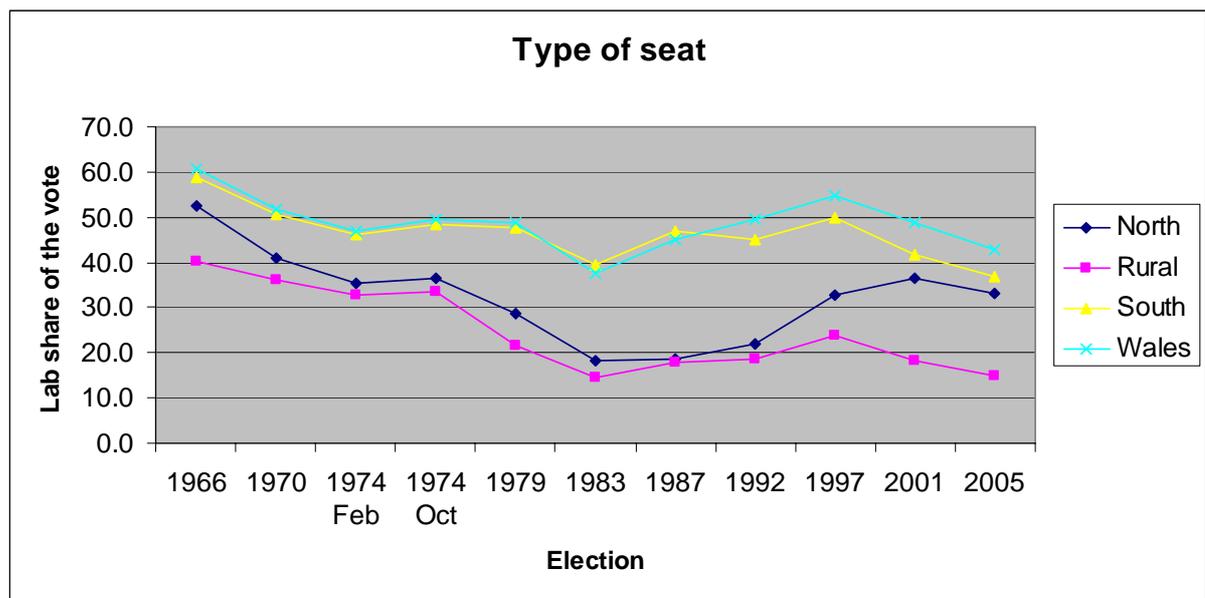


(Graph 2, basically this shows Labour's share of the vote in the Fro as a percentage of its share in Wales generally)

This shows Labour in the Fro declined from 1966-1992, with the decline accelerating after 1974.

Since 1992 Labour in Welsh speaking areas has actually staged a reasonable recovery, but it remains below the comparative performance in 1974.

If we break the Fro into three different categories however we get three very different behaviours (Graph 3).

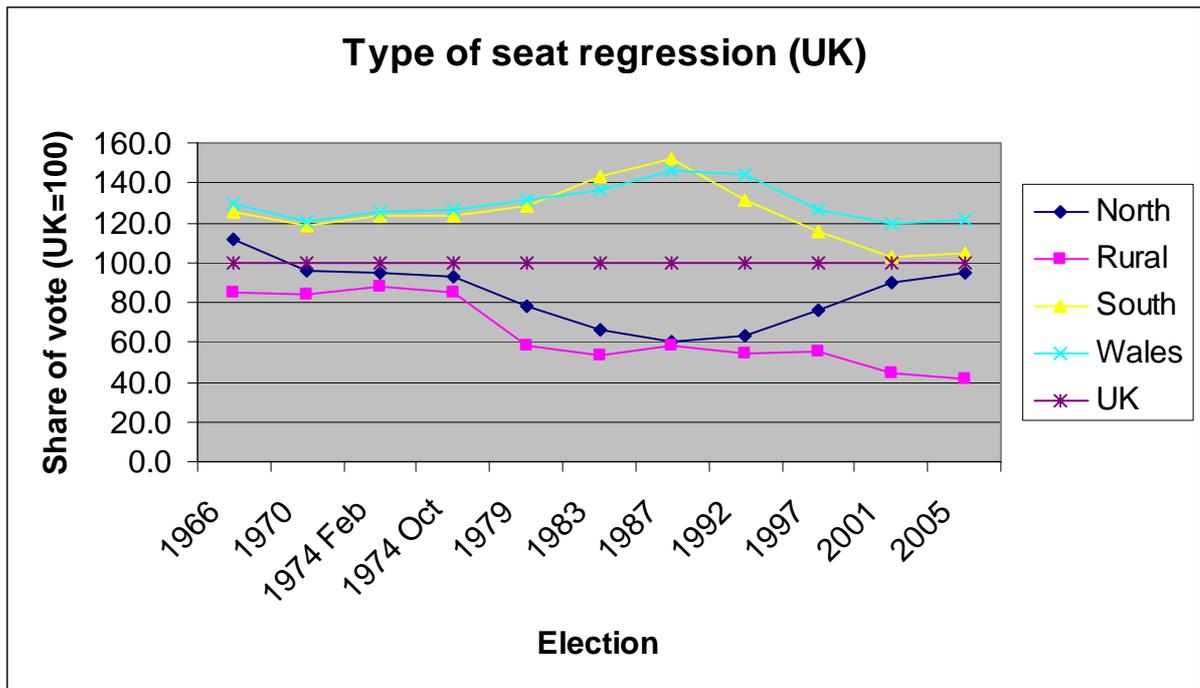


(Graph 3)

In the A55 cluster and rural Wales there was a sharp decline from 1966 to 1983 (the nadir). Since then the Labour vote in the A55 cluster has recovered strongly, but in rural Wales it has flat-lined.

In Carmarthen-Llanelli on the other hand the performance was robust from 1966 to 1987. Indeed in 1983 and 1987 it out-performed the rest of Wales. Since 1992 however there has been a gentle decline.

These trends become even more obvious when looking at the relative performance again, taking out the all-UK swing this time (Graph 4). If these trends continue Labour will soon be performing better in the A55 cluster than in Llanelli-Carmarthen.



(Graph 4, this shows Labour's share of the vote in various areas as a percentage of Labour's share of the vote in the UK)

This is a worrying trend in Carmarthen-Llanelli. Traditionally it has behaved similarly to the bulk of Labour support in Wales, but since the high of 1987 it has increasingly performed worse.

Explanations

There is no simple explanation for these developments. You could write it all off as boundary changes (in 1997, 1987 and 1979), although the recovery in the A55 cluster and in the decline in Llanelli-Carmarthen began before the boundary changes.

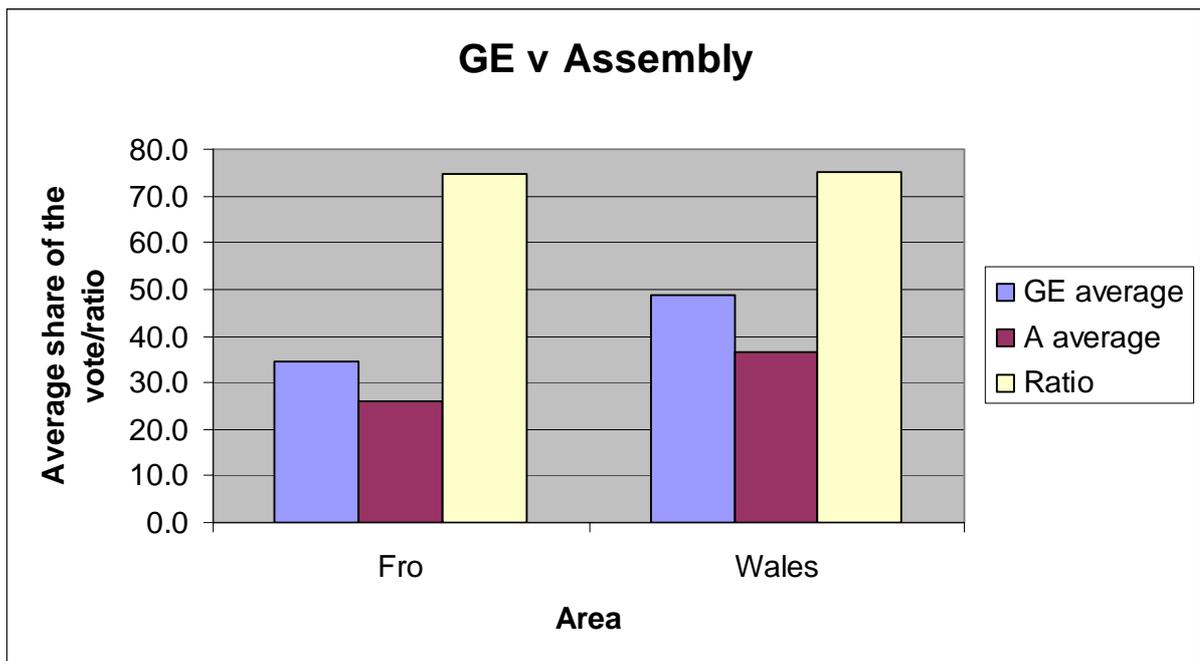
It may be interpreted that Llanelli-Carmarthen are more 'old Labour' and have reacted badly to Kinnock and Blair, while the A55 is more New Labour territory.

It could also be said that cultural nationalism hit north and rural Wales in the 1970s but is only really making itself felt in South-West Wales from the 1990s onwards. The decline of heavy industry in Carmarthen-Llanelli in the 1980s may also be linked to a decline in the Labour vote from the 1992 onwards.

There is probably some truth in all these thoughts, but there is no easy way of distinguishing which is more important.

Assembly elections

Does Labour do worse in Assembly elections in the Fro? In a word: no (Graph 5).

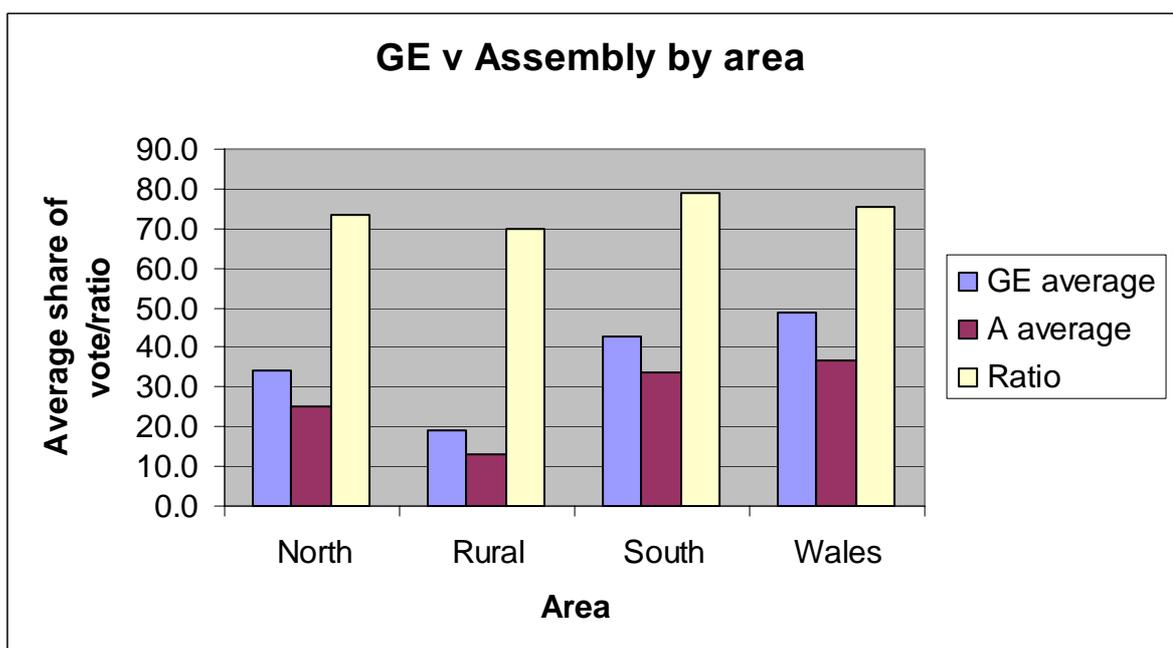


(Graph 5)

This graph shows the average of the last three General Elections, and the last three Assembly Elections. The ratio in Wales and the ratio in the Fro is almost exactly the same. Labour gets about 72% of its General Election share of the vote at Assembly Elections in both the Fro and Wales.

Labour has a problem turning out its General Election vote at Assembly elections; this problem exists in the Fro but is not worse.

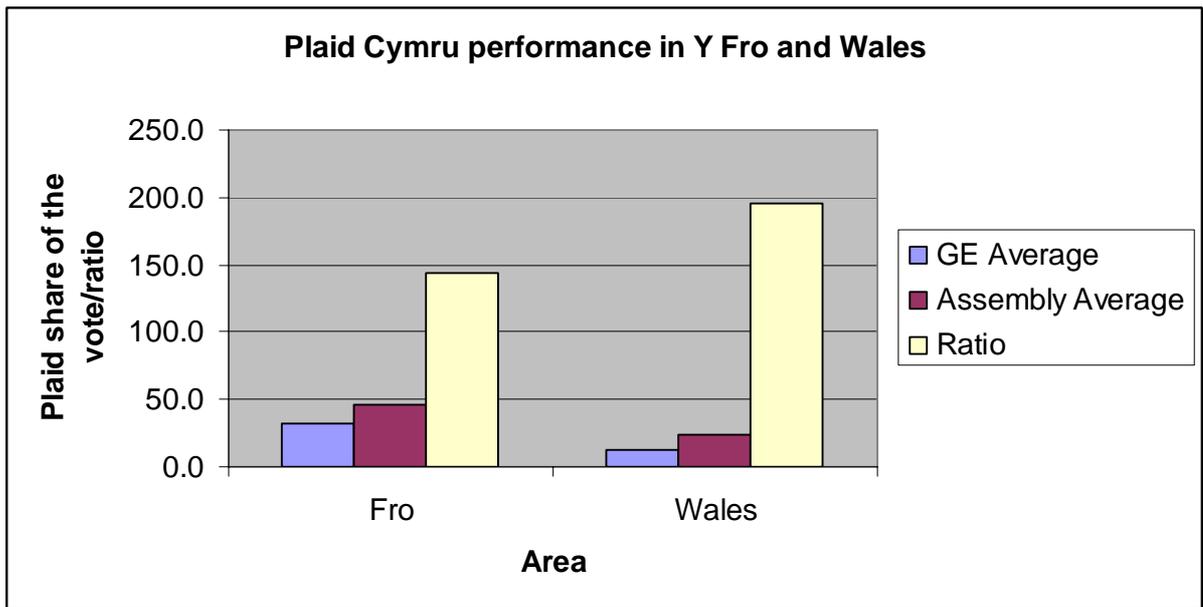
Graph 6 shows this in the three different areas.



(Graph 6)

There is a little difference here, with Llanelli-Carmarthen doing slightly better at Assembly elections than the rest of Wales, and rural Wales doing slightly worse. This probably just reflects the fact that Welsh Labour identified and fought key marginals in the South-West.

It is true that Plaid Cymru do much better at Assembly Election than General Elections, although not so much better in the Fro than it does elsewhere (Graph 7).



(Graph 7)

The above graph shows Plaid Cymru approaching 50% of the vote in the Fro during Assembly elections. Obviously this makes them very difficult to beat.

So due to the fact that in the Fro Plaid Cymru is usually (although not always) the opponent probably does make it tougher terrain for Labour.

II The Opposition

Legitimation

In the 2007 Welsh Assembly elections opposition parties were able to set the political agenda for most of the election campaign particularly through a dishonest attack on health policies. Plaid Cymru also undoubtedly benefited from the attention given to the SNP through the national media.

However, Plaid Cymru's primary tactic (against almost every party) in Welsh-speaking Wales is to attempt to delegitimise them.

This argument is both geographic: to argue that due to the fact Labour are run from (Cardiff/the Valleys/London/Washington) and only care about the (M4 corridor/the Valleys/South-East England/Iraqi oil) they cannot possibly represent people and will always betray them; but also cultural: to argue that they are not rooted in the community, do not care about the Welsh language or are positively antagonistic. This can often get quite personal: suggesting that Labour candidates are in some way not really Welsh, or insufficiently Welsh.

Likewise, the Conservatives have portrayed the Labour Party as being hostile to rural areas. They have used issues like school and post office closures and the fox hunting ban to strengthen their traditional links with rural civic society. They, as much as Plaid Cymru, have sought to delegitimise Labour.

Due to a combination of factors these tactics have worked well: because of language issues; because of social problems in West Wales; because Labour is a declining force in civil society.

PART 2

I Engagement and organisation

1. Re engaging with civil society

The most important battle Labour is losing is cultural: civil society in the Fro is increasingly based around institutions that emphasise the importance of the Welsh language, traditional hierarchies and maintaining a distinct identity in a globalising world; rather than economic development, social solidarity and widening opportunity.

Trade unions are not as vociferous in West Wales as other parts of the country; other working class organisations are diminishing. Traditional working structures where the Labour vote could be relied upon are also changing. In the Fro, outside the main towns, the Labour party has low membership, often does not contest local elections, or does not contest them fiercely, and plays little role in the life of communities in this area.

Labour in the Fro cannot rely only on motivating its working class supporters to turn out. Instead it must constantly seek to expand its potential support, it must look at increasing demographic groups: graduates, the high-skilled, homeowners, and try and devise ways of attracting them.

Surveying the Fro it can be seen that North Wales has usually led the way for the rest of the country: most heavy industry in North Wales did not survive the depression of the 30s and the economy had to be recreated; in North-West Wales cultural nationalism swept aside a shaky Labour establishment in the 70s and has established itself as the 'settled will of the respectable middle classes'. In these areas, Labour has had to fight insurgency campaigns based upon jobs and economic development that the nationalist local establishment ignores. It is a model that Llanelli-Carmarthen will soon have to emulate.

In rural Gwynedd although the Labour Party has councillors (Blaenau Ffestiniog, Barmouth) it does not fight elections (they are generally unopposed), has little life, and little support from outside its few committed enthusiasts. In Llanelli the Labour Party is living off past glories and has to work hard constantly to expand beyond its present cadre.

The links between the volunteer Party, its elected representatives and civil society in the Fro must be strengthened.

2. Getting the right candidate

The qualities of a Labour candidate are very important and we need to select the right candidate for the seat - not an imposed candidate but nevertheless

one that meets the needs of the electorate, reflects the character of the electorate and can be identified with by the electorate.

The Labour party should place greater emphasis on seeking male and female candidates who have qualities that score highly with local people from outside as well as inside the Labour party. We should recruit from outside of the party if necessary. Ideally we should select candidates who will be willing to build support over a number of elections. We should ensure that our political organisation allows us to select a candidate at the earliest opportunity.

3. Building support

The candidate alone cannot effect a lasting change. The candidate needs a team of supporters. At a local level we need to reach out to civic society to rebuild levels of support. We should reach out to selected local people who can add value to the campaign and bring aboard a diversified support base apart from the traditional Labour base.

Local influence is massively important in rural areas. We should aim to recruit a minimum of two or three leading personalities in each seat to contribute to the constituency campaign: perhaps trade unionists - and not necessarily traditional Labour supporters; academics; a member of the arts community; people from the medical profession. People of influence who, until now, would appear apolitical and who carry confidence and weight and are now prepared to support a candidate on a personal basis.

At a national level, Labour needs to declare its interest in developing distinct policies for improving the rural economy. It is not good enough to pay lip service to non-urban areas; we must produce clear political messages that can be easily identified with Labour. Four or five key Labour policies should be chosen for each area and then be driven through consistent and repetitious campaigning.

CLPs need to develop clear community-based campaigns and effective activities. Campaigns must be chosen that will engage the constituency and create ownership. The campaigns and policies should reflect the nature of the candidate chosen. Each constituency will vary in campaign approach and this could be co-ordinated from a central campaign support unit.

Llanelli, however, is a different case. It is the only seat in the west that has been Labour in every parliamentary election from 1945 to the present. In its industrial and urban heritage it is distinct from the rest of the West, therefore a different strategy involving hope and delivery on core electorate grounds will be needed here. Complacency is not an option.

4. Using new techniques to reach out

In rural areas in particular there are issues around the ability of people to attend meetings due to distances. We should therefore try and use new techniques such as forming internet groupings around issues, MembersNet, Facebook, and even texting as a means of reaching out.

Action points:

- A recruitment drive. Local parties with help from elected representatives should target and approach at least three individual prominent members of the community to join the Labour party in each constituency, and should court some specifically with a view to them becoming candidates.
- We need to engage, through TULO, with the trade unions that do exist in West Wales and use these as platforms to enter the wider society; eg USDAW's presence in the dairy industry, GMB and Unison's presence in the public sector and Unite's Rural Agricultural and Allied Workers section.
- We need to reach beyond our core vote - to graduates, highly skilled workers and homeowners.
- When developing our manifesto we need to understand that some issues like free bus passes will not be as attractive to the electorate in rural areas as urban areas as the buses are less frequent, and the car ownership rate is higher in rural areas.
- We need to recognise that the threat does not just come from Plaid Cymru but also from the Conservatives
- We must develop a strategy for single issue politics and responding to community concerns. Four readily identifiable issues should be identified for each area.
- Regional AMs and councillors should be the motivators and the drivers for this, but they should be able to call on their fellow Labour MPs AMs and MEPs from across Wales to help out.
- Each CLP needs to identify and establish one person responsible for reaching out through information technology. These individuals in West Wales should come together twice a year to exchange ideas and information.
- We should have a specific strategy to target people who have moved into the Fro from elsewhere.

- We should take action to recruit and attract young people through issues and activities which are of interest to them (eg green issues and music), targeting colleges, universities and social events.

II Rural Policy

There is a need to acknowledge that the opposition has, to an extent, been successful in portraying Labour as the party which cares only about the South and urban areas. We need clear and flexible arrangements for policies that reflect the concerns of the rural West and North Wales and a targeted message for these regions. At the moment, where these policies exist they are not packaged or directed at the Fro. Clearly identifiable messages and strategies, which can be measured against delivery, need to be promoted.

1. Housing

Housing in rural areas needs specific attention. Since the Shelter Commission in 2006, and now the Rowntree Commission in 2008, the issue has rocketed up the political agenda, with the Rowntree Commission recently warning of a 'lost generation' in rural areas. The homelessness rate in rural areas is twice the rate of urban areas, yet there are 18,000 vacant homes in rural areas. With house prices now more than five times the average income in all rural local authority areas, affordability is an issue, particularly for first time buyers.

Alongside policies to widen access to affordable housing, the Labour-led Assembly Government should introduce a competition offering a substantial financial incentive for a company that can design a model sustainable three bedroom environmentally-friendly zero carbon home. The home should cost no more than £50,000, should stand for a limit of 40 years, and be accepted even by National Parks.

2. Sustainable seaside towns

A strategy for re-invigorating seaside towns and to upgrade facilities and accommodation should be central to a tourism theme. Tourism is already crucial for the economy of the Fro, but attracting higher value tourism is key to increasing pay in the area.

This could be done through promoting twelve pilot projects funded through the EU's Convergence Programme to model sustainable communities which will be mandated to become carbon neutral by 2015.

We should also aim to encourage local businesses to commit to buying from local suppliers, in particular linking up with horticultural and agricultural producers (eg Local restaurants should be encouraged to only offer local produce). This could then be used in a promotional campaign focussing on high quality Welsh environmental tourism.

3. Agriculture

Agriculture continues to be an important part of society in West and North Wales. With food prices increasing and likely to continue to increase. a growing

demand for quality and specialist products and opportunities for farmers to engage in the production of sustainable biofuels, the severe pressure faced by agricultural communities could be eased in coming years.

However the average age of farmers in Wales is 57, and, as it stands we are likely to experience a severe skills shortage in the agricultural sector - especially if we need to bring land back into production. Farming is an extremely difficult job involving massive time pressures and a commitment to a way of life. It is often poorly paid, demands long hours, and the power of supermarkets has severely eroded farmers' negotiating capacity.

Labour in Wales should lead a fundamental re-think in the pattern and promotion of farming. More young people should be encouraged to enter into the profession and given the opportunities and support to acquire the skills necessary to enhance their farm income through diversification, innovation or specialisation. Through developing these new skills farmers could have the option to work on the farm on a part-time basis whilst receiving a second income from an alternative source. This could help address the issue of attracting more young people into farming.

The Single Farm Payment offers real opportunities for farmers to diversify and a specific strategic plan for renewable energy on farms could be of huge benefit, not just to the farmers but also to the local community. The UK Government has committed to increase our energy supply from renewables from the current 2% to 15% by 2020. This will involve not only a massive degree of investment but will also require a radical training programme, in particular if we are to encourage micro-generation. Farmers already have an aptitude and skills in the mechanical field which could easily be transferred to the renewables industry. This could be a way of encouraging young farmers to keep their hand in agriculture and also develop skills in a new and growing industry.

We should build links with Unite's Rural Agricultural and Allied Workers Section who represent farm and forestry workers. This will be an important way to build our support and bring a genuine Labour party voice to the debate on the future of agriculture. Too often poor working conditions on farms and other trade union issues are over-looked by the other political parties.

4. Promoting and supporting community and culture

Encouraging community interaction is essential to maintain the social structure and cohesion of the Fro. Yet many of the rural pubs, community and church buildings which have historically performed this function in West Wales are under threat as their traditional usage declines. Labour in Wales should spearhead an effort to utilise these facilities for multi-purpose use as community centres, cultural centres and sustainability centres - for example where local produce can be distributed or collected.

Cultural promotion in these areas can also have a major impact for very little investment. We should lend support to pilot projects in key tourism areas to encourage the performance of traditional Welsh folk music at community venues. In addition to this, traditional Welsh activities which could attract tourism should be encouraged. e.g. coracle demonstrations on the River Teifi on bank holidays or summer weekends.

Churches, chapels, village schools and pubs have a base within every community in West Wales and have people who attend them regularly, however there is a need for the buildings to be used by the wider community. Clergy, preachers and volunteers should be encouraged to reach out and provide a base of support for economically inactive people in West Wales.

A pilot project should be introduced which would involve 12 church halls churches or pubs using Convergence money, to train four people from each church or pub in providing confidence building techniques for selected individuals identified by statutory agencies as long term economically inactive. The project must remain focused on the end goal, that is, to get people into work. Of course, building confidence alone is insufficient to get people into work so it should be co-ordinated alongside supplementary support systems which help with practical activities associated with getting people into work.

5. Addressing changing rural demography

The demography of Wales is changing and is set to change even further over the next three decades, with large growth in the numbers of older people and a fall in the numbers of the younger and working-age populations.

Wales' annual average growth rate in the retirement-age population is 14.6%. This trend is even more pronounced in some areas of the Fro. In Conwy 26.9% of the population is of retirement age. In the Pembrokeshire Haven area, which encompasses the constituency of Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, the retirement age population has grown substantially, by 37.7% between 1981 and 2005, with growth in each decade at least twice the Wales average in each case. In North-West Wales the retirement-age population grew by 11.4% between 1981 and 2005, though this is less than the Wales average growth rate - since 2001 the trend in the region has been above the national average.

We should not expect older voters to support us without interacting with them. We must listen to older people; we should conduct surveys about their concerns and ensure that their priorities are our priorities. We should encourage people to address their issues to the new Commissioner for Older People. We should find ways of utilising the skills of the older generation, encouraging older people to become active citizens in their communities.

Thousands of people have moved into West Wales from other parts of Wales and beyond. We must listen to their concerns and make them feel welcome.

We need to develop a strategy which addresses the concerns of inward migrants to West Wales from England and beyond and find mechanisms to make sure that they feel they can become active involved citizens who make a contribution to their communities.

We must also recognise that there is a real issue among those living in areas where there is a high level of inward migration. People see traditional communities being diluted and traditional values eroded - often labour-based or community-based, not always language-based, although Welsh may be the language of communication being dissipated. The feelings of loss of traditional stability and values, and the feeling of being forgotten, must be addressed.

6. Service provision

Efforts must be made to ensure the rural health plan for Wales is better disseminated and understood. Labour must lead an honest debate about the sustainability of rural schools. A long term strategy must be set out and, where possible, provision should be made for schools to double-up as community centres.

Rural Wales is suffering from a lack of public transport service provision. In particular, the current de-regulated bus system has abandoned unprofitable rural routes. Labour should promote a major transport overhaul to force bus companies to run these unprofitable, but socially valuable routes by adopting a Labour proposal to tie their contracts to those of the profitable routes. More powers for the Welsh Assembly Government over the level of services required from bus companies would bring real benefits for rural passengers.

7. Rural economy and innovation

Due to their low business density and dispersed population, rural economies have traditionally faced a competitive disadvantage in terms of their ability to innovate. However, in recent years technological and social developments have provided new opportunities for economic development and innovation.

The advance of ICT and the growth of 'quality of life innovations' such as healthy, quality foods and environmentally-friendly products and services offer a wealth of potential. Traditional rural industries are becoming increasingly important sources of innovation, for example 'non-food farming' such as fibre crops and biofuels; agro-tourism; organic farming. At the same time, information and communication technologies are enabling the growth of new industries, for example 'digital' businesses in the creative sector.

Welsh Labour should lead a policy agenda to enable individuals, businesses and communities in the Fro to capitalise on these developments.

A 'distance neutral infrastructure' must be promoted in the Fro. Although broadband services can now be accessed across all telephone exchanges in Wales, a recent study has found that while Cardiff, Newport and Swansea have among the fastest connections in the UK, Wales overall has the second-slowest. Labour must continue to drive improvements in this area.

Rural businesses should be given support to organise through forums and associations which will enable them to build a critical mass of buyers and suppliers. Universities and colleges in rural areas should be encouraged to transfer expertise through providing training to local communities. Women and older people - two key groups who have traditionally been neglected by innovation policies - should be targeted for entrepreneurial support. Inward migrants bring with them a wealth of expertise and experience which must be identified and utilised.

In the more industrial areas of the south West where there are substantial numbers of people with skills that need to be updated or adapted, we should develop sound and sustainable outreach training programmes financed from the post-14 sector. We know mobile training units are not effective - buses and mobile units are perceived by communities to confirm their remoteness - so instead, we should focus on creating provision within 14-19 developments. This should be developed in partnership between the Assembly and Trade Unions, utilising Convergence funding

III The Welsh language

Labour's historic tradition

There has been a long tradition of support for the Welsh Language from within the Labour movement. Indeed, suppression of the language was seen by many as being tantamount to the suppression of the working class. Welsh authors such as Silyn Hughes, Ben Bowen Thomas, the Prifardd William Morris, T.J. Morgan and Frank Price Jones were fervent members of the Labour Party and fought hard for the language, as did Cledwyn Hughes, Goronwy Roberts, Megan Lloyd George and others.

Welsh was the language of the radical movements from the growth of the non conformist tradition - the Baptists, the United Reform Movement etc - to much of the radical thinking and politics of the 19th century. Welsh were the last words of Dic Penderyn, the language of the union and workers' movements, of the Slate Quarry strike in the Penrhyn and of Socialists like Niclas y Glais.

It was the use of the language by the Chartists in 1845 which led to Brad y Llyfrau Gleision (The Betrayal of the Blue Books) which in its turn led to the prohibition of Welsh in schools in the 1871 education act.

The massive growth in Welsh language education provision in the late 90s and early 00s has been delivered largely by Labour councils. Over the past eight years the Labour Assembly Government has backed its strong commitment to the Welsh language with investment, with Assembly spending on supporting the language rising by an additional £28m in the years 2004-7.

Nevertheless, there is a perception among voters in the Fro that the Labour party is hostile to the Welsh language. This may be a result of the fact that Labour has not developed its own unique language policy but rather had adopted the existing policy framework put in place by the 1993 language act. If Labour is to overcome the perception that it is anti-Welsh language and if it is to take its entire membership along with measures in favour of positive action for the language, then Labour should start by convincing its own membership of the need to adopt its own distinct language policy.

In Torfaen, where the percentage of Welsh speakers is 10% it is interesting to note that 70% of people when asked in the last census whether their children spoke Welsh answered yes. Although this figure is extremely difficult to believe, it does show that people have aspirations for their children to speak Welsh. The Labour party must ensure it positions itself on the right side of this development.

The changing national consensus regarding the Welsh language offers Labour a wonderful opportunity to engage people, particularly the younger generations, in a modern approach to language usage centring on community

engagement. Our focus must be on creating sustainable and lively communities where there are at least two languages.

1. Reclaiming the language

Today, studies show that the majority of the Welsh population is either positive or neutral towards the Welsh language, and statistics clearly show that there has been a significant increase in the number of Welsh speakers.

The Labour party must understand the strength of support for the language in the Fro in particular, but also elsewhere in Wales. The Tories have changed their tune on the Welsh language as have the Liberal Democrats. The Labour party in Wales must assert and emphasise all it has delivered for the language over the years. It must acknowledge that it will not gain support among groups in the Fro without making a firm and active commitment to the language.

It should be acknowledged that the Labour party was the only party which was against a new Welsh Language Act. This is not to say that the Labour party should have necessarily agreed with the proposals put forward, but there is a strong argument that we should have presented an alternative positive policy.

2. Welsh for all

As the earlier analysis proves, Welsh is not a language of an 'elite'. Indeed, the Welsh language is still flourishing because the working class have used it and looked after it. It is impossible to imagine that it could have been sustained simply by the Welsh middle classes. It is those who could once have been described as the Labour party's core vote who are those more likely to speak Welsh in the Fro.

Nevertheless, in many areas Welsh is perceived as a language of the elite. This perception, together with the focus on legal means of promotion of the Welsh language has led to a lack of confidence among 'everyday' Welsh speakers, which is even more pronounced in their use of written Welsh.

We must recognise the changing patterns of Welsh language use in communities and families. Documented growth in the use of the language across Wales hides the fact that the everyday use of the language is decreasing, particularly in areas where the Welsh language is the historic and natural language of the community, as in many areas of the Fro.

The Labour party must encourage daily use of the language through persuasion and not through force. Force and elitism could potentially do untold damage. The answer to every issue is not the introduction of new bills or laws.

3. A grassroots policy agenda

The Labour party should reach out to the ordinary 'everyday' Welsh-speaking communities in the Fro by placing far more emphasis on the need to speak Welsh rather than on writing Welsh. We must give support to encouraging Welsh, particularly in sports, pubs and community activities. Many people who speak 'everyday' Welsh lack the confidence to use it in unfamiliar environments. It is through very careful encouragement that this issue can be addressed, not compulsion.

Less formal and simple Welsh, both orally and written, needs to be encouraged in particular by the public sector. Monitoring of this use needs to be public.

The Labour Party should encourage the adoption of categories of Welsh language aptitude for use in job advertisements. Currently, job advertisements which state simply that "Welsh is essential" imply an academic or professional standard of written and verbal ability and can prove off-putting for many ordinary everyday Welsh language speakers, meaning that they do not apply for jobs where they are otherwise qualified.

Welsh should be seen as a language of right in parts of West Wales when, for example, dealing with old people in care homes. But while this would make sense in parts of West Wales it would make no sense in parts of east Wales so this needs to be reflected in Labour manifestos at local government and national levels. Bilingual juries should be a possibility in appropriate circumstances.

The current use of Welsh language services provided by public bodies and private companies is pitifully small. Indeed, in January 2008 a survey conducted by BBC Wales found that the take-up of Welsh language services run by large businesses and public bodies was as low as 1%. The Principality Building Society reported that just 1% of mortgage customers requested correspondence in Welsh, Barclays bank said just 0.25% of its Welsh customers were registered with its Welsh language telephone service, and British Gas reported that fewer than 1% of its Welsh customer base currently received bills in Welsh.

Welsh Labour should start by making sure that those Welsh language services that are currently being offered are used more widely. We should do this by improving awareness through the media and by interlinking groups who work in the field. It should be noted here that Welsh Water experienced a 50% increase in demand for its Welsh language call centre following an advertising campaign.

We should move away from symbolic and expensive translations of complex documents. This is particularly true in the Assembly. The money saved should be ring fenced and diverted to organisations developing Welsh at the grassroots level.

Statutory language schemes in the public sector must continue to be effectively and independently monitored, however we must see an emphasis on ensuring more active action in communities by the Welsh Language Board.

S4C has stimulated a very dynamic media industry, and kept many talented individuals in Wales who otherwise may have left. However, monitoring of S4C needs to be taken seriously by Westminster MPs, including the issue of concentration of commissioned programmes to few companies. We need to ensure that the programmes not only reflect the audiences' taste, but reach out to the next generation. The new S4C children's channel is a very welcome development. Careful monitoring of audience figures will be needed following the digital switchover. A percentage of more accessible less formal Welsh language programmes should be a condition of funding for S4C.

The proposed new Language Commissioner should be given a very tight remit to ensure that his or her time is not spent racing after issues of the elite.

We should give more support to adults to learn and improve their Welsh including those from ethnic minorities.

4. Developing a strategy for Welsh language education

There is a danger that elements of the Labour party in Wales continue to see the growth in Welsh language education as a threat. It should be emphasised here that the massive growth in Welsh medium schools has been delivered mostly by Labour councils.

Since the mid-90s, attitudes to Welsh language education from have been transformed. A recent report from the Council of Europe found that demand for Welsh medium education is currently far outstripping supply. As of 2007, there were 448 Welsh-medium primaries and 72 bilingual primaries across the country. But the report has shown that this is not enough as while 20% of children attend Welsh-medium primaries, between 40% and 50% of parents want a place.

The Labour Party in Wales should have confidence that Welsh schools are not breeding grounds for nationalist support. We can ensure this by encouraging Labour supporters to become actively involved in the governance of their local Welsh medium schools.

We must plan for growth in Welsh-language education and produce an all-Wales strategy which must be agreed in consultation with local government. We should do more to ensure that learners and non-Welsh speakers who send their children to Welsh schools are better received, supported and involved. The massive rise in demand for Welsh language education requires that future growth be designed into education planning, setting out a framework for growth rather than responding to demand.

A comprehensive strategy for Welsh education across the whole of Wales should be driven from Welsh Assembly in partnership with Local Government. It is imperative that local council education authorities and academic establishments own the strategy and understand their responsibilities in regard to implementation.

The principles of the strategy which would be sent out centrally should address every step of a child's education from early years, pre school through the compulsory education years and on to further and higher education and lifelong learning.

It should be noted that the wide range of disparity and differences in the level of Welsh language require a variety of different work methods and policies. Expecting a common approach across Wales would be impractical and inappropriate.

'For Labour, the Welsh language belongs to everybody. Our approach to Welsh medium education aims to make the language equally available to children in all parts of Wales., and from all sorts of backgrounds, where parents want to take advantage of it. We reject the inward-looking and elitist approach to Welsh medium education, in which the language becomes a prisoner of our past, rather than an essential part of a confident, forward-looking nation, determined to make best use of the talents of our children.'

6. Encouraging use of Welsh in the Labour Party

The Labour party has, for many years, ensured that there is simultaneous translation at Wales Labour Party conference. However, this is very rarely used. In future, every speaker who can speak Welsh should be encouraged to ensure that at least part of their contribution is through the medium of Welsh. Part of the conference should be chaired in Welsh.

The Labour Party should always translate its manifesto into Welsh, ensure that part of its web site is in Welsh, and should encourage MPs and AMs to do the same. Consideration should be given to a central free translation service for Welsh Labour candidates. The possibility of a volunteer translation service should also be explored.

The Labour Party should hold a fringe meeting in Welsh at every Welsh conference and always hold a meeting at the National Eisteddfod. The Labour party should encourage the local Labour party of the Eisteddfod host town or city to hold a stall at the event. The Wales Labour Party should match fund this, but responsibility for the organisation and for staffing the stall must be on the local party.