

Clement Davies

An Underestimated Welshman and Politician

Clement Davies led the Liberal Party from 1945 to 1956. *Emlyn Hooson* reviews his life and career.

As I am not an historian, I cannot claim to have investigated the life of the subject-matter of my talk this evening with that thoroughness which is the hallmark of the true historian's skill. However, speaking as a politician, lawyer and businessman from a rural Welsh background who was to follow Clement Davies as the Member of Parliament for Montgomeryshire, and, as someone who happened to know him reasonably well from my early twenties until the time of his death in 1962, I feel able to contribute to the process of reassessing the life and career of this underestimated Welshman. I have also had the advantage of knowing many of his old friends, both supporters and critics. Indeed, he and my late father-in-law, Sir George Hamer, despite some disagreements, were close friends. I was also privy to some of the praises and criticisms of him by some of his contemporaries and some of his closest political associates.

The need for a reappraisal

For me to embark upon a new venture of this kind required some provocation. The first occurred in a lecture delivered to this very Society by our distinguished member, Professor Kenneth O. Morgan. During a lecture on a century of Montgomeryshire Liberalism, he described Clement Davies as 'an erratic Member of Parliament'. He added: 'Yet, it is a paradox that someone who was for so long a political maverick became so powerfully identified with the harmonies and historic continuities of Montgomeryshire Liberalism.' I believed then, and do so even more powerfully now, that this

view certainly needs modification. In my view, he had *always* been powerfully identified with those 'harmonies and historic continuities'. Also, whilst it is hard to think of any worthwhile MP who has not, occasionally, appeared to be erratic, I hope to be able to provide some insight into why Clement Davies appeared to be so at times.

The second catalyst came from Lady Byers, the widow of the late Lord Byers, who as Frank Byers had been the Liberal Chief Whip from 1945 to 1950. She wrote to me to say that she was totally incensed by a sentence in the *Daily Telegraph* obituary to the late Lord Bonham Carter (Mark Bonham Carter). It read: 'Grimond took over the leadership from the *ineffectual* Clement Davies'.² She was rightly incensed, for, without Clement Davies, I am convinced that the Liberal Party would not have survived the latter part of this century.³

In the course of my lecture, I hope to show that Clement Davies was anything but ineffectual and to point to certain signposts, which I believe will lead to his being seen in a different perspective as his life and work are further reviewed in the future. Much light has already been shed on his career by, in particular, the research work of Mr J. Graham Jones of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth,⁴ where the Clement Davies Papers are kept,⁵ and of Mr D. M. Roberts of the University of Wales, Bangor.⁶ However, a full and considered biography of this very remarkable man is long overdue. There is quite a story to tell. I am not the man to tell it, but I hope to provide the *apéritif*.

His career in outline

Let me begin by briefly summarising his career, aspects of which I shall consider in greater detail later. He was born on 19 February 1884



stant and constructive critic of the war effort. He is particularly famed for his part in the replacement as Prime Minister of Chamberlain by Winston Churchill. From 1942 onwards, he was a Liberal without suffix or prefix after he officially rejoined the Liberal Party. I thought I would never quote with approval any saying of the late Sir Henry Morris-Jones, the Liberal National Conservative. However, when Clem had rejoined the Liberal Party, he said ‘Clem decided to rejoin his old love, which of course he had in principle never deserted.’¹⁵ I believe that to be true and that during his so-called maverick period, he was much less of a political maverick in reality than at first appears. At heart, Clement Davies was always a radical Welsh Liberal and he admired Lloyd George enormously as the most effective of radical politicians. In 1945 he was elected leader of the Liberal Party and remained so until 1956, when Jo Grimond succeeded him.

On the Welsh front, he is particularly remembered for a devastating report, which he produced just before the war, on the incidence of tuberculosis in Wales and its causes.¹⁶ He was also very active in the international sphere¹⁷ — in particular, in the movement for world government — for which work he was nominated and warmly recommended for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1955.¹⁸

The Bar

Historians should, I think, look more closely at his work at the Bar. Its standard was such that he had the reputation of having had the highest paid junior brief ever known for his day. It came when, in the 1920s, without a leader,¹⁹ he was instructed to appear for Lever Brothers²⁰ for 3,000 guineas against Brunner/Mond, now known as ICI. The case was eventually settled for £1,000,000. The scale of this settlement in its day was so great that ICI had to pay the damages over four years at the annual rate of £250,000!

Immediately after the First World War, Clement Davies was succes-

and died on 23 March 1962 at the age of seventy-eight. He came from the Llanfyllin area of Montgomeryshire, where his father, Alderman Moses Davies, was a small farmer, agricultural seedsman, valuer, and local auctioneer. Clement was one of the first pupils at the then new local County School.⁷ From there, he won an open exhibition to Trinity Hall, Cambridge where he shone as a law student, taking firsts in everything⁸ and he became the top student of his year. He was pressed to take a fellowship — an invitation he declined after he had definitely chosen a practising career at the Bar, rather than an academic one. Through other scholarships and exhibitions he joined Lincoln’s Inn. In his Bar Finals in 1910, he took a first in every subject and was awarded the Certificate of Honour for being the highest achiever of his year.

In the meantime, from 1908–09 he had been a lecturer in law at Aberystwyth. During this time, he wrote his first books.⁹ The main subjects of his writing were the law relating to land and farm valuations and land duties. These were subjects on which his father had probably advised him that there was a market!

His pupil-master at the Bar was a man called Greer, who afterwards

became Lord Justice Greer before being elevated as Lord Fairfield, one of the Law Lords. Clem, as we all knew him, briefly joined the North Wales and Chester Circuit before transferring to the Northern Circuit. However, the area in which he enjoyed a meteoric rise was in his commercial law and admiralty law work in London. This was interrupted only when he was drafted into the Civil Service for strategic work on shipping during the war.

Clement Davies became a KC in 1926, but, in 1930, he left the Bar and joined the Board of Lever Brothers¹⁰ as an Executive Director.¹¹ He remained in that capacity until his resignation in 1941 when he was appointed as a legal advisor to Unilever in a non-executive capacity.

In the meantime, in 1929, he had been elected as the Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire. During the 1929–31 period, he was a Lloyd George supporter. But from 1931 to 1940, he was a National Liberal, supporting the successive National Governments of Ramsay Macdonald,¹² Stanley Baldwin¹³ and Neville Chamberlain.¹⁴ In 1940 he changed his political course. From then until 1942, he sat in the House of Commons as an independent Liberal. During this period, he was a con-

sively appointed Secretary to the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court,²¹ Secretary to the Master of the Rolls and, in 1922, as Junior Treasury Counsel. The two secretarial jobs were sinecures. They provided him with additional income and were clear pointers of the estimate of the legal establishment of him. This was, to all appearances, a man on the fast route to the Bench. He was not to pursue that course. In 1926 he was persuaded by the Lord Chancellor to apply for Silk and became a King's Counsel in that year. His earlier acceptance of the post of Treasury Counsel, which he had resigned early in 1925, indicated that the first option had been clearly open to him. However, there may have been an intervening cause, which had blocked this path to the Bench, to which I shall turn later.

Clement Davies had a substantial amount of work as a Silk. In the law reports of 1926 to 1930, his name frequently appears in large commercial and shipping cases. His decision in 1930 to accept a position on the board of Lever Brothers, rather than continue at the Bar is, on the face of it, a mystery. His starting salary at Lever Brothers was £10,000 a year²² — double the salary then of the Prime Minister, a High Court Judge or the Lord Chancellor. But, the reasoning and motivation behind the move may be related to the cause of a nervous breakdown he endured in 1924 — a matter which does not seem to have been disclosed hitherto.

Politics

He had been involved in political activity as a youngster in Montgomeryshire. In the 1909–10 period he was certainly addressing meetings in Oswestry and in his home area in support of the Lloyd George budget.²³ In 1910 he rejected the blandishments of Lloyd George that he should stand as a 'true Liberal' for Montgomery Boroughs after the incumbent, D.J. Rees, had quailed over the budget. Clement Davies was

solely tempted, but he saw that he had a living to earn at the Bar²⁴ and his father's advice settled matters: 'I don't know much about the Bar, but I think if I were employing Counsel, I should like him to give me all his attention and not part of his attention.'²⁵

By 1927, he had agreed with the Montgomeryshire Liberal Association that, if they could not find another candidate, he would stand. Despite opposition from his predecessor, David Davies, subsequently Lord Davies of Llandinam,²⁶ he was adopted as its candidate in 1929. In the election of that year, he parried a very spirited attack from the Conservative candidate, a Mr Naylor. After that, he was never to face an opponent for the seat until the 1945 election, when Mr Philip Owen opposed him for the Tories.

The 1929 election was fought under the leadership of Lloyd George with, as far as the Liberals were concerned, the wholehearted support of Clement Davies. The campaign was founded on the famous Yellow Book,²⁷ the Green Book,²⁸ and the Brown Book, which rather upset his predecessor David Davies. These had largely been put together by Lord Keynes²⁹ with a wealth of other distinguished academics and business people contributing. They formed a truly radical policy. Funded by his dubious election fund, Lloyd George mounted a vigorous campaign but achieved only modest success. It is probably one of the great tragedies of this country that Lloyd George's ideas were not effected here, but there is no doubt that Roosevelt's 'New Deal' in the USA in the thirties was largely founded on them.

After a vigorous start to his Parliamentary career, by 1930, Clement Davies was disillusioned with Parliament. He said to a reporter from the *Montgomeryshire Express* in autumn 1930: 'Losing my briefs, wasting my time [in the House of Commons], it really is appalling. Sometimes I wished I had stuck to my proper job, but ambition is a terrible thing'.³⁰ This comment reflected

mounting frustration at Lloyd George's leadership and the *volte face* over the Coal Mines Bill. Clement Davies had cancelled many very important constituency engagements in January and February 1930 to draft amendments to the Bill. The Liberals could have brought down the government. In the event, Lloyd George backed the government. It is instructive to compare Clem's performance and his activities in Parliament before the Coal Mines Bill fiasco with the following ten years. From 1931 to 1939, speeches from Clement Davies were a rarity. Those that he did make were almost entirely devoted to the socioeconomic and administrative difficulties of rural Wales; the problems of his constituents were often used as examples. I would go as far as to say that, in this period, he was almost the archetypal semi-detached politician. He was not trying to further a political career in any way. My suspicion is that he largely devoted his active mind to other matters, not least his absorbing duties as an executive director of Lever Brothers.

After the 1931 election, Lloyd George's followers had virtually been reduced to a rump, largely comprising members of his own family and one or two close friends. Clement Davies espoused Simon's National Liberals. His adherence to the Simonites was due to his friendship with Sir John Simon. They both had Welsh associations: Simon was the son of a nonconformist minister in Pembrokeshire. They had also been closely associated at the Bar; Simon often led Clement Davies. At a time of uncertainty in Clem's mind, incisive advice from Simon coupled with, I suspect, his wife's preference for that course were decisive.

Simon was a very careful politician, always interested in preserving opportunities for himself. Lloyd George devastated him once by stating in the House of Commons: 'The Right Honourable Gentleman has sat on the fence for so long that the iron has entered his soul'. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that Simon was to greatly influence Clem

on Munich and the prosecution of the war.

In 1939 there was a sudden and dramatic change in the political activity and posture of Clement Davies. He returned to the United Kingdom having conducted a four-month inquiry, as Chairman of a commission consisting of businessmen and a considerable number of MPs, into the affairs of East Africa. Upon his return, there was a very different political atmosphere in this country. There was widespread pessimism about the intentions of Hitler and Mussolini. It was a chance meeting, under the auspices of Levers, that led to Clem meeting an important member of the Nazi Party masquerading as a trade official. This meeting caused him, virtually overnight, to change his view and to regard war as inevitable. Herr Wohltat, one of Goering's economic advisors, was later reputed to have occupied a very high position in the Nazi hierarchy. Evidently he had been sent over to the United Kingdom to probe businesspeople to see whether there was a possibility of avoiding war with Britain if Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

Wohltat met some very distinguished people over here. There is no doubt that his visit effected a transfiguration in Clem's appreciation of where the policy of the Chamberlain government had led.³¹ He was galvanized into action and politics became central, as opposed to being marginal, in his life. Jano (his wife) loyally supported him although, I believe, she later came to regret it. Gone now was his rather thoughtless support for the Munich agreement. Soon afterwards, Clement Davies was elected Chairman of an all-party group of MPs³² which was more concerned about the imminent threat of war. It began as a small nucleus with Leo Amery as Vice-Chairman and Robert Boothby as its Secretary. The group grew in size and was particularly discomfited by Neville Chamberlain's apparently ineffectual leadership in the early days of the war. In his address at Clement Davies's memorial

service, and in his autobiography, Lord Boothby tells of Clem's organisation of the campaign to remove Chamberlain and replace him with Churchill. Boothby wrote: 'He was one of the architects, some may judge the principal architect, of the government which first saved us from destruction and then led us to victory'. It was a small group which orchestrated the anti-Chamberlain vote in the no-confidence debate and foiled subsequent Tory party lobbying for Chamberlain to become deputy prime minister. Clement Davies, Robert Boothby, Leo Amery, Arthur Greenwood and others were all determined that Attlee should be deputy prime minister to make it a truly national government.

Boothby, Amery and other Conservatives in the group were invited to be ministers in Churchill's new wartime coalition, as were prominent Labour members and the Liberal leader, Archie Sinclair, and his chief whip. We know that Boothby has underlined the importance of Clem's friendships with Attlee, Greenwood and Lloyd George in particular. We also know that Churchill himself had a soft spot for Clem, yet, on the face of it, nothing was offered to him. When I asked Stanley Clement-Davies about this, he said that Churchill had offered a viscountcy to his father. It was explained to him, apparently, that Churchill had to accommodate all parties within the government and, of course, Clement Davies was not, then, a member of any party.

The family was consulted about this offer of a viscountcy.³³ They decided to support Clem's refusal, although, I suspect, his wife, Jano, had been tempted. Stanley has also told me that in the diary of his late sister, Mary, there is an entry of the date and of the fact of the offer. The offer of a viscountcy explains, in part at least, a reference in one of the letters stored in the National Library of Wales. In 1947, when Clement Davies was made a Privy Councillor, Lord Beaverbrook, that great confidant of Churchill's, wrote to him a letter dated 15 January. It con-

tained these words: 'You had other honours offered you, as I well know. The Privy Councillor is the right honour for your work and high character.'³⁴

I can only speculate as to what other honours were offered. Given his intimacy with Churchill, Beaverbrook would certainly have known of the offer of the viscountcy; that must be one of the honours to which he referred. However, it should be noted that this was well before the offer of a place in Churchill's Cabinet, which was made in 1951.

Family background

In assessing his career, it is very important to have regard to his family background. His father's family came from the Llanfyllin area. They had been great Whig supporters, certainly from the time of the 1832 Reform Act. Some of the family had lost the tenancy of their farms as a result of their Liberal votes and Clem never forgot it. His mother's family came from the Banw Valley and were traditional Tories. His maternal grandfather, a cattle dealer, apparently had had a thriving cattle trade with Ireland. Clem's father and mother lived on a relatively small farm where all the children helped with the farm work. The father, as I have mentioned earlier also ran a successful small-town auctioneering and land valuation business.³⁵ The parents were, in divergent but complementary ways, very considerable personalities and the family was a close-knit unit.

The whole family was academically talented.³⁶ Also, in the traditional Welsh way, they each helped each other financially with their respective careers. In a letter he wrote to his parents, soon after he was called to the Bar, Clem said that he would have to know all the solicitors he can, given the 'tremendous amount of money I have cost you all.' He added: 'Dear old Dav³⁷ is one in ten million and is more of an angel than an ordinary brother.' Out of his 'small income he has paid

£200 for me. In fact I have bled him of all he has, and still he is as cheerful and pleasant over it as if it had been only two shillings.³⁸

In 1913 Clem married Jano Elizabeth Davies, who had a distinguished teaching career before marriage. At the age of twenty-nine, she was one of the youngest headmistresses of Latymer School, a well-known coeducational school in London. She was the adopted daughter of Mr Morgan Davies, a consultant surgeon who practised in London, but originated from Cardiganshire. She was also Welsh speaking. Jano had graduated from University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in classics and modern languages. I imagine that this is where she met Clem during his period as a lecturer from 1908–09. They had four children, of whom the only survivor is Mr Stanley Clement-Davies. I am greatly indebted to him for information which he has given to me and for his permission to disclose, into the public domain, some matters which may explain some of the apparently strange decisions taken during Clem's life.

Few families have suffered as many tragic misfortunes as those that befell Clement Davies and his family. Two of the sons and the only daughter died in tragic and unforeseen circumstances, each at the age of twenty-four.³⁹ I remember Mr Stanley Clement-Davies telling me, many years ago, of the sigh of relief he breathed when he achieved the age of twenty-five. The family bore these tragedies with great fortitude, as far as the outside world was concerned, but the internal anguish must have been great. It will not surprise any of you I think, to learn that Jano herself had two serious nervous breakdowns — one before she was married⁴⁰ and another in 1949. In all Clem's political activities she was, to all appearances, a fervent and indeed adoring supporter of her husband.⁴¹ On the very first occasion on which I spoke publicly with Clem at a packed meeting in Llanidloes, I was amazed to see that Jano was not only beaming throughout, but also, that

she was the one leading the applause! However, I gather from my conversations with Stanley that Jano did not really enjoy politics or the company of politicians. As a matter of taste, she much preferred the legal fraternity.

Jano was an impressive person of impeccable manners with a good deal of poise and style. Her instinct, I suspect, had always been to persuade Clem to adhere to an entirely legal career. These factors should all be remembered in seeking to decipher the change of direction in Clem's career between 1920 and his election to Parliament in 1929. I will come back to that and another important facet later.

Clement Davies as a leader

Contrary to commonly expressed belief, Clement Davies was not an ineffectual leader.⁴² To regard him as ineffectual fails to take account of his undoubted leadership qualities as evidenced by his work in three different capacities: first, in the tuberculosis inquiry; second, as chairman of an all-party group of MPs which brought Churchill's wartime coalition into being; and third, as leader of the Liberal Party.

The Tuberculosis Inquiry

During his Chairmanship of the Government Commission in 1937–39 into the incidence of tuberculosis in Wales and its causes,⁴³ Clement Davies showed considerable leadership qualities, both in his thorough gathering of evidence, and in the incisiveness of the report's recommendations. Support for this assertion can be gleaned from, in particular, the contribution of Mr George Griffiths MP to the debate on the report. He thanked Clement Davies for being 'so definite', and added: 'I was very pleased to see, as he went

from town to town, that he took no whitewash with him. He put blunt questions to all who came in front of him.'⁴⁴ Upon publication, the report, with its condemnation of the dreadful housing conditions in urban and rural areas and its biting criticism of private landlords and local authorities, including some in his own constituency, had an immense and sensational impact. Throughout his time in Parliament, as the Rt Hon. James Griffiths pointed out, Clement Davies had drawn attention to these matters. He took full opportunity, when given the chance to do so, to shake people out of their lethargy and acceptance of such conditions as then existed in parts of Wales.

Apparently, this report was the best seller to emerge from the Public Print Office until the Beveridge Report. This reflected not only its importance for Wales but also its significance for the whole of the United Kingdom. It undoubtedly influenced the whole thinking of political parties on social, housing and economic matters in the pre-Beveridge years. Its effect was reflected in the post-war policies of the Labour Government and indeed in Macmillan's approach to these matters.





Chairmanship of the All-Party Group⁴⁵

The All-Party Group of which Clement Davies was chairman mobilised to achieve a much tougher prosecution of the war effort than was apparent under Chamberlain. It is clear that Clement Davies showed great leadership skills. He was wholly determined to get rid of Chamberlain and was indefatigable in organising the matter. In the course of doing so, Clem succeeded in persuading Lloyd George, who had sulked over something, to return to the Chamber to make what Sir Winston Churchill subsequently described as his last decisive intervention in the House of Commons — a devastating attack on Chamberlain, ending with a peroration to the effect that all had to make sacrifices in war but that the greatest sacrifice Chamberlain could make was to surrender his seals of office.

In the Clement Davies Papers, there are two handwritten letters to Clem from that well-known self-seeker, Sir William Jowitt.⁴⁶ At about this time, naturally seeking help and guidance on his own possible preferment, it is interesting that one letter⁴⁷ begins 'Dear Warwick the Kingmaker' — eloquent testimony from an outsider for the view that Clement Davies was regarded by insiders as the principal architect of the replacement of Chamberlain by Churchill. Here, Jowitt was seeking

the use of the architect for his own furtherance.

Leadership of the Liberal Party

When he became Liberal Leader in 1945, one can well understand the ambivalent attitude of some of the other Liberal MPs. After all, until the early 1940s, Clem had not been a member of the party since 1931, although in Montgomeryshire he was always regarded as a proper radical Liberal. That he was first made Chairman of the Parliamentary Party, rather than its leader, illustrates the suspicion of his colleagues, despite the high reputation he had obtained during the war as a constructive critic of the National Government.

In 1945 the press tended to dismiss the Liberals as having been relegated entirely to the Celtic fringe. Indeed, of the twelve Liberals returned in 1945, six were from Wales, two were from Scotland and one each from Cumberland, East Anglia, Dorset and Cornwall. There were also deep policy divisions. Megan Lloyd George, Dingle Foot, Tom Horobin, Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville certainly wanted more blanket support for the Labour Government than the other six were prepared to give. Unquestionably, it looked as though the Liberal Party might disintegrate.

On social policy, such as education, housing, the health service, na-

tional insurance reform, the party was united in support of much of what Labour was trying to achieve. But, over Labour's nationalisation plans, there was deep dissension. It led to the Liberals in the Commons voting in different ways. In retrospect, it does appear to me, although I was a considerable critic of Clem's at the time, that his refusal to give blanket support was fully justified in the light of subsequent events. He was right in his appraisal that, on economic matters, Labour's ideologically driven approach tended to lead towards disaster. Ironically, most of those who wanted greater support for Labour were themselves defeated and replaced by Labour members. For instance, in Anglesey, Megan Lloyd George was replaced by Cledwyn Hughes.

Lady Megan Lloyd George and Lady Violet Bonham Carter epitomised the polarisation in the party. In 1948, a few months after I had been adopted as the prospective Liberal candidate for Caernarfon Boroughs, I came to London to read for my Bar Finals. I recall that Clement Davies then invited me to be a member of a strange body called the Liberal Party Committee — apparently, entirely nominated by the leader. This body effectively decided and controlled the policy of the party. Some of the debates were, to put it mildly, vitriolic. In retrospect, as I look around that table in my mind's eye, I cannot think of anybody else who could possibly have kept them together. I would normally sit between the two captivating mistresses of the generally acerbic, but always charming comment, Lady Violet Bonham Carter and Lady Megan Lloyd George. They always chose to sit at the end of the table directly facing Clem. Each of them was very critical of him but from entirely different directions.⁴⁸ There was a third chair between them at the table and there I would sit. A particularly difficult session ended one day with a very mundane matter at the end of the agenda. Cornwall required a recommendation for the colour the party should

use in elections. Lady Violet wittingly suggested it was obviously 'a subject for you, Megan dear, to advise upon'. Upon which Megan rejoined: 'Oh well, dear, I don't really mind what colour they have, provided, of course, it's not violet'. To give an idea of the problems the Liberals then faced, Churchill engineered matters so that there was no Conservative opponent to Lady Violet in the Colne Valley in the 1950 election. Nevertheless, she still lost.

Although the Liberals were reduced to only six by 1951, it has to be remembered that they were the remnants of a party historically used to being treated in the House of Commons as a major party. It had its own Whip's room, a leader's room and its leader was invited to take part in all state occasions. Clement Davies insisted that this continued. His close personal ties with Labour and Conservative leaders enabled him to preserve all the essential framework for a national party. Any new centre or centre-left party would have taken an age to acquire such a framework on its own.

During this period he was greatly criticised both by the left wing and the right wing within his party. When I was a Bar student, I would intermittently do some research for a highly independent Liberal MP, of whom I was dearly fond, Rhys Hopkin Morris, KC. I remember that he used to tell me that Clem was liable to put over a viewpoint at the Liberal committee which the last person he had talked to in the lavatory had put into his head! This was a gross simplification, because Clem was indulging in a very careful balancing act. Given the difficulties, I think it astonishing that any leader managed to keep the Liberal Party together, but Clement Davies did so. A letter from him to Professor Gilbert Murray shows that he was acutely aware of the precariousness of the situation: 'My own position is one of almost supine weakness for if I give full expression to a definite course of action, that at once leads to trouble and a definite split. It is that split that I am so anxious to avoid.'⁴⁹

He appreciated that disaster for the party was but a hair's-breadth away; any open split during the 1945–55 period would have brought about the end of the Liberal Party as such. Clem's sustained wisdom, determination and sheer devotion kept them together at that time, and this achievement has been grossly underestimated.⁵⁰

It is against this perilous background that one must understand Clement Davies' refusal of a place in Churchill's cabinet following the 1951 election. Churchill's government was returned in October of that year with a small, but perfectly workable, overall majority. Churchill immediately offered Clement Davies a place in his Cabinet as the Secretary of State for Education. This must have been an enormous personal temptation for Clem; he had been widely described as the ablest MP who had never held ministerial office and he must, by then, have 'had a bellyful' of dissension within his own party, in the words of a modern prime minister.⁵¹ He was also deeply interested in education, as was his wife.⁵² Churchill spent a long time trying to persuade him, at Downing Street and over lunch at Chartwell, to accept. After consulting widely, Clem refused the post in order to preserve the Liberal Party.⁵³

The *News Chronicle* of 1 October 1956 refers to Clement Davies' resignation from the leadership of the Liberal Party. It emphasises that it was his refusal of the post in the Churchill's Cabinet that was the foundation for the ability of the Liberals to reemerge as an independent fighting force, appealing particularly to youth, under Grimond.⁵⁴

Clement Davies the man

Clement Davies was a tallish, distinguished-looking man of a reserved, but very friendly disposition. I first heard him when I was a schoolboy on a market day in Denbigh appealing for funds to buy aeroplanes in the 'Wings for Victory'

campaign. He was a tremendous mob-orator, but had none of the subtleties that I had heard, a couple of years earlier, from Lloyd George. Nevertheless, he made a great impression on me. Later, when I came to know him well, I always found him most friendly and amiable. He had an amazing rapport with his constituents who loved his partly declamatory and partly narrative style. To illustrate his individual style he would frequently speak like this: 'I said to Winston on this problem ... and Winston said such and such. However, when we got into the chamber, things were different.' In an age when there was no television and when reports on political matters were very matter-of-fact, it is no wonder that his style went down well. It evoked a scene of an Old Testament prophet addressing his adoring followers.

I now turn to a personal matter which must be put on the scales, especially in assessing some of the ostensibly strange twists and bumps that characterised parts of Clem's career. In his article on Clement Davies in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the late Francis Boyd, a famous and charming political correspondent for *The Guardian*, who was a considerable admirer of Clem, mentioned publicly for the first time that Clem had lived with another problem. Francis wrote in this way: 'He had an appalling political task, and he was working under a severe personal strain of which the public knew nothing — the effects of excessive indulgence in alcohol.'⁵⁵ I discussed that statement and explored it further with Mr Stanley Clement-Davies. What I say now is said entirely with his agreement and approval.

No-one that I had met in Montgomeryshire or elsewhere ever remembers seeing Clement Davies under the influence of drink. He certainly had a tremor in his hand and in my innocence as a young man I attached no importance to that, but nobody else seemed to do so either. He certainly did not appear to suffer from alcoholism as such. How-

ever, he had a very severe drink problem, which may have manifested itself in sessions of private drinking.

I know a distinguished Silk who, these days, after the strain of a heavy case, will go off on a great binge lasting days at times. Whether it was that kind of manifestation with Clem, I do not know, but the problem that beset the family was a real one. From the early 1920s, he definitely had this serious problem. It was apparent within the family by 1922. The nervous breakdown which Clem sustained in 1924 was related to drink. You will recall that he resigned as a Junior Treasury Counsel in 1925, which was an indication that the smooth path to the Bench, to which I referred earlier, which appears to have been his first, preference, was being abandoned. Intimates at the Bar and on the Bench must have had a severe jolt if they learnt of the fact of his drink problem in the early '20s. Does it account for his change of direction between 1920 and 1930? Was the smooth path to the Bench removed from him? Was this background problem a major factor behind his decision to join the board of Lever Brothers? Did that position raise the possibility, not only of greater security, but also of a more structured and less stressful life than that which exists at the Bar? I myself have had at least four occupations, some simultaneously, but the practising Bar is easily the most stressful if you cannot relax.

I find it astonishing that Clem and his wife and family lived with this problem for forty years and that it was known only to a few. It must have been an inhibiting, as well as a deciding factor behind a number of decisions taken in their lives. Tremendous discipline must have been necessary repeatedly to present a confident and reassuring public face. It seems that his problem was different in kind and in degree from Churchill's.

Perhaps you will now permit me to indulge in a few reflections on the way I see Clement Davies in retrospect. I believe that, for all his ability, discipline and achievements, he was

quite insecure and lacking in confidence. Like Jano, he never gave me the impression of being able to relax.⁵⁶ What his leisure pursuits were, if any, I do not know. It is very interesting to discover among the Clement Davies papers in Aberystwyth, a very touching letter, dating from his student days, from a close friend, whose signature is indecipherable, giving Clem some reassurance after an uncharacteristic failure to win a prize at University.⁵⁷ It reads: 'Of your success in life there must not be the slightest misgivings, a man with your incomparable energy and engaging personality must, sooner or later, come to the fore at the Bar. I know that you rather lack confidence in yourself and are of a retiring disposition (a quality to be rather admired than otherwise) but [*an indecipherable name*] tells me that father was the same and even to this day is quite shy, so let his career be an example to you.'⁵⁸ Who was the author of that letter? It shows an insight into Clem's personality and character, which, perhaps, only a very close friend and contemporary would have had. Was this basic insecurity linked to his later drink problem?

Wales

Clement Davies' concern for Wales and its people runs like a golden thread through his career. I have already mentioned his report on tuberculosis and that even in his 'semi-detached' period, the concerns of his constituents⁵⁹ and the interests of Wales were never forgotten. This illustrates my belief that he was throughout 'powerfully identified with the harmonies and historic continuities of Montgomeryshire Liberalism'. He was also a consistent advocate of the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales.⁶⁰ Among his papers are letters to prime ministers Chamberlain, Churchill and Attlee on the subject.⁶¹ It is interesting to note that the most promising replies came from Churchill⁶² and Attlee and it is probably quite significant that he had a fairly close personal relationship with

both of them.⁶³ Another interesting letter, which is among his papers, sets out clearly his belief that in order to achieve a sensible and satisfactory answer to the socioeconomic and administrative problems of Wales, it was necessary for Wales to have its own Parliament where the Welsh language would have the same standing as the English language.⁶⁴

Clement Davies as a lawyer in politics

Before I conclude, I wish to make some observation on how I would class Clement Davies among other lawyers in politics. In my view, lawyer/politicians fall into one of two categories. In the first, I would put those whose first priorities are their political beliefs and allegiances. The law is a secondary matter. Lloyd George and Asquith were two obvious examples of such men. In his biography of Benjamin Disraeli, André Maurois says that the great prime minister was once asked: 'Why, as you were called to the Bar, didn't you practice and become a great lawyer?' Disraeli is said to have answered cryptically: 'I gave up the chance of being a great lawyer to preserve the chance of being a great man'. There was speaking a man who was truly of the first category.

In the second category are those who are lawyers first and politicians second. Events may pull them into politics and they often bring highly focused minds to the pursuit of their responsibilities in political life without being creative or innovative politicians. In such a category, I would put Lord Shawcross⁶⁵ and Lord Gardiner.⁶⁶

To reflect on the nature of legal training as a basis for political life, first, it is necessary to consider the nature of life at the Bar.⁶⁷ A barrister is trained to behave like a racehorse. He is taught to be wholly oriented on his objective, which is fixed for him at the outset of a case by, among other things, the side he is on and the rules of the profession. As for the racehorse, there are rails

on either side of the course and his training will have taught him to accept a blinkered approach. Whatever his own private view of the merits of the case, he must present his client's case in the best possible light to seek to achieve his objective. The aim may be an acquittal, a conviction, or an award of damages. By contrast, in politics, there are no rails at all. One can have a life in politics without any focus. Some accept the focus imposed upon them by party discipline. But the lack of rails and blinkers offers much greater scope for individual expression and eventually achievement. I think that this is what Disraeli had in mind. I have often said that I found the average standards of behaviour and of achievement to be higher at the Bar than in Parliament. However there were individuals from all parties in Parliament who had a bigger and broader vision, and who, in some cases, were capable of becoming great men.

I have reflected on this because of a view of Clem expressed to me by a man whose judgement I held in high regard: 'when Clement Davies is focused, he has, in my opinion, about the best mind I have

ever come across.' The words were said to me by the late Mr Cyril Jones of Wrexham, then the doyen of Labour solicitors in North Wales and a very remarkable man. I was driving him as my Instructing Solicitor to a planning appeal for one of his clients at Montgomeryshire Quarter Sessions, over which Clement Davies presided.⁶⁸ Legally, we had in our favour a difficult, but unanswerable point. Otherwise our case had no planning merit! It related to an enforcement notice in a case concerning a car dump. During the journey, I expressed the fear that Clem might take a sentimental view of the desecration of his beloved Montgomeryshire countryside by old car bodies and that he would lose sight of the legal point as the magistrates, against whom we were appealing, had done. Cyril dismissed my fear immediately: 'Mr. Hooson,' he said, 'you will see a different Clem today. As you know, I don't share his political views, but there isn't a better mind than his when it is focused, and when at the Bar it is always focused.' He was quite right. Clem saw the force of our argument immediately.

On balance, I would place Clement Davies in the second category of lawyer/politicians. He was at his best when his objective was set for him rather than as a self-generating politician. The three examples I have given of effective leadership from Clement Davies illustrate this. In his famous report on tuberculosis, his intention was set on shaking the country out of its supine acceptance of bad housing and drainage, and poverty. He achieved it. When he organised Chamberlain's downfall, he was ruthless and determined in pursuing his objective. Again, he achieved it. He saw his leadership of the Liberal Party as an exercise to preserve the independence of the party for a younger generation to take over with all the basic machinery for a national party maintained. Again, he achieved it.

Conclusion

There is certainly a fascinating story yet to be fully explored. Among the biographical notes made by one of his sisters, Dr Laura Maule-Horne, who was a distinguished doctor, there is a quotation from the late Lord Atkin of Aberdovey, probably

the greatest judge of the twentieth century. At a meeting in Montgomeryshire or to the London Welsh he said of Clement Davies: 'There was no high office in the land which was not his for the acceptance, when he was kidnapped by commerce and became one of the head directors of Unilever, the biggest combine in the world.' In the light of what I have said earlier, it may be that 'kidnapped by commerce' may prove not to be quite correct. I hope that future

Clement Davies with Lord Samuel, Liberal leader 1931–35



historians will be allowed to see papers from the Lord Chancellor's Department and the archives of Unilever.⁶⁹ The latter will show, I believe, that he was a tremendously effective and incisive administrator who was much travelled. He must have made many more international contacts than were available to most MPs of his era. He was a man of broad knowledge and deep insight, but was not in my view a political philosopher, although he knew perfectly well what his core beliefs were. At heart, he was a traditional, radical Welsh Liberal who remains at the present time, for all the reasons I have given, a very underestimated Welshman and politician.

This paper is based on a lecture given to the Honourable Society at the British Academy on 19 June 1996, with Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos, CH, in the chair. I am grateful to my former researcher, William Williams, Esq., Barrister at Law, for collating references to the sources as given in the footnotes, and to my secretary, Mrs Calan McGreevy, for typing the various drafts and the final version.

Emlyn Hooson, QC, LLB, was MP for Montgomeryshire from May 1962 (winning the seat in the by-election caused by Clement Davies' death) until 1979. Now, as Lord Hooson of Montgomery, he speaks for the Liberal Democrats in the Lords on Welsh affairs, legal affairs, agriculture and European affairs. He was President of the Welsh Liberal Party 1983–86.

This article first appeared in the Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion 1997 (new series, Vol. 4, 1998), and is reprinted here by kind permission of the author.

Notes:

- 1 My emphasis.
- 2 *Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1994.
- 3 See e.g. Geoffrey Sell, 'Clement Davies — the Forgotten Leader', *Radical Quarterly*, 36–51, where Clement Davies' role is described as one of considerable significance: 'Had he accepted [Churchill's offer of a post in Cabinet in 1951], the Liberal Party could have suffered the same fate of other coalition partners of the Conservatives — the Liberal Unionists and the Liberal Nationals. Neither is

in existence today. Speaking at the Liberal Party Assembly in 1976, David Steel summed up why Davies' leadership was important. He said, 'Had it not been for those who have more recently gone before us to preserve and maintain the Liberal Party when many doubted the need, then the condition of the country would demand that men and women come together to conspire to invent it.'

- 4 See 'The Reminiscences of Clement Davies', *National Library of Wales Journal* 28 no 4, Winter 1994, 405–416; 'Montgomeryshire Politics: Clement Davies and the National Government', *Montgomeryshire Collections* 73 (1985), 96–115; 'The Clement Davies Papers: A Review', *The National Library of Wales Journal* 23 (1983–84), 406–421.

5 Henceforth 'CDP'.

- 6 See: 'Clement Davies and the fall of Neville Chamberlain, 1939–40', *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976–77), 188–215; 'Clement Davies: The Liberal Party 1929–56' MA Thesis (unpublished).

7 His headmaster at Llanfyllin County School, Ifor H. Lewis, was never to forget Clement Davies' brilliance. Upon Clement Davies becoming a Privy Councillor, he wrote to him saying that he had won his way 'to the highest peak at the Bar and Parliament by sheer brilliance and scholarship', CDP B/212: letter dated 14 January 1947.

- 8 1905: top of the Inter-Collegiate in Law; Foundation Scholar (£30); 1906: first for both parts of the Law Tripos; made senior scholar at Trinity Hall; Latham prizeman; 1907: awarded prize for first class honours.

9 There are ten references to Clement Davies' works, be it as author, co-author, or contributor, at the British Library: e.g. *Land Valuation Under the Finance (1909–10) Act 1910*, *Reports of Land Valuation Appeals in Referee's Courts, HC, and HL*. Revised by Clement Edward Davies, 3 vol. Estates Gazette & Sweet & Maxwell, London, 1913 (Cat No 6128.c.2); Clement Davies and Ernest Evans, *An Epitome of Agricultural Law*, pp xxii, 378. Estates Gazette, London, 1911 (Cat No 6306.aa11); *Abridgment on Particular Subjects, Agriculture, Laws & Statutes*, IV (Cat. No. 6306.e.35); *The Agricultural Holdings Act 1908*, Laws & Statutes VIII Chronological Series Ed.VIII [1901–1910] (Cat. No 8226.r.20).

- 10 Now known as Unilever.

11 Not as legal advisor as has elsewhere been suggested. According to some biographical notes written by R. J. Maule-Horne, Clement Davies' sister, he was the Head of Transport, Chairman of the Internal Board of Commerce (CDP B/9/6).

- 12 24 August 1931 to 7 June 1935.

13 7 June 1935 to 28 May 1937. Baldwin was quite friendly with Clement Davies.

- 14 28 May 1937 to 10 May 1940.

15 CDP T/5/32.

16 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Anti-Tuberculosis Service in Wales and Monmouthshire*, published March 1939.

17 His visions for an united Europe, *inter alia*, are summarised in his noteworthy letter to Walden Moore, the Director of the Declaration for Atlantic Unity. In particular, he is scathing about the missed opportunity for Britain represented by the failure to join the Common Market. He said that as France could not get a stable government, and as Germany and Italy were 'down and out', all looked to the UK for leadership and 'Britain threw the opportunity away and threw it away again in 1951'. CDP F4/95; dated 17 January 1962.

18 CDP B/8/30–34. B/8/30 is a letter from Gilbert McAllister, Secretary General of the World Association of Parliamentarians, of which Clement Davies was president, and contains a draft press notice headed 'Life Devoted to the Rule of Law'. It lists all the main nominees which included politicians from around the world. The prize was, however, not awarded that year; he was also nominated for the 'Légion d'Honneur' for services to France, see letter from R. B. Vielleville, President of the *Comité d'Etudes du Groupe Parlementaire Français pour un Gouvernement Mondial*, 9 May 1956, CDP B8/41.

19 Sir John Simon, KC, had rejected the invitation of Lever Brothers to appear, apparently for political reasons.

20 Later known as Unilever.

21 Now known as the Family Division.

22 £235,000 in today's money.

23 Among his papers are posters for meetings at which he spoke at this time: CDP, A9/71; A9/78.

24 It must also be remembered that MPs were unpaid until 1912.

25 See interview with Clement Davies on twenty-five years as an MP, *Liberal News*, 28 May 1954, CDP B3/21.

26 For an insight into the relationship between the two men and into the dramatic nature of the change in Clem's views in 1939 on how the war ought to be prosecuted, see CDP Class I: in particular I1/3, letter from David Davies to Clem and I1/5, letter from Clement Davies to his wife, Jano.

27 *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, campaign based on the book, *Britain's Industrial Future*.

28 Dealing with the national control of land and related issues.

29 John Maynard Keynes, the author of the most influential work on economics of the twentieth century: *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, published in 1936.

30 *Montgomeryshire Express* 2 September 1939. For an authoritative account of this

- period, see J. Graham Jones, 'Montgomeryshire Politics: Clement Davies and the National Government', *The Montgomeryshire Collections* 73 (1985), 96 *et seq.*
- 31 See J. Graham Jones, 'The Reminiscences of Clement Davies MP', *National Library of Wales Journal* XXVII no. 4, Winter 1994, 405–17, at 415 in which Clement Davies' record of what Herr Wohltat said to a meeting is: 'Europe is in a chaotic condition. Let us take control over Europe. You have the rest of the World.'
- 32 Sometimes called the 'Vigilantes Group'.
- 33 His son, Geraint, was seething when he had heard that his father had been offered a minor post in the Government: 'What does the PM think you are — an office boy to run and fetch for Arthur Greenwood?', CDP R. 13/14 letter from son to father, November 1940, quoted by J. Graham Jones, *op. cit.*, at 415.
- 34 CDP, B2/3.
- 35 For further details on his father's life and Clement Davies' family background, see the obituary of Alderman Moses Davies, CDP A9/88.
- 36 E.g., his sister, Dr Laura Maule-Horne, took medical degrees at London, Edinburgh and Paris, CDP A8, and she appears to have been a highly regarded member of her profession (see a reference written for her at A8/2); his brother, David Thomas Davies, qualified as a surveyor and became the Superintending Valuer for Wales, CDP A4.
- 37 His brother, David Thomas Davies.
- 38 CDP A9.
- 39 David Morgan Clement-Davies, then articulated to a London solicitor, died of a heart attack, Sep 1939; Mair Eluned died whilst serving in the ATS, Nov. 1941 — a verdict of suicide was recorded; Geraint died in a road accident in Wiltshire whilst on active service, Feb. 1943.
- 40 Attributed to the pressure of her demanding job.
- 41 Jano was also a campaigner in her own right, working for women's rights, and she was a powerful public speaker. See, e.g. J. Graham Jones, *op. cit.* at 415–16
- 42 See, e.g., J. Graham Jones, *op. cit.*, at 416: 'All too often, Davies is portrayed as leader of the party at a time when its electoral fortunes were at their nadir. But, as *The Times* commented when Davies resigned the leadership in October 1956, "No leader could have prevented [the] numerical decline [of the Liberal MPs]; a less devoted leader than Mr Clement Davies might have failed to prevent it turning into a rout".'
- 43 Clem was a workaholic and, it was said, he had written the entire report himself save for the medical contribution.
- 44 See Hansard 22 March 1939 col. 1330–1421, 1421.
- 45 According to his sister's biographical note *supra*, they called, *inter alia*, for a Ministry for Production. Churchill refused, but, 'twelve months later, we had one'.
- 46 Later Lord Jowitt, Labour's Lord Chancellor from 1945.
- 47 W. Jowitt to Clement Davies 13 May 1940 (CDP).
- 48 See Alan Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* 60–82 at 61–62. After the 1951 election, neither was an MP: 'It is arguable, of course, that the Liberal Party in Parliament was more harmonious for the absence of these two from its ranks; Lady Megan was moving rapidly to the Left, Lady Violet just as rapidly to the Right. But despite their predilection for quarrelling — partly, perhaps, because of it — they were undoubtedly the best-publicised members of the Liberal Party.'
- 49 CDP, J3/16, letter from Clement Davies to Gilbert Murray, 11 May 1950 (copy); he also said that 'there is no party today, but a number of individuals whom because of their adherence to the party come together to express completely divergent views.' For further insight into the difficulties Clem faced see Class J generally.
- 50 See, e.g., *The Times* on Davies' honour on being made a Privy Councillor on 29 January 1947: 'The distinction justly recognises the tactical ability with which Mr Clement Davies has led the small, but vigorous, Liberal section of the opposition.' See also Lord Boothby, *My Yesterdays, Your Tomorrow*, 1962, in which he says that few would deny 'that he led [the Liberal Party] with dauntless courage, and no small measure of success.'
- 51 i.e. John Major.
- 52 Latymer School.
- 53 See Alan Watkins, *op. cit.*, at 65: 'some tribute should perhaps be paid to those Liberals who, in the dark days of 1951 and 1952, kept the faith: Philip Fothergill, Clement Davies, Frank Byers and others. It would have been easy for any of these to find a satisfactory, perhaps a glorious, future with one of the other parties. Davies, as we have seen, could have had a post in the Churchill Cabinet. Yet he stood firm ... "We refuse to be stamped out" he said to the Liberal Assembly. "In spite of all temptations we still prefer our own doctrine and we are determined to maintain our independence".'
- 54 Announcing his resignation to the Folkestone Assembly, Clement Davies, using a nautical metaphor, said: 'It is time that the tiller was placed in the hands of a younger man and that a new voice should be calling on the ship's company, rallying them to the great cause, which we all have so much at heart. Fortunately, I can step down knowing that there is a worthy successor waiting — one who has fully earned his master's certificate.' Quoted by Alan Watkins, *op. cit.*
- 55 See also, *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig* 1951–1970 (London, 1997).
- 56 This appears to be the impression he gave to G. B. Shriver, his tutor at Trinity Hall, as well as that of being a workaholic. In a letter of 2 December 1907, he implores Clem not to worry about the 'Whewell' and to enjoy his vacation: 'Vacations are not so frequent as all that. Say you live sixty more years, with three vacations per annum; the 'diminution' total is only 180', CDP A9/47 (i).
- 57 The 'Whewell'.
- 58 CDP A/9/53.
- 59 'James Griffiths, who entered parliament in 1936 as the Labour member for Llanelli, was immediately impressed by Davies' pleas in the Commons on behalf of his constituents: "He always used to talk about "my people, my county".' David M. Roberts, 'Clement Davies and the Fall of Neville Chamberlain', 1939–40, *Welsh History Review* 8, 188–215, 189; for corroboration of this view of Clement Davies as an ardent constituency MP, see Jo Grimond, *Memoirs* (London 1979), 148.
- 60 'Davies was closely involved in the formulation of this plank in the Liberal platform in 1929, was associated with the approach to Chamberlain in 1938, and continued to fight for this appointment throughout his career', J. Graham Jones, 'The Clement Davies Papers: A Review', *The National Library of Wales Journal* XIII, 406–21, 408.
- 61 CDP, D1.
- 62 Churchill wrote to Arthur Evans on 30 October 1943, saying that it was 'no doubt a very fit and proper matter for discussion in a transition period or when peace is restored', CDP D1/19.
- 63 Something which, tragically, was achieved not long after his death in 1964, when James Griffiths became the first Secretary of State for Wales.
- 64 *Ibid.*, D1/4: letter from Clement Jones to W. J. Jones, July 1960 (copy).
- 65 Hartley Shawcross, famed for his role in the Nuremberg trials.
- 66 Gerald Gardiner, who as Labour's Lord Chancellor, immortalised himself for students and practitioners of law for liberating the House of Lords from its own precedents, *Practice Statement* (1966) 3 All ER 77.
- 67 I confine myself to this branch of the profession as it is the one I know well.
- 68 He had become its Chairman in 1935 and remained in that position until his death. In 1959 in recognition of his work on the Bench, he was awarded with a Gregynog Presentation Book, which remains in his collection, CDP, E1/7.
- 69 Papers from the Unilever archives were, I believe, offered to Clement Davies' sister when she was making biographical notes.