A number of historians, writing from differing standpoints, have concluded that Nonconformity has played an important part in founding and fashioning the British labour movement. Denominational writers have claimed, for example, that the labour movement owes more to Methodism than to Marx.\(^1\) The problem at source is to establish how valuable if at all was the contribution not only of individuals but also of religious ideology to labour development. Other historians have detailed the way in which the struggle to achieve the socialist ideal became a religion in itself. It utilised Biblical phrases, such as the “Social Gospel” and the “Ten Commandments of Socialism”, in its addresses to working people and adopted an evangelical flavour to its missionary activity. The process of becoming a socialist was regarded as a “conversion”, involving as it did the same process of individual regeneration which was a feature of all religious revivals.\(^2\)

Much contemporary opinion, however, could see only a conflict between the imported materialist socialism as preached by Robert Blatchford on the one hand and the Welsh brand of inspirational and ‘other worldly’ nonconformity as practised in Wales throughout the 19th century. Occasional attempts were made to fuse the Christian with the socialist ideal but were these in any way significant? Eric Hobsbawm has concluded from a wide-ranging European survey that modern working class movements are almost exclusively anti-religious and even the British movement was “standard socialism, elaborated by secular thinkers and translated into the familiar biblical terminology”.\(^3\) Within a Welsh context the fundamental question to resolve is how a distinctly Nonconformist nation became, in time, a stronghold of the Labour Party. There were of course many factors which contributed to this political change, nor was the change achieved overnight, but the religious dimension deserves closer attention that it has perhaps received in the past.

By the beginning of the 20th century there were relatively few signs that the influence of Welsh nonconformity was waning. In 1911 the Royal Commission on the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales concluded, “that the people of Wales show a marked tendency to avail
themselves of the provision made by the Churches of all denominations for their spiritual welfare." It hardly needed a Royal Commission to announce that fact but the statistical evidence is nevertheless illuminating. Only in industrial Glamorgan and Monmouthshire did the total population outnumber the seats provided by the denominations and the Church of England. Forty per cent of the population aged three and over in Wales were considered to be communicants or members of their respective denominations. This figure becomes even more impressive when it is noted that a feature of Welsh nonconformity was the popularity of the Sunday School, whose primary function was to act as a training place for the creation of full members. Nor should we ignore the attachment to the chapels of a large number of adherents or "gwrandawyr". These were people who were not full members but who came simply to hear the sermons and of course to enjoy the congregational singing of hymns. Membership totals therefore reveal only one element of the strength and vitality of chapel congregations at the turn of the century.

As far as the nonconformists were concerned it was their numerical superiority over the Established Church which proved the strength of their case for disestablishment. But other problems did exercise the minds of the nonconformist hierarchy at the end of the century. One such problem emerged from the large scale immigration of non-Welsh people, particularly into the industrial areas of South Wales. The Royal Commission continually pointed to this situation and asked why the churches were conspicuously failing to attract such people. Religious leaders, as a response, had evolved new ‘direct action’ approaches. One example was the Calvinistic Methodist Forward Movement which was founded in 1891 under the guidance of Rev. John Pugh. As a first stage and in order to announce the movement’s arrival Pugh erected large tents in all the large towns of Wales. As well as tent-preaching Pugh also conducted house to house visitations and temperance marches. He also engaged a number of charismatic preachers to deliver simple but telling sermons. One of these was the Rev. Seth Joshua, a reclaimed drunkard, who was convinced that the masses desperately wanted to hear the Gospel:

The people are crying out for it. There is no grip in anything else. The people are sick and tired of the present day attempts to dress up the Gospel in new clothes. A new tribe of theological tailors have wearied the people by forcing the Gospel to become a quick change artist.

Joshua was here referring to the emergence of a modern approach to theology which was another development to worry denominational leaders. By the 1890’s even the traditionalist Welsh theological colleges were subject to wider European influences, which included the rationalist philosophers. A congregational minister, the Rev. David Adams, was one who attempted to apply the scientific principles of evolution to spiritual values. He submitted a paper to the National Eisteddfod entitled “The Fall,
the Incarnation and the Resurrection in the light of Evolution”.

Critics, who were certainly in the majority, were shocked by the implications of Adam’s theology, especially in the way it appeared to challenge the divine authority of the Bible. Yet however we define the nature and extent of the religious problem in Wales at the end of the 19th century it is certain that any “crisis of faith” which might have existed was not caused by the undermining of religious belief by socialist philosophy.

The infiltration of socialist ideas, especially those developed by Keir Hardie and the Independent Labour Party, began in earnest only on the occasion of the acrimonious coal strike of 1898. Previously there had been some ILP activity in South Wales starting in 1894, and a few branches of the Social Democratic Federation had also been established but without much permanency.

In the early 1890’s several attempts were made to form Labour Churches on the John Trevor model. The Liberal newspaper The South Wales Daily News expressed some hope for the Labour Church in Wales because it was seen as a movement of vitality and a genuine attempt to combine the forces of social and religious improvement. The leader of the transiently successful Labour Church at Cardiff was S. G. Hobson who saw his Church as a necessity because, “unfortunately the old established churches are altogether too far committed to an endorsement of the worst aspects of latter day industrialism”. His aim was the creation of the “Christian brotherhood” in which would be applied economic as well as moral principles. Branches of the Labour Church were established at Cardiff, Swansea and Aberdare but they were short-lived and, although several new branches were formed in 1907, they seemingly failed to capture the imagination of the Welsh people.

As Hobson admitted in his autobiography, Pilgrim to the Left (1936), the Labour Church for him was merely a half-way house on the road to a socialism which ultimately regarded religion as peripheral if not completely unnecessary.

The background to the coal strike of 1898 was the miners’ determination to replace the sliding scale method of payment with a minimum wage rate. In the face of extreme suffering nonconformist ministers did not hesitate to organise relief committees, to man soup-kitchens and to collect distress funds from charitable organisations. Their public pronouncements, however, were carefully worded not to give offence to the coalowners. The Cardiff Free Churches Council, for example, resolved only that both sides in the dispute should be reconciled:

We believe if this were done confidence and harmony would be restored between employers and employed, and we are assured that the side that makes the first move towards this end would not thereby prejudice or endanger the justice of the cause.

The exposition of this “harmony of interest” ideal was entirely to be expected since similar statements had been applied to labour disputes for thirty years. The difference was that in 1898 a rival ideology was at work in
the coalfield in the form of Keir Hardie and the ILP. The moral impact of Hardie's personality and message was crucial. He very quickly comprehended the religious basis on which the Welsh outlook was founded, "The meetings which I addressed," he said, "revealed how eagerly the people will drink in the teachings of socialism, when placed before them in a language which they can understand".15

He was appalled by the many examples of Christian hypocrisy in the face of prolonged human suffering. How, he asked, could men like the coalowner Richard Cory take an active part in evangelistic work like the Forward Movement yet be unmoved by the human misery directly before them? Hardie rebutted Cory's counter charge that all socialists were atheists and declared of the Welsh workman that

Like all true Celts they are socialists by instinct, and the deep religious feeling which strikes even the most casual observer as a prominent trait in their character makes them specially susceptible to socialist teaching.18

Hardie's message and relief work certainly impressed the colliers. The ILP organiser for South Wales, Willie Wright, reported that 31 branches existed by 1899 and,

Branches though not always active, have succeeded in banding intelligent young men together, many of them once the hope of the various chapels, who have lost faith in the old political parties and the old industrial methods of fighting labour questions, of the practical work done or not done — by the chapels in which they have been reared. . . The effect upon the churches is no less noticeable. The writer has been dubbed a Black Angel, a Foreigner, a Firebrand and an Atheist — several young men have been called before the 'Church Council' to give account of themselves for the part they have in the matter. Vestries have been refused despite the fact that applicants were diligent Church workers for some years past.17

The local press noted several examples of excommunication of socialists but some also made their own conscious decision to leave the chapels. The Aberdare miners' leader David Morgan, "Dai o'r Nant", had been imprisoned during the strike for his part in a demonstration. He returned home a local hero but the significance of this event lay in the fact that Morgan was also a prominent deacon at Calfaria Baptist Chapel, generally regarded as a citadel of Dissent in South Wales. A meeting of his fellow deacons resolved not to pass a vote of sympathy with Morgan on his imprisonment. He subsequently left the chapel and urged all local ministers not to meddle in labour problems but to concentrate on that which they were ordained to do.18 Others clearly followed the example. Figures for the East Glamorgan Congregational Association showed that the "adherents" group fell by 35% between 1897 and 1898.19 Nor did the figures recover — at least we must assume this to be the case since the Association omitted this particular statistic from their reports after 1900. There were also falls in the membership totals of the main denominations but the falls were not
exceptionally large and while the situation must have worried the denominations it was far from critical.

The ILP built on this successful initiative. In the next few years socialist societies, most of them indistinguishable from ILP branches, appeared in the towns and valley communities. Judging by the debates and discussions which were held within these societies religion was far from being a dead issue. The Aberdare Socialist Society, originally established in 1895 but formally affiliated to the ILP in 1902, was a good example. The Society consisted of men such as C. B. Stanton, the fiery miners’ leader but grew under the organisational skill of the schoolteacher, W. W. Price. From the outset the Society wished to make it clear that not all socialists were unbelievers. It was true that discussions on theology were not allowed but lectures concentrating on the social teachings of Christ were to be encouraged. Addressing the Society in 1902 Bruce Glasier, who toured south Wales extensively at this time, asked,

When would the Church come back to the teachings of Christ and endeavour to abolish such wicked environments and lighten the burdens of labour by assisting the socialists to sweep away the curse of landlordism and usury and establish a 'Kingdom of Peace on Earth'?

The Aberdare society also established a Socialist Sunday School at which children were instructed in the socialist Ten Commandments. A number of local ministers addressed the Society including the Rev. D. Rees of Pentre, Rhondda and the Rev. George Neighbour, Mountain Ash, who gave a paper on “Labour’s Hope”. Another visiting speaker, Enid Stacey, delivered a paper on “Should Christians be Socialists?” and decided that true socialism was true religion in action.

In the years after 1898 there does not appear to have been a concerted non-conformist effort against socialist principles in general or Keir Hardie and the ILP in particular. It was probably perceived that as yet the threat was not real enough. In any case by 1904 Welsh nonconformity had something much more fundamental and challenging with which to concern itself, a religious revival. Not since 1859 had Wales experienced such a large scale revival, although in the first half of the 19th century these so called “showers of blessing” had been commonplace.

The origins of the revival were to be found in a series of non-denominational “holiness” meetings in Cardiganshire. The meetings were organised primarily so that ministers and ministerial students could find greater spiritual awareness within themselves. The emphasis therefore was not on the conversion of the unbeliever and certainly not on the merits of a more progressive theology but the intention was to bring “the Children of God into life more abundant”. The meetings brought together a number of people who were involved in direct missionary activity. These included the Baptist, the Rev. W. S. Jones who had first hand experience of the American, “Torrey-Alexander” revival. Others were Seth Joshua of the
Forward Movement and Gipsy Smith of the Free Church Council. More important as a catalyst though was that in 1903 the Calvinistic Methodists of South Cardiganshire, under the direction of two local ministers, the Revs. Joseph Jenkins and John Thickens, desired to experience again the awakening of 1859. They set out to recapture that feeling of spiritual anxiety which they believed to be a pre-requisite of a genuine revival. The revival was soon under way and seemed particularly potent among the younger Church members and ministerial students. One of these students, Evan Roberts, was the instrument by which this revival of the already converted became the revival of the occasional adherents and even those who had completely forsaken their religious affiliations. The spread of the revival in the last three months of 1904 was unparalleled. At first Evan Roberts took the revival to his home town of Loughor, between Swansea and Llanelli, and from there he and his co-revivalists moved quickly eastward into the valleys and coastal towns of the South before moving north in 1905. By the end of 1904 it was estimated that 34,000 conversions had taken place — a final figure of more than 100,000 conversions was also quoted. Despite the close, almost indecent, attention of the Western Mail and other newspapers one of the chief characteristics of revival services was their spontaneity. The services were of necessity unplanned because Roberts constantly claimed to be awaiting holy inspiration for his actions. A number of ministers complained about the emotional excesses and the way in which their ministerial guidance was ignored as young people completely took over the meetings. Indeed, £60 worth of damage was caused to Roberts’s own chapel at Moriah, Loughor. Roberts though was no preacher or theologian. His addresses were short and concentrated mainly on God’s love. He promised ultimate salvation if only the people would make a full and public profession of repentance. As a result many communities witnessed scenes of unbridled emotion, public houses closed through lack of custom and rugby football teams burnt their jerseys in a unique ritual. In many ways of course the revival was a reaction to the oppressive social conditions which then existed. It brought colour into a dull and harsh existence. Religiously, it demonstrated the power of inspirational faith as opposed to the dogma of a more rationalist theology. But what did the revival offer the labour movement? Contemporary opinion suggested a variety of sometimes conflicting theories. Bruce Glasier in the Labour Leader asked for the revival to be understood in context, “Welsh religion is, as we all know, a gloomy, narrow and unaesthetic religion. But so alas! are the present day conditions of Welsh industrial life generally”. He saw revivals as “infections of social enthusiasm” in which he acknowledged there were excesses but he believed that this was better for people than living their lives in “cold and soul-less apathy”. Glasier called for the “glory of brotherhood” to be established out of the revival. He hoped that the power of the revival, “could be evoked at this hour against the appalling bondage of capitalism, or the grasp of
monopoly, or the terror of wage servitude, and the fear of masters". Another correspondent to the *Labour Leader*, "Cymro", noted that one lesson of the revival was that enthusiasm was essential to any missionary movement and that Welshmen were particularly well placed to generate such eagerness. He described religious enthusiasm as a "spiritualising force and a driving power which would be invaluable to Socialism in its approaching struggle with capitalism and class privilege". Interestingly, "Cymro" also acknowledged the efforts of nonconformist ministers who themselves had emerged from the working classes but he regretted that their circumscribed environment had made the Bible their one and only subject for study.

A number of active trade unionists reflected on the revival in later years. Many of them were critical of the naked emotionalism and transitory aspects of the awakening. They viewed it as a diversionary tactic to direct attention away from unionism and socialism. The miners' leader "Mabon", on the other hand, held out great hope for the regenerative impulse but even he as a moderate "Lib-Lab" MP was anxious that the awakening should not interfere with their efforts to improve union organisation. For Mabon the revival was to herald what he termed a period of progressive Christianity. One Dowlais collier, interviewed at the time by the French social investigator J. Rogues de Fursac, was adamant that socialism had lost nothing by the revival. His analysis was that since the religious movement had been essentially popular and democratic it had necessarily strengthened unity and brotherhood, both watchwords of socialism. There was certainly nothing in the revival message itself which could have contributed in a positive way to any progressive impulse. Evan Roberts was a mystic and a fundamentalist and not a preacher of the social Gospel. The revival, however, did cause some ministers and ordinary members alike to reconsider their faith in a new light. What is more important is that the revival was closely followed by the intrusion into Wales of a short-lived but nonetheless influential social philosophy. This was the New Theology whose foremost exponent was the Rev. R. J. Campbell, minister of the Congregational City Temple in London. In essence, New Theology represented the fusion of modern liberal theology with a developed social conscience. It particularly stressed the Immanence or omnipresence of God rather than His intangible transcendance. Campbell also challenged the doctrine of original sin, believing that the existence of evil was simply the result of the immaturity of society and not part of a Divine plan. He also denied the special divinity of Christ and the theory of the Virgin birth. The literal truth of the Bible was rejected as untenable in the light of scientific reasoning. Many theologians attacked Campbell's ideas as vague and superficial. Indeed, he was later to modify them on his way out of Congregationalism and into the Church of England. But for a number of years his message found a receptive audience in Wales especially, it seemed, where the New Theology stressed the practical
application of Christian principles in the modern world. Campbell described his philosophy as "the religious articulation of the social movement". In discussing the thorny question of the "atonement" his advice was "Go with Keir Hardie to the House of Commons and listen to his pleading for justice to his order, and you see the atonement". He was in fact a close friend of Keir Hardie and stood with and in place of the Labour leader on a number of engagements. In 1907-8 Campbell toured South Wales lecturing and preaching, often to ILP branches, in towns and villages as far west as Carmarthen.

When Campbell lectured at Pentre in Rhondda in 1908 on "Christianity and the Kingdom of God" he was greeted by a large audience. The local press also noted the hasty organisation of a less well attended counter-demonstration and the holding of so-called "traditional" services in nearby chapels. In his lecture Campbell stated that, "The Kingdom of God was the brotherhood of man in the future". But, he warned, it would be ridiculous to describe Jesus as a socialist in the ordinary sense of the word. He had no economic theory but he did subscribe to that economic system which meant the helping of one another rather than the hampering of each other. Campbell had been invited to the Rhondda by the Treorchy Progressive Theology League. The League was one of a number formed in the valleys in 1907, mainly through the efforts of a progressive missionary to South Wales, the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams. Williams was a Welshman but at that time a Congregational minister at Bradford. He wrote a great deal in English and occasionally in Welsh on progressive theology and the New Theology, and was especially productive in relating these to the problems of modern society.

In 1904 Williams wrote a pamphlet entitled The true Revival versus Torreysim in which he attacked the American revivalist's complete faith in Biblical infallibility. He believed that Torrey's mission undermined the progressive movement. But in his book Does Science Destroy Religion? he defended Christianity against the rationalist theories of Haeckel and Robert Blatchford. He called for more sympathy for labour aspirations and less Forward Movements, Christian Endeavour Societies, sensational revivals and Free Church Federations. His other works included The Evangel of the New Theology and The Social Gospel and both encapsulated his belief that Christianity must adapt itself to the needs of modern society. Williams was a committed socialist, though in his addresses to ILP meetings in South Wales he consistently preached the evolutionary socialism and "no class war" theories which some advanced socialists could not accept.

On a number of occasions Williams was refused the use of a chapel for his "heretical" meetings. The Progressive Theology Leagues, especially in the Rhondda, were forced to resort to Unitarian meeting places. For many nonconformists this simply placed the progressivists in the Unitarian camp. This was confirmed when a number of progressive ministers, including Rhondda Williams, were known to have been trained at the
Carmarthen Presbyterian College, where Unitarian principles were said to have been espoused since the early 1890's. The Rev. James Nicholas, Baptist minister at Moriah, Tonypandy was another trained at Carmarthen. His efforts on behalf of progressive theology were aided by Rev. James Lewis of Pentre English Congregational Church who was local organiser of the Treorchy Progressive Theology League.

In Merthyr the Rev. John Morgan Jones of Hope Presbyterian Church was an assiduous worker in the cause of New Theology. In 1910 he published a series of sermons entitled Religion and Socialism, which included his sermon on "Was Jesus a Socialist?" Both James Nicholas and John Morgan Jones, however, were uncertain as to their socialist affiliations. Nicholas could not declare himself a convert to socialism, though he had great sympathy for its ideals. He was convinced though that Christianity needed the Labour Party and the Labour Party needed Christianity and it was for this reason that he supported Keir Hardie in the 1910 election. It was understandable that there should be degrees of affiliation to the progressive movement but it was significant that what was in essence a theological issue was being debated widely, and in open session, at many ILP meetings as well as in sympathetic chapels.

In the Aberdare Valley one minister stood out openly as an avowed socialist. He was the Rev. George Neighbour of Nazareth Baptist Chapel, Mountain Ash. In 1907 he addressed the Rhondda miners at Tonypandy on the question, "Is Socialism anti-Christian?" He wanted to convince them that socialism was not anti-Christian, irreligious, unethical or immoral. He claimed to be fighting alone among the ministers of the Aberdare Valley but in spite of constant opposition he was a convinced and ardent socialist. His message emphasised "universal brotherhood" and for Neighbour the highest aims of life consisted of the sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of the society. His socialism ultimately brought him into conflict not only with other nonconformist ministers but also with his own deacons. The deacons asked him to sign an agreement saying he would not preach socialism from the pulpit. He refused and in October 1907 he left the chapel and with a majority of its members formed what was known as the "Brotherhood Church". This Church was still in existence two years later and this was despite the fact that it had been refused coal at a reduced rate by Nixon's colliery. It was the privilege of all local chapels to receive cheap coal but the other chapels in the area prevailed upon Messrs Nixon not to recognise the Brotherhood Church as a true Christian church and the company not surprisingly obliged.

The western valleys of the coalfield, where English immigration was much less and a specifically Welsh language culture still existed, were also subjected to the combined thrust of ILP propaganda and New Theology. For example, R.J. Campbell and Rhondda Williams visited Ystalyfera in the Swansea Valley and also the Amman Valley. Their work was supplemented by the so-called "social crusade" of the American brother
evangelists the Revs. Ben and Stitt Wilson who toured the area in 1908 with the full support for the ILP. The Wilsons used simple Bible terminology in their demand for social justice and at Ystalyfera Stitt addressed the gathered on the less than obvious subject of “Moses — the first Labour Leader”. But we must not imagine that Campbell and the Wilsons were solely responsible for labour progress in these areas. The Welsh poet and theologian John “Gwili” Jenkins was primarily responsible for setting the New Theology and its social message in a Welsh context. Amongst his other views he echoed Campbell’s theory of the Immanence of God and he greatly offended his own Baptist denomination when he stated that not all the Old Testament was divinely inspired. One of his most important and influential works was Y Ddwy Deyrnas (The Two Kingdoms) in which he stated the need to reconcile the spiritual with the material world. For the Labour movement to succeed it must have a theological basis in Christianity. Gwili was convinced that the primary objective of true Christianity was to promote social change to hasten the creation of a new social order. To him it was a far less important objective of Christianity that it should prepare the individual for life after death.

Nor did Gwili confine himself to the western valleys. In 1910 he accepted an invitation to preach at Seion Welsh Baptist Chapel at Cwmaman, Aberdare. His text was, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” and he evidently shocked the large congregation by using the pulpit to make a bitter attack on landlords who he said had appropriated the land which was given to the people. It was also significant that his sermon was given in the week of the 1910 election in Keir Hardie’s constituency. During the course of his sermon Gwili openly advocated the giving of one vote in favour of Keir Hardie even though the Merthyr/Aberdare constituency was a two member seat.

It was at election times that a surprisingly large number of nonconformist ministers seemed prepared to support ILP candidates. Despite George Neighbour’s protestations that he was the only socialist preacher in Aberdare it is known that the Rev. Ernest Tidman, also a Baptist, supported Keir Hardie in 1906. By 1910 other Aberdare ministers, who were said to be progressive in theological terms, judged Keir Hardie to be an admirable candidate. These included the Rev. D. Silyn Evans of Siloa, Congregational Chapel and the Rev. J. M. Jones a Calvinistic Methodist minister.

In the Gower election of 1906 the support of the Rev. Gomer Lewis, of Capel Gomer Baptist Chapel, for the successful Labour candidate was believed to have been crucial. In a famous election address Lewis stated that “He felt a desire to leave the ministry and become an agitator, to devote himself to the work of uplifting the toilers”. Speaking at the Calvinistic Methodist assembly in Caernarfon in 1908 a member of the denominational hierarchy, the Rev. Dr. J. Cynddyylan Jones, shocked his audience by
stating that he had voted Labour for a number of years although it has to be said that the Labour men of his acquaintance were those of the Lib-Lab grouping such as Mabon and William Brace. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that some sections of the nonconformist ministry were advocating a move away from Liberalism, even progressive Liberalism, to a support for independent Labour candidates.

Undoubtedly the most colourful Labour supporter among the nonconformist ministry was the Rev. T. E. Nicholas (Nicholas y Glais) of Seion Congregational Chapel, Glais. In 1911 he became the editor of the Welsh section of the Labour newspaper the Merthyr Pioneer. He was imprisoned for his pacifist views during the war and in 1920 he became a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In that sense Nicholas was an exception but this need not necessarily lessen his influence on his congregation or his ministerial brethren in the critical period up to 1914.

In North Wales the steady if unspectacular growth of ILP influence after 1904, following the end of the three year Penrhyn lock-out, owed much to the Rev. R. Silyn Roberts of Bethel Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Tanygrisiau (1905-12). Roberts worked mainly with the slate quarrymen for whom he published in 1908 a pamphlet entitled Y Blaid Lafur Annibynol: Ei hanes a'i hamcan (The Independent Labour Party: its history and purpose). In this he expounded in intelligible terms the inherent Christianity which pervaded the gradualist approach to the achievement of the socialist ideal. The labour movement in North Wales inevitably displayed a distinctly Welsh flavour in its development. At the annual demonstration of the North Wales Quarrymen's Union at Blaenau Ffestiniog one speaker regarded it as the duty of Welsh workmen to see how they could adapt their aspirations to those of the socialists in England without sacrificing their particular Welsh interests. At the same demonstration Silyn Roberts advocated nothing less than the nationalisation of land, mountains and the means of transmission of merchandise.

The blending of socialist and nationalist aspirations received its best expression in a significant, if abortive, meeting at Carmarthen in 1911. A group of Labour sympathisers came together to discuss the formation of a specifically Welsh Labour Party. The aim was to work within the ILP framework for the standard programme of social improvement but this was to be allied to the just demands for a national identity for Wales. In effect, the meeting was an attempt to fuse the movement in the quarrying areas of the North with that of the western part of the South Wales coalfield, the anthracite area. The common factor apart from their socialist beliefs being that both areas enjoyed an almost exclusively Welsh language culture. Delegates at the meeting included Silyn Roberts, Nicholas y Glais, Gwili Jenkins and a Baptist minister, Herbert Morgan. The group also included the academic T. Hudson Williams who had been responsible for
the Welsh translation of John Clifford's Fabian tract entitled *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*.

Keir Hardie noted the nationalist demands of the Welsh and in his election addresses he was always ready to declare himself a Welsh home ruler. In 1912 he published *The Red Dragon and the Red Flag* in which he outlined, not always convincingly, the common aims of socialism and Welsh national aspirations, though he was opposed to the formation of a Welsh Labour Party, "The national party I have in view is this — the people of Wales fighting to recover the land of Wales, the working people of Wales acquiring the mines, furnaces, railways, and the public works generally."

The period 1906–12 was one in which a number of nonconformist ministers, whilst not overtly advocating socialism, were preaching a progressive Gospel in which social change and not charitable work was seen as fundamental. In North Wales the Rev. J. Puleston Jones, a Calvinistic Methodist minister from Pwllheli, was adopting a policy of social evangelism towards his congregations. He claimed to be inspired both by the religious revival and by new developments in theology. He wanted theology to be related to the problems of this life. Much of his preaching emphasised the practical aspects of Bible teaching, especially the lessons of the Epistle of St. James. At Merthyr the Rev. Rowland Jones of Tabernacle Baptist Church withstood immense criticism for preaching to the ILP national conference which was held in the town in 1912. He and his deacons were particularly vilified for actually inviting the conference into the chapel. In the same year the Rev. David Pughe, who claimed to be a Fabian socialist, led a "Brotherhood" campaign in Merthyr on behalf of the Wesleyan Methodists. He pointed out to his listeners that he wanted his form of socialism to reflect true Christian values, and the campaign was apparently well-received. One of the most significant results of the progressive movement within Nonconformity was the creation in 1911 of the Welsh School of Social Service. The idea was originally promoted among English Congregationalists but the Welsh version was devised on specifically non-denominational lines. Two of the leading figures were Baptists, the Rev. Gwilym Davies, a notable peace campaigner and the Rev. Herbert Morgan, minister of a leading Baptist chapel in London. Morgan was the defeated Labour candidate in his home town of Neath in 1918. The School was probably more representative of Progressive Liberalism but at the inaugural meeting the Rev. T. Richards of Newport pleaded with the churches to devote their efforts to solving the social problem in all its manifestations. His reasoning was based on the political reality that their congregations were made up of a large number of socialist and ILP members as well as Liberals and Conservatives. Herbert Morgan at the next meeting in 1912 called for social justice and not charity as a remedy for poverty. For example, he wanted the drink problem to be properly diagnosed — it was caused by bad housing conditions, by
uncongenial surroundings, and by depressing conditions of employment and not by the degeneracy of the individual.\textsuperscript{60} This outlook can be profitably compared with those views which brought into being the Forward Movement in the 1890’s. Its architects firmly believed that the masses “. . . have been sent here in order that we should Christianize them and cleanse them from their pernicious habits”.\textsuperscript{61}

Orthodox Liberal Nonconformity, which remained the majority view by far, regarded both New Theology and socialism with equal horror. Typical of the invective was that New Theology was an import from England, and as such the very last place it should be heard was in the chapels of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. The Mid-Rhondda Free Church Council attacked New Theology as being appropriate to heathen London where Campbell had claimed that only one-fifth of the city’s inhabitants attended any church. But in Wales, they argued, Old Theology had proved gloriously triumphant and therefore what need had they for any watering down process.\textsuperscript{62} Speaking at the opening of the John Pugh Memorial Hall at Porth in 1908, as part of the Forward Movement’s campaign, Alderman T. H. Howell,

Marvelled that men holding the views of the New Theologians were allowed to preach in the Chapels in Wales — the land of Sunday Schools and Bible-readers . . . the men who held these views had a perfect right to expound them in proper places, but it was a ‘desecration and a violation of holy things’ for them to teach these views in the pulpits of Welsh chapels”.\textsuperscript{64}

The nonconformist criticism of socialism was equally unintellectual. There were constant references to the charge that socialists “spat in the face of Christ”, while the Rev. W. E. Harries of Beulah Baptist Chapel, Aberdare said that Keir Hardie was an atheist and anyway he did not want a Scotsman to represent a Welsh borough.\textsuperscript{64} One ILP councillor in Aberdare claimed that he knew of a preacher in the town who preached on the premise that the immediate need was not better houses for the people but better people for the houses.\textsuperscript{65}

An aggressive critic of socialism and New Theology was the Calvinistic Methodist minister, the Rev. W. F. Phillips, who was defeated by the Labour candidate in the Gower election in 1910. Possibly, a critical factor in his defeat was the revelation in \textit{Llais Llafur} (Voice of Labour) that Phillips had been for a few months a member of the Newport branch of the ILP. Phillips published numerous articles in Welsh and English on the theme \textit{Is Socialism Anti-Christian in its tendency?}. For Phillips the question was largely rhetorical. He readily concurred with the emphasis on social questions but he was critical of the “class war” implication of socialist speakers. The literary monthly \textit{Y Geninen} 1907–12, recorded in some detail the essence of the debate between Old and New Theology, and also the related discussions on Christianity and Socialism. Opponents of the progressivists seized on the abolition of private property and division of
wealth as being entirely anti-Christian. One sympathetic writer in *Y Geninen* declared that it was not so much the ministers who were opposed to Labour but the "sêt-fawr", the deacons, who were largely self-made men, capitalists and Liberal voters. It was they who decided that the Liberal candidate could have the loan of the chapel, but the Labour Party could not use the chapel because the trust deeds prohibited its use for political purposes. The implication was that the deacons looked upon the Liberal Party as a religious denomination, an adjunct to their faith, but upon the Labour Party as a purely political section. The same writer believed that energetic young men who once attended chapel were leaving to take up the ILP as their religion.\(^67\)

There are a number of examples among the miners' leaders of those who had claimed a religious affiliation in early life but who saw an irreconcilable dichotomy between the Christianity of orthodox nonconformity and the socialist ideal. For example, A. J. Cook as a young man was a Baptist lay preacher, but he became disillusioned by the failure of the Churches to translate revival enthusiasm into a programme for socialist improvement.\(^68\) Frank Hodges was another leader who left the Primitive Methodist Church to take a greater interest in unionism and the ILP.\(^69\) It would also be possible to point to the policy document of the syndicalists, *The Miners' Next Step* as containing no religious references not even to oppose it. But how typical were Cook, Hodges or Noah Ablett, the best known author of *The Miners Next Step*? In general, they were of English extraction, educated at Ruskin or the Central Labour College, and rather detached from the spirit of Welsh nonconformity which still pervaded many communities on the coalfield.

There is therefore another side to the attempted reconciliation between religion and socialism in the pre-war years. For James Griffiths, at that time leader of the anthracite miners, the revival and the New Theology were essential elements in the creation of a new social outlook based upon the moral certainties of Christianity. Griffiths, brought up as a Welsh Congregationalist, recalled in later years that two events gave his socialism a solid Christian foundation and allowed him to translate his ideology in a tangible and comprehensible way. Firstly, he remembered hearing R.J. Campbell at Ystalyfera in May 1908. This was followed by a visit to the Miners' Hall at Gwauncaegurwen to listen to Keir Hardie. We should not be surprised that Griffiths was of the opinion that Keir Hardie's type of socialism made a stronger appeal to his religious idealism than the rival Social Democratic Federation with its rigid Marxism and anti-religious bias.\(^70\) The incipient labour movement must have been aided to some extent in the industrial Welsh communities by the genuine attempt to combine religion and socialism in a practical way. Gwili's development of the New Theology gave an intellectual as much as a theological basis to the Welsh labour movement. Possibly Wales rather lacked the ideological framework which the Fabians provided in England, but some Welsh
Religious leaders could provide a comprehensible ideology based on recognisable Christian precepts. Even Fabian discussions, where they did take place in Wales, were almost exclusively religious in nature as, for example, at the Bala Theological College in the 1890's. Rhondda Williams and Gwili provided some Welsh working people with a single faith in which they could incorporate their religious and social values. This might also partly explain the exceptional increase in ILP branches in South Wales, from 29 in 1906 to 85 in 1908. The areas of greatest ILP growth were the Rhondda and the anthracite region, precisely those areas where New Theology had received its most attentive and enthusiastic audiences.

Moreover, we should not ignore the popular dimension of nonconformity, for it was that dimension which had secured its centrality in 19th century Welsh society. The revival of 1904 had shown that Welsh nonconformity still had a dynamic element within it and that ordinary people, however intermittently, wished to retain the right to contribute in some way to the conduct of religious life. Similarly, when orthodox ministers criticised the New Theology working men wrote to the local press asking for more information and requesting that chapels be made available for discussion of this important topic. It was colliers who made up the bulk of the membership of the eight branches of the League of Progressive Theology and Social Service to be established in the Rhondda. One New Theology lecturer visiting the Rhondda in 1908 was heartened by the numbers of young colliers joining the League. He noted that the religious revival had swept through the Rhondda but now there were signs of a more lasting revival in which the message was not so much individual ecstasy as social service to others.

In November 1908, 17 followers of the New Theology were expelled from Bethlehem Welsh Congregational Church in the mining village of Abercwmboi, Aberdare. Whilst many local ministers supported the action of the minister and deacons, local people were incensed that the voice of ordinary chapel members was not being heard. The expelled members again set up a "Brotherhood Church" with the support of the omnipresent Rhondda Williams who regretted the split but concluded that, "the truth cannot be quenched and the Progressive Movement must and will go on".

Williams also maintained with some foresight that the best course of action for the churches was, "to remain neutral regarding political parties, and let the members and officers and ministers have perfect liberty to join any party they like. He begged of religious people to let their ministers exercise this liberty. If they did not then they would certainly alienate the workmen of the country."

In analysing the achievement of the movement which attempted to provide the religious underpinning of the developing social and political movement, it is relatively easy to accept the traditional view of most labour historians that the quasi-religious phase which the Welsh labour movement experienced in the years 1906-14 was merely a half way house or stepping
off point to complete religious alienation. For some this was certainly the case but in those Welsh communities where the chapel was and remained a way of life, a historical reality, the religious basis of ILP propaganda, and the support given to it by a significant section of the nonconformist ministry, made it acceptable as a working faith. Far from hindering socialism it provided an intelligible framework and a moral basis, by reference to which many people were able to justify their socialist views. It allowed the situation to occur, as Rhondda Williams had hoped, whereby it was entirely possible, indeed desirable, for a man to be a socialist and a member of the nonconformist chapel. Nonconformity did not collapse overnight and nor did the labour movement. The war was to affect both in fundamental ways but in the period before 1914 this particular brand of Welsh Christian socialism was just successful enough to attract the next generation of labour activists from within chapel congregations and this to the detriment of the Liberal party.

Whatever latter day observers may think of the moderate approach of the ILP in Wales before 1914 it is doubtful whether sufficient numbers of unexceptional Welsh workers would have joined ILP branches in this formative period had not the socialist creed been based on a solid Christian and moral foundation and not simply a socialism couched in occasional Biblical language.

Notes

4 Report Evidence and Indexes of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales, 1910, xiv, 19.
5 Ibid. 19 and 25.
6 For the early history of the Forward Movement see Rev. Howell Williams, The Romance of the Forward Movement of the Presbyterian Church of Wales (Denbigh, 1946), 34–40.
7 T. Mardy Rees, Frank and Seth Joshua, The Renowned Evangelists (Wrexham, 1926), 114.
9 See Labour Leader, 26 May 1894 and 30 June 1894.
10 South Wales Daily News, (hereafter SWDN), 9 November 1891. See also Labour Leader, 16 June 1894.
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12 *SWDN*, 6 July 1907.
14 *SWDN*, 20 August 1898.
16 *Labour Leader*, 9 July 1898.
17 Ibid., 11 February 1899.
18 The incident is recounted in *Aberdare Times*, 13 August 1898 and 15 February 1898. See also *Labour Leader*, 10 September 1898 and *Aberdare Times*, 28 May 1898 for other examples of chapel desertions.
20 The establishment and growth of the society is documented in its minute books; see Glamorgan Record Office (hereafter GRO), Aberdare Socialist Society Minute Books, 1895–1908, D/DX/J 2–5.
21 *Aberdare Leader*, 26 August 1902.
24 The local origins of the revival have been analysed by David Jenkins in *The Agricultural Community in South West Wales at the turn of the twentieth century* (Cardiff, 1971), 219–28.
26 The course of events is detailed in “Awstin”, *The Religious Revival in Wales, 1904–5* (Cardiff, 1905). This was a special reprint in six volumes of articles which had originally appeared in the *Western Mail*.
29 Ibid., 10 February 1905.
30 See transcripts of recorded interviews in the South Wales Miners’ Library, 13/1–3 Ernest Lewis (Blaenavon), 77/11 John Jones (Caerau) and 12/5 Abel Morgan (Ynysybwl).
31 Rhondda Leader, 6 May 1905.
35 See *Rhondda Leader*, 28 March 1908.
36 For Williams see *Who’s Who in Wales*, 1920, (Cardiff, 1921), 326, see also *Rhondda Leader*, 15 February 1907 and *Aberdare Leader*, 9 January 1909.
37 Royal Commission . . . into the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales, xvii, 394.
38 *Rhondda Leader*, 2 May 1908.
40 *Rhondda Leader*, 18 May 1907. For Nicholas see also *Who’s Who in Wales*, 1920, 340.
Aberdare Leader, 29 January 1910.

Rhondda Leader, 14 September 1907.

For the background to the establishment of the Brotherhood Church see Aberdare Leader, 23 January 1909 and 13 March 1909.

See, for example, Aberdare Leader, 19 December 1908 and Rhondda Leader, 23 January 1909. Also James Griffiths, Pages from Memory (London, 1969), 16.


Merthyr Express, 22 January 1910.

Aberdare Leader, 20 January 1906.

Aberdare Leader, 10 January 1910. Other ministerial sympathisers are noted in R. Tudur Jones, Ffryd Ac Argyfwng Cenedl: Cristionogaeth a Diwylliann yng Nghymru, 1890–1914 (Swansea, 1982), II, 265–71.


Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald, 28 August 1908.


Labour Leader, 7 July 1911 and 10 July 1913.


Merthyr Express, 1 June 1912, 15 June 1912 and Jones’s article in the Baptist periodical Seren Gomer, March 1910.

Ibid., 21 September 1912.

SWDN, 8 September 1911; see also K.O. Morgan, “The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour”, 297.


National Library of Wales, Calvinistic Methodist Archives, 5924, “The Forward Movement”.

Rhondda Leader, 25 April 1908.

Ibid., 3 October 1908.

Aberdare Leader, 8 September 1906. Ordinary Chapel members also shared such views, “He (Keir Hardie) don’t believe in the Bible, or God”, in W. J. Edwards, From the Valley I Came (London, 1956), 89.

Ibid., 3 March 1906.

See, for example, W. F. Phillips, Is Socialism anti-Christian in its tendency? (Newport, 1910); also Y Geninen, January 1911, 17–22, and Merthyr Express, 26 October 1912.

Y Geninen, October 1910, 258–261.


70 James Griffiths, *Pages from Memory*, 14 and Griffiths’s personal testimony to the author in an interview recorded in 1974.


72 *Rhondda Leader*, 12 December 1908.

73 *Aberdare Leader*, 23 January 1909. The background to the split is recorded in edition of 7 November 1908.