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DIC PENDERYN : THE MAKING OF A WELSH WORKING CLASS

MARTYR

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To Dic Penderyn, born 1808 at Aberavon

Hanged 13 August 1831 at Cardiff

Martyr of the Welsh working class

So runs a bilingual memorial plaque on the wall of the Central Library, Merthyr Tydfil. The plaque was unveiled by Len Murray, General Secretary of the TUC, during a ceremony in 1977 graced by readings from Alexander Cordell, author of the novel **The Fire People**, whose efforts have led to the discovery of many of the missing records of Dic's trial.

Hard by the Library stands a Town Hall, which looks as if it had been designed by an illustrator of Tolkien. The first in Wales to fall to Plaid Cymru, it displays, as in a shrine, the bust of James Keir Hardie, whom Merthyr elected as Wales' first Labour MP.

Merthyr Tydfil, mother town of iron and steel in South Wales, and of much else beside, was, in terms of numbers at least, the first "town" in Welsh history and for three generations the strongest single concentration of Welsh people on earth. It had been the first and proved to be the most persistent stronghold of Jacobinism in Wales at the time of the French Revolution. It produced Wales's first working-class martyr and its first working-class press. It was the first Welsh town to fall to radical Dissent. It was the heartland of Chartism and the home of the Welsh Chartist press in both languages. In 1868 it became the first Welsh constituency to elect a Nonconformist radical MP on working-class votes and on a specifically working-class thrust of aspiration and grievance: Henry Richard, the "apostle of peace". Even in 1900, in the days of its relative decline, it elected Keir Hardie, though as a second member and on a minority vote.

I am no longer sure I know what a "tradition" is, but if such a phenomenon exists, Merthyr must surely exemplify it.

It is as I write those words that I experience what Aneurin Bevan once called (in capital letters) the Invasion of Doubt. My uneasiness, I think, is not simply personal, it is historical. It is the fear that, in our ceremony outside Merthyr Central Library, we were sanctifying an historical untruth.

This is certainly not a question of historical inaccuracy. That Dic Penderyn, Richard Lewis, was unjustly hanged in 1831, that he was a martyr of the Welsh working class is now, I think, proven. It is not even a question of the wealth of evidence which ordinary, professional, dry-as-dust history can marshal, year by year from Merthyr's experience, to set against the "tradition." From my own family, I could summon up a veritable roll-call of dissidents from the communal identity suggested by Dic Penderyn's plaque and Keir Hardie's bust. This kind of argument misses the point: those historians who see day-by-day, empirical

“history” (itself derived from a limited, slewed and inadequate range of evidence) as the **only** “reality” seem to me to be profoundly mistaken, indeed profoundly un-historical.

A “myth” is not necessarily a lie; on the contrary, a “myth” often expresses a profound historical truth. A “tradition” of this kind can, in sober reality, become “consciousness transformed into a material force.” This has certainly been true of Merthyr. Voltaire was describing a “climate of opinion” or a Gramscian hegemony when he once said that, whereas few people had actually read Isaac Newton, “everybody” believed in Newtonian science. Not the “tradition” itself, but the whole historical experience of Merthyr, which that “tradition” attempts to encapsulate and make usable, created a “climate of opinion” in Merthyr which spirits who were not attuned to it found stifling. It is quite literally true that, as a youth, I had met a fascist before I ever met anyone who was “shameless” enough, indeed “anarchically undisciplined” enough, publicly to admit that he was a Tory. Aneurin Bevan once said that Tories did not have horns growing out of their heads; politics would be simpler if they did. To a whole generation of adolescents like myself, in sober truth, this needed to be said. This is triviality, but it reflects a quite genuine historical reality.

No, what is worrying is the precise nature of the “tradition”, what it chooses to exclude, what it chooses to stress. Antonio Gramsci was working in the mainstream of the Marxist tradition when he conducted those analyses of the way in which rebellious, dissident popular traditions can in fact serve the very hegemony they are ostensibly in revolt against. You may recollect Eric Hobsbawm’s account of those seventeenth-century German bandits who, to distance themselves dramatically from the society of the “straight”, took up Devil Worship; they simply stood Christianity on its head. This in no way disturbed the hegemony of Christianity; it merely confirmed it.

This is an extreme case; in South Wales today, the process is more subtle. The fear that gnawed at me as I wrote on Merthyr in 1831* was the fear that I might succumb to that celebratory style which seems to be gripping the industrial South Wales which is articulate: we are living through a distinctly desperate hunt after our own past, a time of miners’ libraries, old militants on tape, quarries turned museums. What is alarming is that this kind of recovered “tradition” is increasingly operating in terms of a Celebration of a Heroic Past which seems rarely to be brought to bear on vulgarly contemporary problems except in terms of a style which absolves its fortunate possessor from the necessity of thought.

The Ford Company, you will recollect, found the South Wales Working Class (capitals seem in order) the most “intelligent” and “sensible” in Europe. The Hoover Company which presides over Merthyr as potently as Guests and Crawshays ever did, has found little cause for complaint in the conduct of Labour militants who shed a manly tear over Dic Penderyn as they sweep away the Relics of a Past of Capitalist Oppression and regroup people around super-markets, much as they were once regrouped around Norman castles, for much the same reasons.

Some forms of a "tradition" do not merely encapsulate the past, they sterilise it, they remove it from the historical equation of the present. This is not to cultivate an historical consciousness, it is to get rid of it. The past, in this process, is in fact virtually abolished, in much the same way as the fabric of a town.

Consider the "tradition" of Dic Penderyn. In the first place, it is very late. Feelings were passionate in 1831; their expression can be traced through the late 19th and early 20th centuries but it was not until 1945 that a "tradition" effectively broke into print, even on the margins. It was only then, too, that trade union banners appeared in South Wales. We have been a singularly unhistorical people, a people without memory.

Consider the ceremony. It was "official" in the sense that a Labour Establishment (I use the term in a neutral not polemical sense) has become "official". Indeed, the first "official" recognition of Dic Penderyn preceded the Merthyr ceremony by a few years and was conducted by no less an institution than the Church in Wales (and all honour to it) which for generations had been **yr hen fradwres**: the Old Traitress. The driving force behind the ceremony at Merthyr was no historian but Alexander Cordell the novelist who at this moment is without doubt the "people's remembrancer" of South Wales.

Consider the content of the celebration. We celebrate a "martyr," a victim, a past of sacrifice and suffering. It is difficult to avoid this in Merthyr anyway. The Town of Tydfil the Martyr, the novelist Jack Jones used to call it, rolling the sonorous title lovingly around the tongue. This is, to be pedantic, an inaccuracy; Merthyr in places-names generally means a tomb or burial place. This is no great matter; people call their own town what they like. It is, however, curiously symptomatic. The "tradition" of Martyr's Town is distinctly lachrymose. It is martyrs we remember; it is **The Victim** we honour.

There are other figures in our past who were rather less lugubrious: Ifor Bach who seems to have been the first to employ the political kidnap (and effectively) in Wales; Llywelyn Bren, and even more, his wife Lleucu, who knew his French authors as well as his Welsh and could rock fourteenth-century Glamorgan.

More important, there were people and there were qualities in the Merthyr Rising of 1831 who are eliminated from "history" by a particular elaboration of the Dic Penderyn tradition. This, not any academicism, is the reason why that tradition **has** to be confronted with events "as they actually happened" insofar as we can reconstruct them.

This process of elimination finds an exemplar in the very act of association of the Merthyr community with Dic Penderyn. The plaque which commemorates him bears the St. Tydfil coat of arms of Merthyr and its motto: **nid cadarn ond brodyrdde**. The motto is universally translated as **Not force but fellowship**. This is "inaccurate"; in itself this means little. People can do what they like with their own mottos. The "inaccuracy" however reflects a shift in meaning over

time. This shift is relevant to the Dic Penderyn tradition. And it generates an historical untruth.

Merthyr became a County Borough after 1906 during that Liberal high noon when not a single Tory MP was returned from Wales ("traditional" as ever). The local historian Frank Treharne James, who had consulted Goscombe John, RA, on the coat of arms, presented several mottos to the Armorial Bearings Committee. The translation adopted for the final choice was: **There is nothing so strong as combination**. However awkward (and in these degenerate days potentially comic) this was authentic. It used the very words of Taliesin Williams, a schoolmaster in Merthyr during the 1820s, a leader in the Welsh revival and the eisteddfod and a shaper of Merthyr's rich, popular Welsh and bilingual culture. It was also apt, since the motto had been devised by Taliesin's celebrated father, Iolo Morganwg.

Iolo Morganwg, Edward Williams, was the Bard of Liberty of the 1790s, shaper of an embryonic national ideology and national intelligentsia, inventor of a **Gorsedd** (Order) of Druidic, Masonic and **Jacobin** Bards who were to serve, in renewed succession to the old bardic "people's remembrancers", as a radical and directive elite of a new Welsh "nation" (I am tempted to say **une nation**) which Iolo himself served as fabricator-in-chief and revolutionary Merlin. In this enterprise Iolo, who spent much of his later life among the "sturdy old Republicans" of Regency Merthyr, composed 41 "proverbs" on the theme of **brodyrdde** and attributed them to a suitably Silurian medieval sage, St. Cadog. The motto first appeared in print in the third volume of the **Myvyrian Archaiology** of 1807, the major achievement of those genial London-Welsh intellectuals and their allies, **Jacobins** most of them, who "revived" the eisteddfod as an instrument of Enlightenment and Revolution (their prize medals were struck by the engraver to the French National Assembly). They were, in truth, almost perfect specimens of what Gramsci meant by "organic intellectuals", the spokesmen of a class or group entering into historical action.

The word **brodyrdde** itself first appears, apparently, in a dictionary composed by the leading figure of this movement, Iolo's colleague William Owen, an acquaintance of William Blake and a follower of Joanna Southcott, who edited the **Archaiology**. His dictionary came out in 1793, the very year when another Jacobin, Morgan John Rhys, a Baptist minister of Monmouthshire who had been born in nearby Llanfabon and who was to launch a Free Cambria in the New World, published the **Cylchgrawn Cymraeg** (Welsh Journal) which became the first political periodical in the Welsh language. Originally, the word (which today suggests "brotherhood") meant "friendship, social ties" with the adjectival meaning of "fraternal, brotherly". Silvan Evans, in a later dictionary, talked of "fraternal union."

A Jacobin slogan was singularly appropriate for that Merthyr which was a stronghold of the new democratic ideology, as it had been of Cromwellian Independency. In the hands of Iolo's son, Taliesin, however, it acquired an additional dimension of meaning. Taliesin lived through the Merthyr Rising of 1831, which killed Dic Penderyn and also produced the first trade union lodges which

were branches of a national organisation to appear in South Wales. He lived through the Owenite syndicalist upsurge of 1834, when Merthyr, in that cause, produced Wales's first working class newspaper **Y Gweithiwr/The Workman**. The lock-out in Merthyr in 1831, ardently supported by Lord Melbourne, the Whig Home Secretary, who connived at a breach of the law to destroy the unions, seems in retrospect to have been a dress rehearsal for the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the breaking of the unions three years later. Taliesin lived through Chartism, when the editor of the **Gweithiwr** produced Wales's Chartist press.

Taliesin translated "brotherhood" as "combination" and he used the word precisely in the sense of the Combination Acts. It captured the particular flavour imparted to the notion of "brotherhood" by the desperate struggles of the early trade unions in their heroic age. The transmission of this slogan to the Merthyr of 1906 then, is certainly an illustration of that elusive "tradition". Brother Len Murray's presence in 1977 was thus appropriate. It was doubly appropriate in that the evidence now available makes it clear that the man who decided the fate of Dic Penderyn, virtually in isolation, was Lord Melbourne. What was haunting him in 1831 was the power and drive of what the Home Office called **The Union**, the Owenite movement in the North associated with John Doherty. Whatever else he died a martyr to, Dic Penderyn almost certainly died a martyr to the National Association for the Protection of Labour of 1831.

Taliesin's translation, however, fought a losing battle in the twentieth century against more euphonious and oecumenical forms. D. Andrew Davies, Merthyr's Director of Education, made a last stand against this rising tide of false consciousness in 1963 when he suggested a version which would be less clumsy than Taliesin's but equally as authentic: "Nothing as strong as the bonds of brotherhood" **No strength but brotherhood**. To be "authentic" however, the "brotherhood" would have to carry the precise emotional charge of the "brothers" of the trade union movement.

Nothing survives of the bite and the challenge of Merthyr's original motto, just as nothing of the NAPL survives in the living tradition of Dic Penderyn's martyrdom. **Not force but fellowship**. Anybody who was affronted by **that** would be affronted by Motherhood.

A special treat in my youth were Sunday evening gatherings at the home of my paternal grandmother Mary Catherine Williams, a little, tough, black figure whom I suspected had built Gwernllwyn chapel, Dowlais, with her bare teeth. Normally, she was Militant Apathy personified. "What's the worrrld to you, boy," she'd snap as she tore the **News Chronicle** from my hands, "Cere at dy Literature" (Get down to your Literature.) Her children, in despair, once took her to a Chaplin film. She sat unmoved throughout, to comment at the end: "Druan arno fe" (Pity for him). She was known to have made one public comment on events, when she went to chapel to denounce "yr hen Mussolini na" (that old Mussolini): Gwernllwyn Sisterhood duly voted to condemn the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.

The real exception, however, was **The Past**. After the chapel "monkey parade" along twilight roads and the no less carnal delights of cold meat, pickles and Moscow radio (a concession to youth) with its yet more thousands of in-

habited localities liberated from the Nazi invader, three old ladies would settle to a remembrance of things past. After I had withered into a professional historian, it became astounding to me in retrospect, how often the talk curled back to 1831. They'd shriek with laughter at a young boy Abednego Jones who went about Merthyr during the Rising carry a huge white banner as big as himself (sometimes twice as big) piping in a shrill, choir-boy treble: "Death to king and tyrants. The reign of justice for ever."

I ultimately found the "huge white banner": workers carried it on the march to the Waun Fair which started the rebellion. The young boy I never found. But, once, in the **Merthyr Guardian** for 1833, I came across a court case in which a miner, cheated out of his stall, sued two companions and won. He was then exposed as a man who had "carried a banner during the Merthyr riots" (the phrase recurs constantly in obituary and other notices: it marked a man out). The judge read him an appropriate sermon: his name was Abednego Jones. Perhaps he was short.

It was not strictly true, then, that the Rising was forgotten. Quite young women in Cefn High Street (who refused to give their names because they "did not want to get involved", a response I think which reflects less an over-active sense of the presence of the past than the relations then current between Merthyr Civic Society and its Labour Council) talked about the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders marching down their High Street as if it happened yesterday—"Go home and put your trousers on," the women shouted. A remarkable feature of the "folklore" of the Rising, is the fact that much of it turns out to be sober historical fact. On the whole, however, it is largely anecdotal and centred almost wholly on the execution of Dic Penderyn. What is absent from it all, above all, is much sense of the Rising as a **rebellion**. Working people accepted the title bestowed on the action by their "betters"—the Merthyr Riots. This terminology in fact stems from a cold-blooded decision of Melbourne's in the summer of 1831. He was determined to play the crisis as coolly as possible (he had to). He rejected repeated requests from Glamorgan magistrates for a trial for High Treason (which was a perfectly proper request; the **only** "proper" course of action, in fact). Prosecute them for riot, he said. Take the wretched place back into tranquillity and out of the public eye, as the Reform crisis got worse and moved towards the Bristol Riots and the travail of the autumn. As far as I know, the first man to give the action its proper name (after all one of the first steps towards Gramsci's "historical autonomy") was Harri Webb, a radical and nationalist poet, in a pamphlet published in 1956.

The process by which Dic Penderyn became "detached" from the Rising itself can be traced, I now realise, within my own family experience. The very first contact with "history" I can recollect is a story my mother told me about her grandmother: Sarah Herbert of Tredegar whose brother was a Chartist in Nanty-Glo. Sarah Herbert was an ardent supporter of Henry Richard, an active canvasser in his cause. She once paid the princely sum of 4d. to see what was alleged to be Dic Penderyn's ear on display in Dowlais market.

This story, which is so remarkably reminiscent of popular Catholicism and its relic-worship, is intriguing from a strictly craft point of view. I now think it derives from an entirely false report published in the workers' paper **Tarian y Gweithiwr (The Workers' Shield)** in 1884. A correspondent claimed to have met the man who committed the crime for which Dic Penderyn was hanged; he met him in Pennsylvania, the man having fled through France. The writer, who was totally misinformed, said the man had lost an ear and recollected that a soldier who had seen a comrade "killed" had noted that the "killer" had lost an ear. No soldier was killed in the Rising, but it is at least clear that some kind of "Dic Penderyn" had lodged in the popular culture of South Wales long before 1900.

More significant I think is the fact that an ardent follower of Henry Richard, whose brother was a Chartist (and one who taught **Volney's Ruins** as a set text, no less) should also have been a devotee of the cult of Penderyn. Henry Richards' days were **not** those of the frontier years. There had been a massive process of re-alignment and re-stabilisation, a new liberal or radical "consensus"; these were days of the "working classes", whose movements were the marching wing of liberalism, of a virtual fusion of the aspirations of the "working classes" and those of Nonconformist democracy. Dic Penderyn had died after a revolutionary insurrection and during a desperate struggle, without allies, for trade union rights, when a working class identity was established, to re-assert itself episodically over the next decade or so, in the teeth of repression, military garrisons in five South Wales towns, an armed middle class and the hegemony of the ten-pound voters. By my great-grandmother's day, Dic Penderyn had quit the Merthyr Rising and was on his way towards that plaque on the Central Library.

It would take years to trace his progress there, as it would to solve the even more fascinating problem of the "historical invisibility" of the Merthyr Rising. Some points, however, need to be made.

Since his appearance in 1945 the Dic Penderyn of "tradition" has naturally developed. His first begetter, Islwyn ap Nicholas, was certainly left-wing, but his Dic is a rather formidable character, equipped with an exemplary youth worthy of a Sunday School tract. It would not be too hard to fit him (particularly in Welsh) into that major genre of Welsh writing, the minister's memoir (where in fact Dic had originally appeared). Harri Webb's Dic of 1956 is altogether a more racy fellow, fond of his glass and located in a people's war of liberation against colonial oppression. Alexander Cordell's Dic, brilliantly oblique, moves through that world which his maker, genuinely alert to history and even more alert to historic drama, has so successfully created. At his worst Alexander Cordell is Silurian Gothic who ought to be published in Nashville; at his best he can achieve an imaginative "reality" I have hitherto encountered only among American and French practitioners of Popular History or **Haute Vulgarisation** (and both countries, of course, had the good taste to effect their Revolutions during the Age of Reason).

Despite some thunder on the Left, Dic Penderyn becomes ever more visibly a Welsh nationalist. More important, I think, is the terrible tension which

afflicts his creators. On the one hand he has to be presented as a victim of injustice (which he certainly was); on the other, there seems to be an inescapable tendency to make him a **Leader** or at least a person of consequence. Since his historical context was one of **Rebellion**, this is often difficult: it is precisely the idea of **rebellion** which dwindles. The thought that his sacrifice might have been in some senses "accidental" appears to be intolerable. Alexander Cordell once took me to task because I suggested that Dic was a martyr because he was "innocuous"; he read this as "un-important". The connection is a false one: that it should have been made is symptomatic.

These tensions become even more visible in our own day when Dic has been diffused throughout a rebellious youth culture. We have long had a tough, investigative journal named after **Rebecca**. We now have a **Penderyn**.

Que Viva Puerto Rico Libre, proclaims **Penderyn** No. 4, as it prints articles on Puerto Rico, the struggle of the Crimean Tatars in the USSR, the General Strike in South Wales, Prison Letters, attacks on Plaid Cymru as "England's safety valve," the gagging of the Irish community, and Film in Wales. It carries two poems specifically on Dic Penderyn by two of our best-known poets.

John Tripp's can be "placed" by a historian without too much difficulty. Dic has been hanged, cavalry have been disarmed, "then we put down the Taffs." All recent writers are alert to the progress of dry-as-dust history (Cordell indeed has worked hard at it):

The proofs were slender, sir,
as to his presence at all.
Now great crowds outside my window
follow his coffin.

(Thus are martyrs made).

Then, however, comes a conceptual leap:

We need Edward's Justices back,
Thos. Cromwell and Rowland Lee,
a few turncoat hanging judges,
some marcher lords and steel
To take these rascals' minds off
their damned Glendowers,
ap Gwilyms and God knows who.
Offa began a problem
when he built his accursed dyke.
These Welsh will make the coronets rattle
at Windsor before they finish . . .

The revolutionary optimism of the last couplet is as refreshing as a mirage-oasis in a desert, though it is a curious echo of 1831 itself when the government was badly frightened and suspected the loyalty of its own troops (yeomanry were ignominiously defeated and disarmed), took pains to send the correspondence to the king: Melbourne, writing to his successor at the Home Office at the

time of the Chartist march on Newport eight years later, said : "It is the worst and most formidable district in the kingdom. The affair we had there in 1831 was the most like a fight of anything that took place."

You will observe, however, that Dic Penderyn is in fact wrenched out of the only historical context which gives his martyrdom meaning and securely lodged in a strictly nationalist pantheon. Presumably rebels who were Welsh must have been objectively "Welsh rebels"; the revolt is attributed to some quality of **Welshness** in revolt against an old, long subjection. Dic was hanged by **rhaff y Saeson**, the **English** rope, sing the pop groups in their *Noson Lawen Dic Penderyn* (folk night). The litany is familiar : Edward I who hammered us (and especially the "bards") as hard as the Scots; Cromwell and Tudor repressions, Owain Glyndŵr and Dafydd ap Gwilym, the most human and accessible of our medieval poets.

Here Dic is simply an Incantation in a Nationalist Curse.

Harri Webb is something else. Though an immigrant and a sophisticate, he in fact visibly belongs to a long line of Merthyr remembrancer-poets stretching back through the eisteddfodau at the Lamb Inn and the Patriot, through Dic Dywyll, Dic Dark, the blind ballad singer who kept the Workhouse out of Merthyr for years with his verse, won a prize at an Infidel eisteddfod, wrote on Dic Penderyn and made more money from his songs than a furnace-manager, back to some of the Jacobins of Aberdare Mountain. Furthermore, Harri Webb has written on the Rising (as he was the first to call it). Here, he supplies a self-consciously "simple" ballad. Whatever else he is, "simple" Harri Webb is not, though he is a conscious myth-maker in the Sorelian style : myth as a motor of the will and a director of action.

The town was Merthyr Tydfil
The year was thirty one,
Twas there in grim Glamorgan
That mighty deeds were done ac felly yn ymlaen, and

so on to quote a characteristic Welsh pulpit style.

The nationalism is certainly present but not overly obtrusive :

The alien lords of iron
Who ground our people down,
Took refuge in their mansions
And the workers took the town

and, to conclude :

And the time is surely coming
When Wales must once more show
The courage of Penderyn
So many years ago

What this "courage" of Penderyn **was** is not made clear (though surely some sense of the "rebel-leader" would be felt by a reader). In the poem Dic is simply hanged, though "Heaven sent its lightnings down". Moreover, "Lewis the

bold huntsman was banished from the land . . . " Harri Webb knows the story of the Rising and at least mentions somebody other than Dic.

He plays merry hell with the chronology of the revolt to serve his purpose but, rare among celebrants of this tradition, **does** indicate that there **were** workers who "struck" as well as "bled".

This truth however is at once negated by what, to me, is the most interesting and symptomatic verse—about the conflict outside the Castle Inn where at least two dozen people were killed and seventy wounded :

And at the masters' harsh command
They fired on the crowd
And all the gutters ran with blood
Why are such things allowed ?

The sheer bathos of that last line does, in fact, sum up the bulk of the Dic Penderyn tradition.

More important, the verse itself is not only a travesty of what happened but its exact **opposite** (as the author well knows). It was the **crowd** who attacked the soldiers. The ranks outside the inn were hemmed in on all sides; their bayonets were pointing straight up in the air; their muskets in fact were not loaded. Their comrades in the upstairs windows of the inn fired only when ordered to by officers (only one person suggested later that the order had been given by magistrates or masters and this was a cover-up) and after the crowd had broken into the inn, where masters, magistrates and the hated shopkeeper Specials were massed, several times. Their discipline was in fact as remarkable as the bravery of many in the crowd—"Good God ! can't we fire ?" . . . "No, we dare not until we get orders."

It is perfectly true that no soldier was killed and their firing was literally bloody murder, but they fired essentially to save their lives. If they had not, they might well have been torn to pieces.

Some of these details the writer could not be expected to know but the **reality** of the struggle outside the inn he certainly **does** know. What is very striking about this approach (more common among others than Harri Webb generally) is that, despite the celebration of other acts of rebellious daring (which resulted in no casualties) there is a terrible reluctance to say that workers were the attackers, the aggressors.

This exemplifies the contradiction at the heart of the Dic Penderyn tradition with its polarities of Dic as Innocent Victim and Dic as (at the very least) Exemplary Welsh Worker. No matter how fully events are described, it is the **Rising** which is spiritually absent from that tradition, in the only terms that matter. There is a repeated collapse into the **Victim Syndrome**; we are back in the Town of Tydfil the Martyr.

In terms of the historical autonomy of the Welsh working class, in Gramsci's terms (the only ones that matter) this kind of rebel tradition is simply "gastric juice" (Gramsci again) for its enemies. You will recollect that Soc.ety, which

took a hammering during May and June 1968 in France, was within weeks selling plastic paving stones (the student weapon) as souvenirs. It would have even less trouble with **this** Dic Penderyn.

What is diminished and, in extreme cases, excluded by this form of the tradition is the historical existence and the historical meaning of another individual human being who could serve myth-makers perfectly as a symbol of the **Rising** itself. He was a man, moreover, who was much more "visible" in 1831 than Dic (who was in truth virtually "invisible" until his trial); a man who, I think, would have been recognised as a "folk-hero" at any time and any place from the Water Margin of China to the Morelos of Zapata's Mexico.

In 1831 itself in Merthyr, there was another proclamation directed wholly at one man. It was issued by the desperate ironmasters the morning after the shooting outside the Castle Inn, as workers took up arms. An appeal for calm it was signed: YOUR FRIENDS AND MASTERS.

Good God! that you should have been led on by the Speech of One Violent Man to commit so daring an attack as you did

The One Violent Man was not Dic Penderyn: it was Lewis Lewis, known as Lewsyn yr Heliwr, Lewis the Huntsman.

There is no plaque to **him** on Merthyr Central Library. More important, people in Merthyr itself in 1831 chose to remember Dic in preference to him. The **victim**, rather than the **hero**, was singled out from the beginning. The historical inadequacy of the Dic Penderyn tradition in terms of the autonomy of the Welsh working class is thus rooted in a specific historical conjuncture. We, as "people's remembrancers" need to understand that choice. That is why it is necessary to place Dic Penderyn and Lewsyn yr Heliwr in "what-actually-happened". As mere historians we will not and probably cannot succeed. But we have to try.

* Gwyn A. Williams's new book **The Merthyr Rising** (published by Croom Helm at £7.95) appeared in April 1978.