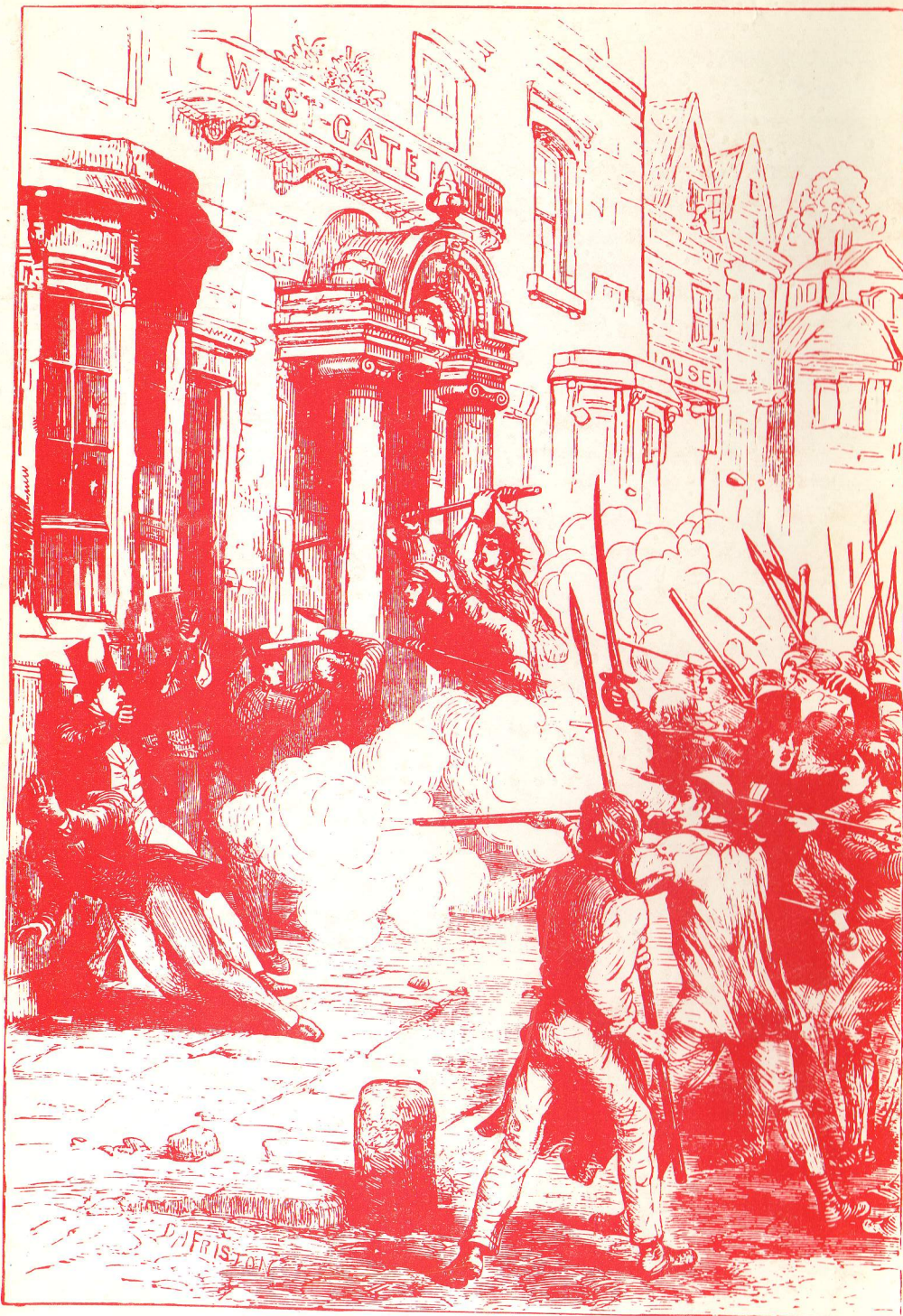




Un o derfysgoedd y Siartwyr y tu allan i westy'r Westgate Casnewydd.
(Trwy ganiatâd y "Mansell Collection")

DYDD MAWRTH, 2 AWST 1988

GWERINIAETH Y SILWRIAID
GWYN A. WILLIAMS



TUESDAY, 2 AUGUST 1988

THE SILURIAN REPUBLIC
GWYN A. WILLIAMS

Un mewn cyfres o ddarlithoedd a draddodwyd yn y Babel Llen yn ystod wythnos Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Casnewydd 1988.

Gweriniaeth y Silwriaid

I ddechrau, ga i ddangos y faner ma i chi. Baner Siartwyr Cymru. HTV a fu'n gyfrifol am ei gwneud hi er mwyn ei chwifio ar y sgrîn am ddeg eiliad. Y fi a'i cafodd hi wedyn. Ddyweda i ddim rhagor—dim ond dweud i fi ei meddiannu'n deg yn ôl Cyfreithiau Hywel Dda—Llyfr Blegywryd wrth gwrs.

Hugh Williams, y cyfreithiwr o ganolbarth Cymru a fu'n gweithio gyda'r cynhyrchwyr gwlanen ar lannau Hafren a fu'n gyfrifol am ei dyfeisio. O Bowys symudodd i Sanclêr a chefnogi'n ddiweddarach ymgyrchoedd y Beca. Fe, er enghraifft, a wnaeth lansio'r gynta o Gymdeithasau'r Gweithwyr neu gyfrinfa gynta'r Siartwyr yng Nghymru sef yn nhref sans-culotte gynhyrfus Caerfyrddin a fe hefyd oedd y cynrychiolydd cyntaf o gymoedd Morgannwg i fynychu Confensiwn y Siartwyr yn Llundain. Ym misoedd Ebrill a Mai 1839 ceisiodd y Confensiwn hwnnw ymsefydlu fel grym gwrth-seneddol, i ddymchwel y Tŷ Cyffredin oligarchaidd a llwgr a sefydlu yn ei le ddemocratiaeth gyflawn a phoblogaidd.

Bardd oedd Hugh Williams. Yn arferol o dan faner werdd yr ymgyrchai'r Siartwyr ond baner drilliw—gwyrrdd, glas a gwyn—yn nhraddodiad y Chwyldro Ffrengig oedd yr un a luniodd Williams. A gwyrrdd, glas a gwyn wrth gwrs yw lliwiau Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain a gawsai ei sefydlu gan Iolo Morganwg genhedlaeth ynghynt a bwriad gwreiddiol Iolo oedd sefydlu Urdd o Gofiaduron i Weriniaeth Cymru.

Ehangu'r sumboliaeth a wnaeth Hugh Williams. Gwyrrdd oedd y ddaear, glas oedd y nefoedd a gwyn ryw ddydd a fyddai'n goresgyn nef a daear yn enw cyfiawnder. Un gair sef CYFIAWNDER a gariai fersiwn Gymreig y faner hon. CYFIAWNDER oedd hefyd ar faner Merched Beca yn 1843 pan gerddasant ganol dydd drwy dref Caerfyrddin cyn cael eu goresgyn gan y Dragoons, a dyna hefyd a ddigwyddodd i wŷr Gwent yn 1839 a gwŷr Merthyr yn 1831—cael eu saethu i lawr gan y milwyr. Onid Tom Paine a ddywedodd "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered".

Blwyddyn dyngedfennol oedd 1831. Nid gwŷr a ddihoenai yng nghrafangau tlodi a orymdeithiai ym Merthyr a Chasnewydd. I'r gwrthwyneb, roedden nhw ymhlith rhai o'r gweithwyr medrusaf a'r gweithwyr a dynnai'r gyflog orau yn y wlad. Yn erbyn gwaradwydd ac annhegwch o bob math y gwrthryfelent; roedden nhw am ennill cydnabyddiaeth i'w gwerth, i'w statws ac i'w hurddas. Syniad oedd y tu cefn i'r gorymdeithio. Syniad y gellid ei grisialu mewn un gair. Diwygio yn 1831, y Siarter yn 1839. Am ddemocratiaeth boblogaidd neu am Weriniaeth fel yr hoffent ei galw yr oeddent yn ymladd. Cawsai Merthyr ei chyffroi am y tro cyntaf gan y ddelfryd hon yn 1831 pan fu i argyfwng lleol godi ei ben yr un pryd ag argyfwng cenedlaethol y Mesur Diwygio (Reform Bill)—ac ymgyrch fawr ymhlith y dosbarth gweithiol am hawliau gwleidyddol a hawliau undebau llafur. Dyna'n fras gefndir Terfysg Merthyr. Cododd y gweithwyr yn erbyn y milwyr, eu trechu ddwywaith a dal yr ardal am bedwar diwrnod. Ar ôl cael eu trechu ymladdasant un o'r brwydrau cau mas mwyaf chwerw yn holl hanes tywyll y maes glo cyn cael eu llwgu i ildio.

Methiant fu eu hymdrech i sicrhau cefnogaeth y maes glo cyfan. Ond ar y diwrnod diwethaf, yr oedd rhwng 10,000 a 20,000 o wŷr Sir Fynwy ar eu ffordd i Ferthyr ac o fewn ychydig wythnosau ymddangosai 'Reform' fel slogan ar y papurau rhybuddio a ddosberthid gan y "Scotch Cattle" sef y terfysgwyr cudd a chyfrwys a weithiai ymhlith glowyr Gwent. I'r cymunedau glo yn rhannau deheuol y cymoedd y perthynent yn bennaf, ac er eu bod yn iachach nag ardaloedd gweithfeydd haearn y blaenau, digon caled a llwm oedd hi yno hefyd. Cymunedau un dosbarth oeddent i bob pwrpas a'r gweithwyr yn cael eu llethu gan y rheidrwydd i brynu eu nwyddau yn siop y cwmni—yn syrthio i ddyled ac yn cwffio'n ddiddiwedd â'u cyflogwyr,—a llawer o'r rheiny'n Gymry twyllodrus a ymladdai'n barhaus i gael y ddau ben llinyn ynghyd.

Yr oedd trefi'r gweithfeydd haearn yn fwy cymhleth gyda dosbarth mwy cymysg o bobl. Y fwyaf cymhleth ohonyn nhw i gyd oedd ardal Merthyr lle ceid traddodiad a ddeilliai o gyfnod y Chwyldro Ffrengig o ddemocratiaeth Jacobin

ddosbarth canol a dosbarth canol is a'r Undodwyr yn gyfrifol yn amlach na pheidio am ei hybu. Ar ôl 1832, cynrychiolid Merthyr gan ei Haelod Seneddol ei hun. Gwleidyddiaeth dair ochrog oedd gwleidyddiaeth Merthyr—Josiah John Guest yr A.S. Rhyddfrydol, radicaliaeth y dosbarth canol a'r crefftwyr a'r dosbarth gweithiol di-bleidlais. Yma, gellir olrhain cyn-hanes Siartaeth yn yr ymgiprys trionglog hwn trwy etholiadau 1835 a 1837.

Yn nhrefi gweithfeydd haearn Blaenau Gwent, nid oedd hyn mor amlwg o bell ffordd. Yr oedd amryw o nodweddion Merthyr yn amlwg yma eto ond heb y ffocws neu'r canolbwynt pendant a geid ym Merthyr. Yn ddi-os, yr un oedd yr ysbryd—a gellir ei synhwyro'n bendant y tu ôl i'r ymgyrchu o blaid undebau llafur Robert Owen yn 1834 a 1835, yn y frwydr tros Ddeddf y Tlodion ac mewn sylwadau i'r Wasg a lithrodd trwy rwyd ohebol y papurau lleol gwrthwynebus. Yng Ngwent, fodd bynnag, wedi 1830 glowyr y cymoedd deheuol oedd ar flaen y gad. Yn ystod streic gyffredinol 1830 fe wnaeth y gwŷr a'r gwragedd hyn a oedd mor gyfarwydd â chwffio ddatblygu system gyfrwys dros ben i ddal eu gafael ar eu lleoedd gwaith a'u cymunedau. Dyma bobl fwyaf proletaraidd y maes glo a nhw hefyd oedd y rhai mwyaf diwylliedig. Yn eu rhengoedd yr oedd beirdd a ganai'n Gymraeg a Saesneg, cyfreithwyr pen pentan—ac ni phetrusent ddefnyddio cyfreithwyr a meddygon cyfeillgar i hybu eu hachos.

Digon parod oedden nhw hefyd i ddefnyddio eu 'Scotch Cattle'. Mae haneswyr heb gydymdeimlad ag achos y gweithwyr wedi myned allan o'u ffordd i orbwysleisio natur gyntefig a threisgar y 'Scotch Cattle'. Beth oedd e mewn gwirionedd ond mudiad gwrthwynebu a phrotestio soffistigedig ac effeithiol; defnyddid trais pan fyddai'r amgylchiadau'n mynnu hynny. Ei nod oedd sicrhau rheolaeth drwy gyfrwng cadernid ysgwydd wrth ysgwydd. Un o'u harfau mwyaf effeithiol oedd hiwmor—hiwmor tywyll Cymreig a allai droi llawr y llys barn yn lwyfan ffars. Byddai Twm Siôn Cati yn falch o'u harddel. Roedd tebygrwydd mawr rhwng y 'Scotch Cattle' a Merched Beca. Ac ni ddylid synnu, cefnderwyr i Ferched Beca oedd amryw

byd ohonynt. Er maint y mewnlifo o Loegr ac o fannau eraill, llwyddid er hynny i'w troi a'u moldio'n frid newydd, y Deheuwy'r Cymreig—a Chymraeg oedd iaith canran sylweddol o'r boblogaeth.

Amgylchynid gweithgareddau'r 'Scotch Cattle' a'r Siartwyr gan fur trwchus o ddistawrwydd na allai'r awdurdodau mwyaf taer dorri trwyddo. Roedd yn ddiysgog gan mai Cymraeg oedd iaith y cynllwynwyr. Cadarnle'r 'Scotch Cattle' oedd y Coed-duon ac yno hefyd y ceid y Siartwyr mwyaf di-droi'n ôl ac ymroddgar. Yn 1839 pan ddaeth eu harwr mawr, yr areithiwr tanbaid Henry Vincent, i fyny o orllewin Lloegr gyda'i bapur newydd, y Western Vindicator a gynhwysai newyddion am Gymru'n bennaf, fe'i derbyniwyd yn null traddodiadol y Siartwyr—tyrfaoedd ar y stryd, cant o ferched yn eu ffrogiau gwyn yn chwifio baneri gwyrdd, rali fawr y tu allan i'r Coach and Horses yn y Coed-duon ac yna araith ysgubol gan Vincent. "In this place, a few thousand armed men in the hills could successfully defend it. Wales would make an excellent Republic. To your tents, O Israel! With one heart, one voice, and one blow, perish the privileged orders! Death to the aristocracy! Up with the people and the government they have established." Ac i ddiweddu, bonllef wrth gwt bonllef, canu a thyngu i fyw a marw dros y Siarter. Yna i'r caeau o gwmpas y Greyhound am noswaith o ganu penillion (tybed beth oedd y geiriau a pha mor effeithiol oedd y delyn fel offeryn taro!)

Yn y cymoedd, llechai Siartaeth fel Atlantis yn disgwyl am i rywun ei chyffwrdd a'i chodi i'r wyneb. Y rhywun hwnnw oedd Vincent—tenau a pharabllus—a chryn ffefryn gyda'r gwragedd.

Yn llythrennol, mae John Frost, fel y gwyddoch i gyd, wedi gadael ei ôl a'i enw yng Nghasnewydd. O ran natur, roedd Frost yn wahanol i Siartwyr y Cymoedd. Roedd ei radicaliaeth yn hŷn—ac yn debycach i radicaliaeth wrth-aristocrataidd William Cobbett a fu'n brwydro'n ddidor yn erbyn y system neu 'The Thing' fel y galwai ef hi. Yn ôl Frost, gartref roedd man cychwyn y 'Thing'—yng ngweidyddiaeth tref Casnewydd a oedd yn llwgr mor aml â pheidio.

Gŵr tawel o daldra cymedrol oedd John Frost. Yng nghylchoedd radical Llundain y cawsai ei fagu ac ar ôl treulio cyfnod byr ym Mryste daeth i Mill Street, Casnewydd i weithio fel teiliwr a draper. Dechreuodd ymddiddori yn y cythrwfl a godasai yn y dref yn erbyn y modd y rheolid pawb a phopeth gan deuluoedd pwerus fel y Somersets, Dugiaid Beaufort a Morganiaid Tredegar. Gydag ef yr oedd Samuel Etheridge yr argraffydd, John Dickenson y cigydd a William Edwards, cawr o ddyn a fuasai unwaith yn bregethwr cyn gadael y pwlpud a throï'n bobydd. Yn amlach na pheidio, fel "Mad Edwards, the Baker" y byddai'r Wasg lidus yn cyfeirio at William Edwards.

A beth am y Wasg? Os cewch chi achos rywbryd i ddarllen y Monmouthshire Merlin cofiwch eiriau Henry Vincent ym Mhont-y-pŵl yn 1839... "Oh! the damned press! What an infernal engine it is! That which might be the means of rescuing mankind from bondage is used as a formidable means of warping the mind struggling to be free..."

Clywch, clywch!

Oherwydd ei ymgyrchu, dedfrydwyd Frost i garchar gan Thomas Prothero, cyfreithiwr a chlerc diegwyddor tref Casnewydd. Hynny neu beidio, dal ati i weithio a brwydro drwy dymhestloedd enbyd y tridegau a fu hanes John Frost. Bu'n cynorthwyo i ffurfio Undeb Gwleidyddol yn 1831, yn cefnogi ymgyrch Benjamin Hall yn erbyn yr oligarchau a bod yn dyst o frwydrau Reginald Blewitt, Llantarnam. Canlyniad hynny fu i Frost gael ei ddadrithio'n llwyr gan y diwygwyr "It is now clear as the sun at noon day that the Reform Bill was a humbug" oedd ei ddyfarniad. Aeth rhagddo i frwydro nid yn unig yn erbyn y Whigiaid a'r Toriaid ond i'w ddiffinio ei hun fel radical yn nhraddodiad Tom Paine gan hawlio pleidlais i bob oedolyn, democratiaeth seneddol gyflawn ynghyd â hawliau i'r bobl. I gyrraedd y nod hwnnw, yr oedd yn barod i ystyried chwyldro—chwyldro heddychlon os byddai'n bosibl.

Yng Nghasnewydd, a weddnewidiwyd yn sgil y Ddeddf Gorfforaethau Dinesig, fe'i gwnaed yn ynad a Maer y dref yn 1836. Yn rhinwedd ei swydd fel ynad, bu'n brwydro yn erbyn

yr Arglwydd John Russell, yr Ysgrifennydd Cartref, cyn cael ei ddiarddel o wasanaethu ar y fainc. Parhau i frwydro hyd y diwedd a fu ei hanes—brwydro yn erbyn ei gyd-drefwyr a'i gyd-Cymry sef y bobl hynny a fyddai yn eu galw eu hunain yn Ddiwygwyr. Dyma Thomas Prothero a Thomas Phillips (Syr Thomas Phillips wedi hynny), er enghraifft, a aeth ati o ddifri i amddiffyn Cymru yn sgîl y Llyfrau Gleision tra'n parhau i garcharu Cymry a ddymunai amddiffyn eu gwlad mewn ffordd fwy uniongyrchol. Fe wnâi'r tri gasau ei gilydd gyda'r angerdd hwnnw sydd mor nodweddiadol, fe ymddengys, o wleidyddiaeth drefol yng Nghymru (Fe ddeallwch mai fel un o wŷr Merthyr rwy'n dweud hyn). Nid yw'n syndod yn y byd felly i Frost ymuno â chyfrinfa'r Siartwyr pan sefydlwyd un yng Nghasnewydd yn haf 1838—ac yn ddiweddarach iddo ddod yn arweinydd arni.

Hynny neu beidio, fuodd e erioed ar yr un donfedd â Siartwyr y Cymoedd. Ymhlith y Siartwyr cynharaf, ceid digonedd o wŷr o blith y dosbarth canol a barhaodd yn deyrngar hyd y diwedd. Ceid hefyd yn eu rhengoedd amryw byd o grefftwyr teyrngar. Ond wrth i Siartaeth ysgubo drwy'r cymoedd yn gynnar yn 1839, fe'i meddiannwyd mewn dim o dro gan y glowyr, gŵyr y gweithfeydd haearn, y gwragedd—y proletariaid. Symudai pethau'n rhy gyflym i Samuel Etheridge, yr argraffydd, ac fe ymddiswyddodd. Doedd John Frost ddim yn gallu deall y bobl hyn; aeth rhai cyn belled â'i ddrwgdybio. Ar ei waethaf ei hun y daeth yn arweinydd. Parhaodd yn deyrngar. Mor gynnar â mis Mai ar ôl i'r Ddeiseb a gyflwynwyd gan y Siartwyr i'r Senedd gael ei gwrthod, yr oedd Siartwyr yn Ne Cymru yn cynllunio 'Cyfodiad' ac yn cyfuno â Siartwyr radical yn Lloegr. Yr oedd Frost yn llawn amheuon, ond cytuno wnaeth e. Ar y funud olaf, a Frost ar un arall o'i deithiau drwy Loegr, fe glywodd nad oedd gwŷr gogledd Lloegr yn bwriadu codi a gwrthryfela.

Rhuthrodd tua thre i dde Cymru i geisio atal y gwrthryfel. Yng nghyfarfodydd tyngedfennol arweinwyr y Siartwyr yn Dukestown, Sirhywi ar 28 Hydref ac yn y Coed-duon ar 1 Tachwedd, fe'i trechwyd. Doedd dim troi'n ôl i fod "I might as well shoot myself as try to stop them now," meddai Frost

wrth un o'i ffrindiau. Y pryd hwnnw gallai John Frost, diysgog ei farn ond tyner o galon, fod wedi rhoi'r gorau iddi a throï ar ei sawdl. Wnaeth e ddim. Fe oedd ar flaen yr orymdaith i Gasnewydd. Ac fe gawn ein hatgoffa yn y cyswllt hwn o'r sylw cofiadwy hwnnw a wnaed, medden nhw, gan arweinydd y gweithwyr yn ystod y Chwyldro Ffrengig yn 1848: "I must follow them. I am their leader." Ond Frost oedd y llyw ac yntau'n gwybod yn ei galon mai methu a fyddai eu hanes nhw. Ac fe ddioddefodd yn sgîl hynny. Enwyd un o sgwariau'r dre ma er cof amdano. Mae'n haeddu pob rhyw glod ac anrhydedd a bellach mae'n un o enwogion ac yn un o ferthyron gwerin Cymru. Ar ei waethaf ei hun y cymerodd yr awenau, ond nid yw ar sail hynny fymryn yn llai o arwr.

Arwyr a merthyron oedden nhw bob un. Ym misoedd cynnar 1839 ysgubwyd cymoedd De Cymru gan y Siartwyr a'u gobeithion. Mae'n bwysig ein bod yn amgyffred maint a graddfa'r ymgyrchu a'r cynllunio a oedd ynghlwm wrth yr ymdrech hon. Llwyddodd dau o'n haneswyr, David Jones ac Ivor Wilks, i ddangos bod gan y Siartwyr pan oeddent yn eu hanterth ddechrau haf 1839 fan lleiaf 50 o gyfrinfeydd yng nghymoedd Gwent a Morgannwg gyda 25,000 o aelodau. Ceiniog yr wythnos oedd eu tâl aelodaeth, ond ar ôl cymryd chwyddiant i ystyriaeth, rhaid cofio fod hyn bron iawn 50 gwaith cymaint a thâl aelodaeth presennol Plaid Cymru. Mynychent gyfarfodydd poblogaidd yn wythnosol a gweithio cynllun soffistigedig ac effeithiol, a hynny yn yr iaith Gymraeg, i sicrhau democratiaeth o'r canol. I fod yn barod am y gwrthdrawiad, buont wrthi'n ddyfal yn casglu cynifer o ynnau ag a allent ac yn cynhyrchu ar y slei arfau rhyfela eraill yn y gweithfeydd haearn ac yn yr ogofau cudd a oedd ganddynt yn yr ucheldir ar gyrion y Bannau. Buont hefyd yn dysgu ar eu cof y llawlyfr milwra, *Defensive Instructions for the People* a gawsai ei baratoi gan Bwyliad ac un o hen filwyr Napoleon.

Roeddent yn barod i ymladd ac yn barod i farw tros eu hachos. Fel hyn yr ysgrifennodd George Shell, saer dodrefn 19 oed at ei rieni cyn mynd lawr o Bont-y-pŵl i Gasnewydd: "I shall this night be engaged in a struggle for freedom and

should it please God to spare my life I shall see you soon, but if not grieve not for me, I shall fall in a noble cause" Trannoeth lladdwyd George Shell y tu allan i'r Westgate Hotel yng Nghasnewydd. Roedd wedi ceisio saethu Maer Casnewydd. Fe'i saethwyd gan y milwyr—tair bwled trwy'i frest a bu'n ddadfyw am deirawr.

Ydych chi'n sylweddoli beth a olygai hyn oll? Yr oedd 25,000 o wŷr yn golygu fod un o bob pump o'r oedolion yn perthyn i Siartwyr Cymru. Dyma'r ymgyrch fwyaf o'i bath yn hanes Cymru—hynny yw, cyn y gorymdeithiau protest mawr hynny yn erbyn y Means Test yn 1935. A'r fath bobol, yn wŷr ac yn wragedd, oedden nhw! Llwyddodd Ivor Wilks i olrhain 38 o blith y 50 cyfrinfa. Cyfrinfeydd y wragedd oedd wyth ohonynt. Dyma'r tro cyntaf yn hanes gwleidyddol Cymru i wragedd gymryd rhan ar y raddfa hon, ac yr oedd iddynt yn ogystal swyddogaeth ganolog yn yr ymgyrchu. Anogodd Zephaniah Williams o Nant-y-glo y wragedd priod i beidio cysgu gyda'u gwŷr nes y byddai pob un o'r rheiny wedi ymuno â'r Siartwyr. Ym Merthyr y ceid y gefnogaeth gryfaf; Siartwyr y Grymoedd Moesol i raddau oedd gwŷr Merthyr a Siartwyr y Grymoedd Corfforol oedd gwŷr y Coed-duon. Dyna Morgan Williams, er enghraifft, gwehydd, mathemategwr ac Undodwr a adnabyddid fel yr Young Mountain Solomon ac a hanai o deulu o delynion. Fe a fu'n gyfrifol am gynhyrchu'r papur newydd cyntaf i'r dosbarth gweithiol yng Nghymru. Papur dwyieithog oedd y Gweithiwr/The Workman 1834, ac yn dilyn cythrwfl Casnewydd, cychwynnodd y papur Siartaidd pennaf ohonynt i gyd sef Udgor Cymru/The Trumpet of Wales yn 1840. Gydag ef yr oedd John Thomas, Ieuan Ddu o Gaerfyrddin a ffrind Zephaniah Williams a fu'n gyfrifol am gychwyn eisteddfodau rhydd-feddyliol eu naws yn ardal Merthyr. Roedd Ieuan Ddu yn gerddor. Bu'n dysgu Joseph Parry a chyflwynodd Messiah Handel i gorau Gymru gyda chanlyniadau ysgubol. Un o'r Siartwyr ydoedd yntau.

I lawr ym Mhontypridd roedd y Dr. William Price, mab i offeiriad, Cymrodor o Goleg yr Iesu Rhydychen ac aelod o Goleg Brenhinol y Llawfeddygon yn gweithio fel doctor y cwmni cynhyrchu cadwynau. Flynyddoedd yn ddiweddarach ar ôl dod o dan ddylanwad Iolo Morganwg, ymunodd

â'r Derwyddon gan fabwysiadu nifer o syniadau anghyffredin a dweud y lleiaf. Credai rhai nad oedd yn hanner call. Yn sicr roedd yn ddigon call yn 1839, ac os colli ei synhwyrâu wedi hynny a fu ei hanes, mae'n bosibl egluro hynny a dala y byddai'r math o Gymru yr heneiddiodd ef ynddi yn peri i unrhyw Gymro sensitif golli ei bwyll. Yn ddi-os, doedd e ddim yn orffwyll yn 1839. I'r gwrthwyneb, roedd yn sylwebydd arbennig o graff a chreodd argraff ffafriol dros ben ar y Fonesig Charlotte Guest. Gydag ef yr oedd William David, mab i siopwr o Ben-y-graig, ac arweinydd glowyr y Rhondda.

Ym Mlaenau Gwent y trigai Zephaniah Williams. Hanai o deulu amaethyddol llewyrchus yn Argoed, Bedwellte a rhoes i fyny ei swydd fel agent mwngloddio a phen glowr yn Sirhywi i gadw'r Royal Oak yn y Blaina ynghyd â hybu rhydd-feddyliaeth "Pe bai Iesu Grist wedi byw yn Coalbrookvale", meddai, "fe fyddai'r ynadon wedi tynnu ei dŷ e lawr flynyddoedd yn ôl". Roedd Zephaniah Williams yn ŵr sylweddol. Ar ôl cael ei alltudio i Awstralia fe wnaeth ei ffortiwn wrth werthu glo a cholli pob dimai wedi hynny. Roedd 'na ddigon o bobl yr un fath ag e. Er enghraifft, dyna David Lewis y crydd a gadwai'r King Crispin Inn gerllaw Bryn-mawr (Sant Crispin oedd nawddsant y cryddion) a'r Siartydd gorau yn y deyrnas yn ôl Henry Vincent. Ac yn ardal Pont-y-pŵl y trigai William Lloyd Jones, actiwr a droes i drwsio clociau a phersonoliaeth atyniadol dros ben. A dyna i chi David Davies y glowr a wasanaethodd ym myddin Prydain am 25 mlynedd gan gynnwys Brwydr Waterloo. Yn y Coed-duon ceid glowyr cyffredin â digonedd o ruddin. Yn eu plith yr oedd Gwyddel a gymerasai ran yng Ngwrthryfel 1798; Richard Rorke oedd ei enw a dyna hefyd oedd enw ei fab. Gŵr arall na ddylid ei anghofio oedd John Rees, y saer maen, neu Jack the Fifer o Dredegar. Ymfudodd i America ac ymuno â charfan o wŷr Texas i ymladd yn erbyn Mexico ym mrwydr San Anton, San Antonio de Bexar. Goroedd y dial a'r lladd enbyd a ddilynodd hynny. Dychwelodd i Brydain a chael gwaith ym Manceinion a Llundain cyn dod yn ôl i Gymru. Fe'i penodwyd i weithredu fel comander adeg cythrwfl Casnewydd. Ar ôl colli'r dydd, dihangodd i Texas

lle bu'n gwasanaethu eto fel swyddog ym myddin y dalaith cyn ymgartrefu ar lannau Afon Colorado. "We are part of a gigantic world movement", oedd sylw un o'r bechgyn a ddaliwyd yng Nghasnewydd.

Roedd ganddyn nhw gynllun—cynllun a luniwyd ar ôl i'w Deiseb gael ei gwrthod ac ar ôl i'w harweinwyr yn cynnwys Henry Vincent a William Edwards y pobydd gael eu dâl. Tasg Siartwyr De Cymru oedd rhoi cychwyn i'r gwrthryfela. I ddefnyddio geiriau Che Guevara yn ein cyfnod ni, y nhw fyddai'r motor bach a gynhyrchai'r wreichionen i gychwyn y motor mawr. Gwrthryfela oedd nod Siartwyr De Cymru a chreu yng ngeiriau'r Times deyrnas y Siartwyr yn y De neu'r Weriniaeth Gymreig i ddefnyddio disgrifiad y gwrthryfelwyr eu hunain neu Weriniaeth y Silwriaid fel y galwyd hi rai blynyddoedd yn ôl gan Harri Webb. Unwaith y cyrhaeddai'r newydd Sir Gaerhifryn, West Riding Swydd Efrog, Canolbarth Lloegr a Llundain, yr oedd Siartwyr y rhanbarthau hynny i godi gwrthryfel a'u galluogai i sefydlu Gweriniaeth Pobl Ynys Prydain. I ddyfynnu geiriau W. E. Adams, yr engrafiwr radical, De Cymru a fyddai "Cockpit of the Kingdom".

Nid breuddwyd mohono. Roeddent o ddifri. Pan glywodd Geordies y Gogledd Ddwyrain am y gorymdeithio i Gasnewydd, rhybuddiwyd 65 o gyfrinfeydd y Siartwyr yn y rhanbarth hwnnw i gael eu gwŷr a'u harfau'n barod ac ar blacardiau sgriblwyd geiriau croch fel "The Hour of British Freedom has struck! John Frost is in possession of South Wales at the head of 30,000 men!" Y cynllun oedd cael 7,000-8,000 o wŷr arfog ynghyd. Dyna a wnaed ac roedd y gwŷr hynny i gribo'r wlad a dod o hyd i gymaint ag a allent o wŷr a gydymdeimlai â'r achos. Ysgwrio'r cymoedd oedd yr union eiriau a ddefnyddid. Yma eto buont yn eithaf llwyddiannus. Erbyn y diwedd, roedd ganddynt gynifer â 20,000 o wŷr yn barod i'r gad. Y cam cyntaf fyddai meddiannu'r gweithfeydd haearn i gynhyrchu arfau. Yna byddent yn herwigipio arweinwyr y gwahanol gymunedau ac yn eu carcharu yn y pyllau glo. Mewn un pwl arbennig paratowyd un o'r corneli salaf ar gyfer caethiwo Arglwydd Raglaw Sir

Fynwy, Capel Hanbury Leigh. Yn y Coed-duon tynnwyd rhestr o'r rhai a gâi eu saethu. Meddiannu'r banciau fyddai un o'r gorchwylion eraill. Fe fyddent hefyd yn denu milwyr i ymadael â'u catrodau ac ymuno â'r gwrthryfelwyr. Mae'n wir i ugeiniau o filwyr a ruthrwyd i Dde Cymru wneud felly ac o hynny y cododd y gred dyngedfennol na fyddai'r milwyr yn debygol o danio at y bobl. O ganlyniad bu'n rhaid i'r Llywodraeth arfogi'r dosbarthiadau canol,—â chleddyfau cwt a phistolau'n amlach na pheidio.

Y bwriad oedd lansio pum ymosodiad yr un pryd ar 5 Tachwedd—Diwrnod Guy Fawkes. Gwŷr Merthyr oedd i gipio barics Aberhonddu, gwŷr Tredegar i oresgyn y Fenni, gwŷr Pontypridd i gipio Caerdydd a gwŷr Pont-y-pŵl i gipio Brynbuga. Gan bumed golofn yn gweithio o fewn y dref y câi Casnewydd ei chipio a gwŷr y Coed-duon yn dod draw i estyn cymorth. I ddal eu tir ar hyd glannau Wysg a Hafren, fe wnâi'r Weriniaeth Silwraidd alw am gymorth eu cymrodor mewn rhannau eraill o Brydain.

Ar y funud olaf, newidiwyd y cynlluniau. Dychwelodd John Frost i Gymru â'r newydd nad oedd sicrwydd y byddai gogledd Lloegr yn ymuno â'r gwrthryfel. Hynny neu beidio, penderfynu mynd ymlaen â'u cynlluniau a wnaeth Siartwyr De Cymru. Yn awr, roeddent i ymosod ddiwrnod ynghynt sef ar 4 Tachwedd a'r gweddill o'r unedau ar ddyddiadau gwahanol. Methu'n llwyr fu eu hanes. Roedd hi'n noswaith anhrugarog o wlyb i'r miloedd anelu am Gasnewydd. Clywsant i'r bumed golofn gael eu rhwydo. Rhaid oedd rhuthro ar y Westgate Hotel i geisio eu rhyddhau. Collodd tua dau ddwsin o Siartwyr eu bywydau yn y fan a'r lle. Ceir tystiolaeth i'r colofnau eraill geisio cadw at y gorchmynion newydd a gawsant ac i hynny greu mwy a mwy o ddryswch. Trannoeth gwyddom i 400 o Siartwyr gychwyn allan o Ddowlais, ond wrth groesi'r Bannau, clywsant am fethiant trychinebus Casnewydd. Dyna nhw'n gwahanu ar unwaith, a gwahanu yn yr un modd a fu hanes y colofnau eraill hefyd.

Yna fe ddaeth y dyddiau dial a'r erlid, Frost, Zephaniah Williams a William Jones yn cael eu dedfrydu i farwolaeth, yr ymgyrchu dygn i atal y dienyddio, eu halltudio, eu codi'n ferthyron a John Frost yn dychwelyd yn y diwedd i gael ei dderbyn fel arwr. O bell ffordd, ni ddaeth Siartaeth i ben yn

1839. Mewn amryw o ffyrdd gellir ei hystyried fel man cychwyn a dechrau cyfnod newydd. O fewn ychydig o wythnosau ym Merthyr, roedd Morgan Williams yn lansio Udgorn Cymru,—prif bapur y Siartwyr. Yn 1843, pan drechwyd y streic gyffredinol, dyna pryd y trechwyd Siartaeth mewn gwirionedd. Yn llechwraidd a dirgel o dan y wyneb y bu'r Siartwyr wedi hynny cyn codi i'r wyneb unwaith yn rhagor gydag ymchwydd Rhyddfrydiaeth y 1860au.

Yn y 1860au gwelwyd Siartaeth yn adfywio yn y Cymoedd. Yn 1862 lansiodd y Siartwyr eu papur newydd sef y Merthyr Star ac achosi cryn bryder i Anghydfurfwr a Rhyddfrydwyr dosbarthiadau canol y dref. Cyn gynted ag y cafodd y gweithwyr lleol yr hawl i bleidleisio yn dilyn Deddf Diwygio 1867, aethant ati i wahodd Henry Richard Tregaron i ymladd am sedd Merthyr. Henry Richard oedd yr Anghydfurfiwr Radical cyntaf o Gymru i gael ei ethol i Westminster ar ôl apelio'n fwriadol at y Siartwyr, seilio ei ymgyrch ar faterion a berthynai i'r dosbarth gweithiol a dibynnu ar bleidleisiau gweithwyr i'w gario i fuddugoliaeth. Adeg yr etholiad, eisteddai amryw o Siartwyr ochr yn ochr â Henry Richard ar y llwyfan. Yn eu plith, rwy'n falch o ddweud, roedd rhai o'm hynafiaid sef Roger Herbert a gadwai ysgol Siartwyr yn Nant-y-glo ynghyd â'i chwaer Sarah Herbert a weithiai fel cynrychiolydd etholiad Henry Richard yn Nowlais. Fy hen famgu oedd hi.

Felly, yn y diwedd, mae'n deg dweud mai'r Siartwyr a enillodd y dydd. Wydden nhw ddim o hynny ar y pryd wrth gwrs. Yn dilyn y cythrwfl aflwyddiannus yng Nghasnewydd, yn nwylo'r beirdd a'r dramodwyr y gadawyd y gwaith o ail ennyn ffydd a chodi calonau'r Siartwyr. Cofiwch y Shell ifanc a'i aberth, meddai'r bardd

Silurian Frosts again shall lead us on

And freedom's baffled battle yet be won

Yng Nghymru heddiw rydym yn byw yng nghysgod 1979, blwyddyn y pla, a chysgod yr etholiad cyffredinol diweddaraf. O edrych ar yr ymadrodd 'freedom baffled battle', efallai y teimlwn mai 'baffled' sy'n hawlio'r prif

bwyslais ac mae'n bosibl y deawn eto wyneb yn wyneb â 'Silurian Frost' tra gwahanol i'r hyn a ragwelid gan y bardd.

Paid â phoeni, yr hen ffrind, fe fuon ni'r ffordd hon o'r blaen. Mewn stad o argyfwng parhaol y bu'r Cymry'n byw oddi ar tua 383 O.C. pan ddaethom i gymryd ein lle fel pobl ar y llwyfan am y tro cyntaf. Oddi ar hynny, rydym wedi llwyddo i oroesi argyfwng wrth gwt argyfwng o un genhedlaeth i'r llall drwy ein hail-ddyfeisio ein hunain o hyd ac o hyd. Os gallwn fod yn ddigon dewr, fe lwyddwn i wneud hynny unwaith eto.

Rwyf am ddiweddu drwy ddyfynnu'r geiriau a ddefnyddiwyd gan y Dr. William Price wrth ffarwelio â'r gŵyr a oedd ar eu ffordd i Gasnewydd yn 1839. "Maent wedi cychwyn ar y daith hir sy'n arwain at Gyfiawnder", oedd ei eiriau. Ar y ffordd honno rydym ni o hyd. Fe fydd hi'n daith hir, yn daith anodd ac yn daith garegog. Cymerwch gysur. Fe fuodd ein cyndadau ni ar y ffordd hon o'r blaen. Ennill wnaethon nhw yn y diwedd. A dyna a wnawn ninnau.

The Silurian Republic

Let me begin by showing you a flag. This is the banner of the Welsh Chartists. HTV had one made to wave on a TV screen for ten seconds. It has passed into my possession. The method by which it HAS passed into my possession I shall not comment on. Suffice it to say that the method was wholly in accord with the Laws of Hywel Dda, Llyfr Blegywryd, of course.

The banner was devised by Hugh Williams, the lawyer from mid-Wales who had worked with the textile workers on the Severn, had moved to St. Clears near Carmarthen, where he was later to become the grey eminence of Rebecca, the guerilla war of small farmers. He had launched the first Working Men's Association or Chartist lodge in Wales at that turbulent and sans-culotte town of Carmarthen and became the first delegate, from the Glamorgan valleys, to the celebrated Chartist Convention in London which in April and May 1839, tried to set itself up as an anti-Parliament, to force the dissolution of the oligarchical and corrupt House of Commons and the establishment of full popular democracy.

Hugh Williams was a poet. Chartists generally used a green flag, but Williams created a tricolour in the style of the French Revolution, green, blue and white. You will note that these are the colours of Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain. Iolo Morganwg had created the Gorsedd and its colours a generation earlier. His original intention had been to create an Order of People's Remembrancers to a Welsh Republic.

Hugh Williams extended the symbolism. Green was the earth, blue the heavens, white was the justice which was to conquer both. The Welsh version of this banner carried the single word, Cyfiawnder. Cyfiawnder was the word blazoned on the banner of Rebecca, when four years later in 1843 as

Chartists staged a general strike in the Valleys, she marched in broad daylight right through the town of Carmarthen, to be cut down by Dragoons as the men of Gwent had been shot down in 1839 and the men of Merthyr in 1831. If I may quote Tom Paine, "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered."

The year 1831 is in truth the decisive year, for these men, the men who marched in Merthyr and Newport were not men broken by poverty; on the contrary, they were some of the best-paid and highly skilled men in the kingdom. They were rebelling against humiliation and exclusion, they were asserting their worth, their status, their dignity. They were marching for an idea. An idea captured in a word. Reform in 1831, the Charter in 1839. They were fighting for a popular democracy, what they called a Republic. The ideal had first convulsed Merthyr in 1831 when a local crisis coincided with the national crisis over the Reform Bill and a major working-class movement for both political and trade union rights. The result was the Merthyr Rising when armed workers fought back against soldiers, defeated yeomanry and regular soliders twice, held the district for four days and after their defeat, fought one of the most bitter lockouts in the black history of the coalfield, until they were starved into surrender.

They failed to mobilise the whole coalfield behind them. But on the last day, anything from 10 to 20,000 people from Monmouthshire were marching to join them and within weeks the slogan Reform was appearing on the warning notes of the Scotch Cattle, the underground and terrorist organisation of the militant and ingenious colliers of Gwent. These came from the sale-coal communities of the lower Gwent valleys. Those communities, healthier than the ironworks settlements to the north were nevertheless bleak and barren, virtually one-class communities locked in debt slavery to the truck-shops and engaged in endless struggle with small-scale and often shifty Welsh employers themselves operating on a shoestring.

The ironworks towns were more complicated with a more mixed class structure. Most complicated was the Merthyr district, where there was a long tradition dating from the French Revolution of middle class and lower-middle class Jacobin democracy transmitted above all by the Unitarians. After 1832 Merthyr had its own M.P. and politics there was a three-sided affair between Josiah John Guest, the Liberal M.P., and middle class and artisan radicalism and the working classes who had no vote. It is possible in Merthyr to trace the pre-history of Chartism in that triangular struggle through the elections of 1835 and 1837.

In the northern iron towns of Gwent this is far less visible. They shared the same characteristics as Merthyr but lacked the central focus. That the spirit was there, however, cannot be doubted. It can be sensed behind the great sweep of the Owenite trade union movement through 1834 and 1835, in the battle over the Poor Law, in many reported comments which slips through the mesh of hostile local newspapers. Since 1830, however, initiative in Gwent had passed to the colliers, with their base above all in the southern valleys. In the general strike of 1830, these embattled men and women had evolved a highly ingenious system to establish control over their workplaces and their communities. These were the most proletarian people on the coalfield, but they were also among the most cultivated. They numbered bilingual poets and barrack-room lawyers in their ranks and did not hesitate to use friendly solicitors and doctors in their cause.

Neither did they hesitate to use their Scotch Cattle. The primitive character of that movement has been grossly exaggerated by unsympathetic historians. It was in fact a highly sophisticated and effective resistance movement, necessarily terrorist in the circumstances. Its aim was to enforce control, through solidarity. One of its main weapons was humour—and a peculiarly black and Welsh humour at that, which turned a courtroom into a theatrical farce. They were a bunch of Twm Sion Catis. They very strongly

resemble the Daughters of Rebecca. And no wonder, many of them were actually cousins to the people of Rebecca. For, while there was a massive influx of people from England and elsewhere and the community was effectively bilingual, the incomers very rapidly developed into that novel breed, the South Walian and the significant language was Welsh.

Both the Scotch Cattle and the Chartist Rising operated in a total secrecy impenetrable to authority. It was impenetrable because the language of conspiracy was Welsh. The great stronghold of the Scotch Cattle was Blackwood. And Blackwood was the storm-centre of the Chartist rising, its most fierce, dedicated and militant heart. In 1839 when their great hero, the orator Henry Vincent came up from the west of England, with his newspaper the Western Vindicator which carried mostly Welsh news in English, he was greeted by the customary Chartist ritual: great crowds in the street, a hundred girls in white dresses carrying green flags, a mass rally outside the Coach and Horses in Blackwood and an eloquent speech by Vincent: "In this place, a few thousand armed men in the hills could successfully defend it. Wales would make an excellent Republic. To your tents, O Israel! With one heart, one voice, and one blow, perish the privileged orders! Death to the aristocracy! Up with the people and the government they have established." Tumultuous roars, songs, oaths to live and die for the Charter. Then they all adjourned to the fields around the Greyhound for an evening of penillion singing (one wonders what the words were and how the harp fared as a percussion instrument!).

Chartism in the valleys lay there like an Atlantis waiting for a touch to bring it to the surface. The touch came from the slim and eloquent Vincent who was a great favourite among the women's organisations. And Vincent came up through this town, Newport and the celebrated John Frost.

John Frost, of course, has literally left his name to this town. He was in fact different in temper to the Chartists of the Valleys, His radicalism was older, in the anti-aristocratic

style of William Cobbett who battled endlessly against the system, what Cobbett called The Thing. For John Frost, The Thing began at home, in the frequently foetid politics of the town of Newport.

John Frost, of average height and quiet disposition, had grown up among radical circles in London and after a brief spell in Bristol, settled in Mill Street, Newport as a tailor and draper. He got involved in the town revolt against control by the dominant families of the Somersets, Dukes of Beaufort and the Morgans of Tredegar. With him were the printer Samuel Etheridge, the butcher John Dickenson and William Edwards, a giant of a man who had been a preacher and became a baker—invariably described by a hostile press as Mad Edwards the Baker.

Ah! the press, the press...if you ever have cause to read the Monmouthshire Merlin of these years, remember what Henry Vincent said at Pontypool in 1839... Oh! the damned press! What an infernal engine it is! That which might be the means of rescuing mankind from bondage is used as a formidable means of warping the mind struggling to be free...' Clywch, clywch!

Frost's campaign had him thrown into jail by Newport's pugnacious and unscrupulous town clerk of a lawyer, Thomas Prothero. Undeterred, Frost butted on through the great storms of the thirties, helping to form a Political Union in 1831, to support Benjamin Hall's campaign against the oligarchs and to witness the great battles of Reginald Blewitt of Llantarnam. The consequence was completely to disillusion Frost with the reformers. 'It is now clear as the sun at noon day,' he said, that the Reform Bill was a humbug. He went on to fight not only Whigs and Tories, but to define himself as a radical in the Tom Paine tradition, standing for manhood suffrage, full parliamentary democracy and power to the people, prepared to contemplate a revolution, preferably peaceable, to accomplish it.

In a Newport transformed by the Municipal Corporation Act, he became a magistrate and Mayor of Newport in 1836. In that capacity, he was to fight Lord John Russell the Home Secretary and be struck off the magistrates roll and to fight to the death against his fellow-townsmen and indeed fellow Welshmen, the people who called themselves Reformers, Thomas Prothero and Thomas, later Sir Thomas Phillips who was stoutly to defend Wales against the Blue Books while busy jailing Welshmen who wished to defend Wales in a more direct manner. Those three men hated each other with that ferocity which seems peculiar to Welsh municipal politics (I speak as a man from Merthyr Tydfil, you understand). No wonder that when a lodge of the Chartists was launched in Newport in the summer of 1838, Frost joined it and became a leader.

Yet he was never in tune with the Chartism of the Valleys. The first Chartists had plenty of middle class men and many of those stayed loyal. It had plenty of artisans; many of them stayed loyal. But as Chartism swept the valleys in the early months of 1839, so was Chartism itself swept by colliers, ironmen workers, women, proletarians. Samuel Etheridge the printer couldn't stand the pace; he resigned in June. John Frost often could not understand these people; some of them suspected him. He became their leader despite himself. But he stayed loyal to them. Already in May, after the Chartist Petition to the Commons had been rejected, Chartists in South Wales were planning a cyfodiad, a Rising, in alliance with the more radical Chartists in England. Frost was dubious but he went along. At the last minute, Frost, on his endless travels through England learned that the English of the north were not going to rebel.

He rushed back to south Wales to try to stop the revolt. At the crucial meetings of the Chartist directorate, at Dukestown Sirhowy on 28 October and at Blackwood on 1 November, he was faced down. They were going ahead anyway. 'I might as well shoot myself', Frost told a friend, 'as try to stop them now'. At that point, John Frost, a man of

strong mind but soft centre, could have cut and run. He did not. Indeed, he led the march on Newport. One might echo that celebrated remark attributed to a leader of the working-class during the French Revolution of 1848... 'I must follow them. I am their leader'. But in fact Frost led them, on what he knew in his heart, to be a doomed enterprise. And he suffered for it. One of the most genial squares in this town now bears his name. He deserves that honour. John Frost is today a hero and a martyr of the people of Wales, the gwerin. He became a hero despite himself. He is no less a hero.

But so were they all. In the early months of 1839, the great hope of The Charter swept the valleys of south Wales. It is important to grasp the sheer scale of the mobilisation, now revealed to us by two of our historians, David Jones and Ivor Wilks. At the climax in the early summer of 1839, there were at least 50 Chartist lodges in the Valleys of Gwent and Glamorgan, with 25,000 fully paid up members. They paid a penny a week—which allowing for inflation, is about 50 times as much as Plaid Cymru requires of its members today. They attended crowded meetings weekly; they worked a highly sophisticated and effective plan of democratic centralism—in the Welsh language. They armed themselves for insurrection, getting guns wherever they could and making pikes, secretly in the ironworks and in all those Chartist caves in the foothills of the Beacons. They learned by heart the military handbook written by a Pole who had been one of the soldiers of Napoleon, *Defensive Instructions for the People*.

They were prepared to fight and they were prepared to die. Young George Shell, a cabinet-maker aged 19, wrote to his parents before setting off for Newport from Pontypool... 'I shall this night be engaged in a struggle for freedom and should it please God to spare my life I shall see you soon; but if not, grieve not for me, I shall fall in a noble cause'. George Shell fell the next day, outside the Westgate Hotel Newport. He had tried to shoot the Mayor of Newport. The soldiers shot him. He got three slugs in the chest and he took three hours to die.

Do you realise what this means? 25,000 men meant that one in five of the entire adult population was enrolled in Welsh Chartism. This is the most massive popular mobilisation in the history of Wales before the great marches against the Means Test in 1935! And what men and women they were! Ivor Wilks has managed to pin down 38 of those 50 lodges. Eight of them were women's lodges. This was the first significant mobilisation of women in Welsh political history. The women of Chartism were central. Zephaniah Williams of Nant-y-Glo told Chartist women not to sleep with their husbands until they joined the Chartists. (Comment on Glenys Kinnock!). Over in Merthyr was the largest single concentration, though they tended to be moral force Chartist as against the physical force Chartist of Blackwood. There was Morgan Williams, master weaver, a mathematician known as the Young Mountain Solomon, who came from a family of harpists, Unitarian of course, he brought out the first Welsh working class newspaper, the bilingual Y Gweithiwr, the Workman of 1834 and after Newport, was to launch the greatest Chartist newspaper of them all, Udgorn Cymru, the Trumpet of Wales, in 1840. With him was John Thomas, Ieuan Ddu, from Carmarthen, a friend of Zephaniah Williams, who launched Infidel, freethinking eisteddfodau in Merthyr. Ieuan Ddu was a musician, he taught Joseph Parry, he was the man who introduced Handel's Messiah to Welsh choirs, with devastating effect. He was a Chartist.

Down in Pontypridd, there was Dr. William Price, son of an Anglican clergyman and Fellow of Jesus College Oxford. Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, who worked as a company doctor in the Chain works in Ponty. In later years, having absorbed Iolo Morganwg he became a Druid and an accentric. Some people call him mad. He was certainly not mad in 1839 and if he went mad later, it was because the kind of Wales he grew old in would have driven any sensitive Welshman mad. He was certainly not mad in 1839; on the contrary, he was one of the best observers we've got and he

greatly impressed Lady Charlotte Guest. With him was William David who led the Rhondda colliers and whose father kept a shop in Pen-y-Graig.

Over in the Heads of the Valleys in Gwent was Zephaniah Williams. Born to a family of yeoman farmers in Argoed, Zephaniah gave up his position as mineral agent and master collier at Sirhowy to keep the Royal Oak at Blaina and to propagate freethought. If Jesus Christ had lived in Coalbrookvale, he said, the magistrates would have pulled his house down years ago. Zephaniah Williams was a man of stature. After he was deported to Australia, he made a fortune as a coal merchant and then lost it again. There were plenty of men like him. There was David Lewis, a shoemaker who kept the King Crispin Inn near Brynmawr (St. Crispin was the patron saint of shoemakers... may the trade be trodden underfoot...) and who was the best Chartist in the kingdom, according to Henry Vincent. And in the Pontypool area, there was William Lloyd Jones, an actor turned watchmaker and a charismatic figure. There was David Davies a collier who had served 25 years in the British army and had fought at Waterloo. In Blackwood, there were colliers who had no names but plenty of guts. Among them an Irishman of the rebellion of 1798, Richard Rorke and his son of the same name. And there was John Rees, a mason of Tredegar, Jack the Fifer, who had emigrated to America and had fought with the army of rebellious Texas against the Mexicans at the battle of San Anton, San Antonio de Bexar. He survived the subsequent massacre and made his way back to Britain, working in Manchester and London before returning to Wales. He was made commander in the field for the attack on Newport. After the defeat, he managed to escape back to Texas, where he became an officer in the army of Texas and settled on the Colorado river. As one of the men captured at Newport said, 'we are part of a gigantic world movement!'

And they had a plan, conceived after the rejection of their petition and the arrest of their leaders, including Henry

Vincent and William Edwards the baker. The task of the south Wales Chartists was to start the rebellion going. They were to be what Che Guevara later called the little motor that starts the big one. The Chartists of south Wales were to rebel, to create what the Times newspaper called a kingdom of Chartism in south Wales and what they themselves called a Welsh Republic, what the poet Harri Webb in our own day has called the Silurian Republic. Once news had reached Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, the Midlands and London, their Chartists were to rise in arms and create the People's Republic of the Island of Britain. South Wales was to be what the radical engraver W. E. Adams called the Cockpit of the Kingdom.

This plan was not a dream. It is real. When the first news of the Newport March reached the North-East, the land of the Geordies, 65 Chartist lodges stood their men to arms and placarded the town with posters proclaiming. 'The Hour of British Freedom has struck! John Frost is in possession of South Wales at the head of 30,000 men!' The plan was to mobilise 7,000-8,000 men with arms. They succeeded in this. Those men were to rope in every single Chartist they could find. They called this scouring the valleys, ysgwrio, like the water scour which ironstone miners used, to drag out every sympathiser. They largely succeeded in this too. In the end they must have had 20,000 men on the march. They were to take over all the ironworks and produce weapons. They were to kidnap the leaders of society and hold them prisoners or hostages in the pits. The worst stall in one pit was reserved for the Lord Lieutenant of Monmouthshire, Capel Hanbury Leigh. Blackwood compiled a list of people who were to be shot. They were to take over the banks. They were going to seduce the soldiers—and indeed scores of soldiers from the regiments rushed into south Wales DID desert—this was the origin of the fatal belief that the soldiers would not fire on the people. Government, however, was forced to arm the middle classes, usually with cutlasses and pistols.

The plan was to launch five simultaneous attacks on 5 November, Guy Fawkes Day. Merthyr men were to march

on the barracks at Brecon. Tredegar men were to take Abergavenny. Pontypridd men were to take Cardiff. Pontypool men were to take Usk. Newport was to be seized from within by a fifth column, supported by the men from Blackwood. Holding the line of the Usk and the Severn, the Silurian Republic was to call upon its comrades in the rest of Britain.

At the last moment, this plan was abandoned. John Frost returned to Wales to report that the rising in northern England was uncertain. The Welsh decided to go ahead nevertheless. They brought forward the date to 4 November and staggered the D-Day for the rest of the columns. The result was disaster—that incredible night of pouring rain, with thousands of men straggling through misery on Newport, to hear that the Newport fifth column had been rounded up, to converge on the Westgate Hotel to free them and to face that confrontation in which some two dozen Chartists died. There is evidence that the other columns tried to follow the brand-new orders which had caused such confusion. I know that 400 Chartists set off from Dowlais the next day. They were already crossing the Beacons, when they heard of the disaster at Newport, whereupon they scattered. The same happened everywhere.

Then came the revenge of the established, the witch-hunts, the trials of Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones, their death sentences, the hard campaign for their reprieve, their transportation, their erection into martyrs. John Frost's ultimate return to a hero's welcome. 1839 however, was in no sense the end of Chartism. In many ways, it was a beginning. Within a few weeks, Morgan Williams in Merthyr brought out *Udgorn Cymru*, the greatest Chartist newspaper of them all. Chartism was not really beaten until the defeat of the general strike of 1843. Chartism in fact lived on as an underground movement, to surface again in the rise of Liberalism in the 1860s.

In the 1860's Chartism revived in the Valleys. In 1862, Chartists launched a new paper, the *Merthyr Star*. This alarmed the Nonconformist and Liberal middle classes of

the town. As soon as the Reform Act of 1867 gave the vote to the workingmen of Merthyr, they hastened to summon Henry Richard of Tregaron and the Liberation Society to stand for Merthyr. Henry Richard, the first Welsh Nonconformist Radical to be elected to Westminster on working-class votes and on working-class issues, made a deliberate appeal to the Chartist. He succeeded. Many Chartists sat alongside Henry Richard on his platform. Among them, I am proud to say, were my ancestors, Roger Herbert who ran a Chartist school in Nant-y-Glo and his sister Sarah Herbert who was Henry Richard's election agent in Dowlais. She was my great-grandmother.

So in the end the Chartists won. They were not to know that at the time, of course. Their poets and dramatists, in the aftermath of Newport, had to rally the ranks. Remember bold Shell, they proclaimed.

Silurian Frosts again shall lead us on,
And freedom's baffled battle yet be won.

Today we live in the shadow of 1979, *blwyddyn y pla*, the year of the plague, and of a recent general election. In the phrase freedom's baffled battle, we may feel the emphasis should be on the word baffled. We may face a Silurian Frost rather different from the one envisaged by the poet. Yes.

Well, don't you worry, *butty bach*, we've been here before. The Welsh people have lived in a permanent state of emergency since about 383 A.D. when we emerged as a people. Since then we have survived a crisis in every generation by re-inventing ourselves. If we can summon up the courage, we can do so again.

I will therefore conclude by quoting the words of Dr. William Price as he sent off the men marching to Newport 1839. They set off on a long march towards *Cyfiawnder*. We are still on that march. It is going to be a long march, a hard march, a rocky march. But take courage. Our forefathers have trod this road before us. They won in the end. So will we.