

A WELSH CHANNEL FOR WALES!

Half a million people in Wales speak Welsh as their first language. In many towns and villages in north, west and south-west Wales, English speakers are a small minority. Welsh is very much a living language, a language which many Welsh people feel sounds more beautiful and expressive than English.

Yet this language has been under intense pressure over the centuries, as Westminster governments have tried to destroy it. While today, Welsh nominally has equal status with English in Wales, in practice, the policies of successive governments and big companies there have continued to deny Welsh its rightful place and pressured people into speaking English. The latest sign of this is the Tory government's decision on the fourth TV channel in Wales.

When plans for the establishment of a fourth channel were announced, many in Wales said that this should be an exclusively Welsh channel. While Welsh speakers felt most strongly over this, many English-speaking Welsh people agreed. Some did so because they considered this a national right, others simply because of the absurdity of the present situation, which satisfies none of the TV viewers. ITV and BBC-Wales both show a few token Welsh programmes a week, which English speakers don't understand, and which fall far short of meeting Welsh speakers' needs.

CAMPAIGN MOUNTS

After playing an important role in getting bilingual road signs put up, and official forms printed in English and Welsh, the Welsh Language Society (Cymderthas Yr Iaith Gymraeg) decided to campaign for the fourth channel to be in Welsh. In furtherance of this demand, its members have used many forms of struggle from leaf-letting through to damaging BBC and ITV broadcasting facilities.

Plaid Cymru (PC - the Welsh National Party) also campaigned strongly for a Welsh fourth channel; aware of the strength of popular feeling in Wales, the organisations of the Labour, Liberal and Conservative Parties in Wales all declared their support for this demand.

In the run-up to the 1979 General Election, the Conservatives pledged that the fourth channel in Wales would be a Welsh language one; if they hadn't done this, their vote would have been considerably smaller than it was (1 in 3 Welsh voters opted for them). But they have gone back on their word, and Wales speaks with one voice in condemning them for that.

The Welsh Language Society has stepped up its campaign for the fourth channel, and has received strong support. After members obstructed the Secretary of State for Wales' car when he visited the Welsh National Eisteddfod (where poetry and song contests take place), one spokesman condemned them, but the Eisteddfod's Archdruid came to their defence.

PC's last conference approved a resolution calling for people in Wales to refuse to pay for TV licenses, and its President, Gwynfor Evans, twice MP for Carmarthen, has said that he is ready to fast to the death if the government does not agree to the establishment of a Welsh fourth channel.

Two thousand Welsh people have refused to buy TV licences in their continuing protest at the government's betrayal of its promise. Eight people have already gone to prison for this.