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Author(s): Peters, Lisa

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“Welsh Obscurity to Notoriety” – Lloyd George, the Boer War, and the North Wales Press

In the world of British politics, perhaps few people have been on a journey so varied as that of David Lloyd George – from the small Welsh village of Llanystumdwy to 10 Downing Street, and in the space of seventeen years from a man condemned as a traitor to the man who won the Great War for Britain.

Although Lloyd George was well known in Wales, it was not so within the rest of the country until the outbreak of the Boer War. It was this war, and his opposition to it, that was to transform Lloyd George from Welsh obscurity to national notoriety.¹ As it can be seen from contemporary newspaper reports, Lloyd George’s support of the Boers deeply divided his constituents and alienated many of his supporters – yet not only did he manage to retain his marginal parliamentary seat in the Carnarvon Boroughs in the 1900 election, he actually increased his majority. What light can local newspapers cast upon reaction in the Carnarvon Boroughs to the stance of their MP and his alleged treason in support of the nation’s enemies and can they explain why the people of the Carnarvon Boroughs re-elected, with an increased majority, a man who had been burned in effigy in his home town?

The Boer War was the ‘first of the modern media wars’.² The 1870 Education Act had significantly increased literacy levels so there was now a mass readership for the cheap press. The Boer War was the most important conflict Britain had participated in since the Crimean War and the press responded with intense coverage that saw fifty-eight newspaper reporters, including Winston Churchill and Edgar Wallace in South Africa by summer 1900.³ The north Wales press did not send their own reporters to cover the conflict first-hand, relying instead on reports from the Press Association. They preferred to focus on reporting local aspects of the war such as the departures of the local militia, local casualties, and publishing letters that Welsh soldiers at the front sent to their relatives in Wales, and, of course, commenting on the actions and speeches of Lloyd George.

¹Nancy Owens Goulart, ‘Backbencher against war : a rhetorical analysis of the parliamentary speaking of David Lloyd George during the Boer War’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University; 1982).

² Donal Lowry, ‘When the world loved the Boers’, *History Today*, 49:5 (1999), 43 (p.43).

³ Tabitha Jackson, *The Boer War* (London, 1999), pp. 80-81.

The Boers and the British in South Africa had an uneasy relationship. The first Boer War of 1880-1881 gave the two Dutch Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State self-government under British suzerainty but the discovery of gold in the Rand led to significant British immigration which resulted in the immigrants (*uitlanders*) becoming a majority in some areas of the Rand. Keen to protect their society, religion and language from the immigrant influx, the Boer governments denied the *uitlanders* political rights. The *uitlanders* appealed to the British government for assistance and in summer 1899, as President Kruger of the Transvaal and the British Commissioner to South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner, met to discuss the crisis, the press pondered the possibility of war.

Whilst the Liberal party was unable to adopt a unified position on the war - some MPs adopted a Liberal imperialist stance, a few openly opposed the war whereas most offered limited support to the Conservative government - the Liberal-supporting Welsh press tended to adopt an anti-war tone. Most of the Liberal-supporting Welsh-language press, including *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, *Y Genedl Cymraeg*, *Y Cymro*, *Y Traethodydd*, *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, *Y Tyst*, and *Y Gwyllydydd* were strongly hostile the war, primarily because of their support for nonconformity.⁴ Morgan has argued that the Welsh-language press showed support for the Boers because they saw them as ‘almost as fellow victims of English colonialism’.⁵ The Liberal-supporting *Wrexham Advertiser* firstly opposed war⁶ but by September the worsening situation had caused it to now support military action against the Boers (although it admitted that this was ‘not very logical’) whilst regretting scenes of jingoistic delight at the thought of war.⁷ In contrast its Liberal neighbour, the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, whilst sympathising with the plight of the *uitlanders*, opposed any talk of war.⁸ It blamed the crisis on the Conservative government’s ‘fiendish desire to avenge the Majube⁹ and a passion of greed to seize the goldfields of the Rand’ and that the grievances of the *uitlanders* were not sufficient to justify war.¹⁰ It drew parallels between Wales and the Boer republics arguing ‘it is but natural that Welshmen should sympathise with a small nation of farmers that wishes to maintain its independence, to

⁴ Kenneth O Morgan, *Wales in British politics 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1970), p.179.

⁵ Kenneth O Morgan, ‘The Boer War and the media (1899-1902)’, *Twentieth century British history* 13:1 (2000) 1-16 (p.10).

⁶ ‘Great Britain and the Transvaal’, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 24 June 1899, p.5.

⁷ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 30 September 1899, p.4.

⁸ *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 4 August 1899, p. 4.

⁹ Majuba Hill – scene of the final battle of the first Boer War which resulted in a British defeat by the Boers.

¹⁰ *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 8 September 1899, p.4.

cherish its mother tongue, and to safeguard its national existence'.¹¹ *Yr Herald Cymraeg* argued that the war was based on greed and deception and reported Lloyd George's statement that the Conservative government's excuses made over its refusal of acquiescence to Kruger's proposals were a mistake and an 'impudent hypocrisy'.¹² The *North Wales Times* blamed Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, and his haughty attitude towards the Boers for the war; it believed that had the Duke of Devonshire been in the Colonial Office war would have been avoided.¹³

Unlike its political rivals, the Conservative government was united behind its desire for war. The Bangor-based Conservative *North Wales Chronicle*, whilst preferring to avoid war, pointed out that 'if President Kruger refuses justice to the Englishmen who have appealed to England to see fair play, war may become necessary for the purpose of upholding the honour of Great Britain in South Africa'.¹⁴ It saw the war as an opportunity to expand the empire and adopted a haughty attitude towards the Boers, condemning them for their 'colonial impudence'.¹⁵ Insults to the Boers were to continue throughout the war. Its fellow Conservative newspaper, the *North Wales Guardian*, firstly urged caution¹⁶ before adopting a more pro-war stance, basing its arguments, not on supporting the *uitlanders*, but on the need to protect British supremacy and the empire.¹⁷

War broke out on 12 October 1899 when the two republics declared war on the British Empire. Lloyd George was in Canada when war broke out but was quick to make his opposition clear. Writing to his wife, Margaret, from Winnipeg, he wrote

Hope you judiciously selected your extracts of my views on the Transvaal for the press. They were not intended for publication but I don't object so long as my hopes that the English will get a black eye are omitted. I am still at boiling point over it. It is wicked.¹⁸

¹¹ *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 8 September 1899, p. 4.

¹² 'Rhaib a thwyll y rhyfel', *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 31 Hydref 1899, p.4.

¹³ 'England and the Transvaal', *North Wales Times*, 2 September 1899, p.4.

¹⁴ *North Wales Chronicle*, 26 August 1899, p.5.

¹⁵ 'War at last', *North Wales Chronicle*, 14 October 1899, p.4.

¹⁶ 'Transvaal troubles', *North Wales Guardian*, 12 May 1899, p.5.

¹⁷ 'The crisis in South Africa', *North Wales Guardian*, 8 September 1899, p.5.

¹⁸ Letter dated 27 September 1899. Kenneth O Morgan (ed.), *Lloyd George family letters 1885-1936* (Cardiff and London, 1973), p.122.

Lloyd George was no pacifist – he believed in the supremacy of the British Empire but he championed the struggle of ‘weak nationalities’ for their liberty and survival.¹⁹ Additionally war would distract attention away from the cause of social reform ‘every lyddite shell exploding on the African hills was, as he vividly put it, carrying away an old age pension’.²⁰

Parliament was recalled on 17 October to allow the militia to be mobilised and to vote for war supplies. Lloyd George spoke in opposition to the war and the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill. To the Conservative press of north Wales, this criticism of the government and questioning the justification for war was tantamount to treason. The *North Wales Chronicle* described Lloyd George’s speech in the House of Commons as ‘the shame of Caernarvonshire’ and questioned whether the county was prepared to be represented by such an MP, an early indication that the *Chronicle* would work hard to remove Lloyd George at the next election.²¹ The newspaper reiterated its desire to remove Lloyd George as MP a month later in an editorial stating

we venture to think that Mr Lloyd George’s action ... was a shock to the feeling of nine out of every ten of his constituents ... it is quite certain that amongst the leaders if the rank and file of the Radical party in these boroughs, the overruling majority of his registered supporters are against Mr Lloyd George and pro Boer advocacy.²²

After the “Black Week” of December 1899, shock at British defeats shook the nation and the war became ‘the burning topic of the day’ and ‘hysterical jingoism ...and ... popular fury [was] directed at the so-called “pro-Boers”’.²³ The *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* supported the local MP, but the *North Wales Chronicle* continued to direct its fury at what it considered Lloyd George’s lack of patriotism. In November, it spoke of Lloyd George ‘speak[ing] and vot[ing] as if you desired to trail the honour of your country in the gutter’²⁴

¹⁹ Lloyd George’s article written under the pseudonym of Brutus published in the *North Wales Express* in November 1880. Quoted in John Grigg, *Lloyd George: the young Lloyd George* (London, 2003), pp.42-43.

²⁰ Grigg, p.259. From a speech in Carmarthen on the 27 November 1899.

²¹ ‘The shame of Carnarvonshire[sic]’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 4 November 1899, p.5.

²² *North Wales Chronicle*, 9 December 1899, p.4.

²³ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1992) p.465.

²⁴ ‘The shame of Carnarvonshire [sic]’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 4 November 1899, p.5.

and 'To Mr Lloyd-George ... belongs the discredit of making the name of Carnarvonshire the scum and bye-word of every patriot in the land'.²⁵

It may well have been rumours, so gleefully reported in the *North Wales Chronicle* that Lloyd George was losing the support of his constituents and the news that he, and his brother and uncle, were burned in effigy in his home town of Cricceth, and also in Nefyn, and Pwllheli, that led to him addressing a series of public meetings across the county, starting at Bangor. Trouble was expected as police were drafted in from throughout Caernarvonshire and Anglesey and this shows how unpopular Lloyd George's views had become amongst his constituents. The *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* tried to counter the attacks on Lloyd George's patriotism by headlining their report of the meeting with 'For conciliation and the rights of nationhood' and by linking Lloyd George's support of the rights of Wales with those of another small nation in South Africa. The newspaper alleged that what it called 'the war party' was intent on stirring up ill-feeling against the meeting and its main speaker by putting up posters showing that the leading nonconformist in the Liberal party disagreed with Lloyd George over the war.²⁶ Entry to the meeting was by ticket, obtainable from Liberal agents, which the *North Wales Chronicle* immediately saw as a way of ensuring only Lloyd George supporters attended the meeting.²⁷ From the two newspaper reports, it seems that each newspaper's reporter attended different meeting – even disagreeing on facts – such as when people entered the meeting, the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* reported that the 'goodly crowd outside ... kept themselves amused by shouting Hurrah and cracking jokes which were not at all times complimentary nor in good taste'²⁸ whereas the *North Wales Chronicle* reported that a 'large hostile crowd' was throwing missiles and breaking windows.²⁹ Both newspapers reported Lloyd George's speech but only the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* reported Lloyd George's statement that the money spent on the war could instead have been better spent on building 300,000 workmen's cottages and giving every old man in the country an old age pension. Lloyd George concluded his speech by saying

²⁵ 'Helping a noble cause', *North Wales Chronicle*, 18 November 1899, p.4.

²⁶ 'For conciliation and rights of nationhood – Great meeting at Bangor – Magnificent speech by Mr. Lloyd-George – The jingo mob break windows – A dastardly assault', *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 13 April 1900, p.8.

²⁷ 'Pro-Boer meeting at Carnarvon [sic]- Mr. Lloyd George attacked – A packed meeting', *North Wales Chronicle*, 14 April 1900, p.5.

²⁸ 'For conciliation and rights of nationhood – Great meeting at Bangor – Magnificent speech by Mr. Lloyd-George – The jingo mob break windows – A dastardly assault', *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 13 April 1900, p.8.

²⁹ 'Pro-Boer meeting at Carnarvon [sic] –Mr. Lloyd George attacked – A packed meeting', *North Wales Chronicle*, 14 April 1900, p.5.

I beg you, I entreat of you not to commit yourselves as a nation to so desperate an enterprise, an enterprise that will cost millions of money and thousands more of lives. And, above all, I do beg Wales to have no part in this. I supplicate my countrymen to have a superstitious horror of it. I fear it for the sake of Wales. I have been asked why should I take this part, and told that my business is to fight for those reforms the Welshmen demand, It is for the sake of those reforms that I beg Wales to have nothing to do with this job (loud applause) ... The turn of Wales will come to stand at the bar of the Empire. I do wish that when that time comes that she shall not falter from the consciousness of any wrong she has done, and that her voice shall not be choked with the blood of the two small nationalities like herself, that she helped to crush (loud and continued cheering).³⁰

The *North Wales Chronicle* reported that Lloyd George was frequently interrupted during his speech, not by the cheering reported by the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* but, by remarks from the audience and the continual sound of the rowdy crowd outside breaking the hall windows.³¹ *Yr Herald Cymraeg* described the barrackers as Tories and ‘faint-hearted Liberals’³² whilst the *North Wales Chronicle* commented that Lloyd George’s once loyal supporters were now bitter opponents because of his opinions on the war.³³ After the meeting, Lloyd George was surrounded by a mob and hit over the head with a stick and was forced to take refuge in a nearby café. The local Liberal press applauded the speech, the *Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald* stating

Mr Lloyd-George has achieved many oratorical triumphs in the cause of progress and righteousness. But those who had the privilege of listening to him at Bangor will not readily believe that he has ever delivered a speech which, in courage, lucidity, pathos and persuasiveness excelled the eloquent oration of Wednesday ... Thick must be the skull that is impervious to the force of the argument; hard must be the heart that does not respond to the pathos of the appeals in favour of peace and conciliation.³⁴

But the best plaudits of the local Liberal press could not disguise the fact that many people in Lloyd George’s constituency, including some of his supporters, were openly hostile to his Boer war views.

³⁰ ‘For conciliation and rights of nationhood – Great meeting at Bangor – Magnificent speech by Mr. Lloyd-George – The jingo mob break windows – A dastardly assault’, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 13 April 1900, p.8.

³¹ ‘Pro-Boer meeting at Carnarvon [sic] – Mr. Lloyd George attacked – A packed meeting’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 14 April 1900, p.5.

³² ‘Rhyddid Llafar yn Mangor’, *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 17 Ebrill 1900, p.4.

³³ ‘Bully the plaintiff’s attorney’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 28 April 1900, p.5.

³⁴ ‘A great speech’, *Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald*, 19 April 1900, p.1.

Despite Lloyd George's obvious unpopularity amongst some of his constituents, he still had the support and admiration of the *North Wales Times*. It praised his speeches³⁵ and reprinted *The Spear*'s complimentary remarks on his oration in the House of Commons on the war.³⁶ These fulsome tributes culminated in an editorial of June 1900 which stated

even his opponents are bound to admire his courage and manliness, and we do not think that he will be made to suffer politically for being honest enough to give voice to his settled convictions ... The next fight [a reference to the forthcoming election] will possibly be the hardest that he has yet engaged in, but unless we are much mistaken, he will emerge from it triumphantly.³⁷

As the election grew closer, attacks in the local Conservative press on Lloyd George grew. In July 1900 the *North Wales Chronicle* was keen to emphasise the damage that Lloyd George's views were doing to the reputation of the people of the Carnarvon Boroughs –

We now have to ensure the mortification of being represented by, and identified with, a member of Parliament who methods of discussion are those of the pot-house and of whose conduct the Leader of the House of Commons says "I repeat that in all my political experience I have never seen a more discreditable exhibition than that of the hon. Member for Carnarvon [sic]" ... we only draw attention to the matter because of the disgrace which attaches to the Carnarvon Boroughs and to Wales, because of their connection with a member who can make such "discreditable exhibitions" of himself.³⁸

Parliament was dissolved in September 1900 and Lloyd George began his campaign to retain his marginal seat in an election so dominated by the war in South Africa that it has gone down in history as the "khaki election". The Conservative government fought the election on the war, stating that a vote for the Liberals was a vote for the Boers and the nation's enemies. Given Lloyd George's rise to national prominence as the leading 'pro-Boer' it is perhaps surprising that the Conservatives were unable to find a high profile candidate to stand against Lloyd George. The man selected, Col. Platt, was a 'mild-mannered nonentity',³⁹ whose only advantage seemed to be that he was a military man. Col. Platt was unable to speak Welsh (although he claimed to be able to understand a great

³⁵ 'The debate on the address', *North Wales Times*, 10 February 1900, p.4.

³⁶ *The Spear* described the speech as 'one of the finest moments I have ever seen in the House of Commons'. "'The Spear' and Mr. Lloyd George, MP', *North Wales Times*, 5 March 1900, p.8.

³⁷ 'The political outlook in Wales', *North Wales Times*, 30 June 1900, p.4.

³⁸ 'The "discreditable" conduct of Mr Lloyd-George', *North Wales Chronicle*, 7 July 1900, p.5.

³⁹ Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George* (London, 1975), p. 146.

deal⁴⁰) which was an important consideration in the predominantly Welsh-speaking Carnarvon Boroughs. Col. Platt and the Conservatives, understandably, focused much of their attack on Lloyd George's refusal to vote for war supplies back in 1899 and this perceived "betrayal" of the empire and the army.

The Carnarvon Borough Liberals, now that an election had been called, seemed to realise that if they were to retain the seat they would need to paper-over any divisions and present a united front behind their candidate. Lloyd George himself admitted that two-thirds of the electors opposed his stance on the war and *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* reported that opposition to Lloyd George was running particularly high in Bangor and Pwllheli.⁴¹ Lloyd George sought to divert attention away from his controversial Boer War stance by arguing that the annexation of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State could not be undone and instead of looking back, he wished to look forward. Lloyd George, as can be seen from his election address published in the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, based his campaign on two issues – his record as an MP and his services to Wales, and his argument that a Conservative replacement would do nothing for Wales.⁴² A Conservative MP for the Carnarvon Boroughs would not vote for disestablishment, grants for non-denominational schools, and local option, but would support the landlords. A Lloyd George election advertisement in *Yr Herald Cymraeg* in September emphasised his commitment to land reform, disestablishment, improved worker rights and said little about the Boer War.⁴³ The *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* obliging recounted for its readers all the benefits that Lloyd George had brought to the constituency including saving the ratepayers of Caernarvon nearly £20,000 by getting the local government board to pay for the town's water scheme, preventing the removal of the police headquarters from Conwy to Llandudno, securing government aid for a harbour of refuge at Pwllheli, winning approval for a light railway for Nefyn, and the re-opening of Gwylwyr railway (such claims were, of course, refuted by the *North Wales Chronicle*⁴⁴). In the words of *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* it would be a 'national disaster' if Lloyd George was not to be present in the next Parliament.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ The general election – Colonel Platt at Bangor – Enthusiastic reception – A stirring address', *North Wales Chronicle*, 6 October 1900, p.8.

⁴¹ 'Mr. Lloyd George, A.S.', *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 19 Medi 1900, p.9.

⁴² 'General election, 1900 – To the free and independent electors of the Carnarvon District Boroughs', *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 5 October 1900, p.1.

⁴³ 25 Medi 1900 p.3.

⁴⁴ *North Wales Chronicle*, 6 October 1900, p.5.

⁴⁵ 'Mr. Lloyd George, A.S.', *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 19 Medi 1900, p.9.

Lloyd George spoke rarely of his opponent, Col. Platt, instead he focused much of his attack on Joseph Chamberlain⁴⁶, a popular figure of hate for Liberals since his defection to the Conservatives over Irish Home rule had split the party.⁴⁷ Chamberlain was particularly open to attack as a result of his involvement with Kynoch's – an armaments company in which he and his family had shares and its alleged preferential treatment in receiving government armaments contracts. Speaking at Caernarvon in September 1900, Lloyd George was able to attack Chamberlain and appeal to his compatriots that only the Liberal party would seek to improve life for the people of Wales –

God help this country if he [Chamberlain] is the proper stamp of patriotism and of a Statesman. Proceeding in Welsh, Mr. George said that Mr Chamberlain did not love Wales. He did not love the country ... He never said anything in its favour.⁴⁸

Certainly the contest in the Carnarvon Boroughs between Lloyd George and Col. Platt was vigorously fought by both sides. The week before the election, Col. Platt spoke at Pwllheli (twice), Nefyn, Conwy, Bangor, and Caernarvon; and Lloyd George at Deganwy, Bangor, Nefyn, Caernarvon, and Conwy. The election was, as expected, a very ill tempered affair on both sides - the *North Wales Chronicle* devoted two columns of insults to Lloyd George stating that if the electors love their country above party then they will vote for Col. Platt, in preference to the 'pro-Boer Radical candidate'.⁴⁹

As the voters of the Carnarvon Boroughs went to the polls the *North Wales Chronicle* asked this question –

If Kruger, Steyn and the Boer traitors of the white flag were voters in the Carnarvon Boroughs to-day, for whom would their votes be cast? If Sir George White, Baden Powell and the English soldiers whom Mr Lloyd George's vote in October would have left to be shot in South Africa for want of supplies were voters in the Carnarvon Boroughs, can anyone doubt for which candidate their voices would be raised?⁵⁰

⁴⁶ This was noticed by the *North Wales Chronicle* who commented 'much of Mr. Lloyd George's speeches so far have been directed to fasten upon Mr Chamberlain'. *North Wales Chronicle*, 29 September 1900, p.5.

⁴⁷ Pakenham commented that 'dislike of Chamberlain was one of the few things that Liberals did not have to pretend to have in common: it came naturally', p.466.

⁴⁸ 'Liberal meeting at Carnarvon [sic] – Scathing speech by Mr. Lloyd George – Chamberlain's patriotism – Back to Liberalism', *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 21 September 1900, p.6.

⁴⁹ 'The Carnarvon Boroughs – Election notes', *North Wales Chronicle*, 6 October 1900, p.5.

⁵⁰ *North Wales Chronicle*, 29 September 1900, p.5.

In response the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* urged its readers to vote for Lloyd George ‘who is a courageous and honest advocate of justice and fairplay, whilst his opponent scornfully dismisses as mere fads the reforms which are demanded by the most enlightened and progressive element in the country’⁵¹ and *Yr Herald Cymraeg* emphasised his energetic work as an MP.⁵² Meetings held by both candidates saw hooting, jeering, and heckling from the other side.

Lloyd George was eventually re-elected with an increased majority of 296 and in his speech of thanks, Lloyd George dramatically spoke of his victory as the Carnarvon Boroughs ‘enlisting in the cause of freedom’.⁵³ *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* was jubilant over his re-election, stating that a great battle had been fought and won, that the Conservatives had given their all and still Lloyd George had held the seat - Lloyd George forever was their triumphant cry.⁵⁴

So, how did Lloyd George change from local villain to local hero? The bastion of the establishment, the *Times*, put the result down to ‘personal consideration ... trade favouritism goes straight to the heart of a shopkeeping constituency’, although it did claim that Lloyd George partly owed his victory to the Conservative government as

singularly enough, Mr. Balfour, as well as Mr. Chamberlain., greatly helped Mr. Lloyd-George. A great statesman once said “Don’t advertise your opponent,” and Mr. Balfour’s rebuke of Mr. Lloyd-George impressed the Carnarvon [sic] voters with more sense of Mr. Lloyd-George’s importance than of the character of his onslaught.⁵⁵

The *North Wales Guardian* argued, probably correctly, that if the election had taken place six months earlier during the height of jingoism and anti-Boerism, Lloyd George would have lost.⁵⁶ Mobs do not attack political meetings and hit the local MP with a stick, at least not in north-west Wales, unless he is deeply unpopular. In the view of the *North Wales Chronicle* and the *North Wales Guardian* Lloyd George won because he avoided discussion

⁵¹ ‘Mr Lloyd George and the electors’, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 5 October 1900, p.5.

⁵² ‘Gwaith Mr. Lloyd-George’, *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 2 October 1900, p.4.

⁵³ ‘The election – The contest in the Carnarvon Boroughs – Mr Lloyd-George’s triumph – Returned with increased majority – The declaration of the poll – Reception of the news’, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* 12 October 1900 p.6.

⁵⁴ ‘Bwrdeisdrefi Arfon’, *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 10 Hydref 1900, p.1.

⁵⁵ ‘The general election in Wales’, *Times*, 26 October 1900, p.13.

⁵⁶ ‘Carnarvon Boroughs’, *North Wales Guardian*, 12 October 1900, p.7.

of the Boer War and his earlier conduct.⁵⁷ This allowed pro-war Liberals to support him as the issue which they disagreed on was, so they believed, now over. The *North Wales Chronicle* disparagingly referred to those Liberals who supported Lloyd George at election time but opposed his position on the war as people with ‘short memories and easy consciences’.⁵⁸ Also Lloyd George and his supporters in the local press emphasised what he had done for the constituency and what he and the Liberal party had done and would do for Wales, namely, old age pensions, disestablishment, land reform, that his Conservative opponent would not. In many respects, it was an election fought on local and Welsh issues, rather than on the Boer War.⁵⁹

By the time of Lloyd George’s election win the Boer War was entering into its final phase. The Boer armies had been defeated, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had been occupied and annexed, and yet the Boers fought on in a guerrilla war. The British generals retaliated with a war of attrition, burning Boer farms and herding Boer women and children into refugee camps. When reports of these actions, most notably by Emily Hobhouse on the refugee camps, appeared in the British press, public opinion began to change. The Liberal press was horrified: the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* advised people ‘with weak nerves’ not to read Emily Hobhouse’s reports that spoke of scarce rations, a lack of tents, the non-existence of firewood, and polluted war and concluded ‘that nothing more shocking has been published since Mr Gladstone exposed the atrocities of the Turks in Bulgaria’.⁶⁰ The *Wrexham Advertiser* described the farm burning policy as ‘inhuman’⁶¹ and the camps as ‘an awful scandal ... let us not starve the women and children’.⁶² In contrast the *North Wales Guardian* would tolerate no attacks on British policy, dismissing claims of ill treatment of Boers and their property.⁶³ Nationally, the *Times* sought to question the accuracy and validity of Miss Hobhouse’s reports, questioning her knowledge of Boer life⁶⁴ and publishing a letter from Victor Sampson, a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly, who had visited a refugee camp at Kimberley where he claimed children were well-fed and healthy and that the death rate was largely the due to the Boers themselves and not any lack

⁵⁷ ‘Mr Lloyd George ... has found it expedient to come down a step or two rather than jeopardise his seat’. ‘Carnarvon Boroughs’, *North Wales Guardian* 12 October 1900, p.7.

⁵⁸ ‘Mr Lloyd George in a bad temper – His challenge to Col. Platt’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 29 September 1900 p.5.

⁵⁹ For more information on Wales and the Boer War see *Wales in British politics 1868-1922*, pp. 178-181; and articles by Kenneth O Morgan and Henry Pelling in *Welsh History Review* 4:4 (1969).

⁶⁰ ‘British Weyerism’, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 21 June 1901, p.4.

⁶¹ ‘The opened Parliament’, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 23 February 1901, p.5.

⁶² ‘War is war’, *Wrexham Advertiser*, 22 June 1901, p.5.

⁶³ ‘South Africa’, *North Wales Guardian*, 1 March 1901, p.5.

⁶⁴ ‘The Boer refugees and British victims of the war’, *Times*, 27 August 1901, p.6.

on care on behalf of the British.⁶⁵ The *North Wales Guardian* and the *North Wales Chronicle* published editorials identical to each other, which suggests some unified effort by Conservative newspapers to ensure that they all adopted the same line and followed the *Times*' lead of blaming the Boers and their poor hygiene and reluctance to seek medical advice and instead relying on their own remedies for the 27,000 deaths in the camps. The editorial refused to accept that there had been any mistreatment of Boer women and children stating that

the British, out of the amplitude of their good nature, conveyed the women and children to campus where they are more carefully tended than are the loyalist refugees who have been driven from their homes by the Boers. The epidemic [of measles] was severe, but the ignorance or superstition of the mothers killed more than the disease. When we hear of Boer women who refused to give their sick children mil, and tried to feed them on sardines, or of others who adopted as a panacea green paint applied outwardly, we are surprised not that so many children died, but that many have survived.⁶⁶

As expected the Conservative press sought to divert blame away from the government and onto the people who were still fighting a guerrilla war against Britain but such comments would have inflamed those who had opposed the war.

Public opinion had changed since the "Black Week" of December 1899. By this time, Lloyd George had organised an anti-war syndicate (including the Quaker cocoa manufacturer George Cadbury) to buy the *Daily News* and turn it into an anti-war newspaper so there was now a national newspaper leading the opposition to the war. The *North Wales Times* went so far as to state that 'judging by the expression of opinion the anti-war policy is by far the strongest in Wales, especially in the country and the smaller towns ... there is hardly any war fever in Wales'.⁶⁷ This lack of support for the war in Wales was reflected when Lloyd George addressed a meeting in Wrexham's public hall in December 1901 when even the *North Wales Guardian* had to admit that Lloyd George received a 'hearty welcome'⁶⁸ whilst the *Wrexham Advertiser* recorded 'tumultuous applause' as he spoke in opposition to the war, focusing on its cost and the social and economic reforms that it had delayed.⁶⁹ This reception showed how public opinion in

⁶⁵ 'Letter to the editor – Concentration camp at Kimberley', *Times*, 27 August 1901, p.6.

⁶⁶ *North Wales Guardian* – 20 September 1901, p.5. *North Wales Chronicle* – 21 September 1901, p.5.

⁶⁷ 'Wales and the war', *North Wales Times*, 30 November 1901, p.4.

⁶⁸ 'Welsh National Liberal Council – Evening meeting', *North Wales Guardian*, 13 December 1901, p.8.

⁶⁹ 'Demonstration at the Public Hall – Lloyd George and others', *Wrexham Advertiser*, 14 December 1901, p.8.

Wales and throughout Britain had altered as the war had dragged on and the scandal of the camps emerged.⁷⁰

Despite the warm welcome at Wrexham, many people still saw Lloyd George's views on the war as dangerous and treasonous. In December 1901 Lloyd George, bravely or foolishly, arrived in Birmingham, the home city of the Colonial Secretary and Lloyd George's arch-nemesis, Joseph Chamberlain, to speak at the Town Hall. The meeting turned into a riot and Lloyd George had to flee the building disguised as a policeman. The *North Wales Guardian* had no sympathy for Lloyd George, insisting that his 'anti-patriotic harangues' did not give him the right to insist on 'spouting his half-treason in the midst of a patriotic community'.⁷¹ The *North Wales Chronicle* ventured into sarcasm headlining its editorial 'PC Stonier, 81D, MP for the Carnarvon Boroughs', in reference to Lloyd George's mode of escape from the meeting and commenting that 'the great hero of the pro-Boer meeting had to adopt the tactics of De Wet; he had to run for his life'.⁷²

The response of the local press in North Wales to Lloyd George's infamous anti-war stance shows that, at that time, political rivalries dominated. The Conservative press condemned the Liberal MP whilst the Liberal press defended their man in the Carnarvon Boroughs. These extremes of bias make it difficult to discover what the ordinary voter in the constituency thought of the local MP and the war, yet not even the best Liberal propaganda from the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* can disguise the fact that Lloyd George's pro-Boer views had alienated some of his Liberal supporters. Yet in the end, loyalty to one's party prevailed as Lloyd George's supporters returned to vote for him at the ballot box – although it would have been interesting to see if such party political considerations would have succeeded if the election had been held six months earlier. Lloyd George was able to utilise the local Liberal press, most notably the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* to set out his political manifesto – support for Wales and religious, social, and economic reforms, and limited discussion of the war. By the time the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed in May 1902, ending the war, Lloyd George had emerged onto the national political stage as one of the young stars of the Liberal party.

⁷⁰ Morgan commented that 'There is evidence ... that in the later stages of the war ... no part of the United Kingdom responded more readily to [Campbell-Bannerman's] appeal than did Wales'. *Wales in British politics 1868-1922*, p.180.

⁷¹ 'Current topics', *North Wales Guardian*, 27 December 1901, p.5.

⁷² 'PC Stonier 81D, MP for the Carnarvon Boroughs', *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 December 1901, p.4.