

LADY MEGAN LLOYD GEORGE JOINS THE LABOUR PARTY

J. Graham Jones

‘L. G. thinks that Gwilym will go to the right and Megan to the left, eventually. He wants his money spent on the left.’¹ Thus did Lloyd George’s trusted principal private secretary A. J. Sylvester write in his diary entry for 14 April 1938 when discussing his employer’s heartfelt concern over the future of his infamous Lloyd George ‘Political Fund’. It was a highly prophetic comment. The old man evidently knew his two politician children. Lady Megan Lloyd George, the left-wing Liberal MP for Anglesey from 1929 until her defeat there in 1951, eventually joined the Labour Party in April 1955 following an extended, rather fraught period of vacillation and intense soul-searching. She later served as the Labour MP for Carmarthenshire from 1955 until her premature death in 1966. The purpose of the present essay is to examine the essential elements of her starkly radical, labourite Liberal philosophy through the years and to chart in some detail the successive steps in her political journey leftwards towards the Labour Party.

Megan Lloyd George had first entered parliament at only 27 years of age as the Liberal MP for Anglesey in the ‘We Can Conquer Unemployment’ general election of 30 May 1929, the first woman Member ever to be elected to represent a Welsh constituency.² Partly because of her famous name, partly because of her bubbly, sociable personality, and to some extent as a result of her skill as a public speaker (including on the radio, a medium at which she soon excelled), she quickly made a positive impression and was highly regarded at Westminster and generally well liked in Anglesey.³ Her maiden speech, which she did not deliver until 7 April 1930, witnessed by her adoring father, was a notably pungent, left-wing peroration in support of the Rural Housing Bill introduced by Ramsay MacDonald’s second minority Labour government. She subsequently spoke to great effect in the House on agriculture, unemployment, and Welsh affairs.

Almost immediately upon her election, Megan had carved out a distinctive niche for herself as an independent minded, highly individualistic Member with unfailingly strong radical, even labourite, leanings – to the general acclaim

- 1 *Life with Lloyd George: the Diary of A. J. Sylvester, 1931–1945*, ed. by Colin Cross (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 206–7, diary entry for 14 April 1938.
- 2 See J. Graham Jones, ‘Lady Megan’s First Parliamentary Contest: the Anglesey Election of 1929’, *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* (1992), 107–22.
- 3 There is a most helpful general, if brief, survey of Lady Megan’s political career in the pictorial biography by Emyr Price, *Megan Lloyd George* (Caernarfon: Gwynedd Archives Service, 1983). This publication contains a splendid selection of marvellous, evocative photographs. There is a very good entry by Kenneth O. Morgan in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 12 October 2016, subscription required]. On her later career as MP for Anglesey, see also J. Graham Jones, ‘Lady Megan Lloyd George and Anglesey Politics, 1945–51’, *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* (1994), 81–113, and since re-published in J. G. Jones, *David Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2010), pp. 509–35.

of her famous father. When the so-called national government was formed in August 1931, Megan became one of the tiny group of just four Lloyd Georgite 'independent Liberals', and was, in this guise, comfortably re-elected to the Commons in the general elections of 1931 and 1935. In the former campaign, she had fiercely opposed Ramsay MacDonald's plans to axe public spending, and she appealed for job creation, most notably in the port of Holyhead within her constituency where unemployment ran at perilously high levels. Even in the early 1930s there were persistent (if unconfirmed) rumours that she was likely to join the Labour Party as she frequently urged co-operation between the Liberal and Labour Parties, and it is possible that it was only her overwhelming loyalty to the father, whom she adored, which kept her true to the Liberal faith. Lloyd George, still a powerful influence on his two politician children, Gwilym and Megan, did not die until March 1945. Megan Lloyd George also followed her father's lead in foreign policy and accompanied him on the famous visit to Germany in 1936 during which, to her apparent embarrassment, they met Hitler at his mountain retreat in the Bavarian Alps at Bechtesgaden. Megan was, however, an uncompromising critic of appeasement from the Abyssinia crisis onwards.

In the 1931–35 parliament Megan continued to press for an expansionary economic approach to tackle the problem of the 'intractable million' long-term, structural unemployed, and in the spring of 1935 she became a cogent exponent of her father's dramatic 'New Deal' proposals to tackle unemployment and related social problems. Small, vital, with unlimited energy, she formed a close bond of friendship with Attlee and Herbert Morrison and, crucially, Labour's General Secretary Morgan Phillips, and was widely considered 'one of us' by Labour MPs. Although opposed by a strong local Labour candidate in the person of Holyhead County Councillor Henry Jones in the general election of November 1935, she secured the votes of large numbers of Labour sympathisers on the island. In 1936 she urged Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin to welcome the Jarrow marchers, and she battled heroically (although ultimately in vain) to gain Special Assisted Area Status for Anglesey.

Megan's innate radicalism and natural independence of outlook grew during the years of the Second World War which she envisaged as a vehicle of social change, especially as an opportunity to enhance welfare reform and the rights of women. She served on an impressive array of wartime committees within the ministries of Health, Labour and Supply, while in 1940 her close friend Herbert Morrison, the Minister of Supply, had invited her to chair the vaunted 'Women against Waste' campaign. She also pressed for increased agricultural production and for more effective organisation of the Women's Land Army. But she was most prominent as a leading figure on the unofficial, non-party woman power committee, concerned with the wartime employment of women and with women's rights. She also campaigned hard for equal pay. A member of the influential pressure group Radical Action (whose champions were people like Dingle Foot and Honor Balfour), Megan was now becoming ever more apprehensive of the post-war policies to be adopted by the Liberal Party. With such colleagues as Dingle Foot, the left-wing Liberal MP for the Dundee constituency, she urged that the Liberals align themselves unambiguously on the left. And she rejected out-of-hand any possible

alliance with the right-wing Simonite ‘National Liberals’.

All these activities served to activate her indigenous labourism (possibly even Socialism), reflected in a fervent championing of the interests of the underdog and a firm left wing stance in the political spectrum, as did her unqualified welcome for the striking proposals of the Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services, a landmark document, in 1942, and her membership of the Central Housing Advisory Committee established to co-ordinate post-war housing construction. In the first ever ‘Welsh Day’ debate held in the Commons in October 1944, a concession for which she herself had battled valiantly in part in her role as the assertive chair of the Welsh Parliamentary Party, and which she herself was privileged to open, Megan’s rousing speech called for the public reconstruction of the public industries – coal, steel, electricity and forestry - and she insisted that the full employment achieved by the exigencies of war should continue in the post-war world. And she was heavily committed to demands for Welsh devolutionary concessions throughout the war years.⁴ She had clearly drifted far to the left of mainstream, moderate Liberal thinking, and she voiced concern over the policies which her party might embrace when peace came. Together with colleagues like Dingle Foot, she urged that the Liberals should align themselves unambiguously on the left, rejecting out-of-hand any possibility of an alliance with the Simonite ‘National Liberals’.

Most surprisingly, in the general election of 1945, Megan was relieved of Conservative opposition on Anglesey (one of five Liberal MPs in Wales to receive this stroke of good fortune), and she faced only a sole Labour opponent in the person of Flying Officer Cledwyn Hughes (much later to become the Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos), a Holyhead solicitor then on leave from the RAF. Hughes was the son of a Presbyterian minister who had given staunch support to Megan Lloyd George (whom he had personally nominated) and the Liberal cause on Anglesey for decades, and Cledwyn Hughes himself had since boyhood been steeped in the Welsh, radical, nonconformist tradition so crucial in Welsh political life. But by 1945 he could see that the chronic social and economic problems which blighted the county could be effectively tackled only by the advanced socialist policies then being advanced by the Labour Party.⁵ Local rumours that Megan had made a pact with Anglesey Conservatives were totally unfounded,⁶ as it was Hughes who seemed to reap the benefit of a two-cornered fight.⁷ ‘Unless Liberalism is the dominating force in the next House of Commons,’ asserted Megan, ‘we shan’t get peace, good houses or work,’⁸ subsequently claiming that ‘the Liberal Party [had] the most practical policy for social security in the famous Beveridge Plan’.

In the event, her majority was unexpectedly axed to a wafer-thin 1081 votes, only twelve Liberal MPs were re-elected to Westminster (seven of these from Wales), and

4 National Library of Wales (NLW), James Griffiths Papers B3/13, Churchill to Megan Lloyd George, 2 January 1945.

5 John Gilbert Evans, *Devolution in Wales: Claims and Responses, 1937–1979* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 53.

6 *Evening News*, 8 June 1945.

7 *North Wales Chronicle*, 27 July 1945.

8 See the reports in the *Holyhead Mail* for June and July 1945.

Megan was suddenly compelled to re-assess her political position. Congratulating her constituents on remaining firm in the midst of the ‘Socialist avalanche’ across the realm, she declared, ‘My faith in Liberalism and its future remains unchanged.’ But the nub of her new-found dilemma was this: how should the self-confessed Labourite radical respond to a landslide Labour government firmly entrenched in power and determined to enact its own left-wing legislative programme? She was also forced to recognize that her personal position in Anglesey was far from secure, and she tended on personal grounds to dislike Cledwyn Hughes standing against her on the island. Although they remained on amicable terms throughout the years, she even attempted to dissuade him from standing there again: ‘Do you really want to go into politics? It’s a hard life!’⁹

Following the Liberal Party’s near decimation at the polls in 1945, and the unexpected defeat of party leader Sir Archibald Sinclair in Caithness and Sutherland, E. Clement Davies, the little-known, former Simonite Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire (like Megan a veteran MP first elected in May 1929) was chosen party ‘chairman’ by the twelve remaining Liberal MPs, a move initially intended as a temporary, interim measure (pending the expected return of Sinclair to the Commons). Lady Megan Lloyd George, after 1945 just about the only popular national figure within the party still an MP and possibly even more well-known than Clem Davies nationally, had suddenly become ‘a minority radical in a minority Party’, whose new-found role was to attempt to thwart Davies’s apparently strong inclination to veer his party sharply to the right. She could possibly have succeeded to the Liberal Party ‘chairmanship’ given the strained circumstances of 1945, and she certainly did not lack an ambition for political advancement and a spirited determination to advance the cause of women.¹⁰

But being a woman in itself placed her under something of a disadvantage as a candidate for the party leadership in 1945.¹¹ It was also well-known that she could be scatty, forgetful, idle and indolent (a trait which to some extent undermined her undoubted drive), with conspicuously little aptitude for administration, and it was highly possible that the left-wing opinions which she expressed at almost every possible opportunity could have split the Liberal Party down the middle – as her father had done in December 1916.¹² As Clement Davies’s biographer has written tellingly, ‘She had the imagination and intelligence to lead the party, but lacked the application and patience, and also, crucially, the desire.’¹³

Lady Megan was now foremost among those striving desperately to prevent the Liberals drifting to the right. She genuinely feared that the emergence of Clement Davies as the party’s leader in 1945 meant a further conspicuous erosion of its

9 Mervyn Jones, *A Radical Life: The Biography of Megan Lloyd George* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 195.

10 *Cambridge Daily News*, 29 January 1947, ‘The Greatest Foreign Secretary Britain has Ever Known was a Woman – Queen Elizabeth’ (Lady Megan Lloyd George).

11 Jorgen Scott Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party: a Study of Retrenchment and Revival* (London: Constable, 1965), p. 41.

12 David M. Roberts, ‘Clement Davies and the Liberal Party, 1929–56’, (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Wales, 1975), p. 92.

13 Alun Wyburn-Powell, *Clement Davies: Liberal Leader* (London: Politico’s, 2003), p. 143.

radicalism. Entering the House of Commons in 1950, Jo Grimond (representing the Orkney and Shetland division) found her ‘perpetually young, perpetually unfulfilled’, and yet ‘nervous and idle’.¹⁴ She had become a close personal friend of both Clement Attlee and Herbert Morrison.¹⁵ Certainly there had been sporadic, informal discussions between left-wing Liberals and the Labour Party leaders even before the end of the war, but nothing positive or concrete had ever emerged.¹⁶ And Megan was on especially amicable terms with the close-knit group of women Labour MPs, one of whom was later to recall, ‘Megan was a great favourite in the Labour women’s Parliament of 1945; we looked on her as one of us.’¹⁷

Almost all the women MPs from the post-1945 era were Labour. Lady Megan’s close, indeed intimate, personal relationship with Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, with whom she had now resumed her affair after something of a lull (largely because of family disapproval, notably that of her mother Dame Margaret) since 1940, had also brought her closer to the left. She was vehemently critical of local electoral pacts between the Liberal and Conservative Parties, and she frequently attacked what she considered to be Clement Davies’s right-wing stand. As early as December 1945 she had spoken out in defence of the nationalization programme of the Labour government: ‘We are not afraid of public control of coal, transport, electricity and water,’¹⁸ and a year later she was the only Liberal MP to defy the party whip by supporting the government’s Transport Bill.¹⁹ Her interest in the Liberal Party really was now being questioned. As one historian has written from the vantage point of 1965, ‘Furthermore even those parliamentary Liberals who have been members of the executive seldom have attended its meetings. Megan Lloyd George, during her Liberal days, never attended an executive meeting after the Second World War,’ something of an eye-opener.²⁰

In January 1947, the North Wales Conservative and Unionist Council (which had resolved not to oppose Lady Megan in 1945) decided that, as she had now given such consistent support to the Attlee administration in the Commons, they should select a Tory candidate in Anglesey at the next general election, a decision which placed the outcome there on a knife-edge.²¹ And persistent rumours that Lady Megan was on the point of joining the Labour Party intensified further during 1947 and 1948.²² Describing her as ‘the only [...] radical left in the Liberal Party’, influential north Wales trades union leader Huw T. Edwards implored her to ‘move left’ in November 1948,²³ and Herbert Morrison (the former Labour Foreign

14 Jo Grimond, *Memoirs* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 149.

15 See NLW MS 20,475C, nos. 3165–66, Attlee to Megan Lloyd George, 4 September 1948 and 10 March 1949.

16 Robert Ingham, ‘A Retreat From the Left?: the Liberal Party and Labour, 1945–55’, *Journal of Liberal History*, 67 (2010), 38–44; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Honor Balfour Papers, ‘Notes on Dinner with Herbert Morrison’, 22 June 1944.

17 Jean Mann, *Women in Parliament* (London: Odhams, 1962), p. 21.

18 *Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 7 December 1945.

19 *News Chronicle*, 20 December 1946.

20 Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party*, pp. 74–75.

21 *Western Mail*, 25 January 1947; Roberts, ‘Clement Davies’, p. 116.

22 See the *Evening Standard*, 2 December 1947.

23 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 December 1948.

Secretary and hugely influential within his party), by now a close personal friend, in particular urged her to change her political allegiance.²⁴

Before the end of the year, there was renewed dissension among the fractious group of Liberal MPs over its attitude to the Iron and Steel Bill of 1948. The leadership line was that they should vote against the measure, but a group of four dissident Liberal MPs, led by Lady Megan, believed that they should support it and propose suitable amendments at a later stage.²⁵ The matter caused much bickering and unpleasantness, but eventually Clement Davies and the party chief whip Frank Byers did manage to persuade all the Liberal MPs to enter the 'No' lobby and vote against the second reading of the Iron and Steel Bill.²⁶ But the episode demonstrated clearly the tensions which split the tiny party. MPs like Emrys Roberts and Lady Megan had been persuaded to vote against the measure wholly contrary to their natural inclinations. They did so again on the third reading of the bill in May 1949, but with much reluctance. Interviewed on the matter years later, Liberal chief whip Frank Byers still recalled vividly, 'Megan never forgave me to the end of her life for persuading her to vote against the nationalization of iron and steel.'²⁷ At around the same time, the Liberals were much involved in opposing the government's National Service (Amendment) Bill to increase the period of national military service from twelve to eighteen months.

Small wonder that Clement Davies appointed Lady Megan to be deputy leader of the Liberal Party in January 1949, an audacious move, wholly without party precedent, and undoubtedly designed to restrict her freedom of manoeuvre and keep her within the tiny Parliamentary Liberal Party.²⁸ But the contentious move caused loud alarm bells to ring in some sections of the party at once. Even in her new position, she underlined her party's need for 'a true Radical programme', adding somewhat impudently, 'Of course that means shedding our Right Wing.'²⁹ Generally, Davies and his chief whip Frank Byers failed conspicuously to create a 'united front' within the Liberal Party during the difficult, fractious years of the Attlee administrations.

It is not difficult to understand Davies's reasons for appointing Megan deputy party leader in January 1949. Her situation was wholly different from that of her brother Gwilym who had gradually drifted rightwards away from the party especially after 1945, almost unnoticed by the public at large, and formally losing the Liberal

24 *The Observer*, 2 January 1949.

25 Roberts, 'Clement Davies', pp. 118–19.

26 *Liberal News*, 26 November 1948.

27 Cited in David M. Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales', in *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s*, ed. by John Osmond (Llandysul: Gomer, 1985), p. 80.

28 *The Observer*, 2 January 1949; *The Times*, 22 January 1949. See also Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party*, p. 43, for interesting reflections on Lady Megan's selection as deputy party leader. He notes that there was a move during 1948 to remove both Clem Davies from the party leadership and Frank Byers, the party chief whip, and to replace Davies with Lady Megan.

29 *Western Morning News*, 12 January 1949.

Party whip at some point between 1946 and 1949.³⁰ Megan, however, was a much more high-profile public figure, one whose defection would undoubtedly occur in a blaze of publicity and recrimination. She was ever likely to become the focal point of discontent and disquiet within the Liberal Party and possibly the instigator of plots against Davies's tenuous leadership.³¹ But the appointment certainly caused raised eyebrows. Many questioned the need for a deputy leader, a new appointment, of a Parliamentary Liberal Party comprising just twelve MPs.

Certainly, by this point, like several other left-wing Liberal MPs including Dingle Foot, Tom Horabin and Emrys Roberts, she looked back with intense nostalgia to the glory days of the Labour victory of 1945 and the promise of Liberal support for genuinely radical policy initiatives and their implementation by the Attlee government. 'Ah, in those days we were a radical party,' she later reflected wistfully to journalist Alan Watkins on the new dawn of 1945.³² She saw subsequent Liberal policy leanings to the right as some kind of betrayal, a blatant forfeiture of its erstwhile radicalism once championed by her late father, whose memory she revered, during the first quarter of the twentieth century. But it is difficult to resist the conclusion that, by this point, her political philosophy displayed something of a political and intellectual torpor. She harked back with intense nostalgia to the radical policies advanced in the once famous 'Yellow Book' of 1928, *Britain's Industrial Future*, her father's brainchild, and the more recent Beveridge proposals *Full Employment in a Free Society*, 1942–43, which, she and Dingle Foot insisted, were still 'the text books of modern Liberalism'. They readily accused Clem Davies of jettisoning such accumulated wisdom in favour of 'ill-digested proposals', scarcely thought out and hardly distinguishable from the line then taken by the Tories.³³

In the general election of February 1950, Megan came to national prominence when she was given a national broadcast slot on Friday 10 February, one of only four granted to the Liberal Party during the campaign.³⁴ Again, she excelled: 'We know that the men and women who tramped the streets of our great cities and the valleys of my country in dull, hopeless despair searching for work were not free men and women, Freedom must be the solid rock on which we must build, but full employment must be the first pillar of our new society; social justice for all must be the other.'³⁵ At the very end of the broadcast, she told her listeners, 'Nos da. Hunan Lywodraeth i Gymru' ('Good night. Self-government for Wales'), a message lost on many of her listeners nationwide but fully understood throughout Anglesey.

Forced to spend almost the whole of the election campaign within her extremely marginal constituency, there was no diminution in the power of her oratory on

30 See J. Graham Jones, 'Major Gwilym Lloyd-George and the Pembrokeshire Election of 1950', *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society*, 11 (2002), 100–120, at p. 110; Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party, 1895–1970* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971), p. 251.

31 Wyburn-Powell, *Clement Davies*, pp. 174–75.

32 Alan Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma* (London: MacGibbon and Gee, 1966), p. 38.

33 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Bonham-Carter Papers 240, ff. 160–63, 'Memorandum by Lady Megan Lloyd George & Mr Dingle Foot', 20 May 1950, at f. 163.

34 H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 127.

35 Cited in Terry Breverton, *100 Great Welsh Women* (St Athan: Glyndŵr Publishing, 2001), p. 98.

the stump. Reflecting on the popular response locally to her addresses during the campaign, the Labour Party organizer for north Wales noted, ‘You could hear the emotion rising. I couldn’t help feeling the desire to join her, and I had to remember that I was there to help defeat her.’³⁶ Surprisingly, against all the pointers, she increased her majority in Anglesey to 1929 votes (an increase of 848), the result of her personal popularity on the island and the efficiency of the local Liberal organization there. Following this, his second consecutive defeat, Cledwyn Hughes seriously considered turning his back once and for all on political life to concentrate on building up his burgeoning legal practice, and indeed his reputation as a solicitor was being much enhanced at this time by his handling of several high-profile local legal cases. Now there were no more than nine Liberal MPs in the Commons, five of them from Wales. Megan was at once re-appointed to the position of deputy party leader.

In May 1950, she and Dingle Foot MP co-authored a lengthy memorandum protesting against the internal organization of the Liberal Party.³⁷ Together with Emrys Roberts (Merionethshire), they were simultaneously engaged in clandestine negotiations with Herbert Morrison to prepare the ground for a ‘Lib-Lab’ pact as a means of preventing the Conservatives from attaining power. In March, Lady Megan and Emrys Roberts had both chosen to abstain in the Liberal Party amendment to the King’s Speech, supported by the Conservative opposition, which would have censured the Labour government for rising prices, an especially sensitive issue at this time of notable lingering post-war austerity which much irked the populace. Their action caused much consternation in Welsh Liberal circles and left Alderman Alfred E. Hughes, the chair of the Welsh Liberal movement, with little alternative but to issue a statement indicating that the party in Wales would not take any action against the two MPs because of their abstention.³⁸ It would seem clear that party leader Clem Davies and committed right-wingers like Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, the Liberal MP for Carmarthenshire, knew nothing of the on-going covert discussions between Herbert Morrison, Lady Megan and Emrys Roberts.

Then, in November, matters came to a head when Megan and three followers – Dingle Foot, Emrys Roberts and Philip Hopkins – staged a revolt inside the Liberal Party, threatening to join Labour immediately and causing Clement Davies seriously to consider resigning as party leader. Eventually the beleaguered Clem Davies steadfastly stood his ground and remained as party leader, the storm blew over, and the fractious party remained intact, but Megan remained obsessed with what she insisted was a distinct ‘drift to the Right in the Liberal Party – a drift away from the old radical tradition’,³⁹ and with what she regarded as Clement Davies’s weak-kneed leadership: ‘There is no telling what Davies will say or do next.’⁴⁰ When the next parliamentary session began that November, Megan was predictably outspoken at a meeting of the Liberal Party Committee: ‘The Liberal ship is listing

36 Ibid.

37 Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, London, Lord Herbert Samuel Papers A/130 (30).

38 *Manchester Guardian*, 11 November 1950.

39 Cited in Robert Pitman, *What happened to the Liberals? A New Light on the 1951 Election and a Glimpse into the Future* (London: Tribune Pamphlet Series, 1951).

40 Cited in Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 213.

to the right and almost sunk beneath the waves.⁴¹ The same month she delivered at Menai Bridge within her constituency a pungent assault on what she perceived to be Clem Davies's 'Keep Right' approach during his leadership.⁴² In the parliament of 1950–51, with two other Liberals (Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville), she was criticized for often voting with the Labour government in defiance of official Liberal Party policy (thus facilitating the efforts of the Labour government to cling to office), and it was often conjectured that she was one of three or possibly four Liberal MPs likely to cross the floor of the Commons and join the Labour Party.⁴³

When the 'frustrating and frustrated Parliament' elected in February 1950 was compelled to go to the country in the autumn of the following year because of the government's very small overall majority in the House, Lady Megan faced yet another extremely close three-cornered fight in Anglesey.⁴⁴ During the intervening period the Labour Party in Wales had spared no effort to devote attention to the very marginal division, attempting valiantly to increase its personal membership there.⁴⁵ Cledwyn Hughes fought the seat for the third general election in succession, and local Conservatives had secured a notably strong contender in O. Meurig Roberts (well-known and highly respected on the island as the administrator of the Caernarvonshire and Anglesey General Hospital) who launched hard hitting personal attacks on Megan: 'True Liberals in Anglesey are not at present represented by any candidate,' while the performance of the Liberal Party within the House of Commons marked them out, he claimed, as 'a very small party which cannot even agree among themselves'.⁴⁶ Throughout the intensively-fought local campaign, Meurig Roberts insisted that local Tories must not vote tactically for Lady Megan simply in the hope of preventing a Labour victory in the election, and it would seem that they truly heeded his advice. It was suggested that Lady Megan, like Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville, had been singled out for special attention by the Tories because of their general support for the Labour government.⁴⁷ In the event, a substantial upsurge in the Conservative poll in Anglesey, fully 21.7 per cent, deprived Megan of victory by 595 votes.

At last, on his third dogged attempt, Cledwyn Hughes had succeeded in capturing the highly marginal seat, although his personal vote had increased by no more than 55 in total. Hughes's local campaign had been further strengthened by his sterling work as a Labour county councillor for the Kingston, Holyhead ward, the youngest county councillor on the island in fact. He had also served with distinction as the clerk to the Holyhead Town Council. These roles had much enhanced his reputation throughout the division and had given a local dimension and application to the policies implemented by the Attlee governments of 1945–51. The very same

41 Ibid., p. 214.

42 *News Chronicle*, 25 November 1950.

43 Geoffrey Sell, 'Clement Davies – the Forgotten Leader', *Radical Quarterly* 4 (1987), 39–50.

44 The phrase is that used in Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 352.

45 NLW, Labour Party (Wales) Archive, vol. 7, minutes of the North Wales sub-committee, 5 May 1951.

46 *Holyhead and Anglesey Mail*, 19 October 1951.

47 *The Times*, 24 October 1951.

period had witnessed a marked improvement in the Labour Party's organization in the division. At the same general election Megan's ally and political soul-mate, Emrys O. Roberts, who had represented Merioneth in the Liberal interest since 1945, also lost his seat to Labour's T. W. Jones who had much in common with Cledwyn Hughes in his nonconformist, radical background. These were the only two divisions throughout the realm which the Labour Party succeeded in capturing in 1951, and the outcome now seemed to suggest powerfully that the Labour Party was now the voice of rural Wales.⁴⁸

For Megan it was a severe personal blow as she had, for whatever reason, been more confident of re-election than in 1950.⁴⁹ Reflecting on her ignominious defeat to Liberal elder statesman Lord Samuel, the octogenarian Liberal leader in the House of Lords (who had actually travelled all the way to Holyhead to speak on her behalf during the campaign), she wrote, 'It was a blow, all the greater because this time, unlike the last election, we thought the signs and portents were better, and that we should just pull it off. *There is no doubt that a substantial number of Liberals voted Tory. The truth is that I am too left for the modern Liberal taste.*'⁵⁰ 'Anglesey moves to the right' commented the local press.⁵¹

For the first time since 1890, no member of the Lloyd George dynasty represented a Welsh constituency in parliament. And even Cledwyn Hughes readily admitted that his personal elation following his victory was tempered by 'an element of sadness' at Megan's defeat as he recalled the close association which had prevailed locally for years between his father, the Revd H. D. Hughes, and Lady Megan. As a thirteen-year-old schoolboy recovering from surgery, he recalled his father taking him proudly to the House of Commons to take tea with Lady Megan who had welcomed them so warmly. His father had been annoyed and felt betrayed at his son's decision to stand as a Labour candidate and had resolved to play no part in the local campaign on either side.⁵² And when he arrived at Westminster to take up his seat, he was congratulated by Herbert Morrison who then commented ruefully, 'Mind you, Megan is a great loss.'⁵³

Megan's long term lover, the Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, wrote at length to console her in a strongly-worded and encouraging missive:

It can't be for long that you will be outside [the House of Commons].
It can't. For Violet [Bonham-Carter] it is the final and devastating

48 See D. Ben Rees, *Cofiant Jim Griffiths: Arwr Glew y Werin* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2014), p. 174; Arglwydd Maelor, *Fel Hyn y Bu* (Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1970), p. 149; and Emyr Price, *Yr Arglwydd Cledwyn o Benrhos* (Pen-y-Groes, Gwasg Mei, 1990), p. 15.

49 See Parliamentary Archive, House of Lords, London, Lord Herbert Samuel Papers A/155/xiii/161, Megan Lloyd George to Samuel, 9 November 1951.

50 *Ibid.* The emphasis is mine.

51 *Holyhead and Anglesey Mail*, 2 November 1951.

52 Jones, *A Radical Life*, pp. 179–80.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 224.

end;⁵⁴ for Clem D[avies], the last step but one down the Gadarene slope. For you, it is a rest; a short one, probably most beneficent in every way. After twenty-two years, you can afford it; it will give you a new perspective, a new appreciation; you have nothing to learn, &, therefore, will be missing nothing; it will open new opportunities which will send you back an even more important person when, *very soon*, you come. I *know* it will be very soon.⁵⁵

Predictably, feverish speculation immediately surrounded Lady Megan's future political intentions. Many observers asked the same questions as Gwilym Roberts – 'What is going to be Lady Megan's political future? Will she stick to the Liberal Party or will she join Labour?'⁵⁶ Initially, a buoyant Megan told the local press in an interview, 'Yr wyf yn barod am yr ornest nesaf a chofiwch y dôf o gyff ymladdgar.'⁵⁷ She soon elaborated to her former constituents, 'I am not of a retiring age nor of a retiring disposition. I am ready for the next fight whenever it comes.'⁵⁸ As she had been the president of the tenacious Parliament for Wales campaign ever since its launch in July 1950, there was considerable speculation that she might now well join Plaid Cymru.⁵⁹ In December, together with her ever supportive, loyal sister Lady Olwen Carey-Evans, she left for a tour of the USA and Canada, telling Anglesey Liberals, 'I would sooner go down with my limehouse colours flying than abandon my radical principles [...] I have fought a good fight and I have kept my faith. That is the only important thing in my public life. My conscience is perfectly clear.'⁶⁰

Some commentators conjectured that she might possibly stand again as a Liberal in Anglesey or perhaps contest a by-election in an English constituency.⁶¹ James Callaghan (the Labour MP for Cardiff South) urged her strongly to return to the House of Commons: 'I am genuinely sorry you are not in the House & I very much hope you will come back. We cannot sacrifice grace, charm, wit, passion as easily as that. But you must come back as a member of our Party. *First, because we are right about the malaise & the remedies for the 20th century. Secondly, because there is no other way back.*'⁶² Another regular correspondent, as Megan traversed the North American continent, was, predictably, Philip Noel-Baker who wrote

54 A reference to Lady Violet Bonham-Carter (1887–1969), Asquith's daughter and Lady Megan's especial political and personal *bête noir*, who had just been very narrowly defeated as the Liberal candidate in the Colne Valley division of Yorkshire in the recent general election. The Conservative Party had put up no candidate against her there and Churchill had even travelled to the constituency to address a public meeting on her behalf, leading to realistic Liberal aspirations of capturing the marginal seat.

55 NLW MS 23257B, ff. 152–55, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 29 October 1951.

56 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 October 1951.

57 *Herald Môn*, 30 Hydref 1951: 'I'm ready for the next contest and remember that I come from fighting stock'.

58 *North Wales Chronicle*, 2 November 1951.

59 *Western Mail*, 27 October 1951.

60 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 December 1951.

61 *Ibid.*

62 NLW MS 22752C, f. 38, James Callaghan to Megan Lloyd George, 31 December 1951. The emphasis is mine.

from a Westminster buzzing with insistent excitement that his lover was indeed on the point of ‘crossing the line’ to join the ranks of the Labour Party which was by now widely regarded as her true political home:

I’ve been thinking, too, so much about your big political plunge. & how you’ll handle it, when you get home [...] I think, so far as I can judge, Edgar [Granville]’s has gone very well – I’ve not seen him, but that’s the comment. Archie [Sinclair] has been seeing Hugh Gaitskell, & is still asking for *pacts* [between the Liberals and the Labour Party]; Herbert [Morrison] is still stalling as hard as ever. I think they may try to get you to take Anglesey for us – they’re so sure you could have won it; if it’s really finally & absolutely out (& I should fully approve if you so decided), I think you ought to see Clem [Attlee] at once & say so right away, before you see anyone else at all. Dear me, how exciting to think of you coming back to the House – I can’t wait for the day.⁶³

Noel-Baker’s suggestion that Megan might take Anglesey for the Labour Party was bizarre as this would have meant unseating the sitting MP Cledwyn Hughes who had rendered the party stalwart service on the island and was personally highly popular and respected among his new constituents. It is extremely unlikely that the idea would have appealed to Megan at all.

After her departure from the House of Commons, Megan still despaired of what she considered to be Clement Davies’s weak-kneed, inconsistent and feckless leadership of his party. In June 1952, Morgan Phillips, the general secretary of the Labour Party, wrote privately, ‘Of course he is extremely ineffective and few people take him seriously [...] The internal position of the Liberal Party appears to be getting worse than ever. Megan Lloyd George and the staff of the Radical Action Group have been refraining from attending recent conferences and Council meetings, and the councils of the party appear to be dominated [...] by those people who wish to work in association with the Conservative Party.’⁶⁴ That summer, Megan had a luncheon date with Clem Attlee following which the Labour leader wrote rather wistfully to his brother Tom, ‘I wish that she would join us, but she thinks it is her duty to keep the Liberal remnant away from the Tories.’⁶⁵

It was widely anticipated throughout 1952 and 1953 that the former left-wing Liberal MPs with strong radical inclinations – people like Megan Lloyd George, Emrys Roberts, Dingle Foot, Edgar Granville and Wilfrid Roberts – would give up on their frustrating, uphill battle to veer the party to the left and eventually join the Labour Party. Indeed Granville, acting wholly on his own initiative, took the plunge as early as January 1952 and actually stood, unsuccessfully, as the Labour candidate for his old seat of Eye in Suffolk in the general elections of both 1955 and

63 NLW MS 23258D, ff. 34–36, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 27 February 1952.

64 People’s History Museum, Manchester, Labour Party Archives, Morgan Phillips Papers, Phillips to Mark Starr, 24 June 1952.

65 Cited in Breverton, *100 Great Welsh Women*, p. 99, and in Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 502.

1959, but failed to dislodge the sitting Conservative incumbent who had defeated him there in 1951.

Eventually, in November 1952, Megan Lloyd George refused an invitation to stand again as the Liberal candidate for Anglesey, asserting that she had ‘latterly been disturbed by the pronounced tendency of the official Liberal Party to drift towards the Right’.⁶⁶ Proudly, she referred back to her initial adoption on the island fully twenty-five years earlier in 1927: ‘I first came to Anglesey as the Radical daughter of a Radical leader.’⁶⁷ But times had changed much during the intervening period. And she also tendered her resignation as the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, a position which she had held through thick and thin since January 1949. She did so in terms which suggested that the irrevocable parting of the ways was not far off. The radical wing of the Liberal Party now had no MPs, and was consequently unable to mount an effective challenge to what it regarded as Clement Davies’s uninspiring leadership. Megan wavered as 1952 gave way to 1953, displaying what the press dubbed a ‘tactful – or tactical coyness’, a ‘sphinx-like silence’.⁶⁸ When a new body, the Radical Reform Group, was set up within the Liberal Party in 1953 in an attempt to guide the party to the left, its leaders – Dingle Foot, Desmond Banks and Peter Grafton – all believed that Megan could be a most influential member if she delivered a series of addresses to local party gatherings. But generally, although she showed some interest, she remained stubbornly aloof from the new initiative.

She may have hesitated formally to join the Labour Party at this point because of the difficulty of finding a suitable seat in England, and because entering the faction-racked Labour Party of the early 1950s – divided rigidly and bitterly into Bevanites and Gaitskellites who gave the impression of being two irreconcilable warring factions – was an ugly, unappealing prospect. During her period within the House of Commons, Megan had remained on reasonably amicable terms with both Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan, both of whose personal qualities she certainly recognized and applauded. And the Labour Party’s internal strife had come to a head during the course of the Labour Party conference held at Morecambe in October 1952. The following February, Philip Noel-Baker wrote to Megan to warn her of the dire state of affairs which still prevailed within the feud-racked Labour Party: ‘Jim G[riffiths] told me that they had a fantastically bad Nat[ional] Executive [Committee] this morning. They began at 10 a.m. & ended at 2.30 p.m., having sat without a break; the last 3½ hours were on the Bevanite Brains Trusts, & he said he had never seen such bad feeling or heard such bitter talk in the Party before. It’s bad. And I’m afraid we haven’t finished with it yet.’⁶⁹ And there was conjecture that the Conservatives, hoping to reap the potential reward of a successful outcome to the Korean question, might well call a snap general election that summer.

Lady Megan certainly possessed many attractive personal qualities and assets, and she was highly popular among her former fellow MPs at Westminster. One

66 Liberal Party of Wales Archives (privately owned), Megan Lloyd George to W. Shubert Jones, 5 November 1952.

67 Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 238.

68 Columns from the *Guardian* and the *Western Mail* as cited in Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 238.

69 NLW MS 23259C, ff. 19–21, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 25 February 1953.

of the difficulties was finding a suitable seat for her to contest within Wales. She regarded herself as, first and foremost, a Welsh MP and one who was extremely reluctant to migrate to an alien English or Scottish constituency. There was, however, an array of problems in selecting Megan as a Labour candidate in a Welsh division. Although the party then held no fewer than 27 out of the 36 Welsh seats, a record high, many of these were, first and foremost, predominantly coal-mining divisions and rigidly controlled by the trades unions. Many of the Labour MPs who represented these divisions were themselves former miners and trades union officials, among them people like Nye Bevan (Ebbw Vale), S. O. Davies (Merthyr Tydfil) and Jim Griffiths (Llanelli). Moreover, Megan was now fully 50 years of age, while many of the miners' MPs were younger, unlikely to retire from parliament for decades and, of course, held seats which were totally safe for life. There were some within the Labour Party in Wales who saw Megan as, first and foremost, an outspoken zealot for Welsh devolutionary initiatives and thus wholly unacceptable as a Welsh Labour MP as her beliefs were diametrically opposed to those of the Labour Party as a whole. There was much impatient anticipation at this time of the final report of a sub-committee set up by the Welsh Regional Council of Labour in May 1952 to examine the party's policies for Welsh affairs.⁷⁰ Megan's ongoing championship of the now struggling Parliament for Wales Campaign was widely regarded as 'an undesirable aberration' in the ranks of Welsh Labour.⁷¹ There were indeed some Divisional Labour Parties in south Wales which had never even considered the adoption of a female candidate at all.

In a long, fascinating, strongly-worded letter published in the north Wales press at the end of November 1953, a correspondent named H. E. Hugheston-Roberts, writing in the wake of a television broadcast by Lady Megan Lloyd George the previous week in which she had insisted that the Labour Party ever since the time of Keir Hardie at the turn of the twentieth century 'had advocated self-government for all creeds and races', and was still the political party most likely to grant devolutionary concessions to Wales, made a number of highly relevant points:

So where does Lady Megan go for honey now? The Socialist hives have enough troubles of their own, the old Liberal apiary is tattered and torn, housing but a few decrepit drones. The Welsh Queen buzzes here and there and, at Chester, settled momentarily on a blood red hive flannelling and wooing of Communist support. At Colwyn Bay we had Mr Gwynfor Evans bleating like a lost sheep. Shepherd [Herbert] Morrison had slammed the fold of the Socialist door in his face. At Liverpool Mr Cledwyn Hughes lost his theme song and had forgotten all about his maiden speech in the House of Commons. He is the first to bow before the big stick. Where does Mr Goronwy Roberts stand? Will he defy the dictates of Transport House and still advocate a Parliament for Wales, or will he, too, forsake his latest love; or will he style himself a Welsh Nationalist Socialist,

70 NLW, Labour Party (Wales) Archive, file 28, Cliff Prothero to Carol Johnson, 14 May 1952.
71 The phrase is that used in Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 238.

risking a fight against an official Socialist at the next election? It is an interesting situation with the prospect of a further cleavage among the Socialists – Attleites, Bevanites and now perhaps Meganites.⁷²

It was at this very time, the autumn of 1953, that the ongoing Parliament for Wales Campaign was not only splitting bitterly the ranks of Welsh Labour, but was also causing ructions at Westminster. Herbert Morrison, it was clear to all, was implacably hostile to any suggestion of Welsh concessions, and even Clement Attlee, taunted by the Conservative MP Harry Crookshank in the House of Commons that his party had done more for Welsh interests than the Labour Party as manifested in the appointment in 1951 of Sir David Maxwell Fyfe to be Minister for Welsh Affairs in the new Churchill administration, had but little patience with the Welsh demands. In the words of the south Wales press, ‘Mr Attlee’s crossness reveals the stresses which wrack Welsh Socialists as a result of the proscription of the Parliament for Wales Campaign. In future it will be heresy, punishable with political death, for a Socialist MP to appear on the stage with Lady Megan Lloyd George and her pierrots [...] And Lady Megan has been thrown out with the Welsh Nationalist bathwater.’⁷³

Two crucial PWC public meetings, both to be addressed by Lady Megan, loomed – one at the Socialist bastion of Tonypandy in the Rhondda valleys (where she shared the platform with two Welsh Labour MPs sympathetic to Welsh devolution, namely Tudor Watkins [Brecon and Radnor] and T. W. Jones [Merioneth]) on 27 November, the other at Trecynon, Aberdare the next evening.⁷⁴ Within days, she also addressed a capacity audience at the Llanelli parish hall at a public meeting chaired by Alderman Gwynfor Evans, where she shared the platform with Ifan ab Owen Edwards. Here she was outspoken in her condemnation of the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire, to her mind a generally ineffectual nominated body set up by the Attlee government in 1948. To Megan, it was no more than ‘a bone with no marrow in it. No self-respecting corgi would give it more than a sniff’.⁷⁵ In her opinion, the current arrangement that Welsh affairs should be debated in the Commons on only a single day was ‘absolutely scandalous’.

When questioned from the audience, however, about her own political future, she simply replied rather coyly that she had ‘strong radical tendencies’, but refused to elaborate any further. About a fortnight earlier she had appeared on the Welsh television service to respond to searching questions from a panel of journalists on the Parliament for Wales Campaign. Towards the end of the programme one of the panel, Anthony Davies, asked her pointedly, ‘We have heard plenty tonight about the future of Wales. What about the future of Lady Megan Lloyd George?’ With a smile, she responded, ‘I will say that is neither here nor there tonight.’⁷⁶ At this

72 H. E. Hughston-Roberts, *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 20 November 1953.

73 *South Wales Echo*, 21 November 1953, column headed ‘Two Surprises’.

74 See the reports in the *Western Mail*, 24 and 28 November 1951.

75 *South Wales Evening Post*, 30 November 1953. There is also a detailed report of this meeting in the *Llanelli Mercury*, 3 December 1953. I hope to examine elsewhere in the near future Lady Megan’s extensive involvement in the Parliament for Wales Campaign.

76 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 November 1953.

crucial point in her political career, she always told public audiences in Wales that she remained ‘radical to the core. You all know where my heart is. It is with *y werin bobl* [the common people]. That is where it has always been and that is where it still is today.’⁷⁷

In her public speeches throughout the spring of 1954, Megan, disappointed by the contents of the extensive party policy document *Labour’s Policy for Wales* published in March, appealed fervently to the Labour Party to adopt a more favourable attitude to the Parliament for Wales Campaign and devolutionary initiatives more generally. In a powerful peroration at Mold, a town which she had not visited for fully 31 years, in March, she was at her most eloquent: ‘Naturally I regret that the Regional Council of Labour has turned down the proposal for a Parliament for Wales. On the other hand I very much welcome the reference made to the spirit which animates the proposals for a Welsh Parliament, particularly to its recognition that, when we look back to the pre-war days of mass unemployment and economic stagnation, it is easy to understand why Welshmen should seek to control their own affairs.’⁷⁸ She applauded the section of *Labour’s Policy for Wales* in which the Regional Council of Labour ‘expressed its determination to do all in its power to ensure the preservation of the Welsh language and the distinctive culture of Wales’. Warming to her theme, she proceeded to discuss various possible devolutionary initiatives. The concession of ‘a Minister without a department’, such as had existed since 1951, was ‘a very small advance and quite unreal in present day circumstances’, while even the appointment of a fully-fledged Secretary of State for Wales ‘would definitely not meet the needs of Wales any more than it meets the needs of Scotland [...] The only effective answer is a parliament elected by all the people of Wales to deal with Welsh problems.’

Some commentators, however, believed that Lady Megan was not sufficiently harsh in her condemnation of the contents of *Labour’s Policy for Wales* which, they argued, she should have assailed much more virulently. ‘The Parliament for Wales Campaign is tottering to a close,’ wrote Pwll y Llygad at the end of March. ‘The pilot is dropping herself – though it will not happen all at once and care will be taken to drown the splash.’⁷⁹ Critics believed that the lukewarm policy document had simply ‘take[n] the Labour Party forward to where the Tories stood in 1949. For months this column had had no doubt about Lady Megan’s political direction – to Socialism (which her father dismissed as subversive) and to the House of Commons via an English seat.’

But it was also argued that the Labour Party machine might well prove reluctant to ‘plant’ their new recruit, however distinguished a catch, in a safe Labour seat in England. It was felt that many experienced Labour MPs who held marginal divisions by the skin of their teeth now felt that they deserved to stand in much safer Labour territory. Another important factor was that the actions of the Boundary Commission, really a Labour creation, might well result in the ousting of several

77 NLW, Elwyn Roberts Papers, file 42, unlabelled press cutting [c. November 1953].

78 Lady Megan Lloyd George, speech at Mold, 11 March 1954: *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 March 1954. On Lady Megan’s political standpoint at this time, see the prescient article in *Y Cymro*, 26 Mawrth 1954.

79 Article by Pwll y Llygad in the *South Wales Echo*, 29 March 1954.

Labour MPs from their divisions: ‘It threatens Socialist babies with eviction in their own bath water. Cherubic Sir Frank Soskice,⁸⁰ seraphic Alice Bacon,⁸¹ may find the bottom out of their bath. Both their seats are in jeopardy. And don’t imagine that Labour stalwarts are going to give Welsh Megan roast beef and allow English Alice [Bacon] to cry wee, wee, wee all the way home.’⁸² And discussion of Megan’s political future was frequently coupled with the unrelieved pouring of scorn on the leaders of the PWC.⁸³

The speculation concerning her political future was indeed intense, especially as general election fever was once more in the air. It was even suggested that she might well stand as an ‘Independent Home Ruler’ against her old friend Jim Griffiths in the Llanelli division, thus producing ‘the most scintillating contest of the century in Wales against a background of generations of Home Rule tradition’. There was, of course, no question that the veteran Griffiths might be defeated, as he enjoyed one of the largest majorities in the whole of the United Kingdom – no fewer than 28,416 votes in 1951 and 31,626 votes in 1950 – but her challenge to him ‘would crystallise opinion on this burning issue as nothing else could. And I am sure he would feel honoured to have so redoubtable an opponent.’⁸⁴ In the face of such conjecture, Philip Noel-Baker urged his mistress to ‘move left’ without delay: ‘My little beloved, I have so terribly wanted you to be in the [Labour] Party tonight! It would have meant so much to me if you’d been there, and it would have *made my happiness* so much more intense and complete.’⁸⁵ Over subsequent months he kept up his barrage of seductive persuasion, writing to her in October: ‘I repeat, therefore, what I’ve said a thousand times before – you’re the most important woman in the world; you, by yourself, can win the next election for the Labour Party. That *may* mean everything in getting peace instead of war.’⁸⁶

The speculation intensified. Indeed, there were rumours that autumn that Lady Megan, disillusioned rather by attitudes towards her in the ranks of the Labour Party, had resolved to re-trace her steps back to the ranks of the Liberals:

‘Back into the Liberal fold tiptoes Lady Megan Lloyd George. Her delicate flirtation with the Socialists nears its end. Wary as ever is Lady Megan’s tread. But to the perceptive ear it beats like thunder [...] If she retreats another couple of paces she will find the red carpet under her feet. It is waiting, It is unrolled. For Lady Megan

- 80 Sir Frank Soskice was the Labour MP for the Sheffield Neepsend constituency and a former Attorney-General under Attlee from April until October 1951. He had returned to the shadow cabinet in 1952 and his political career seemed to be in the ascendant.
- 81 A former schoolteacher, Alice Bacon had been the Labour MP for the Leeds North-East division since 1945. Her seat seemed likely to disappear in the wake of any redistribution of parliamentary constituencies. In 1955 she duly transferred to the Leeds South East division, a seat she represented until her retirement from parliament at the 1970 general election.
- 82 Article by Pwll y Llygad in the *South Wales Echo*, 29 March 1954.
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 March 1954, ‘Cornel y Cymro: Welsh Notes’, ed. by Llygad Llwhchr; ‘Will Lady Megan Fight for Home Rule as an Independent?’.
- 85 NLW MS 23260C, ff. 46–48, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 1 April 1954.
- 86 NLW MS 23260C, ff. 195–97, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 11 October 1954.

the Liberals prepare a frolic welcome. They will forgive all. They will hand her back the party vice-presidency which she resigned in 1952. They will pile party honours on her. Merrily on the spit sizzles the fattened calf.⁸⁷

Only two Liberals, it was reported, were opposed to such a backtracking course of action on Lady Megan's part – her old political arch-enemy Lady Violet Bonham-Carter (whose ongoing enmity with Megan helped to perpetuate the old ancestral split of December 1916)⁸⁸ and John Williams Hughes who had been chosen as the prospective Liberal candidate for Anglesey and who might now well be deprived of his prize by the backtracking, still politically ambitious Lady Megan: 'For if she is going to find a Liberal seat again, it has to be a Welsh one.'⁸⁹ And Welsh Liberal seats were by 1954 very thin on the ground. It was considered most unlikely that Clement Davies, although now clearly drawing to the end of his stint as Liberal Party leader, would also retire from his pretty safe Montgomeryshire citadel which he had represented ever since 1929. Extremely marginal Carmarthenshire was retained by Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris only by virtue of local Tory non-opposition. 'And no appeal to chivalry is likely to budge spritely young Mr Roderic Bowen, 41, from his solid seat (Liberal majority 10,262) at Cardiganshire.'⁹⁰

Might Lady Megan, therefore, now seek again the Liberal nomination for Anglesey which she had represented continuously from 1929 until 1951? And she was fully capable of defending the now often forgotten record of the Liberal Party on occasion. During a PWC rally at Pembroke Dock (part of the constituency only recently represented by her brother Major Gwilym) in November, a heckler mocked a reference to the Liberal Party. 'You have not heard of it? Where have you been living? The Liberal Party have certainly made their mark in history. I think things would be very much different for the workers had it not been for the Liberals for they started the social services.'⁹¹ Loyalty to her father and his legacy clearly prevailed.

But the prospect of a return to the Liberal Party did not now really appeal to Lady Megan at all. Philip Noel-Baker urged her to give serious attention to standing as the Labour candidate for the safe Labour seat of Wrexham where the sitting veteran Labour MP Robert Richards was in conspicuously poor health and most likely to retire from the Commons at the next general election. Noel-Baker conjectured that Wrexham Socialists might well be enamoured by the prospect of selecting Megan as Richards's parliamentary successor, while her friend, Alderman Huw T. Edwards, would be able to persuade Attlee to arrange a peerage for the ailing Bob Richards who would probably savour migration to the Upper House: 'Certainly Clem [Attlee] can be counted on to do *his* part, if there's any hope of

87 'Politics and Personalities', column by Cross-Bencher in the *Sunday Express*, 17 October 1954.

88 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 293.

89 'Politics and Personalities', *Sunday Express*, 17 October 1954.

90 Ibid.

91 *West Wales Guardian*, 19 November 1954.

your coming here.’⁹²

Philip’s calculations were probably based on faulty logic as it was most unlikely that Robert Richards would have agreed to accept a peerage.⁹³ Unexpectedly, however, Richards suffered a fatal heart attack on 22 December, an event which prompted a further impassioned missive from Noel-Baker to Megan: ‘Wrexham is the perfect seat for you [...] Therefore, I don’t believe you should miss the chance.’⁹⁴ One of the main problems in pursuing such a course was that Megan had still not gone over to the Labour Party, at least formally. But Philip depicted this as no more than a minor difficulty: ‘It is, of course, possible that they will say that you ought to have been a member of the party before; I mean, the doctrinaire Labourites. But in fact the *rule* doesn’t apply to *adopted* candidates, only to people on the *Panel*.’ However, he acknowledged, ‘It w[oul]d be far nicer if you c[oul]d be a member [of the Labour Party], & have a General Election without being a candidate, & then come in at a By-Election. This w[oul]d disarm all criticism [...] But things don’t happen as we want them.’

Towards the end of this long letter, Noel-Baker made a rather odd comment, given Megan’s background and beliefs: ‘And if you can’t *bear* the House, you can leave at the General Election, & become a Peeress(!)’. His reference to the possibility of her entering the House of Lords should she find life in the Commons distasteful and irksome was almost outrageous, especially given her reaction to her father’s acceptance of a peerage ten years earlier. But Philip, desperately anxious for her return to Westminster, stuck to his guns. Within days he had written again to inform her that there was great enthusiasm in the Labour Party that she might well stand at Wrexham. The only drawback was the consequent likely necessity to stand in two parliamentary elections, a by-election and a general election, separated by only a few months.⁹⁵

As 1954 gave way to 1955, his eagerness for Megan’s return to the Commons only grew. Early in the new year, he wrote to give her the voting figures for the Wrexham and the Flintshire East divisions in the general elections for 1950 and 1951.⁹⁶ It would seem that Noel-Baker’s aspirations, intensely believed by him, were a mere pipe-dream. Megan stood little chance of adoption for Wrexham where there were several strong possible candidates for the nomination.⁹⁷ (One of these, James Idwal Jones, a local schoolmaster and the brother of T. W. Jones, the Labour MP for Merioneth, was indeed later chosen and held the division comfortably). There is no evidence that Megan courted the nomination, although she did go so far as to discuss the matter with her friend Alderman Huw T. Edwards, a course of events which pleased Philip who wrote to her: ‘I’m very happy about your talk with H. T. I think everything is as good as possible. If they force this on you, well & good, & it will, as you say, be right. If they don’t E. Flints stands ready,

92 NLW MS 23260C, ff. 248–51, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 15 November 1954 (‘From the Chamber’).

93 Jones, *A Radical Life*, pp. 245–46.

94 NLW MS 23260C, ff. 291–94, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 23 December 1954.

95 NLW MS 23260C, ff. 298–99, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 28 December 1954.

96 NLW MS 23261C, f. 1, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 11 January 1955.

97 See the sensible reflections in Jones, *A Radical Life*, pp. 245–46.

& will be cast-iron for you. And now you don't have to worry any more.'⁹⁸ This reference is equally odd. Flintshire East was held by Mrs Eirene White, daughter of Lloyd George's confidante and Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet Dr Thomas Jones CH (1870–1955), only since the previous year. She was a committed, steely and ambitious career politician, still only 42 years of age (seven years younger than Megan) who anticipated a long and successful career at Westminster and a good prospect of ministerial office should she retain her marginal seat where she was run close by the local Tories. There was no question that she would have voluntarily retired from politics simply in order to create a vacancy for Megan.

During 1953–54, however, a protracted series of conversations with Clement Attlee had persuaded Megan that the Labour Party was now the essential voice of British radicalism, and by the beginning of the new year – 1955 – she had made up her mind irrevocably that she must now formally join the ranks of the Labour Party without delay, but she made it clear that this would not herald any diminution in her enthusiasm for devolutionary measure for the Welsh nation. At the beginning of March 1955 she gave her support to the Government of Wales Bill, based largely on the constitution of Northern Ireland which had been in operation for more than three decades, introduced in the Commons by S. O. Davies, the highly individualistic Labour MP for Merthyr Tydfil. Davies acted largely on his own initiative, totally spurning the advice of his parliamentary colleagues within the PWC like Cledwyn Hughes and Goronwy Roberts. In public Megan applauded his stand: 'Mr S. O. Davies and his colleagues deserve the warmest gratitude and congratulations of all those who believe that a reasonable measure of devolution is essential in the interests of Wales and her people [...] I hope the Bill will receive a wide circulation in Wales, that it will be judged on its merits without prejudice, and that all those who agree with its broad provisions will make their views known to their MPs before March 4.'⁹⁹

Indeed, the ensuing debate in the Commons on 4 March was widely billed as a red-letter day in the Welsh calendar when Welsh constitutional issues would be debated in the House for the first time since E. T. John's abortive Government of Wales Bill in 1914, more than forty years earlier. It was known that the ambitious measure was to be opposed during the debate mainly by Megan's brother Gwilym, now Churchill's Home Secretary and Minister for Welsh Affairs. Megan herself chose to remain at her north Wales home at Brynawelon, Criccieth rather than attend the potentially lively debate in the House. She had recently announced her intention of carrying the Parliament for Wales Campaign to London where a public rally had been arranged at the London Welsh hall for 5 May.¹⁰⁰

The debate on 4 March was indeed lively and interesting. 'I have some family connection with this problem,' commented Major Gwilym Lloyd-George at the beginning of his address, although it was wholly unclear whether he was in fact referring to his late father or to his sister, still the president of the PWC. He proceeded to attack the pamphlet recently published by the PWC which insisted that

98 NLW MS 23261C, f. 3, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 13 January 1955.

99 *Daily Herald*, 2 March 1955.

100 *Ibid.*

the Welsh community could not possibly develop fully without a Welsh Parliament: ‘This I frankly do not believe. [Hear, hear] [...] I see no signs in Wales today that Welsh national life or its communal spirit is impoverished. On the contrary, I am sure that those aspects of Welsh character which mark them out as a nation separate from others are as strong today as they ever were.’¹⁰¹ Only 14 MPs voted in the ensuing division to permit the measure a second reading in the House, while 48 voted against.

In a press interview afterwards, Lady Megan Lloyd George paid lavish tribute to ‘the Socialist sponsors of the Bill who had stuck to their guns in the face of a strong cross-fire’:

There is no question of a knock-out as far as the supporters of a Parliament for Wales is concerned. They suffered a defeat in the Lobby on Friday, but in the debate they won on points. The main arguments of the opponents were directed against constitutional and economic severance of Wales from England, against dominion status and a republic, but they were totally irrelevant to the Bill which provided for a Federal parliament on the Northern Ireland model. As for the future, the petition will of course continue. It is growing steadily and we don’t intend to arrest the acceleration.¹⁰²

She strongly supported the suggestion made by several speakers from opposing political parties during the debate that a Royal Commission on Welsh Affairs, similar to that which existed in Scotland, should be established.¹⁰³ Visited at her Brynawelon home by journalist Percy Cudlipp, she reacted angrily to the suggestion made by her brother Gwilym during the recent debate that the Welsh nation could best preserve its vitality by remaining within the framework of Great Britain. She responded:

But we have never suggested leaving that framework! The Members who opposed the Bill last Friday produced completely irrelevant arguments. They talked as if it were proposing the political and economic severance of Wales from England: Dominion status at the very least. Nonsense! And, of course, it is quite true that under the Bill the decisions taken at Westminster on United Kingdom affairs, like defence and foreign policy, would be binding on Wales, which would still be represented there by 36 Welsh M.P.s. [...] One solitary day in each year is set aside for a Welsh debate. Welsh M.P.s have six and a half hours to raise all the problems of the coal, steel and light industries, of agriculture, housing, health, education, tourism, and the rest of it. The Minister for Welsh Affairs hears them sympathetically. But he has no power to do anything. It is the various departmental

101 *The Times*, 5 March 1955.

102 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 March 1955. This interview is also noted in *The Times*, 7 March 1955.

103 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 March 1955.

ministers who wield the power. And if a vote is taken the Welsh votes are engulfed by those of other M.P.s who are utterly remote from the problems of Wales. It is a travesty of democracy.¹⁰⁴

Cudlipp interrupted the impassioned words of his distinguished host at Criccieth with the rejoinder, ‘Gwilym, coming back to Wales, said that he could see no sign that the national life was being imperilled.’ His words cut no ice with Lady Megan who readily launched into a further exposition of her political beliefs:

Half a million of our most vigorous people moved out of Wales between the wars because of mass unemployment. Was that not sufficient impoverishment? But it was not the end of the process. A steady, ominous trickle from Wales is still going on. How can we hope to stop it, prevented as we are from planning our future? Today we simply lack a national focus. Of course, there is the Council for Wales – a worthy body. But it has no power; it is only advisory. It gave advice – most reasonable advice – on conditions in rural Wales. Its proposals were quietly pigeon-holed in Whitehall. Really, what is the use of pretending that the present state of affairs is not damaging to Wales? Consider our internal communications. They are archaic. A few days ago I travelled by train from Llanelly to Criccieth. The journey took 8¾ hours. I had to change trains three times. In the course of the journey we stopped at 50 stations or halts! But when we plead for a North-South trunk road, or a Severn Bridge scheme which would speed up communications between South Wales and the Midlands to the economic advantage of both, we plead in vain.¹⁰⁵

At the end of the interview, she presented her guest with impressive statistics depicting the success of the PWC petitioners and came down strongly in favour of a Royal Commission on Wales: ‘But – and this “but” is vital – if the commission is to be effective and acceptable its terms of reference *must* include Parliamentary devolution. Otherwise we shall simply go on floundering from one expedient to another.’¹⁰⁶

Support for the setting up of a Royal Commission on Wales was just about the only point in her brother’s speech in the recent debate, which she herself had pointedly chosen to boycott, which Megan came close to endorsing. And the family dimension here is not uninteresting. Gwilym Lloyd-George by this point (the spring of 1955) was the butt of much sniping criticism in political circles: ‘What is happening to Gwilym Lloyd-George? I must confess that I’m surprised to hear how unfavourably he is being compared, even within his own party, with his predecessor as Minister for Welsh Affairs. Gwilym, for instance, presents a much more dour attitude to deputations and representations than ever did Scotsman Sir

104 Percy Cudlipp, ‘Lady Megan is on the Welsh Warpath’, *News Chronicle*, 9 March 1955.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

David Maxwell-Fyfe as he then was (Lord Kilmuir now).¹⁰⁷

In April 1955, Lady Megan announced publicly that she had resolved to join the Labour Party: ‘The official Liberal Party seems to me to have lost all touch with the Radical tradition that inspired it [...] There is a common attitude of mind and thought between Radicals and Labour.’¹⁰⁸ She elaborated, ‘In the changed situation of today it is only in the Labour Party that I can be true to the radical tradition.’¹⁰⁹ Labour leader Clement Attlee replied, ‘I was delighted to receive your letter informing me that you have joined the Labour Party. I can assure you of a cordial welcome. As you know, you have many friends on our benches. I am sure that you are right in coming to the conclusion that the effective force to fight for freedom and social justice is now the Labour Party.’ Interestingly, in his letter welcoming the distinguished new recruit into the party, the Labour leader acknowledged the great debt that was owed to the radical Liberal tradition to which her father had belonged at the beginning of the century. Their reforming work between 1945 and 1951 had, to some extent, consisted of ‘extending and amplifying measures initiated by radicals’ in c. 1908–14. But, in Attlee’s view, whereas the reforming measures initiated by the Liberals at the beginning of the century consisted of ‘getting for the underprivileged some crumbs from the rich man’s table’, the Labour governments had emphasised a basic universalism – ‘providing for all things which all should enjoy in a modern community’.¹¹⁰

And Philip Noel-Baker also wrote to her: ‘I’m so proud of you, my angel, & so jealous that I can’t come out in public as your humble helper – it makes me utterly frustrated. But my conscience tells me that my advice has been good, so far.’¹¹¹ Kenneth Morgan tells us that this was ‘a decision she had taken privately two years earlier’, a conclusion he feels is confirmed by the definite manner in which she had ‘declined invitations both to continue as Liberal candidate for Anglesey and to seek re-election as vice-president of the Liberal Party’ a little earlier.¹¹² The implicit suggestion is that she had resolved irrevocably to ‘jump ship’ during 1952–53 and that, thereafter, it was simply a matter of choosing the most appropriate timing. It would also seem that, by this time, she missed desperately the cut-and-thrust of political life at Westminster and she probably felt that, sorely disappointed at the Labour Party’s at best negative, at worst overtly hostile, attitude towards devolutionary impulses during recent years, it would be more beneficial for her to be able to argue the case for devolution from inside the party than as a rebel carping and bickering with acrimony from outside the party and outside Westminster. She would thus be, potentially, in a much stronger position to exert some leverage on the party leadership, especially on people like Attlee and Morrison whose confidence

107 *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1955.

108 Cited in Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 248.

109 Cited in D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1955* (London: Nuffield Studies, 1955), p. 75. See also Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma*, p. 75.

110 Press cuttings in the NLW, Elwyn Roberts Papers, file 44. There is a copy of the letter in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Earl Attlee Papers, ATLE 2/4, Attlee to Lady Megan Lloyd George, 25 April 1955. See also John Bew, *Citizen Clem: a Biography of Attlee* (London: Riverrun, 2016), p. 403.

111 NLW MS 23261C, ff. 70–72, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 29 April 1955.

112 Morgan, *ODNB*.

she certainly enjoyed.¹¹³ Most Liberals, anticipating the long-anticipated move for some years, simply wrung their hands rather helplessly and felt that it could not now be helped.¹¹⁴

Although the revelation, coming close to an announcement by the new Conservative Prime Minister Anthony Eden that a general election would take place in June, set tongues wagging furiously at Westminster, it really came as no surprise, especially to Welsh politicians. Lord Anglesey, president of the Anglesey Conservative Association, issued a statement at Cardiff: ‘When the Socialists wrenched the seat from her in 1951, we considered that Anglesey had taken a swing to the right. She should have joined the Socialist Party long ago, although her father, if he were alive, would probably have condemned her action.’¹¹⁵ Sir Godfrey Llewelyn, chairman of the Wales and Monmouthshire Conservative and Unionist Association, responded thus: ‘Lady Megan’s decision will not surprise those people who have followed her political career over the last few years.’¹¹⁶

There was, predictably, much bitterness within the Liberal camp in Wales, encapsulated in the reaction of G. W. Madoc Jones, the honorary secretary to the Liberal Party of Wales, who noted acidly that Lady Megan’s action was ‘superbly illogical, beautifully timed. Lady Megan has been challenged on previous occasions to state in what particulars the Liberal Party has forsaken its radicalism and moved to the right. She has preferred to leave her very sweeping assertions undefined and unargued.’¹¹⁷ D. Geraint Williams, the prospective Liberal candidate for the Caernarvonshire division, stated, ‘It is ironical that she should have waited until this particular time to join a Labour Party which is becoming increasingly Conservative. As president of the national movement campaigning for a Welsh Parliament, her responsibility is a special one and her action in joining a party which has set its face uncompromisingly against any measure of home rule is inconsistent to say the least and likely to be a grave disservice to Wales and Welsh aspirations.’¹¹⁸ Indeed, it was the apparent incompatibility of her role as the long-term president of the PWC which most interested political commentators.

Generally speaking, Lady Megan’s high-profile defection on the eve of a general election campaign was depicted as the climax of a long political journey leftwards, fully encouraged by Herbert Morrison, and the question on everyone’s lips was ‘Will she offer herself as a candidate at the election?’¹¹⁹ A thoughtful column in the *Liverpool Daily Post* entitled blandly ‘Lady in the cold’ summed up the feelings of many commentators on this occasion:

Mr Morrison wooed her long and diligently to attract her into the

113 There are now many helpful and stimulating references on the broader context of her political journey leftwards in Peter Sloman, *The Liberal Party and the Economy, 1929–1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

114 See the comments in Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma*, p. 75.

115 Press cuttings in NLW, Elwyn Roberts Papers, file 44.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid., cutting from the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

Socialist Party. But now that he has succeeded, there are few political rewards that he can offer her. Can she even hope to get a seat in the Commons? There is no point in asking Mr Morrison for one, since he no longer wields power in the constituencies. How Lady Megan must be regretting her conversion. As a Liberal she had influence and prestige. By turning Socialist, she casts all her political advantages away. Her new party has swallowed her up. Not a trace of Lady Megan remains on the political scene. The only thing left for her is to go back to Wales and bear the drum for Welsh Nationalism.¹²⁰

Although her ‘conversion’ took place rather too late for her to fight a seat for Labour in the general election of May 1955, a cause of sincere regret in many quarters,¹²¹ Megan was immediately bombarded with scores of insistent requests to speak throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.¹²² It was reported that she had received soundings from about a dozen constituencies, almost all of these Conservative strongholds however, to stand as the Labour candidate there. An approach even came from Southampton where there was a small Labour majority of 465 votes in 1951. The general consensus of opinion was that, although she was extremely unlikely to stand in the general election, she would receive the highest priority as a Labour candidate in one of the first by-elections to be convened in a Welsh division, possibly following the elevation to the Upper House of an ageing, long-serving Labour MP. The most likely aspirant was D. R. (‘Dai’) Grenfell who had represented the Gower division continuously since 1922.¹²³ But such a course of events was probably dependent upon the election of a Labour government at Westminster.

It was widely felt within the Labour Party that any prospect of electoral success depended largely upon winning over disillusioned former Liberals. In Welsh constituencies in particular, Megan may have brought large numbers of ‘radical Liberals’ into the Labour fold. Throughout the election campaign she urged wavering Liberals in the country to vote Labour.¹²⁴ She (together with Cledwyn Hughes and Geronwy Roberts) was especially incensed that Plaid Cymru president Gwynfor Evans, although a close colleague within the Parliament of Wales Campaign, had now resolved to oppose Labour and Liberal parliamentary candidates who were fully supportive of Welsh devolutionary initiatives, thus totally reversing the policy adopted by Plaid back in 1951.¹²⁵ Lady Megan also appeared alongside Herbert Morrison, Jim Callaghan and party leader Hugh Gaitskell in the party’s final election broadcast on 20 May.¹²⁶

120 Ibid.

121 See ‘Lady Megan’s Quest’, editorial column in the *News Chronicle*, 26 April 1955.

122 Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 248.

123 *News Chronicle*, 28 April 1955. On Grenfell, see J. Graham Jones, ‘Grenfell, David Rhys (Dai), (1881–1968), Labour Politician’, *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* <<http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/index.html>> [accessed 9 October 2016].

124 Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma*, p. 78.

125 NLW, Papurau D. J. Williams, Abergwaun, file P2/28, Elwyn Roberts to D. J. Williams, 1 July 1955. See also Rhys Evans, *Gwynfor: Portrait of a Patriot* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2008), p. 158.

126 Butler, *The British General Election of 1955*, p. 61.

Throughout the campaign, Labour made much of its distinguished new recruit, who duly penned a column for the ‘party platform’ election series published by the *Daily Mail* and contributed items to an array of local newspapers during the run-up to the poll. During the closing two weeks of the election campaign, Megan spoke every day to enthusiastic audiences wherever she went – ‘They call me the wild woman of Wales. The Liberal Party left me, not the other way about,’ she insisted firmly and repeatedly when questioned on her very recent change of political allegiance.¹²⁷ Her close friend and former Liberal MP Dingle Foot wrote to Megan warmly after the results were known and Anthony Eden had been confirmed in office: ‘My conclusion from the election results is that you have been a phenomenally successful vote-winner. In contrast to the general slump, the Labour Party did extraordinarily well in North Wales, Yorkshire and East Anglia – all of them areas visited by you’.¹²⁸

Two days later, and just five days after the poll, Philip Noel-Baker wrote to her, too, in consoling terms: ‘You are now in Anglesey, & soon your ordeal will be over. You will be able to go home & relax. And I hope you really *will*. I hope you will do absolutely *nothing*, & not even think of the election or of politics, for a long time to come. You have been under a tremendous strain, & have had a superb success, & you must restore your strength, & I hope enjoy the infinite pleasure of repose after effort’.¹²⁹ That autumn, together with Cledwyn Hughes and Goronwy O. Roberts, Megan was deeply involved in shaping future Labour policies for Wales and led the move to set up a ‘fact finding body’ on Welsh issues within the Labour Party Wales.¹³⁰ They debated in the knowledge that both the Cardiff-based Welsh Regional Council of Labour and the Labour Party organization at Transport House in London were seriously considering disciplinary action against the group of Labour MPs who had been actively involved in the Parliament for Wales Campaign.¹³¹ Determined not to give up, Lady Megan continued to champion the activities of the campaign.

Lady Megan did return to the Commons in November 1956 as the Labour MP for Carmarthenshire in a by-election caused by the death of veteran right-wing Liberal Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris. There was a piquant irony in this course of events, as Hopkin Morris, a highly principled, pure Liberal, had been for decades her father’s arch political enemy in Welsh Liberal circles.¹³² She captured the seat by a majority of more than 3,000 votes, and increased her majority in the general elections of 1959, 1964 and 1966. The outcome of the 1956 by-election had reduced the number of Liberal MPs to five, and this represented the nadir of the party’s fortunes as it faced a stagnant local organization, hopelessly inadequate financial resources, a total of only thirty paid agents in the whole of Britain, and a

127 Cited in Jones, *A Radical Life*, p. 249

128 NLW MS 24263E, f. 5, Dingle Foot to Megan Lloyd George, 29 May 1955 (‘Private’).

129 NLW MS 23261C, ff. 89–92, Philip Noel-Baker to Megan Lloyd George, 31 May 1955.

130 See ‘Lady Megan Leads Labour Policy Move’, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 24 October 1955.

131 See ‘Awkward for Labour’, the ‘Day to Day in Wales’ column by Gwilym Roberts in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 26 January 1956.

132 Watkins, *The Liberal Dilemma*, p. 84; Russell Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties in Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2014), p. 82.

woeful lack of radical and progressive policies. Former Liberal MPs Dingle Foot and Wilfrid Roberts also went over to Labour during 1956, while Emrys Roberts retired (permanently as it so happened) from political life and devoted his energies to his extensive business interests.

As Labour MP for Carmarthenshire for the last nine and a half years of her life (she died prematurely from cancer aged 64 in May 1966), Megan may have found herself somewhat hamstrung, missing her former freedom as the highly independent backbench Liberal Member for Anglesey, and sometimes feeling a little ill-at-ease representing a division with a significant industrial base. She became uncomfortable, too, at her new party's long-term marked reluctance to embrace a worthwhile measure of devolution for Wales. It is possible, moreover, that her relatively late entry into the Labour Party, coupled with her intense personal animosity towards Harold Wilson, meant that she was never offered a ministerial position or even the opportunity to speak from the opposition front bench.