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Welsh Labour: From "Fantastic Results" in June 2017 to the "Crumbling of the Red Wall" in December 2019

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Welsh Labour: From “Fantastic Results” in June 2017 to the “Crumbling of the Red Wall” in December 2019

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Stéphanie Bory

Introduction

- 1 General elections usually offer opportunities to study Britain's political life, especially the position and strength of each party in the four nations making up the United Kingdom. The Labour Party has dominated the Welsh political landscape for decades now and the June 2017 snap election was no exception. Welsh Labour obtained good results, mainly thanks to the prominent role given to Carwyn Jones, then First Minister and leader of the party. Less than two years later, his successor Mark Drakeford did not manage to prevent his party from losing seats in Wales in the worst election since 1935 for the Labour Party. Until the European election in May 2019, Labour had come first in 38 of the last 39 Wales-wide election contests, including all 26 general elections, in a run that began in 1922. The European poll results already came as “*an election earthquake*”¹ since the six-week-old Brexit Party got more than double the Labour vote share and came first in 19 of the 22 local authority areas in Wales, thus winning half of Wales's four seats in the European Parliament. Moreover, Plaid Cymru, the nationalist party, ranked second, meaning they had beaten Labour for the first time ever in a Wales-wide election and overcome the psychological barrier of being able to obtain better results than the traditionally dominant party in Wales. It was only the second time Labour had failed to win in Wales in 100 years. The previous occasion was the 2009 European election, which could easily back then be blamed on the British PM Gordon

Brown. However, if, in 2009, Welsh Labour narrowly lost to the Conservatives, in 2019, they were “slaughtered”,² which was a bad omen for a potential general election, and fears proved to be founded. This paper thus aims to study why Welsh Labour, after being for so long the dominant party, has been declining in Wales over the last few years.

- 2 We propose to present the party’s results in Wales for the December 2019 general election, then to analyse the campaign and the reasons for Labour’s declining position in Wales, especially the problem of leadership denounced by some Welsh Labour members, as well as the Welsh leader’s confusing message, before concluding on the party’s prospects for the 2021 Welsh Parliament Election.

‘A disappointing night for the party’,³ Mark Drakeford

- 3 Such were the words uttered by First Minister Mark Drakeford, commenting on the results obtained by Welsh Labour. The expression could be said to be euphemistic considering the fact the party obtained its worst general election results since 1935, worse even than under Michael Foot’s leadership in 1983 when Labour won 20 seats and 37.5% of the vote shares against 14 seats and 31% of the vote shares for the Conservatives.
- 4 Table 1: Results in Wales and Scotland for the 2019 general election

Party	Seats	Vote shares 2019	Swing /2017	Scotland
Labour	22 (- 6)	40.9%	- 8	1 (- 6)
Conservative	14 (+ 6)	36.1%	+ 2.5	6 (- 7)
Plaid Cymru / SNP	4 (no change)	9.9%	- 0.5	48 (+ 13)
LibDems	0 (no change)	6%	+ 1.5	4 (no change)

- 5 Source: figures compiled by the author and based on results given on the BBC website.
- 6 Even if Labour remains the majority party in Wales, its results represent a defeat, since it lost six seats to the Welsh Conservatives, 8% in vote shares, ie two-thirds of what it had won 18 months before. Furthermore, in seats across Wales, even the ones it won, the party lost between 10% and 12% of the total vote share. Most losses were in north east Wales, such as Wrexham, the Vale of Clwyd, Clwyd South and Delyn. Hence the following remark by the Welsh Conservative leader, Byron Davies, on 13 December 2019: “A well organised campaign has confined Labour to being a party of the Valleys.”⁴ The results indeed suggest an ever-growing distance between the North East and Cardiff which the Conservatives exploited. Labour is an even more Cardiff-centric party now.

- 7 Source: Owen Donovan, “UK Elections 2019: The Post-Mortem”, 16-12-2019, <https://stateofwales.com/2019/12/uk-election-2019-the-post-mortem/>
- 8 As for the Welsh Conservatives, in contrast, they made a real breakthrough, gaining 6 seats to reach a total of 14 seats. As already mentioned, their previous high watermark in Wales was in 1983. It was then said that it was possible to drive from Monmouth to Holyhead without leaving Tory territory. Following another 14-seat haul, it is now nearly possible to do the same thing, at least to reach Llandudno, or most major towns in North Wales.⁵ The Conservative performance was in sharp contrast with the difficult start to their Welsh campaign. Indeed, in November 2019, the Ross England rape trial story was dominating the news, culminating in Alun Cairns’s resignation as Secretary of State for Wales on 6 November 2019 following a row about what he knew about a former aide’s involvement in the collapse of a rape trial.⁶ The Welsh Conservative Party was then accused of having a “*woman problem*”, and, even if the party now has its first, second and third female Welsh Tory MPs, Alun Cairns’s re-election as Vale of Glamorgan MP, even increasing his majority, was not seen as a good signal.

- 9 Source: Owen Donovan, “UK Elections 2019: The Post-Mortem”, 16-12-2019, <https://stateofwales.com/2019/12/uk-election-2019-the-post-mortem/>
- 10 Plaid Cymru managed to hold its four seats with a strong performance from Hywel Williams in Arfon (45% of vote share, + 4.3%) and Ben Lake in Ceredigion (37.9% of vote share, + 8.7%), after the very good results it had obtained for the May 2019 European election, when it came second in Wales in vote shares (19.6%) behind the Brexit Party. Adam Price, who has led the party since September 2018, rejoiced and used strong images to describe the results: “*While Labour’s Red Wall has crumbled in the face of the blue tide, Plaid’s Green Dam has held firm.*”⁷ He was using a term coined in 2019 by pollster James Kanagasooria to describe a set of constituencies in the Midlands and Northern England held by the Labour Party.

- 11 Source: Owen Donovan, “UK Elections 2019: The Post-Mortem”, 16-12-2019, <https://stateofwales.com/2019/12/uk-election-2019-the-post-mortem/>
- 12 Despite the disappointing results obtained by the Labour Party in Wales, it came first, while the party is really weakened in Scotland and has nearly disappeared from the political landscape, saving only one seat out of the seven it had gained in June 2017.
- 13 Table 2: Results in Wales, England, Scotland and the UK to the 12 December 2019 general election

Party	Wales share	vote	Swing	England share	vote	Swing	Scotland share	vote	UK share
Labour	40.9%		- 8	34%		- 7.9	18.6%		32.2%
Conservative	36.1%		+ 2.5	47.2%		+ 1.6	25.1%		43.6%
LibDems	6%		+ 1.5	12.4%		+ 4.6	9.5%		11.5%

- 14 Source: figures compiled by the author and based on results given on the BBC website.

Analysis of the campaign: what went wrong for Welsh Labour

- 15 To understand Welsh Labour’s performance in Wales, it is necessary to consider first the position of its newly-elected leader, then the message delivered during the campaign.

Mark Drakeford, 'the hesitant candidate'⁸

- 16 Mark Drakeford had an eventful first year as the First Minister of Wales, since he led his party through a European election that was never meant to be, and was clearly not prepared for the campaign, and a UK general election framing the final 18 months of the Welsh administration he has been running. He may not have been fully prepared, since, during the leadership contest in November 2018, he gave the impression he had "*no great personal ambition*" to be First Minister. When Drakeford first discussed running to succeed Carwyn Jones, the former FM, he explained to journalists he envisaged leading Welsh Labour into the next Assembly elections scheduled in 2021, and then standing aside "*for a new generation of leaders to put themselves forward for election.*"⁹ Being the First Minister in the context of complex Brexit negotiations necessitated a sense of dedication and commitment he seemed to lack, hence not appearing, even for some members of his own party, as credible. During the campaign, Drakeford explained he was not really looking forward to the tasks awaiting : "*I don't think I will look forward to doing first minister's questions particularly. I don't particularly like that sort of bear garden atmosphere or way of doing politics.*"¹⁰
- 17 Besides, he clearly suffered, then, from a lack of visibility, as illustrated by various polls held during the leadership campaign, especially one by YouGov for ITV Wales in early November 2018 asking respondents what they thought of their potential leaders. A "Do not know" (DNK) answer represents a good measure of the individual's visibility, or rather, in this case, anonymity, with the public. Less than a quarter of them picked a favourite and most ticked "Do not know", presumably because they simply did not know the three candidates for Welsh Labour's leadership, Mark Drakeford (59% DNK), Vaughan Gething (56%) and Eluned Morgan (62%), even if all of them were members of the Welsh Government under Carwyn Jones and had been campaigning for several weeks to become the leader of the Welsh Labour party. As indicated by Professor Roger Awan-Scully in his analysis of the results: "*They [the candidates] are familiar to anyone interested in Welsh politics, but not to most of the public. In fact, the best evidence we have suggests Vaughan Gething, Mark Drakeford and Eluned Morgan are virtually anonymous.*"¹¹ Even worse, among those with a view on the potential First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford appeared to respondents as the least popular of the Labour candidates, which was a consistent finding across three polls. He indeed was marked 4.0 out of 10, while Gething and Morgan respectively obtained 4.4 and 4.5.¹² These results reveal that while the Labour front-runner had convinced many Labour members to back him – 17 AMs – he had yet to win over much of the Welsh public, as was stressed by Roger Awan-Scully: "*The party members who will be voting soon may start to question whether Mark Drakeford as leader would be an electoral asset for his party.*"¹³
- 18 During the two campaigns he led, Drakeford displayed weak leadership, being criticised for his poor performances at campaign events, his excessive cautiousness and reluctance to take a bold stance, and his inability to define a clear strategy or direction. He did not hide his unease during interviews and TV debates as early as 2018: "*I don't look forward to doing media interviews. I think some people are fine with them. Me, I'm always nervous before I do them and so on.*"¹⁴ He occasionally got pummelled in First Minister's Questions (FMQ). Such an attitude came in sharp contrast with that displayed by his predecessor, Carwyn Jones, only 42 when he became First Minister, who came to be very popular, and one of his contenders during the general election debates, Adam

Price, Plaid Cymru’s new leader, who was highly effective. For instance, the latter confronted Richard Burgeon, Labour’s Shadow Justice Secretary in the Shadow Cabinet of Jeremy Corbyn since 2016, in a TV leader hustling, asking him “*why had the Labour Welsh Government failed to [integrate health and social care to meet the needs of sick, disabled and elderly people] when the SNP Government had already done so in Scotland?*”¹⁵ Furthermore, Drakeford did not seem to be taken seriously by UK Labour during the campaign, since the Welsh branch was effectively ignored. He was even accused by Alun Davies, the former Welsh local government minister, of “shadowing UK leader Jeremy Corbyn”: “*Mark Drakeford has taken decisions to shadow Jeremy Corbyn’s position on absolutely everything. [...] We’ve been following a line from the leader’s office in London which hasn’t listened to either members of the Labour Party or what Labour voters are telling us.*”¹⁶ These comments reveal Drakeford’s two main issues: he was first following on from two predecessors, Rhodri Morgan and Carwyn Jones, who were politically skilful and publicly popular figures; and, having a genuine affinity with the left, he has from the beginning courted Corbyn supporters. This was illustrated with Drakeford’s position on Brexit since he adopted an unclear stance, like Corbyn, leading Welsh Labour to deliver a confusing message to voters.

A confusing message to voters

- 19 When he became the First Minister of Wales in 2000, Rhodri Morgan insisted on the fact he wanted to devise “*Made in Wales*” policies, defined as Welsh Labour and not New Labour. In a speech delivered in Swansea’s National Centre for Public Policy on 11 December 2002 and known as “*The Clear Red Water Speech*”, he insisted on the fundamental ideological and political differences between the two branches of Labour, contrasting New Labour’s focus on consumers’ choices and competition with Welsh Labour’s priority given to citizens’ voices and cooperation. This will to distance himself from London, to establish “*clear red water*”, was confirmed during the campaign for the 2003 Welsh Assembly election, when the Welsh Labour Party decided to devise its own manifesto – and not to have one drafted in London for Wales, as in 1999. In this manifesto – free prescriptions were advocated: “*We could define our own approach, our own Welsh Labour public services delivery model – neither Old Labour, nor New Labour, but Welsh Labour!*”¹⁷ His successor, Carwyn Jones, stuck to the strategy, even more so since he quickly had to work with a Conservative Government in London. Mark Drakeford, however, being a Corbyn supporter, has not managed to preserve the specificity of the “*Made in Wales*” policies. He did not, for instance, oppose the zero-hour contract clearly. The loss of a special Welsh Labour identity was reproached by Alun Davies, among others, who called for “*clear red water to reappear between Cardiff and London wings of Labour*”.¹⁸ Some ministers also put pressure on the First Minister for him to adopt clearer stances on a variety of issues, as Brexit. It was only after the defeat in the European in May 2019 that he made clear he was in favour of a second referendum on the issue:

I have now concluded that the only way we can try to guarantee a future for Wales that would not be a catastrophe is to put this decision back to the people in a referendum. [...] And for the avoidance of any doubt, a Welsh Labour Government would campaign, in such a vote, for Wales to remain in the EU.¹⁹

- 20 This was well illustrated by the manifestos published by Welsh Labour for the June 2017 and the December 2019 general elections, especially the cover pages. In 2017, Welsh

Labour chose a different cover page from UK Labour’s, showing a photo of Carwyn Jones, the First Minister, who was visible and clearly identified. In the foreword, he provided voters with his own vision, repeatedly using expressions as “*our Welsh Labour manifesto*”²⁰ or “*the Welsh Labour Government*” opposed to “*Labour*” for the UK Party. Jones was then the most senior Labour official in the UK, and was in power, in contrast with Jeremy Corbyn. He added: “*It is important that we can explain what Welsh Labour can do, delivering as a team in Wales – in Westminster, the Assembly and in councils right across the country.*”²¹ The Welsh manifesto was supposed to give the Welsh voice on different issues. Besides, the document contained several photos showing him in different situations.²² The 2019 Welsh Labour manifesto had the same title as in 2017, *Standing Up for Wales*, and the cover page, totally impersonal, was the same as the UK Labour Party’s cover. Mark Drakeford only appeared on page 7. Besides, many photos used in the Welsh and the British Labour manifestos were the same, and expressions as “*our Labour Government here in Wales*” or “*our UK Labour Government*” were common, thus presenting the Welsh Government as an annex of London, and not an autonomous institution.

- 21 On top of that, the choice of the issues dealt with could also be misleading since most of them were devolved questions, hence falling under the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly, and not Westminster. Stephen Crabb, the former Conservative Secretary of State for Wales between 2014 and 2016, explained during the campaign that three issues mattered for Welsh people: Brexit, Corbyn and the NHS, each of which was not favourable for Welsh Labour.²³ Indeed, as previously said, Drakeford was not always clear on his position about Brexit, supporting the line of the UK leadership in resisting calls for a second referendum, he stayed close to Corbyn and had to defend health

issues, a devolved matter. Considering how high health was up the list of people’s priorities, parties had to have a position on it, though this went against endless frustration at people confusing devolved and non-devolved issues at election time. As indicated by Owen Donovan in “UK Election 2019: The Post-Mortem”, published on stateofwales.com: “*This may also be the first time where the Welsh Government’s track record – particularly in health, particularly in north Wales – has impacted a UK-wide election. They couldn’t play the “blame Westminster” card when health was so high up the agenda.*”²⁴ In the 2017 manifesto, Welsh Labour explicitly insisted on the Assembly’s policies, even if it was a general election. For health and education, they largely outlined existing policies implemented by the Welsh Labour Government. This can be explained by the different contexts of the two elections. The 2017 general election was a snap election held only one year after the Welsh election in May 2016, so that Welsh Labour restated existing policies in Cardiff and stressed how pledges made in the manifesto published for the previous election had been honoured. The December 2019 general election was held just one year after Mark Drakeford’s election as party leader and First Minister, and 18 months before the 2021 Welsh election. Drakeford must now prepare the forthcoming Welsh Parliament election, scheduled in May 2021.

Prospects for the 2021 Welsh Parliament election

A weakened Welsh Labour Party

²² In his comprehensive and authoritative approach to the classification of party systems and political parties, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*,²⁵ Giovanni Sartori defined the predominant party system. In previous work I analysed the results of the main political parties in Wales for the Assembly elections since 1999 and concluded that the Welsh Labour Party could be qualified as the predominant party in the Welsh political system. It indeed largely fulfilled the mathematical criteria defined by Sartori, especially the 10-point difference between the two main parties in the share of seats won in three consecutive elections. The same analysis can be made for the UK elections, with results even exaggerated due to the electoral system. For the December 2019 general election, even if Welsh Labour obtained proportionately 20% more seats than the Welsh Conservative Party, the difference in vote shares sharply declined from 15.5 in June 2017 to 4.8 in December 2019, hence indicating a weakening of the party’s predominant position in Wales. Already in July 2019, Ben Gwailchmai, a writer and co-founder of the campaign group Labour for indy-Wales, had insisted on the fact that Welsh Labour had to learn from Scottish Labour who, between 2010 and 2015, had been relegated to the second place in Scotland and “*wiped off the map, bar one seat*”,²⁶ as illustrated by the table below.

²³ Table 3: Voting results in Scotland for Scottish Labour and the SNP, 2010-2019

	Scottish Labour vote share	Scottish Labour number of seats	SNP vote share	SNP number of seats
2010	42%	41/59, ie 69.5%	19.9%	6/59, ie 10.1%
2015	24.3%	1/59, ie 1.7%	50%	56/59, ie 94.9%

2017	27.1%	7/59, ie 11.7%	36.9%	35/59, ie 59.3%
2019	18.6%	1/59, ie 1.7%	45%	48/59, ie 81.4%

24 Source: figures compiled by the author

25 The Scottish party system has thus evolved: it is still a predominant party system under Sartori's classification, but the predominant party is now the SNP, and no longer Scottish Labour. Ben Gwalchmai considers that they missed three key moments. First, after the 2011 Holyrood election when the SNP won 69 seats out of 129 and formed the first majority government in the recent Scottish Parliament history, Scottish Labour lacked any real response to "*the indy question*" and focused on Westminster battles. Then, when YesScotland was launched on 25 May 2012 and alliances forged between the SNP, the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Labour leadership failed to react and, after the 2014 referendum on Scotland's independence, made vows that were broken. Finally, since 2011, the party has had five leaders. This should come as a lesson to Welsh Labour.

26 The disappointing results obtained by the Welsh Labour Party for the last two elections – European and general – must then also be commented on with the prospect of the forthcoming Welsh Parliament election scheduled in May 2021. In May 2019, at the time of the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the Assembly, Owen Donovan assessed the first twenty years of devolution and imagined the next twenty. He prophetically explained that Labour in Wales had to be even more Welsh to survive:

Generating excitement is precisely how they [Labour in Wales] will secure their long-term future – by not being afraid to be radical, not being afraid to step out of line with the "British way of doing things", nor compromising on their core principles which are often ignored for the sake of political expediency. Unless they continually re-invent themselves and become more self-critical [...] they'll eventually lose their position and will find it a real struggle to get it back, as Labour in Scotland has found to their cost.²⁷

27 Welsh Labour does not seem, so far, to have reinvented themselves.

28 Last July, Ben Gwalchmai was warning Welsh Labour: Should Welsh Labour falter at the 2021 election and Plaid Cymru get a minority government, they may well then get a majority at 2026 and... history repeats. The lesson here is to get ahead of Plaid Cymru, not dither as Scottish Labour did. The lesson is to forge alliances with anti-imperialist activists, parties, and trade-unionists because Britain's true face is imperial.²⁸

29 It thus seems that Welsh Labour's declining position may be an opportunity for Plaid Cymru to take power.

An opportunity for Plaid Cymru?

30 Following the December 2019 general election, Adam Price was rather optimistic. Elaborating on the image of the Green Dam in Wales, he asserted Plaid Cymru's objectives for the forthcoming Welsh election: "*Our challenge in the coming year, leading to the 2021 National Assembly Election, is to extend that green dam to Offa's Dyke. [...] We in Plaid Cymru are busy building our green dam to keep the Tories out.*"²⁹ Price is convinced Plaid can form a coalition government in 2021 to become a majority party five years later, hence following the example of the SNP in Scotland: "*We will follow our Scottish*

friends to make the case for independence for Wales inside the EU.”³⁰ Welsh nationalists’ dream would be for Wales to be independent by 2036, the 500th anniversary of the Acts of Union. Some polls now suggest support for Welsh independence could be anything between 16 and 32%, numbers that had previously been unheard of.

- 31 Nevertheless, even if Adam Price managed to raise his profile through his participation in the election debates and succeeded in distancing Plaid Cymru from Welsh Labour in the process ahead of 2021, the party seemed underprepared for the December 2019 general election. It published a manifesto, *Wales, It’s Us*, which rather looked like a composite of previous UK manifestos and a forerunner of the 2021 one. The document included many references to devolved policy areas, from a party which well knows they are controlled from Cardiff and not London. Inversely, the party suggested to make Saint David’s Day a bank holiday, a prerogative the Senedd does not have. Some proposals were dependent on Wales remaining in the EU though they have seemingly planned to a certain extent from a post-Brexit scenario. This 2019 manifesto could be a transition document meant for an election in which Plaid is anyway not very visible. Furthermore, the nationalist party faced an all-Wales drop of just 0.5% in vote shares, but failed to win any second place and did not draw any benefit, except in Arfon, from the Unite to Remain Pact,³¹ an alliance it signed in November 2019 with the LibDems and the Green Party of England and Wales to support remaining in the EU. In 49 constituencies in England and 11 in Wales, the pact led to only one of these parties standing a candidate so that in seven Welsh constituencies there was only a Plaid candidate and three of them were elected in this way. Yet the pact cost Plaid votes in Leave-voting areas, partly explaining its poor performance in the Valleys, as in Blaenau Gwent (- 15.5% in vote shares, from second to fourth place behind the Brexit Party and the Welsh Conservatives) and Rhondda (- 8.6% in vote shares, from second to third place, behind the Welsh Conservatives). One may argue that it is difficult for Plaid Cymru to be visible in the UK general election when Wales only has 40 seats, still a party struggling to get 10% of the electorate to vote for them in the only nation in the UK they stand in cannot really be seen as credible as the “Party of Wales”, especially while the SNP manages to get 45% of vote shares in Scotland. As indicated by Owen Donovan: “If there’s a “Green Dam” it must have been built by a beaver because there are some large holes in it.”³² It thus seems that forming the next Welsh government is, according to him, “ambitious”.³³

Trying a forecast?

- 32 Trying to forecast people’s voting intentions has always been tricky, especially for the next Welsh election since it is difficult to foresee the impact of Brexit in Wales. Yet, the poll held by YouGov for ITV-Cymru Wales and Cardiff University between 20 and 26 January 2020 on 1,037 Welsh respondents – including a proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds now allowed to vote – may indicate a voting trend. It is worth comparing the results with a previous poll conducted in May 2019, a few days after the European election.
- 33 Table 4: Voting intentions for the 2021 Welsh Parliament election, January 2020

	Constituency vote share	Constituency seats	Regional list vote share	Regional list seats	Total

Welsh Conservatives	35%	14	32%	8	22
Welsh Labour	33%	19	32%	5	24
Plaid Cymru	19%	6	19%	7	13
LibDems	5%	1	5%	0	1
Brexit Party	4%	0	3%	0	0
Greens	3%	0	3%	0	0

34 Source: Welsh Political Barometer Poll, 29 January 2020

35 Table 5: Voting intentions for the 2021 Welsh Parliament election, May 2019

	Constituency vote share	Constituency seats	Regional list vote share	Regional list seats	Total
Welsh Conservatives	17%	7	12%	0	7
Welsh Labour	25%	19	21%	1	20
Plaid Cymru	24%	12	22%	1	13
LibDems	9%	2	7%	0	2
Brexit Party	17%	0	23%	13	13
Greens	5%	0	8%	5	5

36 Source: Welsh Political Barometer Poll, 21 May 2019

37 The results reveal that the current post-election boost to the Welsh Conservatives is not just confined to Westminster since they obtain 35% support, their highest ever reported voting intention for the constituency vote in an Assembly election. As for the regional vote, they get an equally best-ever showing. The Welsh Conservative Party, which scored only 6.5% of the vote in the European election last May, now seems buoyant. Within a few months, who knows where things will be. Professor Roger Awan-Scully, commenting on the findings on his blog, declared:

Since the inaugural election to the National Assembly in 1999, Labour have always much been the largest party in the chamber. Our new poll indicates that, around 15 months from the next devolved election in Wales, we are currently on course for a rather different type of politics in what will soon be known as Senedd Cymru / the Welsh Parliament.³⁴

Conclusion

- 38 To conclude, Welsh Labour's election results were quite disappointing compared with its previous success 18 months earlier, especially in the North East, illustrating Wales's fragmentation and the party's partial inability to represent the whole of Wales. In contrast, Welsh Conservatives obtained their best results for the last 35 years. Such disappointing results for the Welsh Labour party can be explained by the weakness of its leadership. Indeed, Mark Drakeford, recently appointed, is not very visible yet and has failed to distinguish himself from Jeremy Corbyn, the British Labour leader. He delivered a confusing message to voters, for whom the three main issues were Corbyn, Brexit and the NHS. The party will have to rethink its policy to get ready for the forthcoming Welsh election, in May 2021, or run the risk of losing ground to Plaid Cymru, led by a buoyant new leader, or even to the Welsh Conservatives. The outcome of the Welsh election will also probably depend on the impact of Brexit in Wales, one of the poorest areas in the EU and receiving the highest EU funds. It is ultimately highly ironical to see a party, the Welsh Conservatives, strongly opposed to devolution back in the 1990s, now in a position to come first in a Welsh election for a devolved body they had long wanted to abolish: as illustrated on the poster below, they "have done it!".

- 39 Source: <https://www.conservatives.wales/>, accessed in January 2020
- 40 **Stéphanie Bory is an Assistant Professor in British Civilisation in Jean Moulin-Lyon 3 University. She obtained in 2008 a PhD on the environmental policy of the National Assembly for Wales. She works on environmentalism as well as nationalism, especially in Wales. She convened two international conferences on these topics in Lyon 3 and has published more than 20 articles, co-directed two issues of the RFCB, one on the May 2016 Regional Elections and a second one on the June 2017 General Election in the UK, and an issue of the *Observatoire de la société britannique* on Political Leadership. In 2019 she published a book on Welsh devolution, 20 years after the Government of Wales Act 1998, *L'Eveil du dragon gallois. D'une assemblée à un parlement pour le pays de Galles (1997-2017)*.**

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31. The pact was launched by Heidi Allen, the former Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridgeshire, in July 2019 and registered as a "non-party campaign" with the Electoral Commission in November 2019. She described the December 2019 general election in the following way: "*This is a Brexit election, and staying in the European Union is possible, and this is a deciding moment. We are putting party politics aside in the interest of our country and [we have] cemented a cross-party arrangement whereby remain-voting parties in England and Wales are working together to back one remain candidate.*", in Kate Proctor, "LibDems, Greens and PC reveal remain election pact", *The Guardian*, 07-11-2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/07/lib-dems-greens-and-plaid-cymru-reveal-remain-election-pact>, accessed in December 2019.
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ABSTRACTS

In November 2019, the British Parliament finally agreed to decide the holding of general elections in the United Kingdom, only 18 months after the previous ones. If the Welsh Labour Party, chaired by a new leader, Mark Drakeford, since December 2018 and weakened by the May 2019 European Elections, managed to remain the dominant party in the country, it obtained its worst election results since 1935, which can be explained by its weak leadership and the

confusing message sent to voters. Such results are a bad omen for the forthcoming Welsh Parliament election scheduled in May 2021.

En novembre 2019, le Parlement britannique, après des mois de tensions, accepte la tenue d'élections législatives au Royaume-Uni, 18 mois seulement après le scrutin précédent. Si le Parti travailliste gallois, dirigé depuis décembre 2018 par un nouveau leader, Mark Drakeford, et affaibli par les élections européennes organisées en mai 2019, réussit à préserver sa position de parti prédominant sur la scène politique galloise, il obtient son plus mauvais résultat depuis 1935. Signes avant-coureurs d'un déclin qui s'explique en partie par le manque de visibilité et de popularité de son leader et par l'ambiguïté du message envoyé à l'électorat traditionnel du parti, ces résultats sont à analyser dans la perspective des élections galloises prévues pour mai 2021.

INDEX

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