

Interview with Ieuan Wyn Jones



Ieuan Wyn Jones is the political leader of Plaid Cymru, and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly for Wales. He has been the Leader of the Party's Group in the National Assembly since August 2000. He was also President of the Party between 2000-2003. Ieuan was elected as the Assembly Member for Ynys Môn in 1999, having been the island's MP since 1987. He stepped down as an MP in 2001 and was re-elected as the AM in 2003. As an MP he successfully piloted a private members bill to assist the hard of hearing in 1989, and was a member of the Welsh Affairs and Agriculture Select Committees. He was the joint chair of the All Party Older Persons Group, and a trustee of the Industry and Parliament Trust. He also has many other responsibilities including governor of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, member of the Eisteddfod's Gorsedd in 2001 and last year he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the University of Wales Bangor. He has also published two books, 'Europe: the Challenge for Wales' in 1996 and in 1998 'Y Llynyn Arian', a biography of the Welsh nineteenth century publisher, Thomas Gee.

Was there a defining event or moment which led you to enter politics?

Not a defining moment as such. I was brought up in a household where politics was discussed regularly and I was active in politics at an early age.

We would be interested to hear of your affiliation or relationship with Wales? Because my father was a nonconformist Minister, we moved around Wales during my childhood. I think of Wales as one nation and within it we find strong communities.

The Liberal Democrats are strong in the central constituencies. Labour dominate North East, South and South West Wales, whilst the Plaid stronghold in the North West (having 3 MPs). What is the economic significance of this, and do you see this map changing in the near future?

Whilst the party has traditionally seen its strongest support in the west of Wales, this pattern has changed

following devolution. We have seen some of our largest growth in membership in the urban areas of South and South East Wales. It's important for the party to continue to develop in all parts of Wales.

In your view has the importance of Westminster parliament declined over the last few years? If so why?

It has declined as devolution grows in strength, particularly in Wales and Scotland. More and more decisions affecting our daily lives are now being taken away from London and increasing in Cardiff and Edinburgh.

What are the particular economic challenges facing your constituency (Ynys Môn)?

The main economic challenges facing the island are the known closure of the Wylfa Nuclear Power Station in 2010, and the difficulties faced by Anglesey Aluminium, the smelter plant to find a new source of electricity at a competitive price. We have recently had the setting up of the government backed

Môn-Menai project team to spearhead the regeneration of the area. We have also seen job losses in the food processing sector, and we must widen our economic base so that we are not over dependent on certain sectors.

Turning to Wales government, where Plaid has 12 AMs, what do you consider the main economic achievements of the Welsh Assembly Government? And the main economic opportunities lost?

It is difficult to see what the main economic achievements of the Labour Assembly Government are given that Welsh GVA figures in West Wales and the Valleys remain stubbornly low despite the injection of European Aid. We must make better use of the money when further European Aid comes on stream next year.

Can you explain what extra powers you would like to see devolved to the Wales, and how these powers might be used to economic effect?

In our submission to the Richard Commission we called for a Welsh Parliament on the Scottish model with full law making and some tax varying powers. We also called for the transfer of responsibility for more policy areas, such as the police and energy. We hope we can secure a referendum on full legislative powers in the next few years.

Can Wales be both different and successful?

We need to recognise that as we live within the European Union and a global economy, we need to be able to co-operate with other counties to be successful. But we also need to be able to fashion national policies to meet the special needs of Wales in areas such as health, education, transport and so on.

If you were granted one economic policy wish, what would it be?

To be able to set our own rates of corporation tax, so that we, like Ireland, could become far more competitive.

What is the thing you most cherish about Wales, and what would you most like to change?

It was Darwin who said, it is not the strongest of the species that survive, or the most intelligent but those which are most adaptable to change. The same goes for nations. We must cherish our national traditions of course, but to succeed in the modern world you have to be ready to accept and embrace change.

Ieuan Wyn Jones. Thank you very much.