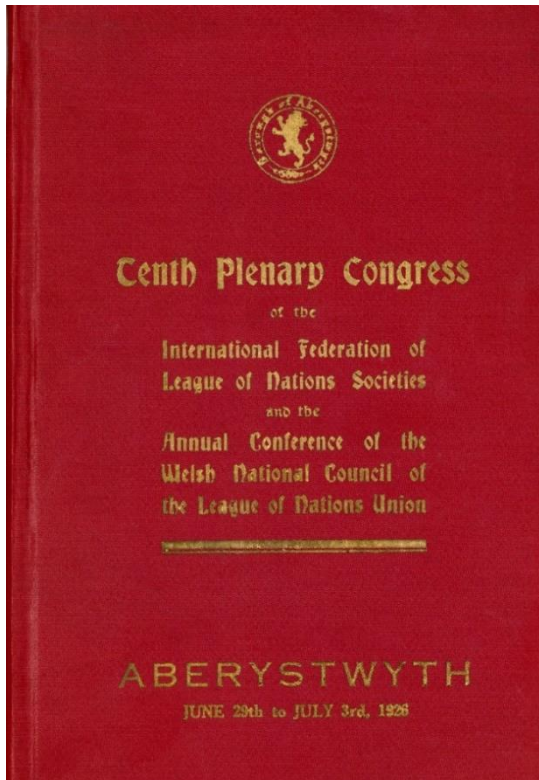


## When Aberystwyth Hosted an International Peace Congress



Although the armistice which brought an end to the fighting of the First World War was signed on 11 November 1918, it took a further six months of negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to draw up the terms of the Treaty of Versailles which was signed on 28 June 1919 and ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers of Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the United States.

At the Paris Conference, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States had put forward his Fourteen Points of principals for world peace which he had previously outlined in a speech in January 1918. In addition to future policies on democracy, free trade, self-determination, and disarmament, his fourteenth point said that, 'A general association of nations should be formed on the basis of covenants designed to create

mutual guarantees of the political independence and territorial integrity of States, large and small equally.'

Despite the scepticism of David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, and Vittorio Orlando, the Italian representative, Woodrow Wilson's points were generally welcomed and the idea of the League of Nations began to take shape.

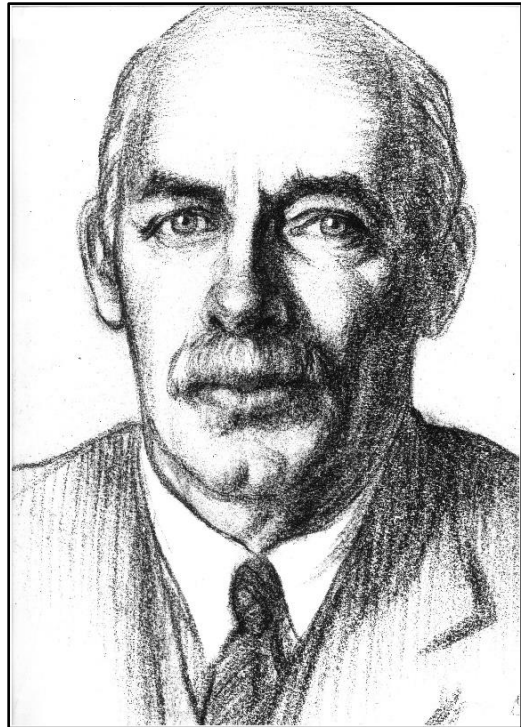
To promote the idea of a League of Nations in Britain, the League of Nations Union was formed on 13 October 1918 by merging the League of Free Nations Association and the League of Nations Society, two organisations that had already been working for the establishment of a new system of international relations and world peace. In November the new Union published a programme that called for the establishment of 'a league of free peoples who desire to end war forever'. To this end it mounted a wide-ranging publicity campaign to explain its objectives and increase popular support for the League. Britain was divided into a dozen regions and a network of union branches were formed throughout the country with paid organizers operating in many of the regions. When

the League of Nations Union was formed in 1918 it had 3,217 members, but by 1922 this had grown dramatically to over 200,000 members.

These activities were mainly financed by David Davies, the businessman, benefactor and politician, and so crucial was his support that Gilbert Murray, Chairman of the League of Nations Union, said that 'only generous donations from the private fortune of David Davies kept the union from financial distress.'

David Davies was the grandson of David Davies, Llandinam, founder of the Ocean Coal Company, and one of the main benefactors of Aberystwyth University when it was established in 1872.

David Davies, the grandson, was born in Llandinam in 1880, and after attending King's College, Cambridge, he followed into the family businesses and the family Liberal non-conformist traditions when he was elected MP for Montgomeryshire in 1905. At the outset of the First World War he had raised and commanded the 14th Battalion, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers Caernarvon and Anglesey, on the Western Front from December 1915 to June 1916 when he was recalled by David Lloyd George to become his parliamentary private secretary.



David Davies

During his time at the front, David Davies had become increasingly critical of other politicians, the military, the Allies, and how the war was conducted, but continuing with his criticisms after his return to Westminster and giving constant advice to Lloyd George on various issues, and especially political appointments after he had become Prime Minister in December 1916, earned him the disfavour of his leader.

On 24 June 1917 David Lloyd George wrote to David Davies saying, 'I regret having to tell you that there is a concerted attack to be made upon me for what is called "sheltering" in a soft job a young officer of military age and fitness...I hear that Welsh parents – North and South – are highly indignant and do not scruple to suggest that your wealth is your shield. I know that you are not responsible, but they blame me, and as I know that you are anxious not to add to my difficulties in the terrible task entrusted to me, I am sure you will agree that I am taking the straight course intimating to the

Committee set up to re-examine men in public service that in my judgement you can render better service as a soldier than in your present capacity.'

There is no evidence that these allegations were true or that the 'attacks' were real, and they are now widely believed to have been created by Lloyd George himself as a way of getting rid of David Davies and his criticisms. Davies proved to be a more honourable individual than Lloyd George, and in his reply said, 'I need hardly say that I should hate to be a source of embarrassment to you...I beg formally to resign my post in the Secretariat.'

His enforced retirement from active politics enabled David Davies to devote his time to campaigning for the League of Nations. Even before the end of the war he had become horrified by the deaths that he had witnessed and was determined to do all that he could to ensure that such waste and slaughter should not be repeated, and to this end he campaigned enthusiastically and untiringly for the League of Nations.

At the National Eisteddfod in Neath in August 1918, David Davies first suggested the formation of the Welsh League of Nations Union saying that Wales had an important role to play in the campaign for world peace. And the following year, to further these aims David Davies and his sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret, gave £20,000 to Aberystwyth University to endow the Department of International Politics, or of International Relationships 'as I prefer to call it', as a memorial to the students of the College who had been killed and wounded in the First World War. In 1922 the Chair – the first academic Chair of International Politics, Relations or Affairs to be established anywhere in the world – was named the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics in honour of the American President and his support for the League of Nations.

In May 1920 David Davies donated £30,000 to set up an endowment fund in order to establish a Welsh National Council of the League of Nations Union. By 1922 it had 280 local branches, and by 1926 the number had grown to 652.

As well as financing the activities of the League of National Unions in Wales and Britain, David Davies also gave his time and energy to travelling across Europe promoting the work of the League. In early 1919, as one of the British delegates, he went to a conference in Paris that resulted in the formation of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies (IFLNS), and in December of the same year he headed the British League of Nations Union delegation to the Congress of International Federation of League of Nations Societies in Brussels.

The IFLNS was a network of societies in League of Nations member states promoting and supporting the League's efforts. David Davies's commitment to supporting the work of the League of Nations was recognised in 1923 when he was made Vice President of the IFLNS, and in 1925 he became its Controller.

From the outset the Federation had held an annual conference in advance of the League of Nations Assembly's September meetings in Geneva. In 1919 it held three congresses: in Paris, London and Brussels; but after that only one Congress would be held annually: Milan in 1920; Geneva in 1921; Prague in 1922; Vienna in 1923; Lyon in 1924 and Warsaw in 1925. Dresden was to have hosted the Congress in 1926, but following the 1925 Locarno Conference where Germany was admitted as a Council Member of the League of Nations, there were objections to the venue. When it was realised that there was a real possibility that the Congress would not be held at all that year, David Davies stepped in and offered Aberystwyth as an alternative venue. The offer was accepted.

Because of his family connections with the town and the university, Aberystwyth was the obvious choice for David Davies. Like his father Edward Davies (in whose memory the Edward Davies Chemical Laboratories were built and named), and grandfather before him, David Davies had been for many years a member of the Court of Governors of the University, and in 1926, following the death of Sir John Williams in May of that year, he was made President.

Another link between the League of Nations and Aberystwyth was Mrs Annie Jane Hughes-Griffiths president of the Welsh National Council. She had been one of the organisers of the Memorial of Women of Wales to Women of the United States and leader of the delegation that took the 400,000 signature petition to New York in February 1924; she was also the sister of the principal of Aberystwyth, John Humphrey Davies.

As well as his Aberystwyth connections, David Davies was also a director of the Great Western Railway, and to convey the 200 delegates from London to Aberystwyth he arranged for a special train to be laid on for them, and also paid all their expenses from the moment they stepped on to the train. Hotels in the town were booked as accommodation and College staff were conscripted as guides and interpreters.

This is how the arrival of the delegates at Aberystwyth was reported in the 2 July 1926 edition of the Cambrian News under the heading, 'Towards World Peace':

# Towards World Peace.

## League Societies Conference.

### Important Meetings at Aberystwyth.

The 10th Plenary Congress of the League of Nations opened at Aberystwyth on Tuesday, and the meetings throughout the week have proved a source of great interest to large numbers of the general public, while the warmth of the reception accorded has both surprised and gratified the delegates. The importance of the work which the various Societies are carrying out is being more generally recognised, and the residents of Aberystwyth have not been slow to show their appreciation of the honour which Mr. Dd. Davies, M.P., has done to the town in arranging for the conference to take place within its borders. Sound and solid work was done at every one of the meetings, but the only regret many have had is that their knowledge of other languages has not been sufficient to enable them to understand the detail of the proceedings. On Wednesday evening a pilgrimage to Tregaron, the birthplace of Henry Richard, was attended by almost every delegate.

Glorious summer weather and a crowd of several thousands lining decorated streets combined to welcome the delegates to the tenth plenary congress of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies on their arrival shortly before 3 o'clock on Tuesday at Aberystwyth, where the Congress meetings were held during the week.

The delegates, numbering over 200, among whom were a number of women, were brought from London by special train and conveyed by motor cars, lent by residents, to their various hotels. A large crowd lined the approach to the station and as the cars drove through Terrace-road and to the Marine-parade, there were many bursts of cheering.

At the Station the Mayor (Councillor Llewelyn Samuel) and members of the Corporation, with the Town Clerk (Mr. T. J. Samuel, O.B.E.) in their robes of office, welcomed the delegates.

Interest was centred in the arrival of Count Berastoff, who heads the German deputation, and there were not a few anxious inquiries as to which of the delegates was the world-famous former German Ambassador to the United States.

There were many delegates of international repute and all showed much pleasure at the warmth of the welcome which they received on their first visit to Wales.

for all he had done and was doing, for that as well as other worthy objects. Aberystwyth residents hoped the delegates would accept their sincere welcome and would feel quite at home during the visit. They hoped the delegates would have an opportunity of seeing some Welsh scenery and have fine weather, so that they might retain pleasant memories of their visit.

"Above all," concluded His Worship, "let us hope that your meetings may be of advantage to attain the great purposes of your Congress."

Mrs. Hughes Griffiths, president of the Welsh National Council, proposed thanks to the Mayor and Mayores for their hospitality, referring to movements inaugurated at Aberystwyth and adding that the Welsh Council of the League of Nations Union was started at Aberystwyth, and that the Memorial from the Women of Wales to the women of America was initiated in the town. (Applause). The delegates were greatly impressed with the munificence of the reception by the people of Aberystwyth.

She hoped they would forward the good cause of peace on earth and goodwill towards men.

M. Dollfus, president, also thanked the Mayor on behalf of the Federation for the extremely generous reception. It was a great pleasure to hold the Congress in Wales, —the noble little country which had been in

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The report continues across five full length columns and records the arrival of delegates such as Mr Theodore Marburg, former U.S. Ambassador in Brussels (America); Dr Constantin Dumba (Austria); Professor Gilbert

Murray, Sir Willoughby Dickinson, Viscount Gladstone, Mr David Davies and the Bishop of St David's (Britain); Senator Brabec and Dr Medinger (Czechoslovakia); M. Aulard and Professor Emile Borel (France); Count Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff (Germany); M. A. van Ryckevorsol (Holland); M. de Paikert (Hungary); Mr Bolton Waller (Ireland); Professor Amedeo Giannini (Italy); Professor Eiichi Makino (Japan); M. S.E. Vewsmans (Latvia); Professor Br. Dembiski and Count Los (Poland); Mlle. Helene Vacaresco (Rumania); M. de Starya Lipy and M. Britantchaninoff (Russia); Professor Eflorrieta (Spain) and Baron Adelsward (Sweden) and Mr Roger Dollfuss, (Switzerland). It also lists the topics that would be discussed during the week: disarmament; the status of minorities; slavery; emigration; international aspect of the coal industry; equitable treatment of foreigners, and a number of educational matters.

*Cambrian News 02/08/2016*



The main venue for Congress meetings was the University Hall, North Road, (the wooden building burnt down in 1933) and at the inaugural meeting which was held on the afternoon of Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup>, the delegates were welcomed by Mr Roger Dollfuss, president of the IFLNS, who also thanked the Mayor of Aberystwyth, Councillor Llewelyn Samuels, on behalf of the Federation *for the extremely generous reception that they had received*. He also said that *it was a great pleasure to hold the Congress in Wales, – the noble little country which had been in the vanguard for the works of peace. That was emphasised by the fact that one out of 17 of the population was a member of the League of Nations Union*.

He was followed by David Davies who, on behalf of the Welsh Council of the League of Nations Union, welcomed the IFLNS to Aberystwyth and to Wales which *was a small country, but it was a privilege of the smaller countries to find a solution of many difficulties*. Then Mrs Hughes Griffiths, president of the Welsh National Council, *proposed thanks to the Mayor and Mayoress for their hospitality, referring to movements inaugurated at Aberystwyth and adding that the Welsh Council of the League of Nations Union was started at Aberystwyth and that the Memorial from Women of Wales to the women of America was initiated in the town*.

Following the meeting a reception was given by the Mayor at the Parish Hall before the Congress began their work began in earnest at the evening meeting with *the appointment of Committees and reports of the work of the League of Nations Union in the several countries*.

On the following day the Committee on International Questions, the Education and Propaganda Committee, the National Minorities Committee, the Economic and Social Questions Committee, the Disarmament Committee, the Juridical Questions Committee and the Political Questions Committee were in session. The Education and Propaganda Committee *considered the introduction of an International Auxiliary language as a means of communication, urging that school children should be taught Esperanto and a resolution endorsing the British Association's choice of Esperanto was adopted... was carried by 8 votes to one, there being two abstentions.* Mlle. Varesco, from Rumania *opposed the teaching of Esperanto. When Esperanto was not merely spoiled Rumanian, it was spoiled Spanish or spoiled English, while M. de Paikert from Hungary referred to Esperanto as a linguistic monstrosity.*

In the evening a pilgrimage, which was attended by almost every delegate, was made to Tregaron, the birthplace of Henry Richard, the Apostol of Peace. The Bishop of St. David's presided at a meeting in Tregaron Memorial Hall commemorating Richards' many contributions to world peace including the first unofficial Peace Congress that Henry Richards and Elihu Burritt, an American, had organised in Brussels in September 1848 which had been attended by some 200 delegates *to consider an agenda which might almost be the agenda of the Congress in 1926.*

Official meetings continued at 9.00am on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> July when the Committee on International Questions discussed the admission of new members, in particular Palestine. Other topics discussed included stateless people, Germany and the League and the International Justice Court. In the afternoon, at the invitation of Aberystwyth Town Council, there was an excursion to Devil's Bridge.

That evening David Davies presided over a public meeting at the University Hall which was attended by between 2,000 and 3,000 people. It was hoped that the meeting that would be addressed by a number of the delegates would win more support for the positive work of the League in the field of disarmament and international cooperation and arbitration. But when *the Chairman called on Count Bernstorff, the head of the German delegation, a man in the audience shouted "What about the Lusitania?" The Chairman asked for order and the man was requested to be quiet. He, however, persisted in shouting "What about the Lusitania, I say?" "You dirty dog." A police sergeant conducted the man out of the hall during which time he was still shouting "You dirty dog. You dirty German".*

David Davies quickly tried to calm the audience and praised Count Bernstorff's work on behalf of the League when it was unpopular in Germany: *In foul weather and in fair he*

*has nobly stood at the helm, and his example has encouraged the friends of the League in Germany to stand together. When at last the Count addressed the audience he was applauded and received an ovation when he resumed his seat.*

*The Times had briefly mentioned the IFLNS Congress at Aberystwyth in their 30 June issue and had reported Count Bernstorff's remarks at the inaugural meeting that *the foreign policy of the German Republic was entirely dominated by the spirit of Locarno. They had no other policy. They were proud of the spirit of Locarno because it was inaugurated by Germany, who made the first proposals.* But following the public meeting and the interruption, which they had reported in their 2 July issue, its editorial on the 9 July said that *the Bernstorffs bear an honoured name in German. Many members of the family are noted for their piety and integrity. But this particular Count Bernstorff has acquired a reputation of a very different kind. He was the Ambassador of the Imperial German Government in Washington during those harassing and contentious years when the United States were still neutral in the war. He is associated in the minds of European Allies with memories of the most unscrupulous pressure on American institutions, with espionage, and with every kind of unsavoury intrigue. The names of agents who were associated with him, and whose adventurous journeys during the war aroused a peculiar resentment, are still familiar. And his own name is especially identified with the inhuman submarine campaign which culminated in the sinking of the Lusitania. In these days Count Bernstorff poses as the advocate of the League spirit in Germany. That may be all very well, but it is intolerable that he should appear publicly in this country as an ardent humanitarian.**

The long shadow of the First World War had fallen over the proceedings at Aberystwyth.

Tenth PLENARY CONGRESS of the INTERNATIONAL  
FEDERATION of LEAGUE OF NATIONS SOCIETIES,  
At ABERYSTWYTH.

*The Local Committee invites*

to an exhibition of the Film "STAR OF HOPE,"  
at the Imperial Cinema, Bath St.,  
on FRIDAY, July 2nd, 1926, at 2-30 p.m.

*Le Comité d'Organisation du Congrès à Aberystwyth invite  
M.M. les membres du Congrès à l'exposition du Film "Etoile  
de l'Espérance" au Cinema imperial, Bath Street, Vendredi  
le 2 juillet à 14h 30.*

On Friday morning while the IFLNS delegates met to discuss the Report of the Committee on Education and Propaganda, members of the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations Council attended their Annual Meeting at Shiloh Chapel School Room. They also hosted an official lunch at the Parish Hall which was followed at 2.30pm by an official screening of *Star of Hope* at the Imperial Cinema, Bath Street. *Star of Hope* was a twenty-minute film on the evils of war and the benefits of the League



that had been produced in 1925 by the League itself and was intended for showing in schools as part of a course on World, European or British History. Aberystwyth residents also had opportunities to view the film as it had been *exhibited every evening during the week at the Pier Pavilion Cinema and at the Imperial Cinema in Bath Street, twice nightly at popular prices.*

Following this interlude, the meetings reconvened until 7.00pm, and at 8.30 Principal J.H. Davies held a reception for the delegates at the University College of Wales.

Despite Saturday being the last day of the Congress, there were still meetings until 11.15am, with Industrial Peace being the main topic of the concluding meeting. The Welsh National Council also concluded their meetings at Shiloh during the morning, receiving reports on the 'Work of Branches'. The delegates left Aberystwyth at 12.00 noon; *luncheon and tea will be served on the train* that was scheduled to arrive at Paddington at 6.00pm.

The Annual Report of the Welsh League of Nations Union, 'Wales and the League, 1927', reported that the official account of the Congress at Aberystwyth with the proceedings and resolutions, had been published by the General Secretariat of the Federation at Brussels, and after referring to the difficulty that the failure to meet in Dresden had created for the International Federation of League of Nations Societies it quotes the words of the General Secretary, Professor Théodore Eugene Césane Ruysen:

*One cannot be sufficiently grateful to the British League of Nations Union, and especially to its Welsh National Council, for their devotion in solving the difficulty by extending an invitation to the Federation to hold the Congress at Aberystwyth.*

*Nowhere throughout the world has League of Nations propaganda been carried on more methodically, with more perseverance or enthusiasm than in Wales. The people in whose midst the Congress worked made an understanding and encouraging setting. The sessions were followed with a sustained interest by large numbers of the public. Even in the streets of Aberystwyth and in the tiniest hamlets through which cars carried delegates on various excursions, the men in the street and the children demonstrated to what extent in this little country right on the edge of the West of Europe systematic and impassionate propaganda has effected the education of public opinion.*

David Davies continued to support and work for the League of Nations until the 1930s when he became disillusioned with its direction. He was created Baron Davies of Llandinam for his work for peace in 1932, the same year that he established the New Commonwealth Society, whose main aim was to promote the ideas of an International

Equity Tribunal and an International Police Force. Some of the ideas of the New Commonwealth Society were later incorporated into the United Nations Charter. In 1934 Davies pledged £58,000 towards a building in Cardiff to house the King Edward VII National Memorial Association – an organisation founded by David Davies himself and dedicated to the treatment and eradication of tuberculosis – and the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations. His wish for the Welsh National Temple of Peace and Health was that it would be ‘a memorial to those gallant men from all nations who gave their lives in the war that was to end war’. Today the building houses the Public Health Wales NHS Trust and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs, the latter being responsible for the *Wales for Peace* project which explores how Wales has contributed to the search for peace in the 100 years since the First World War.

The International Federation of League of Nations Societies did not give up on their intention of meeting in Germany as the location of the 1927 Congress was Berlin.

Elgan Davies