

Aneurin Hughes

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Well,*welsh greetin...g*, this is just a test of Jim's knowledge of Welsh. I have two things to say immediately, the first is; if my parents had been alive and listened to all those flowery things that were coming from Jim, I'm sure my father would have been delighted. My mother would have probably believed it. And of course it's quite nice having the odd plaudits thrown in your direction but you must remember not to breeze then you can exist. The second thing I wanted to say, I never thought that I would declare a Baptist minister turn Presbyterian so full of lies.

All those squats that he mentioned belong to my very well-off brother-in-law and there's a wonderful name of 'Dowie' which is David and our Welsh national Saint. Now, you've read all that stuff in the program, you'd have seen that I graduated from Aberystwyth; the college by the sea and in Welch and Celtic studies and Philosophy. And as somebody said to me, well what does that enable you to be or call yourself or do? And the answer was, well very occasionally a philosophic Welshman and the more I look at the results of our national rugby side the more philosophical I become.

Now when I was in Aberystwyth, I saw that my future would lie in drama. I produced one years a Welsh play, next year I produced that marvellous play Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Wonderful. Beautiful play, one of the best written in the last fifty years. But, at one point there was this man call Jim Henderson. I seemed to be plagued by Jim's through my career and Jim Henderson said no, you've got to be president of the union. I was not really politically involved at all but somehow I ended up being president of the Aberystwyth student's union. And then I was pushed into becoming president of the national union of students and of course I was in good company along with something called Julia Gillard who is a big opposite number here in Australia, I think there was a few years between us but um, she had that under her belt.

Now interestingly enough, this was a full time job for two years and it was the height of the Cold War period. I'm talking about the late fifties early sixties and with student conferences all over the place, arguing the toss about will and student unity. And you had the Russian KGB operating its men out of headquarters in Prague called the International Union of Students and you had on the other side, the International Student Conference; supported by the C.I.A (though we didn't know at the time). But it was rough and tough and hard. And in the middle of this, cause Jim wanted me to recount the story; there came an invitation to the National Students Union to go for first ever visit to Cuba. To celebrate the second anniversary of the Cuban revolution and we in the national union of students suddenly saw that this group was going to include as a representative of British students, a member of the communist

youth. And we said no way, if your going to have anybody represent students, its go to be the elected students representative. So I went and it was absolutely fascinating. I was with a group of about twenty five people including some of the stalwart members of the British Communist Party, you remember that Joan Littlewoods who produced *Oh What a Lovely War*, she was one of them; but er; when we got onto the plane even when the old propellers were turning in London she suddenly shot to her feet, strode down the aeroplane saying "it's going to crash, its going to crash!" and they had to leave her off. Didn't actually fill us with huge confidence, anyway, off we went to Cuba.

When you arrived in Cuba, you had a little piece of paper and on the paper they said.. "*Spanish verbal*".....it was from the ... " *in Spanish*....." (Special Institute for Friendship Between Peoples). Who did you want to meet, where did you want to go and ofcourse all, with all the precocity of a student leader; I put down Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. And as Jim says, three days later I had lunch with Che Guevara and he was the most biggest bore I had ever come across!

Anyway, Cuba was fascinating; Just two years after the revolution. I went of course to the headquarters of the Cuban Students Union and there on one wall was the speech that Castro had given in Santiago Da Cuba (another city in Cuba) where he had been arraigned by the Batista Government for making anti-government statements and the speech is reprinted on the wall with one notable exception. In the actual court record, he starts the speech, Fidel, by saying, "In the name of God and Christ" and then he goes on but in the Students Union that was taken out and only the rest of the speech was included. And the sad thing about the whole of the Cuban revolution of course was Fidel was not part of the Russian set-up before hand, if you look at how awful the Batista regime was before; you'd have probably join Fidel in the Escabre Mountains and joined the revolution.

However, we had a wonderful time. I went to a cigar factory and ah this was the Opman Cigar Factory in sant, in er, in Cuba. Ah, in Havana and its marvellous there, everybody's working away and I know if you've ever seen it but they have layers of tobacco on different levels and then they have a triangular piece of metal where the person puts it all together, da da da da da. The final big thing is the wrapper. And I was looking at this and there was this painting but not a painting really but a drawing of a piece of paper on the wall and the drawing had the huge United States and then seventy kilometres away this tiny pimple of land called Cuba. And underneath in Spanish somebody had written "if the American's don't like us, let them move".

Anyway (cough) it's the final day and I'm packing, its about midnight, gone midnight and there's a hurried knock at the door and ah, a rather startled ah person from the hotel says ah, "the Prime Minister is down stairs to see you", oh, so down I went. Downstairs in this huge hotel, the Hotel Riviera and I get out of the lift and there is this rather big ah, kind of a sergeant major with big handle bar moustaches saying "Wha senior Hughes, you wanted to see the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister here to see you". Escorted me, walking bristly into the restaurant and there in the restaurant, one little table, one light

there's Fidel Castro and I'm brought up, I'm introduced and he introduces him to me and we start speaking Spanish but then going on as his English is better than my Spanish and then er, we carry on for about two or three hours in English, fascinating. At one point there's a delegation from the hotel night club all come in with their ah Prince of Wales feathers and their poppadums and all the rest of it. And one of them say's "Oh Prime Minister you've not seen our new show, we would be so honoured if you and your guest could come and see us" and so Fidel says "do you like to do that?" and I said "well you're the Prime Minister" so in we went and then he had to apologize cause he was drinking tea all the time. And I can't remember what I was drinking which was probably a gin and tonic or something like this and he had to say that his stomach was never good after his time in the Estcarbre mountains. Anyway we saw the show and the show is a take off of the Play of "*Spanish title...*", the Bay of Pigs incident. Aye, it was fascinating, and anyway at six o'clock in the morning; Fidel says "well I think I'd better go now" and I said 'thankyou'; so I went back upstairs and had to pack like mad and furiously because we were leaving. And I packed like mad, no sleep, down to the airport, get off at the airport, come up to the immigration person, show my passport and the guy sprints to his feet and salutes (I think my goodness, what's going on?) "ha wait a minute", goes back behind comes out with six boxes of the finest Havana cigars and a little card on top which says "from your friend, Fidel". I didn't quite get it with the story, because I had to go through customs.

However, I came to London, customs in London says "have you got anything to declare" and I said "well I got six, six (laugh) of Havana", "six boxes of Havana Cigars?" and I told him the story and he said "you couldn't make that up go on". Anyway, the Church in Cuba held me in good stead because ah, after the time in???, I was offered a scholarship to go and work in Latin American doing research in higher education. And ah, we lived ah, we lived in about five countries about three or four months each. And that was an amazing experience. And before that, I'd read a very interesting series of articles that were published in, in those days the Manchester Gardens about South America by this wonderful writer called James Morris. And ah, he wrote of Latin America, Latin America is like the Garden of Eden but it's got a wall all around it, and there are several gates but God hasn't given anyone the key to get in yet. And it was a remarkably perceptive look at Latin America from my experience when er, we went out there. Now, James Morris as you may have known is a remarkable person, wonderful, but he is now Jan Morris. And changed sex and has written an incredible book about it called Conundrum and she now writes, perhaps the best books about Wales that you can find.

Anyway, it's when I'm in South America and I turn up in Lima, Peru and we go up to Machu Picchu and see where the Incas final city was (no floods at that time) and I'm really captivated by the whole idea of South America and I want to go back. I meet a very fascinating man call Pat Dyer and he's the information officer at the British embassy in Peru. And ah, his Irish. Not only is he Irish, he ah went as a young man of eighteen to Spain and he became a Matador or a Toreador, ah met a Spanish lady, got married, went to the Lima Peru, that's where he ended up as the information officer. Well he said, "if you

want come back to Latin America, join the foreign office, easy. Comeback here and have a lovely time". He was particularly well off because he lived outside Lima as some of you I see nodding heads have been to Lima and you know that the weather is called the Inca Revenge. Because for nine months of the year, sometimes more, sometimes a little less, permanent cloud cover because you have the cold air coming down from the Andes and you have the hot air coming up from the sea and it's awful. And all this traffic, you got permanent smog and allegedly it's quite deliberate by the Incas. Anyway, he was allowed to live outside Lima and think of this, drive out with this heavy smog and then suddenly it's as if you got through a curtain and its blazing sun and they haven't had rain for over two thousand years. This of course is where you have those marvellous drawings in the ah, on the face of the surface of huge animals and geometric designs, nobody knows quite how or why they were built. Anyway, it was on his advice that I said "alright, we'd see if we join the foreign office".

Now in those days, I'm not sure if they've changed but you had to go through a Civil Service Selection Board to join the British Foreign Office. Previously of course, there was what they called "The Weekend", where you went to a country home and everybody would look carefully on how you held your fork, and your knife and your spoon. But after we had a few spice dampers like Burges and McLean they thought they better take it a bit more seriously. So the Civil service Selection Board was quite serious and ah it was a three day event in London and I thought well, questions were going pretty well until final board. There are about eight people in front of you, questions went so far so good and then somebody says "well ah Mr. Hughes, if you were the Prime Minister" (I think its was Harold Wilson at the time), "If you were Prime Minister and you just had to face the fact that Rhodesia was declared unilateral independence, what would you do?" and so I thought, well I'll tell the truth, so I said "well you send the troops in" "ah, thank you very much Mr. Hughes very nice" then little later, another quiet little bloke (hadn't said anything throughout the interview) said to me "ahhhh Mr. Hughes um we understand that your father operated an illegal radio transmitter on behalf of Radio Free Wales, is that right?". I didn't ah obviously know, so I said "Yes, that's perfectly..." "How interesting, do tell us about it" and my father had with Gwinver Evans, in Swansea, why? Because in those days the Welsh Nationalist Party was not allowed to have ah radio broadcast because they weren't fighting fifty seats. Well, there was only thirty eight seats in Wales, so we thought this was a bit of an impetus.

Anyway, I got through the final interview to great amazement. My first posting was Singapore. This is now 1968 and at that time the British government had announced east of Suez cause we simply couldn't afford to keep so many troops as we were keeping at that time. Just ruining the economy, we thought it was going to be very difficult as were saying to Lee Quan Yu at the time, well we're going to withdraw probably something like sixty thousand troops from Singapore and the tangent down from Kuala Lumpur to Japourbaru and we thought this was going to be tricky and it wasn't, Lee Quan Yu said (Laugh) "no no no, no problem, you just pay" and it was a big cheque that had to be signed at the time.

A fascinating, I was ah a member of our local Marigold Choir group in Singapore and we performed on one occasion to Lee Quan Yu and Mrs. Lee Quan Yu. And what people don't realize was that the brighter of the two was Mrs. Lee Quan Yu and when they were both doing law in Cambridge or is it Oxford (I'm not quite sure) it was she, who won the prize of the "Best Student of the Year", not Lee Quan Yu, himself. I tell you this; I wouldn't like to be interrogated by Mrs. Lee Quan Yu. After we performed the Choir, she pinned me to a corner and for one hour grilled me on the chances of labour, of the Welsh Nationalist Party coming to power in Wales.

Now my next posting was Rome because ah this was the preparation for U.K, for membership of the European Union and they wanted to build up their teams in different European capitals. I loved Italy; I have to say um the first year wasn't too easy because we certainly got the death threat. You remember the ah, the people who were killed in Londonderry or Derry, ah on ah Black Sunday fourteen? And we fourteen, who were home based diplomats were on the death list from an organization called the "Brigatte Rose" (The Red Brigades), a really nasty so called revolutionary terrorist group who committed the awful murder, if you remember of the Italian, that foreign minister Monsieur Morron. Ah nothing ever happened but it was a little unnerving.

Anyway, there I was in ah suddenly the E.U beckons and ah I go up to Brussels and ah become a member of the Commission of the European Community. Now, what is fascinating about working ah and negotiating in an international ah organization like that is, you arrive with all your back drop of prejudices about the Germans, the French, the Italians and so forth. When you are actually working in it, you start off by thinking "argh, I got to deal with that awful Italian down there or German down there" and that changes after a while, when your working together and you no longer think "oh have I got to work with this awful Italian person Have I got to do something with Guido or Fritz ah or Bernard? It then becomes of normal circumstances entirely personal and not national. And that's rather wonderful in a way, its that it becomes the issue and the involvement of the person rather than the generalisations that are about different countries.

Now when we joined there was the U.K, Ireland and Denmark. Two things happened immediately, first of all, we introduced humour, it was a very un-humorous place before hand. People didn't really believe in, in the use of humour. And you know they tell you whenever you're overseas as a diplomat be very careful; don't tell any jokes. I told jokes all over the place, and they loved them. And the other was that, when I arrived I was given a secretary called Madam Erin. Belgiun, strapping Amazonian lady from Antwerp; and after a day I said "now look you know you can't keep calling me Masseur Huges or Hu-gu or whatever huge". I said, my name is "Ni" ..." Oh Monsieur, jamais la vie" call me by my first name", she'd been working with a Dutchman for twenty years and he was still Masseur Steadmans but, I think it took us seven days before she changed.

So there were two inculcations immediately from that, use of humor and getting rid of all this high-faluting stuff and getting down to more personal relations. Ah I was then sent back to the U.K in 75 to fight the referendum, when ah it was a touch and go as to whether the U.K would remain in or go out. And I was in a nasty referendum in many ways because you had all the kind of tensions emerging ah the fear of working with foreigners and to an extent that fear is still prevalent in the U.K. And that's why you have the issue of membership of the European Union still so dramatic in so many ah quarters.

After that there was a change of commission and I became this very fancy title of "chef du cabinet". Now I'm not sure in Australia what you would acquaint with ah probably it would acquaint to chief-of-staff or something like that. Your number two to the minister or the commissioner and it's I think the best job you can have in the commission. Cause you represent him in every possible way. But I did say that the only way in which you succeed is if you work twice as hard but succeed in looking less intelligent. Then it's okay.

Now, perhaps one of the most interesting things was that you were actually involved in changing things which affect millions and millions of people. You may be a very small cog in a very very big wheel but let me give you one example without going into too much detail. Do you remember that time when people building houses and building all kinds of things were using asbestos? Now those of you that know something about it would know that there is a kind of asbestos called "Presidelite" or blue asbestos. And we were given ample evidence that this was carcinogenic. In other words, if you were working in an atmosphere for certain amount of time and you were breathing in the little bits and pieces from this asbestos, you could die from cancer. So we prepared a directive which would have to be put into effect in all the countries in the European Union banning the use of Presidelite. It took us two years to achieve it, why? Germans are the biggest producers of Presidelite in the world. And we then had to face of course all kinds of evidence that they were producing saying, "no no no no no no, this is not casenogenic, da da da da" back and forth and back and forth. But after two years it came about that you can not say how many lives have been saved from the simple fact of banning that one, that substance. So that was a hugely encouraging piece of ah my career.

The other thing I would say about that period was you tend to think that international negotiations, multilateral negotiations you always hear of the individual, where you know ah 'Sarcosie' said this or Mr. Rudd believed that or what ever it is. The reality is that the civil servants have already prepared the conclusions before the meeting actually starts. And there have been weeks and weeks or months and months of negotiations before hand between civil servants on either side to try and arrive at something that they think the ministers can agree to. And that's what happens now but, also what was interesting was that an individual can count. Now, in my time there occasionally I had to sit in on a meeting of the ministers in place of either Richard or Richard when he was way. No Belgium doesn't carry much weight, you know against U.K, France, Germany but they had as a Belgium a

minister; Masseur Davignon. And Davignon was brilliant. And on issue after issue, we could discuss it around the table and Davignon would come in with the most appropriate response to where the issue was and he would carry weight and it would go through. So it would really er would not just you know the whole welter of countries involved, sometimes the individual was able to ah perform and achieve a result.

Then I went to Norway because we started having a foreign service. And so I was back into the diplomatic role again, not entirely willingly but because Monsieur Delores (the president) had been told by the formidable Prime Minister of Norway (Mrs. Gruehard??) I want an ambassador in Norway and I want him now!" and so I, I went. Now that was entirely political because Norway was split down the middle as to whether she wanted to be part of the European Union enterprise or not and in the end after many years she took a referendum and it was lost by sixty thousand votes. So Norway is still not a member and of course many people blame me that I did not do my job properly.

Now on one occasion there, there was ah a visit from the Australian foreign minister, Mr. Gareth Evans. And ah, I said "well, why don't I give Mr. Gareth Evans dinner?" and the er 'defat' said "ok, not a problem", I didn't know he was going to turn up with twelve other people in his retinue including Mrs. Cheryl Kernot and it cost me a pretty penny and ah he'd had big meeting with the Prime Minister in the morning and of course I asking how it went and the rest of it. And he said "well, he said I raised the question, whaling" and I said "so, what did what did the Prime Minister say about whaling?" "well I said Norway shouldn't do it, whales are the highest species of mammal and shouldn't be killed." I said "what did Gruehard Brooklyn say about it?" "Well she didn't say very much." But that's another indication of how negotiations occur also, doesn't ne nes, just the set meeting its just off hand things like this sometimes you wonder whether they have a result ah or not. But it did mean that when I then came to Australia, ah I was able to present credentials very very quickly because Garath of course has got a Welsh background. You knew that didn't you? Cause essentially, you know your, your you you you definitely got to be a Welsh background and he said "well, well um yeah, I think the Evans, I think they came from Wales to ah to Bath a hundred and fifty years ago". I said "well yes but Gareth, Gareth is a quintessential Welsh name" "oh but I don't tell many people this, so right, my mother's fault really. She was in love with Gary Cooper. So that's where the name comes from".

Anyway, Ah I have to say that coming to Norway there was um very few politics. Ah as you can see, in what they've written here we did a few things like the centre and all the rest of it, we didn't get ah a over arching agreement but together because Mr. Downer ah did not agree er we had lots of problems with Mr. Downer but fortunately most of my job it was on trade. And on trade, I was very lucky indeed. I had McMullen in my first year then the splendid Tim Fisher, ah who ah was terrific. And ah I always thought that Tim Fisher would of made a wonderful Governor General of Australia. But I'm told that Mrs. Howard didn't like the suits that he was wearing. Not sure how true that is. So retirement came about but I did not suffer from Gareth Evans's sufferance

where he said you know he was really worried because of, what did he call it? Ah the "Relevance Deficiency Syndrome". I meant that Billy Hughes and I thought, this is great so I took some years to write about Billy Hughes and Jim's quite right they still keep coming up with stories about Billy!. Not the one's I got in my book and just last week somebody said to me "you do cook that that ah story about Billy" I said "which story about Billy?" oh he said "about the babies" I said "what about the babies?" oh he said "well, well he came I think it was in Canberra" he said "he came and he he he invited a girl and and there were a baby show. And he came and there were always string of babies in a pram and ah he just had to kiss them all, bless them whatever " oh I said, then what happen he said "he came to the first pram and he picked the baby up and kissed the baby and walked away and that was all fine until one of these ah ladies started running after him and saying "Billy Billy Billy come back for goodness sakes, you've left your false teeth behind." So I think there's another book to be written about ah Billy Hughes and as long as frequent flyer points last I will be coming back regularly to Australia which I have loved very much indeed. So thank you for listening and as a man said "I have dined with good friends, I have wine with good friends and I will sleep with a contented mind".