

How did Dylan Thomas help Britain's wartime propaganda?

Video transcript: Personal politics and propaganda

Ifor ap Glyn:

In his own poems Dylan avoided politics – but the verse that he wrote for his film scripts often displays a sharp political edge. Even though he came from a middle-class background, he had seen the effects of the depression of the 20s and 30s upon the people of south Wales, and his scripts show a keen understanding of the issues of poverty and the need for social change.

Clip from Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain (1943)

“Already, new industries are on their way to Wales. To the Rhondda Valley, the Treforest Industrial Estate is one shape of Wales to come. Out of the sickening, deadening idleness must come the pride of labour again. Out of the huddle of slum and alley must come the clean, broad roads and the cool white houses. Britain at war has asked these once-denied, helpless and hopeless men for all their strength and skill at the coal seam and the dock side, the foundry and the factory. The world shall know their answer and the world shall never deny them again.”

Ifor ap Glyn:

Dylan scripted several films that dealt with the need for new housing after the war including this one, *New Towns for Old*.

Post-war reconstruction was a popular subject amongst the documentary makers supplying the Ministry of Information. And as they were, almost without exception, on the left of the political spectrum, later commentators have suggested that they used their position to advance their own political agenda.

Clip from New Towns for Old (1942)

“Visitor: Well you can't say they aren't happy?

Councillor: But they shouldn't be 'ere. Lads shouldn't 'ave to play in a place like this. Kids shouldn't 'ave to grow up in soot and muck. It isn't right. What can they 'ope for? What can they look for'ard to?”

Archive film footage courtesy of Imperial War Museum